

Among the most striking of the many parallels which exist between the works of St. John of the Cross and those of the Sufis is the undeniably close resemblance between Living Flame of Love by St. John of the Cross and Niche for Lights (Mishkat al-Anwar) by al-Ghazzali. So close is said resemblance that even Fr. Bruno de Jesus-Marie, generally inclined to minimize the possibility of Sufi influence in the works of St. John of the Cross, admits:

"It is possible that (St.) John (of the Cross) may have had (a copy of) the Mishkat in his hands."(106)

In this work we will deal with the parallels between these two great works. St. John of the Cross was basically a poet, while al-Ghazzali was basically a philosopher and theologian. Though some praise the Spiritual Canticle from the literary point of view, while others praise The Revival of Religious Sciences and Incoherence of the Philosophers from the point of view of philosophy and scholastic theology, there is no doubt that Living Flame of Love and Niche for Lights are among the most succinct, esoteric and initiatory works of these two great religious geniuses.

It has been said that:

"No one can understand Spanish (Christian) Mysticism who does not know Old Castile."

Like nearly all Spanish Christian Mystics, St. John of the Cross

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was of Old Castile. Unlike Ste. Teresa of Avila and Fr. Luis de Leon, two other great Castilian mystics of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, St. John of the Cross was not of Jewish origin, neither was he a Morisco (at least not on his father's side), but rather he was on his father's side, of the old nobility of Castile, which means that his father was of Celtic and Visigothic stock, "Old Christian on all four sides", to use the expression current in the 16th century, though his mother was a Morisca. He was born Juan de Yepes in 1542 in the village of Fontiveros, not far from Avila, the city of mysticism par excellence. His father, Gonzalo de Yepes, was one of the poverty-stricken aristocrats so common in the history of Spain, and the childhood of the future saint was marked by great poverty. Thanks to his noble origin, piety and intelligence the Church saw to it that he received a fine education. Juan de Yepes early felt his mystical, esoteric vocation. On graduating from the University of Salamanca he joined the Carmelite Order, and became one of the Descalced Carmelites. The name "Carmelite" is derived from Mount Carmel in the Holy Land, and thus the Carmelite Order was originally an Eastern Order which came to the West with retreating Crusaders. Though the Carmelite Order, unlike the Dominicans and the Jesuits, was not founded by a Spaniard nor originated in Spain, yet the

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Carmelite Order has come to be the most Spanish, or Castilian of all Catholic Orders. This most Spanish or most Castilian of all Roman Catholic Orders is in a great many ways a return to the old pre-Benedictine Eastern and Celtic monasticism. The Spanish word **carmen**, used mainly, indeed almost exclusively in Andalusia, means, roughly, "flower garden", or "enclosed flower garden", and is derived from the Hispano-Arabic **al-qarm**, which means "vineyard". In Spain the Carmelite Monasteries or Convents came to be called "Carmens", because of the similarity of this word to "Carmel", and thus the Carmelite Order in Spain is frequently called "Of the Carmen" Our Lady of Mount Carmel, or the Virgin (Mary) of Mount Carmel, Patroness of the Carmelite order, in Spain is almost always called "Nuestra Senora del Carmen", i.e., "Our Lady of the Carmen" or, more frequently "Virgen del Carmen", .e., "Virgen of the Carmen". This is why so many Spanish girls are named "Maria del Carmen", generally shortened to "Mari Carmen" or simply "Carmen".

The peculiar Spanishness or Castilianness of this is recognized in this Carlist quatrain:

Where are you going, Virgin of the Carmen  
With the lighted candle?  
In search of king don Carlos  
For the Patria is lost.

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St. John of the Cross died in 1591, when he was not yet 50 years old.

Certainly the most fruitful years of the life of St. John of the Cross were the six years he spent in Granada, where he wrote all or nearly all his great works. The Castilian nightingale sang most sweetly when he flew from the oaks of Castile to the olive trees of Andalusia. At that time a very large part of the population of Granada was composed of "Moriscos", i.e., descendants of Hispano-Muslims not yet fully assimilated into the "Old Christian" population. In effect, while in Granada St. John of the Cross was literally surrounded by Moriscos and by the monuments of the Hispano-Muslim past.

Very near the convent in the Calle (Street) Elvira which St. John of the Cross frequented in order to hear confessions and say Mass lived a Morisco woman of more than 80 years famous among both Moriscos and Old Christians for her learning and wisdom. We do not know her personal name; all sources call her simply "La Mora de Ubeda" (the Moorish Woman of Ubeda), whom we have mentioned earlier. We do know that although she always showed great respect for the Christian Religion, she made no secret of the fact that she remained a Muslim. She had an extensive personal library and was a faithful follower of the doctrine of

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al-Ghazzali. Since St. John of the Cross was a man of great energy and intellectual curiosity and had been accustomed to dealing with Moriscos since his childhood in Medina del Campo (near Valladolid), it is difficult to believe that he had no contact with the Mora de Ubeda. Therefore, of all the great figures of Sufism it is al-Ghazzali who has the firmest and best documented connections with St. John of the Cross. The great Arabist Fr. Miguel Asin Palacios demonstrated convincingly the influence of the great Hispano-Muslim Sufi ibn Abbad of Ronda in Dark Night of the Soul by St. John of the Cross. There is a firm if oblique relation between al-Ghazzali and ibn Abbad. Al-Ghazzali considered al-Hallaj to be among the greatest of mystics and esoterics, "among the fewest of the few", while ibn Abbad belonged to the Shadhiliyyah School or Order of Sufism, one of whose leading figures was al-Hallaj. Abul Abbas al-Mursi, (note that "Mursi" means "from Murcia", so Abul Abbas al-Mursi was a Murcian, as was ibn Arabi al-Mursi) who introduced said school or Order to North Africa and Spain, claimed to an initiate of an unbroken chain of spiritual masters (a sort of Apostolic Succession) begun by Hasan ibn Ali, Second Shi'ite Imam, and, presumably, including al-Hallaj. As we have said before, this

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Shadhiliyyah connection gives St. John of the Cross a firm if oblique relation to Hasan ibn Ali, Second Shi'a Imam, and to Hussein ibn Ali, Third Shi'a Imam. Louis Massignon and Louis Gardet have compared al-Hallaj's teachings with those of St. John of the Cross, i.e., "Two natures (God and man) in a single spirit and love of God", and found them to be identical.(107) By way of ibn Abbad of Ronda and the Shadhiliyyah School or Order to which **he belonged, St. John of the Cross was an initiate in a line of** spiritual masters which began with Hasan ibn Ali, Second Imam and included al-Hallaj. St. John of the Cross was also connected to al-Hallaj by way of al-Ghazzali. We shall have more to say of this Order in a different context.

There are a number of close parallels between the Shadhiliyya school of Sufism, of which ibn Abbad of Ronda was one of its greatest exponents and the Descalced Carmelite School of Christian Mysticism, of which St. John of the Cross was the founder. This is one of the many firm if oblique connections between St. John of the Cross on one hand and the great Shi'a philosophers and theologians of Safavi Persia as well as Hasan ibn Ali, Second Imam, Hussein ibn Ali, Third Imam, and al-Hallaj. Obviously St. John of the Cross could not have been influenced by these Safavi Shi'a sages, as he is about a century earlier than they. However,

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there are obvious connections between them. A full discussion of this would lead us beyond the limits of the present work.

One of the principle works of St. John of the Cross is Ascent of Mount Carmel, while two of the principle works of al-Ghazzali are Ascent to the Court of Sanctity and Ascent of the Pilgrims. There is a very close parallel between a few passages of Alchemy of Happiness by al-Ghazzali and certain passages of the prose commentary of Ascent of Mount Carmel.

Says al-Ghazzali:

"His (man's) five senses are like five doors which open onto the external world; but, more marvelous that this, in his heart is a window opening onto the invisible world of spirits. In the sleeping states, when the doors of the senses are closed, this window opens and man receives impressions from the invisible world and sometimes foreknowledge of future events. His heart then becomes like a mirror which reflects that which is drawn in the Book of Fate. But, even when sleeping, thoughts of temporal things cloud and tarnish this mirrorr, so that the impression it reflects is not clear. After death, however, those thoughts vanish and things are seen in their stark reality. thus is fulfilled the saying of the Quran: "We have stripped the veil from you and today your vision is acute."

In the above al-Ghazzali is echoed by Rumi in the Divani

Shamsi Tabriz:

"From the body You are far, but in my heart fronting  
Your face is a window.  
Through that secret window, like the moon I am sending  
You a message."  
"Often I laid the spiritual ear at the window of the  
heart

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I heard much discourse, but lips I did not see."

"Dismiss cares and be utterly clear of heart  
Like the face of a mirror without image and picture  
When it becomes clear of all images, all images are  
contained in it."

"The soul resembles a clear mirror  
The body is dust upon it."

Note that image of the mirror is used in exactly the same way  
by St. Efrem the Syrian (4th century AD). Says Sebastian Brock:

"(St.) Efrem was clearly fascinated by mirrors -  
not the glass mirrors we know today, but the metal ones  
that had to be kept polished in order to reflect the  
light and the image of the beholder. Use of the images  
of the mirror, light and the eye allow (St.) Efrem to  
explore the optics, as it were, of spiritual  
perception."(108)

But the passage by al-Ghazzali which we have cited is even  
more closely echoed by St. John of the Cross in the prose  
commentary to Ascent of Mount Carmel:

"And thus, being that the soul is in the body, it is as  
though it were in a dark prison, and knows nothing save  
that which it comes to see by way of the window of said  
prison, and if it sees nothing there it will see  
nothing."

"And thus the soul is like this window, through which is  
ever passing, or, rather, in which is ever dwelling  
this Divine Light of the Presence (literally "Being") of  
God."

Of course, St. John of the Cross was more the Rumi than the  
al-Ghazzali or Mullah Sadra Shirazi of Castile. Though he often



reminds us of al-Ghazzali in the way he puts scholastic tools to mystical use, like Rumi and unlike al-Ghazzali, St. John of the Cross was primarily a poet and was always a mystic and esoteric and nothing else. Thus there is a difference in character between the two works of which we are primarily speaking. Living Flame of Love is a poem with a long prose commentary. Niche for Lights is entirely in prose, and its manner of exposition is more scholastic and systematic. Some have seen in Niche for Lights "a Ghazzalian philosophy of religion".

Yet one should not be deceived by the apparent outward differences between the two works. Both are mystical, both initiatory. Though its style and mode of exposition remind one more of the Masnavi of Rumi than of the Summa Theologica (in the terminology of the Shi'a Kalam, St. John of the Cross is an *Ishraqi* or *Hakim*, while St. Thomas Aquinas is a "falasifa", peripatetic or Hellenizing philosopher) of St. Thomas Aquinas, yet Living Flame of Love reveals enormous learning and theological acumen. Even those who say that Niche for Lights is a "Ghazzalian philosophy of religion" admit that as such it is strangely incomplete and full of contradictions and inconsistencies, something inconceivable if al-Ghazzali had really intended it to be a systematic philosophy of religion. Those who maintain that

Niche for Lights is a philosophy of religion are weaving ropes of sand, trying to make a systematic exposition out of random expressions used to illustrate or reinforce certain points. Living Flame of Love contains direct quotations from early Christian mystics, notably St. Gregory of Nyssa. Niche for Lights contains echoes if not direct quotations from the same early Christian mystics, which were part of the common heritage of Sufism and Christian Mysticism. Living Flame of Love and some other works of St. John of the Cross, notably Spiritual Canticle and Gloss of the Divine contain echoes of Persian Sufis, particularly Rumi, Suhrawardi and Saadi, who lived before the time of St. John of the Cross but later than the time of al-Ghazzali. Said echoes are of course absent in Niche for Lights. Niche for Lights is an exegesis of two Quranic verses, i.e., the Light Verse (XXIV; 35), from which comes the title of the work, the Darkness Verse which follows, and a hadith which says:

"Allah has surely 70,000 veils of Light and Darkness. If He were to withdraw this curtain, then would the splendors of His countenance surely consume everyone who contemplates Him with his sight."

Given the above as preliminary, it should be noted that Living Flame of Love is composed of four short "songs" or stanzas. Of these four it is the first and the third which are of special

interest to us. The first stanza is as follows:

O living flame of love  
How tenderly You wound  
My soul in its deepest centre  
For now You are not shy  
Finish now, if you will  
Tear the veil of this sweet encounter

The first four lines bear no very striking resemblance to Niche for Lights, but nevertheless are of special interest to us.

The same image is used by St. John of the Cross in a minor work (i.e., a poem without a long prose commentary) Gloss of the Divine:

Such a work does love  
That after I have known it  
If there is good or evil in me  
It is all of the same savor  
And the soul becomes transformed  
And thus in its savory flame  
Which within me I am feeling  
Quickly, leaving nothing  
All of me is being consumed

This image has a certain parallel with various works of St. Gregory of Nyssa, as quoted by St. John of the Cross in the prose commentary of the first stanza of Living Flame of Love, e.g., "Internally they softly burned in love." The early Syriac fathers (so-called because they wrote in Syriac, a North Syrian dialect of Aramaic) also use the image of the fire or flame in a

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manner that seems to prefigure Rumi and St. John of the Cross.

St. Efrem the Syrian (4<sup>th</sup> century AD) uses fire as a symbol of Divinity:

"Fire entered Mary's womb, put on a body and came forth", as a symbol of the spirit, and a symbol of the Eucharist:

"The Fire of Mercies has become a living sacrifice for us".

Below is a stanza by St. Efrem the Syrian:

"This Divine Fire has a double aspect, for it can both sanctify and destroy:  
Blessed are you my brethen,  
for the Fire of Mercy has come down  
and purifying and sanctifying your bodies."(109)

Another Syriac Father, Martyrius, or, to use his Syriac name, *Sahdona*, used the image of fire:

"Happy are you, Oh flesh and blood, the dwelling place of the Consuming Fire;  
Happy are you, mortal body made out of dust,  
Wherein resides the Fire that sets the worlds alight."(110)

"We should accordingly worship and glorify Him Who raised our dust to such state, recounting ceaselessly the Holiness of Him Who mingled our spirit with His Spirit, and mixed inyo our bodies the gift of His grace, causing the Fire of His Holy Spirit to burst into flames in us"(111)

The later Greek Fathers also use the image of the fire or flame; we have already mentioned St. Gregory of Nyssa in this

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respect, but St. Symeon the New Theologian also used said image.(112) St. Efrem the Syrian was from Nisibis in Northern

Syria, near the border between the Roman and Persia Empires, Martyrius or Sahdona was from Kirkuk in what is now Northern Iraq, St. Gregory of Nyssa was a Cappadocian, while St. Symeon the New Theologian was from Anatolia. Thus all these Church fathers were from areas which had long been under intense Persian cultural influence.(113)

While it is unlikely that St. John of the Cross was familiar with the Syriac Fathers, save in Greek or Latin translation, he was familiar with St. Gregory of Nyssa, and also, probably, with St. Symeon the New Theologian.(114)

However, by far the closest parallels to the image used in the first two lines of Living Flame of Love and Gloss of the Divine is found in the works of the Persian Sufi poets and esoterics, i.e., Suhrawardi and Saadi.

Says Saadi in the Gulistan:

Oh nightingale, learn from the moth to love  
That shrivels in the flame without a sigh

The parallels and similarities between Living Flame of Love and other works of St. John of the Cross on one hand and the *Ishraqi* philosophy and theosophy of Sheikh (or **Pir**) Abu al-Din

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Yahya al-Suhrawardi on the other are obvious enough. This fact, together with the obvious influence of the Shi'ite Kalam, *Ishraqi*

and Hikmat-i-Illahi in so many Hispano-Muslim thinkers has obvious implications in reference to the religious life and thought of the Moriscos and also to the question of Shi'ism in Muslim Spain. However, all this lies outside the scope of the present work, and at the moment I lack the necessary reference and research materials.

The last line of the first stanza of Living Flame of Love also has an obvious parallel with the hadith quoted above and expounded by al-Ghazzali in Niche for Lights and also with the Quranic saying (a close paraphrase of XXII: 50) quoted by al-Ghazzali in the last sentence of the paragraph from Alchemy of Happiness cited above. Let us see how the Castilian mystical poet and the Persian philosopher-theologian respectively deal with it.

In the prose commentary of the last line of the first stanza of Living Flame of Love, St. John of the Cross says that there are three veils which separate the soul from Union with God, i.e., 1.):

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- ❖ 1.) the temporal, in which all creatures are comprehended;
- ❖ 2.) the natural, which comprehends the purely natural operations and inclinations; &

- ❖ 3.) the sensuous, which comprehends the union between soul and body, which is the sensual, animal life. As far as I am aware, this is the first use of the image of the "veil" in a mystical sense in the history of Christianity.

Since the first two veils are torn by way of the "via purgativa", described in Ascent of Mount Carmel and Dark Night of the Soul, there only remains the third veil. Digressing for a moment, it would be very interesting to compare the two works mentioned above with two works of al-Ghazzali, i.e., Ascent to the Court of Sanctity, and Ascent of the Pilgrims, but unfortunately I have never seen a copy of either of these two works and do not even know if they have been translated to English or Spanish. It would also be interesting to compare Living Flame of Love and Gloss of the Divine on one hand with Book of the Temples of Light and Kitab Hikmat al-Ishraq, literally Book of the Theosophy of Splendor, though often translated as Book of the Theosophers of the Orient, both by Suhrawardi, but once again I do not have the necessary research material at my disposal. This would be especially interesting, since St. John of the Cross was of the old nobility of Castile, and therefore of Celtic stock with a certain

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Visigothic infusion, while Suhrawardi attempted, with some success it would seem, to resuscitate the theosophy of Ancient Persia and

to incorporate it within Islam. This topic is very fascinating indeed. We have already spoken of the parallels between parts of Dark Night of the Soul and the works of ibn Abbad of Ronda.

Al-Ghazzali says that the number 70,000 is figurative and allegorical, that there are really only three veils which separate the soul from Union with God. Some men's souls are veiled by all three, some by only two, some by only one, and a few, the great mystics, have rent all three veils. As al-Ghazzali says in a striking parallel to the words of St. John of the Cross in Ascent of Mount Carmel:

"Some of those souls do not need, in their upward progression and ascent, to climb step by step through all the levels described, nor did their ascent cost them any time."

According to al-Ghazzali, those whose souls are "veiled" are of basically three sorts:

➤ 1.) Those veiled by pure darkness, in other words atheists and materialists. Those believe only in the temporal world, denying all else; in this sense all the temporal world is for them a "veil";

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➤ 2.) Those veiled by mixed light and darkness, which are of three types; a.) the "veil of the senses"; b.) The "veil" of the



imagination; & c.) The veil of the errors of the intelligence. The people in this category are "veiled" by the limitations of ordinary human faculties &

➤ 3.) Those veiled by pure light. Briefly put, these people identify God with His attributes, while understanding that said attributes are not the same as the human attributes which bear the same names, e.g., knowledge, power, etc. This veil, unlike the other two, is not based upon a complete or partial error, but rather is a sort of "stagnation" of the spiritual life; it is correct as far as it goes, but does not go far enough.(114)

The parallel between Living Flame of Love and Niche for Lights in reference to the "veils", though not exact, is very close, both in reference to the symbol or image and to the meaning given it. Both say that there are three veils. In both cases the first veil is the same or nearly so. The second veil of al-Ghazzali would seem to include both the second and the third veils of St. John of the Cross. The third veil of al-Ghazzali is not easy to understand; perhaps it could be said to be included in the third veil of St. John of the Cross, though this point is debatable and does not lend itself to a pat solution. It should be noted that in his exegesis of the "hadith of the veils" al-

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Ghazzali was very much influenced by the "Darkness verse" of the Quran, which St. John of the Cross was not. This verse, though

referred to in Niche for Lights, is not quoted in its entirety in the majority of the editions and translations of said work; if St. John of the Cross really had a copy of Niche for Lights in his hands, the "Darkness verse" was probably not included in it.

The third stanza of Living Flame of Love is as follows:

Oh lamps of fire  
In whose glow  
The deep caverns of the senses  
That were dark and blind  
With strange beauties  
Give heat and light beside the Beloved

Firstly, it should be noted that the image of the Beloved is used by virtually all Sufi poets and by St. John of the Cross, but not by al-Ghazzali. While St. John of the Cross is perhaps the greatest lyric poet of the Spanish language, al-Ghazzali, despite his great gifts and virtues, was apparently without poetic talent.

There is a very close parallel between the first three lines of the above stanza of Living Flame of Love and the beginning of the "Light verse" of the Quran, which goes:

"God is the light of heaven and earth. His light is like a lamp in a niche (in the wall)".

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Indeed, it might not be too much to say that Living Falme of Love gives a closer exegesis of the beginning of the Light verse

than does Niche for Lights.

In his prose commentary on the line **Oh lamps of fire**, St. John of the Cross says that the "lamps" are the Divine Attributes, each of which is the Divine Being itself, God Infinite Light and Infinite Fire (here St. John of the Cross certainly seems to echo Rumi, Saadi, and, most especially, Suhrawardi rather than al-Ghazzali), thus each of these Attributes is a lamp which illuminates the soul and gives the warmth of mystical love.

Al-Ghazzali says that the learned are lamps, but that the prophets are much greater lamps, and thus are called "lamps illuminant". The source from which said lamps are lit is symbolized by fire. As the Quran (XXIV; 35) says:

"Its oil was luminous though untouched by fire",  
but becomes

"True Light upon Light"  
when touched by said fire. Al-Ghazzali discourses on the hierarchy of the various grades of light, though God is the source of all of them, and is thus the only true Light. Thus for al-Ghazzali as for St. John of the Cross, "Light" and "Fire" represent Divine Attributes. Both St. John of the Cross and al-Ghazzali use

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stories of Abraham and Moses to illustrate their points of view, though of course in the case of St. John of the Cross said stories

are derived from the Bible, while al-Ghazzali derives his from the Qur'an.

Al-Ghazzali speaks at some length of the "transcendental Light of Prophecy", something which St. John of the Cross does not mention. But St. John of the Cross includes wisdom among the Divine Attributes, and thus "God is the Lamp of Wisdom". In emphasizing that the fire of these lamps is also the fire of divine, mystical love, St. John of the Cross once again seems to echo Rumi, Suhrawardi and Saadi, who lived later than the time of al-Ghazzali, but some centuries before the time of St. John of the Cross.

We now pass to the third line:

"The deep caverns of sense" (or "the senses"; in Spanish the meaning is ambiguous).

The similarity between the "niche" and "cavern" is obvious enough; a cavern may be defined as a large and deep niche. Not being obliged to follow the Qura'nic text word for word, St. John of the Cross chose "cavern" for poetic reasons. A niche by definition cannot be very deep, because beyond a certain point it becomes a "tunnel", "cavern", "cave" or "hole in the wall".

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In effect, St. John of the Cross expounds only the first part and the last few words of the "Light verse" of the Quran; besides

the niche and lamp said verse also mentions a glass, an olive tree and oil "luminous though untouched by Fire, Light upon Light". In his exegesis of the symbolism of said verse, al-Ghazzali says that the niche is the sensorial spirit, the glass the imaginative spirit, the lamp the spirit of intelligence, the tree the reasoning or rational spirit and the oil the transcendent prophetic spirit,

"Whose oil is luminous, though untouched by fire"

but when touched by the Divine Fire becomes

"Light upon Light".

According to St. John of the Cross the "deep caverns" are the faculties of the soul, i.e., memory, understanding and will. Three of the five "spirits" mentioned above by al-Ghazzali are also "faculties of the soul". For St. John of the Cross the "sensorial spirit" is of the body, not the soul (in other words, the "veil of the senses" of which al-Ghazzali speaks in his exegesis of the "hadith of the veils"), while the "transcendent prophetic spirit" does not fit very well in the Christian

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tradition, and most particularly not in the tradition of Christian Mysticism.

Though the "Darkness verse" of the Quran is not given nor quoted verbatim in most editions and translations of Niche for Lights, nevertheless al-Ghazzali gives a brief exegesis of it. According to al-Ghazzali,

"billow topped by billow topped by cloud",  
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"darkness heaped upon darkness"

is:

- ❖ 1.) The wave of lust of animal appetites;
- ❖ 2.) The fierce or wrathful attributes, i.e., hatred, envy, greed, vanity, pride, etc.; &
- ❖ 3.) False beliefs, heresies, evil imaginings.

The line following:

"deep caverns of sense" is:

"which were dark and blind".

According to St. John of the Cross, the souls does not see when it is in darkness, i.e., when it is not illuminated by the Divine Light. Thus, the darkness of the soul is its ignorance. The soul is blind (absence of light does not necessarily mean

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blindness) when it is in a state of sin. Says St. John of the Cross:

"And (the soul) is also blind while it takes delight in something else; because the blindness of the rational and superior sense is the appetite, which, like a cataract and a cloud which covers the eye of reason, so that it does not see that which is before it."

When cleansed of sin, the deep caverns of the faculties of the soul cease to be dark, and themselves become luminous. Abyss calls to abyss, light calls to light. When touched by the fire of the lamps of the Divine Attributes, the caverns of the faculties of the soul themselves become lamps - Light upon Light - the flames of the lamps become one, and the soul becomes one with God by participation.

Al-Ghazzali, in attempting to explain the Mystical Union,  
Says:

"There is a difference between the expression "the wine is the wine glass" and the expression "as though it were the wine-glass...". To the man in this state it is called, in metaphysical language, "Identity", in more exact language, "Unification".

Living Flame of Love is not a mere copy, translation or paraphrase of Niche for Lights. Very much in the style of

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Dionysius the Pseudoareopagite, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory Palamas, St. John of the Cross gives a Trinitarian interpretation to his mystical doctrines, which of course

al-Ghazzali does not. Two of the four stanzas of Living Flame of Love bear no special resemblance to Niche for Lights. Though it would no doubt be easy enough to show that said stanzas do have parallels with the works of various Sufi poets, this would lead us too far from our main topic, and we have no space here to do this. Living Flame of Love contains direct quotations from the Bible and from St. Gregory of Nyssa, and echoes of Sufi poets and theosophers later than the time of al-Ghazzali, which are of course absent in Niche for Lights. Niche for Lights includes an exegesis of the "hadith of the veils" influenced by the "Darkness verse" of the Quran. In his treatment of the image of the veils, St. John of the Cross betrays no influence of the Darkness verse, though there does seem to be an echo of al-Ghazzali's exegesis of said verse in the fourth line of the third stanza of Living Flame of Love, i.e.:

"That were dark and Blind, and in the prose commentary of said line. In Niche for Lights, al-Ghazzali gives a complete

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exegesis of the "Light verse" of the Qur'an. In Living Flame of Love, both the poem and the prose commentary, St. John of the Cross seems to echo only the first part of said verse, i.e.



"Allah is the light of Heaven and earth; His Light is like a lamp in a niche (in the wall)"

and the last few words of said verse, i.e.,

"The oil was luminous though untouched by fire; Light upon Light."

When all is said and done, the parallels between Niche for Lights by al-Ghazzali and Living Flame of Love by St. John of the Cross are both numerous and close. I leave it to the reader to decide for himself whether or not St. John of the Cross was inspired by Niche for Lights when he wrote Living Flame of Love, keeping in mind the historical facts concerning the Moriscos and the "mora de Ubeda", the parallels between certain passages of Alchemy of Happiness by al-Ghazzali and the prose commentary of Ascent of Mount Carmel by St. John of the Cross, as well as the many parallels between the works of St. John of the Cross and various Sufi poets, both Persian and Hispano-Muslim.

Before leaving our discussion concerning the "Light Verse" of the Qur'an and the exegesis of it according to al-Ghazzali and

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St. John of the Cross, we will give four Shi'a commentaries or exegeses on it, the first by Imam Hussein, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Imam and the Martyr of Karbala:

"Abu Abdillah (Imam Hussein) said, concerning the words

of Allah the Sublime: Allah is the Light of the heavens and earth the likeness of His Light is a niche, Fatima; wherein is a lamp, al-Hasan, the lamp is a glass, al-Hussein, the glass as it were a glittering star, Fatima is the glittering star among the women of this world; kindled from a blessed tree, Ibrahim (Abraham). An olive that is neither of the East nor of the West, neither of Judaism nor Christianity, whose oil wellnigh would shine, knowledge burst out of it, even if no fire touched it. Light upon light, Imam from it (the tree) after Imam; Allah guides to His Light Whom He will; Allah strikes similitudes for men." (115)

Fatima, of course, is the mother of both Hasan, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Imam, and Hussein, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Imam.

Below is a brief commentary by Ja'far al-Sadiq, the 6<sup>th</sup> Imam:

"Eshaq ibn Jarir narrated, saying: "A woman asked me to allow her to enter and see Imam (Ja'far) al-Sadiq. I asked the Imam and he allowed her to enter. She entered with a bondswoman and said: "O Abu Abdullah (Imam Ja'far)! Allah said (in the Qur'an) 'An Olive, neither of the East nor the West.' "What does this mean?" He (Imam Ja'far) told her: "O woman! Allah does not express sayings for the trees. He states sayings for humankind."

Talhah ibn Zayd narrated from his father about Imam (Ja'far) al-Sadiq concerning the interpretation of the verse 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.' He (Imam Ja'far) said: " He began with His Light 'The Parable of His Light' as a guide in the heart of the believer; 'as if there were a Niche and within it a

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Lamp.', the Niche is the interior of the believer and the Lamp is his heart. It is the Light that Allah that Allah put inside his heart."

'Lit from a blessed tree', the tree: the believer. 'An Olive, neither of the East nor of the West', on the darkness of the tree, neither of the East nor of the West. If the sun rises, it will shine upon it. And if there is a sunset, it will be on that tree also. 'Whose oil is well-nigh luminous', the Light, which is inside

his heart, may give light without ever speaking.

'Light upon Light', duty upon duty, and tradition upon tradition. 'Allah guides whom He will to His Light', Allah guides anyone (whom) He wills to the obligations and the traditions. 'Allah sets forth Parables for men', this is just like the one set forth for the believer.

Then he (Imam Ja'far) said: "The believer turns in five types of lights: his entrance is light, his exit is light, his knowledge is light, his speech is light and his destination on the Resurrection Day is also light."

She told Imam Ja'far: "They say, just as the Light of the Lord." He (Imam Ja'far) said: "O praise be to Allah! Allah does not have anything similar to Him. Allah said: "Invent not similitudes for Allah (Qur'an: Surah "The Bee")."

He (Imam Ja'far) said the following in interpreting this verse (the Light Verse); "He the Almighty, chose this saying for us. The Prophet (Muhammad) and the (Shi'a) Imams are among the signs of Allah and His evidences, who are used for guiding people to monotheism, to the benefits of religion and the instructions of Islam, its traditions and obligations. There is no power other than the power of Allah the Almighty." (116)

The above commentaries by Imam Hussein and Imam Ja'far have a certain spontaneous, extemporaneous, "off the cuff" or "spur of

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the moment" quality. It is most likely that Imam Ja'far made more thought out, mystical and esoteric exegeses of the "Light Verse" of the Qur'an. The writings of Imam Ja'far are voluminous, and I have access to only a very small part of them.

Below is a modern Shi'a commentary or exegesis of the Light

Verse of the Qur'an:

"This holy verse is one of the allegorical verses having hidden meanings, and there are several aspects in its explanation. The apparent translation is: It is Allah who grants light to the skies and the earth from the light of His existence and knowledge and guidance as well as the outward glow of the stars etcetera. This attribute, quality and example of Allah's light is like the niche and it is the hole in which the lamp is kept. Some have said that there is a sphere in that lantern which contains a wick as if there is a lamp in that niche and that the lamp may be in a lantern made of glass and that lantern may be shining like a very bright star or Venus and that lamp has been lighted by the bounteous olive tree which neither of The East nor of the West. Some have said that it might not have grown either in the east nor in the west that the sunshine may at times fall on it and at other times not, rather it might have grown in some expansive desert on top of a mountain where it might receive sunlight at all times so that its fruit might be ripe and its oil extremely pure. Some have said that it may not be either to the east nor to the west of human habitation but in the middle of it which is Syria, which produces the finest olive oil in the whole world. Some have said that it may not have grown where the sun does not shine, because then the fruit would not ripen. It should have grown at a place where the sun alternately may shine and not shine and it seems as if

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the oil will give light by itself without being touched by fire and its radiance may continue to increase, light upon light because the purity of the olive oil and the brightness of the lantern and the safety of the lamp-bearer, and thus its brightness multiplies. Allah guides whoever He wishes towards His light and provides examples for the people, and Allah is All-knowing.

The commentators have explained the meaning of this verse from many angles. The first is that Allah has described this example for His Prophet. The niche is the Holy heart of the Holy messenger and the lamp is his wisdom-filled soul and the glass is the Messengership which is neither eastern nor western, neither Christian

nor Jewish because Christians face toward the east and Jews face toward the west while praying. The bountiful tree is Ibrahim (a.s.) and the light Muhammad who is about to come before the people, visibly though not audibly.

Second: that niche may mean Ibrahim (a.s.) and the lamp may be Ismail (a.s.) and the glass may be Muhammad and the blessed tree may mean Ibrahim (a.s.) because the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) was born from his loins and they have been neither eastern nor western. *The oil which almost gives light though fire touch it not* may mean that it is likely that the niceties of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) may become visible and apparent very soon before he receives the revelation. *Light upon light* may mean that Messengership is a kind of light which is from the lineage of messengers.

Third: The niche is Abdul Muttalib and the light is Abdullah and the glass is the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) who is neither eastern nor western, rather he is a Meccan and Mecca is situated in the middle of the world map.

Fourth: This example has been given by Allah for the believer and the niche is his soul and the lamp his heart and the glass is faith and the Qur'an which is in his heart and brightens or shines through that bountiful tree which is sincerity concerning Allah. So that tree remains ever green like the tree around which other trees have grown and the light of the sun does

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not reach that tree at sunrise nor at sunset and this is the example of the believer. No trial or tribulation affects him adversely as he lives with four virtues (attributes): if Allah grants him something he thanks Him and if he is caught in some difficulty, he remains patient and when he gives a judgement or issues an order he does so with justice and when he speaks he speaks the truth. Thus his example among all people is like a living man who walks among the graves of the dead. Light above light means that his word is light and his deed or act is light. His entering every affair is light and his leaving is also light and so is his return on the Day of Judgement.

Fifth: Allah has given this example regarding the

Holy Qur'an. Thereby the niche is the Qur'an, the lamp is a believer's heart, the glass is his tongue and mouth and the bountiful tree is the revelation. *The oil whereof gives light though fire touch it not* means it is likely that soon the the meaning of the Qur'an will become clear even if it is not recited or that the proffs of Allah may become clear to the creatures and for a man who ponders over it even if the Qur'an is not revealed and 'It is light above light' means that the Qur'an is the light along with all those which went before it. 'Allah guides to His light whom He pleases' means that Allah guides whom he wills towards messengership and Imamate.

Apart from these, other explanations have also been given by the commentators but they would be too lengthy to quote them here. Traditions available in the explanation of this verse are also of various kinds.

First: Ali bin Ibrahim has quoted Imam (Ja'far) Sadiq (a.s.) in the explanation of this verse as saying that the niche is Fatima Zahra and 'in her is the lamp' means Imam Hasan and 'the lamp is in the glass' means Imam Hussein and since both these gentlemen are from one and the same Noor (light) both of them have been compared with the glass. The Imam (a.s.) said that the glass is also Fatima; meaning Fatima (s.a.) is like a shining star among all the women of the world (*remember the Latin prayer 'Ave Maria' [Hail Mary]: 'Blessed art thou among women'*) and the Heavens and the blessed tree

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is Ibrahim. *Neither eastern nor western* means he is neither a Jew nor a Christian. *The oil which almost gives light though fire touch it not* means it is as if very soon knowledge would gush out from them and their progeny. *Light upon light* means that Imams will be born one after the other. *Allah guides to His light whom He pleases* means that Allah guides whoever He wills towards the Imams.

Kulaini and Furat bin Ibrahim have also narrated this report in some ways and Allamah Hilli has, in *Kashaful Haqq*, and Ibn Bitreeq has, in *Aamadah* and Sayyid Tawoos in *Taraif* have narrated similarly from ibn Maghazali Shafei and he has said that the niche means Fatima and lamp mens hasan and Hussein and that Fatima is like a shining star (*Kaukabun Duriym*) among all

women of the world till the end.

The writer says: In order to make the matter clearer we say that when Ibrahim was the root of the prophets and the best man and that prophets are like its branches and that from that branch many different branches sprouted (of messenger and legatees) in the progeny of Hazrat Ishaq (Isaac) who are the Bani Israel and in the children of Ismail, the best of whom are the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and his legatees and because of them three branches of the Ahl Kitab (People of the Book), i.e., Jews, Christians and Muslims came into being. Therefore, Ibrahim (a.s.) is the branch and on this basis like the olive tree and since fruits of this tree and the permeation of the radiances of the olive oil was more perfect and to the maximum level, because these great personalities were more filled with grace than all the messengers and legatees and as these honourable personalities were the middle nation (Ummate Wusta) and the moderate Imams (Aimma Wusta) and since their Shariat and laws, characters and manners were most judicious as Almighty Allah had said. *And thus We have made you a medium (just) nation (2:143)* their being moderate is being moderate in laws; for example, the Christians face to the east and the Jews face to the west at the time of their prayers, but the direction of prayer of this Unnah is between the two. Likewise, the laws of retaliation and blood money and

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all other rules of Muslims are moderate. Therefore, the Almighty Allah has compared Ibrahim with the olive oil because of these great brightnesses saying that it is neither eastern nor western, which means it does not go to any extremity but remains intermediate and balanced (as is the case with the Jews and the Christians). The Christians have been called eastern and the Jews western because of the directions towards which they face during prayer. It is also possible that the verse may mean the olive which remains in the middle of the tree which may not be in the east as the sun does not shine over it at mid-day or in the west where the sun shines over it at sunset. Thus the simile becomes more perfect and more conclusive. And in doubt the olive means the remote matter and its knowledge which is for the Imamate and the Caliphate, the origin whereof is

Ibrahim (a.s.). Therefore the Almighty Allah addressed them saying: *Surely I will make you an Imam of men* (2:124) which has been transmitted to their holy progeny and the olive oil means the rare elements of revelation and inspiration and the brightness and radiance of the olive oil means the spreading of knowledge from those elements. *Though fire touch it not* means either revelation or asking because asking also brightens the fire of knowledge and *light upon light* has been explained as the Imams arriving one after another because every Imam who comes after his predecessor increases the knowledge and wisdom and light in the creation just as we have described. The equanimity and excellence of this explanation is as clear as the day.

Secondly. Ibn Babawayh has, in *Tawheed* and *Maniul Akhbar*, with reliable chains of narrators, quoted Fuzail bin Yasir that he asked Imam Sadiq (a.s.) about the verse: *Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth...* In reply the Imam said: The entire sky and earth are radiant by the light of Almighty Lord Allah. I asked what does '*a likeness of His light*' mean? He said: His Noor (Light) is Muhammad. Then I inquired about the niche and he replied: The niche means the

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Soul of Muhammad. I questioned: What does the lamp mean? He replied: It contains the light of knowledge, meaning messengership or Prophethood. I asked: What does '*the lamp is in the glass*' mean, and he explained: The transmission of the light of Muhammad into the heart of the Amir al-Muminin. I asked about: '*as it were*' and he said: Why do you recite '*as it were*'? I asked: What should I read? He said: '*(and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star*'. I asked: what is meant by: '*lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western*'? He said: these are the virtues of Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) who was neither a Jew nor a Christian. I asked about: '*The oil which almost gives light though fire touch it not*' and he explained that very soon knowledge may come from the mouth of a scholar from Aale Muhammad (a.s.) even before its asking or he may know of it even before that through inspiration. Then I asked about: '*light upon light*' and he said the advent of the Imams, one after another.



In *Basair* and *Ikhtisas*, Imam Baqir (a.s.) is reported to have said that 'a likeness of His light' is the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.); that as a niche in which is a lamp is Ilm (knowledge) and the lamp is in a glass is the heart of Ali (a.s.), lit from a blessed olive tree... here lit means knowledge, and neither eastern nor western that the knowledge came from Aale Ibrahim towards the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) and from him Ali (a.s.) got it. He is neither eastern nor western means neither a Jew nor a Christian. What is meant by the oil which almost gives light though fire touch it not is that very soon a scholar will speak with knowledge even before he is asked.

In *Kashful Ghummah*, there is a narration from *Dalail Humairi* that people asked for the meaning of niche (Mishkat) from Imam Askari (a.s.). The Imam wrote in response that niche is the soul of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.).

Moreover, in *Tawheed*, there is a narration from Imam Baqir (a.s.) that, niche means the heart of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.). The knowledge of the Prophet came in the heart of Ali (a.s.) which means the Holy Prophet taught everything to Ali (a.s.). In lit from a

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blessed olive tree it is meant that Ilm (knowledge), neither eastern nor western means that he is neither a Jew nor a Christian. The oil which almost gives light though fire touch it not means it is likely that soon a scholar from Aale Muhammad (a.s.) may describe his knowledge even before he is asked about it. Light upon light means that one Imam will be followed by another who will be supported by knowledge and wisdom and that his routine has continued ever since the time of the Prophet Adam (a.s.) and will continue till the Day of Qiyamat and that only those gentlemen are the legatees (Awsiya) whom Allah has appointed as His Caliphs and made them His Hujjat (proof) on His creation. The world will never be without them.

In *Kafi*, with reliable chains of narrators, it is narrated from Imam Baqir (a.s.) that the Holy Prophet

(s.a.w.s.) transferred the knowledge which was with him to Ali (a.s.), that is, to his Wasee. This is the meaning of the divine word Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth... Allah says: I am the guide of

the residents of the sky and the earth. The example of this knowledge, which I have given to him is My light from which people get guidance like the niche which contains a lamp. The niche is the heart of Muhammad and the lamp is the light of knowledge which is in his heart Muhammad and the lamp is the light of knowledge which is in his heart.

And the word of the Lord of the universe which says that *the lamp is in a glass*, it means that I will call Muhammad to Me and give the knowledge which is with him to his legatee. Just as people keep a lamp in a lantern made of glass. (And) *the glass is as it were a brightly shining star* means that the grace of his legatees Ali ibn Bai Talib (a.s.). *Lit from a blessed olive tree* is the original bountiful lineage of Ibrahim, as the Lord of the Universe has said about him: *The mercy of Allah and His blessings are on you, o people of the house, surely He is Praised, Glorious (11:73)*. And also stated: *Surely Allah chose Adam and Nuh (Noah) and the descendants of Ibrahim and the descendants of Imran (Joachim, father of the Virgin Mary) above the nations (3:33)*. Meaning you are not a

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Jew who may pray towards the east, nor a Christian who may pray facing west, But you are on the path of Ibrahim as has Allah Almighty said: *Ibrahim was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists (3:67)*. But what is meant by the Divine words: *the oil which almost gives light though fire touch it not* is that example of your progeny is like oil which is being extracted from olives. Very soon they will speak with the Prophetic knowledge though no angel may come to him (with revelation).

Third: Ali bin Ibrahim and Furat have narrated from Abdullah bin Jundah that he wrote to Imam Reza (a.s.): May I be sacrificed for you. I have become old and weak and am no more able to do things which I could perform earlier. May I be sacrificed for you. Kindly teach me things which may make me near to my Lord and may increase my wisdom and my knowledge and intelligence. The hazrat wrote in response: read the letter which I am sending to you and understand it fully. There is health

in it for one whom Allah likes and therein is guidance for the one whom Allah wants to give it. You should read it again and again:

In the name of Allah the Beneficent and the Merciful; there is no power or might except Allah the High and the Mighty. Imam Ali bin Hussein (a.s.) said doubtlessly that Muhammad was the trustee of Allah on earth. After he was taken up from the world we of the Ahl al-Bait are the trustees on the earth. We have knowledge of people's calamities and death and the lineage of people and of the one who was born in Islam and who knew merely by looking at anyone whether he is a believer or a hypocrite. Our Shi'as have with them the names of all of their elders. Allah has taken a covenant and an oath from us and from them so that they will go wherever we go and wherever we will enter they will also enter. None save us and they are in the community (Millat) of Ibrahim and we will benefit by the Light of the Prophet on the Day of Qiyamat and the Prophet will benefit from the light of Allah. And our

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Shi'as will catch hold of our light. Whoever will remain detached from us will be destroyed and whosoever will follow us will obtain salvation and whoever will deny our Imamate is a disbeliever and truly we guide the one who follows us and he also gets guidance who does not love us and one who does not love us is not from us and has nothing to do with Islam. Allah has initiated Religion with us and He has also concluded it with us. It is due to our grace that Allah grows your provision from the earth and it is due to our grace that Allah saves you from drowning in the sea and from sinking in the earth and it will be due to our grace that Allah will give you the benefit in your life and in your grave and in the field of gathering (Hashr) and on the bridge (Sirat) and near the balance (Mizan) and make you enter Paradise. In the Book of Allah, our example is that of a *niche* and that *niche* has in it a lamp. So we are the *niche* wherein is the lamp and the lamp is the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) and the lamp is in a glass, the apparent meaning of which is the Hazrat.

According to a report of Furat, we are the *glass*, (and) *the glass is as it were a brightly shining star,*

*lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western which means that there is no defect of any kind in his Holy lineage which may be sometimes related to the east and sometimes to the west and in the words: the oil which almost gives light though fire touch it not fire means the Qur'an. Light upon light means the arrival of Imam after Imam. Allah guides to His light whom He pleases means the light of the Imamate and it is the resolve of Allah to appoint our Wali and our Shi'a in such a manner that his face may be bright and his argument clear and his proof may be precious in the sight of Allah. Our enemy will appear with a dark face on the day of Judgement. His arguments will be false and it is the decision of Allah to make our friends the companions of the messengers, the truthful ones, martyrs and the righteous people and how evil are the friends of satan and the disbelievers and how evil are their friends. And it is the resolution of Allah to make our enemies the friends of Satan and disbelievers and how evil are their friends. Our martyrs have a ten*

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fold grace over all other martyrs. So we are the noble ones and we are the sons and legatees of the prophets and the legatees. We are the dignitaries of the Book of Allah and we are, among all peoples, along with the Prophet of Allah, the best and the highest and it is we for whom Allah has reserved His Religion. *He has made plain to you of the religion what He Enjoined upon Nuh and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Ibrahim and Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus) that keep to obedience and be not divided therein... (42:13)* that is, remain steadfast in the religion of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.). Hard to the unbelievers is that you call them to (42:13); that is who deny the Wilayat of Ali which you invite them to accept (the Wilayat of Ali) is hard for them *Allah chooses for Himself whom He pleases, and guides to Himself him who turns (to Him) frequently (42:13)*. The Imam said: Allah draws whom He likes towards Him and He guides whom He wills, meaning: O Prophet! Allah guides him who accepts your Wilayat.

Similarly, Muhammad bin Ayyash has narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that Imam Zain al-Abidin (a.s.) said: Our example, in the Book of Allah, is like a niche. So we are the niche and the niche is the hole wherein a

lamp is placed and the lamp is in a glass and the glass is Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) (And) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star is Ali ibn Abi Talib. Light upon light is the holy Qur'an and Allah guides to His light whom He pleases means that Allah guides towards our Wilayat everyone whom He loves.

Fourth: Ali bin Ibrahim has narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that Imam Baqir (a.s.) has, in the explanation of the verse of Noor (Light) (24:35) said that Allah began His light as His guidance in the heart of a believer. As a niche in which is a lamp is the heart of the believer and glass is his heart and the lamp is the radiance that Allah has put in his heart. Lit from a blessed olive tree is the lineage of the believer. Neither eastern nor western means that it is in the middle of the mountain so that it may be neither eastern, where the rays of the sun do not fall upon it at the time of sunset, nor is it western where it may

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not receive the rays of the sun at the time of daybreak. Rather it is at a point where it gets light at all times. The oil which almost gives light though fire touch it not means that it is likely that very soon the light which Allah has placed in his heart may begin to spread brightness without saying anything by the tongue. Light upon light means duty after duty and Sunnah (tradition) over Sunnah. Allah guides to His light whom He pleases means that Allah leads whom He likes towards His obligatory duties and the recommended deeds. He said: And Allah sets forth parables for men means that Allah has given the example for the faithful. The business of every faithful person is to go around (keep going around) five Noors (lights). His entering in everyone of said works is a Noor and to come out of it (conclusion) is also Noor. His talking is Noor and his knowledge is Noor. On the day of judgement, his returning towards his Lord is also Noor. The Hazrat said: Subhanallah, Allah has no examples. So: Therefore do not give likenesses to Allah (16:74.)"

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Below is yet another exegesis of the 'Light Verse':

"The great mystery of existence, its eternal origin

and the unending ultimate, is given in this very comprehensive and eloquent parable. No amount of explanatory notes to interpret the mystic meaning of *the various allegorical comparisons can do full justice to bring home to the readers the object of the great author*, which has been so figuratively treasured in the parable. Commentators have given their own conjectures, derived from various scholars. Light has been used for its action, (i.e., the Manifestation), here meaning God is He who manifests the heavens and earth. We human beings so long as we are contained in the physical body and depend upon the various natural phenomena of the physical world around us, can only conceive of the factors of the abstract world through some examples or parables conceivable by our sensuous experiences. Light in fact has no colour or shape and what we perceive of it, is only the experience of its reflexion or the reaction of the objects with which our own physical eye

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is affected, and the limitations of our visual capacity is not a secret. Light is the purest factor which we have come to know, and what we see of it depends upon the external, usually material object from which it is reflected or with which it reacts and which become the source of its manifestation. We see not the Light but the illuminated objects perceivable by our physical eye. Hence what we experience is only an illusion, which needs space and time for its manifestation to our senses. Its speed is conjectured by the scientists to be of **lakhs** (one *lakh* = 100,000) of miles per second. Of the heavenly bodies that man could by this time explore and know, there are some luminaries whose light takes thousands of light years to reach our eyes here on earth. But the Absolute Divine Light of reality has no such limitations nor dependence. It prevails '*Olive*'

The Divine Light with its likeness of which the conception of God is presented to man, in this verse, is said to resemble the one placed on a high stand. When the light enlightens every one and everything of God's creation, the light must naturally be higher than the creation than the creation or the created universe as a whole. In that high place is the lamp, i.e., the genetic factor which generates and emanates the light all around. The similitude is further simplified giving the instance of the lamp placed in a glass, i.e., it is

protected from any approach by anyone and against any puff of wind blowing it out. i.e., without any possibility of being in the least affected or disturbed. (61:8)

The resplendence of the light that is placed in the glass is so strong and powerful that the glass itself has become so radiant that it shines bright as a star. . Now the mind in this physical world of cause and effect, would naturally need to know what makes the lamp burn, for no lamp in this world can ever burn with no oil to consume. Hence to give man the idea of the causative factor of the generation of the light of the lamp, it is said that the lamp is lit by the oil of blessed tree, 'Olive', the oil of which is deemed by mankind as the finest for use to burn in a lamp for light, as well as the healthiest to nourish the body.

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It is said that after the deluge of Noah's time, which caused the wholesale destruction of life on earth, the first thing which grew on the earth was an olive tree and since it received the light of the sun when it 'nothing but only that which was revealed to him...(53:3). The shining of the light upon light refers to the successive line of the Holy Imams issued from the seed of Ali (ibn Abi Talib) and Fatima (Zahra). One holy Imam immediately succeeding the one before until the end of the world. The Light of knowledge in the heart of the Holy Prophet, is so safe as in the glass, (i.e., Ali ibn Abi Talib), it is referred to in (56:77-79), saying that the Holy Qur'an is a protected Book and none shall touch it save the purified ones; and who are the purified ones (see 33:33). This meaning is made clearer in the next verse.

It is said that God Himself guides towards His Light whosoever He pleases, which clearly indicates that anyone and everyone can never have the guidance without God graciously granting it according to the justification or the qualification of the sincerity in the quest for it in each individual aspirant. And mere commonsense suffices for anyone to know that no impure soul could ever be imagined to be able to approach to the Light of God. This factor is made clear in 2:257, the condition for earning the guidance is given thusly:

*:Whosoever disbelieves in the Devil and believes in God, he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handle or the rope or the (means), there is no break for it: (i.e., the handle, the rope or the means). A sincere and intelligent reflection would lead us to the handle or the rope, following which one can surely escape from the abyss of darkness into light, and there can be no others but those purified by God Himself (33:33) for as the ones perfectly purified by God Himself, they and only they could be the manifestation or the reflection of the Divine Light in God's creation. Thus he who will be attached to the holy ones of the House of the Holy Prophet, i.e., the Ahl al-Bait, would have the grace of God to be enlightened but only to the extent of the degree of attachment to them. Among his companions, to*

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only Salman, and to no one else, the Holy Prophet said '*Salman is of the Ahl al-Bait*'.

The Holy Prophet has announced this fact in his well-known saying:

"The likeness of my Ahl al-Bait is that of the Ark of Noah, whosoever entered it was saved, and whosoever turned away from was drowned and perished".

The maximum guidance towards the Light of God referred to here, is '*Nubuwwat*', i.e., the apostleship and the '*Imamate*', i.e., the Divine Guidance, i.e., one being made by God to be the Guide for mankind, and about God's conferring this holy office is made conditional which fact could be known from Abraham's getting it, and his aspiring to this grace for his progeny, and God telling Abraham that '*it is a Covenant which shall not reach the iniquitous*' (2:124). The greatest iniquity is '*Shirk*', i.e., polytheism (31:13). Thus whosoever has polluted himself with the greatest impurity of '*Shirk*', i.e., polytheism, shall never have the office of being the guide to the Divine Light. And those whom '*Shirk*' could never in their lives have touched, are only the holy Ahl al-Bait. And those who were once polluted with '*Shirk*' and subsequently got themselves out of it and remained faithfully attached to the purified ones (Ahl al-Bait) shall also have the enlightenment to the extent of their personal individual sincerity in their



(Vila) faithful attachment to the holy ones. And those who even though they have outwardly discarded polytheism but did not attach themselves to the purified one, they shall naturally not have any benefit of their merely verbal profession of faith in God.

The existence of God being described here as the Light, is only an example given to help the human mind to conceive the idea concerning the great attribute of the Lord, otherwise God is the inconceivable Absolute who is the Creator of Light, and the Light referred to is his manifestation and Not his Essence.

\* \* \*

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To have a correct idea of and the proper application of this celebrated verse of the Qur'an as the 'Aaya-e-Noor' i.e., the Verse of Light, the following points should be kept in view:

- ❖ 1.) That the whole passage is a parable.
- ❖ 2.) A parable is capable of various applications corresponding to the various aspects it implies.
- ❖ 3.) The light should be taken in its widest sense, i.e., a self-evident thing which is evident by itself and through which other things become visible.
- ❖ 4.) The light emanating from a source may pass through transparent, translucent or opaque mediums. The passing through opaque bodies is of no avail, but only that light is profitable which passes through transparent or translucent mediums.
- ❖ 5.) The transparent medium also differs in the degree of transparency; a translucent medium if not opaque, but neither is it truly transparent. The more refined and more purified, the better the conductivity. For example, a high quality glass refracts light much less than poor quality, 'wavy' glass.
- ❖ 6.) The light produced by objects may be through some action such as friction, or application of a

flameetc. It may be sefl-illuminating.

- ❖ 7.) Usually light proceeding from the source illuminates a particular direction leaving the other direction(s) dark.
- ❖ 8.) The source of the light here is described not to be localized in east or west, i.e., any particular direction.
- ❖ 9.) Similitude is applicabile to the process of creation as well as the process of guidance and legislation.

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- ❖ 10.) the light is one of the attributes of God; like His other attributes. It manifests itself in both the realms of creation and legislation. God is the Light through which every being becomes manifest and God is Light through which every being is guided towards that which it ought to be and what it should do. In every realm and sphere there is a point wherein the Light of creation or guidance manifests first and illuminates its surroundings. This point is presented in the Niche and its surroundings as the holy and exalted place meant for the manifestation of God's Name and attributes. In such a holy sphere it is necessary that there should be entities whose cognitive self is the focus of the light. This process applies to every realm and sphere of theconscious beings in general but to man as the chose issu of Adam and above them all, the First and the Topmost in receiving the light of existence in the Arc of Descent and the Last in the Arc of Ascent mentioned in verse 33:33 and *Mubahila* 3:60. If the passage is taken in its application to the realm of creation they are the best examples. If it is taken in its application to the realm of legislation and guidance they are the topmost ones. If applied to each person the popwer of expression is to be taken as the Niche and the body

as the 'House'. If the society of the Ahl al-Bait or the entire society of the Apostles of God is to be taken into consideration, the Niche is the House of the Holy Prophet. However, the Divine Light passing through the chain of Apostles manifested in the Holy Prophet is described as it has passed through the most refined and the purest transparent channels intact in its purity without bending or tending towards any particular direction, came to illuminate the sphere of humanity which is the sum total of the universe. And this Niche throughout its process remained in one particular House which is described in verse 36 and in that House, there are always entities whose

(1769)

mind and heart were occupied in all circumstances with the remembrance of God. (A.P.)

The point from which light spreads out in all directions; the stages between it and the original source are to be of utmost transparency not affecting the purity of the light passing through them, be the stages termed as lamp, glass, etc. the mental or the physical channels of the parental lions and the womb which carry the light. (A.P.)

Niche - the Source, i.e., the Oil of the Blessed Tree is a pure light above light. No glimpse of darkness is there. That the darkness or evil are relative and non-essential entities which appear in the outer realm of the houses wherein the Niche is situated."(117)

We have noted that in some ways "Living Flame of Love" and its prose commentary is a "closer" exegesis of the "Light Verse" of the Qur'an than is the Mishkat al-Anwar (Niche for Lights) of al-Ghazzali. This may indicate that St. John of the Cross had direct personal access to the "Light Verse". While the above is unproven, as obviously there would be no mention of it, the thing is perfectly possible, as many Moriscos had copies of the Qur'an

and were able to translate it into Spanish.

Some people, not many, have claimed that St. John of the Cross was a crypto-Muslim. I do not believe this. What is evident is that St. John of the Cross, like many people in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain, both Moriscos and Old Christians, did not care a cumin seed for names and labels, but only for meanings and substance.

(1770)

It is important here not to go to extremes and lose perspective. St. John of the Cross was very learned in Christian mysticism. The subject of his thesis at Salamanca was Dionysius the Pseudoareopagite and St. Gregory of Nyssa. It would seem that he also knew the works of later Byzantine Christian Mystics, especially St. Gregory Palamas. In fact, except for a great part of the literary expression and a few other things, St. John of the Cross is well within the **apophatic** tradition of the Upanishads and Advaita Vedanta, (though not Christian [indeed, long pre-Christian], the Upanishads are by far the oldest known expression of the **apophatic** tradition) Dionysius the Pseudoareopagite, Stephen bar Sadaili, the Cappadocian fathers, especially St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory Palamas. As we have said earlier, Islamic Sufis and philosophers, both Sunni and Shi'a, also participate in the **apophatic** (Latin: **Via Negativa**) tradition.

Of course, in Vedanta, in traditional Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity and in Islam also exist the contrary of the **apophatic** tradition, which in Greek is called **Kataphatic Theology**, in Latin **Via Affirmativa** or **Via Positiva**. Apophatic Theology and Kataphatic Theology, or Via Negativa and Via Affirmativa are not

(1771)

in conflict, but are in accord; Apophatic Theology is necessary to avoid anthropomorphism and idolatry, but Kataphatic Theology or Via Affirmativa is necessary to avoid falling into nihilism.

Many have attributed a neo-Platonic origin to both Christian Mysticism and Sufism. However, there is a profound difference, well expressed by Vladimir Lossky:

"The ecstasy of Dionysius (the Pseudoareopagite) is a going forth from being as such. That of Plotinus is rather a reduction of being to absolute simplicity. This is why Plotinus describes his ecstasy by a name which is very characteristic: that of "simplification". It is a reintegration in the simplicity of the object of contemplation which can be positively defined as the One and which, in this capacity, is not distinguished from the subject contemplating. Despite all outward resemblances (due primarily to a common vocabulary), we are far removed from the negative theology of the Areopagitica of Dionysius. The God of Dionysius, incomprehensible by nature, the God of the Psalms: "who made darkness His secret place", is not the primordial God-Unity of the neo-Platonists. If He is incomprehensible it is not because of a simplicity which cannot come to terms with the multiplicity with

which all knowledge relating to creatures is tainted. It is, so to say, an incomprehensibility which is more radical, more absolute. Indeed, God would no longer be incomprehensible by nature if this incomprehensibility were, as in Plotinus, rooted in the simplicity of the One. Now it is precisely the quality of incomprehensibility which, in Dionysius, is the one definition proper to God - if we speak here of proper definitions. In his refusal to attribute to God the properties which make up the matter of affirmative

(1772)

theology, Dionysius is aiming expressly at the neo-Platonist definitions. "He is neither One, nor Unity". ... If the God of revelation is not the God of the philosophers, it is this recognition of His fundamental unknowability which marks the boundary between the two conceptions. All that can be said in regard to the Platonism of the Fathers (of the Church), and especially in regard to the dependence of the author of the Areopagitica on the neo-Platonist philosophers, it is limited to outward resemblances which do not go to the root of the teaching, and relate only to a vocabulary which was commed to the age. ... For St. Gregory of Nyssa every concept relative to God is a simulacrum, a false likeness, an idol. The concepts which we form in accordance with the understanding and the udgement which are natural to us, basing ourselves on an intelligible representation, create idols of God instead of revealing to us God Himself.(118)

St. Gregory Palamas expresses all this very concisely:

"The super-essential nature of God is not a subect for speech or thought or even contemplation, for it is far removed from all that exists and more than unknowable, being founded upon the uncircumscribed might of the celestial spirits - incomprehensible and ineffable forever. There is no name whereby it can be named, neither in this age nor in the age to come, nor word found in the soul and uttered by the tongue, nor contact whether sensible or intellectual, nor yet any

image which may afford any knowledge of its subject, if this be not that perfect incomprehensibility which one acknowledges in denying all that can be named. None can properly name its essence or nature if he be truly seeking the truth that is above all truth."(119)

(1773)

If one is looking for antecedents, Christian Mysticism is much closer to the Upanishads than to the neo-Platonists. As one might expect, Sufis, Irfan, Ishraqi and Hikmat-i-Illahi in this crucial respect follow the Christian Mystics rather than the neo-Platonists.

At an early date in the history of Islam this is expressed in the sayings of the Shi'a Imams. Below are some examples:

"I (Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi Najran) inquired of Abu Jaafar (the 5th Imam, born 676 AD, 57 AH, died 733 AD, 148 AH) about the Unity (of God): "Should I think of anything (to understand God)?" He replied, "Yes, but you have to imagine a thing which the mind cannot contain and which is without limit. He is unlike whatever comes into your mind. Nothing resembles Him nor can any thought reach Him. How can he be conceived when He is totally different from whatever is conceived and is the reverse of whatever is imagined. (Because Allah cannot be limited through the limitations of the mind or the senses.) Certainly, the thing which cannot be encompassed by the mind and which is without limits is that which should be imagined."(120)

Said Abu Jaafar ath-Thani (i.e., Abu Jafaar the Second, the 9th Imam, born 811 AD, 195 AH died 835 AD, 220 AH):

"Abu Jaafar ath-Thani was asked, "Is it proper to refer to Allah as a thing?" He replied, "Yes in the sense that this will absolve Him from two constrictions: *tatil* (i.e., to negate the attribute of "existent" or any of His positive attributes), and *tashbih* or anthropomorphism (the similarity between Him and His creatures in His "existence" or any of His positive attributes." (121)

(1774)

Jaafar as-Sadiq, (The Sixth Imam, born 702 AD, 83 AH died 765 AD, 148 AH) said in reply to an atheist who asked him what God was:

"Allah is a thing which is quite different from all other things. From what I say, the stress is specifically on this point that it is an established (truth) that Allah is a thing which is a reality in Itself and by It self, except that He has neither any body nor any shape. He can neither be brought into perception nor can he be touched and felt. He can neither be perceived through the five senses, nor can He be conceived and imagined. Neither can age shorten Him, nor can time bring any change to Him". The interrogator further inquired: "Do you say that He is All-hearing, All-seeing?" The Imam replied: "He is All-hearing, All-seeing. It means that He hears and sees but not with any organ or by any instrument. But He hears and sees by Himself. When I say that He hears and sees by Himself, I do not mean that He is one thing and His self is another thing. I have made this interpretation myself since I was and I wanted to make you understand because you have inquired. Now I further explain, verily, He hears from the totality and completeness of His being. This totality and completeness is not any part or fraction of Him. Even here my idea was just to make you understand and this interpretation is also of my own. By what I have said I mean nothing except that He is All-Hearing, All-seeing, All-knowing and All-aware without any duality in His Essence or any duality in the meaning (of His Positive Attributes)."

The interrogator inquired, "What, after all is He



(Allah)?" Abu Abdillah replied, "He is the Nourisher, the Worshipped, and He is Allah. And this affirmation that He is Allah, does not mean the letters A-L-L-A-H, nor does it mean the letters R-A-B (the Nourisher). But turn to the meaning that He is a thing which is the Creator of all things and their Maker. This meaning has been described by these letters ... It is this

(1775)

meaning which has been given the name of Allah, ar-Rahman (the merciful), ar-Rahim (the Compassionate), al-Aziz (the Powerful) and the like of His other names. He is the (Only) Worshipped, the Great, the All-Mighty."

The interrogator addressed the Imam, "Whatever we conceive of we do not find it except as a created thing." The Imam replied, "If the truth is as you say, then our *taklif* (the imposition of a task) in (believing in) the Unity of Allah should be withdrawn from us since we cannot undertake the imposition of a task of believing in an inconceivable thing. Although we say that anything which is conceived, perceived and encompassed by our senses or by comparison (to any other sensory object) is a creation in itself (and not the Creator). We must prove the Creator of all things while avoiding two reprehensible aspects. First, the negation (of the Positive Attributes of Allah, because negation is (reverts to) the invalidation and non-being (of Allah). The second aspect is to imagine Him by resemblances. But such resemblances are nothing but the attributes of the created, which are apparent, compounded and made up of something. Hence there is no other way except to accept a creator for the existence of all that is created. And we cannot but acknowledge that these created things have been created and their Creator is totally different from them and is unlike them. Since the one who had been like the created would have been applicable to such a creator, like their occurrence after their being non-existent, and their growth from infancy to puberty, and from being black to being white, and from being strong to being feeble, and all these existing conditions (of the created) for which we need no proof since they are obviously real."

The interrogator then remarked, "When you have established (the existence of Allah) you have

(automatically) put limitations on His being." The Imam said, "I have not limited His being, rather I have only proved his existence, since there is no common ground between the affirmation and the negation (regarding His existence."

(1776)

At this the interrogator inquired, "Does Allah have an entity and an individuality?" The Imam replied, "Yes, since there can be no proof of (the existence of) anything unless it has got an entity and individuality."

The interrogator inquired: "Does Allah have any quality (state and condition)?" The Imam replied, "No, since quality (state and condition) is an aspect of (added) attributes (which are quite separate from His being) and which encompass the very Being itself. But it is essential to get rid of the thought of His non-existence and also of the thought of His

resemblance to any other thing. Since whoever negated His being has actually denied His existence and His Lordship, and also invalidated him. And whoever likened Him to any other thing, has actually established for Him the quality of the created who are not worthy of Lordship. But it is essential to establish a quality for Him - the quality which cannot apply to the case of other things, and of which no other than He can have any knowledge." The interrogator further inquired, "Does He conduct all things by Himself (through expedience and endeavors)?" The Imam replied, "He is far too exalted to conduct all affairs through expedience. Allah is above all this. He has only to desire and will, and His affairs

executed at once, without any expedience) and He does what He wills."(122)

One is somewhat inclined to say that the neo-Platonists were philosophers while the Christian and Muslim mystics and esoterics are true initiates, true participants in the Perennial Philosophy, the Tradition with a capital "T" and the Sophia Perennis. In this context, "Christian" of course means Catholic and Eastern

Orthodox, since there are no Protestant mystics and esoterics and never were; Protestantism has nothing to do with the Perennial

(1777)

Philosophy, the Tradition with a capital "T" and the Sophia Perennis and never did. Also, for about the last 375 years it is Islam which has been most faithful to the Perennial Philosophy, the Tradition with a capital "T" and the Sophia Perennis, since Islam has been much less infected by Modernism and by the secularism of modern times than have the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. Of course, Protestantism is NOT relevant here, as it has no mystical tradition and abandoned the Perennial Philosophy, the Tradition with a capital "T" and the Sophia Perennis from the very beginning.

No one should be shocked by the idea that a Christian saint and mystic should make use of the works of Muslim thinkers and Sufis. During the Middle Ages, particularly in the 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Christian scholars and saints borrowed from the works of Muslim thinkers and made no secret of the fact. I have heard on good authority that in the Cathedral of San Marco in Venice is a fresco in which al-Ghazzali is shown included among the Doctors of the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas at times cites Avicenna (ibn Sina) in order to refute Averroes. Three of St. Thomas Aquinas'

proofs for the existence of God appear to be translated into Latin

(1779)

from the Arabic of Alfarabius (al-Farabi). The occasion for which St. Thomas Aquinas wrote his Summa theologiae was to refute the "Parisian Averroists", the followers of Averroes (ibn Rushd) at the University of Paris. Some Muslims attempt to defend Averroes from the charges leveled against him by the Christian Scholastics, saying that they "misunderstood" him because they could not read him in the original Arabic. However, numerous Muslim thinkers, who could and did read Averroes in the original, "misunderstood" him in exactly the same ways as the Christian Scholastics, condemned him as a heretic, and, like St. Thomas Aquinas, devoted much effort to refuting him. In any case, the Christian Scholastics received Aristotle in a "pre-digested" form from Muslim thinkers such as al-Farabi (Alfarabius), ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Ghazzali (Algazel) and ibn Bajja (Avempace).

It is interesting that the contemporary, non-Catholic Aristotelian Mortimer J. Adler spends so much time and effort refuting Averroes, as did the contemporary Catholic Thomist Etienne Gilson.

(1780)

It must be stressed that in the Middle Ages the present "East-West" dichotomy did not exist. In the treatise The Antichrist Gog and Magog, the contemporary Pakistani thinker Maulana Muhammad Ali speaks of:

"...between Europe and Islam, or, to put it more correctly, between the material and the spiritual Forces",

is, with very little qualification, perfectly applicable to modern times but absolutely not applicable to the Middle Ages. Medieval Europe was as spiritual and theocentric (i.e., God-centred) as was Islam. Indeed, as I know from experience, to attempt to know and understand either Medieval Christendom or Medieval Islam while ignoring the other is futile.

Various are the factors which soured relations between the two faiths and gradually caused them to drift apart. One factor is the conquests first of the Seljuk and later of the Ottoman Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean area. Another is the terrible disaster to Islamic Civilization caused by the Turkish and Mongol invasions of the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. This also damaged

Christendom, but to a much lesser extent, in Christendom said disaster was partial; in Islam it came near to being total.

(1781)

Other factors are far more important. The Renaissance destroyed the Medieval Christian world and caused Europe to turn towards secularism, though the process was slow, for a long time confined mainly to politicians and the urban merchant class (or **bourgeoisie**) while both the old nobility and the mass of the people remained quite "Medieval". Also, as Frithjof Schuon says:

"The Renaissance represents the posthumous revenge of the dead Greco-Roman civilization."

The Scottish Nationalist Tom Scott in his long epic poem Fergus about the history of Scotland, expresses the disaster to Scotland which was the Protestant Reformation. Translation from "Broad Scots" is mine. "Fergus" represents the "Eternal Celt" or "Eternal Scot".

And in such a mode the (Protestant) Reformation came  
As weed that chokes the grain  
The unicorn was chased by a hell-black ram,  
The garden made a pen  
Have I (Fergus, the Eternal Celt or Eternal Scot) not seen  
from Solway Firth to Wick  
The white enchantress Beauty burned?  
It was our soul they (the Calvinists) seared at every stake  
That smoked from every flame.

Oh white St. Andrews, snug in your bay,  
I have seen them stone by stone

Take down your great cathedral on the shore  
And leave it bare as bone;  
On many a moor and hill I have seen saintly men

(1782)

Hunted like the fox (by the Calvinists)  
And Murder turn the land into a blood-soaked swamp  
To spread the "love" of a "Protestant" god.

They made God's Day a rookery of (Calvinist) churches,  
God's pulpits nests of crows,  
And loosed on us a herd of lowing steers  
With iron hoofs and jaws  
To trample over the green and burgeoning fields,  
Turning them into bogs of shit,  
Imprisoning the people in their houses,  
And robbing every barn. (123)

Alexander Carmichael described at length how the Calvinists  
attempted to erase every bit of Celtic culture in Scotland:

"Gaelic oral literature has been disappearing  
during the last three centuries. ... The (Protestant)  
Reformation condemned the beliefs as cults tolerated  
and assimilated by the Celtic Church and the Latin  
Church. Nor did sculpture and architecture escape their  
intemperate zeal. ... They (the Calvinists) made people  
break and burn their bagpipes and fiddles. If anyone  
demurred, they themselves broke and burnt their  
instruments." (124)

At several places in his work which we have cited earlier,  
Francis Collinson can barely contain his seething anger against  
Protestantism in general and Calvinism in particular.

Says R.H. Tawney:

"If the only Christian documents which survived  
were the New Testament (Gospel, *Injil*) and the records  
of the Calvinist Churches in the Age of the Reformation,

to suggest a connection between them more intimate than a coincidences of phraseology would appear, in all probability, a daring extravagance." (125)

(1783)

As the Eastern Orthodox thinker Frank Schaeffer in a speech entitled "Understanding the Protestant Mind", said:

"Protestantism is THE ENGINE of secularization in the Western World."

Ali Abul Hasani was quite right to condemn "Islamic Protestantism". (126) In Iran,, "Islamic Protestantism is a term of disdain and execration, as are the terms "Protestant Buddhism" and "Buddhist Protestantism" in Sri Lanka.

Spain maintained close relations with Islam longer than any other country in Western Europe, and was very late in being affected by the Renaissance and was untouched by the Reformation.

If St. John of the Cross was in part inspired by Muslim thinkers and Sufis, he was merely following the tradition of the great period of Medieval Christian Civilization.

The Pope's doctoral thesis has been published in book form under the title The Doctrine of Faith According to St. John of the Cross. Said book is indispensable to anyone who wishes to understand St. John of the Cross as theologian and metaphysician.



(1784)

It deals with an aspect of St. John of the Cross which reminds us of al-Ghazzali; using scholastic methods and vocabulary but giving them new meanings and overtones, putting scholastic tools to mystical use.

The Pope, rightly I believe, came to the conclusion that the meaning which he gives to the scholastic term **fide** (roughly "fe" in Spanish, "faith" in English) is the key to St. John of the Cross as theologian and metaphysician. St. John of the Cross denies neither the common concept nor the scholastic definition of faith; rather he presupposes them or accepts them as axiomatic and does not dwell on them nor expand them. However, he gives the word or concept of faith certain matices which go beyond both the common and the scholastic concepts and definitions. Here indeed he reminds us of al-Ghazzali, as we said before.

Firstly, St. John of the Cross considers faith to be "a proper and adequate means of the understanding to unite the soul with God in love", or, more simply, "a means of union of the soul with God."

But St. John of the Cross goes further: he speaks of the "essential similarity", i.e., between God and faith. "Proper and

(1785)

adequate means" is a practical concept, a signpost on the mystic path, but "essential similarity" is metaphysical, more precisely ontological, and requires more explanation. According to him the two concepts, the practical and the metaphysical-ontological are complementary and necessary one to the other. Between God and the creature there is no essential similarity; the creature is spatio-temporal, limited, conditioned and therefore the Divine Essence is infinitely distant from the essence of any creature. Ergo, in the concept of "proper and adequate means" is necessarily included a "proportion of similarity" with the Divine Essence, though all creatures considered in their own nature lack this "proportion of similarity". Faith, on the other hand, since it possesses this proportion of similarity, is raised to a level superior to that of any created nature. Such is the ontological aspect of the Doctrine of Faith of St. John of the Cross.

There remains what the Pope calls "the dynamic dimension of faith" according to St. John of the Cross. The Union with God for which faith serves as the means is a supernatural union in which God communicates His Own Divinity, and the soul participates in this Divinity by the virtue of Divine Love, the soul is enabled to rise to the transforming Union, in which it becomes "God by

(1786)

participation". Note at the beginning the key part which understanding or knowledge plays in this. In effect, understanding or knowledge is the starting point of the soul on the path to Union with God. Understanding is a spiritual power of the soul, and is thus open to the Infinite. Using the understanding or knowledge as a starting point, the soul, by means of faith is enabled to attain Union with God as described above.

However, the fact that the soul is "imprisoned" in the body puts severe limits on the understanding or knowledge; thus the understanding can only perceive the Divine Essence in a limited, imperfect manner; it may "believe" but not "see". In this life, by the aid of faith, the understanding may perceive the Divine Essence, though without clarity. Thus, the most perfect vision of the Divine Essence, and thus the most perfect Union with God, may be achieved only after death, when the soul is freed from the body and the limits which it imposes. This "dynamic dimension of faith" according to St. John of the Cross reminds us of an almost unlimited number of passages from Rumi, both from the Masnavi and the Divani Shamsi Tabriz, for example:

"The soul is like a bright mirror: the body is dust upon  
it  
Our beauty is invisible, because we are under the dust"

(1787)

"Let your tears flow to lower the dust, like a passionate lover. Because while we are in this dust we cannot see the Face of the Beloved" (Once again, an echo of St. Efrem the Syrian)(127)

Up to this point, in speaking of the Doctrine of Faith according to St. John of the Cross I have followed the Pope's book, cross-checked as it is by references to the original works of St. John of the Cross. Only the quotations from Rumi owe nothing to the Pope's book. Now I wish to make a few personal observations. In his doctrine of faith, which the Pope quite rightly believes to be the key to St. John of the Cross as metaphysician, note that St. John of the Cross, without for one moment denying the Transcendence of God, affirms His Immanence. This is an intuition common to all mystics: that God is both Immanent and Transcendant: denial of the Immanence of God is a heresy in the most profound and existential meaning of the term.

Also note well that while the doctrine of faith of St. John of the Cross is very much within the tradition of Christian mysticism, it is not peculiarly Christian.

The same is true of the whole mystical theory of St. John of the Cross. The resemblance of his doctrines of faith to certain

(1788)

Sufi doctrines is obvious enough; we have seen how a great part of it seems to echo Rumi. Also, the resemblance to certain Hindu doctrines such as Bhakti and Jnana Yoga is clear enough.

Here indeed is a golden opportunity to build a bridge between Christianity and Islam. If the Pope is so fond of the works of St. John of the Cross, he would certainly love the works of al-Ghazzali, the Sufis, the *Ishraqis* and the *Hakims*. Unfortunately I found nothing in the Pope's book on St. John of the Cross nor in the bibliography of said book which indicates that he has any knowledge of the close relationship between the works of St. John of the Cross and those of the Sufis and *Ishraqis*. Certainly it would be a sacrilege to waste this Heaven-sent opportunity. Someone more important than I must take the initiative in this.

As we have demonstrated, St. John of the Cross belonged to the *apophatic* school of the Upanishads and Advaita Vedanta, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, St. Gregor of Nyssa and St. Gregory Palamas. As an example of what we are saying, here is a quotation from the prose commentary of the Spiritual Canticle:

And that which God communicates to the soul in this most intimate union is utterly ineffable, so that nothing can be said of it, even as nothing can be said of God Himself Who thus communicates this to the soul and transforms it into Himself with marvelous glory.

(1789)

Besides the purely apophatic aspect, there is the problem of the limitations of human language to communicate the mystical experience, to communicate in human language that which St. John of the Cross calls 'the language of God'.

Mystics and especially mystical poets have all confronted the problems mentioned above. The manner in which St. John of the Cross attacked said problem was indeed a new concept of poetic language, at least in so far as Christian Europe is concerned ('poetic revolution' might be too strong a term). Luce Lopez-Baralt expresses this very well:

"In his efforts to effectively communicate the mystical ecstasies, St. John (of the Cross) destroys the ordinary and limited language of his European contemporaries and uses words of multiple meanings in order to infinitely broaden it in order to make it able to express the immense translation which he demands. His poetic revolution is so radical and so deep that St. John (of the Cross) is not understood, either by  
(1222)

his contemporaries he is the great absent one in the poetic treatises of the (Spanish) Golden Century nor by his supposed disciples, nor, except for a very few exceptions, by his critics, who approach his works with caution and timidity."(128)

It is perhaps in the Spiritual Canticle and its prose commentary that this new concept of poetic language is most frequently and strongly expressed. Firstly there is the sheer

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incoherence of some verses of the Spiritual Canticle, such as:

"My Beloved the mountains",

"The air of the battlement",

Not to mention the lack of connection or relation between many strophes. As St. John of the Cross says in the Prologue to the Spiritual Canticle:

It would rather be ignorance to think that the sayings of love understood mystically, such as those of the following strophes, can be fairly explained in words of any type. For the Holy Spirit, who helps us in our weakness, so says St. Paul, dwells within us and intercedes for us, with unutterable sighs, pleading for that which we cannot understand nor comprehend, so that we may express it ourselves. For who is able to redact that which He reveals to the loving souls in which He dwells? And who can express in words that which He makes them to feel? And, finally, who can express that which He makes them to desire? Of a certainty, no one; in truth, not the very souls through whom He passes. It is for this reason that, by means of figures of speech, comparisons and similarities, they permit something of that which they feel to overflow (remember this last word), and utter secrets and mysteries from the abundance of their spirits rather than explain these things in a rational manner. These similarities, if they are not read with the simplicity of the spirit of love and comprehension embodied in them, appear to be nonsense rather than expressions of logic or reason.

This apparently incoherent language is nothing new in the history of mysticism; one need only recall Ibn Arabi al-Mursi (the Murciano) (13<sup>th</sup> century), St. Catherine of Siena (14<sup>th</sup> century) and the Florentine contemporary of St. John of the Cross, Maria

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Maddalena de Pazzi. Sufis call obscure and incoherent mystical verse by the technical term *shatt*; we shall have more to say of this. Be that as it may, the *shatt* of St. John of the Cross appears strange in the context of Renaissance Europe (Maria Maddalena de Pazzi was not a poet).

We have already touched on one of the many enigmatic verses of the Spiritual Canticle. We now return to it.

My Beloved the mountains  
The silent music  
The sounding solitude  
The solitary, wooded valleys,  
The strange islands,  
The sonorous rivers,  
The whistle of the amorous zephyrs.

Let us see how St. John of the Cross explains these rather jarring images.

#### **My Beloved, the mountains**

The mountains have height, they are plentiful, vast and beautiful, graceful, flowery and fragrant. These mountains are to me my Beloved.

#### **The solitary, wooded valleys**

The solitary valleys are quiet, pleasant, cool, shady and have plentiful fresh water; and with the great variety of the trees of its groves and the sweet song of the birds they greatly refresh and delight the senses, in their solitude and silence giving refreshment and repose. These valleys are what my Beloved is to me.



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### **The strange islands**

The strange islands are surrounded by the sea, and are far over the sea, aloof from dealings with men. So it is that there are produced and born in them things very different from those of our own experience, of very strange types and with virtues never seen by men, so that they produce surprise and wonder in those who see them. And so, by reason of the great and marvelous wonders and strange knowledge, very far removed from everyday knowledge that the soul sees in God, we here call them strange islands.

### **The sonorous rivers**

Rivers have three properties: the first is that they attack and submerge all that is in their path; the second, that they fill all the low places that are in their path; the third, that their sound is such as to drown out all other sounds.

This voice or sonorous sound of the rivers is a fulfillment so plentiful that it fills the soul with blessings, and a power so great that it possesses the soul and appears to it not merely as the sound of rivers but as the most powerful thunderclaps. But this voice is a spiritual voice and is free of physical sounds and their bother, but is accompanied by grandeur, strength, power, delight and glory; and thus it is a vast and inward sound and voice, which armors the soul with power and strength.

### **The whisper of the amorous zephyrs**

Of two things the soul makes mention in the present context, *id est*, of zephyrs and a whisper (literally 'whistle'). By the amorous zephyrs we here mean to say the virtues and the graces of the Beloved.

This Divine whisper which enters by way of the ear of our soul is not only of the substance which we call understanding, but it is also the manifestation of truths concerning the Divinity and the revelation of His esoteric secrets.

### **The silent music**

In the tranquility and silence of the night, and in the knowledge of the Divine Light, the soul is made able to see a wondrous rightness and disposition of the wisdom of God in the diversity of His creatures and His works, each and every one of which is endowed with its own particular response to God, by which means each according to its manner gives witness to the fact that God is within it, so that it appears to hear a harmony of the most sublime music surpassing all chords and melodies of the world. The soul calls this music silent, because, as we have said, it is a tranquil and quiet intelligence, without the sound of voices, and with it are thus enjoyed both the sweetness of music and the quiet of silence. And so the soul says that its Beloved is this silent music, because the harmony of spiritual music is known and experienced in God.

### **The sounding solitude**

This is nearly the same as the silent music; because, although that music is silent to the senses and the natural faculties, it is a most sonorous solitude to the spiritual faculties; for when these are alone and devoid of all natural forms and apprehensions they can readily and most sonorously receive in the spirit the spiritual sound of the greatness of God, in Himself and in His creation.

And this is like music, for as each one possesses the gifts of God in a different degree, yet all make one harmony of love, just as in music. In the same way the soul is able to see, in that tranquil wisdom, how of all creatures not the higher creatures alone, but also the lower, according to that which each has received from God each raises its voice in witness to that which God is. It sees that each one in its own way exalts God, since it has God within itself according to its capacity, and thus all these voices make one voice of music, praising the glory of God and His wondrous knowledge and wisdom.

And as the soul receives this sonorous music, though not without solitude and withdrawal from all temporal things, it calls them the silent music and the sounding solitude. This, says the soul, is the Beloved.

More examples from the Spiritual Canticle could be found. However, the above gives one the general idea. One notes symbolisms which go far beyond any sort of metaphor or simile, as well as paradoxes and startling juxtapositions. One also notes that the prose commentary is very nearly as obscure as the poetry itself. Nor is this all.

Indeed, the concordance between the verse and its prose commentary is often unclear or virtually nonexistent. As St. John of the Cross himself says the prologue to the Spiritual Canticle:

I do not now think of expounding all the breadth and plenitude imbued in them (the verses) by the fertile spirit of love; it would be ignorance to think that sayings of love mystically understood, such as those of the present strophes, can be truly explained by words of any sort.

It is for this reason, that, by means of metaphors, comparisons and similarities, they allow something of that which they feel to overflow (remember this word) and utter secrets and mysteries from the plenitude of their spirits rather than attempt to explain these things rationally.

In effect, in his prose commentaries on his verses, St. John of the Cross does not adhere to any fixed nor consistent pattern of interpretation and clarification.

One example of a possible multitude, in strophe XXX of the Spiritual Canticle we read 'gathered in the cool mornings'. In the prose commentary on this we read:

This means, that they are won and acquired in youth, which is the fresh mornings of the ages of man. We say "chosen" (the words *escogida* in Spanish may mean "gathered" or "chosen" according to the context, as is true of the English word 'picked'), because the virtues which are acquired in one's youth are chosen and very acceptable to God, because it is in time of youth when there is most resistance to the acquisition of vices, and a greater natural readiness to lose them, and also because, being chosen in time of youth, the virtues are more perfect. And we call youth fresh mornings, because, as the cool of the morning is the most pleasant time of day during much of the year, thus is the virtue of youth before God. And we may even understand 'fresh mornings' as the acts of love in which virtues are acquired, which are more agreeable to God than cool mornings are to the sons of men.

Here we also understand as cool mornings works done in times of spiritual aridity and difficulty, which are called after the cool mornings of winter (note: 'cool mornings of winter' is a gross understatement if one is speaking of Castile); and these works done in times of spiritual aridity and difficulties are much prized by God, because virtues and gifts are abundantly acquired.

In the above, the expression 'cool mornings' takes on three quite distinct meanings:

- ❖ 1.) youth.
- ❖ 2.) acts of love &
- ❖ 3.) works done in times of aridity and difficulties of spirit.

St. John of the Cross sometimes does the opposite of the above, using various words with one single meaning. For example, in the Spiritual Canticle, for example, the word "virtues" at times takes on the meaning of "go by the mountains and river banks", because the mountains, being high, are difficult to climb and reach, as are the virtues. On the other hand, it is the virtues that "assault the soul", those suggested by the amorous zephyrs. Finally, the virtues of the lovers are symbolized as roses of which we make a "pine cone":

And the Beloved Himself aids the soul in this matter, for without His favor and aid the soul could not join together and offer the virtues to the Beloved. Therefore, the soul says: 'We make a pine cone.'

And this union of virtues is called a pine cone, because, as the pine cone is strongly made and within itself contains many strong pieces strongly bound together, which are the pine nuts, just so this pine cone of virtues which the soul makes for the Beloved is one single piece of perfection, which firmly and in an orderly fashion embraces and contains within itself

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many perfections and virtues which are very strong, and gifts which are very precious, for all the perfections

and virtues are ordered and contained in one firm perfection of the soul.

All of the above is well summarized by Colin Peter

Thompson:

Changes of speaker, audience, tense (of verbs), location, large numbers of unrelated images; paradox, logical nonsense, constant uncertainty on the reader's part as to the exact meaning the whole poem Spiritual Canticle is constructed in this extraordinary manner. In parts it is almost impressionistic in feel, in other parts, it seems to be using a sixteenth-century equivalent of modern cinematographic technique: flashbacks introduced without warning, events implied rather than stated, characters introduced in passing, focused upon briefly, then discarded. No sequence of events can be followed except through small groups of stanzas, because the thematic progress of the poem is constantly being interrupted by glances into the past or future, and by fragments of conversations and comments. There is no ordered progression in time, place or argument, except this very basic one that at the beginning the Bride (the soul) is searching for her Beloved and at the end she is united with Him. The overall impression is one of a large number of beautiful fragments pieced together but never fitting together properly. It is therefore most unusual, perhaps unique, in the poetry of the (Spanish) Golden Age, for such a technique is wholly out of keeping with the predominant Classical and Renaissance ideas about poetry. (129)

St. John of the Cross says in one of his own works:

Since these strophes have been under the influence of love and abundant mystical intelligence, they cannot be adequately expounded, nor shall I attempt to do so, but only to throw upon them some general light. And I believe this to be best, because

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the sayings of love are better expounded in their fullness, so that everyone may choose from them according to the mode and the measure of his spirit,

rather than abbreviate them in a single sense which may not be apt for every taste; and thus, although they be expounded in a certain manner, there is no reason to confine them to this exposition, because the mystical wisdom, (which comes through love, of which the present strophes deal) need not be comprehended distinctly to produce love and affection in the soul, because it is like faith, by which means we love God without understanding Him.

Centuries before the time of St. John of the Cross, the Sufi Abu Said ibn al-Arabi (not to be confused with the later Ibn Arabi al-Mursi), said:

"The essence of ecstasy cannot be communicated, and is better described by silence than by speech"(130)

There is an Arabic word, *shatt*, which has passed to Persian, though with the pronunciation changed; Persian, being an Indo-European language, has no 'emphatic' sounds (the final *tt* in the Arabic *shatt* are "emphatic"), and the Persians put a short vowel between the final doubled consonants, thus giving *shatat*, with no emphatic sounds, rather than *shatt* with the final doubled consonants emphatic. *Shatt* in Arabic and *shatat* in Persian both mean 'exceeding just bounds'. Both that Arabic *shatt* and the Persian *shatat* have come to be technical terms for obscure and incoherent mystical verse. The works of St. John of the Cross,

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especially Spiritual Canticle, are indeed filled with *shatt* or

shatat.

The early Muslim commentarists on the Qur'an were heirs to a long tradition of Jewish and especially Christian Bible commentary. As Paul Nwyia says:

"The first commentarists (of the Qur'an), conscious of their cultural poverty and eager to remedy it by an opening to the outside, gave the Qur'an an integral reading, i.e., at once literal, historical and allegorical. But only later, for the necessities of specialization or under the pressure of dogmatic prejudices, these three readings became disassociated, some opted for a literal reading and wrote grammatical and philological commentaries; others were more attentive to historical context and wrote treatises specializing in the *asbab al-muzul*; yet others understood that the language is not given in order to be understood in only one way, but rather that it is a symbol in which the truth is only found by accepting that in life:

"The symbols of the Qur'an, as they say, may only be comprehended by those who have purified their intimate consciousness of all attachment to the creatures', as was said by Ibn Atta."

Said al-Hallaj:

"This is the measure of one's piety, exterior and interior, and of His esoteric wisdom (*ma'rifa*) that each servant of God discover the analogic sense of the Qur'an."

In the Christian exegesis, for example, the three senses of the Scripture are inseparable so that the very true reality which is at one and the same time glittering, present and awaited. With Muqatil, it is not the same Qur'anic verse which is subject to three different readings which in the three successively

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reveals three senses situated at distinct levels of profundity; but rather, so far as method, operates with the internal cohesion of the three readings. In this cohesion there is no reason that, precisely, one reading



approaches the different verses from the literalist point of view, another from the historic point of view, and yet another from the allegorical point of view."(131)

Perhaps the most famous of the early commentarists on the Qur'an was Muqatil ibn Sulayman (8<sup>th</sup> century). Muqatil said that the reading of the Qur'an has three levels:

- ❖ 1. The literal;
- ❖ 2.) the historical, which uses historical facts and personages to help understand obscure passages; &
- ❖ 3.) the allegorical.

Though not identical to early Christian Biblical commentary, Muqatil's principles are broadly similar to those of his Christian predecessors, or at least to many of them.

The next phase in Qur'anic commentary was made by Tirmidi al-Hakim. As Paul Nwyia says:

"Tirmidi surpasses Muqatil thanks to the use of a hierarchy between the senses (of the interpretation of the Qur'an); Tirmidi breaks the horizontal line and introduces within the senses a profundity, and this profundity is the same which gives the Sufi exegesis its experience of *batin* or esoterism and its knowledge of the interior abodes (*manazil*) of the heart."(132)

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We are here very near to the mystical allegories found in the

Biblical commentaries of St. Gregory of Nyssa, who so influenced St. John of the Cross. Origen should perhaps be mentioned in this context, though not all of the allegories in his Biblical commentaries are mystical, though some most certainly are. Origen's allegorical Biblical commentaries have been called a brilliant but artificial arc light, though it is recognized that this sort of commentary has its own interest and merits.

The final pass was that of Imam Ja'afar as-Sadiq, Sixth Shi'a Imam, which finally went far beyond the mystical allegories of some Christian Biblical commentarists. As Paul Nwyia says:

"In the *Tafsir* attributed to (Imam) Ja'afar as-Sadiq we find precisely the most ancient examples of symbolic (Qur'anic) exegesis, based on spiritual experience; an exegesis which is an introspective reading of the Qur'an and which discovers within the Qur'an a plurality of senses because it itself (the Qur'an) is pluriform. While Muqatil juxtaposed the three readings (of the Qur'an) and divides the Qur'anic text in three external parts the one with the other, Imam Ja'afar as-Sadiq works a synthesis of the revealed text in which he recognizes, within the totality, four levels of profundity, seeing that all the Qur'an is in accordance with *'ibara*, in accordance with *ishara*, in accordance with *lata'if* or in accordance with *haqa'iq*. These diverse levels of profundity of the sense proceed according to the degree of spiritual experience which one possesses. It is by means of this hermeneutic principle, in that the sense is engendered by the reencounter of the interior light and the sacred text, of the reencounter between the (mystical) experience and the Qur'anic text is born a new language, the mystical language." (133)

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From the above, the Sufi poets began to write their own mystical verse. The pluriform character of the Qura'nic language

thus, in a manner of speaking, gave birth to Sufi verse; the language becomes pluriform, mysterious, capable of reflecting ('expressing' would perhaps be too strong a term) the great variety of states of mind of mystical ecstasy. This passed quickly from Arabic to Persian. Note that Muqatil and Tirmidi were both Persians by birth, and that Imam Ja'afar as-Sadiq's great grandmother was Persian, daughter of the last Sassanian Emperor.

In any case, we have now passed from allegory to symbolism; not that allegory vanished from Sufi verse; the Conference of the Birds by Farid al-Din Attar is a well known example, but symbolic language entered Sufi verse thanks to Imam Ja'afar as-Sadiq.

Says Seyyed Hossein Nasr:

"The sojourn which signifies the illumination of the consciousness of the Gnostic (in the sense of initiate') and the transformation of the cosmos from fact to symbol cannot be told but in terms of symbols, in the language of what *ibn Sina* (Avicenna) calls the science of the elite ('ilm al-khawass). Only he whose consciousness has been transformed, or who at least has been given certain 'conceptual dimensions', can understand this science. For the rest, it remains either a fanciful story or a superstition. The 'science of the elite', moreover, depends upon the symbolic interpretation (*tawil*) of the Sacred Scripture whose tradition goes back to the Prophet (Muhammad), an interpretation which likewise stands above the common religious law as it is meant for all men."(134)

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Says Paul Nwyia:

"All else is the rapport between the symbol and the experience which it symbolizes. This rapport is intrinsic to the inspiration which engenders it. The

symbol is born, in effect, in the same act which gives birth to the experience, or, if you prefer, the experience gives life to the form of the symbol, reaching the consciousness in the form of symbol. Thus the image is sought in order to represent the similitude (*tasawwur*), that which is identical in truth (*haqiqa*) for access to reality (*tahagguq*), the symbol containing within itself all the experience, as the symbol is all contained within the experience. The symbol is not like the image; the symbol is not an intent to represent the experience and to render it intelligible to others; it is the very text of the experience and demands the same interpretation: neither less clear nor more obscure, neither more present nor less absent, it is for the Sufi the language in which the experience reaches the consciousness. It is the experience itself."(135)

Throughout this work we have mentioned a vast number of symbols; the Holy Grail, the white dove, the red rose, the white rose, the lotus, the crystal fountain, the Simurgh, the pomegranate, the holly, the tulip. One must never confuse symbolism with allegory, Says Henry Corbin:

"The symbol is not an artificially constructed sign. It flowers spontaneously to announce something that cannot be expressed otherwise; it is the *unique* expression of the thing symbolized as of a reality that thus becomes transparent to the soul, but which in itself transcends all expression. Allegory is a more or less artificial figuration of generalities or abstractions that are perfectly cognizable or expressible in other ways. To penetrate the meaning of a symbol is in no sense equivalent to making it superfluous or abolishing it, for it always remains the sole *expression* of the signified thing which it symbolizes."(136)

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Henry Corbin continues:

"Too often there is confusion between allegory and symbol. We speak here of symbols, but not of artificially constructed symbols, but rather of the testimony of the author, of symbols seen in an interior vision, a vision which may only be expressed by way of

symbols, and these symbols in turn open the vision."(137)

Seyyed Hossein Nasr says:

"The nature of the symbol differs profoundly from that of an allegory. A symbol is the 'reflection' in a lower order of existence of a reality belonging to a higher ontological status, a 'reflection' which in essence is unified to that which is symbolized, while allegory is a more or less 'artificial figuration' by an individual having no universal existence of its own."(138)

Says Frithjof Schuon:

"(To give an instance) it would be a great mistake to assert that the association of ideas between the visible Heaven and (the) Celestial Paradise does not arise from the nature of things, but rather from ignorance and ingenuousness mixed with imagination and sentimentality; for the blue sky is a direct and therefore adequate symbol of the higher and supersensory degrees of Existence; it is indeed a distant reverberation of those degrees, and it is necessarily so since it is truly a symbol, consecrated by the sacred Scriptures and by the unanimous intuition of peoples. A symbol is intrinsically so concrete and efficacious that celestial manifestations, when they occur in our sensory world, 'descend' to earth and 'reascend' to Heaven; a symbolism accessible to the senses takes on the function of the supra-sensible reality which it reflects. For example, light-years and the relativity of the space-time relationship have absolutely nothing to do with the perfectly "exact" and "positive" symbolism of appearances and its connection at once analogical and ontological with the celestial or angelic orders."(139)

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The Russian Orthodox priest and thinker, Fr. Pavel Florensky, of whom we shall speak at greater length in the following chapter, wrote much on the questions of symbols and symbolism. Fr.

Florensky was brutally martyred by the Communists in 1937. Says Victor Bychkov:

"(Fr. Pavel) Florensky understands the symbol not just as a purely semiotic unity, but also as an ontological unity; it not only signifies something other, but itself is the bearer of this other, "the living, mutual penetration of two beings"; it is bi-une in nature. Two worlds are united in the symbol the one to which the symbol belongs materially, and the one to which it points, whose signifier it is. The symbol has an inner connection with that which it symbolizes; it is endowed, if only partially, with the spiritual power of the signified. Therefore, it does not simply signify, but also *really manifests the signified*. The Byzantines, these (cult symbols) were bearers of the energy of the archetype."(140)

Says Fr. Pavel Florensky:

"A being that is greater than itself that is the basic definition of the symbol. A symbol is something that manifests in itself that which is not itself, that which is greater than itself a symbol is an essence of the energy of which is joined, or, more precisely, commingled, with the energy of another essence, more worthy in a given respect, and which thereby carries this other essence within itself."(141)

In another place, Fr. Pavel Florensky says:

"Once we understand the difference, we can easily distinguish the 'moment' of an artistic image: the descending image, even if incoherently motivated in the work, is nevertheless abundantly teleological; hence,

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it is a crystal of time in an *imaginal* space. The image of ascent, on the other hand, even if bursting with artistic coherence, is merely a mechanism constructed in accordance with the moment of its psychic genesis. When we pass from ordinary reality into the *imaginal* space, naturalism generates imaginary portrayals whose similarity to everyday life creates an empty image of the real. The opposite art symbolism born of the

descent, incarnates in real images the experience of the highest realm; hence, this imagery which is symbolic imagery attains a *super-reality*. (Note how Fr. Florensky, like the esoterics of Islam, speaks of the "imaginal realm".)

What is true of art and dream is also true of mystical experience: a common pattern holds everywhere. In mystical experience, the soul is raised up from the visible realm to where visibility itself vanishes and the field of the invisible opens: such is the Dionysian (reference to Dionysius the Pseudoareopagite) sundering of the bonds of the visible. And after soaring up into the invisible, the soul descends again into the visible and then and there, before its very eyes, are those real *appearances* of things: ideas.

If we use a purely anthropological approach, then the altar represents man's psyche or soul while the temple (*church or cathedral*) is his body. Theologically considered, the altar reveals to us the mystery of God in His incomprehensible Essence, while the temple signifies God's comprehensible in the world's province and power. Finally, in a cosmological interpretation, the same Simeon (of Salonica) recognizes the altar as the symbol of Heaven while, in the temple, he sees the symbol of earth. Thus, the very diversity of these interpretations strengthens the ontological center of the altar's meaning as the invisible realm.

But this realm, by its very invisibility, is impossible to look at; and the altar, as *noumenon*, would for the spiritually blind be as impossible to see as would the flowing clouds in incense be for the physically blind for the incense is a landmark which which, because it is sensorily comprehensible, reveals the invisible world. Thus, the altar is necessarily limited in order to be something for us; but this

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limitation arises only through the realities of our dualistic power of perception. If these realities were wholly spiritual, they would be incomprehensible to our weak nature and what exists in our consciousness would therefore not be made better. But if these realities were only in the visible realm, then they would be unable to indicate where lies the boundary between the visible and invisible; nor would they themselves know where that boundary existed. Heaven and earth, altar and temple: this separation can only occur through the

visible witnesses of the invisible world, those living symbols of the co-inherence of this world and the other i.e., through the holy people. These holy persons, visible in the invisible, are nevertheless not conformed into this world, for they have transformed their bodies and resurrected their minds, thereby attaining existence beyond this world in the invisible. Thus, they bear witness to the invisible as they bear witness to themselves by their holy countenances. They live with us and they are more easily accessible to us than we are to ourselves. They live with us, and they are more easily accessible to us than we are to ourselves. They are not earthly ghosts but persons standing firmly on our earth, not abstract, not bloodless. But neither are they held in bondage to earth; rather, they are the living ideas of the invisible world (*compare the above with the doctrines of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Suhrawardi, Mullah Sadra Shirazi, Mullah Demavandi, etc.*). Thus, they are (we may say) the witnesses on the boundary between the visible and the invisible, the symbolic images of those visions that arise when passing from one state of consciousness into another. In this sense, they are the living soul of humanity by and through which mankind enters into the highest realm; for they, having left behind all the delusions and fantasies of the ascending passages, and having received the other world they on their return to earth have transfigured themselves into angelic images of the angelic world. And it is no accident that these witnesses who, by their angelic countenances, have made the invisible close and accessible to us have, since ancient times, been popularly termed angels in the flesh.

When air currents of differing heights and speeds

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make contact, the currents continue to flow contrariwise in layers one above another, and the winds that formed the clouds therefore cannot move them away nor are the layers of air currents moved by their own swiftly moving flows. And so fogs are created that fa;; to cover the mountain summits, and though mountain windstorms may rage, the foggy cover does not move. Such a fog-cloud is a boundary between the visible and the invisible. It renders inaccessible to our weak sight that which nevertheless it reveals the real presence of;



and once we open our spiritual eyes and raise them to the Throne of God, we contemplate heavenly visions: the cloud that covers the top of Mt. Sinai, the cloud wherein the mystery of God's presence is revealed by that which clouds it. This cloud is (in the Apostle [St. Paul's] phrase) 'a cloud of witnesses' (Epistle to the Hebrews, XII:1), it is the saints. They surround the altar, and they are the 'living stones' that make up the living wall of the *Iconostasis* (*Icon Screen*), for they dwell simultaneously in two worlds, combining within themselves the life here and the life there. And their upraised gaze bears witness to the operation of God's mystery, for their holy countenances in themselves bear witness to the symbolic reality of spiritual sight and, in them, the empirical crust is completely pierced by light from above.

The wall that separates the two worlds is an iconostasis. One might mean by the iconostasis the boards or bricks or the stones. In actuality, the iconostasis is a boundary between the visible and the invisible worlds, and it functions as a boundary by being an obstacle to our seeing the altar, thereby making it accessible to our consciousness by means of its unified row of saints (i.e., by its cloud of witnesses) that surround the altar where God is, the sphere where heavenly glory dwells, thus proclaiming the Mystery. Iconostasis is a vision. Iconostasis is a manifestation of saints and angels (*angelophania*) a manifest appearance of heavenly witnesses that includes, first of all, the Mother of God (*the Virgin Mary*) and (*Jesus*) Christ Himself in the flesh, witnesses who proclaim that which is from the other

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side of mortal flesh. *Iconostasis is the saints themselves*. If everyone praying in a temple (*church or cathedral*) were wholly spiritualized, if everyone praying were truly to see, then there would be no iconostasis other than standing before God Himself, witnessing to Him by their holy countenances and proclaiming His terrifying glory by their sacred words.

But because our sight is weak and our prayers are feeble, the Church, in Her care for us, gave us visual strength for our spiritual brokenness: the heavenly visions on the iconostasis, vivid, precise, and

illuminated, that *articulate*, materially cohere, an image into fixed colors. But this spiritual prop, this material iconostasis, does not conceal from the believer (as someone [say a Protestant] in ignorant self-absorption might imagine) some sharp mystery; on the contrary, the iconostasis points out to the half-blind the Mysteries of the altar, opens for them an entrance into a world closed to them by their own stuckness, cries into their deaf ears the voice of the Heavenly Kingdom, a voice made deafening to them by their having failed to take in the speech of ordinary voices. This heavenly cry is therefore stripped, of course, of all the subtly rich expressiveness of ordinary speech: but who commits the act of such stripping when it is we who fail to appreciate the heavenly cry because we failed first to recognize it in ordinary speech: what can be left except a deafening cry? Destroy the material iconostasis and the altar itself will, as such, wholly vanish from our consciousness as if covered over by an essentially impenetrable wall. But the material iconostasis does not, in itself, take the place of the living witnesses, existing *instead of* them; rather, it *points toward* them, concentrating the attention of those who pray upon them a concentration of attention that is essential to the developing of spiritual sight. To speak figuratively, then, a temple without a material iconostasis erects a solid wall, through whose glass we see (those of us who can see) what is permanently occurring beyond: the living witnesses to God. To destroy icons thus means to block up the windows; it means smearing the glass and weakening the spiritual

(1799)

light for those of us who otherwise could see it directly, who could (we could figuratively say) behold it in a transparent space free of earthly air, a space where we could learn to breathe the pure ethereal air and to live in the light of God's glory: and when this happens, the material iconostasis will self-destruct in that vast obliteration which will destroy faith and hope and then we will contemplate, in pure love, the immortal glory of God.

The same is true in the realm of metaphysical sight: the spiritual world of the invisible is not some infinitely far off kingdom; instead, it everywhere

surrounds us as an ocean; and we are like creatures lost on the bottom of the ocean floor while everywhere is streaming upward the fullness of a grace steadily growing brighter. But we, from the habit of immature spiritual sight, fail to see this lightbearing kingdom; most often, we fail even to assume that it exists, and therefore we only sense unclearly in our hearts the spiritual currents of what is really happening around us. When (Jesus) Christ was healing the blind man in Bethsaida (Mark VIII:22), He asked him what he saw, and at first he said, I see men as trees, walking such is the way we first see the images of our spiritual visions. We never see, however, the flights of angels not as trees, walking, not even as the quick shadow of a distant bird flying between us and the sun; for, although the most sensitive of us can sometimes sense the powerful motions of the angelic wings, we can experience these great motions only as the very faintest breathing. An icon is the same as this kind of heavenly vision; yet it is not the same, for the icon is the outline of a vision. A spiritual vision is not in itself an icon, for it possesses by itself full reality; an icon, however because its outline coincides with a spiritual vision, is that vision within our consciousness; finally, therefore, the icon apart from its spiritual vision is not an icon at all but a board (*i.e., an idol*). Thus a window is a window because a region of light opens out beyond it; hence, the window giving us this light is not itself like the light, nor is it subjectively linked in our imagination with our

(1800)

ideas of light but the window is that very light itself, in its ontological self-identity, that very light which, undivided-in-itself and thus inseparable from the sun, is streaming down from the heavens. But the window all by itself *i.e.,* apart from its relationship to the light, beyond its function as carrier of light is no longer a window but dead wood and mere glass. The thought is simple enough. But almost always we stop in the middle of it, whereas it would be far righter either to stop long before or to go way beyond it; hence, our usual understanding of a symbol as something self-referentially (if conditionally) true is, at bottom, false: a symbol is

either more or less than that. If a symbol as *carrier* attains its end, then it is inseparable from the surreality it reveals: hence, it is more than self-referential. If a symbol does not manifest a reality, then it attains no end; thus, we should not see in it any pattern or organization of 'carrying over' or transference, and, in the absence of such, the thing is not a symbol i.e., it is not a spiritual instrument but it is merely empirical matter. Let us repeat: the window in itself not a window because the very idea of window (like any culturally constructed thing) possesses 'carrying over' or transference, for if it did not, it would not be a thing fashioned within a culture. Thus, a window is either light or else mere wood and glass, but it is never simply a window.

Icons, too, as St. Dionysius the Areopagite (*known in the Catholic Church as "Dionysius the Pseudoareopagite"*) says, are visible images of mysterious and supernatural visions. An icon is therefore always either more than itself in becoming for us an image of a heavenly vision or less than itself in failing to open our consciousness to the world beyond our senses then it is merely a board with some paint on it (*i.e., an idol*). Thus, the contemporary view that sees icon painting as an ancient fine art is profoundly false. It is false, first of all, because the very assumption that a fine art possesses its own intrinsic power is, in itself, false: a fine art is either greater or less than itself. Any instance of fine art (such as painting) reaches its

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goal when it carries the viewer beyond the limitations of empirically seen colors on canvas and into a specific reality, for a painting shares with all symbolic work the basic ontological characteristic of seeking to be that which it symbolizes. But if a painter fails to attain this end, either for a specific group of viewers or for the world in general, so that his painting leads no one beyond himself, then his work unquestionably fails to be art; we then call it mere daubs of paint, and so on. Now, an icon reaches its goal when it leads our consciousness out into the spiritual realm where we behold mysterious and supernatural visions. If this goal is not reached if neither the steadily emphatic gaze nor the swiftly

intuitive glance evokes in the viewer the reality of the other world (as the pungent scent of seaweed in the air evokes in us the still faraway ocean), then nothing can be said of that icon except that it has failed to enter into the works of spiritual culture and that its value is therefore either merely material or (at best) archaeological."(142)

Fr. Pavel Florensky continues:

"An icon remembers its prototype. Thus, in one beholder, it will awaken in the bright clarities of his conscious mind a spiritual vision that matches directly the bright clarities of the icon; and the beholder's vision will be comparably clear and conscious".(143)

Fr. Pavel Florensky goes on:

"The beholder's soul is necessarily healed in touching, through the icon, the spiritual realm: but that such healing happens means, first of all, that the icon's happening is the having happened of miracle-working help."(144)

Fr. Pavel Florensky continues:

"At one extreme stands purely figurative art at the very boundary of verbal narration, but without verbal clarity; at the other is that degenerative symbolism called allegory, which possesses nothing but

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verbal clarity. But this does not mean, however, that an allegorized symbol is necessarily an abstraction in the inventor's mind. But its purely contemplative visuality, along with the difficult indirectness with which one may pass through it to its prototype, makes the allegorized symbol accessible only to a very few. Moreover, in the same way that apostasy is a separation from all humanity, so an allegorized symbol is opposed to all true symbols, and, in being exalted above the Catholicity of true symbols, the allegory easily becomes the source of heresy, i.e., the source of all isolation or sectarianism."(145)

In the following chapter we shall deal with topics closely

akin to the above, though in very different contexts.

St. John of the Cross's fellow Spaniard, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, said in his *magnum opus* Futuh al-Makkiyya:

"On the other hand, the author who writes under the edict of Divine Inspiration, often records things which are without (apparent) relation to the subject matter of the chapter that he is treating. They appear to the profane reader as an incoherent interpolation, whereas according to me they belong to the very heart of the chapter even if it is by virtue of a reason which others ignore."(146)

Comments Seyyed Hossein Nasr:

"The language of Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi), although at times abstract, is essentially a symbolic one and he makes use of all forms of symbolism, ranging from the poetical to the geometrical and mathematical. The principle involved in the use of symbols is a basic one. It is what Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi), like the Shi'a s for whom it is also fundamental, calls *tawil*, meaning literally to take something back to its origin or beginning. In the Universe nothing is just what it appears to be that is, its reality is not exhausted by its exterior. Every phenomenon implies a noumenon, or,

(1803)

in Islamic terms, every exterior (*zahir*) must have an interior (*batin*). The process of *tawil* or of spiritual hermeneutics, means going from the *zahir* to the *batin*, from the outward reality to the inward."(147)

Henry Corbin emphasizes the Shi'a basis of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's symbolic language:

"The conviction that to everything that is apparent, literal, external, exoteric (*zahir*) there corresponds something hidden, spiritual, internal, esoteric (*batin*) is the scriptural principle which is at the very foundation of Shi'ism as a religious phenomenon."(148)

There is a polemic as to whether Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was a Sunni or a Shi'a. I personally believe that he was a Shi'a, but perhaps he simply made no distinction between Sunni and Shi'a.

Once again, we see the fundamental truth in Haydar Amoli's saying:

**"Shi'ism is Sufism and Sufism is Shi'ism".**

In the following chapter we shall discuss in great detail Imam Ja'afar as-Sadiq and his role in the rise of symbolic interpretation of the Qur'an and of symbolist poetry among the Sufis. In any case, we are obviously quite close to St. John of the Cross. We shall now deal with St. John of the Cross and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi in a monographic manner.

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The vast bulk (in more than one sense of the word) of the work of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi is in prose. However, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi also wrote verse.

Most interesting from our point of view is a poetic work called Tarjuman al-Ashwaq or Interpreter of Desire. This is a collection of mystical verses, some of which are supplemented by a prose commentary, so far very much like St. John of the Cross. Nor is this all. As is true of the poetry of St. John of the Cross,

the obscure verses of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi resist rational analysis. As is also true of the verses of St. John of the Cross, the poetry of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi is filled with what we have called *shatt* (Arabic) or *shatat* (Persian). As al-Sarraaj (10<sup>th</sup> century) says:

"Just as a river in flood overflows its banks (*shataha 'l-ma' 'fi'lnahr*), so the Sufi, when his ecstasy grows strong, cannot contain himself and finds relief in strange and obscure utterances, technically known as *shatt*."(149)

Here we come to some fascinating plays on words. In Arabic *shatt* means, as we have seen, exceeding just bounds, and also strange and obscure expressions, while *shath* may mean either river bank or, as al-Sarraaj says, strange and obscure utterances. In Persian, *shatat* means exceeding just bounds,

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while *shath* means ecstatic ravings. Said Persian words are not pure Persian, but are derived from Arabic, though, as we have said before, the pronunciation has been somewhat altered due to phonological differences between Semitic and Indo-European languages, and also the meanings are not quite identical.

It would appear that St. John of the Cross was in some manner familiarized with the above-mentioned Arabic and Persian words, as the Prologue from the Spiritual Canticle indicates:

For who can write that which He (God) reveals to



the loving souls in which He dwells? And who can express in words that which He makes them to feel? And, finally, who can express that which He makes them to desire? Surely, no one; no, not even the very soul through which He passes. It is for this reason that, by means of figures, comparisons and similitudes that allow something of that which they feel to overflow, and to utter secrets and mysteries from the plenitude of their spirits, rather than explain these things rationally. These figures of speech, if they are not read with the simplicity of the spirit of love and understanding embodied in them, appear to be nonsense rather than an expression of reason, as may be seen in the divine Song of Songs, where, as the Holy Spirit cannot express the plenitude of His meaning in common and vulgar terms, He utters mysteries in strange figures and similitudes. Whence it follows that no words of holy doctors (of the Church), though they have said a great deal and may yet say more, can ever fully expound these things, neither can they be expounded in words of any sort. That which is expounded of them, therefore, is usually the least part of that which they contain.

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Above we see both the idea of overflowing the banks, or, to express it another way, exceeding just bounds and of ecstatic ravings.

In the prose commentaries on his verses, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi resembles St. John of the Cross in many ways; he plays free and easy with grammatical concordances, his verses at times bear no relation to one another, stretching the meanings of words of phrases past all rational limits.

Reynold A. Nicholson, editor and translator of the Tarjuman

al-Ashwaq of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, comments, in words that recall the Prologue of the Spiritual Canticle:

The author (Ibn Arabi al-Mursi) admits that in some passages of his poems the mystical import was not clear to himself, and various explanations were suggested to him in moments. (150)

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi himself says:

"Unknown spiritual feelings of Gnostics (in the sense of 'initiates'), who cannot explain their feelings to other men; they can only indicate them symbolically to those who have begun to experience the like." (151)

Says Luce Lopez-Baralt:

"If Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) shares with numerous other spiritual poets the frustrating insufficiency of language, he specifically coincides with St. John (of the Cross) in his manner of resolving or focusing the eternal linguistic problem. Both translate particularly ineffable experiences the mystical rapture to a

(1807)

mysterious, ambiguous and a-rational language, able to contain the most varied senses at one and the same time. That is to say, the mystery, the perplexity and the infinite simultaneous possibilities of meaning seem to be for both poets the optimum manner to communicate an equally enigmatic and infinite experience." (152)

Here are a couple of examples from Ibn Arabi al-Mursi:

❖ "At Dhu Salam and the monastery in the abode of al-Hima are gazelles who show Thee the sun in the forms of marble statues".

❖ 2.) "Therefore I watch spheres and serve in a church and guard a many colored meadow in the Spring." (153)

One may note that in Arabic verse the gazelle sometimes is

used as a metaphor for the "Beloved", who has a face like the sun. Otherwise, these verses resist an easy, obvious rational explanation.

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi also uses strophes which seem to be independent and to have no obvious relation to the rest of the poem:

- 15.) "I follow the religion of love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith."
- 16.) "We have a pattern in Birsh, the lover of Hind and her sister, and in Qays and Lubna and in Mayya and Ghaylan". (154)

At times Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's verses do not appear to be so enigmatic, but rather remind one of the Provençal trobadors:

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"She shot the arrows of her glances from the bow of an eyebrow  
And on whatever side I came I was killed."(155)

Just so, St. John of the Cross at times reminds us of the Provençal trobadors, as in these verses from the Spiritual Canticle:

Why, since you have managed  
To wound my heart, do you not heal it?  
And, since you have stolen my heart,  
Why have you left it so,  
And not taken the prey which you have stole

In his verses on which he wrote a prose commentary, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi at times plainly clarifies the verse:

"They cut the nose-rings of their camels because of the violent haste with which they traveled"  
(156)

However, as does St. John of the Cross, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi at times transmutes one word or phrase into another, often with no apparent justification:

1.) "branches", i.e., "flames". (157)

2.) "A pasture for gazelles, i.e., for the objects of His love." (158)

Like St. John of the Cross, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi at times assigns different meanings to the same word or phrase. Below are two examples, the verse with prose commentary:

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➤ 1.) "On the day of parting they did not saddle the full-grown reddish-white camels until they had mounted the peacocks upon them".

❖ 1.) "The peacocks mounted on them are His loved ones." (159)

➤ "They did not halt at any place but its meadow contained forms as beautiful as peacocks."

❖ 2.) "Forms beautiful as peacocks, i.e., their lovely spiritual states, actions and dispositions." (160)

Note that *gazelles* are divine manifestations, love objects and exalted spirits.

"Camel" has a huge number of meanings in the works of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, unusual for an Hispano-Muslim. Here are some examples:

➤ 1.) "On the day of parting they did not saddle the full-grown camels until they had mounted the peacocks upon them."

❖ 1.) "The full-grown camels", i.e., the actions inward and outward, for they exalt the good word to Him Who is enthroned on high." (161)

➤ "Through love of them I called out behind their riding camels, 'O ye who are rich with beauty, here I am, a  
(1248)

beggar.'

Behind their riding camels, i.e., the powers of youth and the delights of the commencement." (162)

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➤ "Turn the camels aside towards the stony tract of Thamud, where are the tender branches and the humid meadow."

❖ 1.) "The camels", i.e. the clouds

➤ 4.) "Truly, the camels, even if they suffer from foot soreness, journey by night and make haste in their journey."

4.) "The camels". I.e., the aspirations (163)

➤ 17.) "That I may ask where their camels have turned; for I have plunged into places of destruction and death."

17.) "Their camels", i.e., the aspirations which carry the sciences and

subtle essences of man to their goal."(164)

➤ 4.)"And if they call to one another to set out and cross the desert, thou wilt hear its wailing behind their camels."

4.) "Their camels", i.e., "the aspirations journeying away from the body."(165)

Also like St. John of the Cross, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi also gives the same meaning to quite distinct words and phrases. Thus, the Murciano poet gives both camel driver and friendly maidens the meaning of angels around the throne of God; both meadow of gazelles and peacocks are love objects or loved ones, while deadly

(1811)

glances, sovereign power, red tents, friendly maidens, a delicate and playful young girl and married women are all Divine Wisdom.

Note that the words and phrases given the same meaning have no connection between them.

One of the things which Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and St. John of the Cross have in common is simultaneously giving distinct meanings to the same word or phrase, something quite strange to the poetics of Renaissance Europe, though not, perhaps, to the *Trobar Clus* of the Provençal trobadors. But then the Provençal trobadors belonged to the Middle Ages rather than the so-called

Renaissance". A word concerning the Provençal or Occitan term *Trobar Clus* might be in order at this time.

The Provençal trobadors recognized various styles of *trobar* or composing songs and poems. These are:

- 1.) *Trobar brau* poetry characterized by harsh sounds.
- 2.) *Trobar car*: style of poetry characterized by use of rich, melodious sounds and/or rare and obscure words.
- 3.) *Trobar leu*: a light or simple and easy style of poetry, unadorned by rhetoric.
- 4.) *Trobar naturau*: style of poetry in harmony with nature, including imitation of natural sounds: bird songs, wind, rain, insects, etc.

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- 5.) *Trobar plan*: a style of poetry characterized by smooth, sweet, gentle sounds.
- 6.) *Trobar prim*: a style of poetry characterized by smooth, clipped, short sounds.
- 7.) *Trobar ric*: Similar to *Trobar car*, style of poetry characterized by abundant use of poetic resources of all types, including dazzling sonorities.
- 8.) *Trobar clus*: A closed or hermetic style of poetry, using strange metaphors and a long etc. The idea of deliberate obscurity was alien and repugnant to the Provençal trobadors, who were firm believers in what the Spanish call *Claridad Meridional* (Southern Clarity) in contrast to Germanic, Teutonic or Nordic obscurity. *Trobar clus* was used when the trobador was attempting to express something not really expressible in

normal human language.(166)

The possibility of the influence of Sufi verse, both Arabic and Persian, on the Provençal troubadors is an open question, no conclusions being possible at this time. As we have seen, this sort of thing was far from unknown among medieval Christian mystics, and mystical symbolism is common in the works of the Provençal troubadors.

It is widely believed that the Provençal troubadors were libertines, advocates of illicit and even adulterous sexual adventures, in part because they held that illicit love is more

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genuine than married love, because illicit love, unlike married love, is spontaneous and wholehearted, while married love is complicated by obligations, which compromise it and destroy its spontaneity.

The troubadors were a diverse group and some, a minority, were indeed libertines. However, this libertinism, when it existed, was something which was practiced *in spite of* rather than *because of* the troubador ideal.

The Provençal troubador Guilhem de Montanhagol said that love leads to chastity, as is indicated in the following verse:

From love comes chastity



For he who well and truly knows and understands love  
Cannot commit evil and immoral acts.

Huston Smith recalls encountering this ideal in a Hindu  
milieu:

"In Vrindaban, Krishna's birthplace and the center  
of the Sri Caitanya Hari Krishna sect, I once heard a  
lecture that presented illicit love as the supreme  
model for our love for God. Our love of God should have  
that same passionate intensity that characterizes head-  
over-heels romance. One thinks of Dante (Alighieri) and  
Beatrice." (167)

The Provençal trobador Jaufre Rudel's 'illicit love' was  
Princess Melisende (note the Celtic name), daughter of Raimon II,  
of the lineage of the Counts of Toulouse, Crusader Count of

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Tripoli in Lebanon. Jaufre Rudel never saw Princess Melisende.  
This *Amor de lonh* (distant love) is celebrated in Jaufre Rudel's  
lovely and haunting song *Amor Lointain* (Distant Love).

In many Provençal trobador songs it is the Virgin Mary who is  
the "illicit love". Below is an example by Guiraut Riquier:

Humble, guilty, accused and repentant  
Saddened and afflicted I return  
For I have wasted my life in sinning.  
I beg your mercy, Lady, sweet Virgin  
Mother of Christ, son of the All Poerful,  
Who does not consider how guilty I am before you;  
Consider, if you will, the needs of my afflicted soul.

For I hardly find a sin of which I am innocent  
Save loss of hope and faith, theft and murder;  
For my body has been unable to sate itself with the others,

Which often has made me discontented.  
Because had there been no hope of good faith,  
Because of my grave, vile and shameful sins,  
My soul would have been totally alienated from God.  
But I have hope that you will be my protectress  
In the grave mortal peril which afflicts me  
Of which without you I cannot escape  
So many and so grave are my sins!  
Therefore, I beg your glorious son  
That He may see that I do that which pleases him  
So that I may arise from the dead some day.  
Because Jesus Christ is obedient to you  
When you ask that he heal sinners,  
So that they wish to obey him by righteous living,  
I beg you, Lady, that you  
Be our true guide in our pilgrimage to God.

Because the road is hard at the beginning,  
And so narrow and rough to travel,  
And it is so difficult to leave this world  
Hard is the beginning of the road,

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And the end is twice as hard:  
There one encounters so many perils  
That no one can reach the goal without a guide.  
For us, Lady, Virgin Queen,  
You were the mother of the Son of God the All Powerful:  
Thus, by Him were you made our guide.

It is obvious that the aspect of the troubadour ideal of *fin amor* (good love) mentioned above is not a condoning nor encouraging of illicit sex and moral depravity, but rather, like so much else in the ideals and art of the Provençal troubadours,, encloses a profound mystical symbolism. For the troubadours, the **Domna** or **Dompna (Lady)** often symbolized the Virgin Mary, as we have seen in the above example; the **Domna** or **Dompna** could also symbolize the *Daena*, *Hagia Sophia* or *Sophia Perennis*, either

directly or by way of using the Virgin Mary in her turn as a symbol of the *Daena*, *Hagia Sophia* or *Sophia Perennis*.

The above gives clues to understanding some of the symbolism in the works of St. John of the Cross and the Persian Sufi poets. We have noted that the poetry of St. John of the Cross often reminds us of that of the Provençal trobadors. St. John of the Cross was familiar with the works of the Provençal trobadors, most likely first hand, certainly second hand. The lore of the Provençal trobadors reached Spain by way of Catalunya, which in

(1816)

the Middle Ages was part of "Occitania" or the land of the *Langue d'Oc*, and many trobadors who wrote in Provençal, so very like Catalan, were themselves Catalans, Latin and Provençal being the languages of culture in Catalunya.

Frederic Mistral said in his tribute to the Carlists of Catalunya:

I am weary and my heart burns with shame  
From Provence to Catalunya must go my song  
To the brave ones of Catalunya,  
Fly, fly song

The lore of the Provençal trobadors also entered Spain by way of the Pilgrims' Road to Santiago de Compostela, where it inspired the Gallego-Portuguese trobadors, as we shall see in

Appendix 2, i.e., Romance of Don Gayferos de Mormaltan, and, both directly by Provençal trobadors themselves, and indirectly, by way of the Gallego-Portuguese trobadors, Alfonso X *el Sabio* (the Wise) of Castile.

Very much like St. John of the Cross three centuries later, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi explains the same verse in quite distinct manners, even within the same commentary. Here is an example:

- 4.) Whenever she tunes her triple chords,  
Thou must forget the brother of al-Hadi.

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4.) "Her triple chords", i.e., the body, with its three dimensions, i.e., length, breadth and depth. "Triple chords" may also refer to the grades of the three names, which are the abode of the two Imams (this must be a copyist's error, a 'typo' or a misprint; at the time of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi all twelve Imams had come; this phrase is another proof that Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was a Shi'a) and the Qutb.(168)

The Murciano poet even gives the same word meanings which are not only different but contradictory and mutually exclusive. Below are some examples:

- 10.) The ravens of separation croaked at them  
may God not preserve a raven that croaked!

10.) "The raven of separation", i.e., considerations affecting his phenomenal existence, which hinder him from ascent to God.

- ❖ 11.) The raven of separation is only a camel  
which carried away the loved ones with swift

wide-stepping pace.

11.) "A camel", i.e., the ravens of separation are really a man's aspiration since the aspirations bear him aloft and unite him with the object of his search'. (169)

In the above, the 'ravens of separation' are at once those who 'hinder him from ascent to God' and the aspirations which 'bear him aloft and unite him with the object of his search', a blunt contradiction.

We find the same thing in the Spiritual Canticle:

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That which the soul has to say concerning flight is to be understood of rapture and ecstasy of the spirit in God.

And then the Beloved says:

**Return you, dove**

The souls was very willingly leaving the body upon that spiritual flight, thinking that its life was ending, and that it would be able to unite with the Beloved forever and remain with Him unhindered by a veil. But the Beloved did not allow its flight, saying: 'Return you dove'. As though He had said: 'O dove in the swift and lofty flight of your contemplation, and in the love by which you burn and the simplicity in which you go (for the dove has these three properties), return from this lofty flight in which you aspire to attain possession of Me in truth, for not yet has the time come for such lofty knowledge. And adapt yourself to the lower knowledge that I now communicate to you in your excess.

In the above, God simultaneously says that the soul return to itself, because it is not yet ready for mystical ecstasy; and to

come to Him, the Beloved, because, He, wounded by love, seeks the soul.

Like St. John of the Cross, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi at times adds poetic information in the prose commentaries, for example:

❖ 2.) And would that my heart knew what mountain pass they threaded!

2.) "What mountain pass they threaded", i.e., what gnostic's heart they (the Divine Ideas) entered when they vanished from mine. (170)

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In the works of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi we find strange redundancies:

❖ 3.) May my father be ransom of a tender playful girl, one of the maidens guarded in howdahs, advancing swayingly among the married women!

3.) "A tender playful girl", i.e., a form of Divine Wisdom, essential and holy, which fills the heart with joy. "The married women", i.e., the forms of Divine Wisdom already realized by the Gnostics (as always in this work, "Gnostics" means "initiates") who preceded him. (171)

Here we have Divine Wisdom represented both by a tender playful girl and married women.

We find the same thing in the Spiritual Cantic:

### **O crystalline spring**

The soul calls faith "crystalline" for two reasons: firstly, because it is from (Jesus) Christ, the soul's Beloved, and secondly, because it has the

properties of crystal in that it is pure in its truths, and strong, and clear and free from error and natural forms. And the soul calls it "Spring", because from it flows to the soul the waters of all spiritual blessings.

In the verses of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi we find the same linguistic techniques which so surprise us in the works of St. John of the Cross. The use of similes and metaphors (symbols are another matter, as we have said) whose support is either dubious or even multiple, force the reader into a considerable degree of

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co-creation with the poet. Obscure though may be individual strophes and verses, communication is accomplished by the poem as a whole.

Like St. John of the Cross, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi defends his *trobar clus*, his obscure verse and commentaries. Like St. John of the Cross, the Murciano poet and mystic maintains that mystics cannot express their mysterious spiritual intuitions in a manner which may be understood by the uninitiated. Said intuitions may only be communicated symbolically to those already on the mystical path.

Says Ibn Arabi al-Mursi:

Gnostics (initiates) cannot explain their feelings (I believe 'intuitions' to be a better word in this case) to other men; they can only indicate them symbolically to those who have begun to experience the like. (172)

Says St, John of the Cross in the Prologue to the  
Spiritual Canticle:

And who can set forth in words that which God makes them to feel? And, lastly, who can express that which He makes them to desire. Surely, no one. It is for that reason that, by means of figures, comparisons and similitudes, they allow something of that which they feel to overflow (remember the Arabic words *shatt* and *shath* and the Persian words *shatat* and *shath*) and utter secrets and mysteries from the plenitude of their spirits rather than explain these things rationally. These similitudes, if they be not read with the simplicity of the spirit of love and understanding

(1821)

embodied in them, appear to be nonsense rather than the expression of reason since the Holy Spirit cannot express the fullness of His meaning in common and vulgar terms, He utters mysteries in strange figures and similitudes. From whence it follows that no words of holy doctors (of the Church), though they have said a great deal and may yet say more, can ever expound these things fully, neither could they be expounded in words of any kind. That which is expounded of them, therefore, is generally the least part of that which they contain.

Thus, the language of both Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and St. John of the Cross has meanings which are multiple almost to the point of infinity. Both attempt to resolve the problem of the inadequacy of language to express mystic truths and intuitions by widening their poetic language so that it may be capacitated to express an experience which is beyond spatio-temporal categories and human language.

As we have seen, the roots of the 'poetic revolution' of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and St. John of the Cross is in the sort of



exegesis of the the Qur'an as practiced by Imam Ja'afar as-Sadiq, the Sixth Shi'a Imam. This is a powerful argument for the idea the Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was a Shi'a, and one of the many connections between the Shi'a Imams on the one hand and St. John of the Cross on the other.

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St. John of the Cross seemed to know a great many of the keys of what the Provençal trobadors would have called the *trobar clus* of the Sufi poets, that, in effect, St. John of the Cross was indeed a Sufi initiate.

We now proceed with a monographic study of some of the Sufi images found in the works of St. John of the Cross.

The symbol of 'mystical drunkenness' is pre-Islamic. The Syriac Father St. Isaac the Syrian, of whom we have spoken before, made much use of said image in his mystical writings. Here are some examples:

"Sometimes, while prayer remains for its part, the intellect is taken away from it as if into Heaven, and tears fall like fountains of waters, involuntarily soaking the whole face. All this time such a person is serene, still and filled with a wonder-filled vision. Very often he will not be allowed even to pray: this is truth is the state of cessation above prayer when he remains continually in amazement at God's work of creation like people who are crazed by wine, for this is 'the wine that causes the person's heart to

rejoice' (Psalm CIV:15). Blessed is the person who has entered this door in the experience of his own soul, for all the power of ink, letters and phrases is too feeble to indicate the delight of this mystery."(173)

St. Isaac continues:

"Someone who has not actually drunk wine will not be inebriated as a result of being told about wine: and someone who has not been himself held worthy of a knowledge of the lofty things of God cannot become inebriated with love for Him."(174)

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St. Isaac goes on:

"With a laudable ecstasy the heart soras up toward God and cries our: "My soul thirsted for thee, the mighty, the living God! When shall I come to appear before Thy Face, O Lord?" (See Psalm XDI:2) Only the man who drinks deeply of this wine and afterward is deprived of it, only he knows to what misery he has been abandoned, and what has been taken away from him because of his laxity."(175)

St. Isaac continues:

"Through such zealous and divine diligence a man begins to be stirred to divine love and straightaway he is made drunk by it as if by wine; his limbs become limp, his mind stands still in awestruck wonder, and his heart follows God as a captive. He becomes, as I said, like a man drunk with wine."(176)

St. Isaac resumes:

"As a man drinks wine and becomes inebriated on a day of mourning forgets all the pangs of his sorrow, so the man who is in this world - which is a house of lamentation - is drunk with the love of God, forgets all his sorrows and afflictions and becomes insensible of all sinful passions through his inebriation."(177)

St. Isaac continues:

"Just as men drunken with wine imagine diverse

hallucinations, even so men drunken and made fervent by hope are conscious neither of afflictions nor of anything wordly."(178)

While it is virtually certain that St. John of the Cross could not read Syriac, by his time the bulk of the works of St. Isaac the Syrian had been translated into many languages,

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including Greek, Latin, Church Slavonic, Russian, Italian, Castilian and Catalan, so one may assume that St. John of the Cross was familiar with the works of St. Isaac the Syrian.

I do not for one moment believe that it is a mere coincidence that Shiraz, the wine capital of Persia, is also the capital of lyric poetry, home of Hafiz and Saadi.

Persian Sufi verse is filled with the image of mystical drunkenness, found in Rumi, Hafiz, Shabistari, and, most recently, Ayatollah Khomeini. Shabistari was not the most elegant of Persian poets, but his poetry is clear and lucid. Here is Shabistari's verse on the subject of mystical drunkenness:

#### **THE WINE OF RAPTURE**

Drink wine! for the bowl is the face of the Beloved.  
Drink wine! for the cup is His eye, drunken and flown  
with wine.  
Drink wine! And be free of heart-coldness,  
For a drunkard is better than the self-  
satisfied.(179)

The images of mystical drunkenness and the Zoroastrian images

are also found in the Sufi poem in the style of Hafiz written by Ayatollah Khomeini, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The Sufi symbolism of mystical drunkenness is lucidly explained by Laleh Bakhtiar:

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"Wine is a symbol for the ecstasy which causes the Sufi to be beside himself when in the presence of a vision or emanation of the Absolute, the manifested and present. Wine is the catalyst which causes a motion between the mystic's soul and the spiritual vision; and for the mystic, this is love, which is itself the goal of the Quest (remember the Holy Grail) and yet, paradoxically, forms the greatest obstacle to the seeker.

The cup bearer, *saqi*, causes one to drink; and it is the attention of the *saqi* that one seeks. The cup-bearer brings the wine of love and affection, and symbolizes the Shaykh (or Pir) who guides one through love to drink of Divine Knowledge.

The tavern, *may khaneh*, symbolizes the heart of the mystic, the dwelling-place of love, love which expands the traveler's heart. The wine-seller or vintner *khammar*, is the perfect disciple who knows the qualities of God and the essence of Muhammad. To be a "haunter of taverns" (remember Shabistari) is to be freed of self: for the tavern is in a world that has no similitude. The tavern is a sanctuary which has no place; it is the nest of the bird of the soul. (Remember this image.)

Intoxicated ones *mastan*, are the lovers of God, Sufis who are drowned in the sea of Unity, acquainted with mysteries but unaware of the vicissitudes of this world. They are the ones who have a vision of the Beloved which has no semblance to the sensible world of existence." (180)

St. John of the Cross says in the Spiritual Canticle:

**At the touch of the spark  
To the spiced wine**

### **Then gushes forth the Divine Balsam**

"In these last lines the soul describes the exercise which these souls perform inwardly with the will, moved by two other favors and inward visits which the Beloved grants them, which the soul here calls the touch of the spark, and spiced wine, and the inward exercise of the will which results from these two visits and is caused by them the soul calls the gushing

(1826)

forth of Divine Balsam. In relation to the first point, it must be made known that this touch which the Beloved inflicts upon the soul at times, even when the soul is least expecting it, so that the soul's heart is kindled in the fire of love just as if a spark of fire had flown out and kindled it."

St. John of the Cross also uses the image of the new wine of the pomegranate (remember, the Spanish word for pomegranate is *granada*) to represent ecstasy and Divine knowledge, advising that under the multiplicity of the pomegranate grains is the unity of God, symbolized by the intoxicating drink:

#### **And we will savor the new wine of the pomegranate**

"For, as the pomegranate has many small seeds, which have been born and are nourished in that one round sphere, so each of the attributes and mysteries and judgements and virtues of God contains within itself a great multitude of wondrous ordinances and admirable effects of God, contained and nourished in the sphere of virtue and mystery, etc., which belong to these effects. And we refer here to the spherical or circular shape of the pomegranate, because by each pomegranate we here understand some virtue and attribute of God, which attribute or virtue of God is God Himself, which is indicated by the spherical or circular figure, because it has no beginning and no end.

"The new wine of the pomegranate, which the soul here says that it will taste with the Beloved, is the fruition and delight of the love of God that in the knowledge and comprehension of them overflows (remember

*shatt, shatat and shath*) in the soul. For even, even as from many pomegranate seeds there comes only one new wine when they are pressed, even so from all these wonders and grandeurs of God which are infused into the soul there overflows for the soul one fruition and one delight of love alone, which is the drink of the Holy Spirit."

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- ❖ It is the pomegranate which marks the arrival of the Sufi to the fourth stage of the Quest, the mystic garden, as Laleh Bakhtiar says:

"Finally, the mystic enters the Garden of Essence. Upon entering this garden, the mystic finds the Fountain of Knowledge of the Unity of Being; the water which gushes forth is pure light. The fruit of this Garden is the pomegranate, the symbol of integration of multiplicity in Unity, in the station of Union, conscious of Essence Consumed in the Light, no individuality remains; the mystic has reached the goal of the Quest, the truth of certainty."(181)

Says the anonymous Book of Certainty, which some attribute to Ibn Arabi al-Mursi:

"The pomegranate, which is the fruit of the Paradise of the Essence. In the station of Union It is the direct consciousness of the Essence (*ash-shuhud adh-dhati*). (182)

Says St. John of the Cross in Spiritual Canticle:

"This spiced wine is another and far greater favor which God grants at times to souls that have made progress, inebriating them in the Holy Spirit with a wine that is sweet, delectable and strong, for which reason the soul calls it spiced wine. For even as such wine is prepared with many diverse spices that re fragrant and strong, so this love which is the love that God gives to those that are already perfect, is prepared and made ready in their souls, and spiced with the virtues which the soul has already gained. Flavored

with these precious spices, this love infuses into the soul such strength and plenitude of gentle inebriation."

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This "gentle inebriation" is number 87 of the 9<sup>th</sup> stage of the Sufi Quest.(183)

The symbol of mystical drunkenness appears very early in the history of Persian Sufism and may to some degree be inherited from Zoroastrianism, as a large number of Persian Sufi poems seem to indicate.

Al-Hujwiri (11<sup>th</sup> century) says:

"It is related that Yahya ibn Mu'adh wrote to Abu Yazid:

"What do you say of one who drinks a single drop of the ocean of love and becomes intoxicated?" Bayazid wrote in reply: "What do you say of one who, if all the oceans in the world were filled with the wine of love, would drink them all and still cry for more to slake his thirst?" People imagine that Yahya was speaking of intoxication, and Bayazid of sobriety, but the opposite is the case. The man of sobriety is he who is unable to drink even one drop, and the man of intoxication is he who drinks all and still desires more. Wine being the instrument of intoxication, but the enemy of sobriety, intoxication demands what is homogenous with itself, whereas sobriety takes no pleasure in drinking.

There are two kinds of intoxication:

- ❖ 1.) with the wine of affection (*mawaddat*) &
- ❖ 2.) with the cup of love (*mahabbat*)(184)

Says St. John of the Cross in Spititual Canticle:

In the inner wine cellar of the Beloved have I  
drunk  
And, when I went forth over the meadow  
Then I knew nothing

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And lost the grazing animals which before I had  
followed.  
And then to the lofty caverns of the rock  
We shall go, which are well hidden,  
And there taste the new wine of the pomegranate.

Very near is St. John of the Cross to Rumi when he  
said:

I am so drunken in this world,  
That except of drunkenness and revelry I have no tale  
to tell.(185)

For St. John of the Cross, this "mystical drunkenness" is  
very useful indeed, as he says in the Spiritual Canticle:

"The cause is that this drink of God which the soul  
drank makes it forget all things of this world,  
and it seems to the soul that its former knowledge, even  
knowledge of the whole world, is purest ignorance  
by comparison with that knowledge."

As we have seen, St. John of the Cross shares with the great  
majority of Sufis - including virtually all the Persian Sufis -  
the concept of "mystical drunkenness". As a drunkard babbles  
incoherently, just so an ecstatic mystic uses delirious words and  
phrases due to the inability of ordinary language to express his  
inexpressible mystical experience. At least from the time of al-  
Hallaj (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century), most Sufis have insisted that the  
authentic Sufi is not master of his language, as Miguel Asin



Palacios has noted:

(1830)

"If the drinking persists until it swells the veins and joints of the Beloved with the mysterious lights of God, then comes the saturation which at times leads to loss of consciousness of all the sensible and intelligible, and the subject ignores what is said to him and what he says to himself, and this is drunkenness." (186)

Thus, many verses of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and St. John of the Cross resist rational analysis and comprehension.

Another Sufi symbol found abundantly in the works of St. John of the Cross is the "crystal fountain". This is expressed in Spiritual Canticle:

O crystal fountain  
If on your silvery surface  
You would suddenly form  
The desires eyes  
Which are inscribed on my innermost parts

The prose commentary on the above is most interesting:

#### **O crystal fountain**

The soul calls faith "crystal" for two reasons: firstly, because it is from the Beloved, and secondly, because it has the properties of crystal in being pure in its truths, and strong, and clear and free from errors and natural forms. The soul calls it "fountain", because from there it causes to flow to the soul the waters of all spiritual blessings.

So many Provençal trobador and Celtic love songs seem to enclose a mystical allegory or symbolism, as is most evident in

the above case. Note the use of two mystical symbols, the rose and

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the "pure crystal fountain", as well as the last two lines. As George Bernard Shaw said:

"Holy and beautiful is the soul of Catholic Ireland."

The image of the "crystal fountain" is perhaps best expressed by St. John of the Cross in the poem without prose commentary titled:

**Song of the Soul That Seeks to Know God Through Faith**

How well I know that fountain that runs and flows,  
    Though it is night  
That eternal fountain is hidden,  
    Though it is night  
In the dark night of this life,  
How well I know by faith the cold fountain  
    Though it is night  
Its origin I do not know, since it has none,  
But I know that all origins flow from it  
    Though it is night  
I know that there cannot be a thing so beautiful  
And that Heaven and earth drink from this fountain  
    Though it is night  
I know well that one finds no earth in this fountain  
And that no one can ford it  
    Though it is night  
Its clarity is never darkened  
And I know that all light comes from it  
    Though it is night  
I know that so swift be its currents  
That it waters Hell, the Heavens and people,  
    Though it is night  
The current that flows from these two  
I know that neither is anterior to the fountain  
    Though it is night  
That eternal fountain is hidden  
In the living bread (communion wafer) to give us life  
    Though it is night

Here it is calling all creatures  
And of this water they drink their fill, though in secret

(1831)

Though it is night  
That living fountain which I desire,  
In this bread of life (communion wafer) I now see,  
Though it is night.

Miguel Asin Palacios noted the Islamic symbol of laborious prayer or meditation symbolized by the difficult flow of spiritual water by way of pipes and aqueducts, in contrast to the spontaneity of the natural spring of a higher level of contemplation.

Says St. John of the Cross in Ascent of Mount Carmel:

"Therefore, when it yields itself to prayer, the soul is now like one to whom water has been brought, so that he drinks peacefully, without labor, and is no longer forced to draw the water through the aqueducts of former meditations and forms and figures."

As David Rubio noted:

"None of the 56 metaphors of "the fountain" of the Vulgate (the Latin version of the Bible translated from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek by St. Jerome), nor any of the numerous metaphors on "the fountain" by Western Christian Mystics can in any way, shape or form be related to the concept of the "fountain" in St. John of the Cross."(187)

Note that in St. John of the Cross the fountain is clearly conceived as divine. Ibn Arabi al-Mursi in the Fatuhāt al-Makkiyya says that the fountain is a mirror which the Sufi believes that he sees, and, when he sees his error, discovers God and himself.(188)

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Note that in the poem "The Song of the Soul That Seeks to Know God Through Faith", St. John of the Cross follows the above-mentioned Book of Certainty, attributed by some to Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, to the letter, allowing for differences in language, and the references to the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

Says Laleh Bakhtiar:

"The mystic perseveres and steps beyond the gateway into the Garden of the Soul proper. The garden contains three things: a fountain, flowing water and the fruit of trees. The fountain symbolizes perceptions of particulars: forms and ideas. Having reached this fountain, the mystic gains Knowledge of Certainty.

The water which is found here symbolizes Light: knowledge which gushes from the Fountain of the Spirit, flows to the Garden of the Heart, and from there feeds the faculties of intuition which are partially veiled by psychic forces here in the Garden of the Soul.

As the mystic enters this second garden (Garden of the Heart), further perils present themselves

The mystic enters the Garden (of the Heart) and finds a fountain, water which flows, a tree and fruit of this tree. The fountain is the Fountain of Life or Immortality. By drinking of this fountain, the mystic attains to the Eye of Certainty, that is, reaches direct contact with the Spirit; for the water of this fountain originates from the Garden of the Spirit.

The water which flows in this garden is the intellect, knowledge which has been illuminated by revelation. Having left reason behind, which relates to the sensible world, the mystic's soul is fed by the Intellect which rules the intelligible or spiritual world.

The mystic enters the Garden of the Spirit and finds a fountain, water which gushes forth, a tree and fruit of that tree. The fountain is the Fountain of Knowledge which is illuminated by the Spirit. It is the

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contemplative Truth is illuminated by the Spirit. It is the contemplative Truth of Certainty, the knowledge of illumination, knowledge of the Oneness of all Divine Qualities. The Fountain of Knowledge appears like veils of light, not darkness, behind each of which shines the Light of Essence itself. The water in the garden gushes forth of itself; it is like the oil in the Verse of Light (of the Qur'an) which burns though "untouched by fire".

"Upon entering the Garden (of Essence), the mystic finds the Fountain of Knowledge of the Unity of Being; the water which gushes forth is pure Light. The fruit of the garden is the pomegranate, the symbol of integration of multiplicity in unity (as St. John of the Cross well knew), in the station of Union, conscious of Essence Consumed in the Light, no individuality remains; the mystic has reached the goal of the Quest, the Truth of Certainty."(189)

Ms. Bakhtiar's selections quoted above are a sort of anthology. In the Book of Certainty the mystical fountain is described as "flowing", while St. John of the Cross says: "fountain which gushes and flows". Note that St. John of the Cross also says: "Well I know", see "Fountain of Knowledge" above.

Says St. John of the Cross in Spiritual Canticle:

"When this faith shall end, when it is perfected by the clear vision of God, the substance of the faith shall remain, stripped of the veil of silver so that faith gives and communicates to us God Himself, but covered with the silver of faith."

(1834)

Note that in the selections by Ms. Bakhtiar quoted above, the Fountain of Knowledge appears like veils of light, not darkness, behind which shines the Light of Essence itself.

Nuri al-Baghdadi (9<sup>th</sup> century) says in his Maqaman al-Qulub Gives elaborate descriptions of the mystical water of the soul, that its flowing into the heart of the mystic implies knowledge of the secrets of Eternal God.(190)

In the poem "Song of the Soul that Seeks to Know God Through Faith", translated above, St. John of the Cross says: "That eternal fountain is hidden". Nuri al-Baghdadi says that the water of the Divine Fountain symbolizes the certainty of this knowledge of God.

St. John of the Cross says:

"Well I know by faith the cold fountain."

The "crystal fountain" of the Spiritual Canticle means equally "faith" and "certainty". In the Book of Certainty the author, very likely Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, says:

"This degree of certainty being none other than faith."(191)  
in his discussion of the "fountain of the lore of certainty."

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In another place the same author says that the second degree of faith in Sufism is the "Eye of Certainty".(192) In Arabic 'ayn may mean either "eye" or "fountain", and the author of the Book of Certainty is obviously making use of a play on words. It would appear that St. John of the Cross was also aware of this play on words.

Like the Sufis, St. John of the Cross interweaves the symbol of the fountain with the symbol of the eyes, which he sees reflected in the silvery waters of the fountain. He says that the fountain symbolizes faith, and that the eyes are reflected there. God is not known directly, but only as reflected by faith. Thus, the fountain and the eyes both symbolize faith. Repeatedly in the works of St. John of the Cross the symbol of the fountain and the symbol of the eyes are associated and made equivalent.

As we have already noted, St. John of the Cross makes much use of the symbol of the ascent of a mountain, as exemplified in his major work Ascent of Mount Carmel. To some degree, this symbol is pre-Islamic. One only need think of the work of the early Church father St. John Climacus, from the Greek *klimakeon*, which means "ladder", also known as "St. John of the Ladder" because

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of The Ladder of Divine Ascent, the title of his only known work. Now, St. John Climacus speaks of the ascent of a ladder, but this is not so very different from the ascent of a mountain. No doubt St. John of the Cross was well acquainted with the work of St. John Climacus or St. John of the Ladder.

However, it is in Sufism that the image of the ascent of a mountain is born and becomes prominent. It is Suhrawardi, the great Persian philosopher, who perhaps most extensively deals with said image or symbol, particularly in his work A Tale of Occidental Exile.

The above-mentioned tale is quite arcane and difficult to understand for the uninitiated. Henry Corbin did much to clarify the meaning of the most arcane and esoteric work.

"*Eran-Vej* (or *Aryana Vaeja* in Avestan, the "Homeland of the Aryans" also seems to figure in Celtic legend), the paradise of Yima (the Zoroastrian Pluto), the spiritual realm of subtle bodies, has been a constant and absorbing theme of Iranian meditation for the adepts of Zoroaster in the distant past, the adepts of the Suhrawardian theosophy of Light and the thinkers of the *Shaykhi School* of Shi'a Iran. The idea of the center of the world, the legendary theme of the central *keshvar* determining the orientation of the other six *keshvars* arranged around it and later separated from one another by the cosmic ocean, has had a continuous philosophic development. The most important phase of this development is perhaps the moment when, in Suhrawardi's *Oriental Theosophy*, the Platonic Ideas (or "Platonic Forms") are interpreted in terms of Zoroastrian angelology.



Between the world of pure spiritual Lights (*Luces Victoriales*), the world of the "Mothers" in the terminology of *Iasrao* and the sensory universe, at the boundary of the ninth sphere there opens a *mundus imaginalis* which is a concrete spiritual world archetype-*Fihues*, apparitional Forms, angels of species and of individuals: by philosophical dialectics its necessity is deduced and its plane situated; vision of it in actuality is vouchsafed to the visionary apperception of the Active Imagination. The essential connection in the works of Suhrawardi which leads from philosophical speculation to a metaphysics of ecstasy also establishes the connection between the angelology of the neo-Zoroastrian Platonism and the idea of the *Mundus imaginalis*. Thus, Suhrawardi declares, is the world to which the ancient sages alluded when they affirmed that beyond the sensory world there exists another universe with a contour and dimensions and extensions in space, although these are not comparable with shape and spatiality as we perceive them in the world of physical bodies. It is the "eighth" *keshar*, the mystical earth of *Hurgalya* with its emerald cities; it is situated on the summit of the cosmic mountain of *Qaf*.

There is ample supporting evidence that this was indeed the mountain formerly called *Alborz (Elburz)*, in Avestan *Haraiti Bareza*, geographically, the name today designates a chain of mountains in northern Iran. But this geographical fact is irrelevant to the visionary geography of the ancient legends which tell us of a marvelous race inhabiting the mountain's cities: a race as ignorant as the earthly Adam of *Iblis-Ahriman (Iblis* is an Arabic name for Satan: *Ahriman* is the Zoroastrian Satan), a race similar to the angels, androgynous perhaps, since without sexual differentiation (see the twins of the paradise of Yima and of the *Uttara-kurus*) and hence untroubled even by desire for posterity. The minerals in their soil and the walls of their cities secrete their own light (like the *yar* of Yima); they have no need of outer light, whether from the sun, the moon, the stars of the physical Heavens. These concordant signs establish the heavenly topography of the supernatural Earth on the boundary of the sphere above the planetary Heavens and the Heaven of the

innumerable fixed stars, which encompasses the entire sensory universe. The mountain of *Qaf* is the Sphere of Spheres surrounding the totality of the visible cosmos; an *Emerald Rock*, casting its reflection over the whole of the mountain of *Qaf*, it is the keystone of this celestial vault, the pole.

Now, in the Recital of the Occidental Exile, whose very title points to the fundamental meaning of the "Oriental Theosophy", this is precisely the mountain which the exile must climb when he is summoned at last to return *home*, to return to *himself*. He has to reach the summit, the *Emerald Rock* that rises up before him like the translucent wall of a mystical Sinai; there, as we have already seen, on the threshold of the pleroma of Light, the pilgrim meets his Perfect Nature, his Holy Ghost, in an ecstasy of anticipation corresponding, in the Mazdean (Zoroastrian) dramaturgy, to the meeting in the dawn with the celestial Person, at the entrance to the Chinvat Bridge. This threshold opens onto the "Climate of the Soul", a world made wholly of a subtle "matter" of light, intermediate between the world of the Cherbimic pure Lights and the world of *physis*, which includes corruptible sublunar matter as well as the astral matter of the incorruptible Heavens. This universe of *physis* in its entirety forms the cosmic *Occident*; the other universe is the *Orient*, which begins at the Climate of the Soul, the "eighth" climate."(193)

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and Kubra insist a great deal in the spiritual mountain and its ascent, calling said mountain *Qaf*.

One need only compare the drawing of the mystical Mount Carmel by St. John of the Cross himself (194) with the painting of Mount *Qaf* reproduced in Bakhtiar, op. cit., p. 56 to note that the fundamental idea behind both is the same. Says Frithjof Schuon:

"The inner symbol of the cosmic mountain, *Qaf*, has been expressed in the following way; what separates man from Divine Reality is the slightest of barriers. God

is infinitely close to man, but man is infinitely far from God. This barrier, for man is a mountain. which he must remove with his own hands. He digs away at the earth, but in vain, the mountain remains; man, however, goes on digging in the Name of God. And the mountain vanishes. It was never there."(195)

At the summit of Mount Carmel, St. John of the Cross said:

"Here there is no road"

and discovers that there never was one. In the very depths of his soul he finds God, he has traveled in a circle "from God to God".

Not that the path is easy. Laleh Bakhtiar says:

"One needs a guide to climb: one can climb a mountain by many paths, but one needs to follow one made by experienced people. The higher one climbs, the smaller things below become, but the further one can see. The higher one moves spiritually, the more vision one gains. Only at the peak can one see the other peaks.

The mountain has trees and plants and is full of natural forms: then one passes from form to formlessness, from sensible to intelligible. The nature of the person who reaches the top of the cosmic mountain is a Simurgh."(196)

Says St. John of the Cross on his drawing of Mount Carmel:

In order to come to be everything  
Do not wish to be anything.

In another place St. John of the Cross says:

"Only one thing is necessary, which is to know how to genuinely pray and to totally annihilate one's self."

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Above we have the famous *fan'a* of the Sufis.

As we shall see, Suhrawardi is arguably the Sufi - indeed the

thinker, Sufi or not - with whom St. John of the Cross has most in common. Now, Suhrawardi was not only a Persian by birth (as were Avicenna and al-Ghazzali) who wrote in Persian, he was, if one may use the expression in referring to so early a period, a most patriotic Persian. In great part his philosophy was, according to his own words, derived from the wise men of Zoroastrian Persia.(197), and the very concept of "Illuminism" (*Ishraqi*), by which his philosophy is often called, is of Zoroastrian precedence. It would not be too much to say that Suhrawardi is the most Persian of Sufis, and Suhrawardi is arguably the Sufi, indeed the thinker, Sufi or not, with which St. John of the Cross is most indebted, the one with whom he has most in common. Suhrawardi was **NOT** a Semite. To refer to the Islamic, Sufi elements in the works of St. John of the Cross as "Semitic" is sheer idiocy, and only a person overspecialized in the field of Semitic Philology (note that in Spain Islamic Studies are often, though erroneously, included in the field of Semitic Philology) or someone who has taken much too seriously the arrant nonsense of Americo Castro would ever dream of saying such a thing. As we shall see, St. John

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of the Cross is consistently closer to Persian than to Arab Sufis. Al-Ghazzali was a Persian by birth, as was al-Hallaj, while Ibn

Arabi al-Mursi and Ibn Abbad of Ronda were Hispano-Muslims, Spaniards in whose veins flowed Celtic and Visigothic blood. Even Imam Ja'afar as-Sadiq had a Persian great-grandmother.

Richard M. Weaver was a member of the American traditionalist literary movement known as the "Southern Agrarians". Like most members of this movement, Richard M. Weaver was a devout Catholic.

The movement of the Southern Agrarians, being Southern, is in many ways an American version of the Jacobites of Scotland, Ireland and Wales, the Vendeens and Chouans of France and Brittany, the Carlists of Spain and the Slavophiles of Russia.

Richard M. Weaver was the author of perhaps the best known and most influential work of the Southern Agrarians, Ideas Have Consequences. Below is a brief selection from said book:

"In considering the world to which these matters are addressed, I have been chiefly impressed by the difficulty of getting certain initial facts admitted. This difficulty is due in part to the widely prevailing Whig theory of history, with its belief that the most advanced point in time represents the point of Highest development, aided no doubt by theories of evolution which suggest to the uncritical a kind of necessary passage from simple to complex. Yet the real trouble is found to lie deeper than this. It is the appalling problem, when one comes to actual cases, of getting men to distinguish between better and worse. Are people

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today provided with a sufficiently rational scale of values to attach these predicates with intelligence? There is ground for declaring that modern man has become a moral idiot. So few are those who care to examine their lives, or to accept the rebuke which comes of admitting that our present state may be a

fallen state, that one questions whether people now understand what is meant by the superiority of an ideal. One might expect abstract reasoning to be lost upon them; but what is he to think when attestations of the most concrete kind are set before them, and they are still powerless to mark a difference or draw a lesson? For four centuries every man has been not only his own priest but his own professor of ethics, and the consequence is an anarchy which threatens even that minimum consensus of value necessary to the political state.

Surely we are justified in saying of our time: If you seek the monument to our folly, look about you. In our own day we have seen cities obliterated and ancient faiths stricken. We may well ask, in the words of St. Matthew, whether we are not faced with "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world". We have for many years moved with a brash confidence that man had achieved a position of independence which rendered the ancient restraints needless. Now, in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the height of modern "progress", we behold unprecedented outbreaks of hatred and violence; we have seen whole nations desolated by war and turned into penal camps by their conquerors; we find half of mankind looking upon the other half as criminal. Everywhere occur symptoms of mass psychosis. Most portentous of all, there appear diverging bases of value, so that our single planetary globe is mocked by worlds of different understanding. These signs of disintegration arouse fear, and fear leads to desperate unilateral efforts toward survival, which only forward the process.

Like MacBeth, Western man made an evil decision, which has become the efficient and final cause of other evil decisions. Have we forgotten our encounter with the witches on the heath? It occurred in the late 14<sup>th</sup>

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century, and what the witches said to the protagonist of this drama was that man could realize himself more fully if he would only abandon his belief in the existence of transcendentals. The powers of darkness were working subtly as always, and they couched this proposition in the seemingly innocent form of an attack upon universals. The defeat of logical realism in the great (late) medieval debate was the crucial event in Western culture; from this flowed those acts which issue

now in modern decadence.

One may be accused here of oversimplifying the historical process, but I take the view that the conscious policies of men and governments are not mere rationalizations of what has been brought about by unaccountable forces. They are rather deductions from our most basic ideas of human destiny, and they have a great, though not unobstructed, power to determine our course.

For this reason I turn to William of Occam (or *Ockham*) as the best representative of a change which came over man's conception of reality at this historic juncture. It was William of Occam (or *Ockham*) who propounded the fateful doctrine of *nominalism*, which denies that universals have a real existence. His triumph tended to leave universal terms mere names serving our convenience. The issue ultimately involved is whether there is a source of truth higher than, and independent of, men; and the answer to the question is decisive for one's view of nature and (the) destiny of mankind. The practical result of nominalist philosophy is to banish the reality which is perceived by the intellect and to posit as reality that which is perceived by the senses. With this change in the affirmation of what is real, the whole orientation of culture takes a turn, and we are on the road to modern empiricism." (198)

Beginning with Luther, Nominalism has been the foundation of Protestant philosophy and theology, and this fact is one of the

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many reasons which conclusively demonstrate that Protestantism is merely a halfway house between Catholicism and atheism, as Herman Melville noted.

It is due to Protestantism that

"For four centuries every man has been not only his own priest but his own professor of ethics"

as Richard M. Weaver noted.

Galileo was also a follower of William of Occam (or *Ockham*); significantly William of Occam was an Englishman. As we have said elsewhere in this book, the quarrel between Galileo and the Church was not about astronomy, but rather it was about epistemology, and the Church was right. From a nominalist base it is but a short step to Galileo's theory of primary qualities, which are amenable to mathematical treatment, and secondary qualities which are not, only primary qualities being real and objective, secondary qualities being illusory and/or subjective. The arbitrariness of this division should be perfectly obvious to all, at least to those whose intellects are not totally deformed and perverted by scientific materialism and positivism. The Church was absolutely right to condemn Galileo's theory of primary and secondary qualities as an evil, perverse, pernicious and malignant error.

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Galileo was not a hero but a fool. From Galileo's arbitrary division to what William Blake called "Single vision and Newton's sleep" is but a short step.

The Shi'a Imams, Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Haidar Amoli, the great Shi'a thinkers of the Safavi Period in Persia,



and the contemporary Iranian Shi'a thinker 'Allamah Tabataba'I were and are the most bitter and resolute opponents of that intellectual and spiritual poison known as *nominalism*.

We have cited the works of 'Allama Muhammad Sayyid Husayn Tabataba'I numerous times in the present work. In the Middle Ages, "Realist" referred to those who believed that Universals or "Platonic Forms" are real, hence the name; the opponents of the Realists were known as "Nominalists". Perhaps I should use the present tense, as the controversy between Realists and Nominalists was revived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

'Allama Tabataba'I was author of a book whose title in English would be The Principles of Philosophical Realism, in which he defends Realism in the medieval sense against Nominalism and attacks modern philosophies descended from Nominalism, especially Marxist materialism. It is to the great honor of Shi'ism that it

(1846)

has always defended Realism in the medieval sense and fought fiercely against that intellectual and spiritual poison known as "Nominalism".

Luce Lopez-Baralt has noted the coincidence between the name of Suhrawardi's philosophy "Illuminism" (*Ishraqi*) and the name

of the *Alumbrados*, literally the "Enlightened Ones". This has seldom been noted, because, except for the coincidence of names, the *Alumbrados* had very little in common with Suhrawardi. The true heir of Suhrawardi in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain was St. John of the Cross. Had Suhrawardi been alive in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, he would most certainly have taken the side of St. John of the Cross against the *Alumbrados*.

The soul as a mystical garden is a topic with which we have dealt in various parts of the present chapter. However, we shall now briefly deal with it in a monographic way.

Nuri al-Baghdadi in his Maqamat al-Qulub dedicates various chapters to the description of the above-mentioned garden, its vegetation, flowers, fountains, winds, fragrances, rains, mists, *shatat*, etc. Ibn Arabi al-Mursi calls this garden "The unitive station".

St. John of the Cross in Spiritual Canticle deals with this topic:

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### **Breathe through my garden**

"This garden is the soul; for, as the soul called herself a vineyard in flower, because the flower of the virtues which are in it produces a sweet wine, so, here it calls itself a garden .

### **And let the fragrances flow**

"These fragrances are at times so abundant that the soul thinks itself to be costumed with delights and bathed in inestimable glory - to such a degree that not

only is it conscious of them within, but they are also like to overflow (remember the Arabic *shatt* and *shath* and the Persian *shatat* and *shath*) from it, to such an extent that all who are able to discern such things recognize it, and the soul in this case appears to them to be like a delightful garden, full of the delights and riches of God."

#### **Encompassed with dens of lions**

"But over and above this habitual satisfaction and peace, the flowers, or virtues, of this garden of which we speak are apt to open in the soul and diffuse their fragrance in it after such a manner that the soul seems to be, and in fact is, filled with delights from God."

The winds of the mystical garden are also dealt with by St.

John of the Cross:

#### **Halt, dead wind from the North**

"The north wind is a very cold wind (especially in Castile) which dries and withers the flowers and vegetation, or makes them to shrink and close when it strikes them. And because spiritual aridity and the realization of the absence of the Beloved cause the same effect in the soul which experiences them, drenching in the soul the substance, savor and fragrance of the virtues which the soul has tasted, the soul calls it the north wind; because all the virtues

(1848)

and the affective exercises which the soul has practiced are mortified in it, and so the soul says: "Halt, north wind".

#### **Come, south wind, that awakens love**

"the south wind is a different wind, which is commonly called *abrego*; this peaceful zephyr causes rain and makes the grass and plants to grow and flowers to open and scatter their fragrance; its effects are the opposite of those of the north wind. And this zephyr the soul calls the Holy Spirit, Who awakens love; for, when this Divine Zephyr wafts upon the soul, it wholly kindles and refreshes it and revives it and

awakens the will and raises the desires which had fallen and were asleep, to the love of God."

In the above, St. John of the Cross is very close to Saadi:

A garden where the murmuring rill was heard;  
While from the trees sang each melodious bird;  
That, with the many-colored tulip bright,  
These, with their various fruits the eye delight.  
The whispering breeze beneath the branches' shade,  
Of bending flowers a motley carpet made. (199)

Saadi continues:

"It is natural for plants to be revived by the morning breeze, whereas minerals and dead bodies are not susceptible to the Zephyr's influence. (The meaning is that only those hearts which are alive to the meaning of spiritual love can be quickened by the breathe of Divine Inspiration)(200)

Nuri al-Baghdadi also celebrates the indescribable fragrance of the garden, or the soul in mystical union:

"God, blessed be He over all the face of the earth, has a garden. Whoever smells its fragrance will have no more desires for Paradise. And this garden is the soul of the mystic."

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Nuri al-Baghdadi also says:

The garden of the soul contains a fountain, flowing water."

We have already dealt with Laleh Bakhtiar's commentary on the flowing water of the Garden.

Says St. John of the Cross in Living Flame of Love:

"The well of living water which comes tumbling down from Lebanon (Song of Songs, IV:15) which is God; in which you are marvelously lifted according to the

harmony of your soul and even your body, become a paradise of Diving quenching " Ibn Arabi al-Mursi refers to:

"The flower, i.e., the station of Divine Revelation."

In Spiritual Canticle St. John of the Cross says:

"For it will happen that the soul will see in itself the flowers of the mountains (I am reminded of the Scottish song "Wild Mountain Thyme":

"I will build my love a bower  
By yon pure crystal fountain  
And on it I will pile  
All the flowers of the mountain")

of which we have spoken above, which are the abundance and greatness and beauty of God; with these will be intertwined the lilies of the wooded valleys, which are rest, refreshment and protection; and then there will be placed among them fragrant roses of the strange islands, which, as is said, are the strange kinds of knowledge concerning God; and likewise it will be buffeted by the fragrance of the water lilies from the sounding rivers, which we have said are the greatness of God that fills the entire soul; and intertwined and interlaced with these is the delicate fragrance of jasmine (which is the whisper of amorous zephyrs) And

(1850)

the enjoyment and perception of these flowers is at times such that the soul can say with complete truth:

"Our flowery bed, encompassed with dens of lions."  
Happy the soul that in this life merits to taste the fragrance of these Divine flowers."

Here we see the rose, mystical flower of Persia and the

West (especially of the Celts). As G. F. Hegel said:

"For Persians, the rose is neither an ornament, nor a symbol, but appears to the poet as animate, like a living bride, and his spirit plunges into the soul of the rose." (201)

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats and a host of other Celtic poets, as well as the Provençal troubadors, would understand the above paragraph perfectly.

The above quotation sounds strange coming from G.F. Hegel, who prided himself on his Germanic or Teutonic obscurity and vies with Martin Heidegger as being the most obscure and unreadable of philosophers.

Besides the rose, in the selection from Spiritual Canticle quoted above we also find the lotus, mystical flower of India as the rose is of Persia and the West, and jasmine. Only the nightingale is missing.

Lord Northbourne has noted:

"In certain circumstances the symbolical aspect of a particular flower predominates, but that occurs only when it is used as part of some formal and established religious or traditional symbolism. One could instance

(1851)

the rose in the center of the cross, where the five-petalled flower symbolizes the "quintessence", The unmanifested *quinta essentia* which is central to the four elements and is their principle; the lotus as the throne of the Buddha, horizontal but with upturned petals, and lying on the face of the waters."(202)

Recall the work by the Irish-American composer Edward MacDowell; "To a Water Lily".

As we shall see in the following chapter, the tulip, especially the blood-red wild Persian tulip (*Tulipa Montana*) has a great importance in Iranian Shi'ism, in which it is the very

symbol or icon of martyrdom.

We have mentioned the Easter Lily or Madonna Lily. That the lily had a mystical symbolism for both the pre-Christian Celts and the pre-Islamic Persians is proven by the fact that the *Fleur de Lys*, which is obviously a stylized lily, was a common artistic motif among both kindred peoples, as we have seen.

In the Christian tradition, the lily is often associated with the Virgin Mary, as the name "Madonna Lily" indicates. "Madonna" is one of the titles of the Virgin Mary. The Madonna Lily, *Lilium candidum*, takes its name from the Virgin Mary, "Madonna" coming from the Italian *ma donna*, meaning "my lady". It is also commonly called "Easter Lily" and "Annunciation Lily".

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According to a very old legend, the Archangel Gabriel (Qur'anic: *Jibril*) held a lily in his hand when he appeared to her to tell her that she had "found favor with God" and would conceive and bear a son and give him the name **Jesus**. AFTER THE Virgin Mary touched the flower, which had until then had no scent, an exquisite fragrance arose from it.(203)

The Venerable Bede (673-735) wrote this poetic description of the Madonna Lily as symbol of the Virgin Mary:

The white petals signifying her bodily purity,  
The golden anthers the glowing light of her soul.(204)

This is well expressed in The Golden Legend, compiled in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Jacobus (Latin form of "James") de Voragine:

"A rich and noble knight renounced the world and entered the Cistercian Order. He was unlettered, and the monks, not wishing to number so noble a person among the lay brothers, gave him a teacher to see if he might acquire enough Latin learning to be received as a choir monk. He spent a long time with his teacher but could learn no more Latin than the two words *Ave Maria* (Hail Mary), which he cherished and repeated incessantly wherever he went and whatever he was doing. At length he died and was buried among the brothers, and behold! A beautiful lily grew up above his grave, and on each petal the words *Ave Maria* were inscribed in letters of gold.

Running to see this great spectacle, the monks dug down into the grave and discovered that the root of the lily sprang from the dead man's mouth. They then understood the depth of devotion with which he, whom God glorified with so prodigious an honor, had recited these two words." (205)

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*Ave Maria* comes from the following Latin prayer:

*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventri tui Jesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen*

Hail Mary, (*Ave Maria*) full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and bless is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen

Up to now we have dealt mostly with cultivated flowers (though not "cultivars" in the sense of the word used by Lord Northbourne); double red or white roses, the lotus, the Easter



Lily or Madonna Lily.

However, as symbols, it is wild flowers which have a richness all their own. The five-petalled rose at the center of the cross is not the large, showy, double flowered "cultivar", nor even the double-flowered red, white or yellow "old fashioned roses" of medieval gardens, praised by the Persian poets and Provencal trobadors, but rather:

❖ 1.) The *Rosa Hibernica* (the original "Wild Irish Rose" of the song: "My wild Irish Rose/The sweetest flower that grows"), *Rosa Gallica*, *Rosa Provincialis* or *Rose de Provins*, *Rosa Canina* (dog rose), *Rosa Rubiginosa*, *Rosa Persica*, *Rosa Pimpinellifolia*, *Rosa Pendulina*, *Rosa Mollis*, *Rosa Iberica*, *Rosa Foetida*, *Rosa Foetida Bicolor*, *Rosa Spinosissima*, *Rosa Eglanteria* and *Rosa Arvensis*,

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wild roses found from France and Spain to the Caucasus, with single blooms with five white, clear pink or red petals and golden stamens; or

❖ 2.) The *Rosa Moschata*, *Musk Rose* or *Sacred Rose of Abyssinia*, a very ancient rose originally grown in ancient Egypt, introduced into Europe by Christian monks and common in medieval gardens, especially monastery gardens. The *Rosa Moschata* has single, shell pink or creamy white flowers with five petals and a tuft of golden stamens.

In the Divina Commedia, Dante Alighieri called the Virgin Mary the Mystical Rose of Heaven:

Behold the Mystic Rose in which the Divine Word (Jesus) became incarnate  
Is there. There also are the lilies by whose fragrance  
Men found the road that forever runs straight.

The name of that Sweet Flower to whom I pray  
Morning and evening, seized upon my soul and caused it  
To direct my gaze towards the most brilliant ray.

Paradiso XXIII: 88-90

Some varieties of rose have a special connection with the  
Virgin Mary. Note that all these roses have single, five-petaled  
blossoms, once again, the *Quinta Essencia*.

The dog rose, *Rosa Canina*, is often called "Mary's Rose". It  
is a tall, bushy plant with single, five-petaled white or pink  
flowers. It is generally a wild rose, though sometimes planted in  
hedgerows. (206)

The Scotch Rose, *Rosa Spinosissima* is often called "Our

(1855)

Lady's Rose, especially among the Catholics of the Scottish  
Highlands and the Hebrides Islands. It is a vigorous, very spiny  
plant with single, five-petaled white blossoms. It is generally a  
wild plant, though sometimes cultivated. (207)

The Mary Queen of Heaven Rose, *Rosa Eglanteria*, is also  
called "Sweet Briar" because of the fragrance produced by the  
glands on the undersides of the leaves as well as the flowers. It  
has pink, five-petaled single blossoms. In Gaelic it is called *Ros  
na Bainriona Mhuire*, "The Rose of Our Lady Mary". (208)

The Irish-American composer Edward MacDowell composed a very lovely and moving piece called "To a Wild Rose", the *Rosa Hibernica*, to be exact.

Though not a true rose, the bright red "Pheasant's Eye", *Adonis Aestivalis*, is often called "Mary's Rose". It is a common wild flower in Palestine, and Palestinian Christians often call it "Blood of Christ".(209)

The rose plays a vital role in the poetry of the Persian Sufis, as the Irish poet William Butler Yeats noted, the rose is the mystical flower of the West (which in this context includes Persia), as the lotus is the mystical flower of India. Hence the

(1856)

great role which the rose plays in the poetry of Mr. Yeats. We speak a great deal of the rose in the course of this book, for the same reason that Mr. Yeats uses the image of the rose so prominently. Certainly the rose plays a great role in the Divina Commedia by Dante Alighieri. Indeed, it could perhaps be said that in Paradiso of the Divina Commedia the rose as a mystical symbol reaches its apotheosis. First a digression, the reason for which will become obvious below;

"Ste. Lucia of Syracuse (Sicily), died 304 AD. Ste. Lucia was born of noble parents at Syracuse, Sicily.

When she refused marriage to a suitor during Emperor Diocletian's persecution of the Christians, he denounced her as a Christian. The governor sentenced her to a brothel, but when the guards tried to take her they were unable to move her. She was then ordered burned to death, but the flames made no impression on her. Finally, she was stabbed through the throat. She is invoked by those with eye trouble, perhaps because of her names, which means "light"; one tradition has her eyes torn out by her judge, while another has her tearing them out to present to a suitor she disliked who admired them; in both cases they were miraculously restored." (210)

Notes Guy P. Raffa:

"Like other epics, the Divina Commedia begins *in media res* ("in the middle of events"): the events that prompt the journey have already happened, prior to the opening action of the poem. In this case, Virgil explains that he was summoned to Dante's aid by Beatrice, who was herself summoned by Ste. Lucia (of

(1857)

Syracuse) at the request of a woman able to alter the judgement of Heaven:

In Heaven a noble lady, pitying  
That great distress I send you to repair,  
Has made a breach in the strict reckoning.

That rules above. She summoned Lucia there,  
And said: - Your follower, who is faithful still,  
Needs you, and I commend him to your care. -

Lucia, who is the enemy of all  
Cruelty, came immediately to the place  
Where I was sitting with the venerable

Rachel, and said: - Beatrice, God's true praise,  
Why do you not help him who loved you so  
That he forsook the crowd and its crass ways?

Do you not hear him crying out below?  
Do you not see Death battle him by that flood

The might ocean cannot overthrow?  
Inferno, II, 94-108.

This last woman who sets in motion the entire rescue operation, can only be **Mary**, the virgin mother of Jesus according to Dante's faith. *Lucia* is Ste. Lucia of Syracuse (died 304 AD), a Christian martyr associated with fortitude as well as sight and vision (her name means "light", and a later legend reports that she gouged out her eyes to protect her chastity). The common view that Ste. Lucia bore personal meaning for Dante (perhaps as his patron saint) derives from the poet's claim to have experienced a period of weakened eyesight as a result of intense reading (Convivio, III, 9.14-16). **Beatrice**, who will reappear as a major figure later in the poem, was the inspiration for Dante's early love poetry and now plays the role of his spiritual guide. Early commentators identified her as the daughter of Folco Portinari, an influential Florentine banker who founded the hospital of Santa Maria Novella and was chosen several times to serve on

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the commune's chief executive body, the Priorate. Beatrice was married (in 1286 or 1287) to Simone de' Bardi, whose family ran one of Florence's largest banking houses. She died in 1290 at age twenty-four, just a year or so after the death of her father. Along with Virgil,

Those three great ladies of high blessedness  
Inferno, II, 124.

-Mary, Ste. Lucia, Beatrice - make possible Dante's journey to the afterlife." (211)

Guy P. Raffa continues:

"Admitting once and for all his inability to capture Beatrice's incomparable beauty in his poetry, Dante enters the Empyrean, the heaven of pure [uncreated] light that exists beyond time and space (once again Dante proclaims that he is a mystic). The Empyrean, as the divine mind, is the true home of the angels and the blessed spirits, who appear here in the glorified human form they will assume at the Last

Judgement. His vision fortified, Dante sees a river of light flowing between banks colored with gorgeous flowers. As soon as Dante's eyes drink from the water, he sees it bend into a circle and perceived the true nature of the two heavenly courts: the sparks are angels and the flowers are the blessed. The circle, formed from a ray of light striking the outer surface of the Primum Mobile and reflecting upward, then grows into a magnificent white rose containing, in thousands of tiers, all the blessed souls of Paradise. Beatrice, in her final words to Dante, says that one of the few open spots in the rose is reserved for the Emperor Henry VII; she foresees Henry's noble mission being thwarted by (Pope) Clement V, the simonist pope whose arrival in Hell will stuff Boniface VIII further down his hole.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a venerable theologian (and mystic) devoted to the Virgin Mary, appears suddenly at Dante's side in place of Beatrice, who has

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returned to her location in the rose. After Beatrice smiles down on his prayer of thanks, Dante raises his eyes to gaze on Mary, queen of Heaven, and then, under St. Bernard's guidance, he observes the arrangement of the blessed within the rose. With time growing short, St. Bernard prays to Mary for the successful completion of Dante's journey to God (another mystical image). As His vision rises beyond the power of words and memory, Dante penetrates the divine [uncreated] light and sees how the universe is bound together by love. In a state of rapture, he perceives the Holy Trinity in the form of three circles - in three colors but sharing a single circumference - and finally, through a flash of grace, he glimpses the mystery of the Incarnation. With Dante's will and desire moved by divine love, like a wheel spinning in perfect balance, the journey and the poem come to an end.

### **Encounters**

St. Bernard: Where Dante expects to see Beatrice, there appears instead a new guide for the final stage of the celestial voyage. St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), a gentle father figure who directs Dante's sight

to illustrious occupants of the rose (including Beatrice, now returned to her place), is assigned this role primarily for his special devotion to the Virgin Mary. He earned this reputation as Mary's "faithful Bernard":

The Queen of Heaven, for whom I constantly  
Burn with love's fire, will grant us every grace,  
Because I am her faithful one, Bernard.  
Paradiso, XXXI 100-102.

Through his advocacy of her cult in his voluminous writings, which include homilies, treatises, and letters. Mary, for St. Bernard, is a soothing and beneficent rose, in contrast with the harmful thorn

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that was Eve; he praises Mary as both a red rose and a white rose, the white flower representing her virginity, purity, and love of God (Sermon on the Blessed Virgin Mary, column 1020). It is thus appropriate for St. Bernard to seek Mary's intercession on behalf of Dante, that he might experience a vision of the Christian Godhead and return safely to tell of it.

"Oh Virgin Mother, daughter of your son,  
Most humble, most exalted of all creatures  
Chose of God in His eternal plan,

You are the one who ennobled human nature  
To the extent that He did not disdain,  
Who was its Maker, to make Himself man.

Within your womb rekindled was the love  
That gave the warmth that did allow this flower  
To come to bloom within this timeless peace.

For all up here you are the noonday torch  
Of charity, and down on earth, for men  
The living spring of their eternal hope.

Lady, you are so great, so powerful,  
That who seeks grace without recourse to you  
Would have his wish fly upward without wings.

Not only does your loving kindness rush  
To those who ask for it, but often times  
    It flows spontaneously before the plea.

In you is tenderness, in you is pity,  
In you munificence - in you unites  
    All that is good in God's created beings.

This is a man who from the deepest pit  
Of all the universe up to this height  
    has witnessed, one by one, the lives of souls,

who begs you that you grant him through your grace  
the power to raise his vision higher still  
    to penetrate the final blessedness.

(1861)

And I who never burned for my own vision  
More than I burn for his, with all my prayers  
    I pray you - and I pray they are enough -

That you through your own prayers dispel the mist  
Of his mortality, that he may have  
    The Sum of Joy revealed before his eyes.

I pray you also, Queen who can achieve  
Your every wish, keep his affections sound  
    Once he had had the vision and returns.

Protect him from the stirrings of the flesh:  
You see, with Beatrice, all the Blest,  
    Hands clasped in prayer, are praying for my  
prayer."

Paradiso, XXXIII, 1-39.

St. Bernard , who belonged to the Cistercian Order (a strict branch of the Benedictines) and became abbot of the monastery at Clairvaux, was one of the most influential church leaders of the twelfth century. Renowned for his persuasive preaching (he was called the "mellifluous doctor"), St. Bernard championed theological and ecclesiastical orthodoxy. St. Bernard died in 1153 and was canonized in 1174.

White Rose: The true home of all the blessed is with God in the Empyrean, a heaven of pure [uncreated] light



beyond time and space. The spirits occupy seats in a  
luminous white rose that is formed from array of light  
reflected off the outer surface of the Primum Mobile.

And its expanse comes from a single ray  
Striking the summit of the First Moved Sphere  
From which it takes its vital force and power.

And as a hillside rich in grass and flowers  
Looks down into a lake as if it were  
Admiring the reflection of its wealth,

So, mirrored tier on tier, within that light,  
More than a thousand were reflected there,  
I saw all those of us who won return.

(1862)

And if the lowest tier alone can hold  
So great a brilliance, then how vast the space  
Of this Rose to its outer petals' reach !

And yet, by such enormous breadth and height  
My eyes were not confused; they took in all  
In number and in quality of bliss.

There, near and far nor adds nor takes away,  
For where God rules directly without agents,  
The laws of Nature in no way apply.  
Paradiso XXX, 106-123.

So now, appearing to me in the form  
Of a white rose was Heaven's sacred host,  
Those whom with His own blood Christ made His  
bride.

Paradiso, XXXI, 1-3.

Beatrice draws Dante into the yellow center of the rose,  
from whence he scans the tiers of white-robed souls

Into the gold of the eternal Rose,  
Whose ranks of petals fragrantly unfold  
praise to the Sun of everlasting spring.

In silence - though I longed to speak - was I  
Taken by Beatrice who said: "Look  
How vast is our white-robed consistory.  
Paradiso XXX, 123-129.

Singing angels fly back and forth between the rose and  
God Above like honeybees, but in a reversal of nature,  
they sweeten the soul-petals of the rose with the nectar  
of divine peace and love.

While the other host - that soaring see and sing  
The glory of the One Who stirs their love,  
    The goodness which made them great as they are,

Like bees that in a single motion swarm  
And dip into the flowers, then return  
    To Heaven's hive where their toil turns to joy -

(1863)

Descended all at once on that great bloom  
Of precious petals, and then flew back up  
    To where its source of love forever dwells.

Their faces showed the glow of living flame,  
Their wings of gold, and all the rest of them  
    whiter than ay snow that falls to earth.

As they entered the flower, tier to tier,  
Each spread the peace and ardor of the love  
    They gathered with their wings in flight to Him.  
        Paradiso, XXXI, 1-18.

The queen of this white rose is the **Virgin Mary**:

The Queen of Heaven, for whom I constantly  
Burn with love's fire, will grant us every grace,  
    Because I am her faithful one, Bernard."

As one who comes from someplace like Croatia -  
To gaze on our Veronica, so long  
    Craved for, he now cannot look long enough.

    And while it is displayed, he says in thought:  
"O Jesus Christ, my Lord, the One true God,  
    is this what your face truly looked like then?" -

just so did I while gazing at the living  
love of the one who living in the world,  
    through contemplation, tasted of that peace.

"My son of grace," he spoke again, "this state

Of blissful being will not be known to you  
So long as you keep your veyes fixed down here;

Look up into the circles, to the highest  
Until your eyes behold, enthroned, the Queen  
Who holds as subject this devoted realm."  
Paradiso XXXI, 100-117.

Traditionally represented as a rose herself.

(1864)

There is the Rose in which the Word of God  
Took on the flesh, and there the lilies are  
Whose fragrance led mankind down the good path."  
Paradiso, XXIII, 72-75.

This celestial rose recalls the large rose windows of  
gothic cathedrals, many of which are dedicated to mary.  
The image of the rose, often red, is also used to  
represent Christ or, in other contexts, earthly love."  
(212)

Giuseppe C. Di Scipio has written a monograph on this topic:

So now, appearing to me in the form  
Of a white rose was Heaven's sacred host,  
Those whom with His own blood Christ made his  
bride,  
Paradiso, XXXI, 1 -12.

With these verses Dante introduces the reader to  
the City of the Blessed souls, which has the shape of a  
white rose. These verses, and the whole question of the  
Rose, have not received proper attention. In the light  
of the precedent of the Roman de la Rose (Romance of the  
Rose) and Dante's own adaptation in the *Fiore*, the  
contrast of that "red" rose, symbol of earthly love,  
and this "candida rosa" (dog rose, wild rose), a  
chromatic symbol of purity and faith, as we shall see,  
should pose a question for the attentive reader.

The problem of the Symbolic Rose (or the rose as a  
mystical symbol), whose structure is described by St.  
Bernard (the great mystic) in Paradiso XXXII, offers  
another key to the interpretation of the Divina Commedia

according to the (Florentine) poet's *forma mentis*, his *intention* and his fundamental philosophical and theological position within the context of the medieval exegetical tradition. The *candida rosa* presents several problematic aspects or *cruces* which, to my knowledge, have never been fully explored.

My aim is to resolve the problem of the Rose by utilizing a "globalistic" approach. ...

(1865)

...A survey of the body of dante criticism in reference to the structure of the Rose, shows how much this aspect has been neglected and misinterpreted. The most essential aspect is the position of the blessed, for if the position is misinterpreted, the structure as conceived by the author is destroyed.

A consideration of the problem of structure must begin with Jacopo della Lana. He perceives that the Rose has a certain order and structure, but he does not give the exact position of Ste. Anne and Ste. Lucia. Regarding the letter, he says: "...and across from Adam is Lucia", which might be taken as a correct interpretation. For the other blessed souls, his interpretation is correct. ...

...Tommaseo follows the same line by placing Ste. Anne in the New Testament and Ste. Lucia in the Old. In Tommaseo's case this is even more stunning, since he noted the architectonic order of the Rose. Both F. Ozanam and Tommaseo first alluded to the idea of a possible relationship between the rose-window of the Gothic cathedral and the *candida rosa*. But unlike the Lombardi commentary, Tommaseo does not give any allegorical interpretation concerning Ste. Lucia. ...

...Moreover, if we examine the illustrators of the Divina Commedia, we will find that the artists did not follow the text; they did not place the blessed as indicated by the poet and did not identify them.

It must be pointed out that even some critics or commentators who placed the blessed in their correct position, as Dante intended, achieved this interpretation almost automatically, without giving it much thought. They did not question whether or not Ste. Anne belongs in the Old Testament and Ste. Lucia in the New. Neither did they give any thought to the question

of whether or not the poet was trying to establish a specific order, according to well-defined literal and symbolic meaning. Even less did they consider the numerical symbolism or any possible architectural correspondence. If the Rose was questioned, it was questioned in terms of unreal proportions.

First, it is necessary to probe the structure, the symmetry and the division of the Symbolic Rose, since it has a definite structure and symmetry, and it follows a specific *ordo* within a geometrical design.

(1866)

This can be proven by drawing a circumference in which all the blessed souls who are mentioned are placed according to the directions provided by the poet in the text. It will be shown that the poet himself drew such a circle, and that by doing so, he could not have made a mistake.

The order of the blessed, then, comprises a clear and precise structure that follows a specific order; it can be constructed within a geometrical figure such as a circle or an octagon - the shape of the baptismal font and the symbol of eternal life.

It seems absurd that a rigorous medieval mind such as Dante's, trained according to a hierarchical view of the universe - a perfect order in everything - would commit a blatant oversight that destroys the perfect order describing the City of the Blessed; he himself points out that in this realm there can be no error and that nothing there is based on chance. In fact, it was the poet's intention to conceive and construct the Rose according to a perfect order, keeping in mind the famous phrase from the Wisdom of Solomon: "All is disposed in measure and number and weight". Had Dante disregarded such an essential notion in medieval tradition, he could not have claimed the prophetic nature of his mission by declaring his poem sacred:

If ever it happen that this sacred poem  
to which both Heaven and Earth have set their hand,  
and made me lean from laboring so long.

Paradiso. XXV, 1-3.

Having established the structural element of the Rose, one must consider the blessed souls who are its inhabitants. We must why the poet has placed Mary, St. Peter, St. John the Evangelist, Ste. Lucia, St. John the

Baptist, Ste. Anne, Moses and Adan on the first circle or tier of the Rose, and the Hebrew women, namely: Eve, Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and Ruth? Why St. Francis, St. Benedict and St. Augustine? Such analysis is essential as a second step to the understanding of the whole Symbolic Rose. Each of these *personae* has a specific function as an individual and in relation to the group. This group, as Ernst Robert

(1867)

Curtius points out in discussing "The Personnel of the Commedia, must be examined and interpreted according to its literal and symbolic meaning.

It is indispensable to compare, moreover, Dante's description of his Rose Vision to the body of Vision literature, both secular and nonsecular, that he might have known. Dante's vision is totally innovative in line with his special mission:

I have been in His brightest shining heaven  
And seen such things that no man, once returned  
From there, has wit or skill to tell about;

For when our intellect draws near its goal  
And fathoms to the depths of its desire,  
The memory is powerless to follow;

But still, as much of Heaven's holy realm  
As I could store and treasure in my mind  
Shall now become the subject of my song.  
Paradiso, I, 4- 12.

Keeping in mind the structural analysis of the Rose and that of the blessed, we must examine a third aspect, which only recent criticism has taken into account, namely the numerical symbolism. This notion, derived from the previously cited phrase in the Wisdom of Solomon, has been totally ignored in connection with the Rose. No one has ever considered the simple fact that Dante names eight blessed souls on the first circle of the *candida rosa*. The implication is immense, especially if one remembers the importance of numerology in the Middle Ages. As Emile Male puts it:

This doctrine comes from the Fathers of the Church, who without doubt were adepts of the

neo-Platonic schools, which revived the spirit of Pythagoras. It is evident that St. Augustine considered names to be thoughts of God ... The science of names is therefore the very science of the universe; the numbers contain the secret of the world ... Who knows this will understand the divine plan.

(1868)

One of the most eminent of the Latin fathers of the Church, St, Isidore of Seville, states:

"It is not superfluous to attend to the numeric causes in the Holy Scripture."

Turning to dante himself, let us recall for a moment the Vita Nuova (XXIX) where he speaks of Beatrice as a miracle, in terms of the number nine, and his reproach to Giovanni del Virgilio. The latter sent the poet a Latin Eclogue of 97 lines. Dante replied with the same number of lines, but regretting the Giovanni del Virgilio had not added three more lines to make 100, a perfect number.

It is not necessary to prove that numerical symbolism is present throughout the Divina Commedia. Let it suffice to refer the reader again to Ernst Robert Curtius, who, in his final paragraphs in the chapter "Numerical Composition", does justice to Dante by drawing the following conclusion:

...Dante's numerical composition is the end and the acme of a long development. From the Enneads of the Vita Nuova dante proceeded to the elaborate numerical structure of the Divina Commedia:  $1 + 33 + 33 + 33 = 100$  cantos conduct the reader through 3 realms, the last one of which contains 10 heavens. Triads and decades intertwine into unity. Here number is no longer an outer framework, but a symbol of the cosmic *ordo*.

In addition to these basic observations one must consider the complexity, the precision and the beauty of the *terza rima*.

Numerical structure and symbolism are part of the poet's *intention* and *forma mentis*. The numerical

symbolism and structure present throughout Dante's work is undoubtedly present in the geometrical design of the Rose. Such a design points directly to the prevalent architecture of Dante's times, and therefore to an architectural analogy of the Rose.

(1869)

The fourth aspect, then, is to establish an architectural correlation between the Rose and the Gothic cathedral. Ozaban and Tommasewo expressed such a hypothesis, but did not pursue it. Tommasewo did not pursue this intuition in all its implications. An understanding of this correlation is found, however, in Emile Male, who fully perceived how much Dante is part of the medieval world and its *forma mentis*. Male, in equating Dante and St. Thomas Aquinas as the great architects of that (13<sup>th</sup>) century, states:

... It is thus that the edifice, 'with thought and measure' of the invisible cathedral. It was so with St. Thomas (Aquinas), the great architect of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The biblical notion of measure, number and weight is central to the interpretation of the medieval world view. In fact Otto von Simson suggests that St. Augustine's application of this doctrine goes beyond that of the first book of *De Musica*. In other words, it needs to be applied to poetry, architecture, and to the other *artes*. The Augustinian "philosophy of beauty", one must remember, was adopted by the (neo)Platonists of the School of Chartres and by the ascetic movement headed by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. It was subsequently transmitted to Suger of St. Denis, who was such a force in the birth of the Gothic.

Of this tradition Dante was well aware. Among other attributes, Dante refers to Paradise as "wondrous and angelic shrine" *Paradiso*, XXVIII, 53; "celestial Jerusalem" *Paradiso*, XXV, 56; "and more than charity burns in that cloister", *Purgatorio*, XV, 57;

Two Lights and no more were allowed to rise  
Straight to our cloister clad in double robes -  
explain this to your world when you go back.



And finally, he calls the Church of Paradise "basilica",  
in the prophetic canto:

(1870)

And then my Beatrice, smiling, said:  
"Illustrious life, the one chosen to write  
Of the largesse of our basilica

Make hope resound throughout this heaven's height:  
You can, you were its symbol all those times  
Jesus bestowed more light upon His three."  
Paradiso, XXV, 28 - 33.

The development of Gothic architecture could not  
but exercise a structural influence and produce an  
analogical vision in Dante's works. As Erwin Panofsky  
succinctly puts it,

A man imbued with the Scholastic habit would  
look upon the mode and architectural  
presentation, just as he looked upon the mode  
of literary presentation, from the point of  
view of *manifestation*.

One can see, then how Dante, in the apotheosis of  
his ascension toward the *summum bonum*, the *summum  
pulchritude*, unfolds before our eyes the *milizia santa*  
in the *candida rosa*, an image which may indeed point to  
the rose-window of the Gothic cathedral and to the  
analogous baptismal font. The Rose as the residence of  
the blessed souls is at the same time the Church  
Triumphant, and ultimately the Empyrean. Given the  
medieval *forma mentis*, one must consider, then, the  
formula: *Divina Commedia* - Cathedral, Church Triumphant  
- Symbolic Rose, Symbolic Rose - Rose Window.

These points have not been considered in the study  
of the Rose. The full meaning of the City of the Blessed  
has not been grasped. It seems that a serious study of  
this subject would yield a valid contribution to further  
understanding of Dante's *intention*, by simple proof and  
logical analysis. Dante's world was a whole, a total  
concept of symmetry, clarity, analogy, order and  
mathematical principles. The Rose in Paradiso XXXII

cannot be isolated and considered apart from the total structure of the Divina Commedia, nor can it be separated from the medieval notion of the artes.

(1871)

Perhaps because of its well-defined structure, or its lack of action - since many critics seem to make action a requirement in order to find beauty in the Divina Commedia - the Rose has been neglected or taken for granted. The static realm, as many would consider it, has to be probed by following the text and trying to incorporate it into the poet's cultural context. It then becomes clear that what may have been taken for granted or neglected, assumes a totally new outlook and value. The Rose, therefore, through an architectural and geometrical analysis, with all its correlative implications, may provide a key to a deeper understanding of the Divina Commedia in its totality. Without this kind of gloss one would still be reading this episode of the Divina Commedia as it was read by the early commentators, with a limited scop. With this in mind one can ask: Why did Dante choose a rose as a symbol for the City of the Blessed? [Obvious answer: dante knew of the Rose as a great mystical symbol) Why did he structure it the way he did? Why did he emphasize certain *personae*? Why did he follow a certain order? These questions have to be answered, as we intend to do." (213)

Signor Di Scipio continues:

"In order to understand the magnitude of dante's innovation in his conception of Paradise, let us tun to the tradition of visions, both secular and nonsecular, and to some so-called "precursors".

Dante tells us that his is a journey that no on has ever undertaken:

I set my course for waters never traveled  
Paradiso, II, 7

At the same time he indicates that his heavenly vision will be totally new, for God has given him such grace:

And since God has received me so far into His grace  
That He wills that I see His court

(1872)

The reader is called upon to pause and reflect on these verses, for the poet is announcing a vision of the celestial city which will be granted to him alone in the the last stage of his itinerary. God has given him the grace and the privilege to "see" heaven in a wholly new light and fashion.

Dante's Paradise is unique in Christian medieval literature. His "precursors" have provided very little inspiration, if any, for the description and the structure of Paradise, and in particular, for that of the Mystic Rose (though the concept of the Rose as a mystical symbol was well known in Dante's time, both among Christian mystics and Sufis) in the Empyrean. Whereas Dante's vision is spiritual, many of the ones he might have known were characterized by worldly details, such as knights in armor, feudal courts, beautiful gardens and many other mundane delights. The blessed souls in the Divina Commedia enjoy the vision of God. All of them, although unequally blessed, are happy through God's justice and through the flame of charity. This flame grows in each blessed soul as their number increases. This is the city of light, for God is the Sun that illuminates and radiates the warmth of the blessed souls.

The various visions that are part of the medieval tradition seldom have much in common with Dante's. In Giacomino da Verona's De Ierusalem Celesti, the description of the City of God is that of a medieval city surrounded by walls where gold, precious stones, beautiful palaces, gardens, waters and light abound. God is amidst the angelic choirs, and Mary sits next to Him. This vision, De Ierusalem Celesti, has some details which resemble the Navigatio Sancti Brendani, a vision attributed to an Irish monk of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

There are innumerable visions: the Visio Pauli (4<sup>th</sup> century), the Visio Tugdali (13<sup>th</sup> century), the Visio Alberici (12<sup>th</sup> century), the Visio Caroli Magni, the Visio Anselmi, the Visio Eynsham, the Escala de Mahoma, known in Italy as the Libro della Scala, narrating Muhammad's ascension to heaven, and many other visions. Various attempts have been made to identify them as Dante's sources or precursors. While it may be plausible



(1874)

Again and again Dante re-emphasizes this essential point:

And I said, "though I rest content concerning  
One great wonder of mine, I wonder now  
How I can rise through these light bodies here."  
Paradiso, I, 97 - 99.

If I was body (on earth we cannot think,  
In terms of solid form within a solid,  
As we must here, since body enters body

Then so much more should longing burn in us  
To see that Being in Whom we can behold  
The union of God's nature with our own.  
Paradiso, II, 37- 42

[What a mystical declaration!]

These are irrefutable proofs that the poet claimed to have made his journey with soul and body. The importance of this notion is a key to the reading of the Divina Commedia as a whole (and to the interpretation of dante's mission as *Scriba Dei*).

It may well be stated with Miguel Asin Palacios that in none of the available visions or "precursors" of the Divina Commedia could the poet have found inspiration for his delicate picture of Paradise. Fr. Asin Palacios states that before Dante, the description of Paradise in the Christian tradition was coarse and sensual. According to this critic a similar situation exists in the Muslim tradition before the Fatuhah of the Murciano thinker and mystic Ibn Arabi. In the Escala de Mahoma, Eden and Paradise are not clearly delineated as two different places. Spiritual beatitude is mixed and confused with carnal pleasures. Moreover, Purgatory does not exist in the Qur'an. Asin Palacios compares the structural and moral order of dante's vision with that of Ibn Arabi (and other Sufis, both Hispano-Muslim and Persian) and with other Muslim legends and visions. Although the denials and refutations of Asin Palacios' thesis have been numerous, its observations and richness of detail remain a significant scholarly contribution.

(1875)

Dante's vision is unique in its sublimity and its vividness. Dante, therefore, broke every tradition in order to give his particular description of Paradise, claiming for himself a special mission.

Within the biblical tradition, the most important visions are those of Ezekial and the Apostle Paul.

Said the Prophet Ezekiel:

"In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the first day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."

Ezekiel, I, 1-2.

And St. Paul:

"I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven - whether in body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter."

II Corinthians, X!!: 1-4.

These two visions are the most meaningful to Dante.

One could say that as St. Paul's vision is the fulfillment of Ezekial's, by its extensions, Dante's vision encompasses and fulfills both.

The last vision I want to mention is that of Alanus de Insulis (1128-1202) found in the Anticlaudianus. This visio, however, is totally allegorical. The author himself places it with those visions called *imaginariae*. In the Anticlaudianus Natura wishes to create a perfect man Phronesis (Wisdom) is called because she can understand all the divine mysteries. A cart is prepared for the journey to heaven, so that the secrets of Noys and the will of the

(1876)

Highest Master may be penetrated. Phronesis present Natura's wishes to Theology and asks to be shown the way to the "highest Jupiter". Phronesis reaches the Empyrean, which is the seat of the Virgin Mary, the blessed and the angelic choirs. Among the blessed we find St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Lawrence and St. Vincent of Lerins, a monk and theologian of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Finally the new man is created. He is called Juvenis.

Ultimately, none of these visions have the deep significance, the richness of detail, the perfect structure and the beauty of order that, as will be shown, are present in Dante's Heavenly Rose.

Henry H. Milman in his History of Latin Christianity, while discussing hell, Purgatory and Heaven, attributes to Dante the merit of having assimilated the various traditions, Jewish, Christian and Pagan, and of having created these three realms with originality, order and authority. According to Milman, the real and the unreal are mixed in such a way as to make the Divina Commedia very popular and yet sublime:

Dante summed up the whole of this traditional lore, or at least with a poet's intuitive sagacity, seized on all which was most imposing, effective, real, and condensed it in his three coordinate poems. ... Above all, he brought it (Hell) to the very borders of our world, he made the life beyond the grave one with our present life; he mingled in close and intimate relation the present and the future. Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, were but an immediate expansion and extension of the present world.

Let us set down, then, the essential structure of Dante's conception of Paradise and of the Symbolic Rose.

... ..Dante's ascension with Beatrice to the Empyrean follows faithfully the order given in Convivio. ...

...Upon leaving the earth, Dante as the poet begins his journey in Paradise, he enters the first heaven, that of the Moon:





(1878)

In Venus, the third heaven, the poet meets the souls of lovers. He encounters Charles Martel, Cunizza da Romano (Ezzelino's daughter), Foulquet de Marseilles and Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho who saved Joshua's Explorers (Joshua II: 1-24). The order of the Principalities governs this heaven, which is described in Cantos VII and IX.

The fourth heaven, that of the Sun, is found in Cantos X - XIV. It is presided over by theologians, teachers, historians; the souls of wisdom. The Powers correspond to this heaven, which is inhabited by some of the most meaningful names of Dante's world. St. Thomas Aquinas introduces the first group and points out the following: St. Albertus Magnus, Gratian, Peter Lombard, Solomon, Dionysius the (Pseudo)Areopagite [whoever he was in reality, whether Patriarch Severus of Antioch, Stephen bar Sadaili, or, conceivably, both], Orosius, St. Isidore of Seville, the Venerable Bede, Richard of St. Victor [another great mystic] and Siger of Brabante. The second group is headed by St. Bonaventure, and it includes Brother Augustine, Illuminato, Hugh of St. Victor [yet another great mystic], Peter Comestor, Peter of Spain, Nathan the Prophet, St. John Chrysostom, St. Anselm, Donatus, Rabanus Maurus and Joachim of Flora. This, perhaps, represents the most noble group of people found in the Divina Commedia, at least of the Christian tradition. A formidable assembly of wisdom [and mysticism] whose meaning, as individuals and as a group, is still one of the cruces of the Divina Commedia.

The fifth heaven, Mars, is presided over by the Virtues. Dante encounters the souls of famous warriors who defended their faith, namely: Cacciaguida, his [Dante's] ancestor, Joshua, Judas Maccabeus, Chralemagne, Roland, William of Orange, Renouard, Godfrey de Bouillon and Guiscard (Cantos XIV - XVIII). In Jupiter, the sixth heaven, the poet finds the just and the pious. The angelic order is the Dominations. The souls are David, Trajan the (Roman) Emperor, Ezekiel, Constantine, William II of Sicily and Ripheus the Trojan (Cantos XVIII - XIX).

(1879)

The seventh heaven, Saturn, hosts the souls of the contemplatives: St. Peter Damian, St. Benedict, St. Macarius [another great mystic], and Romualdus. The angelic order is the Thrones (Cantos XXI - XXII).

In the heaven of the Fixed Stars, the eighth, the Triumph of Christ is represented. Dante is examined on the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity, by St. Peter, St. James and St. John. For a moment the poet sees thousands of lights (all the blessed) lit by a sun (Christ). This heaven is presided over by the Cherubim; while the Primum Mobile, the ninth heaven is ruled by the Seraphim. In the heaven of the Fixed Stars all the blessed are assembled. In the Primum Mobile the poet sees also all the angelic hierarchies. The three highest angelic orders correspond respectively to the three Persons of the Trinity: Seraphim - Father; Cherubim - Son; Thrones - Holy Spirit.

Finally over and beyond all the heavens, is the Empyrean, the motionless and incorporeal heaven where the poet will be able to see both the *militia* of Paradise, the angels and the blessed in their glory and in the abode of the Deity:

The nature of the universe, which stills  
Its center while it makes all else revolve,  
    Moves from this heaven as from its starting point;

No other 'Where' than in the Mind of God  
Contains this heaven, while in that Mind burns  
    The love that turns it and the power it rains.

By circling light and love it is contained  
As it contains the rest; and only He  
    Who bound them comprehends how they were bound.  
                                Paradiso, XXVII, 106 - 114.

As Etienne Gilson points out, Dante resolves quite well the problem of the addition of the Empyrean to Aristotle's nine movable spheres. Indeed, this is the passage from the spheres of astronomy and physics to that of theology.

When the poet reaches the Empyrean, he sees the blessed souls in the form of a "candida rosa":

(1880)

By now I had my eyes fixed once again  
Upon my lady's face, and with my eyes,  
My mind, which was oblivious of all else.  
Paradiso, XXI, 1 - 3.

In Paradiso XXXII St. Bernard identifies the blessed and shows the main divisions of the Rose. Mary is seated at the highest circle; below her are Hebrew women, six of whom are named: Eve, Rachel, Sarah, Judith, Rebecca and Ruth. (If the angelic hierarchies are placed in correspondence with these women, Rachel would be a Throne, and so would Beatrice who sits next to her, thus a symbol of the Holy Spirit.) This column of women form a wall dividing the Rose in two. The dividing wall opposite Mary is formed by a row of men led by St. John the Baptist and followed by St. Francis, St. Benedict and St. Augustine. These two walls form a central division on either side of which are seated *beati* of the New and Old Testaments:

Now marvel at the greatness of God's plan:  
This garden shall be full in equal number  
Of this and that aspect of the one faith.  
Paradiso XXXII, 37-39.

Only later in the canto does Dante clarify on which side of Mary or St. John the Baptist the blessed of the two Testaments occupy their seats.

St. Bernard then explains that the Rose is horizontally cut in half. In the lower parts are seated children who, having been unable to exercise their free will, were saved by Christ alone and not through their own merit.

After a theological discussion, spurred by the presence of the children, St. Bernard invites Dante to look at the other blessed souls who complete the vision:

Those two who sit most blest in their high thrones  
Because they are the closest to the Empress  
Are, as it were, the two roots of the Rose:

He, sitting on her left side, is that father,  
The one through whose presumptuous appetite  
Mankind still tastes the bitterness of shame;

And on her right, you see the venerable  
Father of Holy Church to whom Christ gave  
The keys to this beautiful Rose of joy.  
Paradiso, XXXII, 118 - 126.4

Thus, on Mary's right side sits St. Peter; on her  
left, sits Adam. Diagonally opposite St. Peter is Ste.  
Anne, Mary's mother; diagonally opposite Adam is Ste.  
Lucia.

This is, in its simplicity, the total picture of  
the Heavenly Rose. It is a complete innovation in terms  
of visions and Paradise. Yet A. Russsi'a statement that  
Dante made an oversight, *una svista*, as he calls it, in  
determining the position of Ste. Anne and Ste. Lucia.  
The following chapter will prove that such a structure  
and such order do indeed exist."(214)

Signor Di Scipio continues:

"Although the full structure of the Rose  
is not given until Canto XXXII (of the Divina  
Commedia), the Rose itself is introduced in Canto XXX of  
Paradiso As soon as Dante reaches the Empyrean, after  
having gone through the nine spheres which surround the  
earth, his eyes are blinded by a *luce viva*  
(living light) so that he cannot see anything at all:

Just as a sudden flash of lightning strikes  
The visual spirits and so stuns the eyes,  
That even the clearest object fades from sight,

So glorious living light encompassed me,  
Enfolding me so tightly in its veil  
Of luminescence that I saw only light.  
Paradiso, XXX, 46-51.

(1882)

Shortly before this occurrence, Beatrice informed

the Florentine poet that they had left the spheres and entered a heaven which is pure light, where love and joy are supreme. It is significant to note how the poet stresses the supremacy of love and joy by his use of a chiasmus culminating in the word *letizia*:

...We have gone beyond -  
From greater sphere to heaven of pure light,  
Light of the intellect, light full of love,  
Love of the true good, full of ecstasy,  
Ecstasy that transcends the sweetest joy.  
Paradiso, XXX, 38-42.

...Beatrice explains to Dante that the blinding light which overcomes the soul upon entering the Empyrean prepares and disposes it for the beatific vision. It is, in a certain sense, Dante's final conversion and preparation for his mission, an echo of St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

...Immediately after this momentary blindness, Dante perceives a flash of light in the shape of a river between two verdant banks from which living sparks (angels) fly. These sparks from here, there, and everywhere descend into the flowers (blessed souls). As soon as they are inebriated by the aroma, they fly out and new ones descend.

Dante's preparation for the vision is, therefore, gradual, for he is not ready to receive this vision fully until his eyes drink of the river's water. As soon as he does so, the river of light becomes circular in shape.

No sooner had the eaves of my eyes drunk  
Within those waters, than the river turned  
From its straight course to a circumference.  
Paradiso, XXX, 88-90.

In order to see the vision of the city of God, Dante's eyes must drink of the water that cleanses him of human frailty. This water, symbol of cleansing grace, is found also in St. Paul's episode, in the words of Ananias:

(1883)

"And he (St. Paul) said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know His will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from Hid

mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

Acts of the Apostles XXII: 14-16.

In Paradiso XXX water is again a central symbol, as in Purgatorio XXXI where Dante is immersed in the river Lethe by Matelda. That immersion purified him of his sins, and the drinking of it took away the memory of those sins. As Dante heard the words from Psalm 50:9 "*Aspergis me hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor*". he was absolved of all his sins, moving nearer to the reign of the blessed.

As the river of light assumes a circular form, the flowers and the sparks take on human forms. The blessed souls and the angels, in assuming their proper shape, stand in brilliant contrast to the damned and the devils of the city of Dis. The poet thus has the opportunity to see assembled in a circumference all the souls, not only in their human form, but also in the glory of Heaven.

Nevertheless, even though he has overcome the obstacle of the blinding light, he still needs God's help to describe "the great triumph of the great truth":

O splendid grace of God through which I saw  
The one true kingdom's triumph, grant me now  
The power to find the words for what I saw!

There is a light above whose glory makes  
Creator visible to His creations  
Whose only peace is in Beholding Him;

In figure of a circle this light spreads,  
And is so vast that its circumference  
Would be too loose a belt to bind the sun.

(1884)

And no expanse comes from a single ray  
Striking the summit of the First Moved Sphere  
From which it takes its vital force and power.

And as a hillside rich in grass and flowers

Looks down into a lake as if it were  
Admiring the reflection of its wealth,  
  
So, mirrored, tier on tier, within that light,  
More than a thousand were reflected there,  
I saw all those of us who won return.  
  
And if the lowest tier alone can hold  
So great a brilliance, then how vast the space  
Of this Rose to its outer petals' reach!  
  
And yet, by such enormous breadth and height  
My eyes were not confused; they took in all  
In number and in quality of bliss.  
Paradiso XXX 97-120.

The first mention of the Rose stands in direct contrast to "the city in dire pain". The magnitude of the Rose cannot be expressed in human terms, yet Dante can see it because he is now beyond time and space (in other words, Dante was very much a mystic). It is only by keeping this in mind that the reader will not commit the error of considering the enormous dimensions of the Rose as in "strident contradiction with the versimil story and moral", of which Porena speaks in his commentary on Paradiso XXXII. The dimensions of Paradise cannot be given. The poet simply intends to convey a parallel or comparable image for the vastness, magnitude and splendor of this realm. By saying "more than a thousand", the author is clearly expressing the idea of infinity and perfection.

First a distinction has to be made between this description and the description of the flower by St. Bernard (of Clairvaux). Later, when St. Bernard didactically delineates the division of the Rose, its dimensions will be reduced to a human level so that the reader can perceive the order and the disposition of this heavenly city. Only then will the poet use a

(1885)

precise geometric structure. These are two different moments bound in the same image but conceived in different temporal and spatial terms. What is found here, however, is an inverse operation. Dante breaks down Paradise into different heavens and then gives its total view of the Empyrean. The infinite dimensions of

Paradise are consistent with the theological dogma of God's infinity. The representation of Paradise arises from Dante's special privilege of seeing Paradise "sensibilmente", having to transmit it this way to the reader.

In Paradiso XXX Beatrice leads the poet to the "yellow" of the Rose, "Into the gold of the eternal Rose" (verse 124). (Let us recall that yellow, in chromatic symbolism, is the color of divinity, and white that of humanity, as exemplified in the dual (divine and human) nature of Christ. Yellow, according to Alanus de Insulis, is the color of Theology. Moreover, the keys of the angel in Purgatorio are yellow. The sacred letters are yellow, the human letters, white.) There Dante, by looking upward, has a total vision of the Rose. Beatrice points to an empty throne on which a crown rests. This throne was preassigned to (Holy Roman) Emperor Henry VII, whose mission, according to the poet's political and theological philosophy, was to save Italy. Italy, however, was not ready.

In that great chair, already set with crown  
Above it and which draws your eyes to it,  
    Before your summons to this nuptial feast,

shall sit the soul, predestined emperor,  
of that Great Henry who one day will come  
    to set straight Italy before her time.  
                                Paradiso, XXX, 133-138.

Beatrice, moreover, informs Dante that the seats of this city are almost all occupied:

(1886)

Look at our city, see its vast expanse.  
You see our seats so filled, only a few  
    Remain for souls that Heaven still desires.  
                                Paradiso XXX, 128-132.

When Beatrice says "see our seats", she is indicating that section occupied by the blessed souls of the New Testament (*Injil*). This point, however, can only



be clarified when the structure of the rose is examined.

Canto XXXI contains the formal introduction to the Rose:

So now, appearing to me in the form  
Of a white rose was Heaven's sacred host,  
Those whom with His own blood Christ made his bride  
Paradiso, XXXI, 1-3.

The poet is overcome by the beauty of the vision. The host of angels, in their constant flight between God and the blessed souls, do not obstruct his vision, for in their purity they are transparent. Nothing can impede divine light.

As they entered the flower, tier to tier,  
Each spread the peace and ardor of the love  
They gathered with their wings in flight to Him.

Nor did this screen of flying plenitude  
Between the flower and what reigned above  
Impede the vision of His glorious light.

For God's light penetrates the universe  
According to the merits of each part,  
And there is nothing that can block its way.

This unimpeded kingdom of all joy  
Abounding with those saints, both old and new,  
Had look and love fixed upon one goal.  
Paradiso, XXXI, 19-27.

(1887)

In front of such splendor the poet is overcome by marvel, similar to that of the pilgrim at the sight of the long-yearned-for sanctuary. While Dante is in this silent moment of contemplation, Beatrice disappears. As he is about to ask her some questions, he realizes that she has left and that her place has been taken by an elder, who identifies himself as St. Bernard (of Clairvaux). Dante simultaneously has three distinct reactions. He feels gratitude for Beatrice, the person he loved in human terms, who has brought him to the understanding of true love, and who has finally led him

to this point of sublime contemplation and rapture. Thus Beatrice, *typus Spiritus Sancti*, has fulfilled her role. As she smiles at him from her throne on the third tier, the poet in gratitude expresses his feelings toward her:

"O lady in whom all my hope takes strength,  
And who for my salvation did endure  
    To leave her footprints on the floor of Hell,

Through your own power, through your own excellence  
I recognize the grace and the effect  
    Of all those things I have seen with my eyes.

From bondage into freedom you led me  
By all those paths, by using all those means  
    Which were within the limits of your power.

Preserve in me your great munificence,  
So that my soul which you have healed may be  
    Pleasing to you when its slips from my flesh."  
    Paradiso XXXI 79-90

The second reaction is triggered by the appearance of St. Bernard. Dante has barely finished expressing his love and gratitude for Beatrice when a new overpowering feeling overcomes him by the sight of this saint. He compares his admiration and stupor to that of a pilgrim at the sight of (Ste.) Veronica's veil.

(1888)

Immediately afterwards St. Bernard tells the poet to look at the Virgin (Mary), who sits at the highest tier. Mary's glory, her radiance, surpasses that of all the blessed. Her smiling beauty transmits happiness to all the blessed souls. The poet cannot but fix his gaze on her, warmly and admiringly:

And there, smiling upon their games and song  
I saw a beauty that reflected bliss  
    Within the eyes of all the other saints;

And even if I were as rich in words  
As in remembering, I would not dare

Describe the least part of such beauty's bliss.

Bernard, when he saw that my eyes were fixed  
Devotedly upon his passion's passion,  
his own he turned to her with so much love.  
That he made mine more ardent in their gaze.  
Paradiso XXXI 133-142

This *gradation* of admiration, which goes from Beatrice to St. Bernard and culminates with the Virgin Mary, can be considered a *gradation* to beatitude, in which human emotions are relinquished in the pursuit of the highest goal. Beatrice's disappearance is painful to the poet, yet it is this very disappearance that brings him closer to the supreme vision. Dante has already learned from Beatrice, in Purgatorio XXX and XXXI, how he chose the wrong way in turning his back on her:

But as I trod on the edge of the threshold  
Into the second age of my life, he drew  
In his caprice apart from me and turned to  
another.

Purgatorio XXX 124-126

The disappearance of Beatrice coincides with Dante's surrender of human emotions; he serenely calls her "the sun of my eyes", and "sun" here is divine light. It is the same light which has guided him on his journey and which now liberates him from the servitude of human

(1889)

life. The words that he uses in praising Beatrice form images of eternity, true love and true life. Beatrice's reaction is one of satisfaction. She smiles and looks at him, but immediately turns to the "eternal fountain".

Such was my prayer. And she, so far away,  
Or so it seemed, looked down at me and smiled;  
Then to Eternal Light she turned once more.  
Paradiso, XXXI 91-93

[**Nota bene** that here we have a reference to the **Uncreated Light** of which we shall have much more to say.]

The mutual acquisition of confidence, on the part of

Beatrice for the poet, whom she now considers ready to approach the final vision, and of Dante in himself for having obtained her confidence, is reflected in Beatrice's departure, however, he experiences the joy in the knowledge that this is the preliminary step to the beatific vision. Beatrice, in fact, warns him against his human emotions and tells him not to cry, for he must weep "for another sword":

But Virgil had now left us without him,  
Virgil, the sweetest father,  
    Virgil, to whom for my salvation I bent my will

Nor all the ancient mother lost,  
Could help me keep my dew-wet face  
    From turning to dark, gloomy tears.

"Dante, because Virgil has left you,  
Do not yet weep, do not yet weep:  
    You must weep for the other sword in due time."  
    Purgatorio, XXX, 49-57.

The role of St. Bernard as Dante's last guide assumes great importance for the poet's final movement in his *itinerarium ad Deum* (itinerary to God). For St. Bernard (the great mystic) is the only one who can intercede with Mary, being her most devoted servant, so

(1890)

that Dante can attain the grace of God's vision - the ultimate peace and sanctity. St. Bernard alone can be the final guide for the poet's contemplation and ecstasy. He is, as sarolli says, a *typus Trinitaris* who corresponds to the analogical sense, completing the triad of the *movitori*.

This analogy refutes the body of criticism that attributed a nonessential role to St. Bernard. Vincenzo Pernicone, to cite only one critic, reduces St. Bernard's function to that of *efficace orante* toward the Virgin (mary). He maintains that St. Bernard cannot really add anything essential to Dante's mission and that any other blessed soul could be St. Bernard's substitute. Thus, according to the critic, St. Bernard's presence was *una soluzione poetic ache ha consentito a Dante la sublime adorazione di Beatrice nel canto XXXI*. (a poetic solution which has rendered to Dante the

sublime adoration of Beatrice in canto XXXI).

This kind of criticism is simplistic, for it does not take into account the figural interpretation nor its *analogia Trinitatis*; neither does it take into account the more obvious function provided explicitly in the text that St. Bernard assumed *libero officio di dottore* (assumed the role of guide) and that his words are *santé* (holy):

Rapt in love's bliss, that contemplative soul (mystic)  
Generously assumed the role of guide

As he began to speak these holy words.

Paradiso, XXXII, 1- 3.

Although St. Bernard does not offer the detailed theological dissertations given by Virgil and Beatrice, he does give the blessed their positions; he identifies them by name and then explains the position theologically, and the reasons for the presence of children in the lower section of the Rose. St. Bernard, in fact, cannot be replaced. There is no other saint who could have introduced the poet to the Virgin (Mary). St. Bernard was Mary's devoted servant, the one who loved her most. As E.G. Gardner says, Dante's admiration for St. Bernard was based on three things:

(1891)

the Saint's reformation of ecclesiastical discipline, his mystical and inner life which he based on the Song of Solomon (as well as the whole, vast tradition of Christian mysticism [and perhaps Sufism] prior to his time, as goes without saying), and his devoted servitude to Mary.

Paradiso XXX and XXXI, then, establish a number of essential points for the understanding of the Symbolic Rose (William Butler Yeats' and the Sufis' "Mystical Flower of the West", or "Lotus of the West"). One of the most important points is that Dante is stationed "In the gold of the Eternal Rose" (Paradiso XXX, 124). He does not move from there while he is admiring the blessed. He simply moves his eyes, as confirmed in the following verses:

So through the Living [Uncreated] Light I let my eyes  
Go wandering among the ranks of the Blessed,  
Now up, now down, now searching all around.

Paradiso, XXXI, 46-48.

I said not a word, but raised my eyes  
And saw her there in all her glory crowned  
    By the reflections of Eternal [Uncreated] Light.  
    Paradiso XXXI 70-72

Fly through this heavenly garden with your eyes,  
For gazing at it will prepare your sight  
    To rise to the vision of God's Ray  
    Paradiso XXXI 97 - 99.

Dante's ascension will continue after the prayer to the Virgin in canto XXXIII. Meanwhile his vision of the Rose is not impaired by anything; it is clear and total. Even the constant movement of the Angels presents no obstacle to his view.

As St. Bernard begins his orderly lesson on the distribution of the blessed souls in canto XXXII, one must draw a geometric figure in order to establish the exact position of the various blessed, and in order to follow the subdivision of the Rose as given by St. Bernard.

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We have already learned that Mary is seated at the highest circle. Below Mary is seated Eve, her theological opposite, as in the traditional Ave-Eva (also Adam-Christ). Dante makes use of much of his poetic art by noting Eve's position in a very compact *terzina* (three line verse) where the *persona* is identified through a periphrasis:

"The wound which Mary was to close and heal  
She there, who sits so lovely at her feet,  
    Would open wider then and prick the flesh.  
    Paradiso. XXXII, 4 - 6.

In these three lines there is a theological lesson, a physical description, and the position of the two women. First there is the wound, the original sin; then Mary, who tended and healed it, the alliterative *richiuse e unse* (close and heal). We are then given the woman's beauty, in contrast to her sin, and her position below Mary. Finally, Eve is identified not by her own name, but through a rhetorical device which,

with two verbs, enables the poet to narrate the famous episode of Genesis. It is a magnificent sketch, with which a Cimabue or a Giotto could have created a little masterpiece. The four verbs in contrast - *richiuse, unse, aperse, punse* (close, heal, open, prick) - are perfect in their alliteration and assonance. The descriptive immediacy of these verses is further evidence against the many critics who maintain that there is no poetry in this canto.

Below Eve, on the third row, sits Rachel, says St. Bernard, with Beatrice at her side:

And sitting there directly under her  
Among the thrones of the third tier is Rachel,  
And, there, see Beatrice by her side.  
Paradiso, XXXII, 7 - 9

At this stage, whether Beatrice sits on Rachel's left or right side, the reader does not know. This is determined by a latter clarification. Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and Ruth follow in the seating arrangement under the above women. ...

(1893)

...Before proceeding to the structural significance of the women in the geometric design of the Rose, an observation must be made on the terms *soglia* and *foglia* in the following verses:

Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, and then she,  
Who was the great-grandmother of the singer  
who cried for his sin: '*Miserere mei*',

you see them all as I go down from tier  
to tier and name them in their order,  
petal by petal, downward through the Rose.

Paradiso, XXXII, 10-15

*Soglia* means "scan, step". *Foglia* means "seat". The poet uses the letter interchangeably as "petal", thus remaining within the floral terminology. The former, instead, is used to render very clearly the fact that there are various descending and circular steps.

The women mentioned by Dante occupy seven seats. One does not know the total number of women forming this row or dividing wall. What is certain is that they are all Hebrew and that the ones mentioned are Marym Eve,

Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and Ruth:

Down from the seventh row, as up to it,  
Was a descending line of Hebrew women  
That parted all the petals of the Rose;

According to the ways in which the faith  
Viewed Christ, these women constitute the wall  
Dividing these ranks down the sacred stairs.  
Paradiso, XXXII, 16-21.

This row of women, therefore, divides the rose in the middle, providing the central division for the blessed of the New and Old Testaments. On the side where all the seats are taken, "where the flower is mature", are the blessed of the Old Testament. On the other side are the Blessed of the New Testament; this side is not yet full:

(1894)

On this side where the flower is full bloomed  
To its last petal, sit the souls of those  
Who placed their faith upon Christ yet to come;

On that side where all of the semi-circles  
Are broken by the empty seats, sit those  
Who turned their faces to Christ already come.  
Paradiso, XXXII, 22-27.

The reader cannot fail to notice that the seats are now referred to as *semicirculi*, and with good reason. For if this realm is conceived in the shape of a rose, and the seats in the form of petals, it is evident that when one looks at a row of petals, one behind the other, it is not possible to view the whole petal, only half of it or part of it; one sees only a semicircle. This is an additional proof that Dante follows a geometric design and a mathematical pattern in the description of the residence of the blessed. Everything is arranged according to the principles of order and harmony.

Concerning the structure of the Rose there are, at this point, two indications which help determine the



exact position of the beatified as it relates to St. Bernard and Dante. The Saint says that the blessed of the Old Testament are "of this part": while those of the New Testament are "of the other part". Keeping in mind that the two are looking at the blessed souls from the calix of the flower, as stated in

Into the gold of the eternal Rose,  
Whose ranks of petals fragrantly unfold  
Praise to the Sun of everlasting spring.

In silence - though I longed to speak - was I  
taken by Beatrice who said: "Look  
how vast is our white-robed consistory.  
Paradiso, XXX, 123-128.

One cannot but conclude that "of this part" signifies the speaker's right. The speaker is St. Bernard, who appeared to the poet as soon as Beatrice disappeared,

(1895)

so that he (St. Bernard) also is "in the calix of the rose". Consequently, "of the other part" means St. Bernard's left. In the final analysis, all this shows that the blessed of the Old Testament are placed at Mary's left, Mary being seated on the first throne of the dividing wall constituted by the Hebrew women. The blessed souls of the New Testament are at Mary's right.

Having established the above, one can say with certainty that Beatrice sits at Rachel's right side, and also Mary's right side. Beatrice does not belong to the group forming the dividing wall, since she is seated next to Rachel. But Dante must give her position: to have named her by herself would have broken the symmetry present here. The blessed, in fact, are named in groups. Moreover, by naming her along with Rachel, the poet declares that Beatrice sits on the third row, hierarchically very close to Mary.

As St. Bernard proceeds, the Rose begins to assume a more definite shape. A close reading of St. Bernard's words is very important here, for one is dealing with an architectural construction based on a geometrical design. When the Saint affirms that St. John the Baptist and, below him, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Benedict, and St. Augustine form the dividing wall

corresponding on the opposite side to that of the Hebrew women, their position depends upon a correct rendering of the words *quince* and *di contra*:

And just as on this side the glorious throne  
Of Heaven's lady with the other seats  
    below it form this great dividing wall,

so, facing her, gthe throne of the great John  
who, ever holy, suffered through the desert,  
    and martyrdom, then Hell for two more years,

and under him, chosen to mark the line,  
Francis, Benedict, Augustine and others  
    Descend from round to round as far as here.  
                    Paradiso, XXXII, 28-36.

(1896)

On one side there is a row of women. Directly opposite there is a row of men headed by St. John the Baptist. The intersecting diameter vertically divides the circumference in two. The essential issue is that Mary and St. John the Baptist are directly opposite each other, being on opposite ends of the diameter. Since St. Bernard is the speaker, and he is in the calix of the Rose, *quince* means: "from this side", his right side; and *di contra* means: "from this other side" his left.

This basic distinction is necessary to determine the position of the other blessed subsequently mentioned by St. Bernard. It establishes the positional significance of the blessed who sit opposite each other. If a line were to be drawn between the blessed souls who sit facing each other, that line would be the diameter.

St. Bernard goes on to explain that the Rose is horizontally cut in half. In the lower part are seated children, who were saved not through their own merit but by Christ alone. This additional division creates another dimension of the Rose. It can now be stated that the Rose is divided by two diameters, vertically and horizontally, into four parts, in the shape of a cross. It is well known that the shape of the cross is found in many ground plans of churches and cathedrals.

In the upper part of the Rose are found adults of

the New and Old Testaments; in the lower part, the children of the Old and New Testaments. Both sides will be filled equally. Even before the total structure is completed, it is evident that the figure delineated by St. Bernard is based on a design; the reader is compelled to draw it for himself. This kind of reading does not at all detract from the poetic beauty, rather it enhances it.

After a theological *dissertatio* on the problem presented by the children's presence, and after the introduction of the Archangel Gabriel, St. Bernard completes the structure of the Rose by naming some additional blessed souls:

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those two who sit most blest in their high thrones  
because they are the closest to the Empress  
are, as it were, the two roots of our Rose:

he, sitting on her left side is that father,  
the one through whose presumptuous appetite  
mankind still tastes the bitterness of shame;

and on her right, you see the venerable  
father of Holy Church to whom Christ gave  
the keys to this beautiful Rose of joy.

And he who prophesied before he died  
The sad days destined for the lovely Bride  
Whom Christ won for himself with lance and nails

Sits at his side. Beside the other sits  
The leader of those nurtured on God's manna,  
Who were a fickle, ingrate, stubborn lot.

Across from St. Peter, see there, Ste Anhe sits,  
So happy to be looking at her daughter,  
She does not move an eye singing Hosanna;

Facing the head of mankind's family  
Sits St. Lucia (of Syracuse), who first sent your lady  
to you  
When you were bent, headlong, on your own ruin.

The two roots of the Rose are Adam and St. Peter, who, due to their proximity to Mary, enjoy a higher degree of happiness. Adam sits at Mary's left, St. Peter on her right. Next to St. Peter sits St. John the Evangelist. Next to Adam sits Moses. The fundamental problem concerns the position of Ste. Anne, Mary's mother, and Ste. Lucia. The poet simply states that Ste. Anne sits "across from St. Peter" and Ste. Lucia "across from the great *paterfamilias*". There should not be any quarrel as to the meaning of these phrases. They give the position of the two ladies as being directly in front of St. Peter and Adam. More precisely the two women are diagonally opposite the two men. This

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would place St. Anne on the side of the Old Testament and Ste. Lucia on the side of the New. And that is where they rightly belong.

A problem arises if this fundamental distinction is misinterpreted. A. Russi's position, which is an oversight on his part, is that Ste. Anne sits at the left of St. John the Baptist, in the New Testament section; and that Ste. Lucia sits on his right, thus placing her in the Old Testament. If this were so, the order of the blessed would certainly be erroneous, since Ste. Lucia cannot possibly be in the Old Testament section. A. Russi's solution is that Dante has placed Ste. Lucia in the Old Testament section based on her allegorical meaning, as a symbol of illuminating grace, thus disregarding her historical meaning.

This is simply a false deduction based on the distorted notion that Ste. Anne is among the blessed of the New Testament and Ste. Lucia among those of the Old Testament. A. Russi commits this error by not drawing a geometrical figure, which the poet undoubtedly did.

Such a drawing offers clear and conclusive evidence of the correct position of the blessed souls as intended by Dante.

Furthermore, it is absurd to declare that Dante disregarded Ste. Lucia's literal meaning when one is aware of the Letter to Can Grande in which the poet explicitly states that the first meaning is the one obtained through the letter

The point of departure of A. Russi's analysis is Paradiso verse 31, where St. John the Baptist's position

is given: "in front of the great John". This critic argues that if *di contra* is interpreted as meaning "directly opposite" or "diametrically opposite", then St. John the Baptist is directly opposite. And rightly so. Consequently the *di contra* and *contro* of verses 133 and 136 do have a similar meaning and place Ste. Anne and Ste. Lucia diametrically opposite St Peter and Adam.

To be sure, if such is the interpretation, Ste. Anne will be found at St. John the Baptist's left, directly opposite St. Peter, and Ste. Lucia on the other side, opposite Adam/ But A. Russi has neglected to consider that the diameter of a circle is that

(1899)

straight line which passes through the center of the circle. The diametrical line can only be applied to the position of Mary and St. John the Baptist, who are at the center of the two semicircles. St. Peter and Adam, as well as Ste. Anne and Ste. Lucia, are not at the center of the two semicircles. The only way to draw a line connecting these four blessed, one diagonally opposite the other, is to draw diagonal lines, which in this case would be radii; namely, the straight lines which are extended from the center to the periphery of the sphere. This can be illustrated, for example, by the spokes of a wheel, as well as in the rose-windows of Gothic cathedrals. The resulting geometric figure is an octagon.

There is absolutely no doubt that Dante's intention is to place Ste. Anne diagonally opposite St. Peter, thus in the Old Testament section; and Ste. Lucia diagonally opposite Adam, in the New Testament. The poet has not made an error, nor committed an oversight. He has not placed Ste. Lucia according to her allegorical meaning, and he has not broken the perfect order he declares present in this kingdom:

Within the vastness of this great domain  
No particle of chance can find a place -  
    No more than sorrow, thirst, or hunger can -

For all that you see here has been ordained  
By the eternal law with such precision  
    That ring and finger are a perfect fit.  
                    Paradiso, XXXII, 52-58.

To accuse Dante of having made such a blatant error, as A. Russi proposes - because he might be tired after such a long journey, and thus vulnerable to uncertainties and oversights - is to violate the text, and to impose superficially and unjustly a viewpoint which disregards the text.

Regarding Antonio Russi's second argument, if indeed it is one, that even if Ste. Anne were to be placed in the Old Testament section, the poet would still have committed an error because both Ste. Anne and Ste. Lucia belong to the New Testament - nothing

(1900)

could be more false. Neither one can be sitting on St. John the Baptist's right, as A. Russi would say. The only solution left to A. Russi is that Ste. Lucia is placed according to her symbolic meaning, that of *gratia*, but he does not give any theological proof of Ste. Lucia as such a symbol. By doing this, he places Ste. Lucia in the Old Testament section.

There is no doubt, on the contrary, that Ste. Anne belongs to the Old Testament. There is absolutely no mention of Ste. Anne in the New Testament (though there is in the Qur'an). The only source of information regarding her (outside the Qur'an, which was, however, revealed at a much later date than the following sources, though Dante may have known something concerning the Qur'an) is in the Apochrypha, the Protoevangelium, also known as the Book of James, attributed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and well known in the Orient.

According to the Protoevangelium, Ste. Anne, which in Hebrew [rather in its Hebrew version *Hannah*] means *gratia* (grace), was one of three daughters fathered by Mathan, a Bethlehemite (i.e., a man of the priestly caste born in Bethlehem) priest. Her sisters Mary and Sobe married two Bethlehemites and bore daughters: the former bore Ste. Elizabeth (the mother of St. John the Baptist), and the other bore Ste. Mary Salome. Ste. Anne married Joachim (Qur'anic *Imran*), who was a Galilean. She was sterile and conceived late in life. Both Ste. Anne and Joachim died soon after Mary's birth. [In The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine, which we cite several times in this book, no mention is made of Joachim and Ste. Anne after they brought Mary to the

temple at the age of three.] In historical terms, therefore, Ste. Anne died before Christ was born. This dispels any doubt that Ste. Anne belongs to the Old Testament.

In J.P. Migne's *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, moreover, Ste. Anne appears in the *Index Figurarum Veteri Testamenti*, and is designated as a *typus Ecclesiae*. Ste. Anne does belong to the Old Testament, as Curtius himself asserts when discussing the "Personnel of the Commedia".

(1901)

The poem ends with a corporation of the blessed - eight of the Old Covenant and seven of the New (Paradiso Canto XXXII). Both groups form an "elite within the elite". The canon of Old Testament worthies (Adam, Moses, Eve, Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, Ruth, Ste. Anne) surprises us because women predominate and the prophets are not represented.

The two arguments advanced against Antonio Russi's supposition and unfounded intent to destroy the order of this "vast kingdom" are evident. It is absurd to maintain that Dante - who has so carefully constructed the cathedral he named Divina Commedia, and being nearest to God - would commit such a fundamental error as misplacing Ste. Anne and Ste. Lucia, It is evn more absurd to conceive that such a mistake was made because of poetic fatigue and distraction, as A. Russi would seem to imply. Just as Dante carefully constructed his poem by following mathematical and geometric patterns, he also constructed and designed the Rose.

The reader must do the same. In so doing, he will not fail to see that, in a circumference which has eight points of reference, the indications *di contra* and *contro* mean: diagonally opposite and on the same line, as the radii of the circumference. In following this design one will see that Ste. Anne sits diagonally opposite St. Peter and is at the end of the radius of which St. Peter forms the opposite end. Similarly Ste. Lucia sits diagonally opposite Adam. Thus Ste. Anne is in the section of the Old Covenant, and Ste. Lucia in that of the New. By doing this, the perfect order maintained and professed by Dante is not disrupted.

It must be pointed out that as early as Inferno II, Virgil gives Beatrice's position as next to Rachel, when

he informs Dante that it was Mary who summoned Ste. Lucia to send Beatrice to the poet's rescue ( Inferno, II, 94 -102). As early as Inferno II, Dante had designed and constructed the Rose. This fact can be seen by the structural correlation and antithesis of Inferno and Paradiso. If one includes the Vestibule of Hell, one will find that the total number of circles is 10 (1 + 9), which corresponds, *in malo*, to the 10 Heavens of Paradiso, *in bono*. There is no doubt that

(1902)

the Vestibule should be included, since it is occupied by those sinners called *ignavi*, or "the futile". A similar Structure is found in the Purgatorio, where the seven *gironi* are preceded by three divisions of the Antipurgatorio: Terrace I, Terrace II, and the Valley of the Negligent Princes. The three *Cantiche*, therefore, have a structural division based on the number 10. To this is added the subdivision of Circle VIII of Hell, the Fraudulents, which has 10 *bolge*.

The perfect structure of the Divina Commedia does not allow, as has been shown, that the corresponding order be destroyed in the City of the Blessed. Thus, to conclude, the first circle of the Rose has eight blessed people (Mary, St. Peter, St. John the Evangelist, Ste. Lucia, St. John the Baptist, Adam, Moses, and Ste. Anne). The total number of the blessed whose position is given in the Rose is 18, including Beatrice (the above mentioned plus: Eve, Rachel, Beatrice, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, Ruth, St. Francis, St. Benedict, and St. Augustine). By adding the presence of St. Bernard and that of Henry VII, whose positions are not determined exactly but who are definitely there, one would have a total of 20. The number eight is a symbol of eternal life; ten is *perfectio* and *plenitudo sanctorum*; 18 is a number signifying the Church; 20 symbolizes the two Decalogues." (215)

In Chapter 5 we have spoken of Gothic architecture at some length. The differences between Gothic architecture and the Romanesque architecture which preceded it are far more profound than the change from the Roman "round" or "semi-circular"



(sometimes called the "Norman" arch in England, though there is no basis for this whatever) arch and the "pointed" or "ogival" arch which so predominates in Gothic architecture.

(1903)

While there is no doubt concerning the Roman origin of the "round" "semicircular" or "Norman" arch, the origin of the "pointed" or "ogival" arch is much disputed; some say that its origin is Armenian, though a Persian origin might seem more likely; certainly the "pointed" or "ogival" arch much predominated in the architecture of Safavi Persia.

As to the famous "horseshoe" or "lobed" arch so identified with Muslim Spain, in fact its first use in Spain was during the Visigothic period. Once again, there is much dispute concerning the origins of the "horseshoe" or "lobed" arch; some Spaniards insist that it was invented in Spain during the Visigothic period, some attribute to it a Byzantine origin, though the earliest examples of it - albeit small - appear, once again, to be Armenian and Persian.

If Dante's Divina Commedia is the apotheosis of the Rose as a mystical symbol, or as "the mystical flower of the West (including Persia)" in the field of literature, as Signor Di Scipio makes plain, in the field of architecture it is Gothic which represents

the apotheosis of the Rose as a mystical symbol, as "the mystical flower of the West (including Persia)".

(1904)

"The development of Gothic architecture and the appearance of its most outstanding manifestation, the cathedral, are closely related to the development of Scholasticism and the aesthetics of the Middle Ages. In his discussion on Scholasticism and the Gothic cathedral, Erwin Panofsky describes the correlation and interchange between their basic principles, *manifestatio* and *concordantia*:

As High Scholasticism was governed by the principle of *manifestation*, so was High Gothic architecture dominated - as already observed by Suger - by what may be called "the principle of transparency".

Dante based the Divina Commedia on these same principles and worked to achieve something comparable to the totality of Scholasticism and the cathedral. What Panofsky says of the High Gothic cathedral and High Scholasticism can also be said in relation to the Divina Commedia:

In its imagery, the High Gothic cathedral sought to embody the whole of Christian knowledge, theological, moral, natural, and historical, with everything in its place and that which no longer found its place, suppressed.

These three components - Scholasticism, Gothic architecture, and the Divina Commedia - are the natural synthesis and the product of a way of life which strove to glorify the Creator. Like the Gothic cathedral, the Divina Commedia embodies man's highest pursuit, the contemplation of Divinity. It rises - through the poet's developing journey, his ascension, his *gradation* - as a Gothic cathedral. All the aesthetic elements, delineated by De Bruyne, are present in both the cathedral and the

Divina Commedia.

What is a cathedral and what did it mean to the people of the Middle Ages? This makes direct reference to the correlation between the Divina Commedia, the Rose, and the Gothic cathedral.

(1905)

The medieval cathedral represents medieval life in its fullness. Its elements, its decorations and ornamentations reflected the spirit of the age, the discrepancy between the common masses on the one hand, the aristocracy and the clergy on the other [once again the triple social structure of Indo-European peoples: the priests, the warriors and the producers; in the terms of the Hindu caste system, the *Brahmins*, the *Kshatriyyas* and the *Vaisyas*; this ideology even continued in the France of the *ancient regime*; the clergy, the aristocracy and the others; see the works of Georges Dumézil. Those who criticize this should take into account that the alternatives are either what Joseph de Maistre called "the odious hierarchy of wealth" or the even more odious socialist hierarchy of the techno-bureaucrats. Besides representing a social hierarchy, the ancient Indo-European system represents a hierarchy of values, : spirituality, nobility and material wealth. Damn the odious hierarchy of wealth and the even more odious socialist techno-bureaucracy; up with holiness and nobility!). Yet the cathedral was the place where these groups met on common ground. This was so, above all, because the cathedral was built as a result of a common belief, a common element which touched people of all walks of life and every rank - the Christian faith and its heritage. It was this faith, and the glorification of all that it represented, that brought together rich and poor, clergy and serfs, exemplifying the notion of *communitas*.

The funds for the construction of the cathedral were raised not only through the contributions and donations of the aristocracy and the rich bourgeoisie, but also through the poorer classes, according to their means, whose faith was often greater because they believed that relics and miracles would improve their lot. In this fashion these breathtaking and majestic monuments were built. The actual labor was provided by volunteers, artisans, skilled and unskilled workers, masons, carpenters, stone cutters, and others. People

would donate their time and money, because this represented to them the center of their life, a communal project which would bring glory and honor. At the same time, the cathedral's construction employed many people, thus providing livelihood.

(1906)

The architects, such as Villard de Honnecourt, Hugues, Libergier and William of Sens, were all imbued with Scholastic thought, biblical learning, and a thorough knowledge of geometry and mathematics.

These architects, many of whose names are a matter of historical record, were respected eminent men, likened to the most learned. It was expected that they would be both mathematicians and artists, personalities of first order, since on their expertise everything depended.

As Panofsky points out, although the architects may not have read the theological tracts in the original (Latin, Greek or Syriac), they were still imbued with this kind of learning. In the practice of their art, the *ars practica*, they manifested the theory, *ars theoretica*, of the theologians and scholastics:

It is not very probable that the builders of Gothic structures read Gilbert de la Porree or St. Thomas Aquinas in the original (Latin). But they were exposed to the Scholastic point of view in innumerable other ways, quite apart from the fact that their own work automatically brought them into a working association with those who devised the liturgical and iconographic programs. They had gone to school; they listened to sermons; they could attend the public *disputations de quolibet* which, dealing as they did with all imaginable questions of the day, had developed into social events not unlike our operas, concerts, or public lectures; and they could come into profitable contact with the learned on many other occasions.

The architects were immortalized in effigies in the

cathedral itself. These were high honors granted only to princes and kings:

(1907)

After Hugues Libergier, the master of the lost St. Nicaise in Rheims, had died in 1236, he was accorded the unherd-of honor of being immortalized in an effige that shows him not only clad in something like academic garb but also carrying a model of "his" church - a privilege previously accorded only to princely donors. And Pierre de Monereau - indeed the most logical architect who ever lived - is designated on his tombstone in St. Germaine-des-Pres as "*Doctor Lathomorum*": by 1267, it seems, the architect had come to be looked upon as a kind of Scholastic.

The Abbot Suger of St. Denis, who was a major force in the introduction of the Gothic, was directly involved in the construction of his church, and provided the artistic inspiration, the symbolic meaning of its designs, decorations, ornaments, and structural elements, based on theological principles and biblical exegesis. The special emphasis Suger gave to light, an outstanding feature of the Gothic cathedral, was one of the theological aspects of light metaphysics, derived from Plato, Neoplatonism and the Pseudo Dionysius. This light, of course, was divine light:

Suger's infatuation with light which had so decisive an influence in formulating the Gothic style was but an extreme manifestation of a view widely supported by the Scholastics, which received expression from men as different as Hugh of St. Victor, Gilbert de la Porree, St. Thomas Aquinas and Robert Grosseteste, who hailed light as the the most direct corporeal manifestation of the Divine. ... Light, which could pass through glass without breaking it, was likened to "the Word of God, Light of the Father, that had passed through the body of the Virgin (Mary)" and became a symbol of the Immaculate Conception. This concept, too,

derived from Dionysius the (Pseudo)Areopagite

(1908)

[whether in reality he was Patriarch Severus of Antioch, Stephen bar Sadaili, or conceivably both), who had propounded the thesis that the contemplation of the light emanating from material objects [ or created light] could aid in the comprehension of Divine [or Uncreated] Light.

The architects, therefore, followed the same rules, *numerous, mensura, pondus*, and the "Sapiential" aesthetics which encompassed the *artes*. Even St. Bernard, who in his rigid asceticism objected to the embellishments and ornamentations of the churches, conceded, mainly through Suger's arguments, that these decorations might move the mind toward spiritual values. He explicitly states this when he differentiates between what should be in a monastic church and what should be in a cathedral, because "*...carnalis populi devotionem quia spiritualibus non possunt corporalibus excitant ornamentis*". Since the aesthetic of light and symbol were part of the study of the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy), the Gothic cathedral became the focus and the inheritor of this philosophical and theological system. To illustrate this point, let us recall some episodes concerning the construction of the Milan Cathedral and the Duomo of Siena. Both these structures, although subsequent to Dante, show to what extent and for how long these principles permeated the thinking of the medieval architect.

During the construction of the Cathedral of Milan, a quarrel took place between Jean Mignot, the French architect, and the Italian masters. Mignot objected strongly that his Italian craftsmen were disregarding the rules of geometry. He presented a list of fifty-four written objections. The Italians backed off and gave their total support to Mignot, stating that geometry must never be excluded from architecture. It is during this series of quarrels that Mignot said that "art without science is nothing".

(1909)

Another episode regarding the construction of the Milan Cathedral illustrates the architect's reliance on perfect numbers and geometric figures. Heinrich Parler from Gmund was called to replace the other German expert, Johann von Freiberg, in 1391. The builders of the cathedral were facing a number of problems:

Uncertain how best to proceed, they called a conference of master-builders to determine the section through the Church; they asked not so much how high the vaults should be, but, rather, which geometric figure should govern the section. After maintaining that the design under construction was structurally unsound because of inadequate foundations, piers and buttressing, and because the geometrical basis had been compromised, one of the German consultants, Heinrich Parler, who was steeped in Gothic structural theory, actually proposed that the height be increased yet further to make the section conform to a square.

In 1322 the Sienese architect Lorenzo Maitani needed a commission of inquiry to evaluate the extension which was being built in Siena's Duomo. The report issued by this commission shows the concern given to measure, proportion and church law. These are some of the items:

Item, that it should not proceed because when completed it will not have the measurements of a church in length and breadth and height as postulated by church law. Item, that it should not proceed further for the old church is so well proportioned and its parts agree so well in breadth, length, and height that if anything were added to any part, it would be better instead to destroy the said church completely, wishing to bring it reasonably to the right measure for a church.

(1910)

One need only observe the geometric patterns found in the ground plans of churches, and especially of Gothic cathedrals, in order to be convinced of the essential role of geometry. If the architect were to disregard the rules of geometry, he would certainly fail. In Dante this is:

As the geometer who tries so hard  
To square the circle, but cannot discover,  
    think as he may, the principle involved,  
                    Paradiso XXXIII, 133 - 135.

The medieval architect could only design according to the same principles - measure, number, and weight - that the Architect of the Universe used. God, in fact, is often represented with a compass in His hands. The same analogy can be applied to St. Thomas Aquinas and Dante, and indeed Emile Male likens them to architects.

As the cathedrals were being built - usually the completion took whole decades - there was constant cooperation between the builders and the theologians or clergy. As Paul Frankl points out, the clients had to approve the style and the details; the architect implemented and executed the ideas transmitted by the theologians:

Every step in the development of the Gothic style was a logical one, but, but each had to have the approval of the clergy.

Every element of the Gothic cathedral had to have a theological or symbolic meaning. Let us take for example the most evident symbolic structure the front doors of the main façade. The three doors figured not only the Trinitarian concept (God the Father, main door; the Son, right door; the Holy Spirit, left door), but also the gateway to heaven: through these doors, in the unity of the Trinity, the faithful would be admitted to the Heavenly Jerusalem. At St. Denis, the chevet has twelve columns symbolizing the Apostles, as Suger himself.



(1911)

The twelve columns in the side-aisles symbolize the Prophets. In this way, the cathedral, through structural means, symbolizes the two Testaments. Let us remember Suger's utilization of light through the stained-glass windows, the analogy of Divine [Uncreated] Light illuminating the church.

How can one explain the cruciform shape of the ground plans so common to Gothic cathedrals? Although the cruciform shape was also found in the churches of the East, in the Carolingian and Romanesque periods, the Gothic period elongated the shape of the cross so as to correspond to the human figure, to the crucified Christ.

The medieval cathedral was the essence of the Incarnation and the integration of life and religion. The masses learned from the cathedral what they would find in the Bible:

"To the unlettered masses of the Middle Ages the cathedral was the *Biblia Pauperum*.

This was the only place around which was centered the entire life of the city or town. It is important to note that although the cathedral was used as a meeting place to resolve civic affairs, like the Roman Forum, its primary concept and that of the church in general, is to represent, as St. Paul says:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.

Ephesians, II, 19.

It is, then, an image of the City of God, the New Jerusalem, as we read in the Book of Revelation:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelations, XXI, 1 - 2.

(1912)

Then came one of the seven angels who had seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance, like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Revelations, XXI, 9 - 11.

The tradition of the church and the temple as a symbol of Heaven is found in the Old Testament. Noah's Ark, the Tabernacle of Moses, the Temple of Solomon, and the eschatological temple of Ezekiel are all images of and analogies to Paradise. The medieval theologians, consequently, extended the analogy to the Body of Christ, the Church, and the cathedral. Otto von Simson points out that the binomial Church-Heaven was largely expounded by medieval theologians:

The Church is, mystically and liturgically, an image of heaven. Medieval theologians have, on innumerable occasions, dwelt on this correspondence. The authoritative language of the dedication ritual of a church explicitly relates the vision of the Celestial City, as described in the Book of Revelations, to the building that is to be erected.

This is the reason behind Suger's claim that the inspiration for the building of his church was the Solomonic Temple.

In medieval tradition the human body and the soul were often associated with the Temple of God; another reason for the human body and the cross to serve as ground plans for the churches. But the most important idea in this tradition is the temple's relation to the image of Christ, therefore to the mystic body:

(1913)

The church recalls the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon, which prefigure it, the Church is at the same time the image of Christ and the image of the Mystical Body, which prolongs the Passion through the centuries.

Henri de Lubac devotes a whole chapter, *Symboles Architecturaux*, to this correspondence; he shows that the entire medieval tradition adopted this basic notion: Temple of Solomon-Church-Body of Christ-Heavenly Jerusalem:

In the Temple of Solomon, reconstructed after the (Babylonian) exile, Jesus himself told his disciples to search "the temple of his body,; the temple built, according to Rabbi Maur, for "the Fathers of the Old Testament, whom the Lord claimed as his forerunners"; waiting, naturally, for the other material edifice where would be celebrated the worship according to the New Law, the Church of the earth and the Heavenly City, and the two pillars which mark the entrance symbolizing the saints of the one and the other Testament.

It is noteworthy to remember that St. Paul employs architectural terms and images, although using metaphorical language, when stating that we are all members of God's household:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.

Ephesians, II, 19- 21.

As Simson has pointed out, Suger related St. Paul's imagery directly to his "temple".

Let us further keep in mind Jesus' words to St. Peter:

(1914)

"...and upon this rock I will build my church."

The verb *aedificare* was extremely important to the medieval theologian and architect in its relation to the Christian *aedificatio* and the *spiritual aedificium*. Dante refers to the Empyrean as "the most exalted edifice in the world"; he refers to the souls as "the lady which inhabits the edifice of the body". Suger and Dante were certainly aware of this tradition.

Once the correlation: Kingdom of Heaven-Cathedral, Body of Christ-Cathedral, Church-Cathedral, is accepted as part of the medieval theological tradition, we can establish the analogy Divina Commedia-Cathedral.

The cathedral, with its ornaments, biblical episodes, symbolic representations, animals, monsters, devils, angels, apostles, prophets, virgins and all the rest, summarized the religious and secular life of the times along with its philosophy and theology. It embodied the age of Scholasticism in all its unifying ramifications. A counterpoint to the cathedral's structure found its strictly theological expression in the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas; its artistic, theological and political expression in the Divina Commedia. The Summa Theologica is divided into three parts. The first part, containing 119 questions and answers, deals with theology: the nature, attributes, and relations of God. The second part deals with man and the problems of ethics. The third part is concerned with Christ and the sacraments. Of this part, only 90 questions and answers were written by St. Thomas. In Dante's work, also a *Summa*, the theological, philosophical, and encyclopedic knowledge of the times are synthesized to reach their highest expression.

In the Divina Commedia the elements of number, measure, and weight are its foundations, as they are for the cathedral. The numerical and geometric structures of the three realms, the use of the tercet, the correspondence in the divisions of Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso reflect the spirit of the age where, as we have seen in the previous chapter, number was an essential component of any artistic or theological expression. As Emile Male says of Dante:

(1915)

The universe is ordered according to the laws of a sublime geometry ... All is ordered with the same precision in the details ... Dante accepts the law of numbers as a divine rhythm which the universe obeys ... This is thus built *cum pndere et mensura*, the invisible cathedral.

This invisible cathedral becomes visible once the reader enters through the gates of Hell. Accompanying the poet on his journey through the two other doors, the reader arrives at last at the altar, in the presence of God. In Hell the poet-pilgrim proceeds always toward the left; in Purgatory, toward the right; and in Paradise, always straight ahead. Dante's journey moves toward the East, the New Jerusalem. Let us recall that the altar and the chevet of Gothic cathedrals face the East. Dante, therefore, follows the same itinerary as the pilgrim who enters the cathedral and slowly walks up to the main altar. Let us not forget that the poet also calls his poem *sacro*. As Suger calimed divine inspiration and assistance in the construction of his church at St. Denis, so Dante claims that:

If ever it happen that this sacred poem  
To which both Heaven and Earth have set their hand,  
Paradiso, XXV, 1 - 2.

When Dante, led by Beatrice and later by St. Bernard, arrives at the Emyrean and sees all the blessed souls in their glory:

And then my Beatrice, smiling, said:  
"Iluustrious life, the one chosen to write  
Of the largesse of our Celestial Court,

Make hope resound throughout this heaven's height:  
You can, you were its symbol all those times  
Jesus bestowed more light uon His three."  
Paradiso, XXXV, 28 - 33.

He sees that the Emyrean is in the shape of a white rose. We may ask: Why did Dante utilize this symbol, and from where did he derive it? He has built an architectonic structure, following the same principles

(1916)

as the Gothic architect. As he is about to complete his work, he correlates the realm of the blessed souls with architectural structures, the rose-window of the Gothic cathedral and the baptismal font. The poet-pilgrim looks up in order to see the blessed souls in their glory, as the pilgrim visiting the cathedral would look up and see the rose-windows whose stained-glass patterns usually depict saints and apostles. Dante, consequently, obtained his symbol from a deep meditation on the significance of the cathedral, because in this, the greatest single representation of the Christ faith, he found the unity and totality that the medieval man aspired to attain through closeness to God, and that he, as creator, aspired to achieve in the *Divina Commedia*. Dante, like the cathedral architect, had to use Mary's symbol, the Rose.

During the Gothic period, the rose-window became an outstanding feature of the cathedral's west façade. The first appearance of the rose-window is found in Suger's St. Denis:

So far as we know, west facades were pierced by normal windows, and not by roses, until Suger - perhaps impressed by the magnificent specimen in the north transept of St. Etienne in Beauvais - chose to adopt the motif for the west façade of St. Denis. ... In general who has well understood the inner meaning and symbolism of Dante will not find himself in unknown territory in the iconography of the cathedral, for the Florentine poet has given expression to much the same thoughts that were practically presented by the sculptors and glass-painters of France."

The rose-window was not a true Gothic feature, but Romanesque. It needed to be absorbed within the Gothic façade. As Panofsky points out, this represented a problem because of its awkwardness within the pointed arch. Aesthetically the rose-window was in conflict with the Gothic:

...the very concept of an isolated, circular unit conflicted with the ideals of the Gothic taste in general, and with the ideal of a Gothic façade - adequate representation of the interior - in particular.

The fact that Suger had incorporated the rose-window in the façade of St. Denis, proved to be an authoritative innovation which had to be followed. Even though Normandy and England for the most part rejected it, Germany and Italy welcomed it. On the other hand,

"The architects of the Royal Domain (Isle de France) and Champagne ... felt bound to accept a motif sanctioned by the authority of St. Denis..."

The rose-window received its confirmation as a central feature of the Gothic cathedral with the discovery of its "final solution":

It was not until 1240-1259 that the school of Reims, culminating in St. Nizaise, discovered its final solution: the rose was inscribed within the pointed arch of a huge window, thereby becoming elastic, as it were ... The whole arrangement mirrored the cross section of the nave, and yet the window remained a window and the rose a rose."

The architects, however, perfected and refined the rose-window, making it look more like a flower. The rose-windows (west front façade) of Laon (begun c. 1190) and Chartres (c. 1196) are less flower-shaped or rose-shaped than those of Reims (west front begun in c. 1241), Rouen (c. 1281), Strassburg (c. 1277), to mention only a few. The change is gradual, but it indicates clearly the architect's intention of using more and more the flower symbol. Another dimension is given to the rose-window by its comparison to the sun.

"The comparison with a rose is better suited to oculi with tracery such as that used at Reims and Strassburg, with pointed petals lying in a circle. Such windows have sometimes been compared with the sun - a comparison referring to their radiating rays - and because of this likeness the French call the whole High Gothic style Rayonnant."

[Note the Celtic "turning wheel" motif, which was a solar symbol; this motif was used as a decorative or ornamental element in both Romanesque and Gothic architecture.]

The use of the flower symbol, however, is to be attributed essentially to the rose as a symbol of Mary, to whom most Gothic cathedrals were dedicated, since the cult and fervor for Mary were deeply felt, the architect had to reflect them in his creation. As Henry Adams says, describing Chartres, the architect did everything to please Mary, because at Chartres the Virgin is everywhere:

At Chartres, one sees everywhere the Virgin, and nowhere any rival authority; one sees her give orders, and architects obey them ... He felt the value of the rose in art, and perhaps still more in religion, for the rose was Mary's emblem. One is fairly sure that the great Chartres rose (window) of the west front was put there to please her ... The value of the rose among architects of the time, was great, since it was the only part of the church that Villard de Honnecourt sketched...

The fact that Villard de Honnecourt sketched the rose-window of Chartres is of extreme importance, for he believed that the principles of any artistic composition are geometrical. Villard's notebook shows that Gothic architecture and the metaphysics of the

(1918)

time were interconnected, and that the thirteenth-



century architects "did think and act in strictly scholastic terms". Gothic architecture, like the Divina Commedia, is geometric without necessarily being symmetrical.

In France, the rose-window became an essential part of the Gothic façade, and it was harmoniously incorporated above the central door. It assumed a position of central importance both architecturally and theologically. The idea of a circumference amid the pointed arch, the ribs, spires and the cruciform plan heightens the idea of perfection and divinity. At the same time, the rose-window did not detract from the pure Gothic. Describing the rose-window of Reims Cathedral, Paul Frankl says:

With this organic system, the rose-window forms a point of rest and stability in the upward tream of gables and spires.

While there is no textual or documented proof that Dante was aware of the birth and development of Gothic architecture in Europe abd particularly in France, one can assume that he had knowledge of and was interested in this development. Dante indeed refers to the art of miniature when he meets Oderisi da Gubbio:

Oh!", I said to him, "are you not Oderisi,  
The honor of Gubbio and the honor of that  
Art which in Paris is called 'illumination'?"  
Purgatorio, XI, 79 - 81.

Although the debate is unresolved on whether or not Dante was in France during the unaccounted ten years of his life, it is significant that his early biographers, such as Boccaccio, do say so. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were, after all, the periods during which the major Gothic cathedrals of France were built or were under construction. The façade of Notre Dame in Paris was built between 1200 and 1250, for example. The west front of the Cathedrals of Rouen and Strassburg were begun in 1277 and 1281, respectively. Those of Laon, Reims, and Amiens were begun in circa

(1919)

1190, 1241, 1nd 1220. But Dante did not have to look far to see the Gothic architectural developments. It is true

that Italy did not adopt Gothic architecture in its purity, as it is generally agreed among art historians. Italy, however, incorporated Gothic elements into the Romanesque structures, or modified them, precursing Renaissance architecture. Rose-windows, flying buttresses, pointed arches, stained glass, and other elements were accepted, but they were given an Italian character. As mentioned previously, Panofsky states that the rose-window was accepted with great enthusiasm in Italy, "because of its *au fond* anti-Gothic character." It must be pointed out that Gothic architecture was brought to Italy by the Cistercians, the Franciscans and the Dominicans as a result of their own expansion throughout Europe. Dante, let us recall, attended the sermons of the Franciscans at Santa Croce and those of the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella "the school of the religious". All their churches incorporated Gothic elements, whether it was the more severe and simple architecture of the Cistercians, or that of the larger and more complex Franciscan and Dominican churches. The final result was that the local tradition and the Gothic style mixed, thus achieving an impure Gothic when compared to the French standard.

An example of the mixture of local tradition and Gothic elements is the church of San Andrea in Vercelli, built in circa 1219. Whether or not this can be considered "the earliest really Gothic building in Italy", as Frankl indicates, the fact remains that the Gothic elements are there. It is interesting to note that the east-end part of San Andrea has an eight-soped rose-window. Another church with a mixture of Gothic elements is the Cistercian church of Fossanova, near Rome - begun in circa 1187 - whose chevet also has a rose-window of eight spokes, although much simpler than the one at Vercelli.

(1920)

There are a number of churches and cathedrals where Dante could have admired beautiful rose-windows. The church of San Francesco in Assisi, founded in 1228,

finished circa 1239, and consecrated in 1253, has a rather elaborate and majestic rose-window. The nave decorations of the upper church, with scenes from the two Testaments and with the presence of Christ, the Virgin, St. John the Baptist, St. Francis, and Doctors of the Church, might have inspired Dante. Of this church, John White says:

Breadth and airiness are combined with a firm sense of architectural mass. Balance is the keynote. Every vertical acceleration is held by a horizontal of equivalent power, and each strong horizontal broken by a vertical.

The same sense of balance is reflected in the nave decorations. It is interesting that a scene from the St. Francis cycle attributed to Giotto, "The Lament of the Poor Clares" depicts a church with two wheel-windows of eight spokes.

The basilica of San Antonio in Padua and the church of San Lorenzo in Vicenza have, among their Gothic elements, rose-windows which are composed of eight spokes. San Antonio at Padua was completed by 1397; San Lorenzo at Vicenza, toward the end of the century. The façade of Santa Maria della Spina at Pisa has two rose-windows within two pointed arches above the twin doors. Both of them have eight spokes.

In Italy the most spectacular and elaborate rose-window of Dante's time is that of the Cathedral of Orvieto. This cathedral, begun in 1290 was at first under the architectural direction of Lorenzo Maitani, the Sienese architect, whose successors were Andrea Pisano and Andrea Orcagno. It is almost certain that Arnolfo di Cambio was also involved. Arnolfo was for a time the *capomastro* at Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, whose construction was begun in 1296. The rose-window at Orvieto is as elaborate and high as the west front façade. It is made of 24 spokes. It is the

(1921)

only rose-window, as far as I could find, that has in the middle the face of Christ. Moreover, in its four corners are represented St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory. The niche around the rose-

window has eight figures on each side and eight figures above. The main gable depicts the *Coronation* in mosaics. The Church of San Zeno at Verona (circa 1189-1200) has a fortune-wheel window by Briotolo.

Finally, the west front façade of the Florence Cathedral has a rose-window. Although it was executed after Dante's death, it certainly was designed before, at least around the time the actual foundation was begun, i.e., 1296.

It can be safely concluded that Dante was well aware of the widespread use of the rose-window in France and Italy. Undoubtedly, in the selection of a symbol for his assembly of the blessed souls, the poet was influenced by the only architecture that simultaneously symbolized both Mary and Heaven. With the rose-window he crowned his own architectural structure. This aspect of the relationship between the rose-window and Dante's Rose is reinforced by the numerical symbol found in the rose-windows.

An investigation of the rose-windows in Gothic cathedrals and churches indicates that the architects chose to design them mostly with eight, twelve, sixteen and twenty-four spokes. Having already established the significance of the numbers eight and twelve, let us note that the Cathedral of St. Nicaise, built between 1230 and 1163, which is noted by Panofsky, provided the final solution for the amalgamation of the rose in the Gothic cathedral, had a rose-window of eight spokes. The rose-window of Amiens (1220-1288), a cathedral considered "the purest realization of classical High Gothic" also has eight spokes. The interior south aisle of St. Etienne at Beauvais has an eight-spoke rose-window. As mentioned, the churches of San Anrea at Vercelli and of Fossnova both have rose-windows of eight in the west front, as well as Santa Maria della Spina in Pisa, Santa Maria Assunta in Siena (begun 1245), Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, Santa

(1922)

Maria Matricolare in Verona, and Prato's Duomo. Moreover, the small rose-window of the central portal of Peterborough Cathedral in England has eight spokes, as does the Cathedral of Andernach in Germany (circa 1200).

The Cathedrals of Rouen (begun 1281), Toul,

Strassburg (circa 1277), and Tiours, (rose-window of the south transept also) all have rose-windows of sixteen spokes. The rose-windows of the Cathedrals of Chartres, Laon, Reims, Notre Dame (Paris), Bourges, Carcassone, and Suger's St. Denis have rose-windows of twenty-four spokes, which can be considered twelve. The Cathedral of Florence has a central rose-window of twelve spokes and a rose-window on each side portal.

The rose-window with eight spokes was, therefore, one of the forms chosen by medieval architects, and it reinforces the assertion that Dante maintained a similar structural pattern in depicting the Rose of the blessed souls. There are other architectural structure and pictorial representations which add weight to this thesis.

As mentioned earlier, most ground plans of Gothic cathedrals and churches are cruciform. What is of extreme interest to us is that the ground plan of the Cathedral of Florence has an octagonal crossing. Many Gothic churches and cathedrals have an octagonal shape in the apse and high altar - Amiens, Cluny, Sens, laon, to mention a few. And so does San Michele in Pavia.

The lanterns of Coutances, Ely, and Burgos Cathedrals are octagonal. At Ely the face of Christ is in the center of the lantern. The flying vaulting ribs in the Gothic chapel of Ste. Catherine in Vienna are structured around an octagon. The medallion in the center shows Mary holding a sword and a Wheel of Fortune.

There is another architectura structure which has a direct relationship to the number eight, the baptistery and the baptismal font within it. According to Emile Male, octagonal baptismal fonts are much more numerous than circular ones, both in France and in Italy, because the number eight is the symbol of new life:

(1923)

It is true that the concordance of the texts and the monuments leads us to probabilities which closely approach certitude. The octagonal form of baptismal fonts which was adopted in the earliest times and which persisted during all the Middle Ages, is not a mere whim. It is difficult nor to see an application of the arithmetic taught by the

(Early Church) Fathers. For this reason, the number eight is the cifre of the new life ... It is the symbol of the new life, of the final resurrection and of the anticipated resurrection which is baptism ... The pool of the oldest baptisteries of Italy and Gaul, always closely approach the form of the octagon ... In the Middle Ages, the baptismal fonts are sometimes circular, but more often octagonal.

Male points out that St. Ambrose himse4lf states that the baptistery has to be octagonal, in a little ppoem he wrote which was to be inscribed on the baptistery of Milan. Some of the octagonal baptisteries mentioned by Male are those of Ravenna, Novara, Cividale, Trieste, Torcello, Aix-en-Provence, and Frejus. He adds, moreover, that a study made by M.S. Dantenay - in the "Annales de la Societe Archeologique de Bruxelles (1891-1892) - covering the period from the eleventh to the sixteenth century reveals the following: thrity-two circular baptismal fonts, sixty-seven octagonal, and a few more in other forms, but in a very small number. In Italy other octagonal baptisteries are found in Asti, Bergamo, Parma, Milan, and Florence. Finally, the Baptistery of Florence, Dante's "bel San Giovanni", is octagonal. The poet definitely knew this and was aware of its numerical symbolism.

The presence of the octagonal form in the rose-window, in the ground plans of churches and cathedrals, in the baptisteries and baptismal fonts, and evn in many cupolas and bell-towers, and the well-established symbolism of the number eight could not escape dante's eye. As the architect applied it to his Rose of Paradise, where completion and perfection cannot be achieved *sanza battesmo perfetto di Cristo*.

(1924)

In addition to the architectural structures, there are miniatures which might have considerable influence in Dante's pattern of the Rose. There is aminiature of the Mystical Paradise in the Ratisbon Manuscript (circa 1170-1185) at the Staatsbibliothek of Munich. This miniature illustrates a circle in whose center is the *Agnus Dei* (lamb of God). From the center, eight main spokes are formed; each spoke has a medallion at its end. Four of these medallions depicts a cardinal virtue,

and four depict the animals symbolizing the Evangelists. We have them: *prudential* with the symbol of St. Matthew next to it, *fortitude* with St. Luke's ox next to it, *temperantia* on whose side is St. John's eagle, and *justitia* with St. Mark's lion at its side. Four smaller spokes, alternating between each two of the larger ones, are connected to small medallions depicting the four Doctors of the Church; these medallions are being held by humans representing the four rivers of Eden. They are matched in this fashion: Phison-St. Ambrose, Gehon-St. Jerome, Euphrates-St. Gregory, Euphrates-St. Augustine. Above this circle, there is a smaller one with the figure of Christ as *Magister*. On Christ's right side there is an angel carrying the cross; at His left there are the instruments with which He was tortured. In the words of Katzenellenbogen:

...it is as if the illustration were intended to comprise the whole course of world history - the beginning (earthly paradise), middle (Evangelists, Church Fathers, the forces of salvation, i.e., the Church) and the end (Last Judgement as the gate to heavenly paradise).

Another illustration of the Mystical Paradise is found in the Speculum Virginum (second quarter of the twelfth century, British Museum). Here paradise "is depicted as a rose which, in close adherence to the text, includes the cardinal virtues and the other theological groups of four". In this miniature, therefore, we can see the four rivers of Eden, the four

(1925)

Evangelists, the four *Doctores*, and the four cardinal virtues. There are a pair of Virgins below each medallion of the cardinal virtues, symbolizing the eight beatitudes. In the center there is Christ the fount of all the rivers, virtues, Evangelists and Doctors:

The readers of the Speculum Virginum were thus given a complete picture of the Church with its strength-giving foundation (Christ), its scriptures of revelation (Evangelists), its teachings (Church Fathers) and its effect

of saving grace (Virtues and Beatitudes). At the same time the rivers of Paradise (historical) correspond with the Evangelists (typological) and the cardinal virtues (moral).

In Chartres, there is a stained-glass window representing the Transfiguration, in which Christ is at the center of a circle of eight spokes.

These illustrations give added support to the claim that Dante conceived and structured the Rose according to the traditional representation of Paradise as seen in these miniatures. The notion *ut picture poesis* functions also as *ut architectura poesis* or *ut sculptura poesis*. It must be pointed out that various illustrators of Dante's Empyrean hardly followed the poet's text. They relied mainly on their imaginations and artistic genius. No one depicted the Rose as a rose with eight petals. An Italian illustrator of the 14<sup>th</sup> century depicts the Rose as a circumference divided into eight, but Dante's *personae* are not represented. Similarly, the illustrations of Giovanni di Paoli (15<sup>th</sup> century) do not follow the text in the shape of the Rose and in the collocation of the blessed people. In the modern age, Gustave Dore's illustration, to name only one, is circular, full of light and angels, truly a picture of Paradise; but he does not follow the exactness of details given by the poet.

(1926)

Naturally, the artists cannot be blamed because their creations were based on different aesthetics which knew little, and perhaps cared even less for the philosophical-theological prescription of the Middle Ages. This, however, has been a factor in the neglecting of the correlations we have shown between Dante's Rose and the other arts. Dante could have described a paradise based solely on his imagination and exaltation. But his art, like that of the medieval cathedral, painter, miniaturist, was more precise and had to follow tradition in order to create in God's image. Dante was inspired by the rose-window, the baptistery, the baptismal font and the other structures because of their



artistry and their symbolism. The traditional representation of the Mystical Paradise added to his creation. Although he innovated this tradition for his own representational needs by making the Rose simpler, imbuing it with more mystic power, he nevertheless maintains it on a human level. He had before him a tradition and art that he was compelled to incorporate into his own creation, thereby reflecting the totality and perfection strived for by the medieval artist.

The Rose is a cathedral; it is the *Ecclesia Triumphans*. Just as the *Divina Commedia*, in its totality, wants to embrace the whole body of Christian knowledge, so the poet wanted to represent in his vision of the Rose the *habiculum Dei in Spiritu*. By analogy, the whole third Canto is a cathedral corresponding to and contained in the Rose; the eight blessed souls of the first tier may be seen as a rose-window. All the other blessed souls of the first tier in their order and position correspond to the order, the symmetry, the hierarchy found in the medieval cathedral and its art. The medieval conception of the world is one of order, analogy, and hierarchy. Society, knowledge, and dogma reflected these principles, so that art was also organized accordingly. Indeed the medieval cathedral is a book, and Dante's poem is a cathedral. Both the Gothic cathedral and the *Divina Commedia* become the *Biblia Pauperum* in Dante's image:

(1927)

I saw how it contains within its depths  
All things bound in a single book by love  
    Of which creation is the scattered leaves  
        Paradiso, XXXIII, 85-87. (216)

In conclusion, Signor Di Scipio notes:

"My intention in this study was to prove that Dante's vision of Paradise is as unique as his mission. The various earlier visions, forming a whole body of literature, provided little or no inspiration for Dante. His vision is wholly spiritual and mystic, excluding all the worldly details so prominent in previous visions. Through a perfect structure and a perfect order - attribute of clarity and simplicity - Dante achieved, in

a way, *tutto fuor del modern uso*, the sublime and delicate picture of Paradise in the Symbolic Rose.

A close analysis of the Rose has shown that Dante used a mathematical and geometric pattern in structuring the realm of the blessed souls. In following the poet's design step by step, we have been able to observe that the position of the blessed souls on the first tier does not conflict in any way with the geometric figure of a circle; rather, it is only by drawing a circle that we can admire the poet's precision and the totality of the design. It can then be seen that all eight blessed souls of the first tier are placed in their proper place and section with respect to their literal meaning and degree of excellence. Ste. Anne and Ste. Lucia are not misplaced; their position is in line with the poet's design and with his intention. As a result, the perfect order of

the Rose is not destroyed; on the contrary, it offers a significant insight into the perfect construction and the order of the Divina Commedia as a whole.

I have attempted to show, moreover, through a deep probing of the *personae* of the Rose, individually and as a group, the relationship Rose-Maria was established, as well as that of the Rose and Divine Love, in contrast to the binomial rose-sensual love, which is part of a whole tradition exemplified by the

(1928)

Roman de la Rose and Il Fiore. We have observed that in the row of women Dante disregarded the chronological order, using instead an order based on the degree of excellence. Rachel, consequently, is placed on the third throne - biblically, she would have to be on the fifth throne, after Sarah and Rebecca - corresponding to the angelic Choir of Thrones, to whom in fact Beatrice corresponds. In the case of Ruth, whom Dante placed last among the women, it is suggested that the poet did so in order to renew the direct link with Christ, uniting her with Mary. Since Mary is seated first and Ruth last, the link is re-established to emphasize the bond of the mother of Jesus and the ancestress of David, a bond which unites all these women as *typi Ecclesiae*.

Regarding the blessed figures forming the row of men and all the other *personae* of the Rose we have noted that Dante used the same principle of excellence

in their collocation, so that St. Francis comes before St. Benedict and St. Augustine, and St. Benedict before the latter. The same degree of excellence applies to the position of the figures on either side of Mary. The belief that an historical-literal analysis of each *persona* would provide a deeper understanding of Dante's intention in choosing them was constantly reinforced and demonstrated by the significance each *persona* assumes. The qualitative and quantitative balance of the *personae* in the Rose adds another dimension to Dante's use of structural and numerical symbolism in the Rose itself and in the harmonious whole of the Divina Commedia.

The importance of numerical symbolism in Dante's *opus*, and in the Rose particularly, was demonstrated through an *excursus* on the medieval numerical tradition and the well-established mystical significance of the number eight. It was determined that this number assumes a central role in the structure and significance of the Rose, for the poet willingly adopted it because eight is the number of baptism, resurrection and eternal life. For Dante there was no better choice to represent the realm of happiness and eternity. This claim received a strong confirmation with the discovery that the name of Christ is mentioned

(1929)

eight times in Paradiso XXXII, the canto in which St. Bernard, as *magister*, reveals the structure of the Rose. The total number of the blessed figures is twenty, symbolizing the Catechism and consequently representing the two Testaments in the unity of the final and eternal realm.

All this points conclusively to the fact that Dante followed the medieval numerical tradition, using its various elements for his own artistic and representational purposes, while at the same time creating a picture of Paradise that has no antecedent(?) or equal. The idea that the Rose is based on the number eight is a new page in the study of Dante, an additional proof for the skeptics that numerical composition is indeed an essential component of the Divina Commedia.

In the last chapter, the discussion centered on the Gothic cathedral, which, as a symbol of Heaven on earth, built following the medieval aesthetics of *numerous, mensura, pondus* and light-metaphysics, stood in analogy to the order followed by the Architect of the Universe.

The analogy, Kingdom of Heaven-Gothic Cathedral-Church-Body of Christ, was presented following this same line of thought and the medieval theological tradition. Consequently, I established the analogy Divina Commedia-Cathedral, Symbolic Rose-cathedral, Symbolic Rose-Rose-window within the façade of the cathedral. Dante took the Rose - as a symbol of Mary, Queen of the Rose and the cathedral - and incorporated it into his own creation, the City of God and of the Blessed Souls. The notion *ut picture poesis* is expanded to *ut architectura poesis*. The fact that the rose-windows of a number of cathedrals and churches have eight spokes, that the baptismal font and the baptistery are often octagonal (as the one in Florence), and that other sections of the cathedral are octagonal (apse, crossing, lanterns), is added proof that Dante used a similar structural pattern in depicting the Rose of *Paradiso*. The representation of the Mystical Paradise in the two miniatures discussed give further support to my thesis, especially because the illustration of the Mystical paradise found in the Speculum Virginum depicts a rose. Dante, therefore,

(1930)

drew upon a rich artistic tradition that permeated the representational parameters of the Middle Ages. Dante, however, while showing signs of his *ductus*, integrated it within his own creative vision, thus creating the paradigm of his genius: that while attaining the highest level of poetic expression, he erected a monument of synthesis to the Scholastic Age." (217)

Italy has produced a quite respectable number of mystics, to name only a few whose names immediately come to mind, Ste. Catherine of Siena, Ste. Catherine of Genoa, the Florentine contemporary of St. John of the Cross, i.e., Maria Maddalena de Pazzi, and, of course, Dante himself. It is therefore at least a bit surprising that Signor Di Scipio appears to be somewhat "tone deaf" in regards to mysticism.

Dante was himself very much a mystic, as we have shown, whereas he seems somewhat indifferent towards Scholasticism. In Paradiso, Dante gives much space to mystics, e.g., Dionysius the (Pseudo)Areopagite, whoever he was in real life, whether Stephen bar Sadaili, Patriarch Severus of Antioch, or both, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Hugh of St. Victor, and Richard of St. Victor, while giving the Scholastics short shrift, though, of course, he includes St. Thomas Aquinas. More important, Dante's guide in Paradise is not the great Scholastic St. Thomas Aquinas, but rather St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who was a great mystic who had no use for Scholasticism

(1931)

and was rather critical of it, though never perhaps reaching the rhetorical excesses of Walter of St. Victor, who accused the Scholastics of being "sources of confusion", "puffed up with the spirit of Aristotle", treating the ineffable mysteries of the faith with shocking levity, spewing out heresies, and being guilty of a multitude of errors.

As we shall see later, some in the Eastern Orthodox Church have accused the Catholic Church of being captured by Scholasticism and marginalising mysticism. This last is true in a general sense, as Scholasticism never had much importance in the Eastern Orthodox Church, while mysticism is far more central than

is true in the Catholic Church. However, this is very much a matter of degree rather than kind, as we shall discuss later. In fact, the Catholic Church has produced a very rich crop of mystics, and to deny this or attempt to trivialize it represents either gross ignorance or "bearing false witness". Figures such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Walter of St. Victor reveal an attitude identical to that generally considered to be typical of the Eastern Othodox Church.

(1932)

Certainly the Rose is a symbol of the Virgin Mary; however, as we shall see, there are, in fact a great many "Mary Flowers". I am not saying that dante did not give the Rose such a prominent place because it is a symbol of the Virgin Mary, but there are other factors.

One of the many titles of the Virgin Mary is, as we shall see, the *Rosa Mystica*, the Mystical Rose. Being a mystic himself, having some knowledge of at least Hispano-Muslim Sufis, as well as being a profound student of Christian Mysticism, Dante was well aware, as the Irish poet William Butler Yeats said, that "the Rose is the Mystical Flower of the West (which in this context includes

Persia) as the lotus is the mystical flower of India (recall the Buddhist Sanskrit *Om mani padme hum*, i.e., 'Hail the jewel in the lotus')". Dante chose the Rose because it is the mystical flower, as well as a symbol of the Virgin Mary, the *Rosa Mystica*.

Flowers which are neither roses nor lilies are also associated with the Virgin Mary. In fact, their number is so large that whole books have been written about them. In many cases, this amounts to no more than a popular name. We will give only a few examples, in which contain a profound symbolism and/or a particularly beautiful legend.

(1933)

The violet was the third flower of the trinity of medieval symbolic flowers, as is indicated by this medieval Christmas carol:

O fragrant rose, lily chaste  
O violet of purity  
Thine eyes of grace upon us cast  
*Noster misericorde* (Our merciful one)

According to legend, the violet blossomed outside the Virgin Mary's window when she spoke the words: "Here I am, the servant of the Lord" to the Archangel Gabriel (Qur'anic: *Jibril*), who had come to tell her that she would be the mother of Jesus. Humbly and courageously the Virgin Mary accepted, saying "Let it be according to your word".

When the Archangel Gabriel left the Virgin Mary, he stopped

to bless the little flowers outside the Virgin Mary's window, thus bestowing a delicate fragrance upon them.(218)

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (12<sup>th</sup> century) spoke of the Virgin Mary as the violet of humility in his Vitis Mystica. He called the violet the "emblem of humility", because it is small, grows low to the ground and has a sweet fragrance. Hugh of St. Victor (12<sup>th</sup> century) wrote concerning the Virgin Mary: "You are the flower for your beauty, the violet for your humility".(219)

(1934)

Though it is not a rose at all, but, as its Latin name *Helleborus Niger* indicates, it is a member of the hellebore family, there is a flower known as "Christmas Rose", "Holy Night Rose", and, in French, *Rose de Noel*. It has single, five-petaled white, pink or purple, rose-like blossoms. Here is the legend of the Christmas Rose.

On the night that Jesus was born, a girl named Madelon came with the other shepherds to Bethlehem to see the infant about which the angels of the Lord had told them. Madelon wanted to give a something to comfort Mary and show her love for Jesus, but she was very poor and had nothing to give.

The shepherds played on their rustic flutes and offered a sheepskin for the Baby Jesus' bed. The Magi came bearing gold, frankincense and myrrh for Jesus.



Madelon stood outside, weeping bitterly unconsolably because she had no gift to give. The God saw her distress and sent the Archangel Gabriel to her. "Madelon, why do you weep while you pray?", asked the Archangel Gabriel.

Madelon replied: I weep because I have nothing to offer to the baby Jesus. If only I had some flowers to give him I would be content, but it is winter. Good archangel, I am most distressed.", replied Madelon.

(1935)

The Archangel Gabriel took Madelon by the hand and led her out into the night. As they walked the cold seemed to disappear and they were surrounded by a bright, golden light. The Archangel Gabriel touched the earth with his staff, and creamy white blossoms flushed with pink appeared everywhere. Madelon took an armful of the flowers and ran to take them to decorate Jesus' bed and the stable where the Virgin Mary had borne him. Wrote Emile Blemont:

Though you be poor and have no gold to bring  
Though the ice-bound earth no Heaven-sent flowers bestows,  
Yet give your heart this Noel to the King  
This is the legend of the Christmas Rose.(220)

Two closely related wild chrysanthmums with daisy-like blossoms are the subjects of legends connected with the Vitgin Mary.

One is the oxeye daisy or "Mary's Star", *Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum*, whose flower resembles a white daisy with a yellow center. According to legend, when the Magi, following the star, reached Bethlehem they looked for another sign. Then one of them saw a white and gold flower that resembles the Star of Bethlehem. When he went to pick it, he saw the Holy Family.

(1936)

The other is the yellow daisy, *Chrysanthemum Coronarium*. According to legend, the golden yellow flowers of this wild chrysanthemum were blooming in front of the manger in Bethlehem, thus marking it for the Magi because of the resemblance of its flower to the Star of Bethlehem. After leading the Magi to Bethlehem, the star fell from Heaven and took root as the yellow daisy or *Chrysanthemum Coronarium* to mark the entrance to the manger. Both the above wild daisy-like chrysanthemums grow abundantly in Galilee as wild flowers.(221)

True wild daisies (*Bellis* ...) have the same symbolism as the oxeye daisy, *Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum*, especially the English daisy, *Bellis Perennis*, and the wild daisy of Palestine, *Bellis Silvestris*. Both are pure white or pink-tinged daisies with a yellow center. *Bellis Silvestris* is one of the earliest spring

flowers of Palestine.(222)

The Syrian Speedwell, *Veronica Syriaca*, is a common wild flower in Palestine, its dark blue flowers brightening hedgerows and fencerows in spring. According to legend, the blossoms of the Syrian Speedwell marked each place where the Virgin Mary rested during the flight into Egypt.(223)

(1937)

The Star of Bethlehem or Mary's Tears, *Orinithogalum Umbellatum*, grows abundantly in Judea. It is a six-petaled wild flower tinged with blue near the center. According to legend, the star which guided the Magi broke into small pieces, scattering white blossoms everywhere. St. Joseph gathered an armload of the flowers and bought them to the Virgin Mary, saying: "See, the Star of the East has fallen and borne fruit in kind."(224)

The Rose of Jericho, *Anastatica Hierochuntica*, is also known as the "Rose of the Virgin", but it is a desert plant native to the Middle East which is dormant in times of drought but resuscitates after a rain, producing small, white flowers. Hence, the "Rose of Jericho" is often called the "Resurrection Plant". Legends tell of said plant going into dormancy at the time of the Crucifixion and reviving on Easter Sunday.(225)

*Myosotis Scorpioides*, the beloved "forget-me-not", bears a small, blue flower of a hue whose intensity puts the sapphire to shame. It is commonly called "Eyes of Mary". According to legend, as a child Jesus looked into his mother's eyes and said:

"Mother, your eyes are so beautiful, everyone looks at them in wonder. What a pity those who will be born in future generations will not be able to behold them, because in your eyes one can see Paradise, and whoever looks into them cannot help but be drawn towards it."

(1938)

Then he touched her eyelids and passed his hands over the ground as though sowing seeds. Immediately forget-me-nots sprang up, hundreds of tiny blue eyes with golden centers, as a reminder for people of future generations of Our Lady's pure eyes.(226)

*Campanula Rotundifolia*, known as "Bluebell" and "Our Lady's Thimble", is a flower associated with Scotland, as the Jacobite song "Bluebells of Scotland" says:

O where, tell me where does your Highland laddie dwell?  
He dwells in bonnie Scotland,  
Where blooms the sweet bluebell.

There is another Scottish song in which, as is true of so many Provençal trobador songs, one cannot determine whether it refers to the author's **Lady** (**Domna** or **Dompna** in Provençal) or whether it is an allegory in which the **Lady** symbolizes the Virgin Mary:

I love a lassie, a bonnie, bonnie lassie

She's as pure as the lily in the dell  
She's as sweet as the heather  
The bonnie purple heather  
Mary my Scots bluebell.

The fact that the **Lady** is named "Mary", that she is described as "pure as the lilies in the dell", the fact that purple is the royal or imperial color, and that the bluebell is, as we shall see, associated with the Virgin Mary leads one to

(1939)

suspect that she is an allegory for or symbol of the Virgin Mary, especially as patroness of Catholic, Celtic and Jacobite Scotland. William Wallace, who, when humanly possible, had all his men confess and take communion before going into battle, would understand.

According to legend, the bluebell acquired its common name "Our Lady's Thimble" for the following reason:

Our Lady sat by her Mother's side,  
And sewed her seam with a housewife's pride,  
Mary, the child of (Ste.) Anne.

The Virgin Mary pricked her finger and Ste. Anne covered the hurt finger with a healing balm and a cloth bandage.

But the maiden smiled as she softly bent  
And gathered a flower at her side that leant  
A flower with cups of blue.

See, this small cup will be my finger shield,  
And be known henceforward in hedge or field  
As the thimble and shield of Mary. (227)

Few flowers are more closely associated with the Virgin Mary than the Lily of the Valley, *Convallaria Majalis*, also known as "Mary's Tears".

According to tradition, when the Virgin Mary wept at the foot of the Cross, her tears fell to the ground and became tiny fragrant blossoms, "Mary's Tears".

(1940)

The Lily of the Valley is said to represent the meekness and "low estate" of the "Handmaid of the Lord". The name indicated the "hidden" location of the blossom in low places such as valleys ("She's as pure as the lily in the dell"), thus making it a symbol of humility.

The lily of the valley is also a symbol of the Virgin Mary because of its pure white flowers, sweet smell and humble appearance. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Adam of St. Victor wrote in In Assumptione Beatae Virginis:

(Maria) flos campi, convallum	Mary, flower of the field
Singulare lilium	Exquisite lily of the valley
Christus ex te prodiit.	Christ came forth from you.
(228)	

Though not a true rose, *Lychnis Coronaria*, "Rose Campion" or "Our Lady's Rose" has single pink, five-petalked, rose-like blossoms.

There is a legen concerning *Lychnis Coronaria* which is of

special interest because it deals with the origin of the rosary, or, in Islamic terms, *tasbih*.

(1941)

A monk was on a journey, praying his *Ave Marias* as he walked, when thieves approached. The Virgin Mary began to pull roses from the monk's lips, weaving them into a garland. As the garland grew longer, the roses grew smaller, until they were the size of rosary beads. The Virgin Mary placed the beads around the monk's neck, and the thieves, on seeing this miracle, renounced their sinful lives and became monks.(229)

Still speaking of "Mary Flowers", we now go to a place far from both Europe and Asia. Firstly we wish to note that *Nauhuatl*, the language of the Aztecs, is a member of the Uto-Aztecan language, related to many other Amerindian languages of western USA and northern Mexico. Today the word *Nahuatl* is often used to refer to the Mexican Amerindians who still speak said language.

In 1531 the future of Mexico seemed doubtful. The Amerindians were still resentful of the recent Spanish conquest, and to them the white Spaniards, with their pale skins, beards, hairy bodies and hair and eyes very often of colors which to an

Amerindian seemed strange and totally unnatural, were strange creatures indeed. On the other hand, though the Church taught that the Amerindians were fully human and possessed immortal souls, at

(1942)

base many white Spaniards did not consider the Amerindians to be truly human. Noth. It seemed that the two races had nothing in common, that nothing united them.

However, in 1531 the Virgin Mary appeared to a humble Amerindian called Juan Diego or Juan Bernardino by the Spanish, at a place later called *Guadalupe*, name of a place in Extremadura which in hybrid Arabic-Romance means "River of the Wolf", and is the site of a renowned monastery. "However, the name "Guadalupe" cannot possibly be Nahuatl, because the Nahuatl language has neither a "G" nor a "D" sound. As Juan Diego or Juan Bernardino barely spoke a word of Spanish, and could certainly not have pronounced *Guadalupe*, there seems to be no doubt thht "Guadalupe" is derived from a Nahuatl word as pronounced by the Spanish, to whom a great many Nahuatl words are *trabalenguas* (tongue-twisters), virtually unpronounceable. One scholar, Becerra Tanco, gave several Nahuatl names from which *Guadalupe* might be derived. The first was *Tequatlanopeuh*, meaning "She who originated at the



summit of the crags", the second was *Tequantlaxopeuth* (pronounced *Tequantlashope*), meaning "She who saves us from the devourers", which at that time could mean both Satan and the terrible pagan gods whom they believed demanded

(1943)

countless human sacrifice. Very much later, in 1895, when Prof. D. Mariano Jacobo Rojas, head of the department of Nahuatl at the Museo Nacional de Arqueologia, Historia y Etnografia, made a thorough study of the word *Guadalupe* and concluded that it was originally the Nahuatl word *Coatlaxopeuh* (note: the "X" has the sound of "SH"), meaning "she who breaks, stamps, or crushes the serpent".(230) The Nahuatl word *tilma* refers to a mexican peasant cloak made of maguey fiber. Maguey fiber is very durable, but very coarse, and is virtually the last textile material that one would choose on which to paint an oil painting.

The earliest and most authentic account of the apparition of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego is called Nican Mopohua, originally written in Nahuatl by an Amerindian known to the Spanish as Antonio Valeriano:

"Here follows a carefully ordered account of the marvelous manner in which the Ever Virgin Holy Mary Mother of God, our Queen, recently appeared on Tepeyac Hill, known as Guadalupe. She first appeared to a poor Indian, worthy of respect, Juan Diego, and afterwards her beautiful Image appeared on his *tilma* in the

presence of the new bishop, Friar Don Juan de Zumarraga.

Ten years after the fall of the City of Mexico (to the Spanish), when arrows and shields were put aside and there was peace in the villages, the faith and knowledge of the true God, Author of life, had begun to put forth shoots and blossom. At that time, in the year

(1944)

1531, a few days after the beginning of December, there was a humble man of the people, Juan Diego, a native of Cauhtitlan, who worshipped at the chapel of Tlatilolco.

He was on his way to pursue the study of God and His Commandments at the small church in Tlatiloco. It was still dark on Saturday when he set out. Dawn was breaking as he arrived at the foot of Tepeyac Hill. He heard singing from the crest of the hill, which sounded like the song of many birds. When at times their voices quieted, the hillside seemed to echo in response. Their singing, very soft and pleasant, surpassed that of the *coyoltototl* and *tzinizcan* and other fine song birds. Juan Diego stopped to look and thought, "Could I be worthy of what I am hearing? Am I dreaming? Am I arising from sleep? Where am I? Perhaps in the earthly paradise of flowers and corn, about which our ancestors spoke. Maybe already in heaven?" He was looking toward the summit and to the dawning to the east of the foothill to see the source of the beautiful heavenly singing when suddenly it stopped and silence fell, and he heard someone calling him from the top of the hill, saying, **'Juan, dearest Juan Diego.'**

He then climbed the hill in the direction of the voice, not at all frightened, but rather, feeling extremely happy. Upon reaching the summit, he saw a lady standing there who told him to come closer. He was filled with awe and admiration by her splendor. Her clothing was radiant like the sun, the crag on which her foot was resting was giving off rays of light, and looked like a bracelet of precious stones; even the earth glistened like the mist of a rainbow. The mesquite bushes, prickly pears, and other lowly herbs and grasses which usually grow there seemed like emeralds, the foliage like fine turquoise, and the branches and thorns like shining gold.

He bowed before her, hearing her very gentle, polite words which were delivered as to someone very

respected. She said: "Listen, Juan, my dearest and youngest son, where are you going?" He answered, "My lady, my Queen and my little Girl, I am going to your house in Mexico-Tlatilolco to continue the study of the divine mysteries taught us by the images of Our Lord, our priests." She spoke then, revealing her blessed will, saying:

(1945)

"Know, know for sure, my dearest, littlest, and youngest son, that I am the perfect and ever Virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the God of truth through Whom everything lives, the Lord of heaven and earth. I want very much to have a little house built here for me, in which I will show Him, I will exalt Him and make Him manifest. I will give Him to the people in all my personal love, in my compassion, in my help, in my protection: because I am truly your merciful Mother, yours and all the people who live united in this land and of all the other people of different ancestries, my lovers, who love me, those who seek me, those who trust in me. Here I will hear their weeping, their complaints and heal all their sorrows, hardships and sufferings. And to bring about what my compassionate and merciful concern is trying to achieve, you must go to the residence of the Bishop of Mexico and tell him that I sent you to show him how strongly I wish him to build me a temple here on the plain; you will report to him exactly all you have seen, admired and what you have heard.

Know for sure I will appreciate it very much, be grateful and reward you. And you? You will deserve very much the reward I will give you for your fatigue, the work and trouble that my mission will cause you. Now, my dearest son, you have heard my breath, my word; go now and put forth your best effort."

At this, he bowed low before her and said, "My Lady, I am going to carry out your charge; for the present, I, your poor servant, take leave of you." He then descended the hill, intent on fulfilling her command, and continued on along the causeway which goes directly to Mexico City. Once inside the city, he went without delay to the residence of the bishop, a new prelate, who had only recently arrived. His name was Friar Don Juan de Zumarraga, a religious of (the Order of) St. Francis. As soon as he got there he tried to see

him, begging the servants to announce him. After a long while they came to call him, the Bishop having ordered that he should enter.

(1946)

Upon entering, he bowed and knelt before him and immediately gave him the message of the Lady from heaven, telling him everything he had admired and had seen and heard. After hearing the story and the message, the bishop did not seem to believe him and said, "You will come again, my son, and I will hear what you have to say at greater leisure; I shall look into the matter carefully from the very beginning and give much thought and consideration to the request you have brought me." He left feeling sad, because the message entrusted to him was not immediately accepted. He returned that same day, heading directly to the crest of the hill and found the Lady from heaven waiting for him on the very spot where he first saw her. He fell to his knees before her saying:

"My dear little Mistress, Lady and Queen, my littlest Daughter, my dear little Girl, I went where you sent me to carry out your order. Although it was difficult for me to enter the bishop's quarters, I saw him and explained your message exactly as instructed. He received me kindly and listened with attention; but as soon as he answered, it was apparent that he did not believe it; he said: "You will come back some other time, and I shall listen to what you have to say at greater leisure, and I shall examine it from the very beginning and think about the request you have delivered."

"The way he answered me I could clearly see that he thinks I may have made it up, about your wanting a little house built for you here, or that it is not from you. So I beg you, my Lady, Queen and my little girl, to send one of the nobles who are held in esteem and respected with the message, so that it will be believed; for I am a man of no importance, a backframe, a follower. You are sending me to a place that I am not used to spending my time, my little Virgin, my youngest Daughter, my Lady. Forgive me if I grieve you and you are angry with me."

The Most Holy Virgin, worthy of all honor and veneration answered:

(1947)

"Listen to me, my youngest and dearest son, know for sure that I do not lack servants and messengers to whom I can give the task of carrying out my words, who will carry out my will. But it is very necessary that you plead my cause and, with your help and through your mediation, that my will be fulfilled. My youngest and dearest son, I urge and firmly order you to go to the bishop again tomorrow. Tell him in my name and make him fully understand my intention that he start work on the chapel I am requesting. Tell him again that I am the ever Virgin, Holy Mary, the Mother of God, who is sending you."

Juan answered, "My Lady, Queen, my little Girl, I do not wish to give you anguish, pain or grieve your heart; I shall go very gladly as you command; I shall by no means give up, nor do I consider it any trouble. I shall go to fulfill your wish; but I may not be heard or, if heard, still not believed. Tomorrow afternoon, when the sun goes down, I shall return to give you an account of the Bishop's answer. I must now take leave of you, my youngest Daughter, little Maiden, my little Girl and Lady. Rest well in the merantime." Then he went to his home to rest.

The following day was Sunday and in the very early dawn he left his house going directly to Tlatilolco for religious instruction. He arrived just before ten o'clock and heard Mass, keeping his mission in mind. Once the crowd had dispersed, he set out for the bishop's residence. As soon as he got there, he insisted on seeing the bishop, and after many difficulties was allowed in. Kneeling down before him, he repeated sadly and tearfully the demand he brought from the Lady from heaven. He was extremely anxious to be believed and that the bishop comply with the wish of the Perfect Virgin that a place of worship be erected on the spot she had clearly indicated.

The bishop, in order to verify the matter, asked many questions. Where had he seen her? What was she like? He gave a full account of everything. But even though he recounted with great exactitude what she was like and all he had seen and marveled at, and the bishop saw that

it was the Perfect Virgin, Mother of the Savior, he was unable to act without further

(1948)

evidence. He said he could not carry out the order only on his word and request, but that it was necessary to give him a sign that the message had come from the Lady from heaven herself. As soon as he heard that, Juan Diego said, "Lord Bishop, what kind of sign do you require? I shall go and request it of the Lady from heaven who sent me."

When the bishop saw that he confirmed everything and did not hesitate or doubt in the slightest, he dismissed him. He had him followed by members of the household whom he trusted so that they could watch and see where he went, whom he saw and spoke to. This they did. When Juan Diego came directly to the causeway, those who were following him lost sight of him on the wooden bridge where the brook comes out near Tepeyac; and although they looked everywhere, there was no trace of him to be found. So they turned back, annoyed not only because he had slipped out of sight, but because he had frustrated their attempt in shadowing him. After telling the bishop what had happened, they urged him not to believe his story, that Juan was lying, making up a story, dreaming or imagining the whole thing.

They agreed that if he should ever come back, they would grab him and punish him severely so that he would never tell lies nor get the people all excited. In the meantime, Juan Diego was with the Most Holy Virgin giving her the bishop's reply. Upon hearing it, she said:

**"That is fine, my youngest and dearest son; you will return here tomorrow so that you may take the sign he asked for. Then, he will believe and no longer doubt nor be suspicious of you; and know, my dear son, I shall reward your care, work, and fatigue in my behalf. Go now; tomorrow I shall be here waiting for you."**

Upon arriving home Sunday, he found his uncle, Juan Bernardino, seriously ill and in danger of death. First, he went for the native healer who treated him, but he was too late. The next day, Monday, when Juan Diego was to take the sign to the bishop in order to be believed, he did not return. During the night, the uncle begged him

to go to Tlatilolco to bring a priest to hear his confession and prepare him for dying, knowing that his time had arrived, and that he would never get well.

(1949)

Early in the morning of Tuesday, in the middle of the night, Juan Diego was already on his way to Tlatilolco for a priest. As he approached the road that passes at the side of the foothill of Tepeyac toward the west, which was his usual route, he thought, "If I take the direct path, the Lady may see me and I must not be detained by the sign she wished to give me. I must hurry to get a priest first, since my poor uncle is anxiously waiting for him." So Juan Diego took another path around the hill which crosses toward the east side in order to reach Mexico (City) more quickly, and not be detained by the Queen of Heaven. He thought this would prevent his being seen by her, but she was watching him from where she saw him before.

She came down the hill and blocked his way and said to him:

**"What is happening, dearest and youngest of my sons? Where are you going? Where are you headed?"**

And he, regretful, ashamed and fearful, prostrated himself before her and said in greeting:

"My little Maiden, my youngest daughter, my Girl, I hope that you are happy. How are you this morning? Do you feel well? Although it grieves me, and may cause you anguish, I must tell you that one of your servants, my uncle, is very ill. A terrible sickness has struck him down and he will surely die soon.

"And now I hurry to your little house in Tlatilolco to call on the beloved ones of Our Lord, our priests, to hear his confession and prepare him for death. For we all are born for that and await the difficult day of our own death. Although I go, I shall return right away to take care of your message, my Lady and my little maiden. I beg you to forgive me, be patient with me a little longer, because I am not deceiving you, my youngest Daughter, my little Girl. Tomorrow without fail, I will return as fast as possible." After hearing Juan Diego's words, the most merciful Virgin spoke:

(1950)

**"Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that disturbs you, the thing that afflicts you, is nothing. Do not let your countenance, your heart be disturbed. Do not fear this sickness of your uncle or any other sickness, nor anything that is sharp or hurtful. Am I not here, I, who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need anything more? Let nothing else worry you, because he will not die now. You may be certain that he is already well."** [And at that moment the uncle was restored to health, as they were to learn later.]

When Juan Diego heard this from the Queen of Heaven. He felt better, was comforted and at peace. He begged her to send him to the bishop without delay with some sign that he would believe. The Lady from heaven then told him:

**"Go up, my dearest son, to the top of the hill, to where you saw me and received my directions and you will find different kinds of flowers. Cut them, put them all together, then come down here and bring them before me."**

Juan Diego went up the hill immediately, and upon reaching the crest was astonished to find so many beautiful, exotic varieties of fine, full-bloomed flowers since it was out of season, being the time of biting frost. They were very fragrant and covered with night dew which gleamed like precious pearls. He went around cutting and gathering them inside the fold of his tilma. The top of the hill was no place for flowers to grow; it was stony and full of nothing but thistles, thorns, prickly pears (cacti) and mesquite. At times grass grew there, but this was the month of December when frost kills everything. He hurried down the hill taking the flowers to the heavenly Maiden. She took them into her precious hands and rearranged them in his tilma saying:



(1951)

"My youngest and dearest son, these different kinds of flowers are the proof, the sign that you will take to the bishop. You will tell him from me that he is to see in them my desire, and therefore he is to carry out my wish, my will. And you, who are my messenger, in you I place my absolute trust. I strictly order you not to unfold your tilma or reveal its contents until you arrive in his presence. You will relate to him everything very carefully: how I sent you to the top of the hill to cut and gather flowers, all you saw and marveled at in order to convince the Governing Priest so that he will then do what lies within his responsibility so that my house of God which I requested will be made, will be built."

After the Lady from heaven had finished her instructions, he set out along the causeway leading directly to Mexico City. Happy now, and feeling sure that this time everything would go well, he held his precious burden close to protect it and prevent any of its contents from falling out, while delighting in the fragrance of the various beautiful flowers. When he arrived at the residence of the bishop, the doorkeeper and the other servants stepped out to meet him. He begged them to inform the bishop how urgent it was that he see him, but they all refused pretending they did not hear him, either because it was still dark, or because they knew him from his other visits and felt he was giving them trouble with his repeated visits.

Also, they had already been informed by their companions of how he had slipped from their sight the time they had been ordered to follow him. When they saw him standing there a long time, head lowered, doing nothing in case he should be called; they noticed that he seemed to be carrying something. Out of curiosity, they went over to him and tried to see what it was he was carrying.

When Juan Diego saw that he could not hide what he carried, and fearing that they would continue to harass him and possibly damage the flowers, he opened the folds of his tilma a bit to give them a peek. When they saw that it contained exquisite, different, flowers blooming out of season, they were awed. They were impressed by how fresh they were, how open their

(1952)

corollas were, how good they smelled, and how beautiful. They dared to snatch some of them away from him three times but they could not succeed. They no longer saw real flowers, but flowers which seemed to be painted, embroidered or sewn on the tilma.

They went right away to tell the bishop what they had seen and informed him about the humble Indian who had come before and was waiting a long time to see him. Hearing this, the bishop realized that Juan Diego had the proof he needed to convince him to carry out Our Lady's wish. He immediately ordered them to show him in. Upon entering, Juan Diego prostrated himself before the bishop as he had done the other times, reporting everything he had seen and marveled at, and repeating her message. Juan Diego said:

"Your Excellency, I did as you ordered, telling my Mistress, the Heavenly Maiden, Holy Mary, the Beloved Mother of God, that you were asking proof so that you could believe me, so that you could build her sacred little house that she requested. I told her that I had promised to bring you some sign of proof just as you requested. She listened carefully to your word and was pleased to receive your request for a sign, so that her beloved will could be carried out. Today, while it was still night, she ordered me to see you again. I asked for the proof, so that I would be believed and she kept her promise immediately, sending me up the hill where I had seen her had seen her before to cut various roses and other flowers.

Although I knew very well that the top of the hill was not the place where flowers grow, because it is full of craggy rocks, thorns, spiny acacias and mesquite bushes, I did not doubt nor hesitate one minute to do her bidding. When I arrived at the crest of the hill, it seemed as if I were in paradise, because there in one place was a great variety of different precious flowers, all exquisite and sparkling with dew, which I set about gathering. After I brought them down to her she took them in her holy hands and rearranged them in the hollow of my ayate for me to bring and present to you in person. She told me to give them to you in person. She told me to give them to you

(1953)

from her so that you would recognize the sign you requested and comply with her wishes, and also to show you that I was truthful. Here they are, please receive them."

He then opened his white mantle which held the flowers, and as the different precious flowers fell to the floor, then and there the beloved Image of the Perfect Virgin, Holy Mary, Mother of God, suddenly appeared in the form and figure in which it remains to this day and is preserved in her chapel at Tepeyac called Guadalupe. Upon seeing it, the bishop and all those present fell to their knees full of awe and reverence, greatly affected and moved by what they saw. They then grew sad, they wept, and their hearts and minds were in ecstasy.

The Lord Bishop prayed in tears begging forgiveness for not having immediately carried out her will to do what she wanted. He rose to his feet, and untied the mantle from around Juan Diego's neck on which the heavenly Queen's image was imprinted and took it to his private chapel. He detained Juan Diego, who remained another day at the bishop's house. The following day he said, "Come, let us go to see the place where the Lady from heaven wants her temple to be built." People were immediately invited to build her "sacred little house." As soon as Juan Diego had pointed out where the Lady from heaven wanted her chapel to be built, he asked permission to leave. He wanted to see his uncle who had been gravely ill when he left for Tlatilolco to call the priest to confess him and prepare him for dying.

But they did not let Juan Diego go alone; a number of people went with him to his house. Upon arriving, they saw the uncle was well and happy without ache or pain. He was surprised to see his nephew accompanied by so many people and inquired as to the cause for so much honor and attention. The nephew explained that when he had left to bring the priest to hear his confession and prepare him for dying, the Lady from heaven had appeared to him on Tepeyac, and that she had consoled him greatly by telling him not to worry because his

(1954)

uncle was already restored to health. She then had sent him to Mexico City to ask that a house be erected for her on Tepeyac.

The uncle then revealed that it was indeed at that same moment he was suddenly restored to health, when she appeared in much the same way as she had appeared to his nephew. She related too that she had sent Juan Diego to see the bishop in Mexico City. At the same time, the Lady told Juan Bernardino that as soon as he saw the bishop he must reveal to him the miraculous manner in which she had effected his cure and that he should convey to him the proper name for her blessed Image, The Perfect Virgin Holy Mary of Guadalupe.

Then they took Juan Bernardino before the bishop so he might speak to him and give his testimony. Both Juan Bernardino and his nephew stayed at the bishop's residence several days, until the chapel of the little Queen of Tepeyac was erected where she revealed herself to Juan Diego. The Reverend Bishop had the holy Image of the beloved heavenly Maiden transferred from the oratory to the main church, so that all the people could see and admire it. Absolutely, the whole city came to see and admire her precious Image and pray before it. They marveled at the miraculous way it had appeared, since absolutely no one on earth could have painted her beloved Image." (231)

Some things are to be noted here. It is obvious that Juan Diego was not a Spaniard, but of a radically different culture and psychology. Juan Diego was a Nahuatl Indian who in almost certainly did not speak Spanish, as in his psychology there is not the slightest trace of Hispanization. What Juan Diego's original name was we do not know; Juan Diego is his baptismal name. Though

(1955)

obviously at least a nominal Catholic, Juan Diego remained a Nahuatl, totally unhispanized. Note that the account above was also written in Nahuatl by a Nahuatl Amerindian.

No Spaniard would ever refer to the Virgin Mary as "My little girl", "My littlest Daughter", "little Maiden", etcetera. To a Spaniard, the above betrays a irreverence and a lack of respect bordering on sacrilege and blasphemy. Little do I know of the Nahuatl culture and psychology, but it is perfectly obvious that Juan Diego was not a Spaniard, neither by culture nor by psychology. In other words I may not be qualified to judge if or not the above is typical of Nahuatl culture and psychology, but I can most certainly affirm that they do not represent Spanish culture and psychology. As I once said:

"I cannot say if what is written here is in Turkish, a language of which I know virtually nothing, but I can most certainly affirm that it is not written in English nor in Spanish."

What Monsignor Angel M. Garibay is most interesting in this respect:

"The first apparition of Mary (Our Lady of Guadalupe) is on the frosty morning of December 9, 1531, Juan Diego, the Indian, is passing at the foot of Tepeyac Hill. Suddenly the hill is enveloped in rays of light. The air is filled with song and music. He halts in his steps, he looks, he listens, and hears an order from above to climb up. He sees Mary and Mary tells him:

(1956)

**"Know for certain, littlest of my sons, that I am the perfect and perpetual Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God through Whom everything lives, the Lord of all things near and far, the Master of heaven and earth."**

This is the first part of Mary's declaration. She spoke in Juan Diego's language (Nahuatl) and her words sounded like music.

***"Maxicmatti, ma huel yuh ye in moyollo, noxocoyouh: Ca nehuatl in nicensicacemicac ixpochtli Santa Maria, in inantzin in huel nelli teotl Dios, in ipalnemohuani, in teyocoyani, in tloque nahuaque, in ilhuicahua, in tlalticpaque."***

In this manner she introduced herself to the Indian as the Mother of God. In the second part she tells him what she wants:

**"I wish and intensely desire that in this place my sanctuary be erected. Here, I will demonstrate, I will exhibit, I will give all my love, my compassion, my help and my protection to the people. I am your merciful Mother. The merciful Mother of all of you who live united in this land, and of all mankind, of all of those who love me. Here I will hear their weeping, their sorrow, and will remedy and alleviate all their multiple sufferings, necessities and misfortunes."**

It is necessary to make an analysis of each word, of each sentence. The Mexican (Nahuatl) language in its abundant ancient literary productions manifests two styles. One has a tendency towards parallelism; a surprising parallelism because of its similarity to Hebrew poetry. It is a phenomenon that we find in the ancient poetry of all parts of the world from that of the Hindus to that of the Finns (and, the author might have added in various, totally unrelated linguistic families: e.g. Semitic [Hebrew], Indo-European [Sanskrit], Uralic or Ural-Altaiic [Finnish] and Uto-Aztecan [Nahuatl]). The other literary phenomenon is the abundance and profusion of expressions to elaborate one single thought (in other words, *paraphrasis*).

(1957)

The first act of the Guadalupan revelation consists

of three parts: Mary asks, Mary promises, Mary affirms. With insistence she pleads for a sanctuary: "*Huel nicnequi, cenca niquelehuia.*" The purpose of the sanctuary was not to be entirely for veneration; it was also to have a social function. The promises of what she will do in that sanctuary she makes known in three short sentences: she will show, she will make apparent, or literally speaking, raise to the surface and give. "*In oncan nicnextiz, nicpentlazaz, nictemacaz.*"

Give what? She proceeds according to the Mexican custom using a series of words that reveal the meaning of these verbs:

**"My love to the people: *notetlazotlaliz.*"**

**"My compassion: *noteicnoittaliz.*"**

**"My help: *notepalehuiliz.*"**

**"My protection: *notemanahuiliz.*"**

Four activities essentially maternal: to love, to have compassion, to aid, to defend. Can anything more be added to the offices of a mother? If she promises to give these things, it means that she is promising to be a mother and show herself a mother. She says it with precision. Then comes the affirmative part of Mary's words which are the most important:

I. "*I am your merciful Mother.*" It is a solemn declaration of motherhood. Much more is contained in the Nahuatl words than we quote. In accordance with the general belief that Mary is *Mater misericordiae, Virgo Clemens*, according to the teaching of the Church. The mercies of a mother, the clemency of a virgin, the two glories which gird the forehead of the daughters of Eve, never united in harmonious assembly except in Mary.

II. Then she points out to whom she wants to show herself a Mother. Yours, that is to say, Juan Diego's. He comes first, not for his merits but because of his election by Mary. Like St. John on Calvary, Juan Diego on Tepeyac represents humanity.

III. The conditions which she sets forth are really a series of norms of Christian life in its highest spirituality:

(1958)

**They must love her: *notetlazotlachahuan.***

**They must cry to her: *notech motzatzilia***

**They must seek her: *nechtemoa***

**They must have confidence in her: *notech motemachilia***

To love, to call upon, to seek and to confide. Is there any other way for man to show his appreciation for Mary, and is there any other way for a mother to express her love for her children?

IV. In the fourth place comes the promise of what she wants to do: To listen to their cries of sorrow and distress: *Niquincaquiliz in inchoquiz, in intlaocol*. Remedy their sufferings: *nicyectiliznicyectliliz nicpatiz*. Remedy their sufferings: *nicyectiliznicyectliliz nicpatiz*. Two verbs which in Nahuatl style express the two phases of a helpful activity: first by rectifying, then by curing or remedying.

V. That which is to be cured and which is to be remedied is expressed in the exuberant manner of the language in three terms: the need for something: *in netoliniziz*; anguish or affliction: *intonehuiz*; the burn, literally, or the cautery of pain, *chichiinaquiliz*. This is the content, in compressed terms, of the first part of the message of Tepeyac. In it is expressed:

The person who exercises the office.  
The personal object to whom she extends her services.  
The matter in which she manifests herself.  
The evils she wishes to remedy.

The expression, all of it, speaks of the functions of a mother for all, to remedy all kinds of misfortune. It is in a different form, a kind of commentary on the supplication of a child's love for the mother.

*Slove vincla reis*, - Loose the bonds of the condemned.  
*Profer lumen caecis* - Give light to the blind.  
*Mala nostra pelle*, - Ward off our evils.  
*Bona cuncta posce* - Ask for us of every good [for us].

(1959)

[I will make only one more reflection before closing this part of my study. It could be extended much more. The person who wrote the



narrative in the language of the (Nahuatl) Indians with such a harmony of style and expression yet with such deep theological meaning would have had to be a genius. That was impossible for the people of the sixteenth century, Indian or Spanish. The precision of terms, the arrangement of themes, the perfect inclusion of all the aspects presupposes that the person who spoke these words so that they would be put into writing, knew what he (or rather "she") was saying. It is another proof that they were not invented, but transcribed. It is another indication that the one who is speaking is she who could well be called teacher par excellence of the deepest theology. ... If any Spaniard or Indian of the sixteenth century had reached such dogmatic heights, his name would have become famous. But if we cannot find such a brilliant theologian, we may be sure that it was Mary who spoke these words and revealed herself to us in this way.]

The second text which I am going to analyze is the one we find in the narrative of the final apparition. It was the twelfth of December, 1531. Juan Diego was hurrying to bring a confessor to his uncle who was dying. He tried to hide from Mary and took a new path, sure that the Blessed Virgin would not see him. But she came to meet him and asked him why he was going that

(1960)

way. He excused himself, and filled with the sorrow of his uncle's suffering he entreated her to permit him to proceed on his way to bring a confessor to his relative. This is when she made a new declaration in which we find the content of the message in its greatest precision.

I will translate it literally into our language

(Spanish):

Hear and let it penetrate into your heart, my dear little son; let nothing discourage you, norhing depress you. Let nothing alter your heart, or your countenance. Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else that you need? Do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain. Let not the illness of your uncle afflict you, because he is not going to die now of what he has in himself. Be sure that he will get well.

The text sounds like a poem. It is beautiful and (in) perfect conformity with the poetic style of the Mexican language of the prehispanic period (Nahuatl). But its content is much richer than its poetic beauty. We will analyze each statement point by point, in order to discover the hidden lessons which they enclose. After an introductory phrase, Mary takes three steps in her declaration. The solemn insistence that the Indian fix his mind on what she is saying indicates the seriousness of what she is about to say:

He must fear nothing, he must let nothing discourage him, he is not alone in the world nor without help. Of whatever evils there are he must fear none. Then she tells him why his soul must be free from fear. This is the most important part of the whole message.

She expounds a theme, she unrolls it in three metaphors, each more brilliant and precise than the preceding one. It is the exalted style we find in hundreds of poems and speeches in the Mexican language. Let us scrutinize this statement:

(1961)

(a). A complete affirhmatation of herMotherhood. "*Cuix amo nican; nicañ nimonantzín.*" 'Am I not here? I am your Mother."

(b). "*Ciux amo nocehualloñtlan necauhyoñtlan in ticañ?*" You are under my shadow, under my protection."

In the imagery of the Nahuas, the chief, the prince, the father, were like the ahuehuete {cypress) or like the ceiba (silk cotton tree). "*In Pochotl in*

*Ahuehuetl*" is the phrase we find constantly in the speeches of the Aztecs which were made before their kings and rulers. It is a shade that refreshes. It is a shelter and protection.

Mary compares herself to a tree with luxuriant foliage that protects from the heat of the sun or from rain and gives shelter and joy to whoever takes refuge under its branches. It is an affirmation that she, as a Mother, gives what mothers give: protection, tenderness and kindness that is never exhausted.

(c). "*Ciux amo nehuatl in nimopaccayeliz.*" "I am your fountain of life."

These words must be analyzed further. The Nahuatl roots of the principal word contain a concept of well-being, contentment and happiness almost to the letter. "*Pacc*" stands for tranquil, peaceful and "*yel*" contains the concept of existence, of living in some place. It affirms that the fountain, cause or origin of the good existence, of persistence and being in peace, is Mary. Mary is the fountain of our life in the sense that we all know: Mother of the One Who is life and Who condescended to take His human form from her. He is the fountain of grace, which is the communication of Divine Life to the soul. The purely abstract concept of this supernatural reality in the imaginative phrase becomes concrete, it becomes palpable. Mary affirms that she is the life of the soul in all its joyous perfection.

(d). The third picture is obviously the sweetest and the most profound. "*Ciux amo nocuexanco, no mamalhuazco in ticah?*" Are you not in the fold of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms?"

This is a perfect picture from the family life with which the Indian was familiar, and which we continue to see even today. It is the best expression of motherhood in its complex and varied reality.

(1962)

*Cuexantli* means the fold made in the shawl or mantle of a woman, or in a man's tilma or ayate when it is wrapped around them to hold something. In this fold or hollow is carried whatever is most cherished or precious. In the hollow of their mantles women carry their youngest; it is a portable crib. A Mexican mother carries her baby in the warm hollow of her *reboso*.

The other picture is even more beautiful. *Mamalhuaztli* was the instrument of striking fire. Two

sticks were crossed and rubbed against each other. They produce the spark that ignited the flame. From this, the Aztecs derived the most suggestive symbol, the *nahui olin*: the cross which has confused some historians and which is only the symbol of new born life, as fire is created from the friction of two pieces of wood. But it also signifies the manner in which a mother crosses her arms when she presses her child to her heart.

Mary declared that Juan Diego and all who are personified in him, lie in the warm cavity of her mantle and in the crossing of her arms.

To shelter and protect! Is there any better way of expressing the functions of a mother? In this form, with these examples, part poetical and part metaphysical, the Queen of Heaven told Juan Diego, the Mexican nation, the world, that she is the one who protects and assists; that it is she who gives peace and life; that it is she who with motherly tenderness carries the child in her arms, presses it to her heart and quiets and defends it. Greater precision is impossible; greater beauty cannot be conceived.

We will make a short summary in which we will define the meaning of Mary's words in accordance with the historical narrative.

(1). Mary declares that she is the Mother of all humanity as she is the Mother of God. The mention of both functions and of both dignities, one after the other, demonstrates the importance which she gives to her words.

(2). She states that she is the Universal Mother and she enumerates the various categories of persons whom she includes in her sphere of action without excluding anyone.

(1963)

(3). She makes known what is the object of her maternal activity: to remove bad things and to bring the good things nearer.

(4). With brilliant examples, both poetic and instructive, she informs us that she is our shelter, our fountain of grace, tenderness and maternal compassion.

(5). She makes it known definitely that she is the Universal Mother who gives life, the true life that her Divine Son brought into the world.

In conclusion, we may positively say that Mary in her manifestations at Tepeyac declared herself Mother of

Grace for the entire world, fountain of supernatural health, and help in the things of this world.

Nothing is more appropriate, in order to conclude my reflections, than to insert the final part of the short narrative to which I referred in the beginning of this article, especially since it is almost unknown. I will give it in our language as literally as possible.

"This is the image of the Queen." *In tlatocacihuapilli*. Through a miracle it was stamped on the mantle of the humble man; and her Image remains until today (16<sup>th</sup> century). All the inhabitants of the neighborhood come to venerate her and to pray, and that Mother, with her great mercy aids them and gives them what they ask for. *Auh in yehuantzin in ica ihuey tetlaocoliliz Nanyotzin oncan quinmopalehuilia, quinmomaquilia in tlein quimitlanililia.*

Truly, to those who invoke her as advocate, who have devotion to her, she makes herself a refuge, she, the Mother of God. "She truly helps and shows compassion to all who love her, as if they were under her shadow and under her protection. . . ." (232)

I feel that it is necessary to make some comments concerning that part of the text which I have set apart and enclosed in square brackets ([...]). The late Monsignor Angel M. Garibay was one of the Canons of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in

(1964)

Mexico City. He was also a Guadalupan historian and Professor of Nahuatl at the University of Mexico. When reading the above essay I was amazed at the learning of Monsignor Garibay; the only thing I know concerning the Nahuatl language is that it is a member of the Uto-Aztecan language family.

However, when dealing with material obviously outside his

field of specialization, Monsignor Garibay stumbles a bit; it seems as though he was influenced by that grotesque, idiotic and vulgar superstition known as "Progress" (with a capital "P"), or what Alain Danielou calls "the evolutionist prejudice", according to which whatever is new is *a priori* superior to that which went before, which is also sheer idiocy if one reflects even for a moment; as someone said: "there is a provincialism of time as well as place", and what Alain Danielou calls

"the evolutionist prejudice" is a perfect example of "provincialism of time".

Many centuries before the sixteenth century, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology and philosophy, also Islamic theology and philosophy, both Sunni and Shi'a, and, for that matter, Hindu philosophy and theology, had reached very high levels indeed. So,

(1965)

Monsignor Garibay was badly mistaken in saying that no one in 1531 would have been capable of composing or redacting the words of Our Lady of Guadalupe. However, it is one thing to say that in Salamanca, Rome, Florence, Mt. Athos, Okhrida, (or *Ohrid*), Moscow, Cairo, Qum, Isfahan, Meshed, Benares (or *Varanasi*) and perhaps other places were people who would have found no great difficulty

whatever in composing a theological tract such as is expressed by the words of Our Lady of Guadalupe, though in Spanish, Latin, Italian, Greek, Church Slavonic, Syriac, Arabic, Persian or Sanskrit, but not, of course, in Nahuatl. However, it would be quite another thing to affirm that there was anyone in Mexico at the time who would have been capable of such a thing; in fact, the idea is ludicrous. Bishop Zumarraga was obviously a man of some learning; however, there is nothing, absolutely nothing which indicates that the good bishop had the talent or the theological acumen to compose such a tract in any language.

To summarize, though Monsignor Garibay was mistaken in affirming that there was no one in the world in the sixteenth century capable of composing a theological tract such as the words

(1966)

of Our Lady of Guadalupe, it is perfectly true that there was no one in Mexico in 1531 who was capable of composing anything remotely like it. In this sense, the words of Our Lady of Guadalupe are indeed a miracle.

It is not only the words of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego which constitute a miracle. Another miracle is the tilma of

Juan Diego. Says Janet Barber:

"Blessed Juan Diego's ancient, but ever new tilma, with its divinely beautiful Image is a life-giving source which from the very moment of the Image's miraculous appearance has been gradually revealing its meanings. The *Nican Mopohua* tells us that as the different kinds of precious flowers fell to the floor in the bishop's house, the Image of the Perfect Virgin, Holy Mary, Mother of God, "suddenly appeared" on the Indian's tilma. Quiroz says of that moment, "Time fell on its knees before the Indian's tilma." Weeping, bishop-elect Fray Juan Zumarraga and his companions also fell to their knees on that thrilling morning of December 12, 1531.

And every day of the Miracle's continuance has also been mysterious and thrilling, as an examination of the known facts easily shows. The tilma itself had been woven of maguey fibers, on a back-strap loom in two separate panels which were loosely together with maguey thread. The seam goes down the left side of Our Lady's head, barely touching her skin where her mantle, tunic, and neck meet. It touches the cotton cuffs of her left sleeve, neatly goes down the middle of the mantle-fold under her arm, and proceeds straight down through the flowers. That the seam divides the Image in half without affecting the centered portrait in any important way, is in human terms a *tour de force*. On unretouched photographs, the loss of pigment along the seam on the side of her head is very noticeable.

(1967)

The Image hung for 116 years without any glass to protect it from the strong nitrous fumes given off by Lake Texcoco and from the swords, medals, rosaries, pictures, lips and hands which were constantly touched to it, to say nothing of the soot and heat from the many candles that burned at all hours! The glass was sometimes removed for long periods for a more direct veneration by those who loved her. The two pairs of horizontal lines crossing the Image at the level of her tunic cuffs and below her knees are the result of crosspieces of the wooden frame which held the Image for several hundred years.

In an experiment in the 1780s, Dr. Jose Ignacio Bartolache had copies made on maguey-fiber tilmas woven



by the finest Indian weavers and painted by the leading copyists of the day. They were then placed in various buildings at Tepeyac, so as to be subject to the same climatic conditions as the Image itself had been. After seven years, their colors had changed and deteriorated; the paint and gold work were falling off, and the maguey fibers were disintegrating. The almost perfect preservation for 465 years of Juan Diego's fragile tilma and the coloring on it, is clearly miraculous. The original size of the tilma is a matter of question, because toward 1770 it was cut to make it fit into the frame preceding the present one. The height of Our Lady herself, from her mantle to the tip of her right slipper, is some four feet nine inches.

The university professors who examined the Image in 1666, reported that silver had been added to the original moon. It has turned black and is flaking off. The sash seems to have been repainted and possibly elaborated upon, because it too is flaking, and the tunic beneath it is visible at those points. In the first written description we have of the Image, the sash and the moon were reported to be, in Nahautl, *camo paltic*, "mulberry (*morado*), or a dark color." The professors in 1666, also said that the gold had been added to the rays surrounding the Image and was already deteriorating. The rays and their background show considerable damage and discoloration where cherubim had been earlier added and later removed. It is

(1968)

probable that the original rays and aureole were very bright. Fifteen rays at the bottom of the Virgin's right side (our left) seem in perfect condition.

The bottom of the Image is problematical. The lowest part of the mantle and the entire "Aztec fold" of the tunic are not of the same colors as the rest of the mantle and tunic, and the angel has been criticized as not being of the extraordinary artistry that Our Lady shows. It has been suggested that all these were "add-ons" at some unknown time. However, if this were the case, one would expect the quality of the gold flowers on that part of the tunic to be different, but they seem not to be. I assume with others, that because of all the friction endured by the bottom part of the Image until 1647, touchups (not add-ons) were eventually done. The

gold flowers of that part of the tunic may not have needed any "restoration", because, according to artists whose competence and integrity cannot be doubted, the gold gives the appearance of having been put on the maguey threads before the tilma was woven! This is all the more remarkable, when we consider that the maguey threads are composed of twisted fibers.

Judy Brant Smith's infrared photos show that, while none of the rest of the Virgin's figure evidences brush strokes on the "Aztec fold", it has been suggested that an examination of the reverse side of the tilma might supply some answers to these riddles. Careful near-ultraviolet and near-infrared photographs have been made of the back of the tilma; but the results of their analyses seem not to have been published yet.

In 1666, the university professors and the chairman of the ecclesiastical commission, Dr Francisco de Siles, did examine the back of the Image, and to their surprise, found very subtle, fine greens, "soaked up by the material and incorporated into it." These colors are nowhere to be found on the front of the tilma; which they thought was quite surprising in view of the porosity of the maguey fibers. Fr. Francisco de Florencia, Dr. Siles, and others, examined the back of the Image on another occasion. Father Florencia reported that they found "large color

(1969)

stains" resembling the juice squeezed from various flowers and their leaves: green, white, dark purple, pink, blue, yellow; but all the colors were discreet, not blended with one another. In trying to imagine how such an effect could have occurred, they agreed that it was as if the picture had been stamped on the fabric by putting Juan Diego's flowers in a press, and what was left over from the Image soaked through to the other side, resulting in the "clear confusion" of colors that they saw. Until the Papal Coronation in 1895, there seem to have been very few reproductions of the Image that do not show Our Lady wearing a crown. However, the newly publicized Codex 1548, possibly the oldest reproduction that we have, shows her without a crown. It seems inconceivable that a copyist would presume to paint in a crown if the Image did not originally have one. Before the Image was removed from the Basilica for the renovation there was a crown. When it was returned

in 1895 the crown had disappeared. Opinions varied in regarding what might have happened. Don Alfonso Marcue, for many years the official photographer of the Basilica, says that the crown still exists, but it is painted over. He is confident that the crown will eventually reappear. Regardless of add on or not, it is the face that attracts admiration and wonder.

There is a wonderful softness about the Guadalupan Image, especially the face, which even the finest copyists could not capture, in part because of the Divine Artist's economy of means, to such an extent that lack of pigmentation and flaws in the weave are used to lovely effect. Dr. Philip Callahan, who had the opportunity to study the color of the face from different distances was surprised to find, that viewed close-up, her complexion is whitish gray, that at a little more than three feet, it is gray-green, and farther than that, it takes on an (American) Indian or *mestiza* (mixed white-Amerindian) hue. Others report that at about ten feet, the colors of the Image are strong and well delineated; but as one draws nearer, they fade, to be almost lost when seen through a strong magnifying glass. This phenomenon helps explain the extraordinary softness of Our Lady's face.

(1970)

The Guadalupan face is soft not only in technique. It has been said, "She scarcely begins a smile, which gives her face a pleasant expression of kindness, as if inspiring confidence in those who come closer. She gazes softly, sure of herself, peaceful and serene as the message of protection and presence which she came to give us." Her eyes are cast down. "Peaceful, pleasant, perfectly formed and the color of bee's honey (*far more likely similar or, even more likely, identical to that undefinable, undescribable eye color called in Spain, particularly in Andalusia, "ojos del color del vino de Jerez, que con frecuencia parecen salpicados de oro", i.e., "eyes the color of Sherry wine which frequently appear to contain gold flecks"; the most precise description or definition which I can give is the color of Williams Humbert Dry Sack Sherry, either Medio Seco (medium dry) or Oloroso (medium sweet and possessing a delicious bouquet, or as some wine experts call it, nose); the Spanish word Oloroso (from the Spanish word olor, cognate with the English word "odor")*

literally means **odorous, aromatic** or **fragrant**). Pour the **Williams Humbert Dry Sack Sherry** into a small liquor glass, hold the glass up to the light, then imagine the wine in the liquor glass containing flecks of gold, and you have what is meant by "**ojos de color del vino de Jerez que con frecuencia parecen salpicados de oro**", an eye color which I have noted is particularly common among Andalusian women and among white-skinned or 'wheat colored' high-caste Hindu women in north India; (I do not recall seeing "honey colored eyes" anywhere else in Spain save Andalusia, nor anywhere else in India except the North, and in north India, only among high-caste Hindu women). they gaze with a mother's attention, with a expression of infinite tenderness and limitless mercy." (Yes, in Andalusia there is a legend according to which the color of **Williams Humbert Dry Sack Sherry** was inspired by the color of the eyes of some Andalusian women. As was mentioned before, there is the 14<sup>th</sup> century Spanish song *Tres Morillas de Jaen* [Three Morisca Maids of Jaen]. During my years at the University of Granada (Spain), three beautiful girls from Jaen broke my

(1971)

heart; of course I call them my *Tres Morillas de Jaen*. One of my *Tres Morillas de Jaen* had Sherry-colored eyes with gold flecks in them. Only non-Andalusians believe that all Andalusian women have eyes "like the reaven's wing" or "like two windows opening onto the night". As is said in the dialect of western Andalusia: "**viva er vino de Jereh'** " [long live the wine of Jerez (or Sherry)]. **Andalusia, cuanto te quiero!** [Andalusia, how much I love you!] [Note: theories differ as to the origin of the name **Dry Sack**; some believe that it comes from the French **sec**, Spanish **seco**, both of which mean "dry", [in which case **Dry Sack** would be a redundancy, in effect saying: **Dry Dry**] which would apply to **Medio Seco**, but not to **Oloroso**, while others believe that it simply comes from the dry burlap sack in which bottles of it are sold to this day. Interestingly, the **Medio Seco** is inevitably sold with the bottle inside a dry burlap sack, while **Oloroso** is frequently sold without the burlap sack. Draw your own conclusion.]

I cannot resist treating the reader to the words of *Tres Morillas de Jaen*; note that the Spanish is that of

the 14<sup>th</sup> century, not identical to that of the present time, as the English of Chaucer, also of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, is not identical to that of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

*Tres Morillas me enamoran  
en Jaen  
Aixa, Fatima y Marien*

*Tres Morillas tan lozanas  
Iban a coger manzanas  
Y hallabanlas ya cogidas  
en Jaen  
Aixa, Fatima y Marien*

*Tres morillas tan garridas  
Iban a coger olivas  
Y hallabanlas ya cogidas  
en Jaen  
Aixa, Fatima y Marien*

(1972)

*Hallabanlas ya cogidas  
Se volvieron desmaidadas  
Las colores perdidas  
en Jaen  
Aixa, Fatima y Marien*

*Senoritas quienes sois  
Que mi vida destrozais  
Cristianas que eramos Moras  
en Jaem  
Aixa, Fatima y Marien.*

*I love three Morisca maids  
In Jaen  
Aisha, Fatima y Marien*

*Three Morisca maids so lovely  
Went to to pick apples  
And found them already picked  
In Jaen  
Aisha, Fatima y Marien*

*Three Morisca maids so attractive*

Went to pick olives  
And found them already picked  
    In Jaen  
Aisha, Fatima y Marien

Found them already picked  
They became dismayed  
Their faces turned pale  
    In Jaen  
Aisha, Fatima y Marien

Young ladies who are you  
Who are destroying my life?  
We are Christian girls who once were Muslims  
    In Jaen  
Aisha, Fatima y Marien

(1973)

Miguel Cabrera, the great eighteenth-century Zapotec (note: the Zapotecs are a group of Mexican Amerindians who live in the Oaxaca region: they speak a language of the Macro-Otomanguean family, totally unrelated to the Uto-Aztecan family, and therefore unrelated to Nahuatl: the word zapotec is not native to their language, but comes from the Nahuatl word *sapotecatl*, which means 'people of the zapote', a tree found in the Oaxaca region; in their own tongue, the Zapotecs call themselves *Ben 'Zaa*, which means "cloud people") artist who painted more copies of the Image than any of his colleagues, was asked to examine the Image very carefully in 1751 and submit a report to the ecclesiastical commission. He and his fellow artists agreed that the Image seems to have been executed using four different types of media, a thing to their knowledge never before attempted, and especially difficult because of the total lack of sizing or other preparation of the tilma for receiving paint.

However, Dr. Philip S. Callahan, a biophysicist who is very familiar with the composition and properties of artists' paints, has been unable to identify the nature of the colorings used in the Image. In 1936, Dr. Richard Kuhn, a German chemist who later won the Nobel Prize in his field, found on analyzing a red and a yellow fiber

from the tilma, that the colorings were neither animal, vegetable, nor mineral. Synthetic dyes were first derived in 1850 (to the chagrin, fury and lamentations of purists of Celtic plaids or tartans and Persian carpets), so that their presence on the tilma would be completely anomalous, to, to say the least. Dr. Charles J. Wahlig has reported that in 1963, the management of Kodak of Mexico found the constitution of the Image to resemble a photographic film on the surface of the tilma. This could explain both its lack of apparent brush strokes, and the fact that the front surface of the tilma is as smooth as silk, while the back is as rough as anything wove of cactus fiber would be. The heavenly process may have anticipated that of the Polaroid Land camera, which develops its image upon exposure to light!

In 1778, a considerable amount of nitric acid was spilled on the Image while its new frame was being polished. The workman fled in terror, expecting to have

(1974)

seriously damaged his country's most treasured possession; but to everyone's astonishment, only slight stains appeared, which can still be seen in the upper right corner. In 1921, the explosion of a powerful bomb hidden in a bouquet of flowers on the high altar under the Image, bent a large bronze crucifix like a bow, but Our Lady's glass was not even cracked. The Image even rejects insects and dust. Fr. Mario Rojas has told me that according to LaValle, no matter what the surrounding temperature is, the Image itself remains at an even 36.5 degrees C., or 98.6 degrees F., the normal human body temperature.

We regularly come upon the belief that Mary of Guadalupe appeared as an (Amer)Indian maiden and that she is dressed like an (Amer)Indian princess. Pictures in the codices have failed to support this idea, and no documentation seems to be offered by those who hold the belief (like true Stalinists, they obviously believe that what is politically correct can do without proof, even if all evidence is against it). Over their upper bodies, (Amer)Indian women both noble and of the ordinary people, wore various styles of the *quechquemitl*, a triangular or rounded blouse-like garment. On their lower bodies, without exception, they wore the *cueitl*, a wrap-around skirt, sometimes sewn together at the end of

the wrap-around. There are ample and beautiful pictures in the codices of women wearing these garments, and glowing descriptions of them in account after account of pre-Cortesian (pre-Spanish) culture. It is clear that Mary of Guadalupe is not wearing such garments.

On the other hand, Fray Francisco de Guadalupe Mojica, O.F.M., has noticed that even today in the Holy Land, many women wear their mantle over their tunics just as Mary does in her Guadalupan Image. Their hair is parted in the middle and shows under the mantle. In winter, like Mary of Guadalupe, they wear two tunics, an inner one of white linen and an outer one of heavy cloth lined with fur. This tunic is so long that they have to lift it in front as they walk. They use a belt to hold the tunics in, and babouches, or slippers, on their feet, just like Mary of Guadalupe's. Father Jose

(1975)

notes that these garments were worn two thousand years ago, when Mary of Nazareth walked in Palestine. He believes that the Guadalupan Image is an actual portrait of Holy Mary, the Mother of God. I believe that the face of Mary of Guadalupe is the one that Jesus himself saw as he lay in Mary's arms and as he grew from childhood to adolescence in Nazareth."(233)

Many years ago I saw a quite forgettable film; I do not recall its name, nor the names of the protagonists. However, I do recall one scene from it.

In said film a lady is giving a catechism class. One of the children asks:

"Was Jesus black or white?"

The instructor replies with the usual evasions about how it does not matter if Jesus was black or white.

Exasperated at this dishonest attempt to evade the question, the child then asked:



"Jesus was a real person who really lived wasn't he?"

The instructor replied: "Of course."

To this the child replied:

"Since Jesus was a real person who really lived, was he black or white?"

To which the instructor had no alternative but to reply:

"White".

(1976)

Ms. Barber gives another example of this sort of politically correct lie and deception, referring to those who say that the Virgin of Guadalupe is "an (Amer)Indian maiden, dressed like an Aztec princess". Fray Francisco has pointed out that as in the Image the Virgin of Guadalupe is dressed in the typical cold weather garb of a woman of first century Palestine, which garb bears not even the remotest resemblance to the typical Aztec garb. Also, the features of the Virgin of Guadalupe as she appears on the Image are totally Caucasian or Caucasoid, and, as has been noted above, she possesses eyes of a color found only among people of Caucasian or Caucasoid race, utterly unknown among Amerindians.

So, not being a Stalinist, the Virgin of Guadalupe makes no attempt to be politically correct; she preferred to be honest. In effect, she said:

"I will not deceive you; I myself am white, and do not pretend to be anything else. However, I believe that I have shown that I consider Amerindians as well as whites to be my children."

The truth is that the Image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is very much an icon. Says Dom Columban Hawkins, O.C.S.O.:

(1977)

"The Virgin (of Guadalupe) is one of us, the (Amer)Indians! Our Pure Mother! Our Sovereign Lady! She is one of us!". Thus cried the Aztec Indians who were first privileged to behold the miraculous painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Yet, strangely enough, when a Russian Orthodox priest, Fr. A. Ostrapovim, Dean of the Chair of Church Archaeology in Moscow, and unacquainted with the history of Our Lady of Guadalupe, was presented with a copy of this picture for appraisal, he replied that it is an icon, definitely of the Byzantine type and presumably of Eastern-Asiatic origin. It was his opinion that the painter of this Icon deviated from the very severe canons of icon painting and introduced much of himself into it.

Unquestionably, the Sacred Image preserved in the Basilica of Guadalupe is symbolic, employing the symbols of Christian iconography in the traditional style. It is, of course, a matter of conjecture what these meant to Juan Diego and his people. In any case, what they saw was a most beautiful Lady, nobly clad, enveloped by the rays of the sun and standing on the moon, with stars adorning her mantle and clouds dispersing at her approach. Yet she, with folded hands, acknowledges One greater than herself. Hence, these elements need no longer be feared, nor worshipped as gods. This sweet, gentle maiden is one of ourselves, yet greater than all, except God; but even over Him she has an influence, that of a Mother. Perhaps this is what the (Amer)Indians, enlightened by Our Lady's words to Juan Diego, saw in the picture.

Christian iconography is the science pertaining to

representative ecclesiastical art and its visual symbols as established by the Catholic (and Orthodox) Church. It describes the spiritual sentiments which our ancestors expressed in the language of symbols in whatever medium. *Icon* has reference traditionally to religious painting, especially that of the East; though originally it meant any image. Before printing came of age, Christian iconography was considered the "Bible of the Poor". Symbols represented truths of religious belief, and served to instruct the illiterate in the Faith and to lift up their hearts in worship. Of itself, a symbol cannot produce grace; but it can be a

(1978)

channel of grace inducing us to respond to the saving truths represented. For example, A lamb was always a lamb, but in Christian iconography it is the symbol of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. The Eastern (Orthodox) Church has been most faithful to the symbolic language of Christian iconography. In fact, an icon is frequently given an imprimatur to show that its symbolism is free from doctrinal error.

To the extent that an icon expresses in color and form a mystic meaning, to that extent it is a great icon. An icon artist is qualified not only because he follows exactly the ancient norms of icon painting, but especially because of his own personal spiritual depth and vision. If he is to express a mystery, an artist must be graced with contemplative insight.

Now, the artist of the Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is none other than the Mother of God, and in it she shows herself to be the "icon painter" par excellence. The main purpose of an icon is to express a mystery of the liturgy, and to draw one towards a practical and worshipful understanding of that truth in the form of a festal celebration. What is the mystery in the case of the painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe? Christian iconography has traditional styles or types to express certain mysteries. Clearly, in the miraculous painting of Guadalupe, it is the type taken from the Apocalypse of St. John: "a great sign appeared in the heavens, a woman clothed with the sun. ..." In iconography, this type of the woman clothed with the sun represents either the Immaculate Conception or the

Assumption. Since she first appeared on December 9<sup>th</sup>, the day on which the whole Church, East and West, at that time celebrated the feast of the "Holy Conception of Mary," it is evident that the picture is of the Immaculate Conception and not of the Assumption. In the West, the feast of the Immaculate Conception has been transferred to December 8<sup>th</sup>, while the Eastern (Orthodox) Church continues to celebrate on December 9<sup>th</sup>.

(1979)

In this Image then, effected on Juan Diego's coarse tilma, Our Lady - the masterpiece of God, the unspotted mirror of His majesty and image of His goodness - wishes to reveal herself in the traditional religious symbols of iconography. At Lourdes she told Ste. Bernadette that she was the Immaculate Conception. This, we may affirm, she expressed herself at Tepeyac using the language of symbols.

Whatever serves to designate the character and position of the person in a painting is called an "attribute". Among the most important of these is the "aureole" or luminous area surrounding the figure. It is simply an extension of the nimbus, which is the radiance usually encircling only the head. Sometimes the aureole surrounds the entire body as a fringe of light. But it may also be composed of many simple or flame-like rays. Or again, as in the Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the rays may be alternately simple and flame-like. In Russian iconography there are many icons using this and other symbols similar to those in the Guadalupe painting.

The aureole is the symbolic mark of supreme power exalted to the highest degree. It is, therefore, an attribute especially characteristic of God, Who is in Himself properly and intrinsically the Center of Omnipotence. The aureole is bestowed upon the Persons of the Godhead and upon the Virgin Mary; though the latter application is rare, unless she is accompanied by her Divine Son, or when alone, in the imagery of the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption. Quite often, the aureole is surrounded by clouds which are but an extended form of the aureole, and they are symbolic of the unseen God. Under Our Lady's feet is the crescent

moon, the symbol of her perpetual virginity. [*Nota bene: the crescent moon as an Islamic symbol was unknown in Muslim Spain, so in 1531 it is most unlikely that anyone in Spain or much less Mexico considered the crescent moon to be a symbol of Islam*]. This symbol, though it is sometimes used in the imagery of the Assumption, is most often and principally found in representations of the Immaculate Conception. Christian iconography does not use the moon to symbolize the powers of darkness.

(1980)

All of the garments of Our Lady are symbolic. In medieval art, blue was the symbol of eternity and of human immortality. It signified divine contemplation and godliness of conversation. For this reason, blue was mainly used in the garments of the High Priest in the Jewish dispensation. Because of the mystic signification of this color, how fitting it is that blue has been traditionally the color of Our Lady's mantle.

Stars, emblematic of heaven, are studded on the mantle of Our Lady of Guadalupe. They are frequently found painted on the domes of Russian Orthodox Churches to typify the canopy of heaven over the faithful. The ceilings of churches too, were generally powdered with stars for the same reason. On Our Lady's mantle, stars have the added significance of her being the Queen of Heaven. Different pointed stars have different meanings. An eight-pointed star, which is found in the painting of Guadalupe, means Holy Baptism and the regeneration-gifts God gave the (Amer)Indians in such profusion through Our Lady. The limbus, or gold border on her mantle on her mantle and on the edge of her robe and embroidered cuffs, signifies her royal dignity.

The rose-colored robe is symbolic of martyrdom for the Faith, and of divine love. It is lined with white ermine, which is the symbol of her purity and honor without stain - purity which regulates all her conduct. The stylized leaf and rosette design on her robe symbolizes paradise, which she enjoys and wishes to share with us. At her waist, her garment is fastened by a "zone" or "cingulum" . This was worn by young unmarried women, and removed only upon their marriage. It is a symbol of perfect chastity, The golden encircled-cross brooch which fastens the neck of her robe, though the smallest of the symbols, it is very

rich in meaning. It signifies that she is sacred, like a holy temple, and protected against all profanation.

The angels too, have their meaning. In the Middle Ages, which was the golden age of symbolism, angels were usually clothed in tunics or ecclesiastical vestments. They were painted with human forms, but as young men to show their strength, and with wings to indicate their speed and unweariedness. In this painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The angel's red,

(1981)

white, and blue feathered wings are emblematic of loyalty, faith and fidelity. His red tunic is a symbol of his love for her whose garments he holds so serenely. His position proclaims that the Ever Virgin Mary has been raised above the angels by her prerogative of the Mother of God.

From this study of the symbols used in the painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we are obviously led to the same conclusion as the Russian Orthodox priest quotes above, that this is definitely an Icon of the Byzantine type, using the recognized symbols of Christian iconography. These symbols reveal to us the traditional spiritual image of Our Lady. They manifest her as the ever-loving, ever-Immaculate, sweet Mother of God and Queen of Heaven and Earth, adorned with all the virtues and exulted above all the angels, clothed with the might and goodness of God, making intercession for us, her children.

It is true that Our Blessed Mother deviated from the very severe canons of Byzantine rules of icon painting, but necessarily so. She wanted to portray herself as she actually is, in her own natural, lovely form and features. Who is not moved to love and trust by this simple beauty of the Mother of God which her miraculous portrait reveals? In the words of {(Pope) Leo XIII, 'Never before has it been granted us on this earth to see so lovely an image; and its loving-kindness moves us to reflect: How beautiful must Mary herself be, in heaven!'

Pope John XXIII has said that, "the best assurance of reconciliation between Orthodox and Catholics is their common devotion to the Mother of God." Let us hope that this Icon, so rich in Christian symbolism, is destined to be the heaven-sent means of effecting unity and peace in the whole world according to Our Lady's promise at Fatima (*place in Portugal which in Muslim*

times was named for Fatima Zahra): 'When my Immaculate Heart triumphs, then the world will have peace.' Thus would be realized in fullest measure what is explored in the Eastern Rite (or Eastern Orthodox Rite) for the blessing of an icon" "O Lord, Our God, send down the grace of the Holy Spirit upon this icon ... bless it and make it holy; grant it the power and strength of miraculous deeds. Make it a spring of recovery and health."

(1982)

Our lady has done her part. She has given us a portrait of herself, rich in the symbolism of the Mother of God. She has told us that she is our Mother and invited us to come to her with trust and love in all our troubles. Today she earnestly calls us to prayer and sacrifice to save souls. Is not her picture a loving summons to all her children to do their part?"(234)

That the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is an icon in the Byzantine tradition there cannot be the slightest doubt. However, said icon has another aspect, which Janet Barber, I.H.M. defines as a "Divine Codex"

"A Codex is a pre-Conquest or early Colonial document, a record composed of pictures, an *amoxth*, painted by (Amer)Indian *tlacuilos*, painter-scribes, on a long strip of fanfolded paper made from maguey fibers or the bark of a wild fig tree. Some codices were done on specially treated deerskin coated with a white pigment. Bright vegetable and mineral inks were used. The art was continued until about 1560, with at least one document containing entries into the early 1600s. All of the material recorded in the codices was of interest to the people as a whole, rather than to an individual. Because of their importance to all the people, the Apparitions of Mary of Guadalupe were recorded in (Amer)Indian codices.

Over the last several decades. Father Mario Rojas Sanchez, of Hidalgo, Mexico, has discovered in Mary's Image precious and profound meanings which have gone unrecognized by Guadalupan scholars for centuries. In short, what can seem to be a fairly static and puzzling picture of the Blessed Virgin is really a codex itself,

an *amoxtli*, printed on maguey cloth, filled with Christian teachings rooted in the (Amer)Indians' own culture. There seems to be no end to the riches contained in the divine Codex. Father continues to find "new" elements in it.

(1983)

Infrared examinations of the Image have led some persons to suppose that the stars on the Guadalupan mantle are add-ons. Father Mario doubted this, and wondered if the stars might not be imaging the constellations of the winter sky of 1531, He shared his hunch with his friend, Dr. Juan Homero Hernandez Illescas, an amateur astronomer who has an observatory on his roof, a Spitz Planetarium, various computer programs which show the positions of the heavenly bodies (including Halley's Comet, overhead at dawn on December 22, 1531) at any time for centuries into the past, and astronomical journals and books and charts published by universities and researchers. The findings and methods of Hernandez and Rojas were published in 1983, to the effect that the stars on Mary's mantle are indeed the ones present over Mexico City just before sunrise on December 12, 1531, the morning of the Winter Solstice. Which occurred that morning at 10:40, probably just when Juan Diego was opening his *tilma* before Bishop Zumarraga. We must remember that the Julian calendar was still in use and had accumulated an error of some ten days in regard to actual sun time. The constellations are represented on her mantle as seen from outside the dome of the heavens, that is, in reverse.

After I had pored over sky charts for weeks in Los Angeles, verifying the two men's identifications of each star, my traveling companion, Eilene Berg, I.H.M., and I were privileged to meet Dr. Hernandez at his home in Mexico City, when he and his wife Dona Gloria showed us his original work on the project. We gasped when he held to the light a sky map corrected for "reverse" anamorphosis and Dona Gloria suddenly placed a photostatic copy of the Image behind it. The correspondences were overwhelming.

As we study the identifications, we must remember that the Nahuatl artists always represented the east at the top of their pictures, the south at the right, the west at the bottom, and the north to the left. We must



also remember that the Divine Tlacuilo showed the stars "backwards", thus reversing north and south. The constellations wheel from east to west, the top of her Image to the bottom. Those at the top are rising. Leo is directly overhead and if it were shown on the tunic,

(1984)

it would be over her womb. (We recall that Revelation 5:5 gives the Lion of Judah as a type of Christ, and that Regulus, the most prominent star in the constellation of Leo, means "Little King"!) The stars at the bottom are about to disappear over the western horizon. As a further confirmation of the accuracy of the two men's work, and to me, of the miraculous origins of the Image, the Great Northern Crown, the Corona Borealis, lies invisibly on her temples; Virgo, the Virgin, on her virginal heart, the Twins, Castor and Pollux, on her knees, and Orion on the angel.

The Nahuatl *tlacuilos* always dated events recorded on their codices. *The Great Tlacuilo dated his Amoxтли also.* We now know the day was that of the Winter Solstice. And the year? Father Mario has found the year, placed exactly where

Luis Becerra Tanco told us in 1675 that the *tlacuilos* dated their documents: "at the foot and the border." The part of Mary's mantle held at its border by the angel is a different color from the rest of the mantle, possibly because it had to be touched up from damage received during the 116 years that the Image was not protected by glass. Although it might have been the same blue-green of the mantle originally, it is now what we could call olive green. The Nahuatl word for

both colors is *matlalli*. Their word for "ten" is *matlactli*. The (Amer)Indians saw "*Yei citlalli ipan matlalli*", "three stars on olive green (or blue)", and because of their associative way of thought, they could easily jump to "*Yei xictlali ipan matlaclli*", "Three placed on ten", which in their system of showing numbers equaled thirteen. According to the Aztec calendar, 1531 was 13 *Acatl*, "Thirteen Reed". Where is the reed? Next to the thirteen, touching Our Lady's foot! Reeds and arrows could be represented similarly, and this reed has a pronounced arrow tip!

The exquisitely formed floral design on the tunic of Mary of Guadalupe has been misunderstood for centuries, and continues so in our own day. Beautiful

copies of the Image reveal that the copyists either could not see the gold work on the tunic or did not realize its importance. Their own flower designs honor

(1985)

Our Lady by their beauty, but they lose much of what the Great Artist is telling us through His own design, utterly divine in its execution and in the precise play of the multiple meanings.

Miguel Cabrera's examination of the Image in 1751 had revealed that the technique used in putting the gold design on the tunic was inexplicable. He hesitated to touch the gold, because it looked so much like the gold dust on butterfly wings that he was afraid that it would come off on his finger. The gold looked as if it had been applied to the (maguey) fibers before they were even twisted together and woven. On touching the lines, he realized that they were concave, as if they had been stamped onto the tunic, although there were no signs of the size or sizing which gold workers used when they stamped gold onto a fabric. To his further astonishment, he found that on both edges of the gold lines there was another line, as perfect and thin as a human hair. He declared that so far as he knew, no human artist could accomplish such lines or would even attempt them on such a surface. Infrared negatives of 1946 confirm the existence of these lines.

Cabrera noted that although the flowers, "of strange design", do not follow the folds of the tunic, the gold seems darker over the sunken parts of the fabric, Some who have studied the Image state that no competent artist would have laid a flat floral design over the folds, and base on this their conjecture that the flowers were a later addition. Others suggest that the flowers are really on an invisible - and perforce narrow! - gauze sheath that the Virgin is wearing, over a tunic so full that it falls in folds.

The solution to the enigma turns out to be very simple: Father Mario was the first to perceive that the flowers are clever adaptations of Nahuatl glyphs. These adaptations easily conveyed Christian truths to the (Amer)Indians without alarming those Spaniards who did not respect the (Amer)Indians as rational human beings capable of being evangelized, (Amer)Indians whom the Mother of God was addressing as her own children. The

glyphs of this divine Codex, this *Amoxtli*, written on maguey cloth rather than maguet paper, could not fall into the folds if they were to be fully understood.

(1986)

Thanks to Holy Mary herself, Father Mario realized that the four-petaled flower over her womb, the only one of its design, was beyond any shadow of doubt the *Nahui Ollin*, "Four Movement", the *quincunx*, the Flower of the Sun, a symbol of plenitude, representing as it did the four compass directions of the world, with heaven and the underworld vertically encountering earth in the center, in the "navel" of the world, or, to use the Nahuatl metaphor, in the navel of the moon, as they called the Valley of Mexico. The *quincunx* was the central organizing concept of their society. Placed over Mary's womb, the four-petaled flower announced that even though their Fifth Sun had died, the Sixth Sun was to be born of Mary of Guadalupe and *had* been born of her; Jesus Christ, the great Sun of Justice announced in Malachi, would be born in them with Baptism.

The *nahui ollin*, the cross-shaped flower, was derived from their crossed sticks, the *mamalhuaztli*, with which they made fire. Because the life of fire is born of the friction, the *mamalhuaztli* are essentially a symbol of new life. New life for those who were on the edge of total despair as a result of the Conquest and the loss of their gods, their culture, family and friends, their sense of self-worth, their freedom, their sustenance; new life and hope in Jesus Christ. As if to emphasize this promise of new life, the *mamalhuaztli* are shown a second time, in the constellation of the same name, that is, in the three stars on the part of her mantle held by the angel, AI Debaran of our Taurus and his two companions.

Father Mario identifies the flower as the Mexican four-petaled jasmine. Its name in Nahuatl is *Huilacapitzxochitl*, i.e., "Flute-Player Flower". Here it is important for to know that "*in xochitl in cuicatl*", i.e. "flower and song", was the Nahuatl metaphor for access to and experience of the divine, for truth, poetry, philosophy. For Nahuatl philosophers, flowers and song represented the only truth on earth. They were the loveliest things that the Nahuatls knew. The flute-player flower on Mary's womb announced instantly to the

(Amer)Indians the truth of

(1987)

the apparitions, the truth of what she said to Juan Diego, the truth of the rest of the information on her Miraculous Image.

Then there are ten "eight-petaled" flowers which are sometimes confused with the Flower of the Sun. Actually, in some, the narrower "petals" are sepals, the modified leaves which protect the bud and form the calyx. First and foremost, these flowers can be identified with a Nahuatl glyph or symbol for Venus, the Morning and Evening Star. Venus as Morning Star was associated with their god and culture-hero Quetzalcoatl, who after his self-immolation was taken up into heaven as the Morning Star. Quetzalcoatl's teachings were so beneficent and his mythic role so life-giving, that he can be understood as one of the "seeds" of the Gospel which God has planted in all cultures, The Blessed Mother was giving the missionaries a tool which they could appreciate only much later.

#### G L O S S A R Y

**Amoxтли:** A Nahuatl codex, composed of picture-writing.

**Anamorphosis:** An image produced by a distorting optical system or by some other method that renders the image unrecognizable unless viewed by the proper restoring device. Transferring the constellations from their positions on the "dome" of the sky to the flat plane of Mary's tunic was a problem involving anamorphosis.

**Codex:** An (Amer)Indian record composed of pictures.

**Glyph:** A hieroglyph, an (Amer)Indian symbol used in picture writing.

**Maguey:** The "century plant", the fibers from which Juan Diego's tilma was made.

**Mamalhuaztli:** (Amer)Indian fire sticks, also a constellation, either the belt and sword of Orion or the Hyades group in Taurus. Father Mario trends toward the latter, and identifies the three lowest stars on Our

Lady's mantle as the *mamalhuaztli*, a symbol of new life.

(1988)

**Nahui Ollin:** Flower of the sun, used to symbolize the sun; four-petaled flower over Mary's womb. Another interpretation, "four movement or earthquake". It shows the four directions of the universe and the center, where heaven intersects earth.

**Quetzalcoatl:** The "Feathered Serpent". An age-old god who rescued the human race from the underworld by personal sacrifice. A culture hero-king who was opposed to human sacrifice and taught civilizing and cultural skills to his people. A Christ figure, a "seed of the Gospel". [Note: Since Quetzalcoatl is often described as a white man with a beard, some people identify him with St. Brendan, while others consider this to be anachronistic. Since St. Brendan was Irish, he may have been called the "feathered serpent" because of the Celtic artistic motifs on his clothing or other items; certainly many Celtic artistic motifs could be described as "feathered serpents".

**Quincunx:** An arrangement of five things, with one of each corner and one in the middle of an expressed or imaginary square. A symbol of Quetzalcoatl. (Note: Some have noted the resemblance between the **quincunx** and certain forms of the Greek Cross or the Celtic Cross, which brings us back to St. Brendan. Interestingly, the Celtic Cross was originally a Druidic solar symbol. See above; **Nahui Ollin**.)

**Solstice:** Simply one of the two points in the year at which the day is at its longest and the night is the shortest, or vice versa. After the winter solstice, around December 22, the days begin to get longer.

**Tepetl:** A hill. The nine heart-shaped "flowers" on Mary's tunic are also hills or mountains.

**Tlacuilo:** A painter-scribe." (235)

Janet Barber continues:

"Numbers were extremely important to the Mesoamerican peoples' world view and understanding of their lives. A period of sixty-five Venusian years corresponded to 104 of their solar years, at which point these two cycles also coincided with the

(1989)

beginning of their 260-day divinatory calendar, their *tonalpohualli*. This complex divinatory calendar provided the minute mesh of augury by which they lived their days. Imagine their joy on learning from the educated elite and/or Juan Diego that the eight-petaled flower imitates a configuration of their *tonalpohualli*! Although they had lost the public apparatus of their calendars and the ritual celebrations connected with them, Mary of Guadalupe was not leaving them bereft. From now on, their destiny was to be based not on good or ill omens, but on the rich and sufficient grace of her Son Jesus Christ, the loving and merciful Lord of all time and space (which the Nahuatls conceived of as only one entity), the Lord in Whom all would be brought to unity in the end (Ephesians I:9-10).

It is interesting to note that the eight-petaled flowers on the light half of Mary's tunic are imitating with their larger petals the precise position of the petals of the Flower of the Sun. Father Mario identifies them as jasmine with their sepals. We see that the eight-petaled flowers, which are in the shadow, have their principal petals exactly opposite the position of the corresponding petals of the Flower of the Sun. Those which are in the half-light have started to turn so as to imitate the Flower of the Sun! "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah IX:2) "By your light, we see light". (Psalms XXXVI:9)

There are nine of the large, triangular, heart-shaped flowers, six below her sash, one on each sleeve, and one on her bosom, below the little brooch. Father Mario points out that these can represent the nine levels of the Nahuatl underworld and has identified them as the *yolloxochitl*, the Mexican magnolia, (*Yollotl*, is "heart" in Nahuatl, and *xochitl*, "flower"). The design can represent either the magnolia's bud or ovary, which becomes its seed pod. *Yolloxochitl* was an Aztec metaphor for the palpitating heart torn from the body of the sacrificial victims. No longer, then, were the (Amer)Indians to rely on endless human sacrifices to enable the life-giving sun to come up each day. No, they were to rely instead on the new and divine life offered them through the once-for-all sacrifice of Mary of Guadalupe's Son, the Son of God.

(1990)

The seeds of several varieties of mahnolia are bright red, recalling the infinite value of her Son's drops of blood shed on the Way of the Cross.

But the *yolloxochitl* is read as another glyph, too: *tepetl*, "hill", and precisely, Tepeyac Hill, which means "Nose of the Hill", for it was the last and smallest of the range of hills which end there, at what used to be Lake Texcoco. We see the nose inside each flower - and other flowers bursting forth on all the Tepyacs! The large, graceful, virile stems with their leaves are an adaptation of the Nahuatl glyph for water, the water of life which flows through Tepeyac and emerges as the water of the Holy Spirit which will well up in Christians to eternal life (John IV:14). But the leaves are not just water; they are Also Nahuatl flames. A Christian equivalent easily found in these is the fire of the Holy Spirit which Jesus came to kindle upon earth and yearns to see spread (Luke XII:49).

The glyphs for hill and water combine to make the new meaning of "city". Because the *tepetl* also resembles a Bishop's mitre, the (Amer)Indians could read that the Mother of God had come down from heaven with a message for the bishop in the great city. Mary of Guadalupe is Mother of the Church. It is inconceivable that she would have circumvented the Bishop-elect, the one chosen by (the Emperor) Charles V and by heaven, just as surely as Juan Diego was the one chosen to be her intermediary, her ambassador. Mary was pointing her (Amer)Indians toward Christ and toward his Church.

Father Mario understands that the three flowers sprouting from the stems of the *yolloxochitl* are buds. But in addition to this, three was the number of Quetzalcoatl, the mythic (?) intermediary who not only rescued from the underworld the bones of the humans who had lived in the previous era, but brought them to life by bleeding his member on them. Rhree, then, is the number of mediation, of intercession. The three buds or flowers can be taken to express the role of Mary's Son and the Holy Spirit in our redemption, and to set forth one of our most important ministries as other Christs: to intercede before the Father (so) that all hearts may

(1991)

turn to His Son and accept His offered redemption (Hebrews VII:24-25; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians V:18-20). I have been given to understand that the little ball at the tip of each flower is its fruit, the lasting fruit we are to give as branches grafted onto the Vine (John XV:5, 16). We are represented on Mary's divine Codex not only as recipients, but as channels of the grace of God.

Father Mario suspected that the nine *tepetl* glyphs might furthermore represent specific volcanoes of Mexico, and his idea turned out to be correct! If we take the Flower of the Sun as our point of reference and observation, and let it represent Tepeyac, then the *tepetl* on her right sleeve is Ixtaccihuatl and the one on her left sleeve, Popocatepetl, with the white cotton on her cuffs representing their snow! The mountain on her bosom is La Malinche, in the state of Tlaxcala, brooding over the neighboring Valley of Puebla. The star on her left shoulder is Citlaltepetl, "Star Mountain", known to us as the *Pico de Orizaba*. The small cross at her neck marks *Nauhcampatepetl*, the "Hill of the Four Directions", *El Cofre de Perote*! The highest star on her right shoulder represents the volcano Chicnautla, the spur of the Sierra Madre Oriental range. When a slide of the image is projected onto a map of Mexico done on a scale one centimeter to 1,000,000 centimetres, the distances correspond exactly from the foot of Malinche (where the middle of the Virgin's index finger touches the flower) to the Pico de Orizaba to El Cofre de Perote. The other *tepetl* glyphs represent, but not to scale, the great horizontal volcanic axis of Mexico.

In a dazzling yet simple display of His power and tenderness, Almighty God represented the Nahuatl's very earth on His *Amoxtli*, their majestic volcanoes, the horizons and reaches within which they lived their lives. He echoed their unique ideas of time and space, found in the stars and the compass directions, through their own picture language with which they recorded their history and myths, theirs to the meaning of their own views of reality. It was as if their *Huel Nelli Teotl Dios*, their One True God, were returning

(1992)



their culture to them, purified and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They were being affirmed by heaven. *They too were God's beloved sons and daughters in whom He was well pleased* (Matthew III:17).

Father Mario points out that the (Amer)Indians saw in the Image that heaven, the mantle with its stars, is touching, covering, and protecting (the) earth, the rose-colored tunic with its vegetation. Gone are the profound celestial causes for their vital anxiety, their constant terror of falling into nothingness. Heaven is now benign, a source of the love and nurturing that none of their former gods could offer them, not even Quetzalcoatl. The Image goes on to tell the (Amer)Indians that heaven is our true home. The stems of the nine great flowers emerge from the mantle. They are clearly rooted in heaven! Heaven, our source, our sustenance, and our destiny! Has not God made us such that our hearts are restless until, trusting in His unconditional love, they find rest in Him?

In fact. The (Amer)Indians easily saw in the Image that Mary of Guadalupe was kissing them. For the Mesoamericans, the angel with his outspread wings represented Juan Diego, whose (Amer)Indian name had been Cuauhtlatohuac, "Eagle Who Speaks". "Quitennamiqui!" they would exclaim, which meant both "She is kissing him!" and "She is touching him with the edge." She is kissing Juan Diego with the borders of her mantle and her tunic! And, because Juan Diego represents not only all of Mexico, but all humanity also, she is kissing us too!

Although Mary of Guadalupe looks static to some, she nevertheless portrays forward motion, and dancing. The (Amer)Indians see by her bent left knee that she is walking, as we all must, on the inner pilgrimage and in response to Our Lord's call to take the Gospel (*Injil*) to others. She is also dancing, with her hands clapping to the rhythm of the maracas! The (Amer)Indians see many signs in the large heart-shaped flower, and one of them is *ayacachtli*, which means "rattle" or "maraca". She will change their mourning into dancing, she will clothe them in joy! (Psalms XXX:11)

The Nahuatl word *xihuitl* expresses "grass", "leaf", "year", "comet", and "turquoise." Her turquoise-colored mantle and the vegetation of her tunic are signs of Mary's virginity, while the mantle itself is enough to bespeak her sovereignty as Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, since only the emperor could wear that color. Her mantle and the Flower of the Sun told the (Amer)Indians that she was Virgin-Mother. The lone leaf over the left thumb of the angel is that of the *cuetlaxochitl*, "flower of [our] flesh", the poinsettia! When the (Amer)Indians saw the leaf and the Image on the tilma, they would exclaim, "The angel is carrying the Flower of Our Flesh!" This taught them that she is not a goddess, but rather the loveliest Flower of our human race, come to give us the Fruit of her womb, Jesus.

The 70 flowers and buds on her tunic told them that she was singing, because they associated their word for an abundance of flowers, *xochicuicatl*, and *xochicuicatl*, "Blossoming song." Father Mario has found - and played for us - musical rhythms in the details of the Image, using a deer antler and a turtle carapace, typical pre-Columbian instruments. From the heavenly bird song, as Juan Diego began his great adventure, to the fresh, dew-covered flowers on the barren hill and all through the centuries right to our own day, the Guadalupe Event is lush with Flower and Song. All that the Great Tlacuilo had put in his Amoxitli for them - and for us - is trustworthy. He had spoken to them in their own terms, using their own pictures and their own language, even using their own maguey cloth to write it on. Since for the Nahuatls the tilma stood for the man who wore it, they realized with absolute certainty that the Heavenly Tlacuilo was profoundly honoring Juan Diego and all of them too; and they were of one piece with their culture. He was affirming it and honoring it and giving it back to them in the hands of His and their Mother.

Just one more precious detail, of the many left in our maguey-fiber bag. Mary of Guadalupe is radiant, she is shining. Because the Nahuatl verb "to shine", *mihiyotia*, also means "to breathe", the (Amer)Indians said "She is breathing!" Indeed, everything about Mary

(1994)

of Guadalupe speaks of life, the life breath of Jesus

Christ. (Pope) John Paul II said in the Basilica on May 6, 1990, that Mary's maternal heart is beating there. Yes, Almighty God maintains a continuous Miracle in Blessed Juan Diego's tilma and the Portrait it holds, the loveliest Icon and Codex ever given to His sons and daughters, the Image of the Perfect Virgin, Holy Mary, Mother of God. In her advocacy as Guadalupe, she has become Image (Hebrews IV:12), and in her loving response to the cries of her sons and daughters. (236)

**Says Fr. Maximilian, F.F.I.**

Ten million (Amer)Indians embraced the Catholic Faith in less than a decade following the Guadalupe apparitions in 1531, while the Franciscan missionaries had only produced scarcely one million converts in the previous decade (though this was no mean achievement, all things taken into consideration). Brother Peter of Ghent, O.F.M. alone baptized over a million (Amer)Indians in the wake of the heavenly visitation, and in one location 3,000 were baptized and married during Christmas day in 1538. What was the secret of the Holy Virgin's success? What lesson does this loving Mother teach the faithful, especially missionaries, regarding efficacious evangelization? Simply put, the salvation of souls depends upon grace and she is the Mediatrix of all grace that comes to man. We could all be effective evangelizers simply by allowing Mary to use us as instruments in her hands for the salvation of souls. In her life and in her apparitions she points the way by word and example - keeping the commandments, living in union with Christ through prayer and sacrifice.

We see the perfect, ever Virgin Mary of Guadalupe preeminently manifested in the sacred Image as the "woman" absorbed in deep prayer. What is more, from the sash about her waist the Native Americans (Amerindians) immediately knew that she was with Child, and that Jesus the God-Savior was abiding in her. "Abide in Me and I in you." (John XV:4). Because of her perfect union with the Most Holy Trinity and her unparalleled sanctity, it comes as no surprise that her maternal presence in Mexico begot the life of grace in millions of wandering souls." (237)

(1995)

**Says Brother Thomas Mary Sennott concerning an infrared study  
of the Image of the Virgin of Guadalupe made by Dr. Philip Serna**

**Callahan:**

"In 1756, Miguel Cabrera, the most famous colonial artist of of day, examined the tilma and reported:

"I believe that the most talented and careful painter, if he sets himself to copy this Sacred Image on a canvas of this poor quality, without using sizing, and attempting to imitate the four media employed, would at last after great and wearisome travail, admit that he had not succeeded. And this can be clearly verified in the numerous copies that have been made with the benefit of varnish, on the most carefully prepared canvases, and using only one medium, oil, which offers the greatest facility; and of these, I am clearly persuaded, that until now there has not been one which is a perfect reproduction as the best, placed beside the original, evidently shows."

Cabrera knows whereof he speaks, for his own copy of Our Lady of Guadalupe is considered the most faithful to the original. It was at the dramatic unrolling of this canvas the Pope Benedict XIV exclaimed, *Non fecit taliter omne nationi*. "Not with every nation has He dealt thus."

In 1979, in the tradition of Miguel Cabrera, Dr. Philip Serna Callahan, a biophysicist at the University of Florida, an expert in infrared phtography, and himself a painter, was allowed to examine and photograph the Image. Callahan, a devout Catholic, after setting up his infrared equipment on a platform, asked for and obtained permission to receive Holy Communion before he began photographing. Concerning the utility of infrared photography in the study of the Holy Image, Callahan writes:

(1996)

Infrared photography is recommended before any restoration or cleaning is attempted on old paintings. It is most important because one can often detect

undersketching accomplished before the artist applied paint to the canvas. Infrared photography also enables one to determine the nature of the sizing under the paint, provided (that) the layers are not too thick. No study of art work can be considered complete until the techniques of infrared photography have been utilized, and certainly no valid scientific study is complete without such an analysis.

Callahan, who also has a background in entomology, makes the interesting comment that some of the effects of the painting are impossible to accomplish by human hands, but are found in nature in bird feathers and insects. He pointed out:

It is a simple fact that if one stands close to the painting, the face is very disappointing as far as depth and coloring are concerned. At a distance of six or seven feet, however, the skin tone becomes what might best be termed Indian-olive (gray-green) in tone. It appears that somehow the gray and "caked" looking white pigment of the face and hands combines with the rough surface of the unsized hue. Such a technique would be an impossible accomplishment in human hands. It often occurs in nature, however, in the coloring of bird feathers and butterfly scales, and on the elytra of brightly colored beetles. ... By slowly backing away from the painting, to a distance where the pigment and surface sculpturing blend together, the overwhelming beauty of the olive-colored Madonna emerges as if by magic. The expression suddenly appears reverent yet joyous, (Amer)Indian yet European, olive-skinned yet white of hue. The

(1997)

feeling is that of a face as rugged as the deserts of Mexico, yet gentle as a maiden on her wedding night. It is a face that intermingles the Christianity of Byzantine

Europe with the overpowering naturalism of New World-Indian, a fitting symbol for all the peoples of a great continent!

It has been known for some time that there have been some additions to the Image and that these are beginning to flake off, much to the delight of the anti-apparitionists. But Callahan concludes that the original Image cannot be explained in natural terms:

The original figure, including the rose robe, blue mantle, hands and face ... is inexplicable. In terms of this infrared study, there is no way to explain either the kind of color luminosity and brightness of pigments over the centuries. Furthermore, when consideration is given to the fact that there is no underdrawing, sizing, or over-varnish, and the weave of the fabric is itself utilized to give portrait depth, no explanation of the portrait is possible by infrared techniques. It is remarkable that after more than four centuries there is no fading or cracking of the original figure on any portion of the agave (or maguey) tilma, which - being unsized - should have deteriorated centuries ago. Some time after the original image was formed, the moon and tassel were added by human hands, perhaps for some symbolic reason since the moon was important to both Moorish-Spanish and Aztec mythologies. Some time after the tassel and the moon were added, the gold and black line decorations, angel, Aztec fold of the robe, sunburst, stars and background were painted, probably during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The additions were by human hands and impart a

(1998)

Spanish Gothic motif to the painting. In all probability, at the same time the tilma was mounted on a solid support, the orange coloring of the sunburst and white fresco were added to the background. The entire

tilma for the first time was completely covered with paint. ...

Callahan's conclusions regarding extensive human additions to the tilma might well be true, but I suspect (that) he is overdoing it. This suggestion of a 17<sup>th</sup> century date for most of them cannot possibly be true. In 1570, just 39 years after the apparition, Archbishop Montufar sent King Philip II of Spain a copy of the miraculous Image which was placed in the flag ship of Admiral Andrea Doria in anticipation of the Battle of Leoanto. This copy is now enshrined in the Church of San Stephano in Aveto, Italy. The Lepanto Imxage is identical to the original Miraculous Guadalupe Image, which means that any additions had to have been made well before 1570.

The *Codex Seville*, called the "oldest book in America", is an (Amer)Indian calendar in picture writing that was begun around 1407 and ends around 1540. It is reproduced to size in an overleaf of the Historical Records and Studies, Volume XIX, September, 1929, of the United States Catholic Historical Society. It is about three and a half feet long, with small paintings illustrating important events. Reading from the bottom up, just above the symbol for 1532, is a tiny figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe about ab inch high. The codex was probably kept up to date year after year by (Amer)Indian scribes and the tiny figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe was entered in 1531, the year of the apparition. Demarest and Taylor describe it in *The Dark Virgin*.

Under magnification, the tiny figure of the Virgin is startlingly similar to that of the Holy Portrait. The position in which she stands, her manner of dress, the way she holds her hands in prayer are the same; the colors are the same in tone, and the figure is surrounded by clouds bordering the rays of the sun,

(1999)

indicated by this streaks of yellow. When one considers that the miniature is painted on a very rough, thin, fibrous paper, it is astonishing that the likeness is so closely achieved. ... It is obviously intended as a figure of the Virgin ... as above her head there is a great crown, and there are the clouds and sun rays.

We can see from the *Seville Codex* that the Image was not just a simple figure, as Doctor Callahan suggests, but from the first there were clouds and rays of the sun, and evidently the tilma was completely covered with color from the very beginning. It is possible that on top of the miraculous colors, additions could have been made without sizing, but being unvarnished, they are now beginning to flake off. I suspect that all the additions were made almost immediately by (Amer)Indian artists, to enhance the pictogram nature of the Image. Doctor Callahan concludes his study:

"The additions to the Image of the Virgin, although by no means technically elegant compared with the original Image, nevertheless add a human element that is both charming and edifying. Any single addition - whether moon, Aztec fold, gold and black border, angel or whatever - does not alone enhance the portrait. Taken together, however, the effect is overwhelming. As if by magic, the decorations accentuate the beauty of the original and elegantly-rendered Virgin Mary. It is as if God and man had worked jointly to create a masterpiece." (238)

Mexico's population is very diverse, and those who make it up often seem to have little in common one with the other: the whites have their *Hispanismo* (Spanishness), the Amerindians have their *Indianismos* (yes, *Indianismos*; to give only one example, the

(2000)

*Indianismo* of a Nahuatl, the *Indianismo* of a Zapotec and the *Indianismo* of a Mayan are very far indeed from identical), while many of the *mestizos* (mixed bloods), consciously or not, still



feel the effects of what Salvador de Madariaga called *guerra en la sangre* (war in the blood). However, one thing unites all these diverse peoples and the diverse regions of Mexico; devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. While living in Spain, I saw the visit of Pope John Paul II to Mexico. At the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Pope commented:

"It is said that Mexico is 80 per cent Catholic and 100 per cent *Guadalupano* (devotees of the Virgin of Guadalupe)".

I still recall the vast crowds, white, Amerindian and *mestizo*, welcoming the Pope at the shrine of Guadalupe, many carrying placards which said: *Viva Mexico Catolico!* (Long Live Catholic Mexico!), and the many people, with candles in their hands, going around the shrine on their knees. Though I am not of Mexican origin, nor do I speak Spanish with a Mexican accent, I consider myself to be a *Guadalupano*.

(2001)

To those totally unfamiliar with it, and those whose concept of it is based on what passes for Mexican food in fast food restaurants, taco trucks and chili parlors, I wish to inform them

that genuine Mexican cuisine is exquisite. When asked what he most appreciated about his Mexican heritage, the Mexican-American actor Michael Trevino replied; "My grandmother's real Mexican cooking."

During the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), American troops loved the Mexican cooking; those from northern U. S. A. did not know what good food was until they came to Mexico; of course, this was manifestly NOT true of soldiers from southern U.S.A.

Confederate General A.P. Hill said:

"Tis a fact that the ladies of Mexico are beautiful, and oh how beautiful."

How can one not love a country with such beautiful women and such good food? The same is, of course, very true of Iran.

Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, whose wife was a lovely Southern Belle, always called her *esposita*, which is Spanish means: "little wife". During the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, those troops from northern U. S. A.

(2002)

(*Yankeeland*), had never eaten good food nor seen beautiful women until they came to Mexico, which as we said above, was manifestly NOT true of soldiers from southern U.S.A.

Middletown, Ohio is fortunate in having a most excellent Mexican restaurant, known as "el Rancho Grande". Among the waitors

there I am known as "*aquel hombre de nacionalidad desconocida*" (that fellow of unknown nationality"), because I speak Spanish, though my accent makes it obvious that I am not Mexican. Antonio, the former head waiter of "El Rancho Grande" (he has since been transferred to a new restaurant of the same name) and I were great friends. When I would enter "El Rancho Grande" I would proclaim: *Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!* (long Live the Virgin of Guadalupe!), the which Antonio would reply: *Reina de Mexico, Emperatriz de America!*, after which we would say in unison: *Viva Mexico Catolico!* (Long Live Catholic Mexico!).

Someone sent me an Icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe with the caption in Spanish: "*Dios bendiga a la familia McClain*" (God bless the McClain family).

Many other flowers are connected with the Virgin Mary. Above we have given a sampler of the most famous or most interesting.

We return to Lord Northbourne:

(2003)

"Now it can be asserted that the symbolism of the natural is always more direct than that of the artificial, although this does not necessarily imply that the artificial - that is to say, whatever is man-made in all or in part - must always in all circumstances be rejected in favour of the natural, for man was not given his faculties and powers for nothing. The natural is nevertheless always nearer to its origin, and its origin is the origin of all the old-fashioned roses (of which the Persian poets and the Provencal trobadors sang), the cottage pinks and carnations, the double stocks and many other old favorites, although

very artificial in that they are very "double" are nevertheless still a little out of this world, and so are the auriculas, pansies and violas; their beauty is subtle and mysterious even when they are very "showy". Nevertheless, the enrichment represented by these more or less ancient cultivars (flowers altered by cultivation and selective pillination), as well as by many of the less vulgar of their successors, is nearly always in the realm of the quantitative and sensual; the corresponding impoverishment is always in the realm of the qualitative and symbolical."(239)

Myrtle, cypress and rue are sacred to Zoroastrians.

We return to Lord Northbourne:

"One day the disciples of the Buddha were assembled to hear him preach a sermon. But he said not a word; instead, he stooped down and plucked a flower and held it up for them to see. Of all that assembly, only one showed by his smile that he understood."(240)

The flower that the Buddha plucked was almost certainly a wild flower.

(2004)

The herb called "basil" (*Ocimum Basilicum* or *Ocimum Sanctum*) has a special place in the symbolism of the Eastern Orthodox Church. As the Greek Orthodox priest Fr. Anthony M. Coniaris says:

"According to legend, St. Helen, the mother of (the Emperor) Constantine, traveled to Palestine in search of the (True) Cross. She looked for it in every corner of the land, and her search turned up not one cross, but three. St. Helen was unsure. "God", she

prayed, "reveal to me which of these crosses is the one on which Christ the King died." St. Helen stood the three crosses side by side. One day she noticed a sprig of basil growing from the center cross. Immediately she knew that this cross was the real one, for "basil" comes from the Greek word for "king". St. Helen fell on her knees before the cross with the sweet green basil, in adoration of the King Who died upon its beams. Ever since then basil replaced another plant that was used extensively in the worship services of the Old Testament: hyssop. "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean" (Psalm LVII: 7)." (241)

The herb wild rue, *Ruta Graveolens*, (Persian: *Sodab Kohi*) has a special place in Iranian Shi'ism. There is even a book on Iranian Shi'a popular piety titled The Wild Rue by Bess Allen Donaldson (London, 1938).

In the final strophe of Dark Night of the Soul, St. John of the Cross says:

Leave me and forget me  
My face reclining on the Beloved,  
Cease everything and leave me  
Leaving my care  
To the lilies of forgetfulness.

(2005)

St. John of the Cross never finished the prose commentary to Dark Night of the Soul. Nevertheless, among the Sufis the lily is precisely the flower of forgetting, the flower of abandonment of temporal, material things, achieved when the Sufi has reached the final mystical stage in which all language falters and fails. The lily, "breathless with adoration" (242) glorifies God in silence with the mute tongues of the petals.

In Spiritual Canticle, St. John of the Cross says:

"All this cacophony of desires and emotions of the senses the soul here calls "foxes", because of the great similarity which at this time they have to them. Because, even as the foxes feign sleep so that they may capture their prey when they go hunting, just so all these desires and powers of the senses are at rest and asleep until the flowers of the virtues spring up in the soul and open and burst into bloom; and then it seems that, in its sensual part, its flowers, of the desires and powers of the senses, awaken and rise up in their attempt to resist the spirit and to reign. Even to this point comes the lust which, as St. Paul says, the flesh has against the spirit (Galatians V:17); for, its inclination towards the senses being strong, that which is totally carnal finds tiredness and distaste when it tastes of the spirit, where these desires cause great vexation to the sweetness of the spirit; in which case the soul says: "Let us hunt down and kill these foxes."

Al-Hujwiri says:

(2006)

"And it is related concerning Muhammad ibn 'Ulyan of Nasa, an eminent companion of Junayd, that he said: I said: "Other things are destroyed by pain and blows: Why dost thou (the heart) increase?" It replied: "Because I was created perverse: that which is pain to other things is pleasure to me, and their pleasure is my pain." (243)

Says St. John of the Cross in Spiritual Canticle:

**And I lost my flocks and herds which I once followed**

"This means that until the soul attains to the state of perfection, of which we are speaking, however spiritual it may be, there always remains to it a little flock or herd, as it were, consisting of some of its

(carnal) desires and petty tastes and other of its imperfections - sometimes natural, sometimes spiritual - which it goes chasing after, trying to pasture them while following them and caring for them."

### **Now I guard no flocks nor herds**

"That is to say, now I no longer go after my tastes and desires; for, having set them upon God and given them to Him, the soul no longer pastures them nor guards them for itself."

In his Kitab al-Luma, al-Sarraaj compares the lower or carnal appetites to cattle or sheep which the soul "pastures".(244)

In Spiritual Canticle, St. John of the Cross says:

By that hair alone  
Which you saw fluttering on my neck,  
Beholding it on my neck, you were captivated  
And were wounded by one of my eyes.

(2007)

### **Beholding it upon my neck**

"This the soul says: in order to convey the fact that not alone did God prize and esteem this the soul's love when he saw that it was alone, but likewise that He loved it when he saw that it was strong, because for God to regard is, as we have said, for Him to esteem that which He regards. And in this line the soul speaks again of the neck, saying of the hair: "You beheld it upon my neck", because, as we have said, That is the cause of His loving it so much, namely, that He saw in her strength, so that if only the soul had said:"You loved when you saw that it was strong without weakness nor fear, and alone without any other love, fluttering with lightness and fervor.

O, thing that is worthy of all acceptance and joy, that God should be captivated by a hair! The cause

of this most precious capture is that He has been pleased to stop to see the fluttering of the hair.

He would never have been captivated by the fluttering of the hair of our lowly love, since this love cannot soar so high as to attain to the capture of this Divine bird of the heights (remember the *Simurgh*). "Beholding it upon my neck, you were captivated."

Above we have a most exact equivalent of the *zulf* or "curl" that is the "hook" with which so many Sufis such as Rumi, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and Shabistari trap God or allow themselves to be trapped by Him. Says Shabistari:

If you ask of me that long story  
Of the Beloved's curl,  
Sore troubled am I by that curl  
Which veils my longing soul from His Face(245)

(2008)

The history of Spain is, in many respects, controversial. The polemic between the followers of Americo Castro on the one hand and the followers of Claudio Sanchez-Albornoz on the other reached such a degree of bitterness that the followers of Sanchez-Albornoz made use of an untranslatable play on words in Spanish to insinuate that the followers of Americo Castro were homosexuals, a very grave insult in Spain.

What are my views on the above polemic? There is no space here to go into details, as it would lead us very far afield from



our main topic. I will only say for Americo Castros's thesis to be true, one of two conditions would have been necessary:

- ❖ 1.) That Spain at the time of the Muslim Conquest had been uninhabited, or:
- ❖ 2.) That at the time of said conquest an Arab magician had waved a magic wand, instantly turning several million people who were Christians by religion, speakers of Romance languages (except for the Basques and perhaps some nuclei of Celtic speakers in the Northwest) and of Iberian, Celtic and Visigothic ancestry, into Bedouin Arabs.

In other words, the thesis of Americo Castro is arrant nonsense.

(2009)

Luce Lopez-Baralt deserves a great deal of credit for calling attention to mentions of a treatise by St. John of the Cross titled The Properties of the Solitary Bird. The treatise itself has been lost, though one may hope that a copy may yet be discovered, as formerly lost works of Fray Luis de Leon have recently been discovered. Fortunately, St. John of the Cross made some rather scanty references to the solitary bird in the Sayings of Light and Love and in the prose commentaries to Ascent of Mount Carmel and Spiritual Canticle.

Luce Lopez-Baralt has written a monograph on the mentions of the solitary bird in the extant works of St. John of the Cross (246), and it is the work of Luce Lopez-Baralt which has inspired me to delve into the question of the solitary bird.

We now proceed with those mentions of the solitary bird which occur in the extant works of St. John of the Cross, translation mine.

Says St. John of the Cross in the prose commentary to Ascent of Mount Carmel:

"And the cause of this forgetting is the purity and simplicity of this wisdom, which, when it occupies the soul makes the soul simple and pure, free of all apprehensions and forms of the senses and the memory of when the soul has been immersed in time, and thus the soul is left in forgetfulness and beyond time.

(2010)

To the soul this prayer (although, as we have said, it lasts for quite a long while) seems very brief, because the soul has been united with the Pure Intelligence, which is not within time, and is the brief prayer of which is said (Ecclesiasticus, or Book of Yeshua ben Sirach, XXXV:20-21) "He who serves the Lord shall be accepted with favor, and his prayer shall reach the Heavens, because it is brief, because it is not within time and penetrates to the Heavens because it is united with the Celestial Intelligence. And so, this information leaves the soul, when it remembers, with the effects produced by said information without the soul being aware of it., these effects being the lifting of the soul to the Celestial Intelligence and the flight and abstraction of all things, as well as the forms and figures and memories of them. As King David said after having lost consciousness because of this same forgetfulness, when he awoke, he said: "*Vigilavi, et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto*" (Psalm CI:8) which means, in the Latin of St.

Jerome: "I was awake and found my self as a solitary bird on the roof." *Solitary* means that all things are abstractions; and *on the roof* means that the mind is lifted to the Most High. And so, the soul remains ignorant of all things, because it knows only God, without knowing why. Thus the bride declares in the Song of Songs (VI:11) that among the effects of her sleep and forgetting, was this unknowing, when she came down to the garden saying *Nescivi*. That is to say, I did not know. Though the soul in this state of knowing appears to be doing nothing and to be doing nothing because it does not work with the senses nor the faculties, it should be aware that it is not wasting time, because, although the soul and the faculties are no longer in harmony, the intelligence of the soul is as we have said. Thus the bride, who was wise, in the Song of Songs answers this doubt herself, saying: *Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat* (Song of Songs, V:2), as if she had said: "Although I sleep according to my human nature, naturally ceasing to work, yet my heart was awake, supernaturally raised in supernatural wisdom."

(2011)

In Spiritual Canticle, St. John of the Cross says:

"In this spiritual state one sees the natural understanding elevated in a strange new way above all natural understanding to the Divine Light, as after a long sleep, one opens the eyes to an unexpected light. This wisdom tends to lead to understanding David when he said: *Vigilavi, et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto* (Psalm CI:8). As if to say (in the Latin of St. Jerome): "I opened the eyes of my understanding and found myself above all natural intelligence, alone without them on the roof top, which is above all things here below. And he (David) says here that he was *made to be like a solitary bird*, because while the soul is in this type of contemplation, it has the properties of the solitary bird, which are five:

- ❖ 1.) The first, because the solitary bird generally sits upon the highest places; thus the soul in this state is

immersed in the highest contemplation.

- ❖ 2.) The second, that the solitary bird always keeps his beak in the windward direction, the direction from which the wind blows, even as the soul turns the beak of its attention and affection towards the direction from which comes the spirit of love, which is God.
- ❖ 3.) The third is that generally the solitary bird is alone, and will tolerate no other bird near him or he will fly away and leave his perch. Thus, the spirit in this state of contemplation is removed from all things, separated from all of them, nor does it tolerate anything save being alone with God.
- ❖ 4.) The fourth property is that the solitary bird sings softly and sweetly. The soul does the same in this state of contemplation, for the praises which it offers to God are of the gentlest and sweetest love, the most exquisite for the soul itself and the most gracious to God.

(2012)

❖ 5.) The fifty property is that the solitary bird has is that it is not of any defined color. Thus, the perfect soul, which in this excess or superabundance has no color of sensual affection and self-love, nor even of superior or inferior, nor can it speak of this in any mode nor manner, because it is immersed in the fathomless wisdom of God, as we have said.

In Sayings of Light and Love, No. 22, St. John of the Cross says:

"Twice works the bird caught in bird lime: in freeing himself from the bird lime and in cleaning himself of it. Just so, in two ways labors he who fulfills his sensual appetites: in lusting, and after having sated his lusts, in purging himself of the uncleanliness and contamination."

In Sayings of Light and Love No. 120, St. John of the Cross

says:

"The properties of the solitary bird are five:

- 1.) The first, that he flies to the highest place;
- 2.) The second, that he tolerates no company, not even those of his own species;
- 3.) The third, that he points his beak to windward, in the direction from which the wind blows;
- 4.) The fourth, that he is of no specific color;
- 5.) The fifth, that he sings softly and sweetly.

(2013)

The same properties must possess the contemplative soul; that it must fly above all temporal and transitory things, ignoring them as though they did not exist, and must be so enamored of solitude and silence that it does not tolerate the company of any other creature: it must point its beak to the breath of the Holy Spirit corresponding to its inspirations so that the soul makes itself more worthy of the company of the Holy Spirit: must not be of any particular color, not being attached to nor determined by any thing that is not the will of God: must sing sweetly and softly in the cotemplation and love of the Beloved."

What we have to say below concerning the solitary bird is largely - though by no means entirely - based on the admirable essay of Luce Lopez-Baralt titled "On the Genesis of the Solitary

Bird", of which we have spoken above.

A Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Christian will immediately think of the white dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. As we shall see in the following chapter, this symbolism also has a place in Shi'a Islam. As Henry Corbin says:

"The *Simurgh*, for example, from which all souls emanate, (and whose Arabic equivalent is the bird *Anqa*) is also a figure of Gabriel the Archangel, Active intelligence and the Holy Spirit. And it is given the same attributes as Christianity confers on the (white) dove as symbol of the Holy Spirit."(247)

"*Anqa* is feminine in Arabic, as *Saena Meregha* is feminine in Avestan; we have therefore kept this gender in translating the name given in the Persian form *Simurgh* (we mentioned above the connections between the

(2014)

symbol of the *Simurgh* and the Holy Spirit, which is feminine in Aramaic (and Syriac); e.g., the expression of Jesus in the (Apocryphal) Gospel According to the Hebrews: "My Mother is the Holy Spirit."(248)

Wrote the 16<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet Muhtasim:

"When tidings of this (the martyrdom of Imam Hussein) reached Jesus dwelling in the Heavenly sphere. He forthwith plunged his garments in indigo (dark blue as well as black is the color of mourning in Persia) in the vat of Heaven.(249)

The mystical bird plays a prominent part indeed in Persian Sufi literature. Avicenna was author of the work Risalat at-Tair, whose theme is the mystical bird. Al-Ghazzali wrote a book of the same title whose topic is also the mystical bird. Finally, Farid al-Din Attar wrote the marvelous poetic work Conference of the

Birds. Note that all these authors were Persians, though Avicenna and al-Ghazzali wrote in Arabic as well as Persian, and that all lived from the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Henry Corbin called these three works which deal with the mystical bird the "(epic) cycle of the bird".

Below we give Peter Heath's translation and commentary on Ibn Sina's Epistle of the Bird:

## Disorientation and Reorientation in Sina's Epistle of the Bird: A Reading.

(2015)

The Epistle of the Bird (*Risalat at-Tayr*) is one of several short allegories composed by Abu 'Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina ("Avicenna" dies 1037/428). Since first offered in a modern edition by F. Mehran almost a century ago, it has been considered one of Ibn Sina's *traits mystiques*: a corpus of texts whose ideas and rhetoric appear more mystical in nature than philosophical.(1) The general question of the nature and extent of the philosopher's "mysticism" has attracted a respectable degree of scholarly attention and produced a sizeable body of learned discussion.(2) But the Epistle itself has remained little studied. One reason for this is the narrative's difficulty; although quite short, the work is by no means easy to understand. What follows here is an attempt to do just this: to understand and explicate the text. This essay falls into four parts. First, it presents a new, exact translation of the Epistle. Second, it offers a reading which attempts to clarify its many riddles, puzzles, and mysteries. Third, it briefly raises the question of whether this now-explicit intent is the work's only, or even most important, thematic dimension

## The Epistle of the Bird

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate  
My success is only through God, on Him I rely,  
In Him I trust.

1.) Will any of my brothers lend me ear long enough for me to tell him something of my sorrows? For perhaps through sharing, some of tjheir burdens may be lifted from me. Indeed, a friend cannot purify his brother of impurity as long as he does not - in good times and in bad - preserve his own clarity from the muddiness of sorrow.

2. And where do you have a genuine friend? Friendship has been made a business to which one turns when a motive of personal gain makes one appeal to a friend, while its responsibilities are fejected when one is free of need. A comrade will not be visited unless a sudden problem visits; a friend will not be remembered unless a wish is remembered.

(2016)

3.)Brothers are only those whom divine kinship has jopined together, whom celestial closeness has made intimate, who have observed realities with the eye of insight. Who have polished the filth and rust of doubt from their inner heart, who will be joined together only by God's herald (calling):

4.)"Come, Brothers of Truth!(4) Open your hearts and join together!(5) Let each of you unveil the innermost part of his heart to his brother, so that you may examine each other and perfect each other!

5.)"Come, Brothers of Truth! Cover yourselves, just as hedgehogs cover themselves! Reveal your interiors and conceal your exteriors! For, by God, your interior is manifest and your exterior is hidden.

6.)"Come, Brothers of Truth! Shed your skins as snakes do! Crawl as worms crawl! Be scorpions whose weapons are in their tails! For Stan deceives Man only from ehind. Gulp down poison and youu will live! Prefer death and you will attain life! Fly! Do not take a nest to which you constantly return, for the hunting grounds of birds are their nests. And if want of wings hinders you, then



become a thief, and you will snatch success. The best of the vanguard are those strong of flight.

7.) "Be ostriches who gulp down hot stones,(6) vipers who swallow hard bones, salamanders who descend upon blazing flames with confidence, and bats who do not emerge in the day. The best of birds are bats.

8.) "Come, Brothers of Truth! The richest of men is he who dares the morrow, and the most dismal failure is he who falls short of his goal.

9.) "Come Brothers of Truth! It is no wonder when an angel avoids an evil deed, or a beast commits a foul act. Rather, the wonder is Man when he rebels against sensual desires even though his form has been fashioned to prefer them completely,(7) or when he renders total

(2017)

obedience to them even though his character has been enlightened by reason. By Everlasting God! How far above an angel is a man steadfast in eliminating sensual desire, whose foot does not slip from its path. And lower than a beast is the person unable to resist any sensual desire which calls him."

10.) But I return to the beginning of my discourse:

11.) A party set out hunting. They set up snares, arranged nets, prepared bait, and hid themselves in the grass. I was among a flock of birds. When they caught sight of us, they whistled, seeking to call us. We sensed plentiful food and friends, doubt did not enter our breasts, nor did suspicion sway us from our course. We hastened towards them and descended all together, amongst the snares. Suddenly rings encompassed our necks, nets entangled our wings, and snares caught our legs. We tried to move, but our difficulties only increased. So we resigned ourselves to destruction, our individual sorrow precluding each of us from caring about his brother. We strove to discover strategems for escape for a time, until we were made to forget the form of our predicament. We became accustomed to nets and content with cages.

12.)Then one day, I looked through the net and caught sight of a company of birds that had removed their heads and wings from the net. They emerged from their cages, flying with the remnants of the snares still on their legs. But these did not burden them, for deliverance filled them with determination. Nor did the birds feel them, for life had become clear for them. And they made me remember what I had been made to forget, and made loathsome that to which I had grown accustomed. I almost melted with remorse; my soul almost slipped away with regret. I called from behind my cage for them to approach and inform me of the means of relief, for length of captivity had tamed me. Remembering the treachery of the hunters, however, they only fled farther away. Then I adjured them in the name of ancient friendship, sustained comradeship, and

(2018)

remembered vows, which instilled trust in their hearts and expelled suspicion from their breasts. They presented themselves to me, and I asked them about themselves. They related that they had been afflicted with that which I was afflicted, and that they had despaired and grown accustomed to affliction.

13.)Then they tended to me. The snare was removed from my neck, the net from my wings, and the door of the cage was opened. And it was said to me. "Take advantage of deliverance!" I asked them to release my foot from its ring, but they said, "If we were able to do that, we would have hastened to release our own legs first. How can one himself cure you?"

14.)Then I rose flying away from my cage. And it was said to me, "Before you are regions from whose danger we will not be safe unless we advance through them singly. Follow our courses; we will not be safe unless we advance through them singly. Follow our courses; we will save you and guide you along the right path."

15.)The flight led us between two slopes of the mountains of God, in a valley grassy and fertile - no, rather, barren and desolate - until its sides fell behind us. We proceeded along its face and attained the

mountain's summit. And there before us were eight lofty mounts whose pinnacles were far beyond the reach of eyesight. We said to each other, "Hurry! For we will not be secure until we have crossed them safely."

16.) So we embraced resolution until we surmounted six of the peaks and reached the seventh. When we entered its boundaries, we said to each other, "Do you want a rest?" Fatigue had weakened us, a vast expanse lay between us and our enemies, and we saw that we could not allot our bodies a measure of rest. For indeed, flight at a relaxed pace leads more surely to salvation than pushing oneself to exhaustion.

17.) We stopped at its pinnacle. And there were gardens, with grassy meadows, flourishing fields, fruit-laden trees, and flowing rivers, whose delight quenched your

(2019)

gaze; with forms whose splendor confounded the intellect and astonished the mind, who filled our ears with rapturous melodies and heartrending songs, and our nostrils with fragrances unapproached by noble musk and fresh ambergris. We ate of its fruits and drank from its rivers and tarried there until we had cast off weariness.

18.) Then we said to each other, "Hurry! For there is no trap like security, nor any haven like caution, nor is any fortress impregnable to evil thoughts. Our stay in this region has stretched to the verge of negligence; behind us, our enemies follow our path and seek our halting place. If residing in it is pleasant, nothing is as pleasant as safety.

19.) So we resolved to travel on and departed from the area; and we alighted on the eighth mountain. It was a towering peak whose tip penetrated the clouds of the sky, and on whose slopes lived birds. Never have I encountered sweeter melodies, lovelier colors, more elegant forms, or pleasanter companionship than theirs! When we alighted in their vicinity, we knew of their beneficence, their kindness, and their cordiality, that which encompassed us; and of assistance, that which whose slightest part we could not recompense, even if we devoted ourselves to it for the period of our lifetime -

no, even if we stretched it our twice over!

20.)When gaiety had established itself between them and us, we informed them of what had befallen us. They shared in our anxiety and related, behind this mountain is a city over which the Greatest King rules. Any wronged person who seeks his protection and puts his trust in him will find his distress lifted away by his might and support."

21.)We trusted in their ciounsel, and headed toward the city of the King until we alighted in his outer courtyard, awaiting his permission to enter. Then the order of permission for new arrivals emerged, and we were admitted into his palace. Before us lay a

(2020)

courtyard whose vastness description does not encompass. When we crossed it, the curtain was raised before us, revealing another courtyard, spacious and luminous such that, beside it, we thought the first constricted - no, we considered it small! Finally, we arrived at the chamber of the King. When the curtain was raised before us, and our eyes beheld the King in his beauty, our hearts were captivated by him; we were overcome by an amazement which hindered us from presenting our complaint. He perceived what had befallen us and restored our composure with his kindness until we dared to address him.

22.)When we related our story before him, he said, "Only those who knotted the snares will be able to undo tjhem from yur feet. I will send to them a messenger who will demand from them your satisfaction and the removal of the nets from you. So depart, well-blessed!"

23.)And now we are on the way with the messenger, and my brothers are clinging to me, demanding from me the tale of the splendor of the King before them. So I will describe him extremely briefly:

24.)"He is the King who, whatever yu have attained in yur mind of beauty unblended with ugliness, and perfection unmixed with fault, in this you have hit upon a complete picture of him. Every perfection, in reality attains to him; every fault, if only in metaphor, is

banished from him totally. His beauty has a face, his generosity a hand. Whoever serves him gains the utmost happiness; whoever forsakes him forfeits the next world and this."

25.)How many a brother, when my story struck his ear, then said, "I see that your mind is touched; you have become slightly deranged. No, by God, you did not fly! Rather, your mind flew. Nor were you hunted! Rather, your heart was hunted. How does a human fly? Or a bird speak? It is as if bile has become predominant in your temperament, or dryness has gained mastery over your brain! You should drink cooked epithymun; start bathing in tepid fresh water; inhale nymphaea oil; go easy on

(2021)

food, choose healthy ones; avoid sexual indulgence; leave off staying up late at night; reduce thought! We have known you to be reasonable in the past and have observed you to be astute and intelligent. By God, examining our minds, they are worried about you. And because of the imbalance of your state, our own has become unbalanced."

26.)How much they say, how little it avails! The worst of speech is that which is wasted! One seeks recourse from God and freedom from man; whoever believes otherwise has lost in the next world and this.

27.) "Those who do wrong will come to know which reversal they will suffer."(8)

Thus is the Epistle of the Bird completed.

Praise to God is abundantly sufficient.

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As can be seen from the above translation, the Epistle falls into three main parts: a prologue (1 - 9), the bird allegory itself (10 - 24), and an epilogue (25 - 27).

In the first and last parts, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) himself, (or, more correctly, his narrative *persona*) *dominates the narrative, while the middle part is*

narrated from the point of view of the bird. One might think that the prologue and epilogue would serve as a frame for the allegory in between, that they would be buffers of familiarity that would lead the reader in and out of the dark and mysterious forest of allegory. But this is not the case. Each part of the work has its own difficulties and enigmas. This is especially true of the prologue, by far the most confusing and opaque part of the *Epistle*. Thus although there does appear to be a growing trend of coherence running through the work, with the prologue offering the most perplexities, the allegory being easier to comprehend, and the epilogue still clearer, the *Epistle* remains a difficult

(2022)

work. Because of a lack of an immediately obvious logical connection among the contents of the three parts, because of the abruptness of the transitions between them, and because of the conundrums that each part in itself presents, the reader is constantly forced to readjust his sense of context, not only within each section but among them as well. This is not a narrative whose beginning and middle set riddles and whose end offers solutions. Rather, it is one each of whose parts presents its own riddles without offering any solutions, either to them or to those found in other sections. In this context, the apparent lack of coherence among the three parts of the *Epistle* becomes simply one more unsolved riddle.

Balancing one's feelings of confusion or disorientation, however, is the text's strong emotional appeal. A depth of feeling, a powerful sense of sadness and loss, a wrenching yearning, and even undertones of anguish permeate the narrative. The *Epistle*, one feels, reflects an important, even crucial, inner experience. If there are confusions, they are those of senses, emotions, and thoughts in tumult. This, one feels, is not a dry intellectual exercise, but a *cri du Coeur*. This emotional dimension becomes the work's saving grace. Without it, one would hardly bother with its complexities; with it, solving the riddles and resolving the complexities become a worthwhile, if sometimes difficult, task.

## THE PROLOGUE

Ibn Sina begins the prologue by drawing a distinction between the true friend, or spiritual brother, and the false friend. False friendship, he says, is based on the idea of one-sided exploitation, showing friendship only for the sake of ulterior motives. True friendship or brotherhood, on the other hand, is founded upon mutual understanding of divine realities; its purpose is not individual material gain, but reciprocal spiritual purification of base "impurity" (*al-shawb*) from the heart. Brothers are

(2023)

those who have "polished the filth (*al-wasakh*) and rust (*ar-rayn*) of doubt from their inner hearts (*al-sarira*) "those joined and united by "divine kinship" (*a-qaraba al-ilahiya*) and "celestial closeness" (*al-mujawara al'alawiya*).

Why does Ibn Sina draw this distinction? Because he himself is afflicted by sorrows and anxieties that only the concern and company of a true friend can assuage. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance that these sorrows be relieved. For unless one can preserve his own "clarity" (*al-safa'*) of heart and mind from the spiritual "turbidness" (*al-kadar*) that such sorrow causes, he cannot carry out the important task of helping fellow participants in the process of spiritual progress. In other words, one's own internal confusion or disturbance levies its toll on the efforts of the group, interrupting a cycle of mutual spiritual purification. Thus Ibn Sina's cry for help; for only a true brother, a selfless friend, can succeed in alleviating his cares. A false friend will not only fail this task, but through egoism and lack of true understanding, will even increase the sufferer's anguish.

In these opening lines, then, Ibn Sina presents us with two dichotomies. That between the false friend and the true brother (the selfish exploiter and the pure sharer), and that between a pure, clear heart and one polluted by impurity and the filth and rust of doubt. Naturally, these two dichotomies run on lines of equivalence. A true brother is he who possesses a pure heart, while a false friend has a heart sullied by self-

interest and doubt. It is thus one's internal state, one's spiritual awareness, that defines brotherhood, not external conditions. In this regard, a good action done by one of impure heart is a chance affair, in no way part of the conscious cycle of mutual purification intended by Ibn Sina.(9)

Besides this pair of conceptual dichotomies, we should notice another, this one grounded in the rhetorical structure of the text. This is the dichotomy between the narrator and his readers. On the one hand we have the narrator, aware of the nature and meaning of true friendship, yet in need of a friend, cognizant

(2024)

of the importance of clarity of heart, yet afflicted - for some reason - by cares and sorrows. On the other hand we have us, the readers, the narrator's audience. If the narrator is knowledgeable but depressed, we are sympathetic but ignorant. While our hearts naturally sympathize with the narrator's sad state, wish to respond to his plea for a true friend, and are attracted by his call for spiritual purity, we unfortunately suffer from confusion concerning the real nature or purpose of the classifications that Ibn Sina is setting forth. What does the idea of true friendship really entail? What are the spiritual realities to which he refers? How exactly does one proceed to purify one's heart and soul? Do true brothers such as those to which Ibn Sina refers really exist; if so, who are they?

Ibn Sina entices the reader into his text on both emotional and intellectual levels. His appeal for help stirs one's sympathies. But the extension of sympathies is stymied by one's intellectual ignorance. To overcome this ignorance, the reader must turn his mind fully to the text; this in turn deepens his emotional involvement - and so on, in an ever-deepening process of dialectic.

Having created this dichotomy between the knowing but sad narrator, and the ignorant and thus inconsequently sympathetic reader, Ibn Sina proceeds to introduce a link between them in the figure of the "herald of God" (*munadi-llah*). Unfortunately, at first glance one cannot say that this link clarifies matters. God's herald - presumably the Active Intellect, the intermediary between the Divine and mundane, whose function is to encourage, inspire, and direct those aspiring to intellectual and thus spiritual perfection -



issues a series of exhortations to the "Brothers of Truth". But instead of drawing aside the veil of confusion as to just who and what this group is, his exhortations serve to mystify even further.

The herald of God urges one to imitate a diverse group of creatures: hedgehogs, snakes, worms, scorpions, ostriches, and so forth. But the symbolic significance and, in many cases, even the literal context of their specific traits remain unclear. What does God's herald mean when he exhorts one to cover

(2025)

oneself like a hedgehog, gulp down hot stones like an ostrich, or fly like a bird but not return too often to the nest? Why indeed are bats the best of birds? Do salamanders really descend upon blazing flames? To such questions we must now turn.

The herald of God addresses his exhortations to the "Brothers of Truth", a group which is presumably equivalent to Ibn Sina's previously mentioned class of pure-hearted brothers. One further assumes that these exhortations are intended to encourage and instruct those aspiring to spiritual perfection. The assumption is supported by the first and last parts of the exhortations themselves.

The first exhortation urges one to open his heart fully to his brother so that mutual contemplation may ensue. When each brother sees his own heat reflected in that of another, he is able to view it more objectively and thus cleanse it more fully. Mutual contemplation leads to mutual perfection. As a later exhortation points out, that Man is able to undertake such a process is due to his unique cosmological status. A beast is unable to distinguish between right and wrong; all of its actions are intrinsic to its nature. To expect the lions to spare lambs, for example, is nonsensical, for it is the lions' nature to consume lambs. Similarly, for all of their other differences, angels resemble animals in that they too are ethically one-dimensional. To praise angels for purity of heart is tautological; created pure, they are constitutionally unable to sin.

But Man (as our daily experience so fully confirms) has capacities for both good and evil. In this sense, he is a composite of both animal and angelic natures, of matter and spirit, of sensual and rational perception. Because of this, he represents an arena of cosmological

struggle. His material or bestial self attempts to drag him downward toward the status of animals, while his spiritual, rational self urges him upwards to aspire to the state of angels. The message of the herald of God here, therefore, is that only by allowing Divine enlightenment (i.e., God's herald) to enter his soul, only by becoming a Brother of Truth, can man master the dark exoteric forces of his sensual,

(2026)

material self and realize the potential for perfection that his rational, spiritual self offers. This struggle is not easy; one's foot can easily "slip from its path". Hence the importance of having brothers to offer support along the way. Still, the struggle is worth undertaking, for many are the rewards that await one who emerges from it victorious. As Ibn Sina says: "The richest of men is he whodares the morrow".

Having grasped this general context of spiritual struggle, one can begin to unravel the riddles of the other parts of the prologue. As long as one keeps in mind the nature of the opposing forces (spiritual versus material), and the fact that the victory of the one over the other presumes the necessity of struggle, the conundrums of the exhortations become easier to crack.

All the animal traits that Ibn Sina selects for symbolic comparisons are similar to Man's innate capacity for spiritual perfection in two ways. First, they are unique to that species of animal. No other creature besides the hedgehog has quills (the porcupine is an American species, unknown to Ibn Sina), no other besides the snake sheds its skin, no other besides the ostrich gulps down rocks. Second, in spite of the uniqueness and remarkableness of these features, they are - like Man's capacity for perfection - natural to these creatures. It is natural for birds to fly, vipers to swallow their prey bones and all, and salamanders to descend upon flames and emerge unscathed (natural, at least, according to the popular scientific wisdom of the time). In accomplishing these apparent marvels, these creatures are only exercising natural capacities. The important difference between them and Man is that while they do so as a matter of course, Man is usually unaware of his innate capacity for spiritual perfection. In most cases, he must be awakened to its existence.

Let us now review the remaining exhortations in the

light of the above remarks and attempt to elucidate the symbolic and, where necessary, literal meaning of their imagery. To begin: "Cover yourselves, just as hedgehogs cover themselves!" What does God's herald mean by this?

(2027)

The trait that is unique to the hedgehog is its quills. No other animal (outside the Americas) shares this feature. In their normal, lowered (potential) position, these quills resemble ordinary hair. But in their true, raised (actual) state, the once-hidden quills now cover what was before the hedgehog's outer layer. The animal's presumed interior has in fact revealed itself to be its exterior. In this process of revelation, one's perception of reality has been reversed. What one first considered to be reality (quills equal hair) has proven to be a false perception, while what was at first hidden has been proved to be the truth.

It is in this regard that Man resembles the hedgehog. Normally one considers Man's external, corporal aspect as his truest, most real dimension. But this is not the case, since Man's most distinctive and remarkable feature is in his interior, spiritual dimension. A Brother of Truth is one who realizes this, one who is ready to reverse commonly held priorities of innerness and outerness, one who can distinguish what is truly real from what is only apparently real. When urged to cover himself like a hedgehog, he recognizes that he is being urged to identify himself with and develop that part of himself that is most truly real: his soul.

A Brother of Truth is thus one who recognizes that he is able to slough off his outer dimension just as snakes shed their skins. But of course he cannot expect this task to be easy. He must be ready for hard work. He must be prepared to be like a worm, who, though a soft spineless creature, is able to make its slow way through solid earth by dint of relentless persistence. Moreover, throughout his progress, a Brother of Truth must be constantly on his guard. Since flesh is weak, his spirit must be like a scorpion, ever ready to sting those parts of himself that he thinks he has purified himself of and left behind, but which are nevertheless always ready to sneak up from behind and hinder spiritual progress.

Again, a Brother of Truth must realize that this process involves being able to reverse or invert

previously held assumptions. To strengthen spirit, one

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must offer matter poison; one can only obtain spiritual life at the cost of material death. One must reach a state where the soul flies from the body like a bird from the earth. But this flight does not come suddenly of itself; it is the result of long, exhausting effort. One cannot return to one's previous states (or nests), for lack of progress is equivalent to back-sliding. Instead one works steadily on. If birdlike soaring is at times too difficult, one relies on thieflike stealth. The important thing is continual progress toward the final goal. Those who keep trying, whose flight becomes strong through continual practice, eventually join the vanguard.

During this whole process, a Brother of Truth understands that he is not attempting anything unnatural. Strange as it may seem to the uninitiated, engaging in the process of spiritual purification is only the exercising of an innate and unique natural talent. It is no more unnatural than the difficult-to-believe, but completely natural, traits of other animals, whether it be ostriches gulping down hot stones, vipers digesting bones, salamanders penetrating blazing flames, or bats flying only at night, a time when most creatures rest. Indeed, the best of birds are bats.(10)

Viewed according to this reading, the seeming conundrums of the exhortations become comprehensible. What the herald of God is calling for is that the Brothers of Truth appreciate the part of human nature that has true value, the spiritual dimension; that they recognize that this dimension is unique to man; and that fulfilling or perfecting this potential is life's true purpose. Remaining immersed in the material level of being, says God's herald, is only death in the semblance of life.

Having thus adumbrated in this rather obscure speech of the herald of God the themes with which he wishes to deal, Ibn Sina now presents them in a more organized form in his bird allegory. We observed before that the prologue does not form a lucid introduction to the realm of allegory we now enter. But it does provide a useful prelude of sorts. After we have struggled along its twisting, hard-to-discern paths, the allegory itself

stretches out like a wide, well-marked highway.

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## The Allegory

Since the metaphorical correspondences one faces in this part of the Epistle are more organized, they are more immediately comprehensible. In fact, one quickly grasps the gist of the allegory: the bird represents the rational soul; the hunters and their snares represent the material world, or, more exactly, the vegetable and animal souls with their senses, passions and imaginings; the various regions through which the flock travels represent the heavenly spheres of the celestial Souls and intelligences; and the Great King represents the Necessary Existent, God. In short, this is a version of the basic Neoplatonic myth: the story of the descent of the soul into its material, corporal prison, its lapse into oblivion, the moment of its reawakening, and the account of its journey toward reunion with its Divine Source. Since this myth also forms the basis of other of Ibn Sina's allegories, we shall refer to them here when appropriate or useful.(11)

In Hayy ibn Yaqzan Ibn Sina personifies human passions and instincts as evil companions, eager to lead the unwitting narrator astray.(12) Here he presents them as clever hunters who cunningly lure into captivity a flock of naïve and unsuspecting birds. And such is the nature of this captivity that the birds become accustomed to it and forget that they were ever free. "We became used to nets and content with cages."

Both the events and imagery of this sequence resemble that of Ibn Sina's "Ode on the Soul". Here too the soul is likened to a bird, a dove in this case. Here too its descent into matter is presented as a tragedy::

It descended upon thee out of the regions above,  
That exalted, ineffable, glorious, heavenly Dove.  
Unwilling it sought thee and joined thee, and yet,  
    Though it grieve,  
It is like to be still more unwilling thy body to leave.  
It resisted and struggled, and would not be tamed in  
    haste,

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Yet it joined thee, and slowly grew used to this  
desolate waste,  
Till, forgotten at length, as I ween, were its haunts  
and its troth  
In the heavenly gardens and groves, which to leave it  
was loath.(13)

The "Ode" is interesting in that besides describing the soul's descent into the body, it poses the question of why it was forced to do so. Our allegory, however, does not take up this question; instead it concentrates on the process of release.

The bird/soul's captivity entails its not only forgetting its own true nature and place of origin, but also that of its comrades ("our individual sorrow precluding each of us from caring about his brother") Deliverance from this sorry state comes through recollection; recollection comes through remembrance. The sight of a group of birds who have liberated themselves reminds the narrator of his former freedom and inspires him to strive to regain it. Ibn Sina thus retouches the theme of needing an "other", a Brother of Truth, to begin and facilitate the process of spiritual purification.

Just whom the philosopher has in mind here is uncertain. It is of course possible that he had in mind some esoteric group, such as the Isma'ilis, or perhaps some circle of mystics. More likely, however, is that he was referring to the philosophical tradition of which he was part.(14) Through the process of learning, studying, meditating on, discussing, and regenerating this tradition, one's soul awakens and perceived its true origin, realizes the loneliness and lowliness to which it has fallen, and begins to work toward reinstatement. Whatever its intended indemnity, this group of birds effects the narrator's reawakening and release. And they also become his guides during his flight towards salvation. But although they can guide, they cannot carry. Each individual soul must forge its own path.

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Having achieved initial release, the bird and his new-found companions begin their ascent. But although they have escaped from their nets and cages, they have not yet totally escaped the bondage of the sensations and passions of the material world. They still have the remnants of their snares and ropes dangling from their legs.

They fly up the slope of what Ibn Sina calls the "Mountain of God, in a valley grassy and fertile - no, rather, barren and desolate". At first this phase seems contradictory and puzzling. But here Ibn Sina is pointing out the change of perspective that ascent through the sublunary realm of transient generation and corruption entails. From the perspective of earth, the realm immediately above seems to have positive aspects. This is because it is closer to the region of Absolute Form than earth itself. As one traverses it, however, and comes to look down on it from above, its negative aspect, the desolation and waste that increased immersion in matter entails, is what becomes more noticeable and highlighted. One sees then that, as Ibn Sina says in Hayy ibn Yaqzan, "This clime is desolate, a dung-heap, filled with discord,, strife, controversy, and commotion; it borrows its splendor from a distant place".(15) The beauty of creation thus comes from its formal aspect, which emanates from above. Seen from below, the sublunary region's formal aspect attracts and enchants; seen from above, its material aspect puts off and repels.

From the peak of the first mountain (the sphere of the moon), the birds see eight more peaks (the spheres of Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Fixed Stars, and the Starless Heaven). Undaunted by this sight, they continue their ascent. It is not until they reach the seventh peak, that of the Fixed Stars, that they pause to rest. Even in this lofty and wondrous realm, however, they must still be on their guard. Otherwise, they may be lured back to their previous state of sensual captivity. They must be "scorpioms whose weapons are in their tails." This is because the pleasures of this realm are still sensual. It has textures pleasing to the touch, sights beautiful

to the eye, sounds lovely to the ear, fragrances pleasant to the smell, and food and drink delightful to the taste. Even in the highest realms of the heavenly spheres, the sensual temptations of the material world remain dangerous. Perceiving these dangers, the birds urge each other on and resume their journey.

They next arrive at the outermost heavenly sphere, the Starless Heavens. And here for the first time, they encounter other beings: birds (souls) like themselves whose forms, colors, and songs enchant the wanderers. This region is the closest in creation to that of Absolute Form; its inhabitants are the "spiritual beings of the angels (*ar-rubiyun min al-mala'ikab*)" whom Ibn sina mentions in Hayy ibn Yaqzan.(16) But even this realm of almost pure Form does not satisfy the travelers; for they still have not achieved complete release. On the advice of the heavenly birds, they continue their journey until they at last come to the abode of the Great King who rules from beyond the spheres. Arriving at his palace, they await permission to enter, according to courtly protocol. Being invited in, they cross great courtyards, each surpassing the other in magnitude and glory. Finally, they reach the throne room of the Great King. At first, they are dazzled by his beauty, but later the narrator attempts to describe him.(17)

Although the Great King is all-beautiful and described as perfect, he is apparently not all-powerful. He himself cannot directly free the pilgrims from their ultimate material snares; only those who set the snares can do this. But He can arrange that this occurs. He sends a messenger to return with them and give the necessary orders.

Here is another logical paradox in the Neoplatonic cosmological scheme. Although the Great King is the pinnacle of existence, he is not its omnipotent master. He is bound by the limits of the hierarchical cosmic structure of which he is the prime source; he is limited by the forms He himself produces. As in the case of the above-mentioned question of why the soul is initially sent down into matter in the first place, the question of this apparent limitation in the powers of the Great King (God) is here neither stressed nor pursued.



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As for this messenger, it seems certain that Death is intended here. After reaching an advanced state of spiritual progress, one sees Death as an ally whose arrival is welcomed rather than an enemy whose onslaught against bodily matter is feared or hated. This is because only Death can fully and finally release the soul from material bondage.(18)

## The Epilogue

From the heights of spiritual glory to which he has led us, Ibn sina ends the Epistle by plunging us down to the depths of irony and sarcasm, for on describing his experiences to his fellows, to his "friends", he finds himself accused of mental derangement. And his narrative suffers the cruelest fate possible for an allegory; it is taken literally. Men cannot fly, he is told, nor birds talk. And his states of spiritual anguish, yearning, and joy are merely the results of physical disorder. We thus have the irony of having the greatest physician of the Middle Ages portraying himself as being prescribed physical remedies.(19) Moderation in all things, good food, plenty of sleep, not too much thinking, all these, he is told, will return him to his senses. More than this, the very complaint with which he began the Epistle is reiterated and turned against him. His wild ravings and apparent illness is upsetting his friends and causing them distress. So that rather than easing his sorrows through sharing them with a friend, Ibn Sina is himself accused of causing his friends sorrow and worry. As one would expect, his reaction to this charge is bitter. He gives up his friends and seeks refuge in God. And with this the Epistle ends.

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The meaning of the text should now be clear; its riddles, difficulties, and conundrums solved. What we have here is a particular representation, an *exemplum*, of the general Neoplatonic myth of the drama of the

soul. This is a version of the story of the soul's blissful primordial union with the World Soul; the tragedy of its separation, individual descent, and isolation in the world of matter; the account of its joyful rediscovery of its original nature and source; and the epic of its heroic quest to return to and regain its original estate. But why, one might ask, did Ibn Sina not simply relate the myth itself? Why did he cloak it in symbols, metaphors, and riddles? And why did he make his narrative so difficult to understand?(20)

Ibn Sina would reply, I think, in two ways. First, he might say that this is his version of the myth. This was one way he felt he could best express it. Second, he would perhaps say that the meanings of myths cannot be taught; they must be discovered. The emotional, intellectual, and spiritual reverberations that myths provoke cannot be instilled from without; rather they must be induced from within. The symbolic and allegoric mode of the *Epistle*, with all of its difficulties and riddles, imbues the work with an aura of mystery and immanence. It also presents a challenge. To discover the text's meaning the reader must tread slowly and warily; he must pause, study, reflect. In this way, he is seduced into the world of the text. Without perhaps realizing it, he embarks on a project of retrieving, gathering, and reconstructing the details of a myth much of whose force and potency stem from its very emphasis on the idea of primordial recollection and remembrance. In the process of identifying with the *dramatis personae* of the narrative - whether Ibn Sina himself or the bird - and in the process of meditating upon and solving the text's metaphoric mysteries and symbolic complexities, the reader ends by becoming a full and active participant in charting out a conceptual universe whose nature, details, and modes of thought had hitherto been unknown and unimagined.

The reader begins the process of striving to understand the text, making sense of its details, clarifying its enigmas, and grasping its meaning with the idea that he is translating the text, transferring it from its own terms and reformulating it in terms of

his own conceptions of reality. But what really happens - or what should happen - is the reverse. In the course of his reading, it is really the reader who becomes translated and transmuted, for the process of his reading and thinking ends with he himself being stripped of his former conceptions of reality and adopting those of the text. At least, this is the Epistle's intention. By the end of the work, the myth is reality, while one's former conception of reality is now reduced to the status of myth.

The test as to whether this process of seduction and transformation, of disorientation and reorientation, has been successful comes at the narrative's end. By then, it is intended that the reader is so affected by his reading and unraveling that he does not sympathize with, or even comprehend, Ibn sina's "friend" when he says: "No, by God, you did not fly! Rather, your mind flew. Nor were you hunted! Rather, your heart was hunted." Instead the reader trusts, sympathizes with, and believes the "herald of God" when he exclaims: "Fly!"

----- IV -----

Before leaving the text, one further question deserves attention. Is the subject of the Epistle only that discussed above, or does it have another, simpler, more basic theme?

Traditionally, allegories end happily.(21) Since their intent is to move from the confusion of ignorance to the order of enlightenment, they customarily end with a sense of completion and fulfillment. In allegory, true knowledge is bliss. But in the Epistle, the situation is different. Returning to the plane of everyday reality, Ibn sina does not meet an appreciatively receptive audience. Instead he encounters a crowd of doubters and skeptics: fools who neither believe his tale nor comprehend its implications. Hence to the initial query: "Will any of my brothers lend me ear long enough for me to tell

him something of my sorrows?" the Epistle's final answer appears to be a resounding "No!" If "Brothers of Truth" are those who "observe realities with the eye of insight", few seem to have surrounded Ibn Sina!

The bitterness of the epilogue seems to be more than just a reaction to returning to the world of material imperfection after a sojourn in that of spiritual perfection, a kind of mystical postpartum depression. Rather, it is part of a tone of profound dissatisfaction with the nature of Man and a disillusionment with the potentiality of his attaining a common, social level of perfection that runs throughout the text. If one is to achieve some measure of perfection, one must, it appears, attain it individually. Furthermore, it seems that in this project, the group serves more to hinder than help. So we have a paradox. At the same time that Ibn Sina calls for a perfect companion, a "Brother of Truth", someone who will participate and aid in the process of attaining perfection, he also continually suggests that such perfect companionship, i.e., membership in a group striving for perfection, is totally impossible.

This conclusion does not stem only from the work's ending. It emerges continually throughout the narrative's presentation of the interplay between individuality and sociability, solitude and companionship, division and unity. Consider the following scheme an attempt to trace these dichotomies in the Epistle. After each element, or moment, is an assessment (plus or minus) of how the reader is intended to react to the situation.

- I.) Individual narrator's state of solitude and sorrow (minus)
- II.) Possibility of solace in companionship (plus)
- III.) Realization of rareness of genuine friends, as described by the herald of God (minus)
- IV.) Group of hunters set snares (minus)
- V.) Group of birds enticed and entrapped (minus)
- VI.) Individual bird in state of solitude and oblivion (minus)
- VII.) Another group of birds helps individual bird escape (plus)

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- VIII.)But group still has remnants of snares on their legs (minus)
- IX.)Possibility of common final release through ascension (plus)
- X.)But necessity of advancing singly during the journey (minus)
- XI.)Temptation of backsliding during rest stop (minus)
- XII.)Members of group urge on each other (plus)
- XIII.)Meeting with group of heavenly birds, who are friendly and helpful (plus)
- XIV.)But inability of this group to do more than offer advice (minus)
- XV.)Arrival at their final destination and audience with the Great King, the symbol of final unity (portrayed, notice, as an individual) (plus)
- XVI.) His inability to provide immediate help (minus)
- XVII.) His sending a messenger to secure their complete release (plus)
- XVIII.)The group's lack of knowledge concerning the Great King (minus)
- XIX.)Its rejection of the narrator's description and tale (minus)
- XX.)The narrator's rejection and turning away from the group(minus)

Of these twenty elements, thirteen are negative. And two of the remaining seven positive moments are only presented as possibilities, not realities. Hence, although the Epistle begins by suggesting that the group should be a positive entity, that it should encompass and nurture the individual and promote his development and deliverance, in reality, the narrative almost always portrays it failing or, even more, obstructing this task. If salvation is to be achieved, one concludes, it is to be done so individually; in spite of the group, not because of it.

The Epistle of the Bird thus appears to have two dimensions. One, the conscious plan of the text is that the narrative, with its stylistic difficulties, rhetorical obscurity, metaphorical riddles, and symbolic allegory, should serve as a *kone*, an object of

meditation aiming at provoking the attentive reader into shedding one plane of awareness and adopting that of another. The other, latent, dimension is the narrative as a complaint, an expression of and perhaps meditation on both the fact and the inevitability of spiritual solitude. For at the same time that the Epistle's rhetoric and intent, therefore, rest on a paradox. The very thing that it calls for (perfect spiritual companionship), is something that it in the end despairs of finding. But then, most birds only fly so high.

### NOTES

(Notes to "Ibn Sina's Epistle of the Bird by Peter Heath)

1.) For the Arabic texts and French paraphrases of most of this corpus, see A.F. Mehren, Traites mystiques d'Abou Ali b Sina ou d'Avicenne (Leiden, 1889-1899). To these texts, one should add Ibn Sina's "Ode on the Soul" (see note 13 below). Also useful is the collection of texts in Hasan 'Asi, At-Tafasir al-Qur'aniyya wa-l-lugha as-Sufiyya fi Falsafat Ibn Sina (study and texts) (Cairo: 1983). This collection should, however, be used with care since not all texts in it are by Ibn Sina.

2.) The best introduction to Ibn Sina's thought is Dimitri Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works, Islamic Philosophy and Theology 4 (Leiden, 1988). For Gutas' views on the place of allegory in Ibn Sina's methods of exposition, see *ibid.*, pp. 297-318. For a general account of Ibn Sina's mysticism - or lack of same - see Gutas' section "Mysticism", pp. 79-83, in Muhsin S. Mahdi, Dimitri Gutas, *et al.*, "Avicenna", Encyclopedia Iranica, editor Ehsan Yarshater (London and New York, 1982-), !:66-110. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, revised edition, Boulder, Colorado, 1978), pp 181-196, and

Parviz Morewedge, "the Logic of Emanationism and Sufism in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina" *JOAS* 91.4 (1971): pp. 467-476 and 92.1 (1972): pp. 1-18, provide useful surveys of the problem and its literature. See also T. Sabri, "Avicenne philosophe et mystique dans le miroir de trois recits": "Hayy b. Yaqzan", "l'Oiseau", "Salman et Absal", *Arabica* 27.3 (1980) pp. 257-274

3.) This translation is based on a collation of the Arabic text published by Mehran in Traites Mystiques, 2<sup>nd</sup> fascicule, pp. 42-48 (of the Arabic text) and that published by L. Cheikho in Al-Mashriq 19 (1901): pp. 882-887. In general, I have followed Mehren. But in several places, Cheikho's text's reading seems better (Cheikho also offers many personal amendments to his text, but these I have declined to follow). There exist two Western versions of the Epistle. One is a French paraphrase offered by Mehren (pp. 27-52 of the above-mentioned fascicule). The other is Henry Corbin's translation, first presented in his Avicenne et le Recit Visionnaire, 3 volumes (Tehran and Paris: Institute Franco-Iranien and A. Maisonneuve, (1952-1954)). I have consulted the new edition of the English translation of this work: W. Trask, translator, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, Bollingen Series 66 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960). Here Corbin's translation is on pp. 186-192. Because Mehren's effort is professedly only a paraphrase, and because (Henry) Corbin based his effort mainly (if not totally?) on Persian translations of the Epistle, I offer a new translation of the original Arabic here. The pagination of Mehren's Arabic text is inserted between slashes in the translation. I have numbered the paragraphs on the left-hand side of the translation for easy reference in my analysis.

4.) The Arabic here is *wayl-ak*, which literally means "Woe unto you!". Here it is used as an exhortation: "Woe unto you if you do not!" "Come!" presents a better translation of the sense and intent of the phrase than the archaic and at any rate quite rare strong (in modern English) "Woe unto you!".

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5.) reading Cheikho's and Mehren's B2 variant) *tadammu* (gather together) instead of Mehren's preference, *tasabu* (act childishly or rejuvenate yourselves).

6.) Reading C heikho's *taltaqimu* (gulp down) rather than Mehren's *taltaqitu* (gather).

7.) Reading Cheikho's *suyigha* (were formed, fashioned) rather than Mehren's *duyi'a* (were lost, wasted).

8.) Qur'an XXVI:227.

9.) In the framework of Ibn Sina's philosophical terminology, "brothers" help each other strengthen the powers of each others' rational souls, while those of impure hearts are immersed in the preoccupation of their animal souls.

10.) Bats are the best of birds because medieval zoologists and orinithologists considered them the species of birds in the hierarchy of Creation closest in attribute to the genus of Animal (of which they are in truth members!). See Zakariyya ibn Muhammad ibn Mahmud al-Qazvini, 'Aja'ib al-Makhlugat wa-ghara'ib al-Mawjudat, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1970), pp. 274=275. They are also another example of initial, exterior impressions being deceptive. Bats appear weak at first, because they are blinded by light. But no creature compares with them in nighttime navigation.

11.) See Plotinus, The Enneads, translated by Stephen MacKenna, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1957), especially "Fourth Ennead", VIII, "The Soul's Descent into Body, pp. 357-364. See also A.H. Armstrong on Plotinus in The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy, editor A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 250-263. Neoplatonism shares this myth with Gnosticism and hermeticism. The gnostic versions of this myth are essentially dualistic,



however. It is sometimes more difficult to distinguish between hermetic and Neoplatonic versions, but in general the trend of the first (hermetic) is occultist and theurgic, while that of the second (Neoplatonic, in the more traditional sense of the word). See Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, pp. 42-47, 154-173).

12.) See Mehren, Traites, 1<sup>st</sup> fascicule (Arabic), 1.

13.) Ibn Sina's Ode on the Soul has not - as far as I know - been critically edited in a reliable fashion. This translation is from E.G. Browne, A Literary History of Persia, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), 2:110-111. For a version of the Arabic text, see Al-Qazwini, 'Aja'ib, pp. 201-202.

14.) Here I agree with Gutas' general argument in Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, pp. 1-8.

15.) Mehren, Traites, 1<sup>st</sup> fascicule (Arabic), pp. 9-10.

16.) Ibid., p. 13.

17.) For other descriptions of the Great King in Ibn Sina's writings, see that in Hayy ibn Yaqzan, Mehren, Traites, 1<sup>st</sup> fascicule (Arabic), pp. 20-21. (Henry Corbin, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, pp. 149-150). See also the description in Ibn Sina's Kitab al-Isharat wa-Tanbihat, editor Sulayman Dunya (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, undated), 3:124.

18.) In reading the identity of the messenger to be Death, I endorse the view proposed by Mehren (cf. Traites, 2<sup>nd</sup> fascicule, pp. 26 and 31, note 2 of the French) rather than the more optimistic, but in my view clearly erroneous, interpretation of Henry Corbin, who sees the messenger as a representation of the Active Intellect (cf. Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, pp. 194-195). Nor do I agree, by the way, with Henry Corbin's rather simplistic view followed by Seyyed

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Hossein Nasr in Islamic Cosmological Doctrines) that Ibn Sina's Hayy, The Bird, and Salman and Absal are consecutive moments in a single narrative sequence or portrayal of Man's spiritual development. Pushing the texts into this framework glosses over too many of their individual characteristics.

19.) According to Ibn Sina's medical masterpiece Al-Qanun fi-l-Tibb, both nyphea oil and epithymun are effective mild tonics against general discomfort and melancholy, see Qanun, reproduction of Bulak editions (Beirut: Dar Sadir, undated), 1:375 and 1:25 respectively.

20.) Here I am not referring to Ibn Sina's adherence to the Aristotelian theory of levels of exposition - demonstration, dialectic, rhetoric, sophism - for which see Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, pp. 297-318, and Ismail M. Dahiyat, Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle: A Critical Study with an Annotated Translation of the Text (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 31-44. Rather, I am inquiring into the question that given that symbolic exposition is intended for those unable to follow rational demonstrations, why then should Ibn Sina's Epistle be so enigmatic and difficult?

21.) For the genre of allegory, see Morton W. Bloomfield, editor, Allegory, Myth, Symbol, Harvard English Studies 9 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), Stephen J. Greenblatt, editor, Allegory and Representation (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), and Jon Whitman, Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987). (250: Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson, edited by Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen, essay: "Disorientation and reorientation in Ibn Sina's Epistle of the Bird: A Reading", by Peter Heath, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1990, pp. 163-183)

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However, note that the mystical birds of Avicenna, al-Ghazzali and Attar do not possess even one single property in common with the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross. Since the bird as a symbol of the soul is so widespread and found in the works of such medieval Christian mystics as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St. Victor, Richard of St. Victor, St. Bonaventure and Ramon Llull, the above-mentioned "epic cycle of the bird" cannot be considered as a source for the image of the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross. However, said "cycle" must not be forgotten, as it may indeed be an indirect source for said solitary bird image.

Do not forget the *Simurgh*. As Henry Corbin said:

"The *Simurgh* is a mythical bird whose name already appears in the *Avesta* in the form *Saena Meregha*. In Persian literature it appears in a twofold tradition: that of the heroic epic and that of mystical poetry and prose." (250)

"We may also call to mind the bird *Karshiptar*, the marvelous bird gifted with (human) speech and the spiritual lord of all the birds, who brought the religion of *Ahura Mazda* (Zoroastrianism) to *Yima's Var*. [*Bundahishn* XIX:16 and XXIV:11, translated from the *Pahlavi* by E.W. West.](251)

Says C.S. Nott of the *Simurgh*:

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"*Sen-Murgh*, the great bird. In the *Mahabharata*, *Garuda*. There are two *Simugh*s. One lives on Mount Elburz in the Caucasus, far from man. Its nest is of pillars of ebony, sandal and aloe wood. It has the gift of speech and its feathers possess magical properties. It is a guardian of heroes, a symbol of God. The other one (*Simurgh*) is a horrible monster which also lives on a mountain, but it resembles a black cloud." (252)

The *Simurgh* also figures in two of the treatises of Suhrawardi, Risala-e-'Aql-e-Surkh (Treatise of the Red Intellect: remember our discussion of the color red in Chapter 1) and Risala-e-Safir-e-Simurgh (Treatise of the Shrill Cry of the Simurgh). In this last treatise, Suhrawardi says of the Simurgh:

"All colors are from him, but he himself has no color." (253)

Thus, Suhrawardi's Simurgh possesses at least one of the propertied of the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross.

Suhrawardi, also a Persian, lived somewhat later than the three authors of the "epic cycle of the birds". It is well to keep this in mind.

Before leaving the "epic cycle of the birds", one more thing must be noted.

Remember saying No. 22 in Sayings of Light and Love by St. John of the Cross? Here it is:

(2045)

"Twice works the bird caught in bird lime: in freeing himself from the bird lime and in cleaning himself of it. Just so, in two ways labors he who fulfills his sensual appetites: in lusting and after having sated his lusts, in purging himself of the uncleanness and contamination."

In his work Treatise of the Bird (not to be confused with the Epistle of the Bird given above), Avicenna says:

"One day it happened that I was looking out through the meshes of the nets. I saw a company of birds who had freed their heads and wings from the trap and were ready to fly away. Lengths of cord could still be seen tied to their feet, neither too tight to prevent them from flying nor loose enough to allow them a serene and untroubled life.

I called and cried to them from the depths of my cage: "Come! Approach! Teach me by what sleight to seek deliverance, sympathize with my suffering, for truly I am at the end of my strength." But they remembered the impostures of the hunters; my cries only frightened them, and they hastened from me. Then I besought them in the name of eternal brotherhood, of the stainless fellowship, of the unviolated pact, to trust my words and to banish doubt from their hearts. Then they came to me.

When I questioned them concerning their state, they reminded me thus: "We were prisoners of the same cord rings as thine; we too have known despair, we too have been made familiar with sorrow, anguish and pain. Then they applied their treatment to me. The cord fell from my neck; my wings were freed from their bonds. They said: "Profit by thy deliverance!" But again I prayed to them: "Free me also from this hobble that still clings to my foot." They answered: "Were it in our power, we should have begun by removing those that encumber our own feet. How should the sick cure the sick?" I arose from the trap and flew away with them.

(2046)

Finally, we reached the King's oratory. When the last curtain had been drawn and all the King's beauty shone before our eyes, our hearts hung upon it and were seized with a stupor so great that it prevented us from giving words to our complaints. But he, perceiving our weakness, restored our assurance by his affability; so that we were emboldened to speak, and to recite our story to him. Then he said to us: "None can unbind the bond that fetters your feet save those who tied it." (See Richard Wagner in his opera *Parzifal* (strange: the opera *Parzifal* has a Celtic theme, as the name indicates, though it was composed by a very Teutonic German): "Only one weapon avails: only the spear that made the wound will close it.") Now I will send them a Messenger to lay it upon them to satisfy you and remove your fetters. Depart then, happy and satisfied." (254)

Note how Avicenna's bird had to work twice to free himself, as did the bird of St. John of the Cross.

The Persian poet Hafiz, certainly one of the most exquisite poets in any language, live in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in other words, long after the time of the three authors of the "epic cycle of the birds", but long before the time of St. John of the Cross. Hafiz also used the image of the mystical bird. Here is my literal translation:

"O Royal Falcon of lofty gaze, perched on the Sidra (lotus) tree,  
Not your nest is this corner of woe  
From the battlements of the Throne of God they are whistling  
for you  
In this place of worldly snares, vanities and deceptions  
I do not know what has happened to you."

Below is H. Wilberforce Clarke's translation:

(2047)

"O falcon of lofty gaze sitting on the Sidra tree (of lofty degree)  
Not thy nest is this corner (of this world of) woe  
From the highest heaven's pinnacle they utter a cry for thee:  
In this snare-place of the world, I know not what (fortune)  
Has befallen thee (that with it thou art fascinated)."

Here is my own poetic translation:

"O high nesting Royal Falcon of lofty and lordly gaze  
And high degree perched on the Sidra, noblest of trees  
Not your nest is this miserable corner of the world of woe  
From the battlements of the Throne of God  
They are whistling for you to come home  
In this place of worldly snares, deceptions and vanities  
I do not know what dire fate has befallen you."

Hafiz's Royal Falcon does indeed share some of the properties of the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross. The Royal Falcon is a high flying and high nesting bird that perches in the highest places. It is also a solitary bird that usually does not tolerate the presence of those even of its own species.

Could Hafiz have been the inspiration for St. John of the Cross and his solitary bird? In this chapter we have noted that St. John of the Cross often does seem to echo Hafiz. However, in the case of the solitary bird, St. John of the Cross is much closer to a Persian mystic who lived well before the time of Hafiz, and with whose writing Hafiz was certainly familiar. So, in the case of the solitary bird, it would appear that both St. John

of the Cross and Hafiz were inspired by a certain Persian Sufi of whom we shall now speak.

It is in the works of the Persian Sufi Suhrawardi that one finds what is by far the most exact prototype of the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross. Suhrawardi tragically died young, being born in 1153 and dying in 1191. Suhrawardi was not only a great mystic, but also a great philosopher, though not as well known as his fellow Persians Avicenna and al-Ghazzali. An exposition of the philosophy of Suhrawardi would take up much space (huge tomes have been written concerning the philosophy of Suhrawardi) and would lead us very far indeed from our main topic. A most excellent introduction to the philosophy of Suhrawardi may be found in Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi by Seyyed Hossein Nasr; for those who read French, I recommend En Islam Iranien: Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques, Volume II: Sohrawardi et les Platoniciens de Perse by Henry Corbin.

In his treatise The Language of the Ants, Suhrawardi includes a tale concerning a nightingale, another concerning a hoopoe, and one concerning a peacock. By its nature, the nightingale shares one property with the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross,



i.e., it sings softly and sweetly. However, with this one exception, the bird mentioned in The language of the Ants have none of the properties of the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross, so they need not concern us at this time.

It is Suhrawardi's *Simurgh*, which we have mentioned before, which is of interest, as it would appear to be the inspiration of both the Royal Falcon of Hafiz and the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross. We shall begin with what Suhrawardi says concerning the *Simurgh* in The Red Intellect:

"The *Simurgh* has its nest at the top of the Tuba tree. At dawn the *Simurgh* leaves its nest and spreads its wings over the earth. From the effect of its wings fruit appears on trees and plants in the earth." (I am reminded of the Peruvain song "El Condor de Los Andes" [The Condor of the Andes])

"I said to the old man, "I have heard that Zal was raised by the *Simurgh* and that Rustam was able to kill Isfandiar with the *Simurgh's* help."

"Yes," the old man said, "it is true."

"How was that?", I asked.

(Note: the following is based on incidents in the Shah Namah of Firdausi, the Persian national epic.)

"When Zal was born, his hair and face were white (he was an albino). His father Sam ordered him cast into the wilderness, and his mother, who had suffered much pain in giving birth, agreed when she saw that her son was hideous to behold. So Zal was cast into the wilderness. It was winter and cold, and no one expected him to live long, but after a few days his mother recovered from her pain and began to have compassion for her son. She said: "Let me go at once to the wilderness and see how my son is." When she came to the wilderness she saw her son alive beneath the *Simurgh's*

wing. He saw his mother and smiled, and his mother took him up in her arms and nursed him. She was about to take him home, but she said, "I cannot return home without learning how Zal survived these few days." She put him back where he had been beneath the *Simurgh's* wing and hid herself nearby. When night fell and the *Simurgh* left the wilderness, a gazelle came to Zal and suckled him. When he had fed, the gazelle sheltered him with her own body so that no harm might come to him. His mother rose, took her son from the gazelle and carried him home."

"What is the mystery in that?", I asked.

"I asked the same thing of the *Simurgh*", said the old man.

"It (the *Simurgh*) said:" "Zal was born under the sign of the Tuba tree. We could not allow him to perish. We gave the gazelle's foal to the hunter and placed compassion for Zal in the gazelle's heart so that it would tend him by night, while by day I took him under my wing."

"What about Rustam and Isfandiar," I asked.

"When he returned home wounded, his father Zal humbled himself before the *Simurgh*. Now the *Simurgh* has a characteristic such that if a mirror or something like that be held up to it, any eye that looks into the mirror will be dazzled. So Zal had a breastplate made from iron and polished. This he placed on Rustam and on his head a polished helmet. He also covered his horse with mirrors. Then he sent Rustam into the battlefield opposite the *Simurgh*. Isfandiar was forced to come face to face with Rustam, and when he drew near, the rays of the *Simurgh* fell on the breastplate and mirrors, the reflection from which pierced Isfandiar's eyes and dazzled them. He could see nothing. Since he had never experienced anything like that before, he imagined that he had been wounded in both eyes, fell from his horse and perished at the hand of Rustam. The "two-feathered shaft they talk about must be the *Simurgh's* two wings.

I asked the old man if he thought there was but one *Simurgh* in the world.

"He who knows not supposes it to be so," he said.

(2051)

"Otherwise, at every instant a *Simurgh* must come from the Tuba tree to the earth, and the one that is on the

earth must simultaneously cease to exist. That is, at every moment a *Simurgh* comes while the one that is here disappears: just as one is coming toward the earth, the other is going from the Tuba tree."(255)

The following is from Suhrawardi's treatise titled: The Simurgh's Shrill Cry:

"This treatise is in two divisions, the first on origins and the second on aims; it is called The Simurgh's Shrill Cry.

It will not be detrimental to recall, by way of an introductory preface, something of this bird's conditions and place of habitation. Those who have been illuminated have shown that every hoopoe that abandons his nest in springtime and plucks his feathers with his beak and sets off for Mount Qaf will fall under the shadow of Mount Qaf within the span of a thousand years: "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, of those which you compute."(Qur'an XXII:47)

These thousand years, in the calendar of the People of Reality, are but one dawning ray from the Orient of the Divine Realm. During this time the hoopoe becomes a *Simurgh* whose shrill cry awakens those who are asleep.

The *Simurgh's* nest is on Mount Qaf. His cry reaches everyone, but he has few listeners; everyone is with him, but most are without him.

You are with us, and you are not with us  
You are the soul, hence you are not apparent

The ill who totter on the brink of dropsy and consumption are cured by his (*the Simurgh's*) shadow, and it causes various symptoms to vanish. This *Simurgh* flies without moving and he soars without wings. He approaches without traversing space. All colors are from him, but he himself has no colour. His nest is in

(2052)

the Orient, but the Occident is not void of him. All are occupied with him, but he is free of all. All are full of him, but he is empty of all. All knowledge

emanates and is derived from his shrill cry, and marvelous instruments such as the organ have been made from his trilling voice.

Since you have not seen Solomon, what do you know of the birds' language?

His food is fire, and whoever binds one of his feathers to his right side and passes through fire will be safe from burning. The zephyr is from his breath, hence lovers speak their hearts' secrets and innermost thoughts with him.

These words that have been scriiven here are but a puff of breath emanating from him, an incomplete account of his proclamation."(256)

In the works of St. John of the Cross, as in much Persian Sufi poetry, the solitary bird represents the soul, which has achieved the heights of mystical ecstasy, as Otto Spies has noted:

"(Suhrawardi's *Simurgh*) stands for the Sufi (*salik*) who has passed all the stages (*maqamat*) on the road (*tariqa*) and reached his goal (*fan'a fil haqq*)."(257)

So far, both Suhrawardi and St. John of the Cross use the *Simurgh* or solitary bird (which the *Simurgh* is) in the same way as many Sufis and Christian mystics. Abu Yazid al-Bistami said:

"As soon as I arrived at His Oneness, I became a bird whose body was of unity and whose wings were of Eternity. So I continued to fly through the ether of howness (*kayfiyya*) for ten years until I came to the air of something like that one thousand thousand times. I did not cease flying until I came to the field of pre-Eternity and saw there the Tree of Unity."(258)

(2053)

Al-Bistami uses the symbolism of the bird in a slightly different, though similar way:

"I saw myself in the dream, as if I had risen to the Heavens. When I came to the lowest Heaven, I was in the presence of a green bird. It spread out one of its wings and bore me away, taking me as far as some legions of angels who were standing with their feet aflame amidst the stars, praising Allah morning and evening. I saluted them and they returned my salutation. The bird set me down among them and departed." (259)

Al-Bistami died in 877, so he lived long before the Suhrawardi, Hafiz and St. John of the Cross.

If you will recall, St. John of the Cross describes solitariness as one of the characteristics of the mystical bird.

Another characteristic of the mystical bird of St. John of the Cross is that it

"Ordinarily sets itself very high, and thus the spirit at this stage sets itself in the highest contemplation."

All the Persian Sufis - al-Bistami, Attar, al-Ghazzali, Rumi, Hafiz are at one with St. John of the Cross on this point; that their mystical birds symbolize the soul in the highest contemplation: here all mystics agree. As we noted before,

(2054)

Suhrawardi said:

"Those who have been illuminated have shown that every hoopoe that abandons his nest and sets off for Mount Qaf (who renounces the material world) will fall under the shadow of Mount Qaf within the span of a thousand years:

"One day with your Lord is a thousand years of those which you compute." (Qur'an XXII:47)

These thousand years, in the calendar of the People of Reality, are but one dawning ray from the Orient of the Divine Realm. During this time the hoopoe becomes a *Simurgh* whose shrill cry awakens those who are asleep."(260)

Most Sufis who use the symbol of the bird describe it in full flight toward the Divine; such is the image used by al-Bistami, al-Hallaj, who said "I fly with my wings toward the Beloved"(261), Avicenna, al-Ghazzali, Attar and Hafiz. However, on this point Suhrawardi and St. John of the Cross differ with other mystics who employ the symbol of the bird. The solitary bird of St. John of the Cross

"Flies into the highest part of Heaven",  
as we have noted earlier. Likewise, the *Simurgh* of Suhrawardi

"Flies without moving, and soars without wings.  
He approaches without traversing space",

as we have already noted.

(2055)

Whether the bird's flying is explicitly mentioned or not, in all cases which we have mentioned the end is the same: union with God.

The solitary bird of St. John of the Cross, like the mystical birds of the Sufis, achieves a wisdom beyond all merely human reason: "transcending far all temporal lore", as St. John of the Cross says in Coplas del Exstasis. Al-Hallaj's soul

"Falls into the sea of understanding and is drowned".(262)

The solitary bird of St. John of the Cross

"is unknowing of all things, for it knows God only, without knowing how".

In the case of the *Simurgh* of Suhrawardi,

"All knowledge emanates and is derived from his shrill cry."

One property which St. John of the Cross attributes to his solitary bird is, at first glance, rather curious. As we have noted before, St. John of the Cross says:

"Its beak is turned always towards the place from which the wind comes; and thus the spirit here turns the beak of the affections towards the place from which the spirit of love, which is God, comes.

It must put its beak into the air of the Holy Spirit, which is its (the Holy Spirit's) inspiration, so that in so doing, it may be more worthy of the Holy Spirit's company."

(2056)

This same posture is also found among the Persian Sufis, indeed, it is almost a commonplace in what Henry Corbin calls "The epic cycle of the bird". In its mystical flight , al-

Bistami's bird must lift its head to God:

"Then I lifted my head and knew that it was all a cheat".

Commenting on the above, Attar says:

"As for the saying "I lifted my head and knew that it was all a cheat", its meaning - and God knows best - is that the turning to and preoccupation with creation and dominion is a cheat next to the realities of *tafrid* and the purity of *tawhid*. Therefore Junayd (God grant him compassion) said, "I do not see that Abu Yazid (al-Bistami), despite the grandeur of his allusions, has gone beyond the beginning and the middle. I have not heard from him any pronouncement that would point to a meaning that would show the end."

This applies to his mention of the body, the wings, the air and the field. He said, "I knew it was a cheat", because among the people of the end, the turning to anything other than God is a cheat."(263)

Says Attar in The Conference of the Birds:

"O wagtail, you who resemble Moses! Lift up your head and make your reed flute resound to celebrate the true knowledge of God.

Salutations o excellent pheasant! You see that which is far off, and you perceive the heart's source immersed in the ocean of light while you remain in the pit of darkness and the prison of uncertainty. Lift yourself up from the pit and raise your head to the Divine Throne."(264)

(2057)

St. John of the Cross is a bit more precise, when he says that his solitary bird must raise its beak

"Towards the place from which the breeze blows"  
and "To the wind of the Holy Spirit."

This image is also found in the works of the Persian Sufi



poets.

In The Simurgh's ShriII Cry, Suhrawardi says:

"The morning zephyr is his (the Simurgh's) breath." (265)

In the end, both the peacock and the Simurgh are united with God. To St. John of the Cross, the wind of the spirit is "obscure tidings of God" from the Holy Spirit. Earlier we have seen how Henry Corbin has noted that in Islam the mystical bird is at times associated with the Holy Spirit.

We now return to the Simurgh. Says M. Schwartz:

"*Hukairya*, the one place retaining its primeval perfection, connecting the upper and lower regions, and being a cosmic centre from which come light and liquid, may be seen as the Iranian form of the *Axis Mundi* found in many archaic cultures. Related to this idea of a central axis or pole is the World Tree (Tree of Life, etc.). In Iran this was located in the centre of the Vourukasha (Sea). It is the "well-watered tree on which grow the seeds of plants of all kinds by the hundreds, thousands, and myriads. (*Videvdad V:15*)." This tree, which contained all manner of medicaments, was also known as a tree of healing. In it rested the giant *Saena* bird, whose wing beats scatter the seeds of the tree. This bird is the original form of the Simurgh of Classical Persian literature." (266)

(2058)

Ehsan Yarshater elaborates on the above:

"A variety of fabulous creatures who are either helpful or harmful to man are known in the Iranian myths. They are also met in the Avesta, the Pahlavi books, and the folk epics of Persian literature. Important among them, and conspicuous in the Shah Namah and in Persian literature is the *Saena* bird, Avestan: *Saena Meregha*, Phalavi: *Sen-murv*, Persian: *Simurgh*, mentioned in the Avesta and elaborated in the Pahlavi books. Its resting place, according to Yasht XII:17, is

on the fabulous tree which is in the middle of the Vourukasha Sea and which bears the seeds of all plants and healing herbs. It is by the beating of the Simurgh's wings that the seeds of this tree are scattered, to be carried by the wind and rain over all the earth. In the *Shah Namah*, the Simurgh is depicted as a huge eagle with magical powers, which has its nest on top of a huge mountain. It rears Zal and helps Rustam defeat Isafandiyar. It is not certain, however, whether this is the same bird as the one described in the *Avesta*. Since the legends of Zal and Rustam are probably of Saka origin, and in any event from a different region than the birthplace of the *Avesta*, it is likely either that two different miraculous birds coalesced in name or that different myths were attached to the same bird in different regions. Another legendary bird is *Karshiptar*, which, according to the *Vendidad* II:24, spread the good religion in Yima's underground fortress." (267)

It is obvious that the Avestan *Saena Meregha*, the Pahlavi *Sen-murv* is the prototype of the "solitary bird" of Suhrawardi and St. John of the Cross and of the "solitary falcon" of Hafiz.

Persian Sufis often make use of the very Persian image of the

(2059)

garden. One use of the image of the garden by the Persian Sufis is to represent the soul as a flowering garden freshened by divine zephyrs. There is an obvious relation here with the property of the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross mentioned above, as both have to do with divine zephyrs, also a symbol of the Holy Spirit. St. John of the Cross sometimes uses the symbol of the garden in exactly the same way as the Persian Sufis, notably in

the prose commentary to Spiritual Canticle:

"But, beyond this ordinary satisfaction and peace, the flowers of virtues of this garden tend to open in the soul and spread their fragrance so that it seems that the soul is filled with delights from God. And I said that the flowers of virtues in the soul are like to open, because, though the soul be filled with virtues in perfection, it does not always enjoy them (though, as I have said, it does usually enjoy the peace and tranquility which they cause) because we might say that they are in this life they are in the soul as flowers in the garden, but in buds yet tightly closed, which at times it is a most admirable thing to see all of them open (caused by the Holy Spirit), diffusing a great variety of admirable odors and fragrances. For it will come to be that the soul will see itself as the flowers of the mountains. (One is reminded of the Scottish song: "Wild Mountain Thyme":

I will build my love a bower  
By yon pure crystal fountain  
And on it I will pile  
All the flowers of the mountain.

Of which we have spoken before, which are the abundance, greatness and beauty of God; and with these will be intertwined the lilies (another Sufi image) of

(2060)

the woodland valleys, which are rest, refreshment and shelter; and interspersed among them will be the fragrant roses of strange islands (another Sufi image; how William Butler Yeats must have loved this, if he knew of it!) which are, as we say, the esoteric kinds of knowledge of God; and also bathed in the fragrance of the water lilies (or lotus; the rose and the lotus: mystical flower of India; once again, how William Butler Yeats must have loved this if he knew of it!) of the sounding rivers, which we said was the greatness of God, that fills all the soul; and interwoven and interlaced the delicate fragrance of the jasmine (another Sufi image), which is the gentle whistle of the amorous zephyrs, which, as we said earlier, the soul enjoys in this state; and neither more nor less all the other virtues and gifts which, as we say, spring

from the tranquil knowledge and the silent music and sonorous solitude and the savory supper of love. And such is the enjoyment and perception of all these flowers together that the soul with complete truth may say:

Our flowery bed  
Among dens of lions.

Blessed the soul which at times is worthy, in this life, to taste the fragrance of these divine flowers! And say that this bed is festooned with purple."

"The south wind is another wind, commonly called *abrego*. This peaceful breeze causes rains and makes the plants and grasses to germinate and the flower buds to open and disperse their fragrance; its effects are the opposite of those of the north wind. And, for this zephyr the soul understands the Holy Spirit, Who, as is said, awakens love, because, when this divine breeze wafts upon the soul, in such a way does it revive the fire of the soul and refresh and revive it that it awakens the will, raises the appetites which had fallen asleep to the love of God, which we may well say awakens love of God in the soul. And that which the Holy Spirit asks is that which the following verse says:

(2061)

**Breathe through my garden.**

Said garden is the soul, because as above we have called the soul a flowering vineyard, because in it are planted and germinate and grow the flowers of perfections and virtues of which we have spoken. And here we note that the Bride does not say "Breathe in my garden", but rather "Breathe through my garden", for great is the difference between the breathing of God into the soul and His breathing through the soul. Because, to breathe in the soul is to infuse within it grace, gifts and virtues; and to breathe through the soul is for God to touch and set in motion all the virtues and perfections with which it is already endowed, reviving them and moving them so that they may infuse it with admirable fragrance and sweetness; it is thus when aromatic spices are shaken; for as soon as they are put in motion they spill their fragrance in

abundance, which before either was not present or at least was not present to such a degree, because those virtues of the soul, whether acquired or infused, are not always feeling and enjoying, because as we shall note later, in this life are as flower buds not yet opened or as aromatic spices covered, whose aroma is not perceived until they are opened or shaken, as we have said.

But at times God grants such favors to the bride-soul, that, breathing His Divine Spirit through the soul's flowering garden, He opens these buds of virtues and the aromatic spices of gifts and perfections and riches of the soul, and, by making manifest this inward wealth and treasure, reveals all her beauty. And then it is marvelous to see, and smooth to feel the richness of the gifts and the beauty of these flowers of virtues, now all open in the soul. And the sweetness of the fragrance which each one diffuses according to its nature is inestimable. And these flowing aromas of the garden the following (Bible) verse calls

"And let the aromas flow".

(2062)

These aromas are at times so abundant that the soul appears to be clothed with delights and bathed in unestimable glory; so much so that not only is the soul not aware of them within, but they are apt to overflow from it, and to such an extent that those able to discern these things are able to recognize it, and the soul thus appears as a delectable garden full of the delights and riches of God. And not only when these flowers are open can this be seen in these holy souls, but they have within them generally some air of greatness and dignity, which causes others to stop and respect them by reason of the supernatural effect which is produced in them through the close and familiar relations with God."

Said Saadi in the Gulestan (Rose Garden):

A garden where the murmuring rill was heard;  
While from the trees sang each melodious bird;

That, with the many colored tulip bright,  
These, with their various fruits the eye delight.  
The whispering breeze beneath the branches' shade,  
Of bending flowers a motley carpet made.  
It is natural for plants to be revived by the morning  
breeze,  
Whereas minerals and dead bodies are not susceptible to  
the zephyr's influence. (268)

Saadi's meaning is that only those hearts which are alive to  
the meaning of spiritual love can be quickened by the breath of  
Divine Inspiration. (269)

The next property of the solitary bird of St. John of the  
Cross is that it sings very softly. As St. John of the Cross says  
in the prose commentary to the Spiritual Canticle:

(2063)

"The fourth property (of the solitary bird) is  
that it sings very softly; as does the spirit sing to  
God at this time, because the praises which it makes to  
God are of the sweetest love, very savory of themselves  
and very precious to God."

In Sayings of Light and Love, No. 22, St. John of  
the Cross says:

"The fifth property of the solitary bird (St. John of  
the Cross is not consistent as to the numeric order of the  
properties of the solitary bird) is that it sings softly."

One is reminded of the Persian Sufi image of the nightingale  
in love with the rose, the rose, mystical flower of Persia and the  
West, which in this case symbolizes God. Once again it is

Suhrawardi who is by far the closest to St. John of the Cross.

As we noted before, in The Shrill Cry of the Simurgh,

"During this time the hoopoe, (symbol of the soul) becomes a Simurgh whose shrill cry awakens those who are asleep. All knowledge emanates and is derived from his shrill cry."

Qur'an XXVII:16 says:

"And Solomon succeeded David, and he said, "O people! We have been taught the language of the birds, and We have been granted (abundance) of everything; truly this is a manifest grace."

(2064)

Though the image of the Simurgh is of pre-Islamic origin, Suhrawardi's "shrill cry of the Simurgh" is indeed the language of the birds of which the Qur'an speaks. As Suhrawardi says in The Simurgh's Shrill Cry:

"The words that have been scriben here are but a puff of breath emanating from him (the Simurgh), an incomplete account of his proclamation."

In the prose commentary to Spiritual Canticle, St. John of the Cross speaks of the fourth property (fifth in Sayings of Light and Love No. 120) of the solitary bird;

"The fifth property that the solitary bird has is that it is not of any defined color. Thus the perfect soul, which in this excess or superabundance has no

color of sensual affection and self-love, nor even of superior or inferior, nor can it speak of this in any mode nor manner, because it is immersed in the fathomless wisdom of God, as we have said."

This is indeed a startling image, a bird of no specific color. Once again, here is Suhrawardi referring to the Simurgh:

"All colors come from him, but he himself has no color."

In The Conference of the Birds, Attar says:

"At last, in a state of contemplation, they (the thirty birds) realized that they were the Simurgh and that the Simurgh was the thirty birds. When they gazed at the Simurgh, they saw that it was truly the Simurgh who was there, and when they turned their eyes towards themselves they saw that they were the Simurgh. And perceiving both at once, themselves and him, they realized that they and the Simurgh were one and the same being." (270)

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The thirty birds were all of different species, and were therefore of the most diverse colors, so, as Seyyed Hussein Nasr has noted, when they discovered that they themselves were the Simurgh, they too must have become *of no specific color*, like the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross. We now return to Hafiz. Here is a literal translation of two lines from Hafiz which are relevant to our topic:

"I am the slave of the will (though "resolution" might be more literal) of that person  
Who under the azure sphere (though "vault" might be more literal) is free of attachment to whatever possesses color."

Seyyed Hossein Nasr translates the above lines thusly:

"I am the slave of the will of that person



Who under the azure sphere has become free of the attachment to whatever possesses color."

H. Wilberforce Clarke translates the words of the Hafiz in this manner:

"Beneath the azure vault, I am the slave of resolution, Who Is free from whatever takest colour of attachment."

Wilberforce Clarke's translation is weak in that "slave of resolution, who" does not make much sense, nor does "colour of attachment".

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In any case, the affinity between Hafiz on the one hand and St. John of the Cross, Suhrawardi and Attar on the other is obvious.

We have spoken at some length of the "Dark Night of the Soul" of St. John of the Cross, noting its antecedents in the works of the Church Fathers, notably St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Isaac the Syrian, *Sahdona* or "Martyrium", and, most especially, in the works of the great Hispano-Muslim Sufi Ibn Abbad of Ronda. It is also true that the "Dark Night of the Soul" of St. John of the Cross has an antecedent in the works of Suhrawardi, who lived later than the time of the Church Fathers but earlier than Ibn Abbad of Ronda.

In the recital called The Sound of Gabriel's Wing, Suhrawardi

says:

"During the days in which I had first left the women's chambers and some of the restrictions of infants had been lifted from me, one night as a jet black gloom settled over the concave of the cobalt sphere and a darkness that was the right-hand on non-existence's brother spread over the lower world, I was overcome by a sense of despair resulting from the impact of a dream. Distressed, I took a candle and walked toward the men's part of the house, and there I wandered that night until the break of dawn. Afterwards I had a desire to enter my father's *khanagah*.

The *khanagah* had two doors, one onto the city and one onto the field and orchard. I went and shut tightly

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the door to the city. After closing it I went to open the door to the field. When I looked I saw ten old men of handsome countenance seated on a bench. I was so amazed by their magnificence and splendor and so staggered by the sight of their throne, their good looks, their white hair, their garments and trappings that I could not speak."

On reading the above, I was reminded of the time when in New Delhi, India, I gave a talk on Muslim Spain at the tomb of the Sufi master Nizamuddin Awliya, for which I was decorated with a leis of marigolds. Most of my audience on that occasion consisted of saintly looking men with white beards.

"What is the city God has spoken of in the words 'And what has happened to you that you do not fight in the way of God and for the weak among men, women and children who say 'O Our Lord! Take us out of this city whose inhabitants are tyrants and evildoers and appoint for us from You a champion and appoint for us from You a helper'" (Qur'an IV:75)

That city is the world of vainglory, which is the dominion of the lesser word. The lesser word too is a city unto itself, because God has said:

"This is the account of (*the fate of*) the cities We relate to you (*O Our Apostle Muhammad*). Of them some are yet standing and some have been thrown down (*by the passage of time*). (Qur'an XI:100)

That which is standing is the Word, and that which is demolished is the temple of the Word, which is perishable. Anything that is untouched by time is untouched by place, and what is outside of these two are God's Greater and Lesser Words.

(2068)

Then as the day was breaking in my father's *khanqah*, the outer door was closed and the door to the city was opened. As merchants began to pass by, the group of old men disappeared from before my eyes. In my perplexity and regret at the loss of their company I sighed and moaned. But it was of no use." (271)

Says Henry Corbin:

"The time of the fall into captivity is related to the theme of evasion. We find this in the other mystical recitations. This occurs every time in which the author evokes the "binding" of the senses, *eo ipso* freed from subjection to servitude to the world of sensuous perception. Sad state may be symbolized by the "night", because the night, in hiding or covering the world of the senses, symbolizes and coincides with the noetic powers of the soul (this is the moment in which the Holy Grail is "unsheathed" from its covering and hidden from the sensual world). The mystic is not a schizophrenic; he is very conscious of what he seeks beyond the veil; the liberation is not complete. The bird of our recital relates: "All limping within my ligatures, at last I reached the desert road." This same thing is noted in the Recital of the Bird. As for the "desert", the solitary field (image of the solitudes of the Iranian High Plateau or the infinite diversity

concentrated in the quintessential tonalities), is every time the place of the initial escape from the tumult of the perceptions of the exterior world. The opening scene of another recital, Letter on the State of Infancy is also situated in the desert.

The escape to the desert has for its immediate object the reencounter with the Angel. Passing to the prologue of another recital, i.e., The Sound of Gabriel's Wing, we find *l'Enfant* who is the celestial man, frees himself from the bonds of sensual perception which are the bonds which shackle the *infants* which are the men of the earth, which is to say that he frees himself from the shackles of sensual perception which bind the Earthlings, plunged in the sleep of the death

(2069)

of their souls. This is the "night" of the senses; all liberty is granted to the active imagination to perceive the reality of that world which is proper to it, the *mundus imaginalis* which begins on the summit of the mountain of *Qaf* (remember the *Mount Carmel* of St. John of the Cross). At the beginning of the mystical dawn (at the hour of *Ishraq*), the visionary opens the door of the *khanqah* (meeting place or "convent" of Sufis) which opens onto the fields. In other words: on the threshold of his most profound consciousness his "transconsciousness" opens the secret door which opens onto the hitherto unexplored desert and the traversing of which leads precisely to that country by which has come to be in his world (*mundus imaginalis*). These sages (see above citations from The Sound of Gabriel's Wing) are ranged in hierarchical degrees; their good looks stupefy the visionary. With respectful fear, he approaches them, and the initiation begins,

After the presentation of this brief evocation of the prologue placed by Suhrawardi at the head of his recital The Sound of Gabriel's Wing because the Recital of the Purple Angel put us in the same circumstances of the soul, in the presence of the same Figure, distinguished by the same characteristics. When he goes into the desert, the visionary encounters a mysterious personage of enchantingly youthful appearance. And, as he learns, this youth is "the elder of the infants of the Creator". The exact meaning of this declaration is to be understood in terms of the context to which we

have referred, dividing the worlds of the "worlds of the divine imperative" (*alam al-Amr*), known as ensemble of *Jabarut* and "the creaturely world (*alam al-khalq*) which designates the ensemble of the world of *Genesis* which is apparently presented to humans. In regards to the "Angel of Humanity" (*Rabb al-nu al-insani*), the Archangel might call it "elder" of the Infants of the Creator."(272)

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Note that Henry Corbin prominently mentions the mountain *Qaf*. As we noted, one of the major works of St. John of the Cross in Ascent of Mount Carmel, and that St. John of the Cross made a drawing or diagram of his poetic Mount Carmel which is obviously based on the diagrams of *Mount Qaf*.

Below is the commentary of Annemarie Schimmel concerning The Sound of Gabriel's Wing:

"For early Christianity (and for Christian mysticism of all periods, from the redactions of the Gospels and the other books of the New Testament up to the present day) as well as for Shi'ism the same text is susceptible to two exegeses, the exoteric and the esoteric. The vision of the desert which is particularly appropriate for this double interpretation, is one of the favorites of the mystical parables of the [*sic*] Arabs (*Suhrawardi was NOT an Arab, but a Persian who wrote in both Persian and Arabic*), notably so in the case of *Suhrawardi* in the Recital of the Purple Angel (also known as The Recital of the Sound of Gabriel's Wing). The desert symbolizes the rupture with the world of sensory perceptions and the "ego", the night of the senses and the solitude at the bottom of that soul when come to it the entities of

the Wisdom (which Henry Corbin calls the *Mundo Imaginalis*), the essential visions of its Destiny. Like the vision of the desert, the recital of the The Apocalypse of St. John may be deciphered in this manner, as may the anathema against the impure city, the unveiling of the truth to the soul which is engaged in the road of the desert and in the dark night, as we see in the divine verses of St. John of the Cross." (273)

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Below is the poem which St. John of the Cross used as prologue both to Dark Night of the Soul and Ascent of Mount Carmel:

On a dark night  
With anxieties inflamed by love,  
Oh blessed chance!  
I left without being seen,  
All the house being now at rest.

In darkness and secure  
By the secret stairs, disguised.  
Oh blessed chance!  
In darkness and concealment,  
The whole house being now at rest.

In the blessed night,  
In secret, when no one saw me,  
Nor I beheld anything,  
Without light not guide,  
Save that which burned in my heart.

That which guided me,  
More surely than the light of mid day  
To the place where no one appeared.

Oh, night that guided me!  
Oh night more lovely than the dawn,  
Oh night that united

The Beloved with the lover,  
The lover transformed in the Beloved!

Oh my flowery breast,  
Kept wholly for Him alone,  
There He remained sleeping, and I caressed Him,  
And the wind in the cedars made a zephyr.

(2072)

The zephyr blew from the battlement,  
When I parted His locks,  
With His gentle hand  
My neck he wounded,  
And all my senses were in suspension.

I remained and in oblivion,  
My face reclining on the Beloved;  
Everything ceased and I abandoned myself,  
Leaving my cares  
Forgotten among the lilies.

Of course, the images of the soul as "lover" and God as the "Beloved" are thoroughly typical of Persian Sufi verse, as we have said. Other aspects remind us of the troubadors, which is to be expected.

Leaving aside the obvious relation between *Mount Qaf* and *Mount Carmel*, compare the above verses of St. John of the Cross as well as the prose work Dark Night of the Soul with those parts of Suhrawardi's recital The Sound of Gabriel's Wing and the commentaries on it by Henry Corbin and Paulette Duval. Also note that Ascent of Mount Carmel and Dark Night of the Soul use the same poem as prologue, making the relation obvious.

In the Dark Night of the Soul of St. John of the Cross we find echoes of the Church Fathers, especially St. Gregory of Nyssa, Sahdona or *Martyrium* and St. Isaac the Syrian. Even more, as one might expect, we find echoes of Ibn Abbad of Ronda, as we

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said above. However, all things considered, including the equivalence of *Mount Qaf* and *Mount Carmel*, one could perhaps say that the closest parallel with the Dark Night of the Soul of St. John of the Cross is to be found in the works of Suhrawardi, notably The Sound of Gabriel's Wing.

As an anecdote, one part of The Sound of Gabriel's Wing evoked memories. When in India I gave a conference on Muslim Spain at the tomb of the Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya in New Delhi. I vividly recall that my audience consisted mainly of saintly looking men with white beards.

Firstly, I wish to remind the reader of certain historical facts. It is well known that due to the Almoravid (al-Murabitun) invasion, large numbers of Mozarabs and Jews fled from al-Andalus to Castile, and, in smaller numbers, to Aragon and Catalunya. However, it is also true that large numbers of Muslims also fled al-Andalus as a result of the Almoravid invasion; remember, the



Almoravides savagely persecuted Sufis and Shi'as. Most of the Muslim refugees fled to the Kingdom of Saragossa, the only part of al-Andalus to remain free from the Almoravid yoke, though some

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fled to Castile, Aragon and Catalunya. As we said before, these Muslim refugees included a very high percentage of Shi'as and practicing Sufis. It is well to keep all this in mind.

Gemstones symbols play a role in many religions; remember the Buddhist Sanskrit mantra *Om mani padme hum* (Hail the jewel in the lotus). In the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches the pearl is often used as a symbol of the Virgin Mary. In Irish Catholicism the emerald plays a certain role, as does the famous green marble of Connemara in western Ireland, from which highly prized rosaries (*tasbih*) are made.

In Islam some gemstones are regarded as filled with *baraka*. The agate or 'aqiq is said to have been recommended by the Prophet Muhammad himself. The red (carnelian) and liver-colored agate are especially prized. Shi'as like to wear an agate ring inscribed with the names of Muhammad, Fatima, Ali, Hasan and Hussein. A twelve-pointed agate symbolizing the Twelve Shi'a Imams is worn by

the Bektashi Order of Dervishes, a Shi'a order. The emerald has a special place in Islam, green being the color of paradise. Says Henry Corbin, interpreting or synthesizing the writings of Suhrawardi and Semnani:

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"The return to the East is to climb the mountain *Qaf* (remember Ascent of Mount Carmel by St. John of the Cross), the cosmic (or psycho-cosmic) mountain, the mountain of the emerald cities, all the way up to the heavenly pole, the mystical Sinai, The Emerald Rock." (274)

Strange things have happened to the Latin word *jocus*, meaning "play" or "game", Medieval Latin *joellum*, synonym for *jocus*, Medieval Latin *joculari*, meaning "a pleasant object". In the Provençal and Catalan languages we have *joc*, which means "play", more distantly the Castilian *jugar* (verb) and *juego*, (noun).

As is well known, the **Domna** or **Dompna** (**Lady**) of the Provençal trobadors is often a mystical symbol, sometimes a symbol of the Virgin Mary, as we have seen. Anyone familiar with the works of St. John of the Cross and the Persian Sufi poeta does not doubt that the trobador verse often encloses mystical symbolism. Not all the trobadors were libertines, It is obvious that when the trobadors use the word *joi* they mean "internal jewel". Indeed, they use the word *joi* in contexts in which not only the erotic is excluded, but any banal or mundane sort of joy or enjoyment. Here

is an example from Bertran de Born:

My spirit is irritated  
And saddened  
Because deceit is in ascendance  
And merit ignored  
So that *joi* has become almost unknown to me.

(2076)

Certainly much mystical symbolism and allegory may be found in the works of the Provençal trobadors. Some see in the **Lady (Domna or Dompna** in Provençal) of the trobadors the *Daena* of the Persian Sufis and esoterics.

Says Henry Corbin:

"Etymologically (Avestan "*day*", Sanskrit "*dhi*") she (*Daena*) is the visionary soul or the visionary organ of the soul, the light it sheds and which makes it possible to see, and at the same time the light that is seen, the celestial figure that comes face to face with the soul at the dawn of its Eternity.

When the soul in amazement asks "Who are you?", the maiden, more resplendent than any beauty ever glimpsed in the terrestrial world answers: "I am your own *Daena*," which means: "I am *in person* the faith you have professed and she who inspired it in you. I am she for whom you answered and she who guided you, who comforted you and the Image which, finally, you yourself desired. ("I was fair, thou hast made me fairer still"). That is why the *Daena* is also *Xvarnah*, personal glory and destiny." (275)

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century the Byzantine Emperor Justinian built the famous Cathedral of *Hagia Sophia* in Constantinople, today Istanbul. The name *Hagia Sophia* does not refer to a saint but rather means *Holy Wisdom* or *Sophia Perennis* personified as a feminine angel.

In Avestan *Daena* (Pahlavi: *Den*) means Religion and Holy Wisdom (once again, *Hagia Sophia*), personified as a feminine angel, as is indicated by the following quotation from the Zoroastrian scripture Vendidad X:19:

(2077)

"*The best Daena who purifies man's future birth* (this last quoted from Yasna XLVIII:5 of the *Gathas*) is this purifying one, O Zoroaster, who is the *Mazdayasnian Daena* (of him) who purifies his individual *Daena* by means of good thoughts, words and actions. You (Zoroaster) should indeed purify the *Daena*, for thus takes place the purification of her who is truly the individual *Daena* belonging to each man of the material existence who purifies his individual *Daena* by means of good thoughts, words and actions." (276)

In the *Gathas*, oldest Zoroastrian scriptures and said to be the very words of Zoroaster himself, we read in Yasna XLIV:

"Answer me truly, that which I ask of You, O Ahura Mazda. How shall I maintain in purity that which is my living *Daena* which You, the Lord of the *Holy Wisdom* (*Hagia Sophia*, *Daena*) shall teach me concerning the Heavenly Kingdom? Only one such as You are, O Ahura Mazda, will long to dwell in Your Abode with *Xshatra the Righteous*, with *Asha* and with *Vohu Mana*." (277)

As we shall see below, the Sanskrit stem **DHI** is quite prevalent in the Rig Veda, but becomes less common in post-Vedic Sanskrit literature, though never becoming completely obsolete. In any case, there is no doubt about the high antiquity of the stem **DHI**.

Says Sir Monier Monier-Williams:

"Stem **DHI**:

Rig Veda: stem *didhi*: the forms *dhimahi* and *didhayi* belong rather to the stem *dha*, perfect tense *didhaya*, *dhima*, *dhiyur* or *dhyur*, Rig Veda; to perceive, think, reflect, wish, desire, Intensive; *dedhyat*.

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**Dhi**: thought, especially religious thought, prayer (Plural: Holy Thought personified), Rig Veda; understanding, intelligence, wisdom (personified as the wife of Mudra-Manyu), knowledge, science, art; mind, disposition, intention, design (intent upon); notion, opinion, the taking for: Rig Veda; *Yatha dhiya* or *dhiyana*, according to the wisdom or will; *ittha dhiya* or *dhiyah*, willingly, literally 'such is thy will', Rig Veda.

**Dhiya**, Nominative plural *yati*. **Dhiyam**, etc., oblique cases of **DHI** in comparative **dhijinva**, exciting, devout, pious, wise, Rig Veda. **Dhiyajur**; worn out or  
(1449)

grown old in devotion, Rig Veda. **Dhiyam-pati**, 'lord of the thoughts' the soul; name of *Mahju-ghosha*, **Dhiyavas**; rich in devotion, Rig Veda.

**Dhiyasana**, adjective, attentive, mindful, Rig Veda.

**Dhiyaya**, Nominative adjective, *yate*, to be attentive or devout; *yat*, mindful, Rig Veda.

**Dhikarman**, noun, the object of perception or understanding.

**Dhikoti** - name of a work, **dhijada** - name of a man.

**Dhijavana** or **dhiju**, adjective, inspiring the mind or arousing devotion, Rig Veda.

**Dhindriya**, noun, an organ of perception.

**Dhimat**, adjective, intelligent, wise, learned, sensible; name of Brihaspati, son of Viraj, Varaha Purana; name of a *Rishi* in the 4<sup>th</sup> Manv-antara, idem; name of a son of Puru-ravas, a *Bodधि-sattva*.

**Dhimarana** - adjective, delighting in devotion.

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**Dhiraja** - masculine name of one of the attendants of Shiva. **Dhivat** - adjective, intelligent or devout, Rig Veda.

**Dhivibhrama** - masculine noun, 'error of thought', hallucination.

**Dhivridddhi-da** - masculine or neuter noun, name of a work.

**Dhisakti** - feminine noun, mental or intellectual faculty. **Dhisodhini** - feminine noun, name of a work.

**Dhisakha** or **dhisachiva** (Rajatarangini), masculine noun, wise counselor, minister.

**Dhihara** - feminine noun, a kind of sweet gourd.

**Dhita** - adjective, reflected on or thought about; plural noun, thoughts, meditation, Rig Veda.

**Dhiti** - feminine noun, thought, idea, reflection, intention, devotion, prayer (plural also personified as the wife of Rudra-manyu, see above), Rig Veda.

**Dhitika** - masculine name of a Buddhist patriarchal saint.

**Dhida** - feminine noun, intelligence, understanding.

**Dhira** - masculine adjective, intelligent, wise, skilful, clever, familiar with or versed in, (comparative **Dhira-tara**); masculine name of a Buddha, of several men with the patronymic *Sataparneya*.

**Dhirata**, **Dhirtva** - masculine noun, wisdom, discretion.

**Dhivan**, **Dhivanari** - feminine adjective, skilful, clever; masculine noun, an artisan.

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**Dhivara** - masculine noun, a very clever man.(278)

M. Schwartz has noted that *Daena* is used in various senses in the Avesta:

"*Daena* is used by *Zarathustra* (Zoroaster) for "vision, insight, conscience, consciousness"; a two-fold meaning, which quite possibly arises from homonymy (i.e., phonetic identity), shows up unmistakably in the Younger Avesta: on the one hand the *Daena* is one's individual moral conscience, acting invisibly throughout one's life, but after death appearing to the deceased righteous as a beautiful maiden escort in Paradise, to the deceased impious as an ugly hag; on the other (hand) she is the goddess "The *Mazdayasnian* (Zoroastrian) Religion" personified. She (*Daena*) is particularly associated with *Chista*, the hypostasis of The Teaching and The Straight Path, whose *Yasht* is called the *Yasht of Daena*. However, a variety of views is found as to the interrelationship of the various *daena*-concepts and their etymology."(279)

The above concepts of *Daena* may appear to be contradictory, as she is at times described as an abstract concept, at times as an angel or goddess. However, it is well to remember that today *Sophia*, which in Greek means "wisdom" is used as a feminine personal name, as are "Hope", "Faith", and, less commonly "Prudence", "Patience" and "Charity". In Spanish *Luz*, which means "Light", is used as a feminine personal name. Particularly among Shi'as, *Zahrah* or *Zahara* is used as a feminine personal

(2081)

name; in Arabic it means "Radiant", and is one of the titles of Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, wife of Ali ibn Abi Talib and thus female ancestor of eleven of the twelve Holy Imams. In Andalusia, "Zahara" is at times still used as a feminine name; this is undoubtedly a heritage from Muslim times.

However, probably by way of *jocularia* we also have the Provençal *joell* or *joyel*, Catalan *joia* (feminine), *joiell* (masculine), Castilian *joya*, certainly a long way from the Latin *jocus*. What has obviously happened is that, by way of the Medieval Latin *jocularia* meaning "pleasant object", we finally arrive at the above series of words meaning "jewel" or "gemstone, or, by extension, a "precious object". Thus, in Provençal and Catalan, very similar words, Provençal *joell* or *joyel*, meaning "jewel" and *joie*, meaning "joy", Catalan *joia*, meaning "joy" and *joiell* (masculine) *joia* (feminine) meaning "jewel" or "gemstone". Some have tried to explain the above, saying that said word which mean "joy" derive not from the Latin *jocus* but from the Latin *gaudium* (noun), *gaudere* (verb). However, this violates just about every rule of phonetic changes from Latin to Romance languages. Besides, we have the Provençal *gaug* or *jaug* (noun) and *gauzir* or *jauzir* (verb), Catalan *gaudi*, Old French *gogue* (which word has no



(2082)

"descendants" or "successors" in Modern French: it may have been a "Provençalism" in Old French), as well as the Castilian *gozo* (noun) and *gozar* (verb), all clearly derived from the Latin *gaudium* or *gaudere*.

Proof of the above is that when the trobadors wished to refer to erotic or simply banal or mundane joy or enjoyment, they did not use the word *joi*, but rather *gaug* or *jaug* (noun), *gauzir* or *jauzir* (verb). *Gaug* or *jaug* is not only a different word from *joi*, but is even derived from a different Latin word, as we said above. Thus, for the trobadors, *joi* was an essentially mystical concept, meaning, roughly, "internal jewel", while *gaug* or *jaug* was the word which meant "joy" in a banal or mundane sense.

There is a most fascinating parallel here. The Persian word *gohar* or *gaohar*, which passed into Arabic as *al-kawhar*, means an object which is valuable and useful, and, by extension, pearls and precious stones. This word, in its Persian or Arabic form according to the language employed, is the word used by the Muslim peripatetics or *falasifa* to designate the *ousia* of Aristotle. (280)

(2083)

Note that in the works of Aristotle, *ousia* may mean 1.) "being in the abstract"; 2.) "substance, essence"; 3.) "true nature of that which is the member of a kind"; 4.) "the possession of such a nature, substantiality & 5.) the primary real, the *substantium* underlying all changes and processes".(281)

As is well known, Dante Alighieri was such a profound admirer of the trobadors that he considered writing La Divina Commedia, his *magnum opus*, in Provençal rather than Italian, considering Provençal to be superior to Italian as a literary language.

As Karl Vossler has noted:

"But it seems to me impossible to doubt that it was by the spirit of Provence (*Occitania* would be a far more accurate term) above all, that his (Dante's) artistic consciousness was awakened and his attention called to questions of the language, style, origin and purpose of poetry."(282)

St. John of the Cross was very learned in the vast field of Christian mysticism, which Dante was not, though Dante, like St. John of the Cross, was much influenced by medieval Christian mystics, especially St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St. Victor and his great disciple Richard of St. Victor.

(2084)

Though I do not recall that he ever mentioned any of them by name, St. John of the Cross was considerably influenced by the trobadors; their influence is evident in his versification or prosody, with its long strophes and elaborate rhyme schemes. So far as the content of his verse, St. John of the Cross was also to some extent influenced by the Provençal trobadors, especially their *trobar clus*, used to express that at which words can only hint.

Dante was influenced by the trobadors to a much greater extent than was St. John of the Cross. Indeed, one cannot imagine the works of Dante without this influence.

As we shall see, Dante was also influenced by the Sufis, particularly ibn Arabi al-Mursi, though very much less so than was St. John of the Cross. St. John of the Cross was indeed a Sufi initiate, which Dante was not.

Certainly Dante was a great admirer of the trobadors, and even admitted that Provençal is superior to Italian as a literary language, as he says in De Vulgari Eloquentia:

"The second part, the *language of Oc*, argues in its own favor that eloquent writers in the vernacular first composed poems in this sweeter and more perfect language: they include Peire d'Alvernha and other ancient masters." (283)

(2085)

As we shall see, Dante was well aware that Provençal is indeed superior to Italian as a literary language in another way: rhymes are more abundant in Provençal than in Italian.

Too many critics and historians often forget that Dante lived before the invention of the printing press; he could not go to his local book store and order anthologies of trobador verse or manuals dealing with trobadors and their art. We really do not know to what works of the trobadors Dante had access. Therefore, the trobadors whose names Dante mentions and from whose works he quotes do not give much indication as to his taste in trobador verse. Proof of this is the fact that Bertran de Born is prominently mentioned in La Divina Commedia, though Dante indicates that he does not like Bertran de Born as a person, nor much like his verse. There is a whole host of trobadors whose works Dante would certainly have liked and admired had he known them, such as Bernart de Ventadorn and Jaufre Rudel, especially his *Amor Lointan*, which we have mentioned before.

As Henri Hauvette has noted:

"It is worthy of note that Dante does not mention any of the trobadors who are generally considered to be the most original and the most truly poetic: Bernart de Ventador, Arnaut de Mareuil, Peire Vidal and Rambaut de Vaqueiras, for example." (284)

(2086)

As Amos Parducci has noted:

"It would appear to be impossible that Dante was not struck by the passionate tenderness of Bernart de Ventadorn, whose verse, says G. Carducci, are:

*'Flowers that shyly and audaciously reappear winking scarlet and azure on the snowy crest of the medieval winter'*, by the spirit and verve of Peire Vidal, by the ardor of Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, by the elegant fluency of Arnaut de Marueil and by the violence of the passion and the steady concision of the style of Peire Cardinal."(285)

Obviously, we do not know to what works of what trobadors Dante had was familiar, and the names of trobadors that he mentions only indicate those to whose works he had access, give no indication as to what were his tastes.

At some point in his life, Dante learned not only to read Provençal (and Old French), but to write acceptable verse in Provençal. La Vita Nuova is a work thoroughly trobadoresque in spirit. However, this does not prove that at the time Dante wrote La Vita Nuova that he had learned to read Provençal. There are Arthurian allusions in Dante's works. In Inferno, V:67-69 Sir Tristan is mentioned:

And Paris, And **Tristan**." As they whirled above  
He indicated to me more than one thousand spirits  
Of those torn from the mortal life by love.

(2087)

Sir Tristan, of course, was one of King Arthur's knights, who, together with his **Lady** (Provençal: **Domna** or **Dompna**) Isolt (Welsh: *Yssylit*, Breton: *Ysonde* or *Yseult*) is the protagonist of various romances in Welsh, Breton and Old French, and a secondary character in other Arthurian romances.

Here is a selection from a poem by Rosemary Sutcliff:

(King) Arthur is gone  
Tristan sleeps, with a broken sword  
And (his lady) Isolt beside him  
Where the spume-crested waves  
Roll over drowned Lyonesse (Breton: *Ys*)  
To the sounding deep.

Some say that "drowned Lyonesse" or "drowned *Ys*" is submerged under the Baie de Douarenenez at Pointe du Raz at the western tip of the Brittany Peninnsula. When I visited Brittany, I looked out over the Baie de Douarenenez and said:

"Tristan, can you hear me?"

In "Il Inferno" V:127-137 we read in words attributed to Francesca di Rimini:

One day to pass the time we read

Of Lancelot (Welsh: *Llenlleawc*), hoe he fell in love;  
We were all alone, innocent of guile

Time after time our eyes met

By the book we read; our faces flushed red and turned pale.  
To the words of one line we yielded:

(2088)

That line that speaks of those yearned for lips  
Now being kissed by such a famous lover, Lancelot,  
Inspired this one

To kiss my lips, and tremble as he did so.  
Our Galehaut was that book and he who wrote it .

Note that the father of Lancelot or *Llenlleawc* is *Bendigeid Bran* or in Breton *Ban Benwik*, in Old French *Ban le Benoit*.

Interestingly, the Old French *Benoit* means "Blessed" and is an exact translation of the Welsh *Bendigeid* and the Breton *Benwik*.

In Inferno, XXXII:61-62 we read:

Not him who had his breast and shadow pierced  
By one thrust of the lance wielded by Arthur's hand.

There is a reference to Queen Guinevere in Paradiso, XVI:13-15:

And Beatrice, not far from us  
Smiling, reminded me of she who coughed  
To caution (Queen) Guinevere at her first sign.

To exactly which Arthurian Romance in Old French (*Langue d'Oïl*) the above reference is taken I do not know. I have never heard of "Guinevere" in any form used as a personal name in Italy. Dante uses the Breton and Old French (*Langue d'Oïl*) form "Guinevere" and not the Welsh *Gwenhwyvar* nor the Cornish *Jennifer*. This is, of course, what one would expect, as in De

Vulgari Eloquentia Dante says that he read the Arthurian Romances in *Langue d'Oïl*, i.e., Old French. While not totally impossible, it is most unlikely that Dante read Welsh, Cornish or Breton; had he done so, he would have considered it a mark of learning and would have been most proud of it.

Dante's love for Arthurian things indicates an affinity for Celtic topics, not surprising, since, as a northern Italian he no doubt had Celtic ancestry. Virgil, whom Dante so admired, was a Celt, a Cisalpine Gaul, as he himself proudly proclaimed. Some detect a Celtic romanticism and sensibility in the works of Virgil. Though Virgil's works were written in Latin, he himself was not Roman, neither by blood nor in character.

Does the above mean that Dante read Welsh and Breton? No, as we said, he acquired his Arthurian lore through works in Old French, most likely the Old French romance Lancelot du Lac.

As Dante said concerning the *Langue d'Oïl* or Old French:

"Thus the *Langue d'Oïl* adduces on its own behalf the fact that, because of the greater facility and pleasing quality of its vernacular style, everything that is recounted or invented in vernacular prose belongs to it: such as compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome, and the beautiful tales of King Arthur." (286)



(2090)

Salvatore Santangelo has noted that in La Vita Nuova Dante mentions no trobadors by name, nor includes translations of trobador verse. In the same work Dante says that the trobadors wrote only of love, which is most certainly not true. All told, this is conclusive proof that at the time he wrote La Vita Nuova, Dante had not yet learned to read Provençal, and knew of the trobadors and their art only by second hand. At what age Dante learned to read and write Provençal or the *Langue d'Oc* and to at least read Old French or the *Langue d'Oïl* we do not know. (287)

Of the early trobadores, Dante was most profoundly influenced by Peire d'Alvernha. Strangely, Dante never mentions Peire d'Alvernha's song *Rossinhol, El Seu Repaire* (Nightingale, Go on My Part), of which I am very fond and which is thought to be the "original" or "ancestor" of the very lovely and well-known Catalan folk song *Rossinyol, que Per Francia Va* (Nightingale Who Goes to France). One can only assume that it was not contained in any of the manuscripts or anthologies to which Dante had access.

Dante much admired Peire d'Alvernha's winter love song *Djosta.ls Breus Jorns e.ls Loncs Sers* (Are near the Short Days and Long Nights). To express the harshness of winter, Peire d'Alvernha

(2091)

used shrill, strange and complex rhymes, including: *-ers*, *-is*, *-ics*, and *-eis*, in other words, to create a close relation between sound and mood. When appropriate, Dante used the same device, rhymes such as *-orcs*, *-arco*, *-etra*, *-eque*, *-olti*, *-alto*, and *-armo*. (288)

As Karl Vossler noted:

"Dante learned much in this Provençal school. Many of his lyric poems resemble these early works of Peire d'Alvernha. Is not the entire Divina Commedia, to some extent, a great, subjective, didactic and love-poem in the most compressed or conundrum like style?" (289)

Giraut de Bornelh, though in reality he influenced Dante much less than did Peire d'Alvernha, is prominently mentioned in Dante's works. Giraut de Bornelh, unlike Peire d'Alvernha, was not a practitioner of *trobar clus*. Though a cultured man, Giraut de Bornelh was much influenced by folk songs. Being of a sunny temper (and thus more typical of Occitania), Giraut de Bornelh's verse is lucid and pleasing, and thus highly esteemed by the populace of Occitania.

(2092)

Dante indicates that he admired Giraut de Bornellh as a poet of virtue and integrity.(290) In the poetry of Giraut de Bornellh we are reminded of Dante's Beatrice, at least in some of her aspects:

Humility  
Still keeps veiled  
Her noble form  
And gives her peace,  
And bids her: Speak!  
Yet not too much.

In a prosody of short lines and monorhyme rare among the trobadors, we have in the above a portrait of the **Lady**, *Domna* or *Dompna* of the trobadors as well as Dante's Beatrice, at least in some of their aspects.

What Dante learned from Giraut de Bornellh was in the main sophisticated if somewhat superficial word play: figures of speech, certain specific images and ideas, mixing long and short lines within the same strophe, a certain movement in metre and syntax.

Though not with absolute consistency, the trobador most esteemed by Dante was not Giraut de Bornellh, but rather Arnaut Daniel. Which trobador most influenced Dante is another matter,

since one may be influenced by something or someone and not be fully aware of it. As we said above, the lore of the trobadors was "in the very air" of northern Italy in the time of Dante. Those who say that there was never a romantic movement in Italy please take note, as all the trobadors were romantics. As Salvatore Santangelo notes:

"The exaltation of Giraut (de Bornellh), we repeat, did not have a theoretical basis, but rather was determined by the opinion of others and by Dante's personal sympathies. Rather, it is in the aesthetic criterion of subtlety, at first petty, later ample, where we find the origin of the first and second judgements of Arnaut Daniel by Dante." (291)

In Dante's time, Arnaut Daniel was not much esteemed; he was accused of deliberate and unnecessary obscurity, and his occasional use of unrhymed strophes was not admired by those who prized complex and ingenious rhyme schemes.

The trobador known as "The Monk of Montaudon", as contemporary of Arnaut Daniel, said of him:

With Arnaut Daniel they are seven  
Who in this life did not sing (versify) well  
Except for silly words which cannot be understood  
Since I hunted the hare with an ox  
And swam against the undertow,  
His songs are not worth a (grain of) cumin seed.

The Monk of Montaudon was a man of sunny temper, neither envious nor harsh nor uncharitable. He simply did not like Arnaut Daniel's verse, which he considered to be deliberately and unnecessarily obscure.

Also, Arnaut Daniel, unlike Giraut de Bornelh, did not have a personality which attracted much sympathy.

Martin de Riquer has come to the defense of Arnaut Daniel, saying:

"Arnaut Daniel is not an obscure poet, but a difficult poet, which is not the same thing." (292)

Being a Catalan, Martin de Riquer's mother tongue is very close to Provençal, which gives his opinion special weight.

As Gianluigi Toja has noted, M. Bowra also defends Arnaut Daniel from the charge of deliberate, unnecessary obscurity:

"And always in an appreciation of the quality of an artist, one turns to the thesis of Bowra, who is convinced that Dante gave preference to Arnaut Daniel, because in the controversy over *trobar clus* (the "closed" or "hermetic" style of poetry) and *trobar leu* (the "light" or easy style) Arnaut Daniel took "the middle way", the just, following the *trobar ric* (a style characterized by rich sounds and/or rare words, and exhibiting an abundance of poetic resources), creating a style sharp and emotive, corresponding to his (Dante's) taste." (293)

Certainly these lines by Arnaut Daniel quoted by Dante in De Vulgari Eloquentia are striking, though the Monk of Montaudon would no doubt call them "obscure", while Martin de Riquer and M. Bowra would no doubt call them "difficult":

The bitter breeze  
Makes the leafy copses  
Whiten (294)

No doubt the Monk of Montaudon would put the above on the same level as "hunting hares with oxen" and "swimming against the undertow".

In any case, Steven Botterill, translator of De Vulgari Eloquentia, opines:

"Arnaut Daniel (flourished circa 1175-1200) seems to have been the troubadour poet most admired by Dante, as suggested both by the several quotations in the De Vulgari Eloquentia and by his presence - speaking *Langue d'Occ* - in "Purgatorio, XXVI." (295)

Partly because of the obscure or difficult style of Arnaut Daniel, the extent of his influence on Dante is the subject of many polemics, which we can only touch on here. Also, as we have noted, Dante was no doubt influenced by trobadors whose works he had not read, because the lore of the trobadors was "in the very air" of the northern Italy of his day. Dante's works contain

numerous allusions and references to Arthurian themes, of which Dante was very fond indeed, though he read neither Welsh nor Breton nor Cornish. I have known people who never heard of Omar Khayyam cite the following *ruba'I* by him in the version of Edward Fitzgerald:

The moving finger writes, and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all your piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line  
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

And then claim that it is in the Bible!

Even some who have heard of Omar Khayyam think he was an "Arab", which he was **not**.

No doubt most Catalans have never heard of the trobador Peire d'Alvernha nor his song *Rossinhol, el Seu Repaire*, which is the "original" or "ancestor" of their lovely and beloved traditional song *Rossinyol, que Per Francia Va*.

Most American university students who sing the classic university song "Ivy Rose" never heard of the Russian folk song *Poscholej* (Have Mercy on Me) whose tune "Ivy Rose" has borrowed.

(2097)

As Elio Melli has noted:

"After so many works and so many "solutions", the problem of the critical evaluation of the poet Arnaut Daniel on the part of Dante is ever new and always preserves the attractiveness of research never totally concluded." (296)

For reasons given above, the closely related controversy concerning the influence of Arnaut Daniel on Dante is even more imponderable, even more "research never totally concluded".

Dante did indeed use the *sestina* or six-line strophe which was a favorite of Arnaut Daniel. One is tempted to view the *terzina*, the three-line strophe used by Dante in the Divina Commedia as a sort of "sestina cut in half", perhaps in recognition of the fact that Italian has fewer rhymes than Provençal.

Arnaut Daniel's influence on Dante in so far as the content of his verse is concerned is a vexed and complex question, subject of many polemics. There is no space to deal with it here.

So far as Dante's critical evaluation of Arnaut Daniel's verse, many refer to what Dante says in Purgatorio, XXVI, though Gianluigi Toja believes this to be a mistake:

(2098)

"Many students of Arnaut Daniel have spent almost all their effort on analyzing the episode in "Il Purgatorio", which, noting that from the critical point of view it is the least promising, because in large part



it is a poetic creation."(297)

However, I do not see that the fact that said episode in "Il Purgatorio" XXVI is very largely a poetic creation necessarily means that Dante was lying or being insincere when he wrote it.

Below is the famous episode from Purgatorio, XXVI:115-148. The reader will see why I choose to give the first strophe in the original Italian and later translate it:

"O frate," disse, "questi ch'io to corno  
Col ditto" e addito uno spirito innanzi  
Fu miglior **FABBRO** del parlar materno

"O brother, now can I show you." Said he,  
(he indicated a spirit ahead)  
"a better **FABBRO** of his mother tongue.

Poets of love, writers of romances in prose  
better than them all was he! They are fools  
who think him of Lemozi a greater poet.

But now, if yours be the great privilege  
of ascending to the cloister, where Christ  
is Abbot of the holy congregation, then,

Please say a *Pater Noster* (Our Father) for me there  
Or at least that part appropriate for us,  
Who now have been delivered from all evil."

Then, perhaps to make way for someone else,  
He disappeared into the depths of fire  
As fish seeking deeper waters vanish from sight.

(2099)

I moved toward the spirit indicated,  
And told him that my will had prepared  
A fine place of welcome for his name.

He readily and most graciously answered:

"Tan m'abellis vostre cortes deman,  
Qu'ieu no me puesc no voill a vos cobrire.  
Ieu sui Arnaut (Daniel), que plor e vau cantan;  
Consiros vei la passada floor,  
E vei jausen lo **JOI** qu'esper, denan.

Ara vos prec, per aquella valor  
que vos guida al som de l'escalina,  
sovenha vos a temps de ma dolor!"

Then he (Arnaut Daniel) hid in the purifying flames.

Firstly, note that Dante refers to Arnaut Daniel not as a poet but as "A better **FABBRO** of his mother tonmgue". Now, the word **FABBRO** means, according to context, "smith", "blacksmith", "craftsman" or "artisan".

Says Gianluigi Toja:

"*Fabbro* is a word that, fully expressed in the lexicon of medieval poetics, means the personality of the poet as an artisan, or, at most or in the best case, an *artist* in the sense of being learned or trained in one of the *artes liberales*." (298)

The term "master craftsman" still survives from the time of the medieval guilds. This was extended to academic titles, from whence comes "Master of Arts". In other words, according to

(2100)

Dante in Purgatorio, XXVI:113-117, Arnaut Daniel was not so much a poet as a master craftsman with words, or, in the best case, a Master of Arts in the academic sense, in other words,

learned and knowledgeable.

To this day the word "craftsman" is used for a poet whose work is correct so far as rhyme and metre, but whose content is banal, trite, hackneyed, dull, or simply uninspired and uninspiring.

Note that Arnaut Daniel himself sometimes refers to his verse using the language of the *fabbrri*, (Provençal: *obradors, artisans*) or craftsmen:

I forge and file (or grind)  
Words of value  
With the art of love.

In this gracious and happy song  
I make words and brush and sand (or rasp) them  
And they will be true and sincere  
When they have been carefully rasped (or sanded)

And I, who am in love with the most gentle (lady)  
Must make, above all  
A song with such a beautiful construction  
That in it there is no false word nor loose rhyme.

an inspired poet is another matter.

(2101)

We now pass to lines 118-120:

Poets of love, writers of romances in prose  
Better than them all was he! They are fools  
Who think him of Lemozi a greater poet.

"Him of Lemozi" is Giraut de Bornelh, a native of Limousin

(Provençal: *Lemozi*), cradle of the language and art of the trobadors. Arnaut Daniel was from Perigord (Provençal; *Peiregorc*), a region more renowned for its truffles and cuisine than for its poets.

Near the end we find Dante having Arnaut Daniel speaking in Provençal. That Dante was the author there is no doubt; the language is Provençal, but the prosody or strophic structure is Italian. The trobadors never used three line strophes, except perhaps as refrains. Dante's written Provençal is very fine indeed. There can be no doubt that had Dante chosen to write the Divina Commedia in Provençal, he would have been perfectly capable of doing so. Here is the translation of Dante's Provençal into English:

Your courteous request pleases me  
I could not conceal my name from you.

I am Arnaut (Daniel), now singing through my tears  
Remembering with great regret my past follies,  
And with great anticipation awaiting **JOI**.

(2102)

I implore you, in the name of that Great Power  
which guides you toward the summit of the stairs,  
in your good times remember my pain and suffering here.

Remember what we said above concerning the word **JOI** as used by the trobadors. Obviously this **JOI** has nothing to do with any sort of earthly, temporal or sensual joy.

As she appears in "Il Inferno", "Il Purgatorio" and "Il Paradiso" of La Divina Commedia, Beatrice (or *Beatrizzia*) is most certainly a personification of the *Daena*, the *Sophia Perennis*, the *Hagia Sophia*, and, of course, the **Domna** or **Dompna (Lady)** of the trobadors, though as she appears in La Vita Nuova this is doubtful; La Vita Nuova is an earlier work as compared to La Divina Commedia. The original of the image or figure of and Beatrice as symbol or allegory was very much a flesh-and-blood person, Beatrice Portinari, a beautiful young girl whom Dante Alighieri saw on a bridge in Florence (or *Fiorenze*). Dante Alighieri fell in love with her, but she died not long afterwards. As Charles Williams noted, by the time La Divina Commedia was written, the Beatrice of La Vita Nuova was dead.(299)

As Dante Alighieri said in Canto II, lines 52-135 of Inferno," , part of La Divina Commedia:

(2103)

I was among those suspended (in Limbo) when a most blessed  
And lovely lady called to me. So beautiful was she  
That I pleaded to serve at her command.

More radiant than the stars of Heaven were her eyes  
And in a voice so sweet, gentle and pure,  
Like that of an angel, I heard her say:

"My friend (Dante Alighieri), not favored by fortune, has  
encountered  
So many obstacles in his path

Up the rugged slope that fear has turned his head.  
Now go, and with the words of your great art  
Strive to rescue him from this disgrace  
Aid him and thus bring solace to my heart.

I who now command you to go forth am Beatrice,  
I have come from where I long to return (Heaven).  
For love called me. Love makes me ask this of you.

How often will I speak your praises when  
I stand before the my Lord on His throne."  
She spoke no more, and I answered:

"Oh lady of great virtue, through whose power only  
mankind is enabled to rise higher  
than all else within the lowest zone of Heaven,

Yet how can it be that you still dare  
To leave your much loved spacious place in Heaven  
And to descend into this Limbo where I wait?"

"Since you so greatly desire to know for what motive  
I fear not to venture here",  
She said, "I will make it clearer.

In Heaven a most Noble Lady (*The Virgin Mary*) has compassion  
For that great harm which I ask you to repair,  
And has made an exception in the rigid reckoning

(2104)

That rules in Heaven. [It is she who summoned Lucia (*name derived from the Indo-European stem meaning "light"; she is the Divine Light, the Hagia Sophia, the Daena*) to her presence  
and said: "Your disciple, who is yet faithful,  
is in dire need of you, and I commend him to your care.

Can you not hear him weeping and wailing below?  
Can you not see him battling death by that river  
That even the great ocean cannot overcome?

Never on earth did any seek his good  
Nor fly from his harm so quickly as I,

Once I had heard and understood her words,  
Abandoning my seat in Heaven to come to your side,  
Putting my trust in your most noble words  
That honor you and all those who hear them."

She turned after she had spoken, and I beheld  
Tears shining in her eyes, making me yet  
More eager to obey her command.

So have I come to you (Dante Alighieri), as she wished,  
to save you from the monster that is blocking your way,  
by the short path up the beautiful mountain.

So what is this? Why do you hesitate?  
Why has your heart room for cowardice?  
Why are you not daring and resolute, since they,

Those three great ladies (*Beatrice, The Virgin Mary & Lucia*) so  
highly and richly blessed  
In the court of Heaven, are keeping watch over you,  
And I promise that only great good can come of this."

As flowers droop and enfold their petals in the chill of night  
Then arise and unfold and spread their petals wide  
To the warmth and light of the rays of the morning sun

"Blessed be that **Lady** (*Donna, Dompna*) of infinite compassion who  
came to my aid and succor  
And blessed by Your great and courteous (Holy) Spirit  
Who so quickly came at that **Lady's** (*Donna's, Dompna's*) word  
and plea!

(2105)

In the context it is not clear if the **Lady** (*Donna* in Italian;  
*Domna* or *Dompna* in Provençal) mentioned by Dante Alighieri is  
*Beatrice*, the *Virgin Mary* or simply the *Daena, Hagia Sophia* or  
*Sophia Perennis* with neither of them serving as symbols or  
manifestations. How very trobadoresque! Dante Alighieri was indeed  
a disciple of the trobadors, though at last, after much

hesitation, he chose to write La Divina Commedia in Italian rather than Provençal.

In the course of La Divina Commedia, Beatrice is gradually transformed. As she appears in "Il Inferno", cited above, Beatrice is still the lovely, idealized young girl of La Vita Nuova.

Later, in "Il Purgatorio", we see Beatrice in a different role, though something of the former Beatrice is still quite visible.

The Lady (*Donna*) whose face had been half veiled from my eyes  
by the flowers of the angels. But now here eyes  
gazed on me from across the water, piercing me like a sword.

Through the veil she wore, held in place  
by the woven flower fronds  
Let me view only a small glimpse of her face,

"Look at me well. I am she. I am Beatrice,  
how dared you ascend to this lofty peak?  
Did you not know that here is where men live in bliss?"  
Purgatorio XXX:58-75.

(2106)

When I (*Beatrice*) arose from the flesh to the spirit  
To greater beauty and greater virtue,  
Yet he (*Dante*) found less joy in me and less merit.

He turned his feet from the True Way,  
In pursuit of the false images of the Good  
The false promise that they never fulfill.

Not all the inspiration I gained by prayer and supplication  
and revealed to him in dreams and contemplation  
could bring him back, so little did he care.

So far had he fallen from every hope of bliss  
That every means of his salvation failed  
Save to let him observe the damned. For this reason



I visited the abodes of the dead  
And before that spirit by whom his steps have, until now  
Been led, I poured out my tears and prayers.  
Purgatorio XXX: 127-141.

And she (*Beatrice*): filled though you were with the desire  
That I showed your for That Good beyond which nothing  
Exists on the earthly plane to which man may aspire,

What gain or allurement beckoned  
In the eyes of others that you walked before them  
As a lover walks below his lady's window?" (*very trobador  
image*)

Purgatorio XXXI: 22-30.

Tearfully I replied: "The things of this world's brief day,  
False pleasures and allurements, turned my feet  
As soon as you no longer lighted my way."

She (*Beatrice*) replied: "If you had remained silent, or  
denied  
What you here confess, yet would your guilt be known  
To Him from Whom no guilt may be hidden.

Yet here, at our court, when souls denounce  
Themselves for their guilt in true repentance,  
The grindstone is turned against the blade.

(2107)

In any case, so that you may truly come to know your crime  
And with true repentance be made stronger  
so that you might resist the Siren's call on another  
occasion,

Nothing in art or nature could inspire  
such joy in you as the sight of that lovely body  
which once clothed me and now returns to dust.

And if my death turned your greatest pleasure  
to mere dust, what joy could you yet discover  
in mortal things for you to seek and find?  
Purgatorio, XXXI: 34-54.

"Turn, *Beatrice*, turn the eyes of Grace,"  
was their refrain, "upon your faithful Dante  
who has come so far that he might behold your face

Grant to us this favor of your abundant Grace: reveal  
Your countenance to him, and let his eyes behold  
The Second Beauty, which your veils yet conceal."  
Purgatorio XXXI: 133-138.

In Il Paradiso, Beatrice takes on the qualities of the  
*Hagia Sophia* or *Daena*. She learnedly disputes with Doctors of the  
Church, something which puts her well above the ordinary woman.

If all that I previously said of her (*Beatrice*)  
Were now united in a single song of praise,  
That would be scant praise of her beauty now

That beauty I saw there is beyond all measure  
of terrestrial minds. I believe that only God  
can fully comprehend so vast a treasure.

Here I acknowledge my defeat. No poet,  
lyric or tragic, were he to undertake this task  
To demonstrate his power, would be ever frustrated.

(2108)

From the first time I beheld her face  
in this life, to the present vision of her,  
my song has ever striven to sing her praise.

Yet now I must not even attempt  
To describe her beauty. Every painter,  
having done his best, must at last put aside his  
brushes.

She (*Beatrice*) like a guide for whom the goal is in sight,  
began to speak again: "We have now ascended  
from the greatest sphere to the Heaven of Pure Light

Light of the intellect, which is love without end,  
love of the True Good, which is pure bliss;  
bliss beyond bliss, transcending all other joys.  
Paradiso, XXX: 16-42.

One thing I had expected, yet found another;  
I thought to find Beatrice there, but in her stead I  
found  
An elder in robes of glory.

His eyes and cheeks were bathed in the Holy Radiance  
of loving bliss, his gestures, pious grace,  
he appeared a loving father to me.

"She, where is she?", I asked in sudden fear.  
"To guide you to the goal of all your desiring  
Beatrice called me from my place." He said.

"And if you lift your eyes you may yet see her  
in the third circle down  
upon the throne her merit has earned her."

I did not answer, but I looked toward the height  
and saw her draw a halo around herself  
as she reflected the Eternal Light.

No mortal man, though he be at the bottom  
of the deepest sea, has ever been so far  
from the highest Heaven to which the thunder rumbles

(2109)

As I was the far from Beatrice, but there  
distance was of no importance because her image  
reached me undistorted by any atmosphere.

"Oh lady to whom my aspirations ever soar  
and who for my salvation even condescended  
to set foot upon Hell's ghastly floor,

You have broken my bonds and set me free  
By every way, by all loving means  
that are within your power and charity.

Grant me your splendor that my soul,  
which you have healed, may be pleasing to you when it  
escapes  
the bonds of the flesh and rises to its reward.

Such was my prayer, and she - far above me  
as it appeared to my eyes - looked down and smiled.

Then she turned again to the Eternal Fountain.

And the Holy Elder said: "I have been entreated  
by prayer and holy love to help you achieve  
the final goal of your ascent.

Look about this garden, that you may  
By basking in its radiance, be ready  
To lift your eyes ever upward to the Primal Ray.

The Queen of Heaven (*The Virgin Mary*), for whose devotion  
I burn with love, will grant us every grace  
because I am Bernard (*St. Bernard of Clairvaux*) her  
faithful one."

Paradiso, XXXI: 58-102.

As is obvious, especially in Purgatorio and Paradiso,  
Beatrice, like the **Lady** (*Domna* or *Dompna* in Provençal)

(2109)

of the trobadors, takes on the aspects of the *Hagia Sophia* or  
*Daena*. However, Beatrice does not take the place of the Virgin  
Mary, which Dante and Beatrice herself would have considered as  
blasphemy and sacrilege, as is indicated below:

"Why are you enamoured of my face?  
Why do you not turn your head to see the garden  
That blooms in the radiance of Christ's Grace?

The Rose (*the Virgin Mary*) in whom the Word became flesh  
Is there. As are the lilies by whose fragrance  
men find the ever straight path."

Paradiso XXIII: 70-75.

In the above, Beatrice advises Dante to look to the Virgin

Mary.

Each of the angels of that host  
Extended its flame in such a manner  
As made its love of (*The Virgin*) Mary clear to my eyes.

There they remained, yet visible to me,  
singing "*Regina Coeli*" (*Queen of Heaven*) in voices so sweet  
that even yet the memory fills me with delight.  
Paradiso, XXIII: 124-129.

When Beatrice takes leave of Dante, she entrusts his care to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who was a mystic, in Islamic terms a *Sufi*. What this demonstrates is that Dante was a mystic, a Sufi. Helen Flanders Dunbar has dealt with the mystical symbolism in La Divina Commedia in a masterful way. (300)

(2110)

In La Divina Commedia are found the *Via Negative* or *Via Purgativa*, the *Via Illuminativa*, the *Via Unitiva*, and, finally, the *Mystical Fulfillment* or *Beatific Vision*, all of which we have already encountered in St. John of the Cross and the Sufis.

Inevitably, Dante speaks in symbols. To the ordinary man, trapped in the spatio-temporal world and its categories, there is a Worm at the center of the world. By the *Via Purgativa*, the soul is enabled to transcend spatio-temporal categories, and it is perceived that God and not the Worm is the true center, that time and space are ultimately illusory. As Beatrice says:

Then she (*Beatrice*) began: "I do not ask, I tell  
that of which you most desire to hear, for I have seen it,  
in which every *where* and every *when* are focused in one single  
ray."

Paradiso XXXIII: 13-15.

The *Via Purgativa* has done its work, and Dante has passed to  
the *Via Illuminativa*.

Beatrice guided Dante through the *Via Purgativa* and the *Via  
Illuminativa*. Now, however, it is St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the  
great mystic, who must guide Dante to the *Via Unitiva*. It is St.  
Bernard of Clairvaux who shows Dante the truth that man may not  
see God directly, but must approach Him through the hierarchy of

(2111)

creatures. St. Bernard of Clairvaux shows Dante the Way of  
Spiritual Progress, the Law of Mystical Ascent.

Finally, it is the Virgin Mary who must prepare Dante for the  
*Mystical Fulfillment*, the *Beatific Vision*, as we have already  
noted:

Lady (*The Virgin Mary*) so great are you and so great are your  
merits

that he who seeks Grace and does not first seek you  
is as one without wings wishing to learn to fly.

Paradiso XXXIII: 13-15.

Of the *Beatific Vision*, the *Mystical Fulfillment*, Dante can  
say little, for even symbols fail:

What I then beheld is more than the tongue can relate.  
Our human speech is useless before that vision.  
Failed memory faints and swoons.

Like one who wakes from a dream and finds  
the stamp of passion on his vision  
yet the sweetness born of it remains in my heart.  
Paradiso XXXIII: 55-60.

Remember the words of St. John of the Cross in "Coplas del  
Extasis":

And if you wish to know  
In what consists this supreme wisdom  
In the elevated sense  
Of the Divine Essence;  
It is the work of His Mercy,  
To make one remain not knowing  
Transcending far all temporal lore

(2112)

As revelation increases, the very symbols through which said  
revelation has been attained vanish, until the finite human mind  
emerges utterly stripped of its spatio-temporal senses into the  
very presence of the Infinite.

The *Beatific Vision* is devoid of all physical imagery, though  
later the memory may retain impressions which may be expressed  
only by totally inadequate symbols, as Dante said above. The human  
mind has advanced beyond the power of symbol to aid or express,  
and even the memory is rendered powerless. St. John of the Cross  
understood this perfectly. It is very possible that St. John of  
the Cross was familiar with the works of Dante Alighieri, though I

know of no evidence of this. However, both St. John of the Cross and Dante Alighieri were disciples of the trobadors, of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and of the Sufis, so there are links between them.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, in his emphasis on Love of God and his definitions of the mystical union continues a tradition which goes back at least to St. Maximus the Confessor (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century), perhaps earlier, and in al-Ghazzali. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, like St. Maximus the Confessor and al-Ghazzali, says that in the

(2113)

unitive state the soul is not totally annihilated in God; what is annihilated is dissimilitude. St. Bernard of Clairvaux uses the following comparisons: iron reddened in the fire seems to have become fire; the air filled with light seems to have become nothing but light; but iron and air, now no more than subjects carrying fire and light, are yet there to carry them. A drop of water mingled into wine *deficere ase tota videtur*; it appears to be dissolved.(301) These expressions are virtually identical to those used by al-Ghazzali, as we noted earlier. This is yet another proof of the very close kinship between Sufism and Christian Mysticism. Also, al-Ghazzali, under the name *Algazel* was



well known to medieval Christian thinkers. In the Cathedral of San Marco in Venice is an alfresco painting which shows al-Ghazzali among the Doctors of the Church.

Dante was familiar with the works of Hugh of St. Victor and his great disciple, Richard of St. Victor, these two were collectively known as *the Victorines*, *The Victorine Mystics*, or *The Mystics of St. Victor*.

Canto X of Il Paradiso is particularly relevant at this point:

(2114)

CANTO X

*. . .Lo mimistro maggior de la natura,  
Che del valor del ciel lo mondo imprenta  
E col suo lume il tempo ne misura,*

*Con quella parte che su si rammenta  
Congiunto, si girava per le spire  
In che piu tosto ognora s'appresenta;*

*E io era con lui; ma del salire  
Non m'accors io, se non com'uom s'accorge,  
Anzil primo pensier, del suo venire.*

*E Beatrice quell ache si scorge  
Di bene in mehlio, si subitamente  
Che l'atto suo per tempo non si sporge.*

*Quant' esser convenia da se lucent  
Quell ch'era dentro al sol dov' io rntra'mi,  
Non per color, ma per lume parvente!*

*Perche' io lo 'ngegno e l'arte e l'uso chiami,  
Si nol direi che mai s'imaginasse;*

Ma credor puossi e di veder sib rami.

E se le fantasie noostre son basse  
A tanta altezza, non e maraviglia;  
Che sopra 'l sol non fu occhio ch'andasse.

Tal era quivi la quarta famiglia  
De l'alto Padre, che sempre la sazia,  
Mostrando come spira e come figlia

E Beatrice comincio: "Ringrazia,  
Ringrazia il Sol de li angeli, ch'a questo  
Sensibil t'ha levato per sua grazia".

Cor di mortal non fui mai si digest  
A divozione e a renderi a Dio  
Con tutto 'l suo grader cotanto presto,

Come a quelle parole mi fec'io;  
E si tutto 'l mio amore in lui si mise,  
Che Beatrice eclisso ne l'oblio.

(2115)

Non le dispacque; ma si se ni rise,  
Che lo splendor de li occhi suoi ridenti  
Mia mente unita in piu cose divise.

Lo vidi piu folgor vivi e vincenti  
Far di noi centro e di se far corona,  
Piu dolci in voce che in vista lucent:

Cosi cinger la figlia di Latona  
Vedem talvolta, quando l'aere e pregno,  
Si che ritenga il fil chef a la zona.

Ne la corte del cielo, ond' io rivegno,  
Si trovan molte gioie care e belle  
Tanto che non si posson trar del regno,

E 'l canto de quei lumi era di quelle;  
Chi non s'impenna sic he la su voli,  
Dal muto aspetti quindi le novella.

Por, si cantando, quelli ardenti soli  
Si fuor girati intorno a noi tre volte,  
Come stele vicine a Fermi poli,

Donne mi parver. Non da ballo sciolte,  
Ma che s'arrestin tacite, ascoltando  
Fin che le nove hanno ricolte.

E dentro a l'un senti' cominciar: "Quando  
Lo raggio de la grazia, onde s'accende  
Verace amore e che poi cresce amando,

Moltiplicato in te tanto resplende,  
Che ti conduce su per quella scala  
U' senza risalir nessun discende;

Qual ti negasse il vin de la sua fiala  
Per la tua sete, in liberta non for a  
Se non com' acqua ch'al mar non si cala.

Tu vuo' saper di quai piante s'infiora  
Questa ghirlanda che 'ntorno vagheggia  
La bella donna ch'al ciel t'avvalora

(2116)

Io fui de li agni de la santa greggia  
Che (Santo) Domenico (di Guzman) mena per cammino  
U' ben s'impingua se non si vaneggia.

Questi che m'e a destra piu vicino,  
Frate e maestro fummi, ed esso Alberto  
E di Cologna, e io (Santo) Thomas d'Aquino.

Se si di tutti li altri esser vuo' certo,  
Di retri al mio parlar ten vien col viso  
Girando su per lo beato serto.

Quell' altro fiammeggiare esce del riso  
Di Grazian, che l'uno e l'altro foro  
Aiuto si che piace in Paradiso.

L'altro ch'appresso addorna il nostro coro,  
Quell Pietro fu che con la poverella  
Offerse a Santa Chiesa suo Tesoro.

La quinta luce, ch'e tra non piu bella,  
Spira di tale amor, che tutto 'l mondo  
La giu ne gola di saper novella:

Entro v'e l'alta mente u' si profondo  
Saver fu messo, che, se 'l vero e vero,

A veder tanto non surse il secondo.

Appresso vedi il lume di quell cero  
Che giu in carne piu a denro vide  
L'angelica natura e 'l ministerio.

Ne l'altra piccioletta luce ride  
Quello avvocato de'tempi cristiani  
Del cui Latino (San) Augustin si provide.

Or se tu l'occio de la menti train  
Di luce in luce dietro a le mei lode,  
Gia de l'ottava con sete rimani.

Per vedere ogne ben dentro vi gode  
L'anima santa che 'l modo fallace  
Fa manifesto a chi di lei ben ode.

(2117)

Lo corpo ond' ella fu cacciata giace  
Giuso in Cieldauro; ed essa da martiro  
E da essilio venne a questa pace.

Vedi oltre fiammeggiar l'ardente spiro  
D' (San) Isidoro, di (Venerabile) Bede **e di Riccardo (di San  
Vittorio),**  
**Che a considerer fu piti che viro.**

Questi onde a me ritorna il tuo riguardo,  
E 'l lume d'uno spirto che 'n pensieri  
Gravi a morir li parve venir tardo:

Essa e la luce etterna de Sigieri,  
Che, leggendo nel Vico de li Strami,  
Silogizzo invidiosi very".

Indi, come orologio de ne chiami  
Ne l'ora che la sopsa di Dio surge  
A mattinar lo sposo perche l'ami,

Che l'una parte e l'altra tira e urge,  
Tin tin sonando con si dolce nota,  
Che 'l ben disposto spirto d'amor turge;

Cosi vid' io la gloriosa rota

*Muoversi e render voce a voce in tempra  
E in dolcezza ch'esser non po nota*

*Se non cola gipor s'insempra.*

Paradiso, X:28-148.

CANTO X

The greatest of Nature's ministers.  
Which inscribes Heaven's plan on the world  
And with its light measures the passage of time,

Being now in conjunction with that place  
Which I indicated, wheeling through the spirals  
In which we see it earlier each day;

(2118)

And I was with it, of my exit  
I was not aware, since one cannot be aware  
Of how a thought will first appear until it comes.

And it is Beatrice who is the guide of our ascension  
From good to better, in an instant-  
Her action cannot be measures by the passage of time.

How brilliant must have been the essence  
Which shone within the sun, from whence I had come,  
Not with its color, but with light upon light!

Even had I called upon genius, art and skill,  
I could not make this live for you in your imagination;  
One must believe and yearn to see it there.

And if our imagination cannot ascend  
To such an elevated plane, it is not to be marveled at;  
No light brighter than the sun's has an eye ever seen.

The fourth family shone therein  
by the highest Father, always kept in bliss  
manifesting how He breathes, how He begets.

And Beatrice said: "Let us give thanks,  
Give thanks to the Sun of angels, by whose grace  
You have ascended to this sun of senses."

The heart of no mortal was ever more willing  
To give devotion and to render unto God  
So completely and so eagerly

Than was my (heart) at her bidding.  
So totally did I render all my love to God,  
That Beatrice, eclipsed, was had slipped my mind.

But she was not displeased by this, for she smiled  
So that the splendor of her laughing eyes  
Broke the spell and made me aware

Of seeing flashes of living light  
Making of us a center and of themselves a crown-  
Sweeter were their voices than their aspect was bright:

(2119)

As Latona's daughter sometimes appears,  
girt by a halo, when the pregnant air  
snares the beams of moonlight on her belt.

In the court of Heaven from whence I have returned  
I beheld jewels too rich and beautiful  
So that I could not bring them from that heavenly kingdom;

And the song those splendor sang was one such jewel:  
Of which he who cannot grow wings to fly up there,  
Awaits these tidings from the the deaf mutes here.

Because, when singing, all those blazing suns  
Had three time revolved around us two  
As do those stars that circle close to the fixed poles,

They paused like ladies still in dancing mode,  
Who halt in silence listening to hear  
The sound of the new notes of the dance.

And from within one of the lights I herad: "Since  
The ray of grace, from which is kindled  
True love, which the more it loves more loving grows,

Within you multiplies such splendor,  
That it leads you to ascend that staircase  
From which no one descends except to begin to climb again-

None could deny you the wine of his flask  
To quench your thirst of your soul, no more than a  
Moving stream is free to prevent its water flowing to the  
sea.

It is your desire to know of what sorts of flowers  
Is made this garland which lovingly surrounds  
The beautiful lady who gives you strength for Heaven.

I was one of the lambs of the sacred flock  
Which (St.) Dominic (*de Guzman*) led along the road  
Where all may fatten if they do not wander off.

He close by my right hand  
Was to me brother and master: Albert  
He of Cologne, and I am (St.) Thomas Aquinas.

(2120)

If you care to learn the truth about other things,  
Then where my words lead let your eyes follow  
Turning to see all this blessed wreath of souls.

The other flame is the light of the smile  
Of Gratian, who in one court and the other  
Served so well that he finds joy in Paradise.

The next who brightens our choir,  
Was that same Peter who, like the poor widow,  
Offered his treasure to the Holy Church.

The fifth light, most beautiful of all,  
Breathes of such a love, that all the world  
Yet hungers to know of his fate;

Within his lofty mind such profound  
Wisdom was granted, that, if the truth speak the truth  
There was never a second with such vision.

See the flaming candle next to him  
He, who in the flesh saw the depths  
Of the angelic nature and its mission.

Then, inside this tiny light smiles  
The great defender of the Christian Age  
whose latin words (St.) Augustine dis provise.

If the eye of your mind has moved

From light to light following my words of praise,  
Yoy must be eager to know what spirit shines in the eighth  
flame.

Within the vision of all good rejoices  
The holy soul who the world's deceitfulness  
Makes manifest to he who reads him well.

The body that was torn from below  
Cieldauro to this place of peace came  
From martyrdom and from exile.

(2121)

See the next flames, the fervent breath  
Of (*St.*) Isidoro, of (*Venerable*) Bede, and **of Richard (*of St.*  
*Victor*)**  
**Whose contemplation made him more than man.**

That which your eyes to me return to me,  
Is the light of a soul once given to deep thoughts,  
Who wept that death was so slow in coming:

This is the eternal light of Siger,  
Who lectured on the Street of Straw,  
Expounding on invidiously logical beliefs".

Then, as the clock chimes  
The hour when the Bride of God is roused  
To woo with the song of matins her Bridegroom's love,

With one part pulling and the other pushing,  
Its *tin-tin* sounding such sweet music  
That the soul. Ready for love, strains with anticipation;

Just so was I witness to that glorious wheel  
Moving and rendering voice on voice in concord  
And with a sweetness not known, save there.

Where joy becomes one with eternity.  
Paradiso, X:28-148.

Below is a very brief selection from The Mystical Ark, the



*magnum opus* of Richard of St. Victor:

"...The grace of contemplation  
Which is bestowed by the Lord as a kind of pledge of love,  
As it were, to His lovers.  
Contemplation, however, is the free and clear vision of the  
mind,  
Fixed upon the manifestation of wisdom in suspended wonder."

For reasons whose explanation would require a long treatise  
on Indo-European philology, until fairly recently, the word

(2122)

"mystic" was used only as an adjective or adverb, never as a noun.  
This means that in the Middle Ages no one was called a "mystic",  
and the word "mysticism" had not yet been coined. Hence Richard of  
St. Victor titled his *magnum opus* The Mystical Ark, but, like  
Dante, never refers to anyone as a "mystic", and uses the word  
"contemplation", where today we would say "mysticism".

Hugh of St. Victor and Richard of St. Victor were never  
canonized as saints by the Church, and this is perhaps the reason  
why Dante chose St. Bernard of Clairvaux rather than Hugh of St.  
Victor or Richard of St. Victor as his mystical guide in  
Paradiso. However, Hugh of St. Victor and Richard of St. Victor do  
give a near approximation to Dante's attitude of the superiority  
of mysticism over rationalism and of the mystical stages as  
described by Dante in Paradiso:

"... that is to say, it was natural enough for him

(Hugh of St. Victor) to think of the mind as passing from a knowledge of divine effects to a knowledge of their Author. It was also natural from him (Hugh of St. Victor & Richard of St. Victor) to see theology, considered as conceptual knowledge about God, as subordinate to the knowledge of God by acquaintance which can be obtained in mystical prayer, and to see mysticism as a preparation for the Beatific Vision of God in Heaven."(302)

(2123)

Certainly the above must remove all possible doubts concerning the fact that Dante was a mystic.

Some call Dante a "forerunner of the Renaissance", but this is ludicrous. The fact is that the so-called "Renaissance" had no use for Dante, rightly considering him to be "medieval". It was the Romantics who rediscovered Dante as they rediscovered so much else. One can only agree with Goethe who laughed at the so-called "Age of Reason", better called, in William Blake's words, "the Age of Single Vision and Newton's Sleep". Dante belongs to the Middle Ages, the same as his masters the Provencal trobadors and his beloved Arthurian Romances.

St. John of the Cross participated in both the tradition of Christian mysticism and of the Sufi tradition, as we have said. So, to a degree, did Dante. Miguel Asin Palacios demonstrated that in the preparation of Divina Commedia Dante owed a great deal to Islamic sources, particularly Sufis and most especially the great

Sufi Ibn Arabi al-Mursi.(303) This is a large and complex topic, would lead us very far afield indeed, and would require a chapter unto itself. I can only refer the reader to the great work of Miguel Asin Palacios.

(2124)

There are those who say that Dante Alighieri, though chronologically medieval, was, in reality, of the so-called "Renaissance". On what basis they make this affirmation I have no idea, since they never mention any except for their own ignorance, biases, prejudices, stereotypes and preconceptions. As we said above, in fact the so-called "Renaissance" had little use for Dante, who was rediscovered by the Romantics. The fact that Dante Alighieri was so fervent a disciple of the trobadors (whom real "Renaissance" types held in contempt or at least ignored simply because the trobadors were so totally medieval) and like them Dante Alighieri was utterly medieval in his mystical spirit, symbolisms and allegories, which proves that he was very much a medieval man, to his everlasting honor.

Someone once said that I have a mentality which is "Medieval and not modern, rural and not urban", to which I replied; "and very proud of it", or, as we say in Spanish, "*y a mucha honra*"

Ruzbehan Baqli Shirazi was author of various Sufi tracts in Persian and was a contemporary (1120-1209) of the trobadors and of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi. He is best known as the founder of the

(2125)

"faithful in Love" (*Khassan-e-Mahabbat*). In recognition of the strong affinity, indeed virtual identity between the *Khassan-e-Mahabbat* of Ruzbehan and the companions of Dante, Henry Corbin usually translated *Khassan-e-Mahabbat* as the Italian *Fedeli d'amore* (Provençal *Fidels d'amor*) rather than the French *Fideles d'amour*. (304)

As we shall see, there are many other parallels and affinities between Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and Dante than those so exhaustively studied by Miguel Asín Palacios in his masterful La Escatologia Musulmana en la Divina Comedia, and we shall also perceive at least the outlines of the interrelation between Ruzbehan, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, the trobadors, Dante, Hafiz and St. John of the Cross. To give a full account of this interrelation would require a book unto itself.

True, in an earlier chapter we said that the prosody of the trobadors is **NOT** derived from Classical Arabic verse, but rather is of Celtic origin. However, this in no way denies nor precludes

Islamic - both Arabic and Persian - influences in the content of the trobador verse. We also believe that the word *trobador* is a hybrid between the Medieval Latin *tropus* on the one hand and the Arabic trilateral root **TRB** and its derivatives on the other.

(2126)

A century before Dante, Ruzbehan had his own Beatrice. In his *magnum opus* Futuhāt al-Makkiya, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi recounts an anecdote concerning Ruzbehan during his time in Mecca, which anecdote Ruzbehan recounts in a largely autobiographical work. Hence, there is no reason whatever to doubt the veracity of said anecdote.

During his prolonged stay in Mecca, Ruzbehan fell in love with a young chanteuse of great beauty.

Ruzbehan possessed that absolute honesty and sincerity of which only the pure of heart and the most honorable and chivalrous are capable. Ruzbehan attended a meeting of Sufis, and said:

"I will not lie to anyone concerning my status."

confessed his devotion to the beautiful chanteuse, and removed his *khirqa* or Sufi robe, of which he now considered himself to be unworthy. As Henry Corbin noted:

"Nota bene: Ruzbehan's comportment was that of a true *fedele d'amore* (*khassan-e-mahabbat*) . He was not involved in a banal "adventure" as we would say today. Ruzbehan kept his secret; he kept his ecstasy in the

silence of the vision of such beauty. Certain other persons informed the young woman of the ecstatic adoration of which she was secretly the object of on the part of one considered to be one of the great spiritual masters (*min akabir ahl-Allah*). The young woman was upset on learning such a thing. Confused, she renounced the life which she had led up to that moment. She converted to the service of God, which conversion

(2127)

was, according to Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi), the good fruit of the sincerity of Ruzbehan. She became a disciple of Ruzbehan. Similarly, the contemplation of her beauty had caused Ruzbehan to cease to wear the outward sign of a mystic (the *khirqa*). The message of the above anecdote is a perfect example of the ethic of the *Fedeli d'amore*: the beautiful being which is the object of adoration is finally metamorphosed by it; the theophanic function with which it is invested by the lover leads to the true interior of said beauty which becomes immune to all temporal changes. The anecdote ends with a gesture of the same simplicity. Ruzbehan returns to the assembly of Sufis and once again dons the *khirqa*.

The contemplative (*nazar*) who regards the beauty of the Beloved as an object of contemplation (*shahid*) is an attention which transfigures: the being which is thus transfigured attains the truth of its interior beauty (it comes to be the way in which it is contemplated). As Ruzbehan himself said:

'When the beautiful beings are favorable to the mystical contemplation of Sufis and those who pry their internal being, said beauty becomes eternal. On the contrary, when the light of said exterior beauty vanishes with accidents of nature or the passage of time, the contemplative attention of the mystics ceases, and the being (of the beautiful object) is enveloped by Darkness.'"(305)

In his largely autobiographical work Kitab-e-'Abhar al-'Ashiqini, translated by Henry Corbin as Le Jazmin des Fedeli d'amore, Ruzbehan includes a dialogue between himself and the

beautiful chanteuse of Mecca. As Henry Corbin has noted, in this case it is impossible to know what part of said dialogue actually occurred and what part is, in Corbin's words:

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"events in the sensual world being amplified in a visionary perception of the invisible." (306)

At first, the chanteuse ignores the mystical adoration of which she is the object, she is ignorant of the meaning which her beauty might have for a Sufi; in other words, she is ignorant of the theophanic function with which her beauty is invested.

Ruzbehan begins the dialogue by saying:

"You are of the party of the *Fedeli d'amore*, oh beautiful icon! Because you are eminently worthy, even though you do not participate with us in imbibing of love in the assembly of ecstasy." (307)

She replied:

"To turn aside from the Divine World, this is culpable negligence. To make of me the object of contemplation, this is blemish upon you, unless you are content to be misguided." (308)

In the rest of said dialogue, Ruzbehan demonstrates to the chanteuse that she is mistaken. This involves many philosophical and mystical terms which would be long to explain, as well as a large number of references, many quite obscure. Henry Corbin synthesized the message of said dialogue thusly:

"For Ruzbehan, he is not by any means moved to contemplate the beauty of the Creator beginning *with* the creature, but rather to see within the creature itself,

because it is itself the sole mirror, the unique manifestation; the theophanic vision is immediate, a stranger to and apart from reasoning and *via eminentiae*."(309)

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The rejection of beauty by Puritans, whether Manichaeans, Protestant or Wahhabi, is a betrayal of religion, an apostasy, it is blasphemy and sacrilege. I fully understand the fury of the medieval Catholics and Muslims against the Albigensians (who were Manichaeans) and the fury of the Cavaliers against the Puritans and Covenanters in the British Civil Wars of the 1640's.

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, like Ruzbehan, had his own Beatrice. As Henry Corbin said:

"He (Ibn Arabi al-Mursi) received the hospitality of a noble Iranian family from Ispahan, the head of the house being a *sheikh* occupying a high post in Mecca. This *sheikh* had a daughter who combined extraordinary physical beauty with great spiritual wisdom. She was for Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) what Beatrice was to be for Dante (and the unnamed chanteuse of Mecca for Ruzbehan); she was and remained for him the earthly manifestation, the theophanic figure, of *Sophia Aterna* (once again, *Hagia Sophia, Daena*). Not to understand, or to affect not to take seriously Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi)'s conscious intention, in addressing the young girl Sophia (**NOT** her personal name), of expressing a divine love, would be neither more nor less than to close one's eyes to the theophanism on which this book insists because it is the very foundation of our *shaikh's* doctrine, the key to his feeling for the universe, God and man, and for the relationships between them. If, on the other hand, one has understood, one will perhaps by that same token, glimpse a solution to the conflict between symbolists and philologists in



connection with the religion of the *Fedeli d'amore*, Dante's companions. Theophanism there is no dilemma, because it is equally far removed from allegorism and literalism; it presupposes the existence of the concrete person, but invests that person with a function which transfigures him (or her), because he (or she) is perceived in the light of another world.

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Henry Corbin continued:

There is one term which perhaps calls for special justification: *Fedeli d'amore*. We have already had occasion to speak of the *Fedeli d'amore*, Dante's companions, and we shall speak of them again, for the *theophanism* of Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) has a good deal in common with the ideas of the symbolist interpreters of Dante (see: Il Linguaggio Segreto di Dante e dei "Fedeli d'amore", Luigi Valli, Roma, 1928), though it is secure against such criticism as that of the literalist philologists who were alarmed to see the person of Beatrice fade into a pale allegory. We have suggested that both the *Fedeli d'amore* and their critics can be reproached with one-sidedness. In any case, the young girl who was for Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) in Mecca (and the unnamed chanteuse of Mecca was for Ruzbehan) what Beatrice was for Dante, was a real young girl, though at the same time she was "in person" a theophanic figure, the figure of *Sophia Aeterna* (whom certain of Dante's companions, the *Fedeli d'amore*, invoked as *Madonna Intelligenza*).

Ruzbehan in his beautiful (and largely autobiographical) Persian book titled The Jasmine of the *Fedeli d'amore* distinguishes between the pious ascetics, or Sufis, who never encountered the experience of human love, and the *Fedeli d'amore* for whom the experience of a cult of love dedicated to a beautiful being is the necessary initiation to divine love, from which it is inseparable. Such an *initiation* does not indeed signify anything in the nature of a monastic conversion to divine love; it is a unique initiation, which transfigures *eros* as such, that is, human love for a human creature. Ruzbehan's doctrine falls in with Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi)'s dialectic of love. It creates a kinship between him and Fakhr 'Iraqi, the Iranian who was Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi)'s disciple through the intermediary of Sadr Qunyawi, and also makes Ruzbehan the precursor of that other famous man of

Shiraz, the great poet Hafiz (who, as we have seen, so influenced St. John of the Cross), whose Diwân is still observed today by the Sufis of Iran as a Bible of the

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religion of love,, whereas in the West it has been solemnly debated whether or not this Diwân has a mystic meaning. This religion of love was and remained the religion of all the trobadors of Iran and inspired them with the magnificent *ta'wîl* (spiritual meaning) which supplies a link between the spiritual Iran of the (Muslim) Sufis and Zoroastrian Iran, for according to this *ta'wîl*, the Porphet of Islam in person proclaims Zarathustra (Zoroaster) to be the prophet of the Lord of Love; the altar of fire (*Atashgade*) becomes the symbol of the Living Flame (remember the work of St. John of the Cross Living Flame of Love); in the temple of the heart (as St. John of the Cross knew so well.)" (310)

We have already compared Living Flame of Love by St. John of the Cross to Niche for Lights (*Mishkat al-Anwar*) by al-Ghazzali. However, without excluding the work of al-Ghazzali, who, after all, was a Persian and a Sufi), perhaps the mystical *ta'wîl* of the Sufi trobadors of Persia is the most exact prototype of Living Flame of Love.

We must deal in more detail with Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and Nizam, his Persian Beatrice. However, first a point must be clarified.

I can say from experience that a surprisingly large proportion of the male population of Spain consists of my "doubles". In India and USA I have been taken for Iranian with some frequency. So, to mistake a Spaniard for a Persian would not

be unusual. Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was a Spaniard, a Murciano (*Mursi*) to be exact.

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In his description of the circumstances in which he first met his "Beatrice", Ibn Arabi al-Mursi says that he first took her to be a Byzantine. Henry Corbin made much of this; however, in this case I believe that he was putting more into the incident than is really there, as the Spanish say, "Looking for five feet on the cat". This is human nature, and I have certainly been guilty of it myself.

As Ibn Arabi al-Mursi describes the above incident, he was making a nocturnal circumnavigation of the Ka'aba when he felt a tap on one shoulder and turned to see a very beautiful girl whom at first he took to be a Byzantine. Now, especially in that time and place, the idea that a young and beautiful girl of good family would accost a strange man on the street after nightfall is simply unthinkable, and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was a most honest and sincere man. What really happened is obvious: Nizam, the young girl, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's "Beatrice", in the semi-darkness took him for someone that she knew, most likely a relative, and spoke to him in Persian, a language which he did not understand and which he took to be Greek. To make more of the incident than this is to "Look for five feet on the cat".

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During his time in Mecca (1201), Ibn Arabi al-Mursi knew many fascinating people. As he says in his Diwân:

"Although they were all persons of distinction, I found none among them to equal the wise doctor and master Zahir ibn Rustam, a native of Ispahan who had taken up residence in Mecca, and his sister, the venerable ancient, the learned woman of Hijaz, whose name was Fakhr al-Nisa (Glory of Women) bint Rustam." (311)

Apparently the first member of Zahir ibn Rustam's family with whom Ibn Arabi al-Mursi became acquainted was Zahir ibn Rustam's daughter Nizam, the circumstances of their first meeting having been recounted above. Henry Corbin made much of the fact that Ibn Arabi al-Mursi at first took Nizam to be a Byzantine, but, for reasons given above, I consider this to be merely anecdotal.

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi continues:

"Now this *sheikh* (Zahir ibn Rustam) had a daughter, a lissome young girl who captivated the gaze of all those who saw her, whose name was Nizam (Harmony) and her surname "Eye of the Sun and of Beauty" (Arabic: *Ayn al-Shams wa'l-Baha* Persian: *Chashm-e-Aftab va Khoshgelee* or *Chashm-e-Khorshid va Zibayee*). Learned and pious, with an experience of spiritual and mystic life, she personified the venerable antiquity of the entire Holy Land and the candid youth of the great city faithful to the Prophet. The magic of her glance, the grace of her conversation were such an enchantment that when, on occasion, she was prolix, her words flowed from the source; when she spoke concisely, she was a marvel of eloquence; when she expounded an argument, she was clear

and transparent. And I took her as a model for the

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inspiration of the poems contained in the present book (*Diwân*) which are love poems, composed in suave, elegant phrases, although I was unable to express so much as a part of the emotion which my soul experienced and which the company of this young girl awakened in my heart, or of the generous love I felt, or of the memory which her unwavering friendship left in my memory, or of the grace of her mind or the modesty of her bearing, since she is the object of my **Quest** (what Arthurian resonances!) and my hope, the Virgin Most Pure (Al-Adhta al-Batûl). Whatever name I may mention in this work, it is to her that I am alluding. Whatever the house whose elegy I sing, it is of her house that I am thinking. But that is not all. In the verses I have composed for the present book, I never cease to allude to the divine inspirations (*waridat ilahiya*), the spiritual visitations (*tanazzulat ruhamiya*), the correspondences (of our world) with the world of the angelic intelligences; in this I conformed to my usual manner of thinking in symbols; this because the things of the invisible world attract me more than those of actual life, and because this young girl knew perfectly what I was alluding to (*id est*, the esoteric sense of my verses)."(312)

Henry Corbin noted:

"In order to understand him (Ibn Arabi al-Mursi) and to avoid any hypercritical questioning of his good faith, we must bear in mind what may be termed the theophanic mode of apperception, which is so characteristic of the *Fedeli d'amore*, that without this key one cannot hope to penetrate the secret of their vision. We can only go astray if we ask, as many have done in connection with the figure of Beatrice in Dante: is she a concrete, real figure or is she an allegory? For just as a Divine Name can be known only in the concrete form of which it is the theophany, so a divine archetypal Figure can be contemplated only in a concrete Figure - sensible (in the case of Ruzbehan, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and Dante) or imagined (many of the

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trobadors and the companions of Dante) - which renders it outwardly or mentally visible. When Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) explains an allusion to the young girl Nizam as, in his own words, an allusion to

"A sublime and divine, essential and sacrosanct *Wisdom* (*Hagia Sophia, Daena*), which manifested itself *visibly* to the author of these poems with such sweetness as to provoke in him joy and happiness, emotion and delight", We perceive how a being apprehended directly by the Imagination is transfigures into a symbol thanks to a theophanic light, that is, a light which reveals its dimension of transcendence. From the very first the figure of the young girl was apprehended by the Imagination on a visionary plane, in which it was manifested as an "apparitional figure" (*surat mithaliya*) of *Sophia Aeterna* (*Hagia Sophia, Daena*)."(313)

Some of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's verses are so enigmatic that Henry Corbin likened them to the *trobar clus* of the trobadors.

Below is an example:

Ah! To know if *they* know what what heart *they* have possessed!  
How my heart would like to know what mountain paths *they* have taken!  
Ought you to suppose them safe and sound, or to suppose that *they* have perished?

The *Fedeli d'amore* remain perplexed in love, exposed to every peril.(314)

Henry Corbin noted:

"Then come the hours of weariness or lukewarmness in which reasoning intellect, through the distinction it introduced, through the proof it demands, insinuates between the Lord of Love and His *Fedele d'amore* a doubt that seems to shatter their tie. The

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*Fedele d'amore* no longer has the strength to feed his Lord on his Substance; he loses his awareness of their secret, which is their *unio simpatico*. Then, like critical reason informing itself of its object, he ask whether the "Supreme Contemplated Ones" are of his own essence, whether they can know what heart they have invested? In other words: Has the Divine Lord whom I nourish with my being any knowledge of me? Might the bond between them not be comparable to those mystic stations (*muqamat*) which exist only through him who stops (*muqim*) in them? Since the spiritual visitations have ceased, at best perhaps they have taken some mountain path leading them to the inner heart of other mystics; or at worst might they not have perished, returned forever to nonbeing?" (315)

On hearing his verses cited above, Nizam, or Harmony, surnamed "Eye of the Sun and of Beauty", Arabic: *Ayn al-Shams wa'l-Baha*, Persian: *Chashm-i-Aftab va Khosgelee* or *Chashm-i-Khorshid va Zibayee*, native of Ispahan, who was Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's Persian Beatrice, says:

"How, oh my Lord (*sayyidi*), can you say "Oh, to know if they know what heart they have possessed? You, the great mystic (*Sufi*) of our time, I am amazed that you can say such a thing. Is not every object of which one is the master (*mamluk*) by that very fact an object that one knows (*ma'ruf*)? Can one speak of being master (*mulk*) unless there has been knowledge (*ma'rifa*)? Then you said:

"How my heart would like to know what mountain paths they have taken!"

Oh my Lord, the paths that are hidden between the heart and the subtle membrane that envelops the heart. Those are things that the heart is forbidden to know.

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How then can one such as you desire what he cannot attain? How can he say such a thing? And what did you ask after that? Ought you to suppose them safe and sound, or to suppose that they have perished? As for them, they are safe and sound, or have you perished, O my Lord?"(316)

Henry Corbin continued:

"Unsparingly reversing the question, *Sophia* (*Wisdom, Daena*) recalls her *Fedele d'amore*, to the truth of his mystic state. He has given in for a moment to the philosopher's doubt; he has asked questions that can only be answered by rational proofs similar to those applying to external objects. He had forgotten for a moment that for a mystic the reality of theophanies, the existential status of the "Supreme Contemplated Ones", depends not on fidelity to the laws of Logic, but on fidelity to the service of love. Do not ask *them!* Whether you are still alive, whether you can still "answer for" *them*, still permit *them* to invest your being. And that is the crux of the matter: what to a philosopher is doubt, the impossibility of proof, is to the *Fedele d'amore* absence and trial, for on occasion the mystic Beloved may prefer absence and separation while his *Fedele d'amore* desire union; must the *Fedele d'amore* not love what the Beloved loves? Accordingly, he falls prey to perplexity, caught between two contradictories.

This is the decisive point on which *Sophia* (*Daena*) continues to initiate her *Fedele d'amore* with lofty and at the same time passionate rigor.

"And what was the last thing you said? The *Fedele d'amore* remains perplexed in love, exposed to every peril?"

Then she cried out and said:

"How can a *Fedele d'amore* retain a residue of perplexity and hesitation when the very condition of adoration is that it fill the soul entirely? It puts the senses to sleep, ravishes the intelligences does



away with thoughts, and carries away its *Fedele d'amore* in the stream of those who vanish. Where then is there room for perplexity? It is unworthy of you to say such things."

This reprimand, concluding with words of stern reproach, states the essential concerning the religion of the *Fedeli d'amore*. And what is no less essential is that, by virtue of the function with which she who states its exigencies in that Night of the Spirit (the "Dark Night of the Soul" of St. John of the Cross) is invested, the religion of mystic love is brought into relation with Sophiology, id est, with the Sophianic Idea. We note the visionary aptitude of a *Fedele d'amore* such as Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi), who invests the concrete form of the Beloved Being with an "angelic function", and, in the midst of his meditations, discerns this form on the plane of Theophanic vision.

How is such a perception, of whose unity and immediacy we shall have more to say in a moment, possible? To answer this question we must follow the progress of the dialectic of love set forth by Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) in an entire chapter of his *magnum opus* (Futuhat al-Makkiya): it tends essentially to secure and test the sympathy between the invisible and the visible, the spiritual and the sensual, that sympathy which Jalaluddin Rumi was to designate by the Persian term *hamdami* (lit. *sumpnoia*, *conflation*, "blowing together"), for only this "con-spiration" (breathing together) makes possible the spiritual vision of the sensual or the sensual vision of the spiritual, a vision of the invisible in a concrete form apprehended not by one of the sensory faculties, but by the Active Imagination, which is the organ of theophanic vision."(317)

We have already used the word *gnostic*, and in the rest of this chapter we will continue to use it with a certain frequency.

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Today the word *gnostic* is often used to refer to a series of aberrant sects and cults which, apparently, first appeared in the early centuries of the Christian era. These diverse sects and cults were composed of the most heterogenous elements - Greek, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Christian, Buddhist and even ancient Babylonian paganism - and were considered to be a heresy by Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Buddhism, and, finally, Islam. The followers of these sects or cults called themselves *gnostics* or "knowers" in order to give their teachings a certain snob appeal. Says the Oxford English Dictionary: the word "gnostic" is from the Greek *gnostikein*, i.e., "to know", from whence *gnosis*, i.e., "knowledge", and *gnostikos*, meaning "knower", from whence *gnostic* and *Gnosticism*, all cognate with English - **know**: Sanskrit - **jnana**: Urdu - **janna**: Hindi - **janna**: Bengali - **jana**: Latin - **cognitum**: Lithuanian - **zhinoti**: Russian - **znat**: Bulgarian - **znai**: Czech - **znat**: Slovak - **coznat**: Polish - **znach**.

For a bit more depth, we shall now deal with the Sanskrit **jnana**. Note that the first "N" in the Sanskrit **jnana** has the sound of the Spanish letter called **enye**, which is an "N" with a

*tilde* or "wavy line" over it, giving it the sound of "NY" in English and Catalan, "NH" in Portuguese. So, the nearest approach to the pronunciation of the Sanskrit *jnana* in English would be: *jnyana*. Interestingly, in French and Italian the "GN" has the sound of the Spanish letter *enye*, or "NY" in English and Catalan, "NH" in Portuguese.

1. *jna*, Rig Veda *jnana*, future *jnasyati*; aorist *ajnasit*, passive *ajnayi*. Rig Veda "to know", "have knowledge" infinitive *jnatum*; Mahabharata, "perceive, apprehend, understand" . . . .

2.) *Jna* Mahabharata: "knowing, familiar with." *jnata*, or *jnatva*, "intelligence", *jnashakti*, "the intellectual faculty" . . .

*jnatavaya*, Mahabharata, "to be known, understood or investigated".

*jnati*, "intimately acquainted" (cf. Gothic: *knodi*). . . .

*jnatri* "one who understands, a knower". . . .

*jnatra* "the intellectual faculty".

*jnana*, "knowing, becoming acquainted with, knowledge, especially the higher knowledge (derived from meditation on the one Universal Spirit). . . .

*jnanakanda*, "that portion of the Veda which relates to knowledge of the One Spirit". . . .

*jnanaghana*, "pure knowledge or intellect".

*jnanachakshus*, "the eye of intelligence, inner eye, intellectual vision. . . .

*jnanalakshana*, "Knowledge marked", (in logic) intuitive knowledge of anything actually not perceivable by the senses." . . .

*jnaniya*, "to wish for knowledge".

*jnapaka*, "causing to know, teaching, designing, in forming, suggesting. . . .

*jnapana*, "making known, suggesting"

*jnapaniya*, "to be made known". . . .

*jnapita*, "informed, made known, known by".

*Jnapya*, "to be made known." (318)

It should be obvious that the words *gnosis* and *gnostic* derive from a very ancient Indo-European root word documented as early as the Rig Veda, and so far antedates those strange and aberrant sects or cults of the first centuries of the Christian era who adopted the names *gnosis* and *gnostic* merely to give snob appeal to their teaching. Rather, when we use said words here we refer to men who: 1.) had the capacity and the preparation & 2.) put forth the very considerable time and effort necessary to learn and comprehend the esoteric doctrines of Shi'ism. This last, and not "secret" is the real meaning of "esoteric"; i.e., comprehensible only for those with the capacity and the preparation who put forward the necessary time and effort. As a former soldier, I am thoroughly aware of the meaning of the word "secret", and it is not the same as "esoteric", nor even very similar to it.

To reiterate, it should be obvious that the words *gnosis* and *gnostic* are far older than those strange sects and cults of which we have spoken, and really bears no relation to them; said word, as we said, was adopted or "hijacked" by the practitioners of said sects and cults in order to give them a certain snob appeal.

The Shi'a "gnostics" of which we shall speak below had nothing whatever to do with those strange, heterogenous and aberrant sects and cults which arose at the beginning of the Christian era and which were such a plague to Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Buddhism, and finally Islam.

Luce Lopez-Baralt, whom we have already cited at some length, and, as we have indicated, is a leading authority on Hispano-Muslim Sufism. Below she gives a brief overview of the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr concerning Sufism and mysticism in General.

"Seyyed Hossein Nasr has disclosed recently that his foremost book, Knowledge and the Sacred, 'came as a gift from Heaven. He was able to write the texts of the [Gifford] lectures with great facility and speed and within a period of less than three months they were completed ... it was as though he was writing from a text he had previously memorized.' The author's reverent admission may come as a surprise in the West, because his philosophical text, based on the prestigious Gifford Lectures he gave at the University of Edinburgh in 1981, is one of the major intellectual feats in the history of religious ideas in the twentieth century. Nasr reflects upon both Eastern and Western spirituality, and he is equally at ease with Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu thought, as well as with the philosophy and science of both hemispheres. His display of erudition is indeed stunning, even more so because of the fact that when he wrote his lectures he had recently lost his family library and his scholarly notes from the two decades of research he had done in his mother country, Iran. It comes indeed as a surprise - especially in the West - for such a renowned philosopher to claim spiritual inspiration for a veritable masterpiece of intellectual scholarship.

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But, on second thought, Nasr's confession as to the mysterious, otherworldly quality of the intuitive

elling he experienced while writing Knowledge and the Sacred is ultimately not that surprising after all. His essays constitute an erudite book, yes, but even more so a *sapiential* book. In his Gifford Lectures he argues for a special kind of knowledge, a *sacramental* knowledge which the Western world had long disregarded and forgotten due to the long process of postmedieval secularization which divorced intelligence from the sacred.

The Iranian scholar, much in the tradition of sages like Rene Guenon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and Frithjof Schuon, makes the case for perennial wisdom or *Sophia perennis*. This otherworldly, suprarational *sapientia*, like the sacred olive tree of the Quranic Surah XXIV:35, belongs neither to the East nor to the West because it transcends both time and space; it resides in the One [or, the Vedantic *Advaita* i.e., "not two" or "non-dual"] as well as in the inner recesses of the gnostic's (in the sense of 'initiate') soul, where the union of the *Unus/Ambo* [or in Sanskrit *ek/Dvair*] takes place. This particular wisdom implies the direct knowledge of the Absolute [Sanskrit: *Brahman*], and the illuminated mystic who attains it is endowed with a unified view of reality. By privileging this sacred experiential knowledge, the philosopher is subjecting Western culture and epistemology to a profound philosophical criticism. He is forcing his readers to an abrupt revision of the ideas they have taken for granted for many centuries now regarding the limits of the cognoscitive capacities of the human mind. Knowledge and the Sacred is an invitation - undoubtedly disturbing for many - to revise such a narrow and disheartening epistemological point of view.

But perhaps the times are ripe for Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophical challenge. Western philosophy has undergone numerous crises and revisions in the twentieth century, the epistemological pessimism of Fritz Mauthner, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the Vienna Circle concerning the limits of language being just one case at hand. Contemporary physics is another example. Anyone even remotely familiar with quantum physics is

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overwhelmed by a new conception of reality which "normal" language and classical logic simply cannot grasp, much less explain in a satisfactory way. The

words which must be used to explain quantum theory are not adequate to explain quantum phenomena. Ordinary conceptions and thought processes need to be modified so that we can "understand" certain new scientific propositions. John von Neumann's theories come to mind: the wave function is not quite a thing and yet it is more than an idea; it occupies a strange ground between idea and reality. Richard Feynman's diagram of the "dance" which continuously changes a neutron into a proton and back into a neutron again is equally disturbing. Bell's theorem, on the other hand, formulates another disquieting notion: separate parts of reality in the universe are connected in an intimate, inexorable way which our common experience and the "laws of physics" belie. The new physics truly defies "Aristotelian logic" in affirming that contraries can coexist. Niels Bohr summarizes the dilemma we face as students of modern physics: "Those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum theory cannot possibly have understood it." I admit to having been profoundly shocked by the most elemental propositions of quantum physics. Much more so because, having dedicated my life to the study of mystical experience, I am quite aware that for the first time physicists and mystics seem to speak the same "language". Or perhaps I should say that neither can truly "speak", for normal language seems painfully inadequate for both disciplines. Both science and mysticism push our verbal capacities to their uttermost limits to no avail: plain reality, just like Ultimate Reality, transcends our efforts at restraining it with our limited linguistic tools, or even with our sophisticated mathematical symbols. A universe whose subatomic particles dance in perpetual change and yet are connected in an inexorable way, and where time and space are relative is consistent with the mystic's perception: he acknowledges to having attained unified knowledge beyond the limits of space, time, and change.

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In other words, Nicholas of Cusa's *coincidentia oppositorum* does not seem so incongruous to today's quantum physics student.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is well aware of this modern

tendency on the part of the West of trying to relate modern physics to mysticism and to Oriental esoteric doctrines (Advaita Vedanta and Taoism, for example). He feels it is akin to the concern for the sacred which characterizes contemporary ecology, so adamant in the conservation of nature.

I feel that the Iranian philosopher has grasped a tendency quite true to our times. Indeed it seems that a sacralized mode of knowing is slowly emerging in different scientific and philosophical disciplines in the West. The study of mysticism itself is undergoing a definite process of validation in recent decades. Evelyn Underhill's and William James' theories on the subject are being updated by neo-Freudian psychiatrists such as W.W. Meissner, author of the revolutionary - as well as reverent - (St) Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint. Even more relevant to our contemporary revalorization of the mystical experience are Ana Maria Rizzuto's exploration of spirituality in the light of post-Freudian psychoanalysis and her revision of Freud's theories concerning the Divine.

I think that these epistemological revisions going on simultaneously in different disciplines (science, philosophy, mysticism, psychiatry) must be kept in mind in order to understand the relevance and the opportune timing of Nasr's epistemological theories in the context of contemporary Western religious thought. Nasr's dramatic defense of mystical *sapientia* is very much part of our times and of our hemisphere. Let us now take a closer look at his principal epistemological propositions.

The Iranian scholar makes abundantly clear that in Knowledge and the Sacred he is not dealing with an empirical or rational mode of knowledge but with the highest form of knowledge, "which is the ultimate knowledge of God not by man as an individual but by the divine center of human intelligence, which, at the level of gnosis, becomes the subject as well as the

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object of knowledge". For man to attain knowledge of Ultimate Reality is to be delivered from duality [Sanskrit: *Advaita*; "not Two", "non-dual") and to discover his own essence. Thus, Nasr argues, theology is in the end nothing but "autology". This is an elemental



mystical truth which gnostics (in the sense of "initiates") from all ages and cultures articulate in different ways. Contemporary gnostics such as Meher Baba in India claim the "to know Reality is to be transformed in It", while Maria Zambrano in Spain (that land of mysticism, both Christian and Islamic) affirms in turn that *el conocer es ser* ("knowing is being"). Nasr in turn feels at home with Ibn Arabi el Mursi and Meister Eckhart, who propose that the eye with which man sees God is the eye with which God sees man.

The gnostic - called in Arabic *al-arif bi 'Llah* because he knows through or by God - sees things in *divinis*, as Adam did in Paradise. His knowledge must be attained through experience and taste. This is a cognoscitive experience of a radically different order from empiricism and rationalism, and to illustrate this point Nasr rightly reminds the reader of the etymology of the word *sapientia*, from the Latin root meaning "to taste". This concept is equivalent to the *hikmah dhawqiyyah* or "tasted knowledge" of Sufis such as Suhrawardi. The Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, for his part, assigns to "taste" (*dhawq*) the first of the symbolic four degrees that mark the manifestation of the Truth. In the West (is Andalusia or Muslim Spain not geographically in the West?) bot Nicholas of Cusa and St. John of the Cross became experts in this "tasted knowledge" or *ciencia sabrosa* which led to the blessed state of *coincidentia oppositorum* or unitive knowledge, something the rationalist mind alone can never apprehend. With a certain vulnerability and perhaps even spiritual nostalgia, Albert Einstein reflected that "*Die Sehnsucht des Menschen verlangt nach gesicherter Erkenntnis*" [Man has an intense desire for assured knowledge]. And Nasr is arguing the cause of precisely this kind of knowledge.

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Man has what we can call different "organs of knowledge" and is capable of operating at different levels of cognoscitive experience. Sacred knowledge or knowledge of the sacred is not limited to reason but involves the whole of man's being. It is, again, direct and "tasted knowledge", which "imposes itself with

blinding clarity upon the mind of the person who has been given the possibility of such a vision through intellectual intuition." This is why this sacred knowledge is never hypothetical or approximate, but absolutely certain. The philosopher is speaking here about a direct, infused experience. No wonder knowledgeable Sufis who are part of Nasr's spiritual tradition called their cognoscitive experience the "science of certainty" or *'ilm al-yaqin*. St. John of the Cross boasted once and again of his absolute certainty of his knowledge of the One, which he had "tasted": "*Que bien se yo la fonte que mana y corre/aunque es de noche*". "[indeed] I know well the spring that flows and bursts forth/in spite of being immersed in night].

Modern Western thought does not grant such infallibility and absolute certainty to any form of knowledge. Seyyed Hossein Nasr is indeed bestowing upon the cognoscitive dimension of the mystical experience an ontological dignity it has not had in the West since the dawn of the so-called "Modern Age". It must be remembered that the author takes into account in his philosophical explorations both the direct revelation of God treasured by traditional religions as well as the personal epiphany of the individual gnostic. And he considers this intuitive, direct knowledge the most legitimate form of knowledge. But it is of a different order than rational knowledge.

The source of this inner revelation which Nasr expounds is the center of man, known symbolically as the "heart". He distinguishes this cognoscitive mystical "organ" from the limited rational mind: "The seat of intelligence is the heart not the head, as affirmed by the traditional teachings." This is what Plato, Origen and St. Augustine called "the eye of the soul", the Sufis the "eye of the heart" or *'ayn al-*

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*qalb* and the Hindu tradition "the third eye". This *qalb* or heart as an organ of divine perception constitutes a very complex symbol in Islam, for which there is no exact equivalent in Christian spirituality. We will have the opportunity of examining it further on. Suffice it here to say that Nasr claims that "it is not possible to attain this knowledge in any way except by being consumed by it." And the philosopher's prose dissolves

into poetry because what he is speaking about, like contemporary quantum physics, cannot easily be reduced to analytical thought:

The truth descends upon the mind like an eagle landing upon a mountain top or it gushes forth and inundates the mind like a deep well which has burst forth into a spring. In either case, the sapiential nature of what the human being receives through spiritual experience is not the result of man's mental faculty but issues from the nature of that experience itself. Man can know through intuition and revelation not because he is a thinking being who imposes the categories of his thought upon what he perceives but because knowledge is being.

While extolling direct perception of the Truth as a truly legitimate form of knowledge, Nasr admits Rene Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* to a vigorous critique. With his famous *cogito*, Nasr argues, the French philosopher

Made the thinking of the individual ego the center of reality and the criterion of all knowledge, turning philosophy into pure rationalism and shifting the main concern of European philosophy from ontology to epistemology. Henceforth, knowledge ... was rooted in the *cogito*. The knowing subject was bound to the realm of reason and separated both from the Intellect and revelation. Neither of which were henceforth considered as possible sources of knowledge of an

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objective order ... To the mentality of those who were caught in the web of the newly established rationalism ... knowledge and science were henceforth totally separated from the sacred even if the sacred were to be accepted as possessing a reality.

Nasr's critique of the (so-called) Renaissance is well known in spite of the fact that as Gisela Webb so

eloquently states, precisely because of our scholar's expertise in science, religion, philosophy, and comparative literatures he could well be considered a "Renaissance man". But Nasr objects to certain crucial philosophical aspects of "modernity" and considers Descartes' rationalism, which was to decide the general approach to knowledge in the West for many centuries to come, as "this most intelligent way of being unintelligent". But the learned philosopher, in spite of his witty remark, is not against speculative reason. His traditional approach and his defense of the *scientia sacra* does not oppose the activity of the mind, but rather opposes its divorce from the heart or *qalb* as an organ of gnosis superior in nature to the rational mind.

Western readers are ill-prepared to embrace this truth, *tam antica et tam nova*, as St. Augustine exclaimed in awe, because our culture, in its radical secularization, has trivialized and ignored sapiential knowledge. We lack - and I am saying this as a Christian by birth and tradition and as a scholar in comparative mysticism - an esoteric dimension for Christian spirituality, a dignified, respectful niche for dimensions of knowledge which transcends (without ever denying) pure reason and speculative logic. Nasr contrasts the case of Christianity with that of Judaism and Islam: both religions have the esoteric branches of Kabbala and Sufism, for which we lack a true equivalent. The efforts on the part of many Renaissance figures of rendering prestige to intuitive or direct knowledge of the Truth went unheeded by the modern Christian tradition. To the well-known cases of

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Hermetists like Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Nicholas of Cusa, and Francesco Patrizzi Nasr argued, we must add that of St. John of the Cross, who besides being a mystic himself, explored in depth and with an esoteric approach more akin to the Orient than to the West the different dimensions of the faculty of knowledge.

The inspired perception of the Truth these sages expounded has been all but discredited in modern Western thought. The very association with any form of spiritualized knowledge has been sufficient to erase any

trace of dignity accorded to certain approaches to knowledge, as Nasr rightly states:

The most sublime form of wisdom has been transformed into simple historical borrowing, Neoplatonism ... playing the role of the deal historical tag with which one could destroy the significance of the most profound sapiential doctrines. It has been and still is simply sufficient to call something Neoplatonic influence to reduce it, spiritually speaking, to insignificance. And if that has not been possible, then terms such as pantheistic, animistic, naturalistic, monistic, and even mystical in the sense of ambiguous have been and still are employed to characterize doctrines whose significance one wishes to destroy or ignore.

Nasr, an heir of the gnostic approach to knowledge of revealed, traditional religion (in his own case, Islam) update in a very innovative way the Neoplatonic perfume that pervades both Oriental and early Christian thought. (Recall Frithjof Schuon's comment that one must return to Plato and Advaita Vedanta). His ardent defense of the unitive, all-consuming knowledge that is perceived by man's whole being, not by his limited rational mind, is, as I stated before, difficult to assume - to "naturalize", as Jonathan Culler would have it - by a reading public long devoid of gnosis.

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The Iranian philosopher's *inspired* and profoundly Oriental book, written, ironically enough, in the West and in a Western language, is indeed one of the most courageous enterprises in the field of spirituality in recent times. Nasr has dealt a sever blow to the cherished rationalism and empiricism the West has taken for granted since the Renaissance. Personally, I could not agree more with his momentous contribution to the history of ideas concerning epistemology.

The philosophical and spiritual consequences of this *Sophia perennis* that we are exploring again thanks to Nasr's pioneering book are truly significant. The

scholar reminds the reader that the world and its changing forms are born from the reflections and reverberations of Being - the author is alluding here to the traditional Islamic concept of *nafas al-rahman* or creative "Breath of the Compassionate". This Divine Relativity or *maya* simultaneously veils and reveals the sacred, but the true sage beholds the cosmos and the myriad of forms it displays as theophany; as reflections of the Divine Qualities rather than as a veil which would hide the "splendor of the face of the Beloved". The gnostic is endowed with a "rhapsodic intellect" which gives him a unified view of creation, with which he "sees God everywhere (recall the saying of the Chinook Amerindians of the valley of the Columbia River in the states of Oregon and Washington: 'Pray with your senses')" and observes harmony where others see discord and light, where others are blinded by darkness. The man of knowledge goes beyond him to reach heaven and in so doing, he reaches the sacred ground of his own being. He is redeemed from his symbolic "Occidental exile" and is finally back home, illuminated by the light of the Eastern dawn. His center is pure consciousness, wherein lies the eternal essence "which survives all change and becoming". Nasr echoes Chuang-Tzu's [a Taoist philosopher] words to further explain this overwhelming state of knowledge: "[The divine man] fulfills his destiny. He acts in accordance with his nature. He is at one with God and man. For him all affairs cease to exist, and all things revert to their original state". The cosmos, as viewed

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through eyes "which are not cut off from the sanctifying rays of the *eye of the heart*, indeed reveal the cosmos as theophany. The world functions not as a "pattern of externalized brute facts," but as an icon which reflects diverse aspects of the Divine Qualities, as "a myriad of mirrors reflecting the face of the Beloved", The enlightened mind which is capable of grasp[ing such a form of sacred knowledge asserts that the changing forms of *samsara* are ultimately *nirvana*, that all separation is union, that all otherness is sameness, that all manifestation of the One is a return to the One. Nature thus constitutes for him a grand theophany that externalizes all that man is inwardly: "the Ultimate

Reality can be seen as both the Supreme Object and the Innermost Subject, for God is both transcendent and immanent, but He can be experienced as immanent only after He has been experienced as transcendent". Thus for the spiritual "hero" the dichotomy of creation is only apparent.

Equally apparent for him is the temporal order and process of change of the cosmos. "Pontifical man" renders ravaging time inoffensive and is able to gain access to the eternal while living outwardly in the domain of becoming, for Eternity is reflected in the present now. The gnostic can experience time not only as "change and transience but also as the *moving image of Eternity*. Time mercifully dissolves in "the supreme moment in which the spiritual man lives constantly. He knows he is ultimately safe from the cycles of the "days and nights of the life of Brahman" in the immutability of that "eternal instant from which all things are born", and which he discovers in his own being. The sage always lives in the sacred instant of pre-eternity (*al-azal* for Sufis such as Hafiz); in the "early dawn" in which man made his eternal covenant with God.

The mystic who has attained *Sophia perennis* understands that "Heaven and earth are united in marriage, and thus the Unity, which is the source of the cosmos and the harmony that pervades it," is reestablished for him. Nasr goes as far as to propose a new definition of mankind in the light of his epistemological propositions: "to be fully man is to

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rediscover that primordial Unity from which all the heavens and earths originate and yet from which nothing ever really departs." No wonder the author reserves such adjectives for the privileged human being of "ecstatic" or "rhapsodic intellect" who has experienced fully his ultimate essence, which is shared by the Eternal One: he considers him a "hero", a "Pontifical man", a "gnostic", even a "divine man".

I propose that the "hero", the "Pontifical man", the "gnostic", and the "divine man" who has realized his full potential as a human being and who is endowed with a veritable "rhapsodic intellect" and a sacred, unified view of creation is none other than Seyyed Hossein Nasr himself. The learned philosopher, historian, and scientist who has authored fifty books

and over five hundred articles translated into over twenty languages disclosed for the first time his own soul *in the inner courtyard of intimacy* in his recently published Poems of the Way. As a reader of his philosophic texts for so many years, I must confess that this short volume is, surprisingly enough, the veritable crowning of Nasr's sapiental philosophy. His forty poems, anthologized in a volume whose title is an homage to Ibn al-farid's Poems of the Way, is an updating of Sufism written in the venerable tradition of Islamic gnostics such as Ibn al-Arabi al-Mursi and Rumi. But in the context of Nasr's philosophical *opera magna* this collection of mystical odes has an additional meaning: the Persian gnostic has rendered his learned Knowledge and the Sacred in ecstatic verse. Philosophy is put into practice, *logos* dissolves into experience, theoretical knowledge ('*aql*) becomes realized knowledge ('*ishq*) before our startled eyes. Nasr has chosen to share his divine gift and to sing in "the language of the birds" for the first time in his life. His book of poetry could only have been authored by a mystic attuned to otherworldly sapiental experience. Poems of the Way culminates the scholar's philosophical argumants in a moving admission of direct experience: Nasr has evolved from lecturing about Knowledge and the Sacred to celebrating his having

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attained knowledge of the sacred. Truly his sapiental and mystical *knowledge is light*. The sage's poetry is the living proof of his philosophical theories, which the reader suddenly discovers sprang from the fountainhead of unmediated, "tasted" experience. Poems of the Way constitutes a veritable *medinah of victory* for *Sophia perennis*, and I cannot resist remembering at this point that the name "Nasr" means precisely "victory".

No wonder our scholar confessed that the ideas for his book Knowledge and the Sacred "came as a gift from heaven", and that he felt "as though he was writing from a text he had previously memorized." No wonder he spoke of Grace "as one in which it is operative"; no wonder he exhibited an interior dimension of the Truth which "no mere scholarship could produce". The moving words Nasr



applies to his admired sage Frithjof Schuon fit perfectly his own scholarship: it is not difficult to suspect that the Iranian scholar always spoke "from the point of view of realized knowledge not theory", and that is precisely why his writings bear an *existential* impact that can only come from realization". His praise for Rene Guenon could also be applied to his own philosophical, mystical, and literary achievement: "His lucid mind and style and great metaphysical acumen seemed to have been chosen by traditional *Sophia* itself to formulate and express once again that truth from whose loss the modern world was suffering so grievously". It is not difficult to conclude that both Knowledge and the Sacred and Poems of the Way are inspired books.

I have been quoting the epistemological theories advanced by Nasr in Knowledge and the Sacred so extensively because I propose sanctifying rays of the *eye of the heart*, indeed reveal the cosmos as theophany. The world functions not as a "pattern of externalized brute facts", but as an icon which reflects diverse aspects of the Divine Qualities as "a myriad of mirrors reflecting the face of the Beloved." The enlightened mind which is capable of grasping such a form of sacred knowledge asserts that the changing

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forms or *samsara* [Sanskrit] are ultimately *nirvana* [Sanskrit], that all separation is union, that all otherness is sameness, that all manifestation of the One [or, the Sanskrit *Advaita*, "not two", "not Dual", since "One" is still a numeric category] is a return to the One [or *Advaita*]. Nature thus constitutes for him a grand theophany that externalizes all that man is inwardly: "the Ultimate Reality can be seen as both the Supreme Object and the Innermost Subject, for God is both transcendent [Sanskrit: *Brahman*] and immanent [Sanskrit: *Atman*], but He can be experienced as immanent [Sanskrit: *Atman*] only after He has been experienced as transcendent [Sanskrit: *Brahman*]. Thus for the spiritual "hero" the dichotomy of creation is only apparent.

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No wonder our scholar confessed the the ideas for his book Knowledge and the Sacred "came as a gift from heaven" [as some have called the works of St. John of the Cross, in particular Spiritual Canticle, "A gift from God to man"], and that he felt "as though he was writing from a text he had previously memorized". No wonder he spoke of Grace "as one in which it is operative"; no wonder he exhibited an interior dimension of the Truth which "no more scholarship could produce". The moving words Nasr applies to his admired sage Frithjof Schuon fit perfectly his own scholarship: it is not difficult to suspect that the Iranian scholar always spoke "from the point of view of realized knowledge not theory", and that is precisely why his writings "bear an *existential* impact that can only come

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I have been quoting the epistemological theories advanced by Nasr in Knowledge and the Sacred so extensively in this essay because I propose now to demonstrate that the scholar's conception of the sacred indeed comes to life in his Poems of the Way, a veritable example of "sacred art". Thanks to Nasr's intoxicating poetry, we will be able to attest that for the mystical author the cosmos is a "cathedral of celestial beauty" where he contemplates the "Divine Presence in its metacosmic splendor". The poet-mystic, who as a "Pontifical man lives in time but as a witness to eternity", finally becomes here "what he always is,

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a star immortalized in the empyrean of eternity". Nasr challenges the impoverished view of nature that has been our sad Western legacy for so long and sees the sacred as ubiquitous, for it is the substance of his own being in the mystical station of union.

As so many Sufis with which he forms tradition, Nasr has probably realized that revealed Truth is better expressed in poetry than in prose. Poetry is mysterious, is inspired, is rhythm - "days and nights of the life of Brahman" - and is, above all, polyvalent. Thanks to its very prodigious ambiguity poetry is perhaps the only human endeavor that mimics and even renders true the sacred *coincidencia oppositorum* (to use again Nicholas of Cusa's revealing phrase) of the mystical experience. And Nasr's poetry flows, convinces, caresses, dances with the mystified reader the eternal dance of Shiva. And yet the flowing oceans of light of his inspired poetical images are congealed *like a diamond firm* forever, ready to actualize the poet's spiritual ecstasy every time the reader convokes them and gives them new life.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr the poet is indeed the symbolic

*Adam who saw the Face of the beautiful/reflected upon the mirrors of Paradise.* Let us share with him the myriad of paradisaical reflections of the quicksilver of his scintillating verses, in whose delicate verbal geometry of light and shadow the exquisite opalescence of Persian poetry shows through so clearly.

I allude to the verbal opalescence of Nasr's poetry on purpose. The Persian poet is part of a venerable literary tradition endowed with a rich symbolism of its own. Sufi poets have celebrated once and again their cherished **trobar clus** [*trobar clus* is an expression used by the Provençal trobadors; see Chapter 3]. Lahiji, who commented upon Shabistari's Gulshan-i-Raz, acknowledges that only the true initiates are able to comprehend their hermetic *langage a clef*:

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Certain initiates express different degrees of mystical contemplation by the symbols of vestments, shoe buckles, games, colorful beads, wine, flaming torches, etc. ... which to the eyes of the vulgar do not inspire other than a brilliant appearance. ... What is signified by the shoe buckle is the multiplicity of things which cloud the visage of the Beloved...; the wine symbolizes love, the ardent desire the spiritual drunkenness; the flaming torch the irradiation of divine (uncreated) light within the heart of he who seeks the Way. ...

[Once again, recall the saying of the Chinook Amerindians of the US states of Oregon and Washington:  
*Pray with your senses.*]

Nasr is perfectly conscious that as a literary *homo faber* he is giving new life to this centuries-old Islamic literary discourse so rich in symbolic meaning.

In doing so, his language gains an immediate inner sense and a polyvalency that belies the unidimensional character typical of literary works devoid of a complex literary tradition. The author has explored in depth the sacred nature of the symbol not only in Knowledge and the Sacred but in his Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines:

The nature of the symbol differs profoundly from that of an allegory. A symbol is the "reflection" in a lower order of existence of a reality belonging to a higher ontological status, a "reflection" which in essence is unified to that which is symbolized; while allegory is a more or less "artificial figuration" having nonuniversal existence of its own.

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Anyone familiar with [Persian] Sufi poetry will be able to decode Nasr's "secret" mystical symbolism: the wine which the Saki pours is the nectar of divine ecstasy; the Prophet's *mi'raj* or nocturnal ascent into heaven is now the mystic's own ascent into the Real; the personal "Occidental exile" of Nasr, living in the West far away from the exalted peaks and vast deserts of his Persian homeland turns to the symbolic "Occidental exile" of the Sufi living *in nostalgia for the Paradise within* in this transient realm of becoming; the crescent moon of Ramadan is the dagger of the mystic who carries out the inner war against the ego; the "luminous night" is the state of spiritual darkness [recall the "dark night of the soul" of Ibn Abbad of Ronda and St. John of the Cross] due to an excess of light (the gnostic attains illumination when he "darkens" discursive reason); the mystic truly enters the Ka'bah in Mecca only when he enters the spiritual *Ka'bah of the heart*.

The symbol of the heart or *qalb* has a particular relevance in Sufism, and in Nasr's poetry as well. It could be said that Poems of the Heart as a whole constitutes a sacred pilgrimage to the Ka'bah of the heart. The exquisite edition of the book itself points to the different stages of this spiritual path by reproducing a symbolic door (or *mihrab*) for each and

every poetic unity or *maqam* ("spiritual station") of the mystic's itinerary. The inner heart is the ultimate goal of the Way the poet painstakingly travels. It is the true *locus* of Divine life, and Nasr employs a *hadith* of the Prophet of Islam to repeat the traditional Sufi instruction: "The heart of the Believer is the Throne of the Compassionate". Nasr, ever the Persian poet, celebrates his *locus* of Divine manifestation with *luminous metaphors* which evoke the incandescent hearts or *qulub* of such masters as 'Attar, Kubra, Suhrawardi, Hujwiri, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, al-Nuri. But many other symbols serve him as well for the inner sanctuary of his heart: it is by turn a *crescent moon*, a *chalice made to receive*; the *castle of the inner man*, the *holy courtyard of inwardness*. Our contemplative, as many Islamic gnostics before him, circles feverishly

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around the heart like a moth around *the candle of the night*/Around *this pole supreme of Truth and Presence*. Unlike the passing forms of earthly life, *unstable abode of becoming and change*, this sacred interior temple which holds the Throne of the Compassionate is invulnerable; *immobile like a diamond firm*. The pristine purity and hardness of the diamond is a leitmotif with which the poems of the Way try to evoke the perfect safety of the interior heart as the sublime abode of God. The verses themselves turn majestic, *diamantine, fulgurous*, when they depict *the crystalline perfection, coldness of life eternal* of our inexpugnable innermost soul.

But the diamond is also multifaceted. It reflects light in a myriad of different hues. And as such it is, again, a perfect symbol for the resplendent, ever-changing organ of gnosis which is the interior *qalb*. Sufis such as Al-Hakim al-Tirmidi and especially the Christian mystic Ste. Teresa of Avila [known in Spain as *Santa Teresa de Jesus*], so indebted to Islamic mystical symbolism, knew well this heart of *fino diamante* ("fine diamond"). Contrary to its European counterparts, the Islamic symbol of the interior heart is immensely rich. The Arabic term for "heart (*qalb*)" comes from the triliteral root **QLB**, which includes the meanings of "heart", "*perpetual change*" and "*inversion*". Michael Sells explores the meaning of this symbolic heart which is

*receptive of every form in the mystical poetry of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, especially in the famous verses from his Tarjuman al-Ashwaq (Interpreter of Desires): "My heart has been receptive to every form. ... For the Andalusian (Murciano, to be exact, hence his title al-Mursi, "the Murciano") mystic, the Truth "manifests itself through every form or image, and is confined to none. The forms of its manifestation are constantly changing". Needless to say, Sells' description of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's symbol could also be applied to knowledgeable Sufis such as al-Kubra, al-Nuri, Kashani, Baqli, among many others, who took ya muqallib al-qulub (O you who make the hearts fluctuate!):*

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The heart's function is ... dynamically integrative. The heart that is receptive of every form is in a state of perpetual transformation (*taqallub*, a play on the two meanings of the [trilateral] root **QLB**, heart and change). The heart molds itself to, receives, and becomes each form of the perpetually changing forms in which the Truth reveals itself to itself.

To achieve a heart that is receptive of every form requires a continual process of effacement of the ego or individual self. The gnostic who succeeds in doing so reaches the loftiest of all mystical stations: the "station of no station" (*maqam la maqam*). His heart, capable of reflecting all of God's infinite Attributes without being confined to a particular one could be described not so much as an object or an entity, but as an "event, the process of perspective shift of *fana'*, the polishing of the divine mirror". Nasr himself confesses to be this sacred mirror: *I am the mirror in which the Self reflects, / Reflects her infinite Beauty, inhaustible.*

Our mystic has polished the diamantine mirror of his ever changing *qalb*, and he now discovers with inexpressible joy that his inner heart, like a symbolic Ka'bah, becomes an ocean of light in spiritual contemplation - a changing, ever fluctuating profusion of *cascades of light*. Sure enough, the myriad of otherworldly reflections he reenacts in his poetry are



indeed multifacetous.

But how is it possible for Nasr to celebrate a heart that is simultaneously solidly diamantine - and thus, safe from change - and yet fluctuates like unceasing luminous waves? In the *coincidentia oppositorum* of his ecstatic poetry, Nasr is illustrating with supreme mastership the exalted *knowledge of the sacred* that his symbolic *qalb* has reached as an organ of mystical perception. He takes refuge from the transient shadows of creation in the inexpugnable castle of his inner soul, where he finds supreme peace. Yet, he also experiences, with the passive vessel of his soul, the constantly changing epiphanies of the Truth as it manifests Itself to

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Itself. Let us see how the poet succeeds in convoking the reader to share - and to reenact - with him this sublime intuition of a mystical experience in which he simultaneously "tastes" the immovable *Center that is the center of all wheres* and, precisely because he has arrived at this lofty station, also savors his perpetual transformation in God as well. The stunned reader at this point feels tempted to pray with Ibn Arabi al-Mursi: "My Lord, increase me in bewilderment in You.". A supreme prayer indeed, and it seems that it has been answered in the case of Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

Let us explore further Nasr's poetic *ars coincidentiarum*. On a first level, he lets us know that he feels exiled *in this domain of transience*, the sad voice of his nostalgia crying *for the Paradise within*. The poet truly loathes this worldly abode of becoming and change which devours and kills and mutilates. His longing soul cannot cling to the *fleeting images passing by* which are but evanescent shadows. Even the delightful *changing wonders of the azure bright skies* of his native Persia or of the *emerald land of the gods* [which could be interpreted as Ireland, as anyone who has seen Ireland from the air well knows why it is known as the "Emerald Isle" and "The Emerald of the Ocean"] of Bali pierce his heart with the pang of separation. The mystic is truly *drowning in this sea of change*, as he clamors in a dramatic, moving verse. But we will attend to the wonder of seeing how these fleeting forms of the earthly abode are redeemed into divine epiphanies in the poet's protean heart. The author subjects these

mystical forms to a painstaking alchemical transformation and succeeds in rendering the dreadful *sea of change* into a *glorious ocean of light*, reflecting the *Oneness of the Source of all*. Nasr had expounded this supreme lesson in *Knowledge and the Sacred*: true *sapientia* stands for unitive knowledge, and the mystic discovers that change is only apparent.

From the very *Exordium* to the collection of poems, Nasr makes it clear that the world would *suffocate of its own ugliness* were it not for the fact that the very substance of existence manifests the Breath of the Compassionate. God loves His own theophany, and the

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changing world of forms is indeed part of it, which explains why Nasr begins tossing with an exulting *Alhamdu li'Lah* (May God be praised!). Verily, only a mystic endowed with a *qalb* receptive of every form and with a supreme spiritualized alchemical power can redeem the ugliness of this *sea of ignorance* in such a compassionate, complete way.

Almost every poem reenacts this sanctifying act of true gnosis. In "the Eternal Covenant" Nasr remembers with awe the primordial "yea" of acquiescence man gave to God in the Eternal Covenant they pact at the dawn of time. The poet still feels that "yea" reverberating in his heart, turning the *meaningless noise devoid of sense or rhyme* of the world into a prelude to our return to the One. The poet has started to upgrade our earthly journey into a *heavenly song*. Thanks to his perpetual state of remembrance he feels he is with God *from eternity to eternity*: his protean *qalb* not only has succeeded in abolishing the fleeting shadows of this earthly abode of change but also of abolishing time itself. The mystical Way to which *Poems of the Way* invites the reader thus begins to *dissolve as if by miracle*. The mystic discovers that he has always been in the bosom of God, "sharing" His infinite, timeless Essence, and there cannot possibly be a "way" to separate him from the Truth, to separate the Truth from the Truth.

The poet also celebrates the Saki [cup bearer] who pours a wine for how so strongly thirsts. The reader must decode the Sufi symbol: Nasr is yearning for the intoxicating wine of the Unitive mystical experience,

which transcends the limits of a rational mind immersed in the limited, tragic coordinates of space and time. Ibn al-Farid was one of the foremost Sufis to sing about this wine which had inebriated him "before wine was planted on this earth", as he reverently boasts in his *Al-Khamriyya (In praise of Wine)*. Nasr repeats *ad pedem latterae* this same verse in "The Wine of Remembrance". Our poet offers his heart as a vessel and his whole being as a chalice for this *ruby wine tasted by the pure in Paradise*". Only when he is intoxicated by the sacred elixir can he realize that he had tasted

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it in the pre-eternal dawn of the Eternal Covenant his soul had made with God. This merciful wine abolishes time, for it is tasted by the gnostic before the vine was ever created. But let us remember here that it was precisely the sacred container - the poet's ever changing, protean *qalb* - the one that transformed the mundane drink of the festive Saki into this otherworldly paradisiacal nectar that renders him free from the bondage of time.

In "Occidental Exile" the poet yearns in nostalgia for his lost homeland's exalted peaks, vast deserts and azure skies. As I have already observed, Nasr suffers from a literal Occidental exile, for he lives in America after having been banished from Iran. His longing to return to his native Orient is of course to be expected. But he is again rewriting an important Sufi mystical symbol which the reader needs to decode: the poet-mystic is really yearning to return to his native *spiritual* Orient, not to the geographic Orient of his birthplace. Nasr is masterfully reenacting the traditional leitmotif of many Sufis who preceded him. The Persia Suhrawardi describes his *pelerinage mystique* towards the "Orient" of his own soul in his *Recit de l'exil occidental*, which in turn Henry Corbin explores in his much quoted essays on Sufism, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* and *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. To arrive in this *Sinai mystique* implies a symbolic return to the Orient from which the mystic came originally, and where he rejoins his Perfect Nature in ecstasy. The mystical pilgrim, upon reaching this celestial pole, has finally become "oriented" in this *geographic visionnaire*. Nasr's version is close to Suhrawardi's: *Our return from exile*

*is return to that Center/to our real land of birth.* Our poet directly associates the Orient with illumination - *that Orient which is light pure.* He is a true Sufi, for Muslim mystics have claimed for centuries that when they finally reached the "Orient" of their souls their symbolic "Occidental exile" came to an end. And only then were they worthy of the name *ishraqiyyun* - that is to say, "Orientals", and, at the same time, "illuminated". In Arabic *Ishraq* means simultaneously the "East" and "to be enlightened". Nasr thus joins

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the traditional *illuminati* from his native homeland, and in joining them, his "Occidental exile" finally comes to an end.

Engulfed in [uncreated] mystical light, he discovers that his banishment was more spiritual the geographical in nature. Most of all, he realizes that his *qalb*, receptive of every form, has finally banished space and the state of separation we associate with it: we carry the Orient in our hearts. This is precisely the Orient to which he has arrived: *to that Orient we carry in our hearts/at the center which is the seat of the All-Merciful.* And again the reader discovers that the "way" was never really trodden upon because it was a journey from oneself to oneself. Nasr broke the shell and entered the sacred Orient of his inner core, where the Center is. He is singing in his Poems of the Way from this blessed Center: it is indeed a centrifugak collection of mystical odes. Again, the poet's *qalb*, endowed with a vertiginous alchemical power, has succeeded in transforming the geographical Orient of Persia into the spiritual Orient of the inner soul. And yet I must add that Nasr recovers his yearned-for geographic homeland in a special way: the cascade of interior images that evoke it so beautifully is now congealed forever in his heart and in his poetry, and the reader can visit the poet's long-lost Persia once and again every time he reads Poems of the Way.

Now we gain access to the primordial temple of the Ka'bah itself. Nasr conjures it with a verbal play of light and shadow that subtly begins to render the holy shrine ethereal and otherworldly. Thee sacred calligraphy that adorns the temple is *woven of golden light upon the darkness of celestial night*, when the Ka'bah becomes an ocean of light. The visiting pilgrims

are transformed into moths that circle around the nocturnal symbolic candle of this poetic Ka'bah. And the venerated house of God is further transmuted by the poet's spiritual eye (his 'ayn al-qalb), which sees everything *in divinis*: it is his own illuminated heart, where the One resides. The poem closes with a majestic, yet supremely intimate final verse - I can almost hear the gnostic reverently whispering to himself and to the reader, with joyous certainty, *How blessed to enter the Ka'bah of the heart.*

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Nasr now convokes us to contemplate the breathtaking mountains of Machu Picchu. The poet is taken aback by the beauty of its mountain peaks that cling to heaven, *verdant with the exuberance of life*, and with its snow-peaks, which shine as jewels in the afternoon light. But all of a sudden this majestic scenery begins to dissolve before our eyes: *Their vertical walls disappearing ethereally/In that mist which opens into infinite space.* And the poet asks himself if he is not before a Taoist painting come to life. We all know that the geographic Machu Picchu is frequently enveloped in a thin film of moisture. But the poem's verdant peaks are dissolving in the infinite space of the poet's interior heart, which is transforming them *into jewels which know no death or decay: the exalted empyrean/which is our abode of origin and home.* The mystic claims, nostalgic yet triumphant that *we belong to peaks that shine above/in that eternal Sun which never sets. The mystery of the wedding of heaven and earth has occurred*, and a redeemed Machu Picchu has turned celestial deep in the recesses of the mystic's ever-changing qalb.

The emerald isle of Bali is equally dissolved by the mystical gaze of Nasr's inner 'ayn al-qalb. Its thousand masks of gods and demons dancing to the rhythm of gamelan and drums remind the poet of the imaginal world pouring forth in countless forms, but the reader realizes that Bali's *verdant fields reflect in their green mirror the infinite sky.* Nasr's "green sky" might need an explanation for the Western reader, for he is consistent with this peculiar chromatism. He will allude again to the horizons that *wore an emerald dress* in his poem "*Laylat alQadr*" (The Night of Power). And we have seen how the verdant Machu Picchu turned celestial inside the poet's spiritual heart. Green is the symbolic color of spirituality in Islam and ultraterrenal bliss

is anticipated by the faithful as a green Paradise full of lush vegetation, where the blessed will be robed in green garments of silk and brocade (Qur'an XVIII:30-31). The triliteral Arabic root **KhDR** associates the notion of green (*al-khadur* or *al-khudra*) with the color of Paradise (*al-khudayra*) and with the color of the sky (*al-khadra*). So it does not

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come as a surprise to realize that we have been thrust into the *green mirror* of the mystic's heavenly *qalb*, where the *myriad forms with which the divine veils and unveils Itself* are transmuted into myriad epiphanies of the *single Face*.

The poet gazes constantly into the night with his redeeming inner vision, rendering it luminous. In "Luminous Night" he rewrites the old Sufi lesson that *night is the day of the gnostic whose heart/Remains luminous by the presence of the Sun*. Indeed a *thousand suns* reneeder bright the holy darkness of the purified soul. Again and again the heavenly bodies are but symbols of the mystic's inner life. For a Muslim gnostic the newly born moon of Ramadan is transmuted into a sacred visual image of the glittering warrior's sword needed to *carry out the inner war to empty ourselves from ourselves*. And the moon-dagger in turn is sebtly transformed into the *qalb*, which is seen now as a blessed *chalice of all substance freed*. That is why it can be a true container and a true mirror of the One. Paradise is indeed within, and that is why the contemplation of the heavens always brings the mystic poet back into his own interior heaven.

The *Laylat al-Miraj* or the Nocturnal Ascent of the Prophet to the Divine Throne from Jerusalem is again seen in intimate spiritual terms. Muhammad's mystical station was so high that even the archangel could not approach it *lest his wings be burned*. But Muhammad prostrated before the Throne is in *perfect submission, an empty cup ready to receive/the nectar of the secrets of the here and beyond*. The nostalgic mystic yearns reverently to imitate Muhammad's supreme spiritual feat, but we soon realize that the only way to ascend into the Throne is to penetrate into the empty cup of one's purified heart, *that Center wherein He resides*. And the reader is struck with awe: the poet is again singing

from his joyous *Station of Intimacy*, deep inside the thron of his inner soul. And his wings, unlike Gabriel's, have not been burnt.

In "Wonders of Creation" Nasr reflects upon the beauty of created forms which overwhelm him with admiration and love:

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The starry heavens, mountain and peaks sublime  
Forests teeming with life, arid deserts pure,  
.....

Nebulae far away in immense spaces hidden,  
Reefs underneath the sea with fishes of every hue,  
A broken rainbow hidden from the eye,  
Which casts its glance upon the surface of the sea  
Unaware of the myriad shades in blend,  
A paradise of harmony of colors and forms...

The cascade of images indeed has an unearthly beauty that seems to *belong to a world strange to terrestrial man*. The poet observes that this myriad of lovely forms is a blessed gift from the *Inexhaustible Treasury Divine*, and he bears witness to the glory of God manifested in the impressive heights and depths of creation. But there is more to his reverent admission: the unceasing flow of inciting images *is* within. The starry heavens and the reefs with fishes of every hue, as well as the spring flower which *wITHERS NOT AWAY NOR DIES*, are but symbols of the infinite epiphanies in the reflecting mirror of the polished soul. The mystic's *qalb* in perpetual change receives the unceasing, symbolic manifestations of God, rendering sublime and supernatural the already otherworldly beauty of the blessed heart where the mystic can reflect - and can share in the state of Bi-Unity - the *Oeness of the Source of all*. In this sacred abode Heaven and earth are united in marriage. Again Nasr is admitting to having been endowed with *unified* knowledge of the sacred.

Not only nature but art itself - sacred art, I should say - is seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. Nasr reminisces now about the breathtaking beauty of the *Mezquita de Cordoba*, an architectonic marvel of Muslim Spain. Suddenly, right in the middle of the poem, he gnostic fixes his protean spiritual gaze in the very center of the old Islamic mosque: its golden *mihrab*. The

*mihrab* orients the faithful in the direction of the house of the One God, Mecca. Yet the mystic goes beyond the sacred religious symbol, remembering the lesson of Surah II:115: *whithersoever we turn, we behold His Face*. The *mihrab* is within.

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The Alcazar of Seville's wondrous ceilings inspired the exquisite poem "Golden Geometry in Alcazar". Again the poet sees with penetrating eyes the *snow crystals in golden hue/Hovering above yet never falloing*. And the congealed stalactites with their iridescent color whose airy beauty has been sung by many an Andalusian poet offer him a double spiritual lesson. Even though they remind him of this world of changing forms, the golden crystals that seem to fall from above but never really do, are like our souls, *embedded eternally in the diadem of the Almighty*. We might seem to fall, yet as jewels in His crown we are forever safe from change. And the poet evokes Surah XXVII:88's sublime lesson: *all things do perish save the Face of God*.

We are still in Spain. Now we enter with the poet in a majestic castle that hovers over a dale, and are entranced by the beauty of the fair queen who resides within. The poetic protagonist, *a traveler who has come from afar*, has always longed for her embrace, which will cast into oblivion all his suffering in this world of time. It is the only erotic poem of the whole collection, and Nasr evokes profane love with exquisite tenderness. He has, of course, the foremost literary lesson of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's love for Nizam. Yet when our poet whispers gently into his royal lady's ears *grant me a single moment in thy arms*, the reader discovers that both the queen and her majestic castle are within. Her fortified stronghold is the mystical castle of the inner soul sung by *hadiths* and by Sufi mystics and even by Ste. Teresa of Avila. To enter this castle is to draw into the heart, and to embrace the queen is to behold the Supreme beloved and to experience the unfathomable mystery of Bi-Unity.

Music is very important in Nasr's mystical path. Still in Spain, he hears *the music of the Friend from afar*, this time in the rhythm of the castanets and the throbbing of the guitar. The haunting voice of the flamenco singer raises *in nostalgia for the paradise within*, and as soon as we hear it with the poet, the



music dissolves into the timeless primeval dance of creation. The author is returned for a blessed instant to the dawn of time of his pre-eternal pact with God:

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time is mercifully abolished in the Ka'bah of his heart, where the flamenco from the Sacro Monte of Granada is rendered primordial rhythm. He no longer hears it, for what he is hearing now is his own "Silent Music". And the words of this unimaginable rhapsody are *chanted by the Eternal Singer* himself.

The poet knows well Who is singing his own literary songs: *If I cry Thou, it is Thee calling Thine own Name/For how can Thy Oneness accept This I as I.* It is not Nasr who is really singing in enthralled verses, but *Sophia* singing through Nasr. In the last two parts of the collection, titled "Illumination" and "Stages of the Path to the One", the poet-philosopher reflects, with uncanny verbal intelligence, upon the *sacred knowledge* he has attained, a gnosis which harmonizes contraries in instructing him as to Who he really is. Like al-Hallaj and al-Bistami before him, our mystic has been delivered from his painful duality and thus claims the externalization of his blessed but brief beatific state: *Let Thy Unity as the victorious come/to rend asunder the claimant I/to reveal the One who is I and Thou.* Verily the poet can exclaim *sns-l Haqq* (I am the Truth) with al-Hallaj and *subhani* (Glory to Me) with al-Bistami, even though his articulation of the state of Divine Bi-Unity (the *Unus-ambo*) is more restrained and more intellectual than the intoxicated utterances of these passionate Sufis. But he has a profound understanding of what his gnostic antecessors really meant: *It is The Supreme Self who alone can utter I./In whom alone am I really I.* And the reader acknowledges that Nasr is a veritable *al-'arif bi 'Llah* - a mystic who knows God through or by God.

Protected in *the crystalline perfection, coldness of life eternal* of the pure and inviolable Reality, where his soul has been *crystallized as a star*, the poet-mystic finally reaches his spiritual goal and enters into his timeless and imageless interior *qalb* to find that *Here is the center that is the Center of all wheres,/Now is the moment at the heart of all times.* Time and space dissolve and the gnostic feels free at last. The symbolic path of Poems of the Way culminates here, and the reader realizes that Nasr, a true prince

among the guides of that royal road to the One, has

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succeeded in turning his *earthly journey to a heavenly song*. Thus the path suddenly disappears. It was never there. We were always embedded in the diadem of the Almighty.

Yet the reader has witnessed a myriad of changing wonders along the mystical Way this collection of poems describe: *arid deserts, green mountains dissolving in mist, fishes of every hue, hovering golden stalactites. Silent music*. The poet's soul has served as a polished, passive mirror for the One: *I am the mirror in which the Self reflects, / Reflects her infinite Beauty, inexhaustible*. We have gazed upon this vertiginous mirror while reading Poems of the Way, and in staring, we have witnessed how the changing forms of samsara have been sanctified into *nirvana*. Cosmos is theophany, not *maya*. The created world has been purified, sacralized, and unified. The poet rewrites the philosopher's lessons, and his bewildering verse renders these spiritual instructions more clear and more convincing.

Every image and indeed every poem, *whose letters are woven of congealed light*, is like a new refraction of light irradiating from our poet's diamantine heart, *receptive of every form*, just as Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's interior *qalb*. The collection of mystical odes itself is an icon of this blessed ocean of pulsating light which is the heart witnessing the epiphanies of the One in the ultimate station of mystical union. In the act of reading, we have truly shared Nasr's *'ayn al-qalb*, his mystical "eye of the heart", and in doing so, we too have been symbolically transformed into the sacred vessels of reception of God's ever changing attributes. The anguishing world of changing forms has been miraculously redeemed, even if temporarily, into a myriad of symbolic Attribute of God. Nasr amply demonstrates that he possesses a sacramental sense of the created cosmos, an immediate and unveiled sense of the sacred. We have shared his profound gnoseological intuitions and for a blessed moment we scintillate with the author *in the luminosity of His proximity*.

Nasr's protean heart (*qalb*) has succeeded in literally inverting (*taqallub*) the shadows of this

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pitiful sea of change into the perpetually changing forms in which Truth reveals Itself to Itself. "Forms lead to the formless:, for when the gnostic sanctifies the ofrms he is able to "journey beyond them". Again the poet articulates the philosopher's ideas in symbolic verse. In his poetry Nasr has rewritten the traditional symbol of the *qalb* with such amazing perfection that I confess I really do not know if he was conscious of his artistic *coup de grace* or if *Sophia* again spoke through him.

In Knowledge and the Sacred Nasr taught that it is not possible to attain this mercifully unifying knowledge without being consumed by it. The *hikmah al-dhawqiyyah* - the "tasted" or "realized" knowledge about which he so amply theorized in his "inspired" philosophical *opus magnus*. Again his verses allow the reader a glimpse (better yet, a "taste") of this otherworldly *sapientia* which the poet discovered deep within the diamantine castle of his heart.

Poetry, as usual closer to the psyche than prose, was able to give life to the philosopher's epistemology in a most dramatic, unexpected way. I salute the *rhapsodic intellect* of Seyyed Hossein Nasr with the very same words with which he reverently celebrated Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, the *Interpreter of Desires* and *reviver of the Religion of the Heart: Thy poems interpreted the 'Desires' which are those for God/Dressed in the love of earth;y forms.*

Nasr the philosopher, historian, scientist, theologian, literary critic, and now the mystical poet, has succeeded in reminding contemporary mankind *Of the song of that celestial music of which he is, like Ibn Arabi al-Mursi eight centuries before him, the supreme troubadour in these Western lands.*" (319)

In accordance with the format of the book The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Seyyed Hossein Nasr presents a

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**REPLY TO LUCE LOPEZ-BARALT:**

"Professor Lopez-Baralt is today the leading expert in the field of comparative literature dealing with Sufi texts in relation to Spanish mystical literature. Not only does she have intimate knowledge of Spanish mystical works, especially those of Ste. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, but also knows Arabic and Persian and has immersed herself for years in Sufi literature and especially poetry in both Arabic and Persian. Her appraisal of my poetry is based on this long love affair with mystical poetry in general and Sufi literature in particular as well as an in-depth knowledge of Sufi symbolism, cosmology, and metaphysics. She is also herself a poet in addition to being a celebrated scholar. Her essay in fact reflects these two dimensions. The first part is devoted to a study of my Knowledge and the Sacred and the second to a collection of my poetry which appeared under the title Poems of the Way. I shall answer the first part as I have done for other essays. But the second part, which is a literary work in itself, in which she embarrasses me with her laudatory comments about my poetry. I shall not analyze save to say that her love of Oriental poetry has caused her to use Oriental hyperbole in evaluating my humble poems. Rather, I shall take this occasion to say something about the role of poetry in my own life and how I envisage the relation between philosophy and poetry.

Lopez-Baralt refers at the beginning to how the text of my Knowledge and the Sacred came to me as if it had descended upon me and that I was writing each chapter as if from memory. She speaks of the "otherworldly quality of the intuitive feeling he experienced while writing Knowledge and the Sacred. I wish to clarify this question by stating first of all that of course the extensive footnotes of the book were the result of long periods of research primarily at the Widener Library of Harvard University and are not to be included in the comments I had made about the text itself which was written in its totality in less than

three months, each chapter "flowing" as if I were transcribing a recording. This experience was not, however, one of intuitive feeling but the result of intellectual intuition combined with a sense of light and grace. I could say, if it does not sound too audacious, that the process was similar to what Suhrawardi would have called *ishraq*. But as she writes, this is not unusual when one is dealing with the *Sophia Perennis* which is already transcribed upon the tablet of the heart or, one could say, the tablet of the innermost layer of the very substance of our being. After having meditated for many years upon these matters, I was in such a state of being that I can say that the text of the book came to me as a recollection combined with what I could call a gift from Heaven. It was sent during a most difficult period of my life following upon the wake of the Iranian Revolution and my social uprooting as well as the loss of my library and the preliminary notes that I had prepared for the Gifford Lectures in Tehran before the advent of the Revolution. I should also add that in many cases when I am to write something after the necessary research and pondering over the matter, the actual process of writing is like the crystallization of a liquid solution and takes place fairly rapidly, the words coming forth in a flow that is most often continuous and uninterrupted. [I have had the same experience, M.Mc.] This has not been true of all my writings but of a number of them, although not on the scale that I experienced in writing Knowledge and the Sacred. In the process of writing such works, the first and last sentences are especially important and I usually wait until they come as a categorical assertion within my mind. As for the text itself (for that class of my writings belonging to this category), I do always go over them and make occasional corrections, but in the case of such writings these corrections are always minor. As for what this category comprises, it is almost always writings dealing with exposition of traditional doctrines, whether they be metaphysical or cosmological, and with spiritual matters in general.

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This manner of writing does not include those essays based on ordinary scholarly research, although even in these cases I have never remained satisfied with scholarship for its own sake but have considered the discovery or exposition of some aspect of the truth to be the goal of all my writings.

The author also speaks of the times being ripe for my philosophical challenge and mentions certain developments in both Western philosophy and science in this connection. I need to add that cracks began to appear in the wall of the Western paradigm based on humanism, rationalism, materialism, and so on, already at the beginning of the twentieth century. These cracks appeared both from below and from above so that along with infra-human elements of dissolution coming from below the possibility was also created for the light of sacred knowledge long forgotten in the West to shine from above. "The philosophical challenge" based on traditional sapiential knowledge and the perennial philosophy was presented long before me by Guenon, Coomaraswamy, and Schuon. My role has been to carry this challenge to the heart of the Western academic community and centers of mainstream Western philosophy, which until recently had chosen to neglect and even overlook the very existence of traditional teachings. With this important historical correction in mind, I would agree that the time has come to challenge the whole edifice of modern and postmodern Western thought including its academic expression which is vital for its survival. And perhaps in this process my humble works have a role to play.

As for modern physics, I have had occasion to speak elsewhere in the volume about my own views about it and do not want to repeat myself here. Suffice it to say, quantum mechanics does not itself lead to perennial philosophy, but by breaking the hold of the earlier mechanistic and materialistic physics upon the minds of many and by making evident, for those who can see, the poverty of Cartesian bifurcation as the existing philosophical background of modern physics, the new physics has made it not only possible but also necessary to search outside the mainstream of modern

Western philosophy for an appropriate philosophy of nature. The *philosophia perennis* stands as the only possible source of wisdom wherein one can find what is being sought. The works of such figures as Wolfgang Smith, who has contributed to this volume, present crucial keys for discovering an appropriate philosophy for quantum mechanics on the basis of the sacred knowledge of which I speak.

Unfortunately there are also many shallow attempts to correlate the findings of modern physics and those of the mystics. Therefore, when the author writes that for the first time physicists and mystics seem to speak the same "language", I feel quite uneasy because I have observed only too often the kind of superficial harmony which is propagated by so many New Age religions and even by elements within traditional religions - so-called harmonies which have no metaphysical foundation and are in fact dangerous. The energy of modern physics is certainly not the same thing as the Divine Energies about which Orthodox (Christian) theologians speak, and the movement of molecules in a solution is not the Dance of Shiva. For my part, I prefer to base the discussion between physicists and mystics on a metaphysical foundation which cannot be but the doctrines at the heart of the perennial philosophy rather than the experience of phenomena and mental states. The thrust of my writings on this subject is to resuscitate traditional metaphysics and then to integrate what is positive in modern science within that metaphysical framework. I do not believe that trying to divide material units to an ever greater degree will lead to the same numinous Reality that the true mystic seeks to reach by leaving the abode of the outward and the material for the inward and the spiritual. Therefore, while I have noted interest in such works as The Tao of Physics by F. Capra, I have also criticized their neglect of the veritable significance of traditional cosmologies and the sacred sciences with which they are trying to correlate the tenets of modern physics.

Actually what Lopez-Baralt has written on physics and mysticism is peripheral to her main thesis. If I have paused to discuss this point fairly extensively, it is to make clear my own position. As for what she writes in the rest of the first part of her essay on my understanding of sacred knowledge and her interpretation of Knowledge and the Sacred, they are fully confirmed by me. They also contain many deep insights which complement my own words and make more accessible some of my theses. Her statements concerning the book are a notable commentary upon its content and are fully accepted by me.

As for the analysis of my poetry, as I have already mentioned the author herself writes in a highly poetic style of much power and beauty and makes comments upon my poetry and its author which make me embarrassed and about which I have nothing to say save to point once again to her recourse to Oriental hyperbole. But her exposition affords me a valuable opportunity to discuss the role of poetry in my life and in my writings as well as my views on the relation between philosophy, or rather *Sophia* itself, and poetry.

Poetry has occupied a central role in my life since my earliest childhood. Born into a culture in which poetry has played a central role and continues to be of much greater importance than in present-day America and Europe (with the possible exception of Spain), I was nurtured from the earliest period of my education with the verses of the Qur'an, which are themselves supreme poetry in Islamic sources, and the works of Persian classical poets such as Firdawsi, Sa'di, Hafiz, Nizami, and Rumi. I was made to memorize hundreds of verses of poetry and by the age of ten could recite Persian poetry for hours from memory. The rhyme and rhythm of classical Persian poetry left its permanent imprint upon my soul, an imprint which was never erased even during those years at Peddie, the preparatory school which I attended in America, when I hardly had any contact with Persian and forgot many of the poems memorized in childhood.



It was also at Peddie that I began to learn the English language seriously and became exposed to English poetry, especially the works of Shakespeare, Milton and the Romantics such as Shelley, Byron, Keats, and Blake. At first, however, poetry in English did not speak to me and only increased my nostalgia for Persian poetry. But as my command of English improved, the poetic medium in that language began to reveal its treasures to me to an ever-greater degree.

[I must confess that I do not love the English language, as I feel that I have been robbed of my natural Gaelic language; I do not consider the English language to be my own. M.Mc.]

We had to memorize many pieces of English poetry and this process also helped in the alchemical process which was taking place at that time in my soul and was being reflected in my writing in English. The process to which I am alluding is the gradual penetration of the poetic characteristics of Persian into my writing of English prose which finally resulted in the style that has characterized my prose writings from the beginning of my writing formally in English in the late '50s and continuing to this day. [Just so, some note the apparently indelible influence of French and Spanish substrata in my English prose as well as my spoken English, which some say I speak as though it were a foreign tongue imperfectly learned. M.Mc.] When I handed my doctoral thesis at Harvard to one of my main advisors, Henry Wolfson, he was kind in praising the scholarship and intellectual context of the work and then added that he had not seen a doctoral thesis in a philosophical subject written in poetic prose which reminded him of some medieval texts. The wedding between the rigor of mathematics and logic and the gentleness of poetry which I have sought to achieve in my prose works owes its existence on the one hand to my long scientific training and on the other to that early imprint of poetry on my soul. Also, my own quest after

the eternal *Sophia* [see references to the *Daena* in this chapter as well as the certain references to Fatima Zahra and citations from the book *Sophia-Maria* by Thomas Schipflinger in the following chapter] only confirmed not only the possibility but also the necessity of such a wedding in the full expression of realized gnosis as we see in so many traditional works.

While at MIT and Harvard I continued to read much poetry in English including especially the twentieth-century figures T.S. Eliot (whom I met at Harvard), Ezra Pound and William Butler Yeats as well as Dylan Thomas (whom I met for several days at MIT shortly before his death). These years were also for me the period of return to classical Persian poetry as well as my introduction to German and Italian poetry, especially Goethe and Dante. Although I was and remain much more familiar with the French language and its literature than German, Italian, or Spanish, as far as poetry is concerned, I have always been attracted more to these three languages than to French, whose prose literature has been of greater interest to me than its poetry. There are of course certain exceptions such as Paul Claudel and even Rimbaud and Baudelaire, but by and large German, Italian, and Spanish poetry have always appealed more to me, especially metaphysical poets such as Dante whom I consider to be the supreme poet of Christian Western civilization.

In any case ever greater intimacy with poetry in English combined with reading much wisdom poetry in other languages (including, of course, Arabic or in translation as well as re-reading of the Persian classics) let me at the age of twenty-one to try my hand in writing poetry in English as well as a few verses in Persian, although I never considered myself a poet nor ever labored to write poetry. The fruit of these years which ended in 1958 with my return to Persia was a booklet of poems, some composed directly and others translated from the Persian into English. The latter included a poetic rendition of the introduction to the *Mathnawi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi and several *ghazals* of Hafiz while the whole collection dealt with metaphysical and mystical themes. These poems were personal and I never meant to publish them.

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The hands of destiny were to assure the realization of

my intention for these early poems remained in manuscript form in my library in Persia for the next twenty-one years and were lost along with all my other handwritten and as yet unpublished texts when my house was confiscated and my library plundered in 1979.

During those two decades in Persia from 1958 to 1979 my concern with poetry, especially of the sapiental kind, remained very strong and I continued to read and study much Sufi poetry in Persian and Arabic as well as poetry in European languages, chief among them English. But during this period I wrote little poetry in either Persian or English save for a *ghazal* and quatrain (*ruba'i*) or two here and there along with translations of Sufi poetry into English verse in the context of some of my prose writings such as those concerning Rumi.

The angel of poetry, or of the muse as Western poets have known her, came to visit me suddenly in the mid-eighties in of all places Cordoba, Spain. Since then a number of poems have been written mostly in English but also some in Persian in different places and varying conditions. All of them have come to me quickly, as if in a flash, and have always been related to an inner experience of the spitual world as a result of which phenomenal reality has gained the tongue to speak of the noumenal realities which the external forms at once veil and reveal. Even where some of the poems speak of pure metaphysical doctrine, they di do as a telling of the vision of that metaphysical reality of which the doctrine speaks rather than of mental concepts associated with the doctrine. These humble poems are in a sense the fruit of that long period of ingestion of the subtleties of the English

language and development in my mind of that language as it became evermore impregnated and transmuted by the ethos, forms, symbols, and sensibilities of Persian Sufi poetry. If when Islam came to Bengal, the Bengali language could develop as an Islamic language and create a rich Bengali Sufi poetic tradition, why if one accepts and appreciates all those possibilities and does not remain satisfied with the evrmore vulgarized

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usage of the language so prevalent today can one not achieve the same goal for the English language which is poetically very rich and possesses vast possibilities

for the expression of spiritual realities?

In any case I had never meant to publish a book of poetry but only the few poems which I had myself included in a number of my essays and books. Various circumstances, however, including the insistence of a number of intimate spiritual friends, finally forces me to select the forty poems which have appeared in Poems of the Way, with Lopez-Baralt's introduction, poems analyzed with such profound sympathy and understanding by her in this essay. I should add once again that I do not consider myself a poet but a lover of sapiental poetry, who like so many traditional Persian philosophers also jots down a few lines of poetry now and then.

It is necessary in conclusion to summarize my views concerning the relation of poetry to philosophy in its original sense. It is not accidental that the father of Greek philosophy, Pythagoras, composed the Golden Verses, that Parmenides has left us a poem of the greatest philosophical significance, and that in nearly every tradition the expressions of *Sophia* have been in poetry or poetic prose but have never been prosaic. Philosophy in the Pythagorean sense is the love of that *Sophia* or *sapientia* which is none other than beauty. Furthermore, the intellect in its traditional sense, which is the instrument whereby *Sophia* is attained, once actualized becomes the "rhadsodic intellect", as Lopez-Baralt says, and expresses itself through the cadence, rhythms, symbols, allusions, and music which characterize poetry. Real poetry is not only the vehicle for the expression of wisdom. It is wisdom itself. The great sages who were also poets were not poets who then attained gnosis and illumination. They were gnostics and illuminated beings, wise men and women whose expression of the wisdom they had attained was by nature poetic. One needs only to recall in this instance the saying of Rumi that he was not even a poet. This is the statement of one of the greatest mystical poets who ever lived.

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What Rumi and others like him wanted to say was that they were not like ordinary poets who would compose a poem on any subject or occasion at hand either to be financially compensated by a benefactor or to fulfill some kind of egotistical urge or so-called self-

expression. Rather, contact with the noumenous world had turned the soul of Rumi and others like him into a poem itself so what they uttered could not be but poetry.

In the West the separation of reason from intellect resulting in the rise of modern philosophy with Descartes, muted the melody of the rhapsodic intellect within and divorced the soul from its source of heavenly music. Philosophy became prosaic in its expression and more and more divorced from poetry. During the past few centuries the West has produced poets who were still philosophical in the time-honored sense of the term, such figures as Shakespeare, Calderon, Angelus Silesius, Goethe, Blake, and the like, but they are never taught in courses on the history of Western philosophy. As for well-known philosophers in the West, in modern times none has been also known as a poet even if a few have written a number of poetic lines on the side. The eclipse of poetry in the modern West is directly related to the eclipse of the intellect and of gnosis (cognate with the Sanskrit: *jnana*) and traditional metaphysics which only an actualized intellect within man can attain, provided it functions within the framework of revelation.

In the Islamic tradition the Qur'an speaks of the "age of ignorance" (*al-jahiliyyah*) [as modern times could be called by the Sanskrit term *kali yuga*] because they were fortune tellers and made prophetic claims. But the Qur'an itself is of the highest poetic quality, to which no Arabic poem of no matter what level of eloquence can be compared. Moreover, the Prophet of Islam appreciated those poets such as Labid who spoke of the truths of life and death. As a result of the Qur'anic revelation, a civilization was created wherein poetry has always been held in the highest position of honor and many portions of the greatest Islamic texts of wisdom have been composed in the poetic medium. Even

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many of the great Islamic philosophers who wrote about logic and rational discourse in philosophy also composed poetry on the side. One can cite as examples among those who were Persian, Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra, and Sabziwari, while a number of philosophers such as Nasir-i-Khusraw and Afdal al-Din Kashani were outstanding poets.

It is in the light of this tradition as well as

that of the Sufi poets such as Sana'I, 'Attar, Ibn al-Farid, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Rumi, Shabistari, Sa'di, and Hafiz that I interpret the relation of poetry to wisdom or *Sophia*. One of my favorite poems, which I have taught over the years along with the appropriate commentaries, is the Gulshan-i-Raz ("The Secret Garden of Divine Mysteries") by the fourteenth-century Persian Sufi master Shaykh Mahmud Shabistari. This poem of celestial inspiration was composed in a few days by the author who did not write any poems before or after, and who, like Rumi, did not even consider himself a poet. Through heavenly inspiration he was able to summarize the whole of Sufi metaphysics and symbolism in verses of unbelievable poetic power. This work represents for me, in the context of the poetic tradition of my mother tongue, one of the supreme examples of the veritable relationship between poetry and *Sophia*.

This relationship is not, however, culturally bound. It is universal and can be seen whenever realized principal knowledge finds its fully eloquent expression. In the context of the perennial philosophy in contemporary times, it is interesting to point out the case of Frithjof Schuon, the foremost expositor of the *Sophia perennis* of the twentieth century, who was also a remarkable poet leaving behind two short volumes of German poetry written during his youth and a vast collection composed in the last years of his life, a collection which has not as yet been completely published. His case, as well as that of Martin Lings, another celebrated authority of traditional doctrines, who is also a master poet, demonstrates the relation between poetry and wisdom in the context of the present-day Western world and shows that this

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relationship is not confined to Islamic or other non-Western civilizations and to older eras of history. God is, symbolically speaking, both poet/musician and architect. The attainment of knowledge of that Divine Reality must also in its fullness contain both the mathematical rigor of arithmetic and geometry and the musical gentleness of poetry.

The subject of the relation between poetry and tradition or perennial philosophy is a vast one and in fact there are traditional texts in Islamic languages,

Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, and so on, pertaining to this subject. My intention has not been to expound the full doctrine here but only to summarize that aspect of the subject which is indispensable for the understanding of my own attitude towards poetry. I am deeply grateful to Professor Lopez-Baralt for her luminous and penetrating analysis of my humble poems but wish to state at the end again that I am not a professional poet but a seeker and lover of *Sophia* who, having touched my being, has created rhythmic dilations within my mind and soul that result occasionally in the composition of a few lines about which the author has kindly made such gracious comments in her highly poetical essay."(320)

It would seem wise at this point to reiterate that St. John of the Cross was not simply a "baptized Sufi"; he was much influenced by the Early Church Fathers - Latin, Greek and Syriac - by the medieval Christian mystics, including Hugh of St. Victor, Richard of St. Victor, St. Symeon the New Theologian, and, especially St. Gregory Palamas, and also, in a purely literary way, by the Provençal trobadors.

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Throughout this book we have emphasized the many influences and affinities between Spain and Persia, so it is no surprise that Islam in Spain exhibits such a potent Persian "flavor". Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was very much a Spaniard, certainly one of the greatest Spaniards who ever lived. In the book we note the many Persian

affinities and connections, - including close personal connections - of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi. Also, it was in Persia that the influence of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi has been most pervasive and most enduring.

St. John of the Cross was much influenced by the Sufis, Persian even more than Hispano-Muslim, and also by the Shi'a Imams. I agree with Ms. Lopez-Baralt that the Sufi - perhaps the person - who most influenced St. John of the Cross is arguable Suhrawardi. Now, Suhrawardi was totally Persian, perhaps the most Persian of all Sufis.

A personal anecdote here. The editor of the Catholic traditionalist monthly "Culture Wars" , to which I am a frequent contributor, is Irish. In spite of this, said monthly has a strong Lithuanian and Slavic orientation, pierogis and Ukrainian borsht alternating with Irish Stew and corned beef and cabbage; "Kalinka", "Evening Bells" and "Ride Cossack Ride" with

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"Danny Boy", "The Wearin' o' the Green" and "The Skye Boat Song"; balalaikas and banduras with harp, fiddle and bagpipes; vodka, *horlika* and *slivovitz* with single-malt whiskey, rye whiskey and Guinness Stout. A Ukrainian Catholic of the Slavonic Rite wrote to "Culture Wars", saying that the Catholic Church made a grave error



by not officially embracing the Uncreated Light of St. Gregory Palamas. I seconded this, emphasizing that the Uncreated Light of St. Gregory Palamas has a rock-solid Gospel basis. The editor of "Culture Wars" did not agree with us, though he refrained from making jokes about "Ukrainian Alcoholic Psychosis", or saying that my real surname was "Klainenko", the suffix *-enko* being to Ukrainian surnames what *-ski* or *-sky* is to Russian and Polish surnames, *-escu* to Romanian surnames or *-ian* to Armenian surnames; however, he soon found himself outvoted, and dropped the subject.

The affinities between the Uncreated Light of St. Gregory Palamas, to which Dr. Nasr refers when he speaks of "the Divine Energies about which Orthodox (particularly Russian Orthodox) theologians speak", and the Illuminationism of Suhrawardi are perfectly obvious. Though it is not a literal translation of

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*Hikmat al-Ishraq*, it is perhaps John Walbridge who has given the best definition of the philosophy of Suhrawardi i.e., "The Science of Mystic Lights", because this definition avoids any possible confusion with the movements such as the *alumbrados* who were such a plague to St. John of the Cross, or, much worse, with the utterly evil, pernicious and malignant "Illuminists" or *Illuminati*

of 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, so well described and chronicled by Abbe Augustin Barruel in the masterful Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism.

At this point we present two overviews of the mystical tradition in Islam, the first by Seyyed Hossein Nasr:

### Introduction to the Mystical Tradition

By

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

"In order to speak of the mystical tradition of Islam, it is first of all necessary to understand the meaning of mysticism in the Islamic context, especially considering the nebulous nature of the meaning of this term in English today. We can speak of Islamic mysticism only if we understand by this term its original meaning as that which deals with the Divine Mysteries. One must recall that silence or the closing of one's lips is the root meaning of the Greek verb *muo* from which the word *mysterion* and mysticism derive. As such, one might relate it in the Islamic context to such terms as *asrar* (mysteries) or *batin* (the inward or esoteric), remembering that the Sufis refer often to

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themselves as people who are the guardians of the Divine Mysteries or *asrar*. In the Islamic context mysticism means the esoteric dimension of Islam identified for the most part with Sufism but also with Shi'ite esoterism, both Twelve-Imam and Ismaili.

Moreover, Islamic mysticism understood in this sense is primarily a path of knowledge (*al-ma'rifah*, *irfan*) to which the element of love is attached in accordance with the structure of the Islamic revelation, but it is very rarely the sentimental and individualistic mysticism found in many circles in the Christian climate since the Renaissance. That is precisely why Islamic mysticism has had a close rapport with Islamic philosophy over the ages; and one might say

that despite the criticism made by many Sufis against Islamic philosophers, particularly from the sixth/twelfth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries, the Islamic philosophers, especially those of the later period, belong to the same spiritual family as the Sufis, both being concerned with the attainment of ultimate knowledge. It did not take too long before the intellect (*al-aql*) of the Islamic philosophers became identified with the *ruh al-qudus*, the Holy Spirit, and the angels of the religious universe with the intelligences of the philosophers. Nor must one forget that some Sufis were given the title of Ibn Aflatun, literally the son of Plato.

What is most essential to emphasize is that Islamic esoterism and especially Sufism have remained alive and vibrant over the centuries, providing practical means for the realization of the Real and the activation of the potentialities of the noetic faculty within human beings. They have continued to provide the possibility for the attainment of a realized knowledge, a sapience or gnosis, which the Islamic philosophers could hardly ignore. In fact, in the same way that from the Scientific Revolution onwards Western philosophy became more and more the handmaid of a science based on the empirical data drawn from the outward senses, Islamic philosophy became wedded even more closely to the fruits of that other way of knowing

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which is based on the inner senses and the opening of the "eye of the heart" (*'ayn al-qalb* in Arabic and *chism-i dil* in Persian) which can "see" the invisible world hidden to the outward eye.

The first notable Islamic philosopher in whom one observes direct interest in Sufism is al-Farabi, who was in fact a practicing Sufi. The influence of Sufism on his writings is, however, not evident except in the *Fusus al-Hikmah* ("Bezels of Wisdom"), which some have attributed to Ibn Sina (Avicenna). The presence of Sufism is to be seen mostly in the personal life of al-Farabi, which needless to say must have influenced his thought, and also in his musical compositions. Few realize that some of these compositions are sung and played in Sufi orders to this day in both Turkey and the

Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.

The rapport with Sufism is more evident in al-Farabi's chief successor in the Peripatetic (*mashsha'i*) school, Ibn Sina. Although the account of his meeting with Abu Said Abi'l-Khayr, the celebrated Sufi of Khurasan is considered by most contemporary scholars to be apochryphal, there is little doubt that Ibn Sina was greatly influenced by Sufism, and his "Oriental Philosophy" (*al-hikmat al-mashriqiyyah*) is impregnated with mystical ideas. Moreover, in the ninth book (*namat*) of his last masterpiece, *Al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat* ("Directives and Remarks"), entitled *Fi Maqamat al-Arifin* ("Concerning the Stations of the Gnostics") he provided the most powerful defence made of Sufism by any of the Islamic philosophers. There he admits openly the attainment by gnostics or intellectually inclined Sufis of knowledge of the spiritual world and the possibility of discovering its hidden mysteries. This chapter of Ibn Sina's enduring work which has been taught for the past millennium in Persia and elsewhere is not only a testament of the influence of Sufism upon Islamic philosophy but has been itself influential in furthering this influence.

In the same period as the advent of early Peripatetic philosophy and the rise of such men as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, one observes the rise of Ismaili philosophy, which reached its peak in the fourth/tenth

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and fifth/eleventh centuries with such figures as Hamid al-Din al-Kirmanî and Nasir-I Khusraw. This whole school identifies philosophy with the esoteric dimension of Islam. Such basic doctrines of Ismaili philosophy or theosophy as hermeneutic interpretation (*ta'wil*), the rapport between the *Imam* and the human intellect, initiation, cycles of prophecy and imamology as well as cosmogony and anthropology bear witness to its close rapport with a certain dimension of Islamic esoterism. Moreover, such Greco-Alexandrian mystical teachings as those of the Pythagoreans and Hermeticists found an echo in Ismaili philosophy, as we see in the *Rasa'il* ("Epistles") of the Ikhwan al-Safa (Brethren of Purity) with their great emphasis upon the mystical significance of numbers.

While Peripatetic philosophy was being criticized by both Ash'arite theologians and Sufis such as al-Ghazzali and sana'I in the Eastern lands of Islam, the flourishing of Islamic philosophy in the Western lands of Islam was again marked by its close affiliation with Sufism. In fact the whole phenomenon of Islamic philosophy in Spain was to bear the early imprint of Sufism upon philosophical thought given by Ibn Masarra. Nearly all the notable Islamic philosophers of Spain, with the exception of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), had a strong mystical dimension which is clearly reflected in their writings. One needs only to recall the mystical love of Ibn Hazm, the mathematical mysticism of Ibn al-Sid of Badajoz, the doctrine of intellectual contemplation of Ibn Bajjah and the role of the Active Intellect in Ibn Tufayk to confirm this assertion. But it is most of all in the last of the great Andalusian philosophers, Ibn Saba'in, that one can observe the clearest manifestation of the rapport between Sufism and philosophy. At once a Sufi and philosopher, Ibn Saba'in created one of the major syntheses between Sufi doctrine and philosophy in the history of Islamic thought.

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In the sixth/twelfth century it was back in the Eastern lands of Islam and especially Persia that the most significant and influential synthesis of mysticism and philosophy was to take place in the hands of Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, the founder of the School of Illumination (*al-ishraq*). A Sufi in his youth who also mastered the philosophy of Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi created a new philosophical perspective which is based on knowledge through illumination and the wedding between the training of the rational mind and the purification of one's inner being. Suhrawardi was himself fully aware of the centrality of this synthesis between rational knowledge and mystical experience and included the Sufis along with the Peripatetic philosophers as constituting the categories and stages leading to that of the "theosopher" (*kakim muta'allih*) who is the ideal of *ishraqi* doctrine. Through Suhrawardi, Islamic philosophy became inextricably bound to spiritual realization and

inner purification associated with the mystical life during nearly all later periods of Islamic history. Subsequent *ishraqi* philosophers such as his major commentators Muhammad Shahrāzuri and Qutb al-Din Shirāzi as well as major later representatives of his doctrines such as Ibn Turkah Isfahani were at once philosophers and mystics.

The close nexus between philosophy and mysticism characterizes in fact nearly all later Islamic philosophy. The reviver of Ibn Sina's Peripatetic philosophy in theseventh/thirteenth century, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, who was at the same time one of the great mathematicians and astronomers of history, also wrote *Awsaf al-Ashraf* ("Descriptions of the Nobles") on Sufi virtues. His contemporary Afdal al-Din Kashani, at once philosopher and theologian, was also seriously interested in *ishraqi* and esoteric doctrines and even commented upon Suhrawardi.

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In the Safavi period with the establishment of the School of Isfahan in the tenth/sixteenth century, the relation between philosophy and mysticism came to be taken nearly for granted by most philosophers and the experience of the Real through practice and intellection became almost inseparable from the philosophical discussion of the Real; hence the importance in the Islamic metaphysics of this period of the relation between *haqiqat al-wujud* (the reality of being) and *mafhum al-wujud* (the concept of being). The founder of the School of Isfahan, Mir Damad, one of the most rigorously rational philosophers, also wrote mystical poetry under the pen name *Ishraq* and composed a treatise on ecstatic mystical experience.

The major figure of this school, Mulla Sadra, underwent a long period of inner purification along with formal learning and considered illumination and revelation as vital sources of knowledge along with ratiocination. The new intellectual perspective

established by him and called "the transcendent theosophy" (*Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah*) is based on the three foundations of revelation, inner illumination and ratiocination, and many if the most basic doctrines mentioned in his works are considered by him to have been unveiled to him by God. Therefore, he refers to them by such terms as *hikmah 'arshiyah* (wisdom descended from the Divine Throne). Some of the works of Mulla Sadra, such as *Al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah* ("Divine Witness"), have a strong *irfani* or gnostic color, and the author was a strong defender of the great Sufis of old such as Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) whom he quoted extensively in his *magnum opus*, *Al-Asfar al-Arba'ah* ("The Four Journeys"). Mulla Sadra also wrote a biographical work, *Si Asl* ("The Three Principles"), and *Kasr al-Asnam al-Jahiliyyah* ("The Breaking of the Idols of the Age of Ignorance") in which, while attacking some of the deviant, popular forms of Sufism, he defends strongly the authentic Sufis and their doctrines. In fact Sadrian philosophy or theosophy cannot be understood without the immense influence of Ibn Arabian doctrines and other Sufi teachings including those of al-Ghazzali upon Mulla Sadra.

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Islamic philosophy was to continue this close relationship to mysticism especially as far as later proponents of Mulla Sadra's school were concerned. His immediate students, 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji and Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani, distanced themselves somewhat from Mulla Sadra because of the political climate of the day and devoted themselves mostly to the religious sciences and theology. But they did write some works inspired by their teacher and both composed mystical poetry. Kashani also wrote a number of important mystical prose treatises such as *Kalimat-I Maknunah* ("The Hidden Words"). Their student Qadi Said Qummi also composed important mystical treatises and must be considered a notable mystical philosopher. Likewise, the Qajar philosophers who revived Mulla Sadra's teachings were at the same time mystics and philosophers, notable among them being Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, who composed, in addition to logical and philosophical texts, mystical ones in both prose and poetry. He must in fact be called a philosopher-saint, being considered by his

contemporaries and later generations as at once a towering philosophical figure and a mystic saint.

This trend was to continue into the fourteenth/twentieth century. Many of the most eminent Islamic philosophers of Persia of the past century such as Mirza Mahdi Ilahi Qumsha'i were at once philosophers and mystics, many following rigorously a spiritual path. There are thus witnesses in this period of an age-old rapport and later wedding between philosophy and mysticism going back to Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra.

Nor is this situation confined to Persia. In India where Islamic philosophy began to flourish, especially during the Mogul period, the same close relation between mysticism and philosophy is to be observed among many major figures, chief among them Shah Waliullah of Delhi, perhaps the greatest Islamic thinker of the subcontinent. In reading his works, it is difficult to decide whether he is a theologian, philosopher or Sufi. The truth is that he was all three at once, a thinker who created yet another synthesis of

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these disciplines. One can likewise observe figures of this type in the Ottoman Empire and also in the Arab world in modern times. One of the most important religious figures of Egypt during the fourteenth/twentieth century, 'Abd al-Halim Muhmud, who was also Shaykh al-Azhar, was at once a Sufi and an Islamic philosopher and wrote important works on both subjects.

In modern times the influence of Western thought has drawn many people in the Islamic world away from both Sufism and traditional Islamic philosophy. But to the extent that this philosophy, grounded in a twelve-hundred-year-old tradition, survives, the nexus between mysticism and philosophical thought continues. In any case the nature of Islamic philosophy as it has developed over the century cannot be fully understood without grasping the significance of that reality which can be called Islamic mysticism and its influence upon many of the leading figures of Islamic philosophy from al-Farabi and Ibn Sina to those of the contemporary period." (321)



Below is another overview of Sufism or Islamic mysticism, this by Mahmud Erol Kilic:

### MYSTICISM

By

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"Classical Muslim thought generally seems to regard the meaning of the word *philosophia* only in the sense of its second term *sophia*, distinguishing not only a literary difference between the two terms but also a difference in meaning and reference. Thus *philosophia*, the study of divine wisdom, is understood as *Sophia*, divine wisdom in itself. This distinction emphasizes the necessity of the spiritual receptivity of the seeker rather than his mere conceptual comprehension. Since God is al-Hakim (The Wise), the source of all wisdom, a *hakim* is one who receives and

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participates in divine wisdom. Therefore to study *hikmah* (theosophy) is to undertake a journey towards God; towards divinity; in other words, to al-Hakim. The Qur'an says, "He unto whom the wisdom (*hikmah*) is given he truly had received abundant good" (II:269). While this verse clearly states that wisdom is *given* by God and *received* rather than acquired by humanity, it also indicates that such wisdom is accessible to those prepared to receive it, those who undertake the journey towards Divine Perfection.

As we consider the following definitions of wisdom by some major Islamic figure of philosophy and gnosis, we shall see that they contain an essentially initiatic and esoteric meaning. For example, al-Kindi says:

Philosophy is the knowledge of the reality of things within man's possibility, because the philosopher's end in his theoretical knowledge is to gain truth and in his practical knowledge to be in accordance with truth ... philosophy is to act like God's action.

Al-Kindi goes on to tell us that the soul is a light from God, which when detached from the limitations of the body is able to know everything and therefore nothing is hidden from it. When ancient sages realized that it was not possible to attain to the true nature of things (*haqa'iq al-ashya'*) through the senses or by reasoning, their asceticism brought them to the point where the knowledge of the unseen could be revealed to them, and they then attained to the mystery of creation' "Philosophy is mans's knowing himself ... the art of arts". Al-Farabi defines philosophy as "comprehension of Being", and Ibn Sina as "to know the true nature of things as much as one possibly can". Still, there is a distinction to be made between the *falasifah* of the Peripatetic school and the gnostics and illuminationists. For example, Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) defines *hikmah* succinctly as *tasawwuf* (Sufism) and also as "knowledge of the special knowledge". Suhrawardi says:

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Those who have not yet detached themselves from the limitation of the body and made themselves available to undertake a spiritual journey cannot be regarded as *hakim* ... Do not pay any attention to the ideas of the materialists who pretend to be philosophers; *the issue is greater than thye think.*

Suhrawardi makes his mystical concern explicit when he says that Peripatetics "are those who do not depend upon initiatic experience but upon their reasoning in their quest for knowledge."

Ibn Sina, about whom it has been said that he came to the gnostic path after having been affected by the powerful gaze of the Sufi master Abu Yusuf al-Hamadani in the streets of Hamadan, is not at all rationalistic in his view of the soul and intellect. He says:

*Al-nafs al-natiqah* [the human soul] is empty in terms of intelligible forms. When is contacts the active intellect these forms pour into it and it eventually becomes the sbode of the (Platonic) forms. All the intelligibles [*ma'qulat*] which are at once

potential and veiled have been actualized by the illumination of the Active Intellect. When the soul contacts the Active Intellect and because of its nature participates in the Active Intellect's process of knowing, then naturally it can receive something from the Active Intellect according to its pureness. The soul receives the reflection of the First Being through the participation of the celestial world. Mystical knowledge is the continuation and perhaps the more advanced stage of natural rational knowledge. What distinguishes mystical knowledge from natural rational knowledge is not its forms but its objects ... The revelation of the unseen [*ghayb*] can occur in intense thought. But sometimes it can come within the experiences of a gnostic [*'arif*].

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Ibn Sina also observes in another text that "When an initiate [*salik*] practices enough ascetic discipline and spiritual effort, his or her soul and secret [*sir*] becomes a mirror which reflects the Real [*al-Haqq*].

Although we could present numerous examples indicating the mystical and initiatic nature of wisdom, the preceding passages sufficiently prove that many Islamic thinkers who possessed the authentic tradition, even some who were Peripatetics, penetrated to the esoteric core of Islam. Even some of the so-called Peripatetics became very sympathetic to the initiatic path of knowledge in the later period of their lives. We have a striking example in the communication between Abu Sa'id Abi'l-Khayr and Ibn Sina. It is said that Abu Sa'id wrote to Ibn Sina, inviting him to "Come to the true path, a path of knowledge, come to true Islam!" Ibn Sina responded, "*Ay bi kufr-I haqiqi wa baray az islam-I majazi*" ("You should come from metaphorical Islam to a true infidelity!") Upon reading these words, the Shaykh was overwhelmed by ecstasy and said, "During my seventy years of worship I have never experienced such a joy as for this response." It is this Ibn Sina who travelled through the "Stages of the Gnostics" (*Maqamat al-arifin*) to attain the Oriental wisdom and become a real theosopher.

These examples illustrate that it is possible to state that the true Islamic philosophy is essentially a mystical philosophy. Any difference which arises is that between the approaches of the theoretical and initiatic ways of life. Regarding the attainment of knowledge, there are two groups: the possessors of theoretical knowledge, namely the *falasifah*; and the possessors of real knowledge and *maqam*, namely Sufis (gnostics) and *muhagiqun*, the true *hakims* of Islam.

The ontological position of those who possess *hal* (spiritual state) is always higher than those who possess *qal* (conceptual knowledge). However, there are those who do not endorse the stages of *qal* as possession of any metaphysical grade at all. The real difference between the two groups is that, while the possessors of *hal* have their referent in vertical knowledge and experience, the possessors of *qal* make their reference horizontal experience and rational and

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historical information. Real philosophers "are not those who would report any statements of the sages or statement of others. In our works we set down only the result of revelation and dictates of the Truth to us."

According to Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi), who represents the gnostics rather than the *falasifah*, spiritual travelers, that is, individuals engaged in the search for metaphysical knowledge, are of two groups. The first group travels toward God with their thought (*afkar*) and rationality. They inevitably stray from the road, because they accept only the guidance of their own thinking. They are the philosophers and those who follow a corresponding course (*mutakallimun*). The other group of those who travel are the messengers and prophets and the chosen saints. It is the possession of real knowledge that distinguishes one group from the other.

The sciences of reason derived from thinking contain an element of changeability, because they follow the temper [*mizaj*] of thinking in the intelligent individual. He considers only the sensible matters which may have existence in his imagination and accordingly are his evidence. The result is that the theories with respect to one and the same thing differ or one and the same investigator differs with

respect to the same things at different times, because of differences in temper and mixture and combinations in their state of being. Thus their statements differ with respect to one and the same thing and with respect to basic principles upon which they construct their details. In contrast, directly inspired and legislative knowledge possesses one and the same taste, even if the perception of this taste differ.

A contemporary Muslim gnostic also explains the "Oriental Wisdom" almost one thousand years after Shaykh al-Ra'is ibn Sina, demonstrating that this concept is not geographical or national, but vertical, illuminative and metaphysical:

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To comprehend universal principles directly, the transcendent intellect must itself be of the universal order; it is no longer an individual faculty, and to consider it as such would be contradictory, as it is not within the power of the individual to go beyond his own limits ... Reason is a specifically human faculty but that which lies beyond reason is truly "non-human"; it is this that makes metaphysical knowledge possible, and that knowledge is not a human knowledge. In other words, it is not as man that man can attain it, but because this being that is human in one of its aspects is at the same time something other and more than a human being. It is the attainment of effective consciousness of supra-individual states that is the real object of metaphysics, or better still, of metaphysical knowledge itself ... in reality the individuality represents nothing more than a transitory and contingent manifestation of the real being. It is only one particular state among the indefinite multitude of other states of the same being ... Such is the fundamental distinction between "self" and "I", the personality and the individuality ... is bound by personality to the principal center of being by this transcendent

intellect ... Theoretical knowledge, which is only indirect and in some sense symbolic, is merely a preparation, though indispensable, for true knowledge. It is, moreover, the only knowledge that is communicable, even then only in a partial sense. That is why all statements are no more than a means of approaching knowledge, and this knowledge, which is in the first place only virtual, must later be effectively realized ... there is nothing in common between metaphysical realization and the means leading to it ...

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[for example] concentration harmonizes the diverse elements of human individuality in order to facilitate affective communication between this individuality and higher states of being. Moreover, at the start, these means can be varied almost indefinitely, for they have to be adapted to the temperament of each individual to his particular aptitudes and disposition. Later on the differences diminish, for it is a case of many ways that all lead to the same end; after reaching a certain stage, all multiplicity vanishes ... it is from this human stage, itself contingent, that we are at present compelled to start in order to attain higher states and finally the supreme and unconditioned state ... This realization if integral individuality is described by all traditions as the restoration of what is called a primordial state ... [this] second state corresponds to the supra-individual but still conditioned states, though their conditions are quite different from those of the human state. Here the world of man, previously mentioned, is completely and definitely exceeded ... by the world of (Platonic) forms in its widest meaning ... Nevertheless, however exalted these states may be when compared with the human state, however remote

they are from it, they are still only relative, and that is just as true of the highest of them. Their possession is only a transitory result, which should not be confused with the final goal of metaphysical realization; this end remains outside being, and by comparison with it everything else is only a preparatory step. The highest objective is the absolutely unconditioned state, free from limitation; for this reason it is completely inexpressible ... In this Unconditioned State all other states of being find their place.

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Muslim gnostics and Sufis claim that, since the hierarchical status of being requires a hierarchical status of knowing, then it is natural to envisage that there are different degrees of qualitative knowledge corresponding to different stages of ontological Being. And, according to the Sufis, a person who possesses the higher stages is regarded as a guide for those in the lower stages. The knowledge that belongs to the higher stages of reality is possible only through revelation. It is not the rational soul of the *falsafah* but the illuminated soul of the gnostic or Sfi which is capable of real metaphysical knowledge. Unlike the systematic logic of the Peripatetics, this metaphysical knowledge can be conveyed to the un-illuminated only through the language of symbolism. For this reason we can regard the Mathnawi of Rumi, some of Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi)'s writings, Ruzbihan's Shathiyyat, Mawlana Jami's Salman and Absal, the Diwan of Shaykh Ghalib and other works of symbolic mysticism as philosophy according to its definition by the gnostics.

However, the perspective of the *philosophia perennis* does not consider it relevant to distinguish between Islamic philosophers who are involved in Sufism and Sufis who are involved in philosophy. Both are able to understand the one and the same Reality according to their degree of approximation to It. In this sense, every seeker of the Truth is classified according to his or her correspondence with the Center. Those who are close to the Center are regarded as more similar to it than those who are far from the Center. Since

ontological status reflects epistemological standing, it is not surprising that the knowledge of one individual should be more esoteric and universal and another more exoteric and particular. The travelers of the esoteric path to Truth in the meta-philosophical domain are called *wali*, *mutasawwif*, *muhaqqiq* and *arif*, according to their standing. Al-Ghazzali, who himself travelled these intellectual stages, presents a similar classification in The Niche for Lights (*Mishkat al-Anwar*).

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According to him, the soul, in its upward sevenfold way to union with pure Deity, is at every stage stripped of these veils, the dark one first and then the bright ones. After that the naked soul stands face to face with naked Deity, with Absolute Being, with a unveiled Sun, with unadulterated Light. These veils are various according to varieties of the natures which they veil from the one Real.

Al-Ghazzali grades not only souls but also systems according to their proximity to Absolute Truth in the order of logic and the mathematical sciences and the sciences of Being. The most respected are the sciences of Being which deal not only with contingent beings but with Necessary Being in regard to its Names and Attributes.

You should know that intellectual sciences are holistic in their content, and from which theoretical knowledge issues. It is both theoretical knowledge and intellectual knowledge that form Sufi knowledge. There are many aspects of Sufi knowledge, such as *hal*, *waqt*, *shawq*, *wajd*, *sukr*, *sahw*, *ithbat*, *mahw*, *faqr*, *walayah* and *iradah*. *Hikmah* can be attained only through the given knowledge. Those who do not reach that stage cannot be named "sage" [*al-hakim*], since wisdom is a gift of God.

Specific and very important to the Muslim gnostics is the dynamic and active "being" in the hierarchical structure called the Muhammadan Reality (*al-haqiqat al-*



*muhammadiyah*), considered the first manifestation of Supreme and Unconditioned Being. As the first manifestation, the Muhammadan Reality is thus also the highest locus of knowledge. According to the great Sufi 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, the esoteric knowledge of the Muhammadan Reality is an epistemological stage which can lead to Divine Knowledge.

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There are three stages in the knowledge of the Truth. The first is the knowledge of God's action and His command which can be gained through the soul. The second is the knowledge of Attributes of God which can be attained through the Muhammadan Soul [*al-Nafs al-Muhammadiyah*]. The third is the knowledge of the Godhead [*al-dhat al-ilahiyyah*] which is beyond any description. The grace of a person who possesses such knowledge is always hoped for. The Prophet Muhammad said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Truth." Therefore those who do not know themselves cannot know the Prophet Muhammad and whoever does not know him cannot know God. If one wants to know God in the deep sense, what one has to do is to make one's own soul a mirror and to see the soul of Muhammad; through the soul of Muhammad only one would be able to know God Himself. Jami says:

The world is a mirror, all things through the Truth exist.  
In the mirror Muhammad, God is seen to persist.

One needs to acquire the knowledge of God in this world because what you receive by knowledge today is to be seen tomorrow. Jami says:

Wisdom of Greece itself is a passion and inclination.

But the wisdom of believers is a command  
of the Prophet.

As a traveler traverses each age step by step, he or she is said to become a person of each particular stage who has the knowledge of that stage. A person of each particular stage remains in ignorance of the knowledge of the stage above. Certain Sufi masters teach the secret knowledge of the stages to those qualified by their inherent capacity to receive wisdom.

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Although the method of training differs from master to master, most of the Ottoman Sufi masters trained their candidates according to the following schema.

Knowledge descends from the upper stages to the lower. The recognition of the descending gradation of knowledge which establishes the ascending stages of wisdom is very important, itself constituting to the first knowledge. In their journey of the purification of the soul, the travelers toward Reality arrive first at the stage of the Lower Soul (*al-Nafs al-ammarah*), and then ascend in order through the Inspired Soul (*al-Nafs al-mulhamah*), the Soul at Peace (*al-Nafs al-mutma'innah*), the Pleased Soul (*al-Nafs al-radiyyah*), and the Being-Pleased Soul (*al-Nafs al-mardiyyah*). The final stage in the purification of the souls is the Perfected Soul (*al-Nafs al-kamilah*).

After passing through the degrees of the purification of the soul, the traveler begins the stage of the purification of the spirit (*ruh*). In this stage of purification the traveler reaches first the inner centers of the Heart (*qalb*), then the Spirit (*ruh*), Secret (*sir*), Secret of Secret (*sir al-sirr*), Arcane (*khifa*), and finally the Most Arcane (*akhfa*). The Most Arcane is directly receptive to Divine Reality, which illuminates the purified traveler. An illuminated person is therefore one who has passed through the stages of the self, the thorough cleansing of the Heart, the emptying of the Secret and the Illumination of the Spirit. According to the traditional perspective, only one of this degree can be called a theosopher, a philosopher or a sage.

According to Muslim gnostics, a sage is one who has passed through the various stages, also described in the following manner:

*First stage.* In this stage the abode of the spiritual traveler is lowliness; the invocation is "There is no god but God"; the state is that of alternating spiritual optimism and pessimism. The realm of the traveler is that of sense perception.

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*Second stage.* In this stage the abode of the spiritual traveler is blaming; the invocation is *Allah*, the esoteric meaning of which is "There is no aim but Allah." The direction of travelling is "progress to God"; and the state is "contraction and expansion (*qabd wa bast*). The realm is the Isthmus (*alam al-barzakh*). In this stage love for this world begins to disappear. The degree of certainty is certainty by knowledge (*'ilm al-yaqin*).

*Third Stage.* In this stage the abode of the spiritual traveler is inspiration. The invocation is *Hu*, the esoteric meaning of this invocation is "There is none to be loved but Allah." The direction of journeying is "progress within God". The state is that of giving up everything. The realm is the realm of Majesty (*'alam al-haybah*). At this stage the traveler seeks only the love of God. He or she hears the invocation of every thing and of every creature, knows what is inside the heart, and has many secrets here. He or she becomes a place of manifestation of God's Action and Attributes, whose knowledge is composed of certainty by vision (*'ayn al-yaqin*).

*Fourth stage.* In this stage the abode of the spiritual traveler is confidence and peace. The invocation is *Haqq*, the esoteric meaning of which is "There is none but Allah." The journeying is the "journey with God". The state alternates between spiritual drunkenness and soberness. The realm is that of omnipotence (*'alam al-jabarut*). The love for God is increased. He or she witnesses God everywhere in everything, and undergoes the second unveiling (*fath al-mubin*); however, the veil over things is not yet

completely raised.

*Fifth stage.* In this stage the abode of the spiritual traveler is pleasing and satisfying. The invocation is *Hayy*, the esoteric meaning of which is

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"There is none but Allah, there is no aim but Allah, there is none to be loved but Allah". The state is the full absorption (*fana*) of the human qualities in the Qualities of God and His Attributes. The journeying is the "journey in God" (*sayr fi'Llah*), and the realm is the realm of Divinity (*'alam al-Lahut*). He or she is located in the Secret of Secrets (*sir al-asrar*). In this state he or she knows by direct tasting rather than inspiration. Here he or she is one loved by God.

*Sixth stage.* In this stage the abode of the spiritual traveler is Being Pleas'd (*Mardiyyah*). The invocation is *Qayyum*. The state is establishing (*tamkin*) and astonishment (*hayrah*). The journeying is the "journey from God", and the realm is the realm of the Visible *'alam al-shahadah*. In this stage the manifestations of the names of God begin to replace the manifestation of the actions of God. Here the love of God informs the love of God's creatures. Although he or she lives among the creatures, he or she is always with Hod. This stage is also called "The Grand Viceregent": one who returns from unity to multiplicity in order to awaken the people. The traveler can attain to this stage through his or her own effort and conduct, but they do not suffice to pass beyond it. Only Divine Grace can attract the traveler from the sixth to the seventh stage.

*Seventh stage.* In this stage the abode of the spiritual traveler is perfection. The invocation is *Qahhar*. The journeying is the "Journey for God" (*sayr bi'Llah*). The state is subsistence (*baqa'*). The realm is the "realm of unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity". The degree of certainty is certainty of truth (*haqq al-yaqin*). This stage is also called *ahadiyyah*, *jam' al-jam*, *'ama'*, *yaqin* and other terms. This is the

beginning of the stage of the inner kingdom where all actions as well as inactions are worship. The breathing is power and favor, the face is ease, the words and actions are wisdom. He or she has become a real philosopher, and only one who has reached this

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stage has the right to be called really a sage (*Sophos*). Sainthood is the end of this sevenfold journey. At the completion of the stages of annihilation, essence and manifestation are one in the seeker after Truth and Reality. The beatitude of "asif it were not" is conferred at this station.

Shaykh al-Akbar ibn Arabi (al-Mursi), himself one of the real sages of islam, defines the sage or "possessor of wisdom" (*al-hakim*), whether God or human, as "one who does what is proper for what is proper is proper". (says Ibn Arabi al-Mursi in *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* (Beirut, 1970, 3:69):

Wisdom is the hallmark of the perfect friends of God, possessed in its fullness only by the "People of Blame" [*malamiyyun*], the highest of perfect men. Since wisdom puts things in their proper places, it rules over *tartib*, that is, arrangement, order and hierarchy ... The name "Wise" arranges affairs within their levels and places the things within their measures. It is the perfect combination of knowledge and practice. The name "Wise" has a face toward knowing [*al'ilm*] and a face toward the governing [*al-mudabbir*]. The gnostics give each thing its due, just as God gives each thing its creation. The distinguishing feature of the gnostics is that they verify that which distinguishes the realities. This belongs only to those who know the order of God's wisdom in affairs and who "give each thing its due ... Know that the wisdom [*al-hikmah*] in all things and in every single affair belongs to the levels, not to entities. The most tremendous of the levels is servanthood ... So verify, my

friend, how you serve your Master! Then you will be one of the men of knowledge who are "deeply rooted in knowledge" [Qur'an III:7], the divine sages [*al-hukama' al-ilahiyyun*], and you will attain the further degree and the highest place along with the messengers and prophets!

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The capability to witness unity in multiplicity indicates the perspective unique to a man of wisdom such as Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi) himself (ibid., I:32):

O, you considering the study of the branch of knowledge [that is gnosis] which is the prophetic knowledge inherited from the prophets (may God bless them all), you should not be veiled when you find an idea that has been mentioned by the true Sufi [which has been] also mentioned by a philosopher or a *mutakallim*, or any other thinkers from any branch of knowledge and accuse a true Sufi of being a rationalistic philosopher just because the philosopher spoke about and believed in the same idea. And so not accuse him of copying the philosophers, or say that he has no religion, just as the philosopher has no religion. Refrain from so doing ... It does not necessarily follow that all his knowledge is false. This is perceived in the simple intellect [*'aql*] of every intelligent person. Your objection to the Sufi in this case led you away from knowledge, truth and religion on to the path of the ignorant, the liars and slanderers, those who suffer lack of intellect and religion, and the people of corrupt consideration and deviation.

From our discussion we can conclude that, according to the perspective of the *Sophia perennis*, Islamic philosophy in its entirety amounts to different explanations proceeding from different degrees of one and the same Reality. As we have shown, the Divinity makes himself known in descending gradation from Subtlety (*latafat*) down to Density (*kithafat*), from the Hidden (*al-batin*) to the manifest (*al-zahir*). As Divine

Knowledge and the nature and structure of that knowledge are revealed in descending gradation, so does the knowledge of the possessors of knowledge ascend along the same line, beginning with the merely rational and proceeding to the intellectual, and inward from the

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exoteric to the esoteric. The inward journey to the esoteric knowledge of Divine Reality constitutes *tasawwuf*, and he who attains to it is a gnostic, sage or Sufi (*al-hakim*). Since real knowledge is ultimately bestowed only upon those who are prepared to receive it, mysticism or *tasawwuf* is a central theme in classical Islamic philosophy and philosophy on the highest level is not separated from mysticism.

*Chism-I sar ba chism-I sir dar jang bud  
Ghalib amad chism-I sir hujjat namud.*

(The eyes of the head with the eyes of the inner secret quarreled. No need to prove that the eyes of the inner secret became victorious.)

Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi (322)

At this point it seems to be advisable to give an overview of Islamic philosophy in Persia during the Safavi period. Fortunately, a most excellent essay on this topic is available. First, a bit of information on the religious situation in pre-Safavi Persia. First, a brief exposition of the religious situation in Persia under the Timurids (descendants of Timur Lang).

"The somewhat grim background of general conditions is eminently important for an understanding of the religious situation of the Timurid period. It is undoubtedly true to say that the larger part of the population should be thought of as belonging to the

Sunni form of Islam, yet this is an inadequate description of the pattern. Even the limitation that

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individual areas such as Gilan, Mazandaran, Khuzistan (or *Arabistan*) and eastern Quhistan, and a few cities such as Ray, Varamin, Qum, Kashan, and Sabzevar in Khurasan. Were traditional centers of the Shi'a - and especially of the Twelver (or *Imami*) Shi'a - amounts to no more than a rough amplification of what is only a crude sketch. In reality, it was a far more complicated matter. The facts show that much of the Islamic world was vigorously involved in religious change. This begins at the latest with the disappearance from the scene of the 'Abbasid caliphate, the rule of the Mongols and the resulting curtailment of the influence of the theologians in the Islamic East. The most important aspects of these changes were numerous manifestation of popular piety, an increase in Islamic monasticism (*tariqa, tasavvuf*), veneration of the saints, pilgrimages, belief in miracles, veneration of 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) and the *ahl al-bait* generally [note: the above statement is a quite exact description of popular piety in Muslim Spain; delete the references to Islamic monasticism, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and the *ahl al-bait*, and it is also a very precise description of Catholic popular piety in Spain and Eastern Orthodox popular piety in Russia and Ukraine]. Such phenomena often bore a Shi'I stamp [once again, this also applies to popular piety in Muslim Spain] but this is far from justifying the conclusion that they are evidence for religious assent and adherence to the Shi'a (on this last point, in reference to Muslim Spain, this would be doubtful, the true situation in this respect being unknowable). For some time past Folk Islam (or popular piety) has been applied to this kind of phenomenon, usually in reference to conditions in Asia Minor; but there is no lack of convincing evidence for an analogous development further to the East, in the dominions of the Timurids (and also in Muslim Spain).

The oscillation between Sunna and Shi'a typical of Folk Islam also exercised a powerful influence on the political potentates of the age [as we shall see in the following chapter, this would also appear to be true in



reference to the Caliphate of Cordoba and many of the taifa kings, at least those who were not of Berber origin, such as the Banu Abbad dynasty of Seville,

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whose most famous member was al-Mutamid of whom we have spoken in Chapter 5]. The traditional formula which speaks of the Shi'I Qara Qyunlu (Black Sheep Turkomans) and the Sunni Aq Qyunlu (White Sheep Turkomans) can now no longer be sustained in its former exclusive sense. It is undoubtedly true to say that the princes of the two federations were hardly concerned about a religious issue but far more about political ones when they sought to achieve assent and more effective support among the population by favoring one side or the other. Similar motives of expediency - in addition to personal preferences, no doubt - may explain something of Abu Sa'id's adherence to the Naqshbandiyya, the order of Khwaja Ahrar, who was omnipotent in Samarqand and indubitably persecuted Sunni attempts at restoration of the Shari'a; or again, it would seem, when Husain Baiqara (a Timurid prince), who after his succession to the throne in Herat had taken the first steps to introduce the Shi'a, then abandoned the project at the instigation of 'Ali Shir; not to mention Zahir al-Din Babur's [also a Timurid prince, and the first of the Moghul Emperors of India] conversion to the Shi'a on his third conquest of Samarqand, when his only concern was to secure the support of Shah Isma'il (Safavi) for his plans.

All in all there developed in the atmosphere of Folk Islam (or popular piety) favorable preconditions for heterorthodox tendencies and hence also for the Shi'a, either because it formed a bridge to the popular variant of Shi'a and thus advanced the Imamiyya (once again, analogous conditions existed in Muslim Spain), or because it prepared the ground for extremist sects, which in the course of the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century attracted many new adherents and had far-reaching effects. The underground political-cum-religious activities of the time are vividly projected for a moment on 22 Rabi' II 830/ 21 February 1427 by an attempt on the life of Shah Rukh (son of Timur Lang), when an adherent of the Huruffiyya attempted to stab him as he was leaving the Friday prayers. This was by no means the first outbreak of heretical violence. It had been preceded by

religiously inspired risings, immediately after the death of Timur (lang), in Sabzavar, where Shah Rukh had

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only been able to exert his authority with difficulty, and a year later in Mazandaran, where an attempt was made to re-establish the amirate of the Shi'ite Mar'ashi Sayyid. One rising which was successful, at least against the Timurid governor of Fars and Khuzistan, was that of Sayyid Muhammad ibn Falah (845/1441-1442), who claimed to be the Mahdi and who made the city of Haviza the official seat of an extremist provincial dynasty, the Musha'sha', which even outlasted the Timurids. It must also be assumed that the revolt of Muhammad ibn Baisunqur in 849/1446 had a religious background. This would also explain the severity of Shah Rukh, unusual for him in his dealings with Islamic aristocrats and scholars (*sadat* and '*ulama'*'), when in Ramadan 850/December 1446 in Sava his verdicts on the adherents of the rebellious prince - to the horror of many contemporaries - did not spare this category of persons the penalty of execution. In fact he thus dealt a severe blow to the Shi'a, which was spreading rapidly in Fars, as elsewhere, from which it could not easily recover. This action of his is intimately connected with his religious attitudes and the role as restorer of orthodoxy and protector of the Sunni theologians which he had assumed.

Even though it is difficult, and in many cases impossible, to classify individuals or indeed even particular orders as to their religious attitude - Sunna or Shi'a - this does not mean that all the distinctions were simply blurred. Orthodox theology existed under the Timurids as it had before. It had passed its ultimate climax with 'Azud al-Din al-Iji (died 756/1355), who had gathered its doctrines together in a new form in his Mawaqif - and in a challenging fashion. His ideas were, moreover, still widespread among the theologians of the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century. But they had long since ceased to be productive and had petrified into merely scholastic forms. With few exceptions - one of them the Suluk al-muluk of Fazl-Allah ibn Ruzbihan al-Khunji, written in the Furstenpiegel tradition - the theological writings of the period have nothing to offer but commentaries and super-commentaries in devastating quantity, and glosses and manuals which in their use of abbreviations are

barely comprehensible to the modern reader.

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To be brief, the representatives of the Sunna were in no position to have their own way in the conflict with the rising tide of Shi'i or heretical movements. The decisive blow was struck, as far as large areas of the Timurid territory were concerned, when one of these movements, that of the Safavids, succeeded in Persia in forcing through its religious ideas against the Sunna by the use of the military might which it had acquired through the support of fanatical adherents. However, it was unsuccessful [at least in eliminating them, though the Safavids dealt the Uzbeks some severe defeats] against the mortal enemies of the Timurids, the Uzbeks, who now became the protective power of orthodoxy in the eastern Islamic world. The results of these events were, however, only clearly perceptible after the fall of the Timurid states of Central and Western Asia." (323)

At this point I cannot resist telling the story of Shah Isma'il Safavi and his defeat of Shaybani Khan of the Uzbeks. Shaybani Khan sent Shah Isma'il Safavi a begging bowl, telling him that he should become a wandering sufi like his grandfather if he knew what was good for him. To this Shah Isma'il Safavi replied by sending Shaybani Khan a distaff or spinning wheel, telling him that he had better hide among the women of the harem if he did not wish to feel the sharp steel of swords.

Shah Isma'il Safavi and his *Qizilbash* or "red heads", so called because of the red cloths with twelve pleats for the Twelve Imams which they wore over their helmets, met Shaybani Khan and

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his Uzbeks near Merv. In the resulting battle, the Uzbeks were crushed, Shaybani Khan's body being found under a large pile of dead Uzbeks. Shaybani Khan, the "Old Fox", had been out-generalled and outfought by a 21 year-old novice. Shah Isma'il made a drinking cup from Shaybani Khan's skull. To thereader this may seem barbaric, but it is a very ancient custom of various Indo-European peoples, including Iranians, Celst and Vikings. To this day the Scandinavian toast *skoal*, which means "skull", and is also the name of a brand of beer, is a reminder of this custom among the Vikings.

We now continue with the topic of religion in the Timurid and Safavid periods.

#### **GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TIMURID ERA**

At the time of Timur's death and under his immediate successors the religious situation in Iran was characterized by two complementary processes, whichere the primary determinant - or, minimally, ultimately resulted in - that particular form of religious reality known as Safavid Shi'ism.

The first factor is great flexibility, bordering on prevarication, displayed by the religious world in fulfilling its cementing function between the political rulers and their subjects in the most disparate alliances between successive sovereigns and the local religious (and administrative) aristocracy, even when the diversity of *madhhab* professed by the two protagonists would lead one to expect an at least dual missionary activity rather than a day-to-day cooperation. It is true that there was a diversity of

madhhab in a slightly broader and more equivocal sense, rather than in that usual connotation of the word which restricts it simply to the canonical schools. But it is indisputable that there was a rapprochement on the concrete plane which occurred at a time when, as all scholars admit, there was a "return" to the myth of the ideal sovereign, a "true caliph", and consequently to a renewal of the hope in the advent of a leader in spiritual affairs and so too in religious affairs. This eagerly awaited leader was the Mahdi, a figure who was variously delineated and characterized in the different areas and *madhhab* proclaiming and anticipating his coming.

The other decisive factor is a gradual trend towards Shi'ism among the "aberrant" currents or orthodoxy, including Sufism, allied with the presence of strong "Twelver" elements in the movements consciously aiming at a centralist outlook, which transcended the traditional divisions of Muslim religious society. This analysis is acceptable only up to the advent of Shah Isma'il (Safavi), after which any discussion of the religious situation in Iran must necessarily involve an examination of the religious policies followed by the various sovereigns in circumstances which, interesting though they may be, were less fluid and so easier to classify.

That these two processes were of a complementary nature is plain once one recognizes the presence of ideological elements which provide us also with a key to the analysis of all the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century religious movements. Muslim society explicitly embodied at that time, particularly in Iran, the backlash of reaction to the "paganism" of the Mongol hegemony during the preceding centuries. The watchword was the restoration of Islam, conceived of as the restoration of the true *Shari'a*, that is, the *Shari'a* as expounded by the Prophet - and even more by the first Companions - which envisaged in a precise fashion a homogenous society united under one leader. This led to an extension of the functions and prerogatives of the teachers of the *Shari'a*, and in consequence to an exaltation of the ideologiual, and not merely the functional, values of

the juridical madhhan to which the subjects had to conform. In religious terms, however, this is tantamount to admitting the possibility of the existence of an orthodox Shari'a side by side with a faith open to innovations - a coexistence which was advocated and defended by many heresiarchs of those days.

The transition from the concept of an ideal sovereign acting as the leader of such a restoration, to that of the Mahdi representing the only hope of implementing the reform of Islam according to the dictates of the ancients, appears ever more natural. Typologically speaking, it is therefore more specific to recognize that religious trend of the Muslim world which, though representing the apotheosis of the waiting for the Mahdi in its most persistent form, is nevertheless always partial to an ever-delayed realization of his coming as a sovereign: that is, the tradition of the Twelver Shi'a.

According to the ideal line of evolution [poor choice of words!], the lawful sovereign is considered at one time as an intermediary who wields the powers recognized as legitimately appertaining to the religious entity we call the Mahdi; then as his deputy and Caliph; and ultimately as the incarnation of the Mahdi. Timur (lang), the "refuge of the Caliphate", the cosmic vindicator of all Islam, who punished the Shi'is for their crimes against the Companions and the Damascenes for the wrongs they had inflicted upon the *Ahl al-bait*, represents the first and not altogether clear example of mediation between the Mongol heritage and the new complex of political and religious requirements of Islam. A significant case in point is his relationship, according to legend, with the Safavid Khwaja 'Ali, which thanks to the new sources published by Horst can now be even more legitimately considered as one of a number of attempts made by the throne to take advantage of the sufi movements in order to acquire a wholly religious kind of legitimacy, which might be exhibited as one of the indispensable attributes of regality. For Timur this may have been merely an *a posteriori* justification of an attempt to break with

the preceding era that was to be emphatically endorsed by his successors and in particular Shah Rukh (son of Timur). The latter claimed to be the restorer *par excellence* of the Shari'a and the Caliphate ("May God perpetuate his reign in the Caliphate of this world" are the words of the *khutba* which the Indian Khizr Khan was required to utter in Hafiz-I Abru) in the shadow of an increasing and deliberate philo-'Alidism which, although tempered by a prospective alliance with sufism, was destined to become gradually an Imamite form of 'Alidism. In this connection we must remember the aspirations of Husian Baiqara (Timurid prince of Herat) ("ornament of the throne of the Caliphate"), who, by trying to persuade Mir Sayyid 'Ali Qa'ini to recite the *khutba* on behalf of the Twelvsve Imams, presented himself as the legitimate forerunner of the future authority which would automatically replace the principles of authority hitherto recognized.

This amalgam of the Shi'a, of Sufism and of the awareness of the necessity for a Mahdi had an 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century precedent in the Sarbardar movement, in which are discernible those elements that are typical of and common to all religious protest movements of the century under consideration. Strictly speaking, the history of the Sarbardars (Sabzavar 1337-1381) and its repercussions in the Caspian (Sayyids of Mazandaran, 1350-1392; of Gilan, 1370) and Kirman (1371) areas do not concern us here, but a brief analysis of the nature of the movement will serve as an *ante litteram* case history of the subsequent relationship between the sovereign and the Musha'sha' or Qizilbash heretics. The Sarbardar opposition comprehended many kinds of heterogenous elements: there were not only peasants and plebians from the towns, but also members of the local landed gentry, who provided the first two military leaders of the movement - 'Abd al-Razzaq and Ma'sud - and other elements also. These non-plebian and essentially Iranian elements, faithful to the Firdausian traditions, did what they could to provide an opposition to the administrative aristocracy, many of whose members were also Shi'I, and to the Sunni 'ulama, both of them groups which were enmeshed in the Il-Khanid policy. On the religious plane these

aristocrats represent an idealization of the true Shari'a, which lay beneath the expectation of the coming of the perfect prince, whereas the dispossessed, ready as they were to accept any leader provided one could be found, represent the longing for brotherhood of all Muslims and thereby for one of the Mahdi's prerogatives, i.e., the establishment of social justice. Both components of the movement were at any rate Shi'i. Thus, with the Sarbardars, the Shi'a became an effective form of protest. We are dealing here with a Twelver Shi'a, despite the fact that some of its attitudes are reminiscent of the Zaidite revolts in the early years of the 'Abasid era which, though in a different way, were likewise obsessed with the idea of a legitimate sovereign. The Mahdi whose coming they awaited was to be a warrior and a conqueror, and the armed struggle they waged against constituted authority was directed towards hastening his coming by removing all possible obstacles. This explains the revival by the Sarbardars of a custom witnessed by Yaqut in the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century Kashan: every morning the city authorities would lead a saddled horse outside the walls, in the always likely eventuality that the Mahdi should arrive.

The sufi movements, even under the Saljuqs (Turks) and more especially during the years of Mongol domination, were characterized by a progressive socialization, the first consequence of which was access to the "mystic path", open to those social classes who, because they were poor, were ready to accept any authority having the seal of religious legality, as opposed to the political reality which was proving more and more disappointing. The shaikhs to whom they had recourse appear to have represented a court of appeal for complaints, even when the only solution they could suggest was a disdainful liberation from worldly needs pending the arrival of better times.

This form of shaikh cult filled most of the gap between the Shi'i outlook and Sufism, thanks to the ever greater ideological affinity between imam and shaikh. The Sarbardars were, in fact, Shi'is, but they were organized on military lines as a confraternity, and in



this was a diarchy of power - religious and political - was created; this would seem to have posited the need for a kind of coexistence between an amir, responsible for maintaining order in temporal affairs, and a shaikh-Mahdi who would act as a guarantor of the truthfulness of the professed madhhab. As a result of this distribution of powers, the role of revolutionary elements and the task of introducing social reforms were entrusted to the shaikh-Mahdi, while the amir acted as a moderator and hence as the mouthpiece of the claims of the minor aristocracy, whose chief aim was to supplant the Mongol rulers and their emissaries. In the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century, when movements emerged of very different dimensions and religious significance, such as the Muwash'sha' leaders - Muhammad ibn Falah and 'Ali - and Shah Isma'il (Safavi), whose careers display a certain similarity in evolving [poor choice of words!] from a form of political and religious extremism. This led both (Shah) Isma'il and 'Ali to consider themselves as partaking of a divine quality and thereby being in a position to grant favors of a mainly material nature - into a self-imposed limitation of their own prerogatives which they accepted in exchange for security of office (a development which was completed within Shah Isma'il's own lifetime, while in 'Ali Musha'sha'I's case it extended to the rule of his successors).

Regardless of one's point of view, the religious history of Iran can be seen as being wholly reflected in the complex relationship of the Qara Quyunlu (Black Sheep Turkomans) and Aq Quyunlu (White Sheep Turkomans) with their subjects, in a complicated network of alliances and enmities which do not seem to have been dictated by any coherent religious policy; though it must be added that any such apparent policy would inevitably appear ambiguous owing to the individual sovereigns' wavering between orthodoxy and "heresy" in their own personal convictions.

It was in this climate of ambiguity and an uncertain political situation that heretical movements like those of the Hurufies and the Musha'sha' were born, and that the Qizilbash movement assumed the form of a military and religious organization.

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Detailed information about the religious situation in the various provinces and cities of 15<sup>th</sup> century Iran is lacking. Hamd-Allah Mustaufi, however, has left us in his Nuzhat al-qulub (circa 740/1340) a fairly accurate religious topography of Persia during the preceding century, thus providing us with a starting-point for an analysis of the transformation of the Iranian mentality which, as we have seen, was characterized by an attempt to fuse sufism with the Shi'i and by an increasing trend towards 'Alidism (i.e., reverence for 'ali ibn Abi Talib, the 1<sup>st</sup> Shi'a Imam). It needs to be said that this latter trend was extremely vague. The misfortunes of (the great poet) Jami, who in 877-878/1472 proclaimed himself a potential victim of both Iraqi (Shi'i) and the Khurasan (Sunni) *ta'assub*, are highly significant. For the same reason, when the philosopher Jalal al-Din Davani, who was a Sunni despite claims to the contrary, devoted all his energies between 1467 and 1477 to a typical vulgarization of a classical Shi'I text such as the Akhlaq-I Nasiri, this did not seem to the 15<sup>th</sup> century mind to be due to the eccentricity of a scholar, because in reality it formed part of a complex - and to some extent unconscious - official Sunni attempt at annexing concepts or studies traditionally held to be part of the Shi'I rationalistic heritage. In Davani's case this was an abstract ethico-political theory, polyvalent by its very nature, which explains why both currents regarded him as their master. A more specific instance is provided by a fundamental work of Talibite genealogy, the 'Umdat al-talib, compiled at this time by Ibn 'Inaba (died 828/1424) and dedicated to a patron who is generally believed to have been the reigning monarch, Timur. While the historical validity of this dedication may be disputed, the work remains an indication of the popularity and the importance of the *Ahl al-bait*, which the religious mentality is inclined to regard as the common heritage of all Islam (at any rate such an attitude appears natural in this historical context, given the still more significant

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fact that *a posteriori* the work has been seen as written for Timur). At Balkh the true (Iranian) *mazar* of 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) was rediscovered and pilgrims flocked to

Mashhad as a result of the growing importance of its shrine, whose influence was felt beyond the confines of the Imamite entourage and led the Timurida to embark on a whole range of public works.

This was, in fact, the golden age of Mashhad, for after succeeding to the throne Shah Rukh visited the city several times, paying homage to the tomb (of Imam 'Ali Reza, the 8<sup>th</sup> Imam, whose mother, as we shall later in this chapter was almost certainly Hispano-Muslim, and of Hispanic, i.e., Iberian, Celtic and Visigothic ancestry rather than being of Arab or Berber origin. In other words, the mother of Imam 'Ali Reza, the 8<sup>th</sup> Imam, was as Spanish as St. John of the Cross.) and making generous gifts to the local sayyids. The Matla' al-shams records visits during the *Muharram* in 809/1406, 810/1407, 815/1412, 821/1418, 822/1419, and 840/1436. Shah Rukh was also responsible for the embellishment of both the great Khurasan shrines: the one we have just mentioned, at Mashhad, and the newly "discovered" shrine at Mazar- Sharif, where his minister Ghiyas al-Din (died 829/1425-1426 was buried. The name of Mashhad, however, is connected above all with that of the sovereign's wife Gauhar Shad, who was responsible for the erection of the mosque by the same name, built by a craftsman from Shiraz between 808/1405 and 821/1418. Shah Rukh's successors also venerated this shrine and the Matla' al-shams records visits by Ulugh Beg in 852/1448-1449; by Abu'l-Qasim Babur in 856/1452-1453 and on a second occasion before he died and was buried in the *madrasa* of Shah Rukh in 861/1457; by his son Mahmud, who was crowned at Mashhad in the latter year; by Musain Baiqara in 870/1465-1466; and by Abu Sa'id in 872/1467-1468. An "officially" Shi'I dynasty could hardly have been more obsequious. In short, this was a period when the popular substratum played a leading role in official "sacred history" by introducing a kind of sentimentalism that might be described as group religiosity, and also had a share in

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formulating the language of Sufism - for example in the "theology" of Va'iz-I Kashifi, who died in 910/1504-1505 (the Rauzat al-shuhada is identical in terms of its contents with the classical Imamite texts, but its form is that of a narration, supplemented with a wealth of

elements drawn from mythology and folklore), and in the mysticism of Shah Ni'mat-Allah Vali (died 834/1431). As regards the other point, i.e., the intermingling of Sufism and Shi'ism in the light of a reacheived Islamic unity, in accordance with the attempt to return to a kind of religious purism which, as we have seen, was a constant factor in Muslim society at that time, the man whi was most effective and coherent in trying to bring about this synthesis was the Kubravi mystic, Sayyid Muhammad Nurbaksh (died 869/1464).

Nurbaksh derives his desire for unity from 'Ala al-Daula Simnani, a Sunni whose centralist outlook was typically Ash'ari but who, at the same time, was appointed by Oljeitu to preside over the Sunni-Shi'I council at Sultaniyya (1305) which ended with his "conversion" to the Shi'i. It should, however, be noted that this anti-rigorist attitude of both tendencies did not prevent Simnani from replying to Shaikh Khalifa, the theoretical founder of the Sarbardar movement, by throwing an inkpot at his head to punish him for his impertinence in declaring that he wanted something more than his master was able to give him. Shaikh Khalifa, in fact, had ventured to deny the validity of the juridical concept of the orthodox *madhhab*, to deny which was a very different thing from a sentimental attachment to 'Alidism. An equally centralist outlook, on the other hand, was shared by the most direct teacher of Nurbaksh, Ahmad ibn Fahd al-Hilli (died 841/1437-1438). This twelver (Imami) Twelver Shi'I did not hesitate to pronounce a sentence of *takfir* against his former pupil Muhammad ibn Falah Musha'sha'I when he too, although in circumstances different from those of the Nurbaksh case, claimed the prerogatives of a Mahdi.

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The position of Nurbaksh, which concerns us here more closely, is defined in a passage in his 'Aqida, which is, incidentally, coherently Shi'i. In it he lays stress on a process which might be called one of "transfer", whereby the heir to the prophetic mission, i.e., he who is in the position of privilege of the Ahl al-bait, is the sufi, whose own spiritual ancestor is 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib), while at the other extremity of

the chain is the Mahdi. Within the history of the development of religious ideas in Iran this assertion is far more important than the reasons which later induced Nurbaksh to proclaim himself Mahdi, these reasons being based for the most part on astrological and cabalistic calculations as well as on a number of coincidences. Nevertheless, the religious topography of Iran that can be deduced from Mustaufi clearly reveals the possibility of the formation, in a promiscuous religious milieu, of a certain ambivalence and so the belonging to the Shi'I rather than to the Sunni confession would seem to be a matter of religious sensibility rather than one of ideological divergences or different judicial rites.

According to Mustaufi, in the big urban centers the majority of the inhabitants were Sunnis, while the traditionally Shi'I - or, to be more precise, Twelver - areas were, in addition to Gilan and Mazandaran, the cities of Ray, Varamin, Qum and Kashan, the province of Khuzistan and the Khurasan region of Sabzavar. In those parts of Iran where it existed Shi'ism was widespread among the peasantry, but in the cities some of the aristocratic families were also Shi'I and occupied leading posts in the administration during the Timurid era, and especially under the Sunni Aq Quyunlu (or "White Sheep Turkomans)". (One strongly suspects that an analogous situation existed in Muslim Spain, in which much of the peasantry and that part of the aristocracy - especially that of Visigothic origin - were largely Shi'i, while the Mozarabs were strongly influenced by Shi'ism, though remaining Christian); see the following chapter. While the exact percentage of Shi'is in Muslim Spain is unknowable, the percentage must have been large, in order to so strongly influence the Mozarab or Christian population and to be so evident amongst the later *Moriscos*, as we shall see.).

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Some significant examples, in this connection, are cited and developed by Aubin to show the privileges granted to certain Shi'I sayyids or whole families, in accordance with a policy which began with Timur and continued down to Uzun Hasan. On the other hand, as late as 1720-1721 the Ottoman Durri Effendi reported that a third of the population of Iran were Sunnis. Their numbers must have been more constant still outside the cities, a contributory factor being the ambivalent effects of *taqiyya*. (The same situation existed in

Muslim Spain, which is one of the factors which makes it impossible to estimate the Shi'i percentage.) It is pointless to ask what had happened during the period intervening between these two statements, unless one takes into account a fact of the greatest importance in the work of the earlier of the two writers. Mustaufi maintains that Shafi'i elements existed in almost every place he mentions, both in those where he speaks of the presence of Sunnis and in the traditional centers of Shi'ism, and this provides evidence to support the supposition that the religious situation in Persia had a certain homogeneity, due not only to the factors mentioned above, but also to the influence of Shafi'ism, which from another point of view seems more capable than any other Madhhab of absorbing methodologically different outlooks, thereby paving the way, in its turn, to a more complete amalgamation.

As a partial confirmation of these suppositions let us consider an extreme case reported by Nur-Allah Shushtari in the Majalis a-mu'minin when speaking of Kashan, a city which, more than any other, provides frequent evidence of its adherence to the Shi'I faith (the saddled white horse waiting for the Mahdi, the "death festival" of 'Umar, etc.). Despite this, it was in Kashan that, when Shah Isma'il (Safavi) ordered a public execration of the first three Caliphs, "the great and the worthy among the people of the Sunna in the land of Iraq took the path of exile", and it was in Kashan that "there remained no traces of Sunni *qadi* or *mufti*". For two years, whenever they wished "to ascertain the truth in their problems of Shari'a", the

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people of Kashan had to ask the *maulana* Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Khunfari, "although he was not a specialist in the problems of *fiqh* and had no adequate text among his Shi'i books". When formulating his *fatwa*, the *maulana* used his common sense (a method used, in particular, by the Shafi'I school), pending the arrival in Kashan of a Shi'i jurist who, after examining the *fatwas* given by the *maulana*, ratified them all because they were in accordance with the principle of "rational beauty and ugliness", which was precisely the basic precept of the Imamite (or *Ja'fari*) school. If we compare this valuable testimony with the fact that it

was in Kashan that a bitter enemy of the Safavids, the Sunni (but Shafi'i) historian Fazl-Allah ibn Ruzbihan Khunji (who was also the author of a poetical hymn in praise of the Twelve Imams), found a temporary refuge, we have more than a clue of the complexity of the situation. This will perhaps provide us with a basis for further inferences, for the existence of such a situation in one of the main centers of Persian Shi'ism, where it would seem that the jurists were Sunni by nature and that one was a Shi'i particularly in the writing of poetry, can serve to dispel much of the confusion surrounding the figure of Shaikh Safi al-Din in connection with his proper place in the religious history of Ardabil and his now undisputed original adherence to Sunnism.

According to Mustaufi, Ardabil was a center of Shafi'ism. In particular, A. Kasravi has shown that Shaikh Safi al-Din's Shafi'ism was an essential part of the religious mentality of the Shaikh and was certainly not due to any taqiyya, which would be unlikely at a time when Oljeitu was tending towards non-orthodox attitudes. Nevertheless, the example of Kashan would seem to demonstrate that we cannot take the type of madhhab as an adequate basis for determining the nature of the faith professed by any Persian city. This does not cast any doubts on the position of Shaikh Safi, but it does lead us to another question, the answer to which might help us to solve at least some of the outstanding problems concerning the religious evolution of the first Safavids. A certain simplification of terms, possible after the installation of Twelver

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Shi'ism in the whole of Iran, would seem to have been applied retrogressively to this period, which, as we have seen, was full of ambiguities. In particular, the claim made by Safi al-Din's descendants to be Husaini sayyids deemed for a long time to imply that they were Shi'i, despite the fact that the authentic sources do not mention this title when referring to the shaikhs or Ardabil. It would seem more likely that there was a gradual realization of the importance of this claim - beginning with the vague remarks of Sadr al-Din, becoming explicit in the assertion of (Shah) Isma'il, who described himself, though not always, as a Husaini, and arriving finally at the generalisation of the title

under (Shah) Tahmasp. In the traditional terminology, in fact, extremism and Shi'ism seemed to be more easily reconcilable than extremism and Shafi'ism, and it was impossible to give a typological definition of the Safavid *ghuluww* if the Shi'I premises were to be discarded.

The transition from Shafi'ism to the *ghuluww*, on the contrary, does not necessarily have to pass through a stage of claiming the *sayyada*, this being no different from moderate Shi'ism, and there is another factor that might ultimately have proven disadvantageous to the *sayyada*, i.e., to the Twelver Shi'ism, of the first Safavids, which may help to throw light on the situation. This was the Kurdish origin of the family, unequivocally demonstrated by Togan.

The inhabitants of Kurdistan were Shafi'I, and yet it was in Kurdistan that certain extremist heresies either had their origins or found fertile soil - for example, the *Ahl-I haqq*. Such heresies were not offshoots of Twelver Shi'ism, but as a result of long contacts they were subjected to its influence to such an extent that after the accession of the Safavids they borrowed some of its forms. Moreover, the *Ahl-I haqq* component seems obvious in the *Qizilbash* (*Qizilbash* in Azeri Turkish means "red head" which in Persian would be: *Surkh Sar*, which also means "red head", so called for the red cloth with twelve pleats for the Twelve Imams which they wore over their helmets, and also perhaps because Shah Isma'il Safavi himself had red

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hair.) movement, in regard to which the Shaikhs of Ardabil set themselves up as unquestioned and traditional leaders, and even today there are groups of Kurdish *Qizilbash* [though to use the Azeri Turkish term "*Qizilbash*" to describe Kurds seems inappropriate; Kurdish is an Iranian, and therefore Indo-European language, totally unrelated to Turkish.] in Anatolia. Protected also by sufi esotericism, the Shaikhs of Ardabil seem to have submitted outwardly to a certain moderation, until they eventually found an outlet in a twofold kind of extremism: political when Shaikh Junaid indulged in extra-religious activities along lines apparently going back to the Zaidism of Gilan, and religious when it reflected their relationship to their



extremist followers.

This may enable us to hazard a definition of the components of the madhhab under the first Safavids: and extremist type of Sufism - influenced by the Kurdish (Ahl-I haqq) and Turkish (Bektashi) aspects of Qizilbash religious beliefs, but possibly also by Nuqtavi elements known to have been present (see below) in Gilan, the traditional refuge of the Shaikhs. Its approach was therefore of a heretical type which cannot be strictly characterized as Shi'I or non-Shi'i: such was Shafi'i Sufism, which became the ideological banner of so composite a movement as that of the Qizilbash, engaged in difficult political manoeuvres with both the Shi'I Qara Qyunlu (Black Sheep Turkomans) and the Sunni Aq Qyunlu (White Sheep Turkomans), which were rendered even more complicated by innumerable ties of blood relationship in no way determined by religious sympathies. Another instance of the coexistence of juridical Shafi'ism and heretical beliefs is provided by the case of the son of Hurufi Fazl-Allah, who, when commenting on his flight from ruthless persecutors, claimed to have answered their question (to which madhhab he belonged) by professing a Shafi'ism which he did not subsequently renounce.

This swinging of the balance of power from Aq Qyunlu to Qara Qutunlu and vice versa was particularly noticeable in the first half of the 9yj/15<sup>th</sup> century. Although, to a certain extent, it was a reflection of

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the sphere of political influence, there is no real parallel to this shifting of power in the far more subtle field of diplomatic and ideological relationships. Practically speaking the latter were limited to the support given by princes to one another when they came into conflict with members of their own families. In such cases they exploited the idea of religious differences, which they seem to have regarded as being so many more strings to their own bows, and had the aim of encouraging the greatest possible confusion in their relationship to their subjects.

As examples one can cite the alliance between the Qara Qyunlu and the Sunni Ottomans against Aq Qyunlu, who considered themselves the most direct heirs of Timurid power on account of the Il-Khanid princes'

authoritative investiture; or conversely, the support given by Aq Ayunlu such as Uzun Hasan to the traditional enemy, embodied in this case by Hasan 'ali, while the anti-Timurid Qara Qyunlu policy was carried on by Iskandar. Such was the background in Iran to the fortunes of Mahdism, to the diffusion of the Hurufi and Musha'sha' heresies and to the formation of Ahl-I haqq (or rather their predecessors) and Qizilbash groups. All these things made it incumbent upon the sovereign to follow an elastic religious policy, ranging from broad-minded comprehension of equivocal or antithetical professions of faith on the part of his subjects to the inevitable exclusive adhesion to one group whenever the political situation became critical and the duties and ambitions of the sovereign were not limited to functioning merely as the guarantor of the *status quo*.

The two sovereigns who appear to have been more or less involuntary mouthpieces of this complex religious world were Aspand and Jahan Shah, both of whom were representatives *par excellence* of Qara Qyunlu heterodoxy, though the type of Shi'ism professed by each had different characteristics.

Aspand embraced Shi'ism after a grand council attended by both Sunnis and Shi'is, seemed at last to have found the leader for whom not only Khurasan and Iraq, but the whole Islamic world, had been waiting - a man who, at all events at this stage, combined

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political audacity with an original religious syncretism, the Mushasha' Muhammad ibn Falah. Aspand's explicit acceptance of Shi'ism seems to have been a clever move on the part of a sovereign who was trying to reach a compromise with his non-orthodox subjects, to place himself on their religious level and to obtain - paradoxically enough, from his subjects - a more official investiture than that obtained by Shah Muhammad. For Aspand, becoming a Shi'I meant minting coinage in the names of the Twelve Imams, professing the Twelver cult and thus becoming - in effect - the champion of the pure madhhab of the Ahl al-bait.

By contrast, Jahan Shah's Imamite profession of faith seems to have been dictated by more personal reasons, as he was a Shi'I not merely by virtue of his minting coins with the names of the Twelve Imams but

also because he was troubled by more sincerely religious spiritual doubts, at least if we can judge from the *divan* which the ruler, designated Shams al-'arifin, either composed himself or at any rate claimed as his own. In other words, while Aspad represents the high level and probably demagogic realization of the ruler-subject relationship which had been much more spontaneously anticipated by the vicissitudes of the Sarbardar movement, Jahan Shah would appear to have been a forerunner of Shah Isma'il. The appropriateness of this analogy is evident in the negative attitude of both rulers towards the *ghuluww*, which they did not in any way try to appeal to in the name of a common background, either in a religious or in a political sense. Although Jaqhan Shah was not the most outspoken denouncer of Hurufism, he could not accept it, not because his point of view coincided with that of such rulers as Timur or Miran Shah, who feared the danger - always latent in the Shi'a - of the discovery of the true sovereign, but because the chosen ruler had already been made manifest in his own person. Nor did his stubborn opposition to Hurufism create any real halo of ambiguity regarding the sincerity of his Shi'i beliefs. On the contrary, it would seem to have been due to the enthusiasm of one who felt that he had been entrusted with a superhuman task: as champion of the Twelfth Imam, he was the chosen leader and the repository (such

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was the esotericism of the Imamite agnostics) of a higher truth the need for which, directly or indirectly, had been repeatedly and insistently asserted in the course of the history of Twelver Shi'ism and had led to the *'arifs* being considered its trustee, sharing - to use an expression dear to (Henry) Corbin - in the Body of which the Imam is the head.

## II THE HURUFIS

The Hurufis made their first appearance at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century. Their founder Fazl-Allah (possibly known earlier as 'Abd al-Rahman) was born in Astarabad in 740/1340. The details of his life reflect all the ferments of his time: he was a sayyid, a mystic from childhood, an interpreter of dreams, an ardent pilgrim and a strict observer of the Shari'a, as was

only to expected in the son of a qadi (hence his nickname, *halal-khur*). His actions were invariably determined by dreams; it was a dream that induced him to undertake the *ziyara* to Mashhad immediately after the *hajj*; in another dream the names of the holiest mystics were revealed to him; and a dream of light foretold his by piercing his right eye (*'ain*, which also means "essence" or "source") with the rays of the Star which rises in the East at intervals of centuries. His investiture immediately assumed the diouble form - indispensable in one who lays claim to being the repository of *sir* in the Muslim world - of mediation in trans-human things (he acquired his first disciples by interpreting dreams and reading them in the mind) and of *hujja* in sub-human matters (the world of nature as represented by birds, whose language Fazl-Allah, like all the Imams, could understand). The community he gathered around him, however, had the same characteristics as the contemporaty groups of dervishes: its members were of humble origin and were for the most part artisans; it practiced frugality and rectitude. It was not until he had reached middle age, about 1396, that Fazl-Allah was led to theopathy - from the authentic revelation of the meaning of the Prophecy to the dignity of Sahib al-zaman and the glory of the

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divine manifestation. He wrote the Javidan-nama-yi kabir, and while his religious mission between Isfahan and Shirvan naturally had a political significance, he went unarmed. He seems to have merely "besought" the potentates to join him, but Miran Shah, whom he trusted, betrayed him, cast him into prison (during his imprisonment he wrote the Vasiyyat-nama) and had him executed at Alinjaq in 790/1304. Equally unfortunate was his first caliph, 'Ali al-'ala, when he tried to approach the new Qara Quyunlu leadership, embodied in this instance by Qara Yusuf. Yet though he was executed in 822/1419, he was nevertheless responsible for first spreading the Hurufi doctrines within the Bektashi-Anatolian environment. Subsequent external events and the various subdivisions and schisms are of only relative importance.

In substance, Hurufism is still an expression of Isma'ilism, in the sense that the theological terms

defining it on the religious plane are not derived solely from Isma'ilism, i.e., the doctrine that the Creation is necessarily determined by the cosmic drama of which it is a pallid and imperfect reflection. Significantly, the definition of divinity was based on the absolute *ta'til* of the divine attributes and on a form of *tashbih* which predated in an opposite direction to the orthodox, in the sense that the term of comparison was Man and it was to Man that the divine likeness was referred. But although this concentration of interest on the human figure as representing completely the ultramundane mystery is its closest link with Isma'ilism, Hurufism differs from the latter in its recognition of the real location of the *Haqiqah* in the substance of the letters rather than in the person of the Imam. And hence a new type of Qur'anic exoressions capable of different and even conflicting interpretations, the various *tafsirs* being merely approximate and incomplete catalogues of these that could be amplified. In this sense, for example, the letters *kn* symbolize the divine creative activity. The various heretical movements have always felt the need of clarifying the metaphysical content of such symbols by choosing - out of the various alternatives which

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were often suggested by orthodox as well as unorthodox thought - some that could represent Reality as a whole. By using among other things a cabalistic interpretation, Hurufism raises the letters' value to such a level that the dualism between Substance and Form is transformed into the equation: Reality of Substance = Determined Value of the Letter. This process of emphasis is, however, at the same time a process of simplification and, theologically speaking, instead of leading to an innovatory interpretation of the divine content, crystallises into a confessional creed of a static type, the revolutionary message of which is, paradoxically enough, entrusted to those practical measures which Muslim society regards as the inevitable consequences of any new religious choice. In any case, in the context of Hurufism, the thing that most plausibly transcends a strictly Shi'I mentality is the claim to possession of the key to the *Haqiqah*; this eliminates both the first intermediary (the Imam) and a leader like Jahan Shah,

claiming to be the second intermediary destined (as Twelver Caliph and Sovereign) to recognize the function of the Imam and to proclaim it to the world.

#### IV THE MUSHA'SHA'

Aspand, too, had to deal with heresy, viz the Musha'sha' movement which, on the social plane had perhaps an even greater significance. His reaction, however, was quite different, and it has already been said that the ultimate aim of his persecution of the Musha'sha' was not so much their extermination as the hope of reducing their leaders to their rightful rank of vassals obedient to the wishes of their legitimate Shi'i sovereign. The Musha'sha' movement originated in circles that, strictly speaking, were not Iranian and in areas where many of the inhabitants were Arabs, though it is true that Ibn Battuta located a Persian population in Haviza, which was later to become their capital. Typologically, however, this was an entirely Iranian heresy, so much so that the more modern Babi offshoot of the Twelver Shi'a seems to have modelled

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itself upon it in various stages of development and in its degrees of heretical intensity. Thus a description of the religious situation in Iran during the period in question would be incomplete without some reference to this movement.

The political situation, which is dealt with more fully in an earlier chapter, was characterized by an alteration of military successes and reverses on the part of the Musha'sha', who were initially helped by Aspand's policy of trying to win over to his side, in one way or another, the discontented and unreliable inhabitants of 'Arabistan (Or Khuzistan), and by a sort of compromise whereby the legitimate authority of the Qara Qyunlu was acknowledged in exchange for a measure of frequently disputed autonomy in religious affairs which survived until (Shah) Isma'il, like Jahan Shah, compelled everyone to embrace orthodox Shi'ism. The "conversion" of Aspand, in 840/1436-1437, leaves open the question whether he took this step as a counter-offensive against the founder of the Musha'sha' heresy, who in that very year had launched his campaign among

the local tribes, declaring that he was the Mahdi; or whether the public declaration by Muhammad that he himself was the long-awaited Mahdi was possibly an unconscious reaction to the authority of Aspad, who since his conversion had become the legitimate religious - as well as political - leader. What is certain is that the grave economic situation in 'Arabistan, where problems existed that could not be solved by means of a new *siyasa Shar'iyya*, gave the Musha'sha' movement plenty of scope for manoeuvre. It also gave them a kind of moral authority for their expansionist activities when they decided to set up an ideal structure, permeated by the wish to achieve consistency between the religious problems and the civil elements, in accordance with the principle of the perfect prince and a religious State that has remained an unrealized alternative throughout the history of Islam.

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In any case, having recognized the complex nature of the relationship between the Shi'I sovereign and the equally Shi'I group facing him as his revolutionary opponent in the political as well as in the religious field, it is to the latter that we must turn our attention if we wish to provide analysis of some of the most typical stages of an evolution [poor choice of words!] through which, it would appear, every heresy that can be called Iranian must necessarily pass.

The focal point of the Musha'sha' theory (known to us thanks to an unpublished Kalam al-Mahdi brought to light by A. Kasravi) is the person of the Mahdi, which signifies the immanence of the Imam, conceived as a transcendent entity mediating between the Creator and His creatures in the metaphysically existential act which, through the process of creation, distinguishes the one from the other. Proceeding along these lines, the Musha'sha' (or, to be more precise, the two most interesting protagonists from the religious point of view, the founder Muhammad ibn Falah and his son 'Ali) reached a halfway point in the ideal development of Mahdism, which began with the Isma'ili affirmation of the Imam's participation in the divine essence and ended

with the Babi movement, which claimed that the dicitinity had been manifested in the Imam. Muhammad ibn Falah would seem, however, to have progressed gradually in his religious evolution [poor choice of words!] and in his career as leader of a community - unless of course this was merely tactical caution in the ever more explicit diffusion of his message. Two statements of his which were not necessarily intended as imposture can be quoted as cases in point: the declaation he made to the governor of Vasisit, following the *takfir* of his teacher Ahmad ibn Fahd, to the effect that he was a sufi and a follower of the Sunna, and his words when, on being confronted with an '*alim* sent from Baghdad to refute his extremist position, e boasted that he had always applied the Shari'a. Now it is a fact that from the historical point of view the Musha'sha' (the etymology of the word is obscure, but it may be connected with the idea of "light" or "ray", from the root) was one of those movements organized along

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the lines of a confraternity, the birth and development of which were realized in Sufism - under whose authority they placed themselves - during the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> centuries in particular.

The 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century organisations are different, principally by virtue of their platform of social and economic reform which frequently allowed them to set up a parallel military organization among their disciples, as is clearly shown by the continually expressed desire of their leaders to observe scrupulously the law and the Sunna. Nevertheless, among the Musha'sha' the subsequent religious evolution [poor choice of words!] was the result not of a group approach as in the case of the Qizilbash, but of their leaders' individual elaborations. Muhammad ibn Falah began his career by proclaiming himself *wali* of the Mahdi (the Twelfth Imam), thus characterizing himself as a leader of the *jihad* in a typically Shi'i sense, in order to bring about, in the name of the Mahdi, the indispensable moment of the Test, i.e., establishing who was for the Mahdi and who was against him.

This type of logic can be reconmceled both with the most classical principles of Twelver ideology and with the most normal Shi'i interpretation of Qur'an X:99-100,



if one bears in mind that for the Shi'is each verse is always a *zahir* expression of a more obscure substance. Muhammad, however, denied that any such verification by the Mahdi himself was possible, since it was one of the Mahdi's prerogatives (and here we see the influence of contemporary social aspirations) that he was invincible and omnipotent, so that *vis-à-vis* the Mahdi, both good and wicked men would be in an identical position, since they would be bound to recognize him. In this there was already a heresy, even though it was camouflaged by a sophism. Soon, however, caution was thrown to the winds, for the Test was to be followed by a period of *zuhur* (manifestation) and Muhammad ibn Falah declared that he was the *hijab* (shield) of the Mahdi, while his son 'Ali went so far as to maintain that he himself was God, by a process based on one of those syllogisms so typical of extremist movements: the Mahdi is 'Ali; 'Ali is God; I, the Mahdi, and 'Ali; I am God. In any case, the fact

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remains that, although the respective positions of father and son may appear to have been different (in his correspondence with Pir Budaq, Muhammad ibn Falah apologized for his son's conduct, comparing his position with that of 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib), who had allowed Abu Bakr to assume an office for which he was not destined, in the same way as God, in spite of His infinite foresight, had created Iblis), the religious premise is the same. The conception of the Mahdi was based on a clear distinction between the historical figure and his metaphysical nature, expressed in a terminology whose lucidity confirms the originality of the *Mushasha'* way of thinking. Thus the Twelfth Imam, being alive as a category, might also be dead, and not merely "hidden" in the evanescent person of Muhammad ibn Hasan al-'Askari. And following this line of thought there was no real difference between him and the Prophet, or between him and the other Imams. All of them were the Twelfth Imam, and the actual death of any one of them was in its turn nothing but *ghaiba* on the conceptual plane from which their existence stems. It was therefore prophesied that each one of them would return, because the substance of the Imam was invariable, whereas the body in which he appeared was variable. In other words, in the actual prophetic cycle the divine function was expressed in the

*silsila* leading up to the Eleventh Imam, whereas the function entrusted to the Twelfth Imam (the Return *par excellence*) was now to be realized in his *hijab* Muhammad ibn Falah. The transition accomplished by 'Ali, in claiming to be the substance of the metaphysical presence of the Imam, seems to have been an esoteric stage of what his father had exoterically preached rather than an extremist extension of the concept from which it derived. And in the field of realization it was 'Ali who plundered and defiled the tomb of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, while it fell to the father to punish severely the *ghali* even when they were his own followers, in a manner sometimes reminiscent of Kharijite ideas. (And yet his punctilious guardian of the Shari'a was also the author of canonical formulae for the *ziyara* to himself, on the lines of the classical Imamite formula.)

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It is also worth noting *how* the Qur'anic Christ, too, tends to be absorbed in this explanatory vision of the Imam. Strange tales were circulated concerning the dead Christ worshipped by Christians, almost as if he were a real, i.e., material, figure. The Qur'an, on the contrary, tells not so much the "true story" of Christ as the story of Christ as an immortal, ever-present spirit. This duality, and the fact that the legends derived from Christological mythology differ from the Muslim versions, whether Shi'I or orthodox, suggest Mandaean views were exerting their influence through a mechanism of borrowings whose starting-point cannot be established with any certainty. For example, the Christians' Jesus Christ is said to have had his head cut off and sent to a prostitute at Najaf, on the grounds that the cult practiced there was idolatrous, since 'Ali was the living God, in Egypt (*sic*); in other words, Christ is John the Baptist, but the John of the Christians, whereas a quality attributed by the Mandaeans to (St. John) the Baptist - that he could not be wounded with a sword - is also one of the miraculous attributes of the Musha'sha' Mahdi, just as the "death in the river" of 'Ali ibn Muhammad reminds us of the death of (St. John (the Baptist) according to the Mandaeans. Nor is this all, for the attribution to the "Magi", by Muhammad ibn Falah, of the veneration of Bukht al-nassar (Nebuchadnezzar), too hastily rejected as absurd by Kasravi, might also imply a Mandaean link

with very ancient forms of Irano-Semitic syncretism. [Some members of the Protestant sect known as "Baptist", desperate to claim Apostolic Foundation, claim that they were founded by St. John the Baptist. Besides the total absurdity of this (the Baptist Church is no older than the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD), they do not seem to realize that by claiming St. John the Baptist as the founder of their church that they are denying that they are Christians at all; such is one of many gross Protestant lies and absurdities.]

On the other hand, much of our information on Musha'sha' beliefs ( a striking example is the *dhikr* 'Ali Allah) can be compared with what more recent writers have attributed to the Ahl-I haqq. This and

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other analogies - the Safavid coin called Huvaiza (Haviza) used in initiations - give us an idea of the continuity of the connective tissue in the religious life of the period in question, which leads on to broader and more composite issues, such as the complex problem of the Qizilbash.

### **THE QIZILBASH**

The Qizilbash movement constitutes the meeting-point and the melting-pot of the various elements - or at any rate the most significant among them - of the religious life of the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century. It is not, however, a zone of light amidst the obscurity characteristic of the period, for the presence of diverse motives in the movement produced composite, eclectic and contradictory results. The movement could be described as an ethnographical-religious complex localized, during the period we are discussing, in Asia Minor, principally in a geographical belt extending from the Lebanese - Syrian border to the Azarbaijan frontier. Its members were drawn from Turkish tribes, but that the term Qizilbash (Literally "men with red caps") [in fact, the Turkish word *bash* means "head" rather than "cap", so, in reality, "Qizilbash" literally means "red head"; this is appropriate, since Shah Isma'il Safavi had red hair: the term "Qizilbash" arose because over their helmets they wore red cloths with twelve pleats for the twelve Imams] was, ethnographically speaking, vague is

demonstrated by the number of different connotations that it acquired at different times and in different places. Subsequent to its origination in Dzhungaria, it was used in eastern Turkestan to denote the Shi'is; in Asia Minor it was often used as an alternative for the term 'alavi; for the Ottomans it meant a member of a secret society, a heterorthodox or, in the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century, the Safavid enemy; in Russia it became a synonym for Persian [though, of course, the word "Qizilbash" is Turkish; in Persian it would be *surkh sar*, i.e., "red head"], and later, by extension, Asian; and among the Volga Tatars (or *Chuvash Tatars*) it was used to denote a

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cunning man (a merchant, often a Persian merchant). The different ways in which this word was used independently of ethnical entities shows that it had an ideological content that became fused with the concept "Persian" [though "Qizilbash" is NOT a Persian word], i.e., schismatic, in the same way as the Persians themselves were defined in antithesis to the Ottomans. This, however, did not occur until a victorious Qizilbash movement under Shah Isma'il (Safavi) had first made its contribution to Iranian religious life and then suffered what was essentially a repulse, being reduced, by a humiliating process of absorption, to the more commonplace, yet still heretical, (from a Sunni point of view) connotation of official Safavid Shi'ism. The internal dialectic of all 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century extremist movements seems, in fact, to have led to a kind of self-camouflage, through which certain religious forms survive under different names or as original contributions to the great stream of Twelver (or "Imami") Shi'ism. Despite this, the most striking innovatory feature, that particular religious attitude which could still be described as *ghuluww* and which acted as the catalyst of new social demands, was paradoxically eliminated at the very moment when a certain degree of political equilibrium might theoretically have enabled it to be utilized in a new type of society.

Whereas the Sarbardars can be described as the first link in the sufi chain leading to the Musha'sha', its most outstanding element is undoubtedly represented

by the Qizilbash. It now becomes self-evident that the particular kind of religious feeling permeating, with its longing for renewal, the conscience of the Iranian Islamic world at that time, had as its essential component a certain type of Sufism. Or, to be more precise, we should speak, not of Sufism, but of that particular evolution [poor choice of words!] in the sufi world, and in the relations existing between the members of the confraternities, which, as we have seen, was based on the communion - drawn from the Twelver Shi'a - between the Shaikh as vicar of legitimate religious authority and his *murids*; these latter in accordance with the classical Shi'I procedure, were to

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be the "proofs" of his intentions, that is of his truthful madhhab. The gradual transition from the ascetic mission to identification with the task assigned by the Mahdi, and thereby the *mazhar* of God in this world.

The Shaikhs of Ardabil were precisely this in the eyes of those who turned to them, and the stages which they proposed are already comprehended in the evolution [poor choice of words!] of the relationship between Shaikhs and their supporters. In other cases both the figure of the sayyid, though invested with an authority not solely due to his birth but recognized and demanded from below (the sayyids of Bam were examples of this during the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century), and that of the Shaikh, whose position was very similar to that of the Caliph, though in less universalistic terms (we need only think of Shah Ni'man-Allah Vali), remain so to speak experiences crystallised in time, without any of that evolution [poor choice of words!] which facts and circumstances seemed logically to require.

The union between Qizilbash and the Shaikhs of Ardabil was a military relationship having, in its turn, no original features, which provided a practical solution for that reciprocity of duties and obligations which formed part of the relationship between the Shaikh and his followers. Seen in this light, the personal attitude of individual Shaikhs - that is to say, when they were "converted" to Shi'ism, the type of Shi'ism which they embraced and how much of the Qizilbash aberrations had entered into the religion of the man whom they recognized as their leader - becomes of

secondary importance. The key element seems to be, above all, Junaid's awareness of the military potential latent in that order and the fact that in beginning preparations for his "reign" he developed it with the full consent of the Qizilbash, who then responded with fanatical enthusiasm to the appeals of the Shaikhs up to the time of (Sha) Isma'il (Safavi)'s victory. Hence the particular reaction of the sovereigns then ruling Azarbaijan who, whether they were Aq Quyunlu (White Sheep Turkomans) or Qara Quyunlu (Black Sheep Turkomans), displayed a mistrust which sometimes erupted into open hostility. This is understandable

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when we remember the more or less conscious desire, on the part of authorities who were afraid of being bypassed, to surround themselves with a halo of religious legitimacy. It also explains the religious preparations for the reign of (Shah) Isma'il (Safavi), and the burden that he had to bear as a result of his presumed infallibility, which found expression in a theopathic enthusiasm, counterbalanced by his consent to the compromise offered by the Twelver Shi'a.

The religious folklore of the Qizilbash, in contrast to their spiritual ideas, which were typically Iranian, had been borrowed from Asia Minor, the religious outlook of which was by definition heretical,, open to every kind of eclecticism and already endowed with a heritage of complex religious forms. On to the rites of an orgiastic nature with which the Qizilbash carry on extremely ancient Anatolian traditions, and on to the elements of a Christianity hostile to orthodoxy, Islam imposes a graft of plebian social aspirations of a dissenting and vaguely communistic nature, such as those of the Qalandars and the Jalalis, combined, in this specific case, with the expectation of the imminent coming of the Mahdi. From this point of view it is difficult to separate the religious forms of the Qizilbash from those of the Bektashis, who according to Gordlevskii were the "codifiers" of the fluid Qizilbash religiosity maintained by the various wandering dervishes of the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century. The orthodox party accused them of forming secret societies, at the meetings of which ritual orgies were celebrated, including incest and pederasty, but these accusations do not differ greatly from the sins attributed by orthodox

Islam to any heretical movement.

On the other hand, heresy did not prevent a movement which seems to represent the codification of that trend of Anatolian Qizilbash religiosity, which prevailed in the Kurdish area, i.e., the Ahl-I haqq, from finding the necessary links with Twlever (Shi'a) tradition. Indeed, were it not for the fact that the texts dealing with Ahl-I haqq religious ideas are too modern to allow us to consider them here, it would seem more correct to regard the Bektashi, Ahl-I haqq and

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Qizilbash movements as slightly different expressions of the same religious form. For the Qizilbash as well as for the Bektashi, authority was vested in a centralist leader who chose to rule the various communities his representatives - *dede* or *baba* - who in their turn made use of an intermediary in dealing with the *talib*. One of their distinctive signs was the ear-ring worn on the left ear, which in the case of a *dede* signified asceticism and chastity. Among the Bektashis, even today, the chiefs wear sleeveless robes like those of the Armenian peasants, but the most characteristic feature of their costume is the peaked twelve-banded red cap, the *taj-I Haidari*, variously explained as symbolizing the Twelve Imams or else resulting from Christian influence (the Twelve Apostles), transmitted through the Armenians, from whom they have also borrowed certain practices relating to fasts. Another external sign is beard-kissing as a form of greeting - a beard being regarded as indispensable, for anybody dying without one is considered doomed to unhappiness. A counterpart to these visible signs is an esoteric sign, understood only by initiates, viz. the star symbolizing the light of the intellect and the soul, which shone in a Qizilbash and distinguished him from others. Incidentally, the Qizilbash are sometimes called *ot-dinli*, or "worshippers of grass", owing to a belief (also current among the Bektashis), which might be characterized as of Dahrite origin, in the eternity of natural matter undergoing continual change. This belief led them to a pantheistic (or perhaps more precisely Hurufi) attitude based on uninterrupted communication between God and His creatures; that is why, for instances, they swear by grass and by 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) while beating the ground with a stick. Another name for the Qizilbash is

*chiragh-sonsuren* ("extinguishers of the light"), reminiscent of one of the Ahl-I haqq sects which is similarly called *Khamushi* in Persian, just as the name *Da'udi* ("worshippers of David") applies both to some Ahl-I haqq and to certain *Qizilbash* from Sivas.

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In addition to the normal veneration of 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) and the fraternal banquets - the Bektashi "communion" - another custom, recorded, for example, among the *Kach-Kiri* Kurdish tribe, is the funeral banquet which may throw some light on the charge of cannibalism that has been brought against the *Qizilbash*, believed to be in the habit of setting fire to their dead and eating them instead of burying them. As a matter of fact the funeral repast is consumed on the spot, on the tomb of the deceased, after the rite of lamentation, and consists of the scattering of yogurt and morsels of a specially prepared sacred loaf, all of which is offered to the friends present at the ceremony. Another characteristic custom is the confession of their sins which the *Qizilbash* make to their *dede*. The latter ties a tape round the neck of the penitent, who has then to bring the *dede* an offering, marking the door with a cross as he enters. After this the tape is removed and the sins are written down and burned. The person of the *dede* is considered sacred and everything he touches is thereby sanctified, and so too is the earth covering his tomb and the dust on which his horse has trodden, the latter being carefully collected because of its miraculous properties. On certain occasions the young women would come to kiss the *dede*, who singing mysterious songs would choose one of them to be his companion for the night; on the morning after the *dede* is washed and the water distributed among the various households. All these hybrid and non-Islamic elements exist side by side with a deep reverence for Shi'ism, as is shown not only by the link with 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib), who, with his attributes of holder of temporal authority and repository of the divine secret, is the central figure in this type of religious belief, but also by a social organization reminiscent of certain Zaidite politico-social experiments, as well as by Sufi ideas,



which, as we have seen, were impregnated with Twelver (or "Imami") Shi'ism during the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century. The sufi influence in turn found its way into ritual practices and widening the devotional field, which previously had been limited to the Twelve Imams."(324)

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As a former soldier, I would like to point out that the Qizilbash were one of the great fighting units of history. A study of their history will show that they could only be beaten by cannon fire; man-to-man, sword-to-sword and horse-to-horse they were invincible.

It is sometimes said that Prince Rupert, nephew of Charles I, during the English Civil War invented shock tactics. It would be more accurate to say that the gallant Prince Rupert, whom I greatly admire, reinvented or revived shock tactics. In fact, shock tactics were used by the Sarmatians, Alans and Goths, as we have noted in Chapter 2. It was the shock tactics of the Goths which destroyed the Roman legions at the battle of Adrianople. Said tactics were brought to perfection by the Normans, whose shields were better designed than those of the Sarmatians, Alans and Goths, and, most especially, whose body armor was much superior.

Anna Comnena, daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus, was much influenced by something which she was quite unable to hide, i.e., her very strong attraction to the Norman

Count Bohemund, eldest son of Robert Guiscard and nephew of Roger Guiscard, conqueror of Sicily. Bohemund was a big, strikingly

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handsome man as well as possessing great personal bravery and tactical genius, Anna Comnena, daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus gives repeats a detailed description of the armament of the Normans which she had heard from her father, as well as from her own first-hand observations of the Normans which she had seen during the 1<sup>st</sup> Crusade:

"Knowing that as far as their cuirasses and iron coats went they (the Normans) were difficult to wound or rather altogether invulnerable ... For the Norman armor is an iron coat, ring wound round with, [i.e., chain mail], and the material is good iron, so as to turn off even a considerable dart ... And as an addition to their defence there is a shield, not round but oblong, beginning very broad and ending in a sharp point [i.e., what is usually called "kite shaped"] It is sparkling, with a bronze knob [generally known as a "boss"]. Therefore, any dart, whether Scythian or Persian or launched by arms of giants, would be beaten off, and would bound back to the sender." (325) At the battle of Doryleum during the 1<sup>st</sup> Crusade it was observed that the surcoats and shields of the Normans had been struck by so many Turkish arrows that they resembled hedgehogs, yet the Normans were unscathed. Anna herself observed:

"A Norman man on horseback is irresistible [apparently she found Count Bohemund "irresistible" in another sense] and could even break through the great wall of Babylon." (326)

Though with improved armaments, it is obvious that the Normans in their style of combat copied the Sarmatians, Alans and

Goths. In Chapter 2 we noted that the Sarmatians, Alans and Goths used the tactic known as "feigned retreat". This last is a very

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sophisticated tactic whose use requires much training and iron discipline. At the battle of Hastings the tactic of "feigned retreat" was used by the Normans against the Saxons or Englishmen with deadly effect. In England, Sicily and during the 1<sup>st</sup> Crusade the Normans with their superior arms and tactics time after time inflicted crushing defeats on enemies far more numerous.

Added to the use of "shock tactics", the use of so sophisticated and complex a tactic by the Normans as well as by the Sarmatians, Alans and Goths cannot be dismissed as "mere coincidence". Yet, the Goths, not to mention the Sarmatians and Alans, were never anywhere near Normandy. The answer to this apparent riddle is really quite simple. The Normans were partly Viking by origin; Rollo, the founder of the Duchy of Normandy and its first Duke, was a Viking. The very name "Normandy" means "Land of the Northmen", i.e., Vikings. That the Normans copied the way of making war used by the Sarmatians, Alans and Goths is yet another proof, in addition to those mentioned in Chapter 2, that the Goths when they lived on the shores of the Black Sea always maintained contact with their ancient Scandinavian homeland.

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Today the English try to glorify their defeat at the hands of the Normans at the battle of Hastings. However, the truth is that at Hastings the Saxons or English had superior numbers as well as the advantage of "holding the high ground", yet were crushingly defeated by the superior arms, tactics and generalship of the Normans. Harold Godwinson, whom the English try to glorify, in fact displayed very poor generalship at Hastings. Not only were the Saxons outfought at Hastings, but King Harlod Godwinson of England was badly outgeneralled by Duke William of Normandy, known to history as "William the Conqueror".

However, the invention of first the long bow and not long afterwards the first crude firearms temporarily caused shock tactics to go out of fashion, only to be revived by Prince Rupert. Later the invention of the rifled musket, followed by the repeating rifle and finally the machine gun, put a permanent end to cavalry shock tactics.

The "Roundhead" cavalry proved themselves unable to face Prince Rupert's *cavaliers*. Oliver Cromwell, finding that there was no way to get the Roundheads to match the horsemanship, dash and elan of the *cavaliers* of Prince Rupert, compensated with superior numbers and iron discipline, something which Prince Rupert's

cavaliers, unlike their Norman ancestors, sorely lacked.

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The Qizilbash, more than a century before Prince Rupert, proved themselves to be past masters of shock tactics. Prince Rupert would have very much liked to have the Qizilbash, as they were his kind of fighters; splendid horsemen, with an invincible courage, dash and elan. Even with their superior discipline, the "Ironsides" of Oliver Cromwell would have been unable to face the Qizilbash.

We now turn to Shah Isma'il Safavi himself.

#### VI. SHAH ISMA'IL

"It was against a background of the kind that we have just described that there suddenly emerged the figure of Shah Isma'il (Safavi), who personifies success in the historical and religious situation we are studying. In his own person he comprehended the qualities of a spiritual leader, a military commander, and a legislative reformer aware of the economic needs of his followers, as is clearly shown by, among others, Sanudo in his Diarii. These qualities were exemplified in his public career, for he realized the basic aspirations of the Qizilbash movement and those of the other heretical and dissenting bodies active at that time.

He was a sufi, but in such a way as to transcend a shaikh's ordinary role, acting as an intermediary with God along lines which placed him closer to God than to the creatures to whom he gave witness. In this sense he was the long-awaited leader and his military successes were regarded as proofs of the superhuman nature of his task. His aspirations were identical with those of all the other "Messiahs" of the time, namely the creation of a State in which religious ideology would be identified with political necessity. Nevertheless, once he had risen to power, this did not prevent (Shah) Isma'il

(Safavi) from accepting political compromises and fusing them with his religious beliefs - and this not only on a personal level.

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But in spite of his heretical acts - such as proclaiming himself 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib), or God, or disdaining to follow the dictates of the Shari'a - Isma'il combined in his own person two conflicting aspirations of Islam, which, however, have not always led to antithetical consequences: a need for individualistic religious expression, which was the mainspring of Sufism in the more generic significance of the term, and an urge to socialize every kind of experience by translating it into terms of the common weal. Isma'il was thus a typical Islamic *condottiere* - in other words, a "true Caliph", a new embodiment of what was symbolized by 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) throughout the history of Islam, whether orthodox or not.

Western sources describe Isma'il as a new prophet and provide us with evidence of the Mahdist and reforming aspect of his mission as well as of the fanaticism of his followers, whose relationship to their leader was of the peculiar military-religious type mentioned above. Isma'il is also depicted as a friend of the Christians [after all, his paternal grandmother was a Byzantine princess], in contrast to the Ottomans who were considered the enemy *par excellence*. This is, in a way, a Venetian cliché, which, however, has some foundation as far as Isma'il's changing attitude to the jihad is concerned. Ever since Junaid's time the shalikhs of Ardabil, by extending their power to the temporal field, were conditioned in their tactics for its consolidation by the jihad, which presented the only religiously admissible method in a community as fundamentally Islamic as that of the Qizilbash. Their most natural enemies were obviously the Christians, firmly established to the north of the Ardabil sphere of influence, but the wavering policy of the Qara Qyunlu (Black Sheep Turkomans) produced what might be called a territorial landslide in the Shaikhs' interests when they became the heirs of this policy. The result was a new interpretation of the jihad, directed no longer against the Christians but against the Sunni Ottomans, as soon as the buffer represented by the Aq Qyunlu (White Sheep Turkomans), who in their turn were also

Sunnis, was eliminated. The religious element in the Safavid conception of the jihad was gradually trivialized into the normal allegations of impiety in accordance with the classical formulae of disputes between Sunnis and Shi'is; but until the battle of Chaldiran the arguments used in this connection rank from the point of view of *kalam*, and even of Mu'tazilite *kalam*, among Isma'il's most outspoken affirmations of heterorthodoxy. At least, this is the case if we are to believe (Marino) Sanuto's Diarii, of which the following is a typical passage:

"He took a Turk named Talisman and asked him where God was; and he replied that God was in Heaven, whereupon he caused the Turk to be cut in two. And then he took another man, a Christian priest from Armenia, and he asked him where God was; and he replied that God was in Heaven and upon earth and pointed to him who was listening. And he said: "Let him go, for this man knows where God is."

In the Western sources Isma'il is called the *Sofi*, *Sufi* or *Soffi*, a name which is also applied to his successors. That *sufi* and *Safavi* were confused, in the way exemplified by the passage where Prieto della Valle, speaking of the Ardabil tombs, confuses the "Sofi" (Isma'il) with *Sufi* (al-din), would explain why the "surname" of the Safavid dynasty is not given in any other form. For Europeans, in fact, the *Sufis* are identical with the Safavid *tariqa*. This is the case even when a correct etymology and explanation of the word *sufi* are given in the texts, e.g., in Rota or in Don Juan of Persia, who denies [accurately] that it had any connection with that it had any connection with the term "sophist", or again in the remark of an English traveler to the effect that the King (Shah) of Persia would not be very pleased if he knew that in the West he was called the "Great Beggar". In any case, since those Western texts which mention the word *sufi* do not do so in order to stress its mystical connotation, the European interpretation of this term does not coincide fully with the local meaning, even if any hypothetical

confusion is taken into account. In Persia mystics are not normally called *sufi*, but the fact remains that contemporary Persian sources use the word to denote certain Safavid murids, and in particular, to cite one example, to denote the seven dervishes who accompanied Isma'il when he left Gilan and the reinforcements he subsequently received during the march from Lahijan to Tarum; later on the term was also used to denote those members of the Safavid confraternity who were intimates of the shah, i.e., the *Shahisvani*, especially those from the Shamlu, Rumlu and Qajar tribes.

This is most probably the reason why the term reached the West as nothing but a synonym for Qizilbash or Safavid. The Qizilbash Sufis provided the group from among which were chosen the various *khalifas* and the *khalifat al-khulafa*, i.e., the vicar-general of the *murshid-i kamil*, the sovereign and only effective head of the brotherhood. The heaviest burden of the rules of honorable conduct towards the sovereign fell on the *sufi*, and as late as the reign of Isma'il II a *sufi* who lied to his sovereign would be put to death. Abbas I used the term *na-sufi* (non-*sufi*) to denote misbehavior (1101/1192-1193) and called a betrayal in the year 1023/1614-1615 a *na-sufi-gari*. Under Abbas II and Sulaiman the Sufis met in a hall called the *ta'us-khana*, but gradually the importance of the category declined and some of the Sufis were engaged in the humblest occupations e.g., as sweepers, porters or executioners. At the time of its greatest splendor the Safavid confraternity granted to the *sufi* the religious privileges that it conferred upon its leaders: a morsel of their food had the virtues of *shafa'a* and the *khalifat al-khulafa* granted remission of sins in public meetings, beating the penitents with a stick in accordance with the customs and rites of the Anatolian Qizilbash and Bektashi communities which we have already mentioned. In this connection the report of an ambassador, Michele Membré, who visited the court of Shah Tahmasp on behalf of the Venetian Republic, contains a detailed account of the ceremony of public confession as practiced in 1540 and lays particular stress on details of a ritual character (the fact that



the sinners prostrated themselves when begging for remission and that they were publicly called upon to do so in a certain order) and on those of a cabalistic Hurufi nature (the stick representing the (Arabic) letter *alif* etc.)

In the religious career of Shah Isma'il we can discern a veritable parabola. Between the time when he left Gilan with the seven Sufis and his coronation at Tabriz he devoted himself with profound conviction to his mission as a new prophet-divinity; while the Qizilbash, against a background that was not only military and political but above all religious, represented the embryo of a new society that had still to be built up, and acted as a social element which, while accepting the new message, could provide the guarantees - necessary according to the Muslim way of thinking - that the declarations and appeals of the leader were genuine.

The official disavowal of this attempt came at Tabriz when Isma'il recited the khutba in the names of the Twelve Imams, thus declaring his support for the Twelver Shi'a in the traditional way of a sovereign, which even found a reflection (admittedly merely formal) in the tenuous reform of the *taj-i haidari*. This fact, however, does not appear to have had a decisive influence on the religious personality of Isma'il, who continued to regard himself as the elected one and as a conqueror, that is to say as the Imam of his day according to Qizilbash ideas, which obviously went beyond any Twelver definition of the term Imam.

The peak of his religious crisis may be historically placed after the defeat at Childiran, which Isma'il seems to have accepted as a test designed to confute his divine mission. After that a change became apparent in his policy, which perceptibly turned Iran toward the east, as contrasted with the 9<sup>th</sup>/15 century tradition which regarded it as an alternative to Ottoman domination. It was at this stage that the great betrayal became irreversible, in respect not only of the Qizilbash ideal, but more specifically of the members of the brotherhood conceived of as the supporting structure of that now vanished ideal. A vivid echo of the religious vicissitudes of Isma'il and

his followers can be found not so much in historical chronicles (e.g., the questionable events of 1512) as in the literary cycle revolving around certain Turkoman variants of the legend of Kir-oghlu, apparently a hero of the *jalali* type belonging to the Takkalu tribe, one of the most extreme among those making up the Qizilbash movement and also, partly for geographical reasons, one of the most susceptible to non-Islamic influences.

To a fundamentally Shi'i programme, based on the expectation of the Mahdi and the acknowledgement of the spiritual powers of the sovereign, were added various extremist elements of the Qarmato-Ismai'iliyya type, symbolised by communitarian ideas of the ideal State, reflecting perhaps an experience of the Sarbadar type. Despite the modifications of this legend to meet the circumstances (among the Uzbeks we find the extreme case of the hero being an enemy of the Qizilbash), everything seems to point here to a definitely Qizilbash conception of history - the key to which is provided by a Bulgarian variant in which it is definitely stated that Kir-oghlu was a Qizilbash - more especially as regards the hero - sovereign relationship. We have on the one hand Bektashi historical disengagement, which characterizes the hero as a member of the tariqa of 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib), the Mahdi etc, and on the other a trend towards a more perceptive description of the hero as a victim of the shah, for whom, although no longer a Messiah, the hero continues to fight. The figure of the sovereign is deliberately left vague; he is not a symbol of oppression and betrayal, these tasks being normally left to an emissary, but an accomplice and supporter of the anti-ideal pursued to the disadvantage of Kir-oghlu, who by definition is the shah's hero.

Another indication of Isma'il's religious compromise stands out in typically legalitarian aspect against the background of the more and more "orthodox" character of his virtual conversion to what was obviously Twelver Shi'ism, even though its first manifestation is not chronologically defined by our sources: namely the claim to the *siyada* which, explicit already in Isma'il and even more precisely asserted by his successors, was retroactively attributed to his

ancestors by the panegyrists and emendators of texts. On this point too, the Western, and particularly the Venetian, sources are helpful. We need only remember the first items of information recorded by Sanudo. Contemporary Eastern texts, when speaking of Isma'il, still tend to call him *shaikh-oghlu* or even *Ardabil-oghlu* (cf. the term *sheikh-avand* used to denote relatives of the sovereign), without normally referring to his title of *sayyid husaini*. And yet this claim, which had its period of incubation and partial realization in the years before the battle of Childiran, acquired in serving as a strongly anti-Qizilbash move the value of a well-planned political decision at a moment when the sovereign had given up his Imamate aspirations: his power was now supported by a new form of authority which, being more traditional, was endowed with sufficient legality to place a bond of obligation on the Shi'I Iranian aristocracy which had by now the privileged position formerly held by the Qizilbash." (327)

Notes the selection given above from the Diarii of the Venetian chronicler Marino Sanuto:

He took a Turk named Talisman and asked him where God was; and he replied that God was in Heaven, whereupon he (Shah Isma'il) caused the Turk to be cut in two. And then he took another man, a Christian priest from Armenia, and he asked him where God was; and he replied that God was in Heaven and upon earth and pointed to him who was listening. And he (Shah Isma'il) said: "Let him go, for this man knows where God is."

As we have noted in another part of this book, the philosopher Mortimer J. Adler once said that, though he was born into a Jewish family, he converted to Christianity because, of the three Abrahamic religions, only Christianity affirms that God is both transcendent and immanent.

Mortimer J. Adler is a philosopher of Aristotelian (or "Peripatetic") orientation, not an Islamic scholar nor a student of comparative religion. In fact, various sayings (*hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad vigorously affirm that God is immanent as well as transcendent. Likewise, Sufism and Shi'ism strongly emphasize that God is immanent as well as transcendent. As Shah Isma'il Safavi was a sufi and a Shi'a, he considered that denying God's Immanence - as did the Turk named Talisman - is a gross error and heresy. Thus, Shah Isma'il found the traditional Christian (though some Protestant sects - generally of Calvinist origin - deny God's Immanence, apparently unaware that by so doing they are denying their Christian identity) position on the question of the transcendence and immanence of God to be identical to his own.

## VII. TAHMASP AND ISMA'IL II

The history of this reciprocal granting of favors was repeated in a more decisive way under (Shah) Tahmasp, though with an irregular rhythm reflecting the religious involution of Isma'il's successors, and it culminated in the violent and systematic repression of the Qizilbash carried out by 'Abbas I. When the youthful Tahmasp ascended the throne, he was steeped in the spirit of his preceptors and advisers; thus, like his father, he inaugurated his reign along the lines of Qizilbash teaching and then renewed, in a minor key, the experiment of transition to the traditional forms of Twelver Shi'ism. Obviously Tahmasp was, so to speak, born a Twelver, and did not inherit from his father the pride in a mission to be accomplished by him as a prophet-Mahdi. But despite the conventional trappings with which he surrounded himself following his accession to the throne, his figure remained isolated amidst the orthodox Shi'I establishment, which only later succeeded in obtaining his complete surrender. This was due to a particular conception of sovereignty, still strictly bound up with Qizilbash religious demands - which it would be wrong, because only approximate, to describe as being autocratic - and determined by the ethnic-political trend towards a unified conception of the State-religion hendiadys, which still demanded renewal, reforms, and the elimination of old structures. In this respect, Tahmasp at first continued the anti-Ottoman policy, and it was precisely during the least Twelver phase of his reign - and perhaps not altogether by chance - that the religious aspect of Iran seems to have undergone an effortless change, with the result that Shi'ism acquired a greater degree of homogeneity. It seems legitimate to see in this grandiose phenomenon of conversion, not so much the abandonment of old systems or a break with juridical traditions, but rather a transition towards a new conception of the State, which was accepted because it clarified - or at any rate set out to clarify - the relationship between the sovereign and his subjects, and consequently between political praxis and Islam. This did not imply a reaffirmation of those divine attributes which Isma'il had specifically

renounced, since he had preferred a simple temporal investiture; but it did mean that there was a supreme idealisation of the temporal leader as a guarantor of the preparations for the blissful era of the Mahdi and also of the continuity of the Islamic past, as represented by the claim, from now on loudly proclaimed everywhere, that the sovereign belonged to the Ahl al-bait. And, at the same time, this could be considered the first actual manifestation of a nationalistic kind of claim, according to which regality was derived from the ancient rulers of Iran.

An analysis of the situation in Tabriz at three critical moments between 907/1501, the year of Isma'il's coronation, and 942/1535, the date of the reconquest of the city by Tahmasp after it had been occupied by Suleyman. Serves to validate our hypothesis of the conversion of Iran - or at least of the larger urban centers - to Twelver Shi'ism. In 907/1501 Tabriz was in a position similar to that of Kashan (see above), in the sense that there were neither Ja'fari texts, nor, consequently, juridical experts - a circumstance which is normally attributed to the predominance of Sunnism in the first Safavid capital. The sources do not record any drastic measures taken to remedy the situation, and this leads one to suppose that in Tabriz, as in Kashan, there was a slow evolution [poor choice of words!] from a type of Shafi'ism towards a stricter form of Ja'farism. In 920/1514, when Selim occupied Tabriz after the battle of Chaldiran, he did not deem it necessary to take any repressive measures, probably because to him the city appeared to be still Sunni (and this despite the fact that he had just ordered the massacre of 40,000 Anatolian Qizilbash). For the following twenty years, from this point of view, Tabriz has, as it were, no history. When Suleyman arrived in 142/1535, however, it would seem that the city had completely changed; in other words it had become Shi'i. Venetian sources tell us that many jabissaries went over to the other side and that the populace rose against the Ottoman foe and greeted the Shi'I Tahmasp as a liberator. The description of so oddly compliant - and yet complete - a conversion is confirmed by a passage in Menbre's

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report. There Tabriz is described as a typically Shi'i and almost "modern" city, where by "modern" we refer to

the "form" which characterizes any Shi'I Iranian city, distinguishing it from the towns of any other Islamic country, and which is not merely based on rituals such as the observance of Muharram or the public execration of the first (three) Caliphs. It is also based on certain religious factors inspired both by sentiment and by folklore which, as we shall see, acquired a canonical form in the days of Majlisi and were based on a whole set of examples of "coexistence" with the Twelve Imams, including prophecies, miracles, apparitions and dreams - all this in a setting which was halfway between the everyday life and the realm of myths. The modern originality of Persian Shi'ism has its roots here, and in this sense Tahmasp can serve as a symbol: after a beginning marked by his Qizilbash background he soon fell under the influence of the Shi'I 'ulama, the first notable occasion being his contacts, during the 1530s, with the sayyids of Uskuya near Tabriz. Although the influx of new contingents of immigrants from Anatolia continued throughout his reign (at Qazvin alone there were ten thousand new immigrants at the time of the sovereign's death, which would seem to indicate that Isma'il's betrayal had not taught them an effective lesson), the administrative framework shows signs of the arrival of this new component on the political scene, although its influence was obviously by no means undisputed. Tahmasp is thus the first modern Persian Shi'i about whom we have information drawn not only from oriental sources (including the significant and searching autobiography of the sovereign himself) but also from reports by Western observers among which that of Membre gives us a lucid account of the early period, while the better known work by d'Alessandri deals with the latter years of the monarch's reign. And as a conclusion to this theologico-sentimental edifice of which he was at once the champion and the victim, in his last years Tahmasp was seized with a veritable mania for conservation: it

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replaced his already languishing anti-Ottoman ardor and led him to cut himself off from the world and to waste time in commonplace activities that served as

palliatives to his suspicions and fears, rendered more acute by continual dreams which were his only guide whenever he had to make a public decision.

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We now present an overview of the spiritual and intellectual life of the Safavi period.

#### **SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS, PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN THE SAFAVID PERIOD.**

"The Safavid period is one of the outstanding epochs in the intellectual and spiritual history of Islamic Iran, although its artistic and political life is much better known to the outside world than what it created in the domains of Sufism, philosophy and theology. Particularly in *Hikmat* - that combination of philosophy and gnois which should be translated as *theosophy* (though it has nothing to do with the likes of Madame Blavatsky) rather than philosophy as currently understood in the Occident - the Safavid period is the apogee of a long development which reaches back to the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century and the introduction of new intellectual perspectives into Islamic civilization by Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi (al-Mursi). Likewise, in Sufism and the religious sciences the sudden flowering of activity in the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century is based on the important but little studied transformation that was taking place in Persia since the Mongol invasion.

Persia did not become Shi'ite through a sudden process. Ever since the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century Shi'ism was spreading in Persia through certain of the Sufi orders which were outwardly Sunni - that is, in their *madhhab* they followed one of the Sunni schools (of jurisprudence), usually the Shafi'i. But they were particularly devoted to 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) and even accepted *wilaya* (or **valayat**, in its Persian pronunciation), that is, the power of spiritual

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direction and initiation which Shi'ites believe was bestowed upon 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) by the Prophet of Islam (Muhammad). It was particularly this belief that made the transformation of Persia from a predominantly



Sunni land to a Shi'I one possible (there were other factors). The Shi'is consider Safi al-Din Ardabili, the founder of the Safavid order, as a Shi'i, whereas the research of modern historians has revealed him to be a Sunni. The same holds true of Shah Ni'mat-allah Vali, the founder of the Ni'matallahi order, which is the most widespread sufi order in contemporary Persia. In a sense both contentions are true depending on what we mean by shi'ism. If we mean the Shafi'I school or madggab, then these sufi orders such as the Safavi and Ni'matallahi were initially Sunni and later became Shi'i. If, however, by Shi'ism we mean the acceptance of the valayat of 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib), then in this sense these orders were inwardly Shi'I during this period and became also outwardly so during the Safavid era.

In any case, the role of Sufism in the spread of Shi'ism (as was also true in Muslim Spain, as we shall see in the following chapter) and preparation of the ground for the establishment of a Shi'I Persia with the Safavids remains basic both in the direct and active political role played by the Safavi order and in the religious and spiritual role of other orders such as the Kubraviyya and especially the Nurbakhshiyya, which more than any other order sought to bridge the gap between Sunnism and Shi'ism. Shaikh Muhammad Ibn 'Abd-Allah, entitled Nurbakhsh, who died in Ray (near Teheran) in 869/1464-1465, made indirect claims to being the Mahdi and sought to bring Sunnism and Shi'ism closer together through Sufism. His successors Faizbakhsh and Shah Baha' al-Din continued the movement in the same direction and finally became fully Shi'i. A celebrated member of this order, shaikh Shams al-Din Muhammad Lahiji, the author of the best-known commentary upon the Gulshan-I raz, a work which is a bible of Sufism in Persian, was thoroughly Shi'I while being an outstanding sufi. The story of his encounter with Shah Isma'il and the question posed to him by the shah as to why he alswy wore black, to which he replied

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that he was always mourning the tragic events of Karbala, is well known. And it indicates the complete transformation that had taken place within the Nurbakhshi order so that it became totally Shi'I in form. We observe the same process within the Ni'matallahi and Safavi orders. Bot Shah Ni'mat-Allah,

who came to Persia from Aleppo, and Shaikh Safi al-Din from Ardabil were at first Sufis of Sunni background such as the Shaziliyya and Qadiriyya brother hoods. But the inner belief in the valayat of 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) gradually transformed the outer form of the orders as well into thoroughly Shi'I organizantions, although the inward structure of these orders, being sufi, remained above the Sunni - Shi'I distinctions. The ni'matallahi order became Shi'I during the Safavid period itself, while the Safavi order began to show Shi'I tendencies with Junaid, who was attracted to the Musha'sha movement, and became fully Shi'I with Ali ibn Junaid. In all these cases, however, a similar process was occurring. Sufi orders with shi'I tendencies were inwardly transforming Persia from a predominantly Sunni to a predominantly Shi'I land (the same process occurred in Muslim Spain, as we shall see in the following chapter; how far this tendency went in al-Andalus is unknowable, but it influenced even the Mozarabs or Christians, and left an inprint on Spanish Catholicism which is very visible today. So, it is not outrageous to say that St. John of the Cross was influenced by Shi'ism and by the Shi'I Imams, especially Imam Hussein, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq, the 6<sup>th</sup> Imam, and Imam 'Ali Reza, the 8<sup>th</sup> Imam; to affirm the contrary would be absurd.) Sufi orders. Therefore, Sufism is the most important spiritual force to be reckoned with in studying the background of the Safavid period.

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As for the intellectual background of the Safavid era, there are also the theoretical and doctrinal aspect of Sufism, known as gnosis ('*irfan*), plays a fundamental role along with schools of philosophy and theology. The very rich intellectual life of the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries did not come into being from a vacuum. There was a long period of preparation from the time of Suhrawardi and Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi) to the advent of

the Safavid renaissance, a period which, although spanning nearly four centuries, remains the most obscure in the intellectual history of Persia. Yet without a knowledge of this period an understanding of Safavid intellectual life is impossible.

There are four major intellectual perspectives and schools of thought, all clearly defined in traditional Islamic learning, which gradually approach each other during the period leading to the Safavid revival: Peripatetic (*mushsha'i*) philosophy, illuminationist (*ishraqi*) theosophy, gnosis (*'irfan*) and theology (*kalam*). It is due to the gradual intermingling and synthesis of these schools that during the Safavid period the major intellectual figures are not only philosophers but also theologians or gnostics. The very appearance of vast syntheses such as those of Sadr al-Din Shirazi attest to the long period preceding the Safavid renaissance which made these all-comprehending metaphysical expositions possible.

The usual story of Islamic philosophy, according to which it was attacked by Ghazali and after an Indian summer in Andalusia disappears from Muslim lands, is disproven by the presence of the Safavid philosophers and metaphysicians themselves. The fact that they were able to expound philosophical and metaphysical doctrines and ideas matching in rigor and depth anything written before or after in traditional philosophy is itself proof of the continuity of Islamic philosophy after the attacks of Ghazali and Fakhr al-Din Razi. Actually, in the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century the mathematician and theologian, Nasr al-Din Tusi, who was also one of the foremost Islamic philosophers, revived the Peripatetic philosophy of Ibn Sina (or Avicenna), which had been attacked by both of the above-mentioned theologians,

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through his philosophical masterpiece the Sharh al-isharat, which is a reply to Razi's criticism of Ibn Sina's last philosophical testament, the Isharat wa'l-tanbihat. Henceforth, Persia continued to produce philosophers who followed upon Tusi's footsteps. His own students, Qutb al-Din Shirazi, author of the monumental philosophical opus Durrat al-taj in Persian, and Dabiran Katibi, author of the Hikmat al-'ain, continued the tradition immediately after him. In the 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> and

9<sup>th</sup>/15 centuries Qutb al-Din Razi and a whole group of philosophers who hailed from Shiraz and the surrounding regions also wrote important philosophical works. Among them Sadr al-Din Dashtaki and his son Ghiyas al-Din Mansur Dashtaki are particularly noteworthy. The latter, the author of Akhlaq-I Mansuri in ethics, a commentary upon the Hayakil al-nur of Suhravardi and glosses upon Tusi's commentary upon the Isharat, lived into the Safavid period and was very influential upon the major Safavid figures such as Sadr al-Din Shirazi, for who he has been mistaken by many traditional scholars as well as by some modern historians. Many of the cardinal themes of Safavid philosophy metaphysics may be found in the writings of Ghiyas al-Din Mansur and other figures of the period, not one of whom has by any means been studied sufficiently.

Even these philosophers, who were mostly Peripatetic, were influenced by the ishraqi theosophy of Suhravardi, especially in such questions as God's knowledge of things. After the founding of this new intellectual perspective by Suhravardi in the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century, its teachings spread particularly in Persia and became more and more integrated with Avicennan philosophy as seen in the case of Ghiyas al-Din Mansur and similar figures from the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century. And this ishraqi interpretation of Avicennan philosophy is one of the characteristics of the intellectual life of the Safavid period, as seen to an eminent degree in the case of the founder of the school of Isfahan, Mir Damad.

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There is also the basic question of gnosis to consider. The teachings of the founder of the doctrinal formulation of gnosis in Islam, Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi), spread throughout Persia rapidly, especially through the works and direct instruction of his pupil, Sadr al-Din Qunyavi. Henceforth nearly all the masters of Sufism in Persia, such as 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi)'s eminent commentator, Sa'd al-Din Hamuya, 'Aziz al-Din Nasafi and such famous poets as Fakhr al-Din 'Araqi, Auhad al-Din Kirmani and 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, were deeply influenced by the

gnostic teachings of Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi). Jami in fact wrote several commentaries upon Ibn 'Arabi's works as well as composing on the themes of gnosis independent treatises such as the Lava'ih nd Ashi'at al-lama'at.

Certain philosophers and theologians began to incorporate this form of teaching into their schools. Ibn Turka of Isfahan, the 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century author of Tambid al-qawa'id, was perhaps the first person who sought to combine *falsafa* and *'irfan*, i.e., philosophy and gnosis. In the following centuries this tendency was accelerated in the hands of a few Shi'I gnostics and sages such as Sayyid Haidar Amuli, author of Jami al-asrar, which is so deeply influential in Safavid writings, Ibn Abi Jumah, the author of Kitabal-mujli, which is again a doctrinal work of Shi'I gnosis, and Rajab Bursi, known especially for his Mashariq al-anwar. The importance of the work of these figures for the Safavid period can hardly be overemphasized, because it is they who integrated the sapiential doctrines of Ibn 'arabi (al-Mursi) into Shi'ism and prepared the ground within Shi'I intellectual life for those Safavid figures who achieved the synthesis between philosophy, theology and gnosis within the cadre of Twelver Shi'ism.

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As for theology or Kalam, in its Shi'I form it reached its peak in a certain sense with the Tajrid of Nasir al-Din Tusi. During the centuries preceding the Safavid period a very large number of commentaries and glosses were written upon it by Shi'I theologians while the Sunni theologians of Persia as Taftazani and Davani - at least in his early period - continued to develop the Ash'ary Kalam, which had reached its peak with Fakhr al-Din Razi. In fact, this outspoken theological opponent of the philosophers was also influential in many ways among Shi'I theologians and thinkers.

In this domain also gradually philosophy and theology began to approach each other. It is difficult to assert whether a particular work of Sayyid Sharif

Jurjani of Jalil al-Din Davani is more Kalam or Falsafa. Moreover, certain glosses and commentaries upon the Tajrid such as those of Fakhri and especially of Sammaki, who influenced Mir Damad, contain many of the themes that belong properly speaking to Hikmat and Falsafa and were adopted by the Safavid philosophers. The long series of commentaries upon the Tajrid, which has not been studied at all fully, is the source of many of the important elements of Safavid philosophy.

From this vast intellectual background there gradually emerged the tendency towards a synthesis of the different schools of Islamic thought within the background and matrix of Shi'ism, which became of its inner structure was more conducive to the growth of the traditional philosophy and theosophy which reached its full development in the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The advent of the Safavids, which resulted in Persia's becoming predominantly Shi'I, along temporal conditions such as peace and stability and the encouragement of the religious sciences, which in Shi'ism always include the intellectual sciences (*al-'ulum al-'aqliyya*), aided in bringing nearly four centuries of intellectual development to fruition. And so with such figures as Mir Damad and Sadr al-Din Shirazi, usually known as Mulla Sadra, an intellectual edifice which has its basis in the teachings of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Suhrawardi and Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi) and also upon the

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specific tenets of Shi'ism as found in the Qur'an and the traditions (*hadith*) of the Prophet (Muhammad) and the Imams reached its completion. A synthesis is created which reflects a millennium of Islamic intellectual life.

#### **THE REVIVAL OF RELIGIOUS LEARNING IN THE SAFAVID PERIOD**

For both religious and political reasons the Safavids sought from the very beginning of Shah Isma'il's reign to foster the study of Shi'ism and to encourage the migration of Shi'I scholars from other lands to Persia. Of scholars of non-Persian origin most were Arabs either of the Jabal 'Amila region in today's Lebanon and Syria or of Bahrain, which included in the

terminology of the day not only the island of Bahrain but the whole coastal region around it. There were so many Shi'I scholars from these two regions, which had been strongholds of Shi'I learning, that the two biographical works, Lu'lu' al-Bahrain by Yusuf ibn Ahmad al-Bahrani and Amal al-amil fi 'ulama Jabal Amil by Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Hurr al-'Amili, are devoted to the account of the scholars of Bahrain and Jabal 'Amila. Such men as Shaikh 'Ali ibn 'Abd al-'Ali Karki, Shaikh Baha' al-Din 'Amili, his father Shaikh Husain, a disciple of Shahid-I sani, abd Ni'mat-Allah Jaza'iri, all of Arab extraction, were some of the most famous of a large number of Shi'I scholars and theologians who were responsible for the major renaissance of Shi'I religious learning during the Safavid period.

It has often been said, even by such authorities as Browne and Qazvini, that the very emphasis upon religious and theological learning during the Safavid period stifled science and literature and even Sufism. This is only a half-truth which overlooks previous conditions and what was actually happening in these fields. The emphasis upon the study of the *Shari'a* (Islamic Law) and theology, while helping to unify Shi'I Persia, did not stifle activity in other domains until the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century, when a reaction against Sufism set in. As far as literature is concerned, it is true that this period did not produce another Hafiz or Sa'di, but such poets as Sa'ib

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Tabrizi, Kalim Kashani and Shaikh-I Baha'I (Baha' al-Din 'Amili) cannot be brushed aside as insignificant. Moreover, there are two types of poetry which reach a new mode of perfection at this time: the poetry dealing with the life, sufferings and virtues of the Shi'I Imams, which is particularly associated with the name of Muhtashan Kashani, and poems in which the doctrinal teachings of Sufism or gnosis, as well as theosophy, are set to Persian verse. In this latter case the Safavid period witnesses the interesting fact that most of the great philosophers and gnostics were also poets, some of commendable quality.

As for science, a decline had already set in in Islamic science with the Saljuqs (Turks), after which the mathematical sciences were revived by Nasir al-Din Tusi and his school at Maragha. The early Safavid period

continued this tradition of mathematics and astronomy, whose center of study in the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century was Herat. Only in the following century did the study of mathematics begin to decline in the *madrasas*. As for medicine and pharmacology, this period, far from being one of decline, produced outstanding figures like Baha' al-Da'ula to the extent that some have called it the golden age of pharmacology.

The case of Sufism is somewhat more complex. During the early Safavid period Sufism flourished spiritually and even politically, until, due to the danger of a Qizilbash uprising and a certain mundaneness which had penetrated into some sufi orders possessing worldly powers, a religious and theological reaction set in against Sufism as seen in the figure of the second Majlisi. But many of the earlier religious scholars and theologians like the first Majlisi and Shaikh-I Baha'I were either Sufis or sympathetic towards Sufism. Moreover, it was because and not in spite of the spread of Shi'I religious learning that the type of metaphysical and theosophical doctrine associated with Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra became current. Such forms of thought would have been inconceivable without the Shi'I climate established by the Safavids. Even the Shi'I 'ulama opposed the *mutasawwifa* in late Safavid times, 'irfan or gnosis continued to be taught and studied within the

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traditional Shi'I madrasa system itself, in which milieu it survives to this day in Persia. Those who know most in Persia even today about Islamic philosophy and even the "theology of Aristotle", or in other words Plotinus, wear the turban and belong to the class of religious scholars; they are not "free thinkers" who are *hakims* in spite of being Shi'I divines. The establishment of centers of religious learning by the Safavids and the emphasis placed upon Shari'I and theological learning undoubtedly diverted much of the energy of the intelligentsia to these fields and indirectly diminished activity in other fields. Not only did it not destroy the intellectual sciences, however, but it was an essential factor in making possible the appearance of the vast metaphysical synthesis for which the Safavid period is known.



## SUFISM IN THE SAFAVID PERIOD

The major sufi orders of the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century such as the Nurbakhshi, Ni'matallahi and Qadiri, not to speak of the Safaviyya themselves, continued into the Safavid period and flourished into the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century. Naturally most of these orders acquired a purely Shi'I color and centered most of all around the Eighth Shi'I Imam, 'Ali al-Rida (generally known in Persian as "Imam 'Ali Reza"), who is the "Imam of initiation" in Shi'ism and to whom most sufi orders in the Shi'I and Sunni world are attached through Ma'ruf al-Karkhi. [As we shall note below, it is virtually certain that the mother of Imam 'Ali Reza, the 8<sup>th</sup> Imam, was an Hispano-Muslim, and of Hispanic, i.e., of Iberian, Celtic and Visigothic origin rather than of Arab or Berber descent; in other words, the mother of Imam 'Ali Reza, the 8<sup>th</sup> Imam, was as Spanish or as much a Spaniard as St. John of the Cross.] Many eminent sufi masters of the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century in fact lived at or near Mashhad, as we see in the case of Muhammad al-Junushani, 'Imad al-Din Fazl-Allah Mashhadi and Kamal al-Din Khwarazmi, all spiritual descendants of 'Ali Hamadani. All these masters expressed a special devotion to Imam Rida (Or Imam 'Ali Reza). Likewise the masters of the Ni'matallahi order, such as some of the actual

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descendants of Shah Ni'mat-allah from whom most of the present-day orders in Persia derive, were thoroughly Shi'I, although here the order was attached most of all to 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) himself.

A sufi order which to this day considers itself as the purest Shi'I sufi order, the Zahabi, was also active during the early Safavid period. The Zahabis, like most other Shi'I sufi orders, believe that even before the advent of the Safavids the basic chains (*silsila*) of Sufis were Shi'I but hid their Shi'ism through the process of concealment (*taqiyya*) [the same was certainly true in Muslim Spain]. The Zahabis claim that only with the advent of the Safavids did the necessity for *taqiyya* subside so that the orders were able to declare themselves openly Shi'I in Persia. Among all the orders the Zahabis consider themselves as being the most intensely Shi'I, and being especially devoted to Imam Rida (Imam 'Ali Reza) they add the title *razaniyya* to

the name of their silsila.

An outstanding example of a sufi work belonging to the Safavid period and typical of a Shi'I sufi order in its new setting is the Tuhfat al-'abbasiyya of the Zahabi master, Muhammad 'ali Sabzavari, a contemporary of Shah Abbas II and, interestingly enough, the *mu'adhdhin* (he who calls the prayers) of the mausoleum of Imam Rida (Imam 'Ali Reza) at Mashhad. The work consists of an introduction, five chapters, twelve sections and a conclusion. The titles of the chapters and sections are as follows:

Chapter I - On the meaning of *tasavvuf* and *sufi*, why there are few Sufis, why they are called so and the signs and characteristics pertaining to them.

Chapter II - On the beliefs of Sufis in unity (*tauhid*).

Chapter III - On the beliefs of sufis in prophecy (*nubuvvat*) and imamate (*imamat*).

Chapter IV - On the beliefs of sufis concerning eschatology (*ma'ad*).

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Chapter V - On the dependence of the sufis upon the Shi'I Imams.

Section I - On the virtue of knowledge.

Section II - On continence and asceticism.

Section III - On silence.

Section IV - On hunger and wakefulness.

Section V - On self-seclusion.

Section VI - On invocation.

Section VII - On reliance upon God.

Section VIII - On contentment and surrender.

Section IX - On worshipping for forty days.

Section X - On hearing pleasing musi and on that all pleasant music is not the siging that is scorned in the Shari'a.

Section XI - On ecstasy and swoon.

Section XII - On the necessity of having a spiritual master, and the regulations pertaining to the master and the disciple.

Conclusion - On the sayings of the sufis concerning different subjects.

An examination of the contents of this work reveals that it deals very much with the same subjects as one finds in the classical treatisies of Sufism such as the Kitab al-luma', Risala qushairiyya and Ilya' 'ulum al-din. The only difference that can be discerned is in its relating the chain of Sufism to the Shi'I Imams and in its relying not only upon the Qur'an bit also upon the Prophetic *Hadith* and traditions of the Imams drawn from Shi'I sources, whereas sufi works within the Sunni world are based upon the Qur'an and

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Prophetic Hadith mostly of the *sihah* literature. As for the role of the Imams, this is a major point that distinguishes Sufism in its Shi'I and Sunni settings. In the chain of nearly all the orders that re widely spread in theSunni world such as the Shaziliyya and Qadiriyya the Shi'I Imams up to Imam Rida (Imam 'Ali Reza) appear as saints and spiritual poles (*qutb*), but not as Imams as this term is understood specifically in Shi'ism. In shi'i sufi orders the presence of the same figures is seen as proof of the reliance of Sufism upon the Imams, as the fifth chapter of the Tuhfat al-'abbasiyya demonstrates in a typical manner.

Besides the type of Sufism represented by the Zahabi and other regular orders during the Safavid period, there are two other kinds of Islamic esoterism to consider: the first is the case of those like Mir Abu'l-Qasim Findirski (no, he was NOT Polish or Russian) and Baha' al-Din 'Amili, who were definitely sufis and are recognized as such by the sufi orders, but whose initiatic chain and spiritual master are not known; the

second is the case of gnostics like Sadr al-Din Shirazi who definitely possessed esoteric knowledge usually in the form of Hikmat - which also implies means of attaining this knowledge - but who did not belong, at least outwardly, to any sufi orders, so that the means whereby they acquired this gnostic knowledge remains problematic. Mulla Sadra, while being a thorough gnostic like Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi), wrote his Kasr al-asnam al-jahiliyya against those in his times who pretended to belong to Sufism and whom he calls *mutasaavvif*, using this term in the particular context of his time and not as it has been employed throughout the history of Sufism.

In fact, what we observe during the Safavid period is that as the sufi orders become more popular and acquire in certain cases a worldly character, a reaction sets in against them from the quarter of the religious scholars. Henceforth within the class of the 'ulama it is no longer socially acceptable to belong openly to one of the well known sufi orders so that the esoteric instruction is imparted without any outwardly declared sufi organization. Moreover, the term 'irfan, or gnosis, is employed with respect in

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place of tasavvuf, which from the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> centuries falls into disrepute in the circles of exoteric authorities of the religion. That is why, while Baha' al-Din 'Amili practised Sufism openly, Qazi Sa'id Qumi, whom a contemporary authority has called the Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi) of Shi'ism, refers constantly to 'irfan, but never claims to be a sufi in the usual sense that is found within the *turuq*, although without doubt that he was a sufi. To this whole situation must be added the initiatic role of the Twelfth Imam for the elite of Shi'ism in general, and the fact that the whole structure of Shi'ism possesses a more esoteric character than we find in the exoteric side of Sunnism. This fact made it possible for the esoteric ideas to appear even in certain exoteric aspects of Shi'ism.

As a result, the Safavid period presents us with not only the regular sufi masters of the well known orders, but also with gnostics and sufis of the highest spiritual rank whose initiatic affiliation is difficult to discern. Moreover, the gnostic dimension of Islam penetrates at this time into philosophy and theosophy or

Hikmat, and most of the important figures of this era are thinkers with the highest powers of ratiocination and with respect for logic while at the same time seers with spiritual vision and illuminations. It is hardly possible to separate philosophy, theosophy and gnosis completely in this period

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**OUTSTANDING INTELLTUAL AND SPIRITUAL FIGURES OF  
THE SAFAVID PERIOD**

*Shaikh Baha' al-Din 'Amili*

From the point of view of versatility, Baha' al-Din 'Amili, known to the Persians as Shaikh-I Baha'I (the name is quite unconnected with the heterorthodox Baha'I sect which finally broke away from Islam), is the most remarkable figure of the Safavid renaissance. Born in Ba'albakk in present day Lebanon in 953/1546, the son of the leader of the Shi'I community of that region, Shaikh Baha' al-Din was brought to Persia by his father at the age of thirteen and soon mastered the Persian language to such an extent that he is usually considered the best Persian poet of the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century. He studied in Qazvin, then a center of Shi'I learning, and in Herat, where he mastered mathematics. His most famous teachers were his own father, 'Izz al-Din Husain ibn 'Abd al-Samad, and Maulana 'abd-Allah Yazdi, the author of the celebrated glosses upon the *tahdhib* in logic, which is studied to this day in Persian madrasas under the title of Hashiyya-yi Mulla

'Abd-Allah. He also studied medicine with Hakim 'Imad al-Din Mahmud. After a period of travelling in Persia and pilgrimages to Mecca, Shaikh-I Baha'I settled in Isfahan, where he gained the title of Shaikh al-Islam and where, during the reign of Shah Abbas, he became the most powerful shi'I figure in Persia. He died in 1030/1621 and is buried in Mashhad near the tomb of Imam Rida (or Imam Reza, he of the Spanish mother). His beautiful mausoleum is visited by thousands of pilgrims to this day.

The many-sided genius of Shaikh-I Baha'I is best illustrated by the diversity of his works, nearly all of which have become authoritative in their own domain. These works include: in the field of Qur'an and Hadith, Arba'un hadithan, a collection of forty prophetic traditions with commentary glosses upon the *Tafsir* of Baidawi, Hall al-buruf al-Qur'an on the opening letters of some of the chapters of the Qur'an, 'Urwat al-wuthqa, a commentary upon the Qur'an, and Wajiza, also known as Dirayat al-hadith, on the science of Hadith; in

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the field of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology, and specifically Shi'I studies, Ithna'ashariyyat in five parts on the Muslim religious rites, Jami-I 'abbasi, the most famous Persian work on Shi'I fiqh, Habl al-matin on the injunctions (*ahkam*) of religion, Hada'iq al-salihin, a commentary on the Sahifa sajjadiyya of the Fourth shi'I Imam, Miftah al-falah, on daily litanies and prayers, and a treatise on the necessity to perform the daily prayers (*salat*); in the sciences of language, Asrar al-balagha on rhetoric, Tahdhib al-bayan on Arabic grammar still very much in use in Persia today; dozens of works on various branches of mathematics such as Tashrih al-aflak on astronomy, Khulasat al-hisab, the most famous Muslim mathematical treatise of the last few centuries, and glosses on Chaghmini's astronomical treatise; several treatises on the occult sciences now lost; and many works on Sufism of which the most famous is the Kashkul ("The Begging Bowl"), which as the title indicates contains like the begging bowl of the dervishes into which bits of food were thrown, selections from masterpieces of sufi literature. His poems also, such as the *masnavis* Tuti-nama, Nan wa halva and Shir va shikar, which are written in the style of Jalal al-Din Rumi's Masnavi, all deal with Sufism.

Altogether nearly ninety works are known to have been written by him concerning nearly every domain of the Islamic sciences from mathematics to gnosis, from astronomy to theology.

But the works of Shaikh-i Baha'i include, besides these writings, buildings and gardens which have helped leave such a vivid memory of this figure in the minds of the people of Isfahan and surrounding regions to this day. Shaikh-I Baha'I was an accomplished architect and helped in drawing the plans for the Shah mosque in Isfahan, which is among the masterpieces of Islamic art. He built a bath house based on the orak abd secret knowledge of masonry an architecture which he undoubtedly possessed, a bath which according to many witnesses had hot water with only a candle vurning underneath its water tank. The bath was destroyed about forty years ago. He designed the plans for the beautiful Fin Garden of Kashan, which served as a model for the more famous Shalimar Gardeb of Lahore. In yet

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another field, he calculated the proportion of water of the Zayandarud to be distributed to each piece of land on the river's course to Isfahan, a work which is called the Tumar-I Shaikh-I Baha'i. This involves a very complicated mathematical problem, which he solved so well that over three and a half centuries later his method is still used and only after the projected dam on theriver is finished will his division of its waters no longer be applicable.

Shaikh-I Baha'I is the last eminent representative of the Muslim hakim in the sense of being the master of all the traditional sciences. He was also one of the last eminent representatives of the class of 'ulama who were outstanding mathematicians and who did not feel it below their dignity to take an astrolabe and make actual observations or measurements. After him, with only a few exceptions, the 'ulama ceased to be interested in the mathematical sceinces, with the result that the teaching of these sciences deteriorated rapidly in the madrasas.

Shaikh-i Baha'i was an authority in both the exoteric and esoteric aspects of Islam. He hardly hid his Sufism and frequented sufi gatherings openly. His Tuti-nama contains some of the most eloquent and frank expositions of Sufism in Persian verse. His Sufism also possessed a popular aspect without itself being in any

way devoid of intellectual content or the awareness that belongs only to the elite (*khavass*) among the sufis, But in the sense that the highest is reflected in the lowest, his sublime sufi message was propagated within the popular strata of Sufism and even in fact among the populace in general. To this day many storytellers (*naggals*) in the traditional tea houses chant his poetry, while his theological and juridical works are read by advanced religious students in the madrasas. Also his prowess and competence as mathematician of the Pythagorean kind and fame as an alchemist have left their mark on the popular conception held of him. He is an eminent representative of the sufi sciences of which Islamic history has produced many examples.

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In traditional theosophy or *Hikmat* Shaikh-i Baha'i does not reach the level of Mir Damad, his contemporary and close friend, or Mulla Sadra, his student. But his contributions to Shi'I law and theology, mathematics and Sufism are sufficient to make him one of the leading lights of the Safavid period. He is one of the figures most responsible for the rapid spread of Shi'I learning in 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century Persia and a person who, more than any other figure of his day, sought to display the harmony between the law and the way, the *Shari'a* and the *Tariqa*, which comprise the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam.

Most of the well known scholars who came to Isfahan were students of Shaikh-i Baha'i: men such as Mulla Muhammad Taqi Majlisi, , Sayyid Ahmad 'Alavi, Sadr al-Din Shirazi and Mulla Muhsin Faiz Kashani. Over thirty of his students, many of whom also studied with Mir Damad, became well known figures themselves, spreading in yet another way the influence of their teacher. Through all these channels, that is, his writings, monuments and students, Shaikh-i Baha'i was able to exercise widespread influence throughout nearly all classes of Persian society. There is no other figure of the Safavid period who became so well known to the elite and the common people alike and who left such a deep mark as a national and almost mythological hero upon the people of Persia.



### Mir Damad

Mir Muhammad Baqir Damad Husaini, entitled *Sayyid al-hukama'* and *Sayyid al-falasifa*, is the real founder and central figure of the theosophical and philosophical school which has now come to be known as the School of Isfahan. As the person who established and classified the traditional sciences in the new Shi'i setting of safavid Persia, as Aristotle had done in Athens and Farabi in the newly born Islamic civilization as a whole, Mir Damad has been honored with the further title of the "Third Teacher" (*mu'allim-i salis*) following Aristotle and Farabi, the First and the Second Teachers. As for the title *Damad* ("son-in-law"), it refers to the fact that his father was the son-in-law of Shaikh 'Ali 'Abd al-'Ali Karki,

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the celebrated Shi'i scholar of the early Safavid period. Mir Damad also composed fine poetry under the pen name *Ishraq*, by which he is known in the annals of literary history. But the appellation also has a philosophical significance in that it demonstrates openly his attachment to *ishraqi* theosophy.

The date of Mir Damad's birth has not been determined with certainty: that given in the glosses upon the *Nakhsbat al-'iqal* of Sayyid Jamal al-Din Husain Burujirdi in 969/1561-1562, and appears as fairly likely considering the date of his death and the approximate span of his life, which are known. His education was carried out mostly in Mashhad, and possibly Arak, and his best known teachers were Shaikh 'Izz al-Din Husain ibn 'Abd al-Samad, the father of Shaikh-i Baha'i, and Mir Fakhr al-Din Sammaki, who taught him the intellectual sciences (*al-'ulum al-'aqliyya*). Mir Damad travelled several times within Persia to Qazvin, Kashan and Mashhad and accompanied Shah Safi to Iraq, where he died in 1040/1630-1631; he was buried in Najaf near the mausoleum of 'Ali, and his tomb is venerated to this day.

It was possible for Mir Damad to revive the intellectual sciences and especially *Hikmat* because of his special gift in these sciences, added to the remarkable respect and authority in which he was held among the jurists and theologians as well as with the king. He lived an extremely pious life and is said to have read half of the Qur'an every night. Many of his

poems are dedications to the Prophet and 'Ali, such as the following quatrain in praise of the Prophet of Islam:

O Seal of Prophecy! The two worlds belong to Thee.  
The heavens, one is thy pulpit and nine thy pedestal.  
There would be no wonder is Thou didst not cast a shadow,  
For Thou art light and the sun is itself Thy shadow.

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In his Persian work, the *Jazavat*, he begins with a poem dedicated to 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) in which he sings:

O herald of the nation and soul of the Prophet,  
The ring of thy knowledge surrounds the ears of the intelligences.  
O Thou in whom the book of existence terminates,  
To whom the account of creation refers,  
The glorified treasure of the revelation,  
Thou art the holy interpreter of its secrets.

The intensity of religious fervor in Mir Damad was too great to permit his being criticized in any quarter for having revived Hikmat and the wisdom of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Suhrawardi. To this element must be added the abstruseness of his writings which veiled their meaning from the eyes of the uninitiated and helped establish the banner of Hikmat firmly, without any opposition from the 'ulama. No Muslim philosopher or sage has ever written works in such a difficult style and complicated phraseology, which makes access to his works well nigh impossible for all, save for those with a sound training in the tradition of Islamic philosophy and the aid of the oral instructions which accompany the texts. The difficulty of Mir Damad's works is such that many stories have been told about him and it is even said that, during the first night in the grave, when the angels asked him concerning his beliefs he gave an answer that was so difficult that even they did not understand it and so went to God in search of help. The

anecdote continues by mentioning the fact that even God did not comprehend Mir Damad's sayings but allowed him nevertheless to enter Paradise because he was a virtuous man.

About fifty works of Mir Damad are known, of which most are in Arabic and a few, including his collection of poems, are in Persian. [We see that Mir Damad, like so many others, preferred to write his verse in his native tongue, rather than in an acquired language.] These include works on theology and jurisprudence, Qur'anic commentary and other religious sciences, and especially Hikmat, which is the subject of most of his writings.

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The most celebrated of these are Al-Ufuq al-mubin, Al-Sirat al-Mustaqim, Qabasat, which is possibly his most important opus, Taqwim al-Imam, and Taqdisat, all in Arabic, and Jazavat and Sidrat al-Muntaha in Persian. The lattermost work may have been completed or even written by his student Sayyid Ahmad 'Alavi, although in the Jazavat Mir Damad mentions it as one of his own writings. He also wrote commentaries upon the works of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Nasir al-Din Tusi, and the collection of Persian and Arabic poems, Mashariq al-Anvar.

Mir Damad revived Avicennan Philosophy in Ishraqi dress. He may be considered as an ishraqi interpreter of Avicennan metaphysics in the spiritual universe of Shi'ism. But his interpretation is very far from the rationalistic Avicennanism of which the Occident is acquainted through the interpretation of medieval Latin scholastics. In fact, in a conscious manner Mir Damad distinguishes between Yamani and Yunani (Greek) philosophy, the first of which he associates with wisdom derived from revelation and illumination and the second with rationalistic knowledge. The "Yamani" here refers to the symbolism of the right side (*yamin*) of the valley when Moses heard the revelation of God. The right side or the east is therefore symbolically the source of illumination and revelation, of light and spirituality, and the left side or the occident, in accordance with the well known symbolism of ishraqi theosophy, the source of darkness or of purely discursive and rationalistic knowledge. The school of Hikmat thus established by Mir Damad, very far from being a

continuation of Muslim Peritatic philosophy as it came to be known in the West, was a school in which illumination was combined with ratiocination and where the Avicennan metaphysics was transformed from an abstract system of thought to a concrete spiritual reality which became the object of spiritual vision and realization.

Nowhere is this better seen than in the two works of Mir Damad which record two different spiritual visions he had, the first in Ramadan 1011/1603 and the second twelve years later in the middle of Sha'ban 1023/1614. The first, which occurred in a mosque in the

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city of Qum after the afternoon prayers, involved a theophanic vision of the Prophet and his five Companions, Abu Dharr, Salman, Miqdad, Hudaifa and 'Ammar - who are so important for Shi'ism - the Twelve Imams and a host of angels. These figures of light appeared to Mir Damad with such intensity that he wrote that he would have a nostalgia for the vision of this spiritual universe until the Day of Judgement.

The second vision, which took place twelve years later in Isfahan, came directly from the practice of invocation (*dhikr*) in a spiritual retreat (*khalwa*). As Mir Damad himself accounts in his Risalat al-Khaliyya al-Qudsiyya al-Malakutiyya, the vision came when he was invoking the two Divine Names, *al-Ghani* and *al-Mughni*. Suddenly he was taken on the wings of the spirit to the spiritual world where he was given a vision of the spiritual hierarchies [reminds one of Dante in Il Paradiso, third part of the La Divina Commedia.] and the various superior states of being. In a most dramatic fashion the vision involved an actualization of the Avicennan metaphysics and cosmology from what appears as an abstract scheme in Peritatic philosophy to a concrete reality - in accordance with all true metaphysics, which deals not with theory in the modern sense but with *theoria*, or intellectual and spiritual vision in its original Greek sense. Moreover, the vision took place on the eve of the birthday of the Twelfth Imam, on a night which according to Shi'i sources is the second most sacred night in the Islamic calendar after the *lailat al-qadr* or the night of power. It is a night when spiritual influences descend upon man and when this very descent or deployment of grace (*faid*) makes

possible the spiritual ascent described by Mir Damad.  
[Once again, one is reminded of Dante in Il Paradiso.]

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The two experiences described by Mir Damad himself are the only witnesses we possess to the spiritual side of his life, a life which was otherwise immersed in religious and philosophical activity. But the very fact that he was able to experience such visions proves the constant presence of a spiritual life and a practice which is the same as Sufism in its most universal manifestation. There is nothing closer to sufi spiritual practices than the dhikr and the khalwa. This may appear strange in a sage who was especially known for his powers of ratiocination and logic and who was such an authority in the exoteric sciences. But one of the characteristics of later Persian theosophy is precisely the fact that philosophy and rational thought are tied to spiritual practices and illumination, and metaphysics becomes not the result of rational thought alone but the fruit of vision of the superior world.

An element that characterizes the works of Mir Damad is his concern with time and the relation between change and permanence, or the eternal and the created (*qidam* and *huduth*). This problem has occupied Muslim theologians and philosophers from the beginning and many solutions have been presented for it, although it cannot be solved through rational thought but only through the *coincidentia oppositorum* made possible through metaphysics and gnosis. Mir Damad is well known as the author of a novel view on this subject called *hudus-i dabri*. He distinguishes three realms of being which are as follows : *Sarmad*, or eternity, refers to that reality which does not change, or more exactly to the relation between the changing and the changeless. This concerns the Divine Essence and the Divine Names and Qualities, which are the self-determination of the Essence and themselves immutable. Below this world,

which alone is absolutely eternal, stands *dahr* or the world which relates the immutable to the changing. The world is created not directly by the Essence but through the immutable archetypes or "lords of the species" (*arbab al-Anva*) and *dahr* represents precisely this relationship between these immutable archetypes [the Platonic forms] and the changing world. [Note that those thinkers of the School of Isfahan are the most implacable enemies of that intellectual and spiritual

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poison known as Nominalism.] Below *dahr* stands time (*zaman*), which represents the relation between changing things. The world was not created in time in the sense that there was first a time and then an event called creation which took place in it. This would be *hudus-i zamani* which Mir Damad rejects. Rather, according to him this world was brought into being through the archetypes and with respect to *dahr* which stands above *zaman*. Creation is therefore *hudus-i dahri*; it is *ibda* and *ikhtira*, not *takwin*.

This theme is amply treated by Mir Damad in all its ramifications and he comes back to it again and again in his books. His works in fact are not divided into the classical four sections of metaphysics (*ilahiyat*), natural philosophy (*tabi'iyat*), mathematics (*riyaziyyat*), and logic (*mantiq*) that we find in the well known works of Islamic philosophy such as the *Shifa* and *Najat* of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) or the Persian *Durrat al-Taj* of Qutb al-Din Shirazi. Rather, they treat different themes of metaphysics and philosophy whose axis remains the problem of the relation between time and eternity. Altogether these works show a Suhrawardian interpretation of Avicennan philosophy in the matrix of Shi'ism, in which the most rigorous Peripatetic logic is combined with a Pythagorean interest in number and harmony and an ishraqi attraction to the illuminative aspect of the angelic world. These are elements that were instrumental in establishing the School of Isfahan, which Mir Damad more than any other figure helped bring into being and which found its culmination in his disciples and students.

Of the intellectual progeny of Mir Damad the most important is Mulla Sadra, whom Mir Damad held in the greatest esteem and to whom we shall turn shortly. But there are a host of others such as Sayyid Ahmad 'Alavi

who became Mir Damad's son-in-law and is known for his commentary upon the Shifa of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and works which elucidate the thought of his master. One must also mention Mulla Khalil Qazvini, a most respected scholar of his day, who has left one of the best known commentaries upon the Usul al-Kafi of Kulaini, Zalali Khunsari, one of the well known poets

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of the Safavid period, Qutb al-Din Ashkivari, the author of the monumental history of philosophy in Persian called Mahbub al-Qulub, which remains unedited to this day, and lesser known figures such as Ahmad ibn Zain al-'Abidin 'Alavi 'Amili Jili and Mirza Muhammad Qasim ibn Muhammad 'Abbas Jilani. One must mention also particularly Mulla Shamsa Gilani (died 1098/1686-1687), who continued the school of Mir Damad, writing a treatise on the problem of the creation of the world, about which he also corresponded with Mulla Sadra, and commenting upon the Qabasat of Mir Damad. The combination of Avicennan and ishraqi elements seen in Mir Damad is very much present in his work and he is among the most faithful propagators of his master's teachings.

*Mir Abu'l-Qasim Findirski*

A contemporary and close friend of both Mir Damad and Shaikh-I Baha'i, Mir Findirski is much less known and less studied and remains to this day the most mysterious intellectual figure of the Safavid period. In his lifetime he was considered, along with Mir Damad and Shaikh-i Baha'i, as one of the great masters of Isfahan and was highly revered in religious circles as well as at court. He lived a life of simplicity and asceticism and was a practicing sufi whose person alive can be compared in every way with those of the well known classical masters of Sufism. He travelled to India frequently and was highly revered by Hindu Yogis and Muslim sages alike. He is said to have journeyed often, but he also lived in Isfahan for a considerable portion of his life and taught philosophy, mathematics and medicine in that city. Because of his sufi practices and esoteric knowledge Mir Findirski came to be credited with miracles such as being in two places at once and travelling great distances instantaneously. The very

attribution of these accounts to him is of the greatest interest in understanding his personality. Even after his death his reputation would not leave him alone, for when he died in 1050/1640-1641 in Isfahan he was buried in the famous Takht-i Fulad cemetery, not in a regular grave, but in one which is surrounded within

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the earth by a metal case. Since he was celebrated as an alchemist, people were afraid that his grave would be dug up by those who sought the philosopher's stone and who would violate the sanctity of his grave in quest of physical gold.

Mir Findirski wrote little. His extant works include the monumental commentary in Persian upon the Yoga Vasishtha which had been rendered into Persian by Nizam al-Din Panipati and which is one of the major works in Persian on Hinduism, a treatise on motion (Risalat al-Baraka), another on sociology from the traditional metaphysical point of view (Risala Sana'iyya) and the Usul al-Fusul on Hindu wisdom. Recently his treatise on alchemy, in Persian, has also been discovered in a manuscript acquired by the Library of the Faculty of Letters of Tehran University. But his most famous work is a *qasida* which summarises the principles of Hikmat in verses of great beauty, showing Mr Findirski to be an accomplished poet like Mir Damad and Shaikh-i Baha'i. The poem begins with the verses:

Heaven with these stars is clear, pleasing and beautiful.

Whatever is there above has below it a form.

The form below, if by the ladder of gnosis

Is trodden upward, becomes the same as its principle,

And continues to discuss the most essential aspects of Hikmat. It has been for this reason commented upon by several later hakims such as Muhammad Salih Khalkhali and Hakim 'Abbas Darabi. It is also highly regarded by most of the contemporary masters of Hikmat in Persia.

Many later authorities believe that Mulla Sadra studied with Mir Findirski and learned the particular features of his doctrine such as trans-substantial motion and belief in the "imaginal world" from him. This is impossible to deny categorically, for there may have



been an oral instruction imparted, but what remains of the written works of Mir Findirski reveals that in philosophy he was a faithful follower of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and specifically denied trans-substantial motion (*al-Harakat al-Jauhariyya*) and the

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archetypal world in his particularly philosophical works. Moreover, all of his students except Mulla Sadra - if we do accept that Mulla Sadra studied with Mir Findirski - were more or less Avicennan. Yet his *qasida* affirms the reality of the archetypal world and reveals Mir Findirski as a sufi pure and simple. One must therefore say that Mir Findirski, while a master of Peripatetic philosophy and the sciences such as medicine and mathematics, in all of which he taught the classical works such as the *Shifa'* and *Qanun*, was a practicing sufi and gnostic who was also well versed in the occult sciences such as alchemy and, in addition, Hindu metaphysics. He is yet another of the remarkable intellectual figures of the Safavid period who were masters of several disciplines and expositors of different planes of knowledge.

Mir Findirski trained many students, some of whom became well known figures. These include Mulla Rafi'a Gilani (died 1082/1671-1672), the commentator upon the *Usul al-Kafi*, Mulla Muhammad Baqir Sabzavari (died 1098 or 1099/1686-1687), author of several important works on jurisprudence such as the *Kifaya* and the glosses upon the *Isharat wa'l-Tambihat* and *Shifa'* of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Aqa Husain Khunsaru (died 1080/1669-1670), who was one of the greatest Shi'i scholars of his day and wrote *Mashariq al-Nufus* on jurisprudence and also glosses upon the *Shifa'* and *Isharat*. ("Key to Paradise") on eschatology, was opposed to Mulla Sadra and did not accept his views concerning trans-substantial motion and the union of the knower and the known. Also, opposed to the great majority of Muslim philosophers, he had nominalistic tendencies and considered being (*wujud*) to be shared only nominally by existing things without its corresponding to an objective reality. He taught the books of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and trained many well known students, including Qazi Sa'id Qumi and Muhammad Rafi' Pirzada, who under the direction of his master composed *Al-Ma'arif al-Ilahiyya*, assembling therein the lessons

given by Mulla Rajab 'Ali.

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*Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra)*

The philosophical and theosophical movement of the Safavid period reaches its climax with Sadr al-Din shirazi, known as Mulla Sadra or Sadr al-Muta'allihin ("the foremost among the theosophers"), whom many Persians consider as the greatest Muslim thinker in the domain of metaphysics. His influence has been immense ever since his death and he has in fact dominated the intellectual scene in Persia during the past centuries. The present day interest in traditional Islamic philosophy in Persia also revolves around his name and many works have been devoted to him in the past few years.

Sadr al-Din shirazi was born into an aristocratic family of Shiraz in 979 or 980/1571 or 1572 and received the best education possible in his native city. Gifted from early childhood with a love for learning and being the only son of a wealthy and influential father, he was placed under the care of the best masters from an early age and was able to learn Arabic, the Qur'an, Hadith and other religious sciences early in life. This was made easier for him because of his intense devotion and religious fervor which he combined with keen intelligence from the age of childhood. At that time, although Shiraz was a major city, the great center of learning was Isfahan, to which the young Sadr al-Din decided to travel in order to benefit fully from the presence of the masters at the capital. In Isfahan he pursued his studies eagerly first with Shaikh Baha'i al-Din 'Amili in the religious or transmitted sciences (*Al-'Ulum al-Naqliyya*) and then with Mir Damad in the intellectual sciences (*Al-'Ulum al-'Aqliyya*). It is said that he wrote a work on the order of Mir Damad and when Mir Damad saw it he exclaimed that henceforth no one would read his own works. Some sources have also mentioned that Sadr al-Din studied with Mir Findiriski but, as already pointed out, this has not been established with certainty.

After completion of his formal studies, Mulla Sadra began a new phase of his life in quest of the other kind of knowledge, which comes through intuition and illumination resulting from inner purification. He left the busy life of the capital and retired to a small village named Kahak, near Qum, where he spent according to some seven and to others eleven years in ascetic and spiritual practices. He attained in this was immediate knowledge (*'ilm-i Huzuri*) as he had perfected earlier his grasp of acquired knowledge (*'ilm-i Husuli*) as he had perfected earlier his grasp of acquired knowledge (*'Ilm-i Husuli*). At this moment he was asked by Shah 'Abbas II to come to Shiraz to teach and train qualified students. He accepted the call and returned to public life, spending the last thirty years of his life teaching in the Khan school of Shiraz built for him by Allahvardi, the governor of Fars. Due to the presence of Mulla Sadra, the Khan school became a great center of learning attracting students from near and far. In fact, it became so famous that it attracted the attention of some of the European travelers of the period such as Thomas Herbert, who writes: "And indeed, Shiraz has a college wherein is read philosophy, astrology, physic, chemistry, and mathematics; so as 'tis the most famous through Persia" It was also during this period that Mulla Sadra wrote most of his works. On returning from his seventh pilgrimage on foot to Mecca he died in Basra in 1599/1640 and was buried in that city.

Nearly fifty works of Mulla Sadra are known, most of which were lithographed during the Qajar period and are now being republished in modern editions. Some of these concern specifically religious themes such as Qur'anic commentaries and the monumental commentary upon the Usul al-Kafi of Kulaini, which was left uncompleted. Others deal with Hikmat properly speaking, such as Al-Shawahid al-Rububiyya, in many ways his personal testament and the summary of his teachings, Al-Mash'ir on being and Hikmat al-'Arshiyya on the posthumous becoming of man. Yet another group of his writings are commentaries upon earlier philosophical works such as the glosses upon Ibn Sina's Shifa' and the

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Abhari known as Shahr al-Hidaya, which became the most famous work on Islamic philosophy in the Indian subcontinent and is referred as Sadra in India and Pakistan to this day. Mulla Sadra also wrote two works in his own defence one the Sih Asl, his only Persian work in prose, in which he defended gnosis ('irfan) against attacks of superficial doctors of law and jurisprudence, and the Kasr al-Asnam al-Jahiliyya, in which he defended the shari'a and the exoteric dimension of religion against some of the extremists who existed within sufi orders and to whom he refers as the mutasawwifin of his time. Mulla Sadra also wrote a Divan of poetry, selections of which have been published. But these poems do not compare in quality with those of his teachers Mir Damad and Shaikh-i Baha'i or those of his students Faiz-i Kashani and Lahiji.

The outstanding masterpiece of Mulla Sadra is the Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyya fi'l-Asfar al-Arba'at al-'Aqliyya ("The Supernal Wisdom Concerning the Four Journeys of the Intellect"), known in Persia as the Asfar. The most advanced text of Hikmat is a final summation of traditional wisdom, including, in addition to the most thorough exposition of Mulla Sadra's own vision, a vast amount of material related to the views of earlier gnostics, philosophers and theologians. It is therefore a major source for our knowledge of Islamic intellectual history and at the same time a testament to the author's remarkable knowledge of earlier philosophical, religious and historical texts. The Asfar, which is taught only to students who have already mastered Peripatetic philosophy, ishraqi theosophy and Kalam, is taught in traditional schools over a six year period and is the crowning achievement in the traditional curriculum of the "intellectual sciences" in the madrasas. Numerous commentaries have been written on this work, of which some of the best known include the commentaries of Mulla 'Ali Zunuzi and Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabzavari. The Asfar and its commentaries are like a central river compared to which all other streams are peripheral. In such fashion has this work dominated the intellectual life of Persia; and the later philosophical and theosophical schools

have been like so many tributaries that have only contributed to its expansion in its onward march.

The work of Mulla Sadra, all of which except for the Persian Sih Asl, a few letters and the poems are in Arabic, are written in a remarkably lucid style which in fact makes them appear as deceptively easy. There is, moreover, a mixture of logical analysis, mystical gleaming and references to religious sources, especially the Qur'an and Hadith, which characterizes all of Sadr al-Din's writings. He chieived in his own life, as well as in his works which are the fruit of that life, a synthesis of the three means open to man in his quest after truth: revelation (*wahy* or *shar'*), illumination and intellectual intuition (*dhaug*) and the ratiocination (*istidlal* or '*aql* in its limited meaning). His works reflect this synthesis. A most vigorous dialectical and logical discourse, in which type of expression Mulla Sadra was an unmatched master and for which he is especially known in the Indian subcontinent, is often followed by a gnostic utterance received through illumination to which he usually refers as "truth received from the Divine Throne" (*tahqiq 'arshi*). In the same manner rational arguments are supported by citations from the Qur'an, and the commentaries upon the Qur'an and Hadith are carried out through the process of hermeneutic interpretation (*ta'wil*) in such a way as to reveal their gnostic meaning. There is but one inner, spiritual reality which manifests itself outwardly in the revealed scriptures, in the soul and the mind of man and in the cosmos, or "upon the horizons" to use the Qur'anic terminology. The synthesis achieved b Mulla Sadra aims at bringing man back to this one spiritual reality from all the different modes of perceptions and knowledge that are open to him, whether it be the given text of revelation, or ratiocination and its analysis of the externally perceived world, or the inward illumination which opens up the inner horizons of the two above modes of knowledge and is at the same time objecivised and regulated by them.

The synthesis of Mulla Sadra and his intellectual progeny is based upon the integration of the four major schools of Islamic thought alluded to earlier: namely Kalam, Peripatetic philosophy, ishraqi theosophy and 'irfan. In Mulla Sadra we find elements of Ghazali, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Suhrawardi and particularly Ibn 'arabi (al-Mursi). Moreover, there is Shi'ism, especially its gnostic aspect, which serves as the background for this whole synthesis. The *Najh al-Balagha* of 'Ali (ibn Abi Talib) and the traditions of the other Shi'i Imams are a constant source of inspiration for Mulla Sadra and a major source of his doctrines. Of course, this synthesis could not have been achieved without the work of the sages and philosophers of the two preceding centuries. But their work in turn finds its final meaning and elaboration in the doctrines of Sadr al-Din.

There are many principles which distinguish the metaphysical doctrines of Mulla Sadra, not all of which can be enumerated here. Some of the most important of these principles include the unity, principiality and gradation of being; trans-substantial motion; the unity of the knower and the known and the reality of "mental existence" (*wujud al-dhihni*) as a distinct state of existence which makes knowledge possible; and the catharsis (*tajrid*) and independence of the power of imagination (*khayal*) in the soul from the body, and also the existence of a cosmic "world of imagination" which makes possible the theosophical explanation of religious descriptions of eschatology.

The doctrine of unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) is usually associated with Sufism and in fact finds its highest expression in the gnostic teachings of Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi) and his school. This doctrine is usually mistaken for pantheism or panentheism [the two are NOT the same] by those who cannot distinguish between profane philosophy and a sacred metaphysical doctrine. But in reality it is nothing but the inner meaning of the *shahada* of Islam, *La ilaha ill'Allah*, made manifest by those who are given the vision of the inner meaning of things. There is nothing more Islamic than unity (*al-tauhid*) and the

*wahdat al-wujud* is the essence of al-tauhid and therefore of Islam. But even this doctrine has levels of interpretation; that is why in Persia a distinction is usually made between the *wahdat al-wujud* of the 'urafa or gnostics, referring to Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi) and his school, and the *wahdat al-wujud* of the *hukama* or theosophers, referring to Mulla Sadra and his school. In order to understand this distinction it is necessary to analyse the gradual process by which man comes to understand unity. The first perception of the external world for the untrained mind or for a child is to see multiplicity and only multiplicity, The multiplicity is due to the quiddity (*mahiyya*) of each thing which distinguishes it from others, and to consider this multiplicity as ultimately real is to accept the view of *isalat al-mahiyya* or "principality of quiddity" for which Mir Damad and Suhrawardi are known, if we do not consider that Suhrawardi held to be true for light what Mulla Sadra held with regard to being. Of course these sages did not negate unity, which for them stands above the world of multiplicity, but in their analysis of the world of multiplicity they stopped short at the quiddity of things without considering their existence (*wujud*).

The next stage is to hold that within each thing, which according to Avicennan philosophy is composed of existence and quiddity or essence, it is the existence which is ultimately real and not the quiddity, but nevertheless to believe that the existence of each object is totally different from that of another. This view is *isalat al-wujud* ("principality of being"), but still falls short of fully grasping the sense of Unity. It is the view of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and his followers.

Above this view stands that of Mulla Sadra and his followers, who claim that not only is the existence of each object principal *vis-à-vis* its quiddity (*isalat al-wujud*), but also that the existence of each object is a state and grade of Being itself, not a totally independent being. They thus believe that there is only one Being (*wahdat al-wujud*), which possesses grades and stages (*maratib*), and it is this being and not the quiddity of objects which gives reality to things.

Mulla Sadra and his followers are therefore said to believe in the unity (*wahdat*), gradation (*tashkik*) and principiality (*isalat*) of Being (*wujud*). Above this concept of the "Unity of Being" stands the unity of gnostics (*urafa*), usually called *wahdat-I khassa* (special unity), according to which Being corresponds to only one objective Reality, God. Nothing else can even be said to exist. Everything else is the theophany (*tajalli*) of this One Being, not having any being of its own, not even that of being a stage and state of the One Being.

On the basis of the doctrine of the Unity of Being Mulla Sadra created the vast doctrine of the metaphysics of being, which is another version of the metaphysics of essence of Suhrawardi. The interrelation between all stages of existence and the incessant deployment from the Source and return to the Source characterise the whole doctrine of Mulla Sadra. There is a dynamism in his view; but it must not be in any way confused with the type of dynamism found in modern thought, which usually results from a forgetting of the immutable essences of things and terminates in a horizontal and purely temporal and secular evolution that sometimes even appears in a theological garb, as in the case of Teilhardism. The dynamism of Mulla Sadra is "spatial" rather than "temporal". It is directed not towards the achievement of a future state but towards the realization of a higher state of being that exists here and now. The world of becoming is related to the world of being not by a temporal sequence but in a relation that can be best symbolized by the spatial circumscription of one sphere by another, as we see in the medieval cosmologies based upon the metaphysical symbolism of the Ptolemaic spheres. Interestingly enough, Mulla Sadra in fact described this metaphysical relationship without having recourse to Ptolemaic astronomy: his exposition, therefore, cannot be brushed aside so easily by those who, being unable to distinguish the symbol from the brute fact, discard the medieval metaphysical doctrine of the states of being because it is tied in its exposition to the homocentric Ptolemaic astronomy.



The relationship between being and becoming, which Aristotle himself had also sought to explain, lies for Mulla Sadra in the idea of trans-substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jauhariyya*). Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and the Peripatetics in general limited motion in the Aristotelian sense of the word to the four categories of position, space, quality and quantity; that is, all gradual change from potentiality to actuality or motion for them occurred not in the substance of things, but in one of the above four accidents. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) in fact gave reasons in the *Shifa* as to why the substance of an object cannot change in the process of motion. Mulla Sadra, nafter answering the difficulties stated by Ibn Sina (Avicenna), proceeds to prove the necessity of trans-substantial motion while arguing at the same time for the "Platonic ideas" or archetypes of things which the Peripatetics had negated. It is hardly possible to analyse this difficult doctrine here. Suffice it to say that for Mulla Sadra motion is the means whereby gradually the substance of a thing changes until it is able to achieve a higher state of being and through man gain access to the world of immutable forms (*tajarrud*) above and beyond all change. In the same way that the cosmos receives its reality through the effusion of being from the Origin and Source of all being, the becoming and change in the cosmos are with the aim of achieving higher states of being and finally states that lie above the world of change and becoming and that lead ultimately to the Source once again. The Universe is a vast system aimed at making possible this catharsis and disentanglement from matter and becoming which the very rich term *tajrid* implies. (an angel being called *mujarrad* in the language of theosophy, that is one who possesses the state of *tajrid*). This possibility exists here and now, at least for man who stands in an axial and central position in this world. The role of *Hikmat* is to make him realize where he stands and to enable him to achieve the state of *tajrid*. The doctrine of trans-substantial motion, therefore, in addition to enabling Mulla Sadra to construct a new form of natural philosophy, is a corner stone of both his metaphysics and his spiritual psychology.

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The problem of how we know, or epistemology, which

since Descartes' dissection of reality has become both central and insoluble in Western philosophy, also occupies a central position in Mulla Sadra's writings. A good part of the first journey of the *Asfar* is devoted to it. With a rigor which would satisfy a modern analyst Mulla Sadra seeks to analyse the problem of knowledge from a background which is again essentially gnostic and is based on the union between the knower (*al'aql*) and the known (*al-ma'qul*). In the act of perception (*idrak*) man becomes identified with the object of his knowledge; that is, the knower or '*aql* is at the moment of perceiving the known identified with the form of the known or *ma'qul*, which is in fact its reality. Knowledge is only possible through the union.

In order to demonstrate the possibility of this union taking place, Mulla Sadra must prove the existence of an independent plane of reality which he calls the mental plane (*wujud al-dhihni*). He is the first of the Muslim philosophers to have devoted attention to this question and to have analysed all that the reality of this plane implies. It is true that the union of knower and known had been alluded to by Abu'l-Hasan al-'Amiri and some of the sufis, but here as elsewhere it was Mulla Sadra who for the first time provided demonstrations for it and incorporated it into a vast metaphysical synthesis. To have found traces of this and other ideas in earlier books does not at all detract from the genius of Mulla Sadra, for the important question is how these ideas are incorporated into a new intellectual perspective. Otherwise in the domain of metaphysics there is nothing new under the Sun, as Aristotle had already asserted. It is enough to compare Mulla Sadra's treatment of this question with what is found in earlier Muslim sources to realize exactly what he achieved.

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For Mulla Sadra the mind is not a *tabula rasa* nor only a tablet on which certain "ideas" are engrained. It has several faculties and powers, one of which is to

create forms, and this power of imagination (*mutakhayyila khallaqa*), through which the mind is able to bring forms into being in the same way that the Divine Intellect has given objective existence to things through its own creative power. Knowledge results, not from the external form "entering" the mind, but in this external form acting as an occasion for the mind to create, in accordance with the immutable essence of the object concerned, its form. This act in turn changes the state of being of the knower itself. Therefore knowledge is inseparable from being and leaves its effect upon the being of the knower.

The catharsis or *tajrid* of the imaginative faculty plays a major role in the eschatological doctrines expounded by Sadr al-Din. In the last part (*safar*) of the *Asfar* as well as in individual treatises on resurrection and the afterlife, especially the monumental commentary in the form of glosses upon the *Hikmat al-ishraq*, Mulla Sadra has expounded in the most complete fashion the esoteric meaning of the Muslim doctrine of resurrection and eschatology (*ma'ad*). His writings in this domain are probably the most thorough and systematic of any Muslim work in this area, where Muslims, in contrast to Hindus and Buddhists, have been generally laconic. It is only in the works of Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi) and Mulla Sadra and their schools that these questions are amply treated.

The intermediate world of imagination or the "imaginal world", which he also calls "purgatory" (*barzakh*) and the world of "hanging forms" (*sawar al-mu'allaga*), is the locus of the eschatological events described in sacred scripture. It is where the events of the Last Judgement occur in a real way because this world is real and has an ontological status. This is a world possessing not only form but also matter which is, however, subtle and celestial (*latif* and *malakuti*). Man, likewise, possesses a subtle body, or what in the parlance of Western Hermeticism would be called the astral body. In his glosses upon the *Hikmat al-ishraq*,

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Mulla Sadra asserts that neither the peripatetics like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) nor the theologians like Ghazali could really solve this problem. The one could only prove spiritual resurrection (*al-ma'ad al-ruhani*), and the other believed in corporeal resurrection (*al-ma'ad*

*al-jismani*) without being able to provide an demonstration for it. Mulla Sadra broke this deadlock and was able to prove corporeal resurrection in accordance with Qur'anic teachings by appealing to this intermediate world where man is resurrected after death not as a dismembered soul but as a complete being possessing also a subtle body.

Mulla Sadra develops fully the theme of the posthumous becoming of the soul and its resurrection beyond the imaginal world to higher states of being and finally to a station before the Divine Presence itself. He makes the science of the soul (*'ilm al-nafs*) a branch of metaphysics (*ilahiyat*) rather than natural philosophy (*tabi'iyat*) as was the case with the Peripatetics, and he develops an elaborate science of the soul starting with the embryonic state of man and terminating in his ultimate beatitude far beyond the earthly life. In this domain no less than in metaphysics he gives an imprint of a powerful genius to a teaching that is by nature timeless and perennial.

Mulla Sadra trained many students, of whom two, Mulla Muhsin Faiz Kashani and Maulana 'Abd al-Razzq Lahiji, are among the first-rate luminaries of the Safavid period and will be treated below. Others less known but nevertheless significant include Shaikh Husain Tunakabuni, who continued Mulla Sadra's school after him, Aqajani Mazandarani, the author of a vast commentary upon the *Qabasat* of Mir Damad, and Mirza Muhammad Sadiq Kashani, who went to India to propagate Mulla Sadra's teachings. In Persia the teachings of Mulla Sadra were not continued immediately after him due to difficult circumstances. But a century later men like Mirza Muhammad Sadiq Ardistani revived his teachings, and early in the Qajar period Mulla 'Ali Nuri, followed by his student Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabzavari, established Mulla Sadra's school as the central school of *Hikmat* in Persia.

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#### *The Akhbari - Usuli Debate*

Almost contemporary with Mulla Sadra there began a debate which had some influence upon the later course of philosophy and a great deal of effect upon the further chapters of religious and theological history. This

debate concerned the role of reason in the interpretation of religious matters. An 'alim by the name of Mulla Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (died 1033/1623-1624) established the *akhbari* school, which opposed the use of 'aql in religious matters and relied completely on the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams. In his *Al-Fawa'id al-madaniyya* he attacked the idea of *ijtihad* or the giving of opinion based upon the four principles (*usul*) of the Qur'an, Hadith or *sunna*, the consensus of the community (*ijma*) and reasoning or 'aql, which in Sunnism is called *qiyas*, and branded *mujtahids*, or those who practiced *ijtihad*, as enemies of religion. The opposing school, which came to be known as *usuli* and which finally won the day, continued to emphasise the importance of 'aql within the tenets of the Qur'an and Hadith.

Usually the followers of the *akhbari* school were literalists and purely exoteric and outward interpreters of religion, and came to be identified as *qishris* (those who remain content with only the husk rather than seeking the kernel as well). They were usually opposed to Sufism and *Hikmat* and even *Kalam*. But this was by no means always the case. There were some *akhbaris* who became outstanding Sufis and *hakims*, such as Mulla Muhsin Faiz Kashani, the disciple of Mulla Sadra. Such men, while opposing the use of 'aql on a certain plane, were able to reach the supra-rational domain of gnosis and illumination.

The *akhbari* - *usuli* debate continued into the Qajar period in the form of *Shaikhi* - *Balasari* disputes. Strangely enough, Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa'I, the founder of the *Shaikhi* movement, was close to the *akhbari* position and at the same time an enemy of the *hakims* and Sufis. He was particularly opposed to Mulla Muhsin Faiz despite the fact that both may be classified as *akhbaris*. The situation, then, is more complex than classifying *usulis* as pro-*Hikmat* and

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*Akhbaris* as opposed to *Hikmat*; although the refusal to consider the role of 'aql in the interpretation of religious matters naturally led the *akhbaris* away from *Hikmat* and gnosis, in which reason serves as the first stage for a knowledge which is supra-sensible and where in any case reason is never opposed on its own plane, but is ultimately transcended.

### *Mulla Muhsin Faiz Kashani*

Of Mulla Sadra's students the best known is Muhammad ibn Shah Murtaza, known as Mulla Muhsin Kashani or Kashi, and given the title of Faiz by Mulla Sadra himself, who besides being his teacher also became his father-in-law. Mulla Muhsin was born in Kashan in 1007/1598-1599, studied for a few years in Qum and Isfahan, where he belonged to the circle of Mir Damad and Shaikh-I Baha'I, and then came to Shiraz to receive the last phase of his education from Mulla Sadra and to study the religious sciences with Sayyid Najid Bahrani. The last part of his life he spent in Kashan, where he died in 1091/1680-1681 and where he is buried. His tomb is to this day a center of pilgrimage and is credited with miracle-working powers.

Nearly 120 works of Mulla Muhsin are known, of which most have survived. They are in both Arabic and Persian and have become since his day a mainstay of the curriculum of Shi'i religious schools. Like Farabi and Nasir al-Din Tusi, Mulla Muhsin was able to place himself in the different intellectual perspectives and schools of Islam and write outstanding works in each without mixing it with the teachings of another point of view. This, of course, does not mean that he was hypocritical or without a particular point of view himself; rather it means that he observed strictly the hierarchic structure of knowledge that is such an essential element of Islam and Islamic civilization, and avoided the "mixing of the arguments of different sciences" (*khalt-I mabhath*) which is so disdained in traditional Islamic learning.

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The works of Mulla Muhsin, of which he himself has left us with three lists, include many commentaries upon the Qur'an such as the *Al-Safi* and *Al-Asfa'*; works on Hadith including *Al-Wafi*, which is the most outstanding of its kind in recent centuries; treatises devoted to the principles of religion (*usul al-din*) such as *'Ilm al-yaqin* and *'Ain al-yaqin*; treatises on the muslim rites such as the daily prayers and *hajj* and their esoteric

significance, in which this period is particularly rich; collections of litanies and invocations such as Jala' al-'uyun; treatises on jurisprudence such as Al-Tathir; and works devoted to the lives and sayings of the Imams such as his commentary upon the Sahifa sajjadiyya of the Fourth Shi'I Imam. Besides these works in the religious sciences, he wrote many works on Sufism and gnosis, of which the Al-Kalimat al-maknuna with its summary, Al-Kalimat al-makhzuna, is perhaps the outstanding example. This work, which is in Persian, is one of the outstanding expositions of gnosis in its Shi'I setting and treats a complete cycle of metaphysics. Mulla Muhsin also summarized and commented upon earlier sufi works such as the Al-Futuh al-Makkiyya of Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi) and the Masnivi of Jala al-Din Rumi. He also wrote many poems himself mostly on mystical themes and in the masnavi form. His dican is very well known and contains some fine verses, although all of his poems are not of first rate quality. As to Hikmat, he did write a few treatises on the subject, but they are not as well known as his works on religion and 'irfan.

Perhaps the most important work of Mulla Muhsin outside the domain of Hadith, where he is the undisputed Shi'I authority of the last centuries, is his Al-Mahajjat al-baida fi ihya' al-ihya' (The White Path in the Revival of the 'Revival'), the second "Revival" (ihya') referring to the Ihya' 'ulum al-din of Ghazali. In the same way that the Ihya' is the outstanding work of sufi ethics in the Sunni setting, the Al-Mahajjat al-baida' must be considered as the most important Shi'I work of ethics with a sufi orientation. In fact, what Mulla Muhsin did was to revive the work of Ghazali in Shi'i circles by "Shi'ifying" it. He achieved this task by substituting

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traditions drawn from Shi'I sources for the Sunni ones which serve as a prop for Ghazali's book. Otherwise the two works are nearly the same, and of the same monumental proportions. A close comparison of the two would be a most fruitful undertaking to elucidate exactly how the Sunni and Shi'I religious and mystical climates are related.

Mulla Muhsin was one of the foremost esoteric interpreters of Shi'ism. While an outstanding exoteric interpreter of the religion and an undisputed 'alim of

theology and jurisprudence, he was also a gnostic and sufi of high standing and sought throughout his works to harmonise the Shari'a and the Tariqa. Of the three elements which Mulla Sadra unified in his vast synthesis, namely *shar'*, *kashf* and *'aql*, or revealed religion, inner illuminations and rational and intellectual demonstration, Mulla Muhsin followed mostly the first two. Yet he was of course a hakim well versed in Mulla Sadra's teachings, as works such as the *Al-Kalimat al-maknuna* reveal. In fact, it is with him that the process of the integration of the school of Hikmat into Shi'ism is completed. It is he who identified the "celestial guide" or illuminating intellect of Avicennan and Suhrawardian metaphysics specifically with the Twelve Imams, who as heavenly archetypes reflect the "light of Muhammad" (*al-nur al-muhammadi*) which is a sun that illuminates these "spiritual constellations".

*Mulla 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji*

The other well known student of Mulla Sadra, 'Abd al-Razzaq ibn 'Ali Lahiji, entitled Fayyaz, was also a son-in-law of the master and intimately associated with him. His date of birth is not known and several dates are given for his death, of which the most likely is 1071/1661-1662. Lahiji is known particularly as a theologian with several glosses upon different commentaries of Nasir al-Din Tusi's *Tajrid*, the *Shawariq al-ilham*, itself an independent commentary upon the *Tajrid*, as well as two Persian works, *Sarmaya-yi iman* and *Gauhar murad*, the latter work being perhaps the best known book on Shi'I theology of the Safavid

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period. But these works are theology (*Kalam*) that is deeply impregnated with Hikmat, of which Lahiji was also a master. In fact, during the Safavid period there is not so much an independent growth of Kalam as the development of Kalam within the framework of Hikmat. Most of the glosses and commentaries upon the *Tajrid*, such as those of Khafri, belong more to the tradition of Hikmat than Kalam proper, and most of the debates that are truly theological are found within the pages of works on Hikmat, especially those of the school of Mulla Sadra.

Lahiji in fact developed a form of Kalam which is



hardly distinguishable from Hikmat, although at least in his better known works such as the Gauhar murad he does not follow the main doctrinal teachings of Mulla Sadra, as on the unity of Being and the catharsis of the faculty of imagination. Yet in other works he confirms these points in such a manner as to indicate that the condition of his times did not allow a more open espousal of the teachings of Mulla Sadra and that he had to adopt a more "theological" or Kalami dress to suit the taste of some of the 'ulama who were by now severely criticizing the Sufis and the gnostics.

Lahiji, however, has also left us with works that belong more purely to the tradition of Hikmat such as Huduth al'alam, the commentary upon the Hayakil al-nur of Suhrawardi and Al-Kalimat al-tayyiba, which deals with the contending views of Mulla Sadra and Mir Damad on the principality of existence or essence (*isalat-I wujudand isalat-I mahiyyat*). All these works show Lahiji to be a master in Hikmat and a true disciple of Mulla Sadra.

Like Mir Damad and Mulla Muhsin Faizm Lahiji also wrote poetry which is of a high order containing many beautiful verses. His divan of about six thousand verses, of which the most complete manuscript is to be found in the Kitabkhana-yi astana-yi quds-I razavi in Mashhad, reveals a very different aspect of his personality from that revealed by his other works. Here one finds the gentle breeze of realized gnosis and mysticism in which pearls of wisdom are couched in verses of beauty and harmony rather than in rigorous

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rationalistic arguments. The poems contain many verses in the praise of the Prophet and the Imams and also long qasidas dedicated to both Mulla Sadra and Mir Damad, with whom Lahiji also most likely had contacts. These are perhaps the most eloquent and telling poems ever written on these two giants of the Safavid period, and they could have been written only by a person of the stature of Lahiji, who stood close to them both in time and from the vantage point of ideas.

Lahiji had many students, of whom his own son, Mirza Hasan Lahiji, and Qazi Sa'id Qumi are perhaps the most important. Mirza Hasan was a very respected religious scholar of his times, revered as an outstanding

authority on the religious sciences. But he was also a hakim of much merit and, at a time when Hikmat was being attacked by some of the 'ulama, wrote a work in Persian entitled A'ina-yi hikmat to defend Hikmat by appealing to the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams.

*Qazi Sa'id Qumi*

The other student of Lahiji, Muhammad ibn Sa'id Qumi, is usually known as Qazi Sa'id or as the "Junior hakim" (*hakim-I kuchak*), is as well known as his master and belongs to the rank of the most outstanding figures of the Safavid period. A student of Lahiji, Mulla Muhsin and also of Mulla Rajab 'Ali Tabrizi - who represents the more Peripatetic trend of philosophy in the Safavid period - Qazi Sa'id was particularly attracted to Sufism and gnosis, while at the same time he was the judge or *qadi* of Qum from which position he has gained his title. In fact, most of Qazi Sa'id's life was spent in Qum. It was in this holy city of Shi'ism and center of religious studies that he was born in 1049/1639; here he passed most of his active years and also died and was buried in 1103/1691. Besides serving as the judge of Qum, he was also a well known physician in the city and was considered as a real hakim in both senses of the word, as physician and philosopher.

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The total attachment of Qazi Sa'id to 'irfan has made him the "Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi) of Shi'ism". This is a very apt title for him because he belongs more to the school of pure 'irfan of Ibn 'Arbi (al-Mursi) than to the school of Hikmat of Mulla Sadra, where gnostic themes are provided with rational demonstration. The works of Qazi Sa'id bear this out, for they usually deal with esoteric meaning of revealed and sacred texts and rites. They include Al-Arba'un hadithan, which is a commentary upon forty prophetic hadiths dealing with divine science; Al-Arba'unat li-kashf anwar al-qudsiyyat, which is a collection of forty treatises, again mostly concerned with the esoteric meaning of religion; Asrar al'ibadat, which deals with the esoteric significance of the Muslim rites; and commentary upon different traditions such as the famous Hadith-I ghamam.

His largest work in this domain is the monumental three volume commentary upon the Tauhid of Shaikh-I Sadduq, which remains unedited and is not well known except for the section dealing with rites which has become known independently as the above-mentioned Asrar al-'ibadat. But he also wrote several works on logic and philosophy such as the Asrar alsanayi' on logic; glosses upon the "Theology of Aristotle". Which is among his most important works; and also glosses upon the Shahr al-isharat of Nasir al-Din Tusia.

The most marked feature of Qazi Sa'id's thought is his mastery in revealing the esoteric sense of different aspects of the Islamic tradition in both its doctrinal and practical dimensions. The process of ta'wil, of spiritual and hermeneutic interpretation of things, which is so central to both Sufism and Shi'ism, found in Qazi Sa'id one of its greatest masters. In his writings the inner meaning of verses of the Qur'an, traditions of the Prophet and the Imams, as well as Islamic ritual practices, gains the transparence and lucidity which result from the purely gnostic and metaphysical point of view held by him. In his exposition of the symbolism of the Ka'aba, he even develops a true philosophy of art, and explains the symbolic significance of forms and spatial

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configurations with such completeness and thoroughness that it is difficult to find its like in the annals of Islamic thought. In this field also he reflects in many ways the doctrines and teachings of Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi).

#### *The Two Majlisis*

It would hardly be possible to treat philosophy and theology in the Safavid period without dealing with Mulla Muhammad Taqi Majlisis and his more famous son, Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, although they, and especially the son, have been dealt with elsewhere in this volume. The first Majlisis, who died in 1659-1660, was one of the religious scholars of his time who was attracted to Sufism and was probably a practicing sufi. The reaction against organized Sufism in religious

circles had not yet set in so that Mulla Muhammad Taqi could enjoy respect among Shi'I scholars and yet openly espouse the cause of Sufism. He rendered a great service to both in many ways. He was the first Shi'I scholar to spread and propagate widely the text of the traditions of the Imams and to encourage their study, so that he must be considered in a way as the father of the science of Hadith in its new development during the Safavid period. He also made the life of Sufism in religious circles easier by lending to it the weight of his authority and support.

His son, Mulla Muhammad Baqir (born 1037/1627-1628, died 1111/1699-1700), was in many ways a different type of personality. He was politically more influential than his father and must be considered as the most powerful Shi'I scholar of the Safavid period. He was also much more austere and exoteric, and openly condemned and opposed organized Sufism, to the extent of denying his own father's allegiance to Sufism. In fact, he was the most formidable spokesman for the reaction which set in within Shi'I religious circles during the later Safavid period due in part to excesses within some of the sufi orders. With the same breath he also condemned the *hukama*, whose teachings he saw as closely wedded to those of the sufis.

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The second Majlisi is the most prolific of Shi'I writers, and probably wrote his works with the aid of some of his own students. Otherwise these works, numbering over one hundred and including the monumental *Bihar al-anwar*, could hardly have been written by one man. The *Bihar alanwar* itself, which is over twenty-six lengthy volumes in its modern edition, is a vast encyclopaedia of Shi'ism dealing with different aspects of Islam as a religion as well as the Islamic religious sciences and the history of the Prophets and the Imams. It remains a treasury of information for all the phases of Shi'I learning to this day. His other works deal with different religious sciences. Some of the most famous, such as *Haqq al-yaqin* and *Hilyat al-muttaqin*, both in Persian, and *Sirat al-najat* in Arabic, are concerned with principles of religion, traditions and theology in the general sense, not in the technical sense of Kalam. In his commentary upon the *Usul al-kafi* of Kulaini,

however, Majlisi turns to the intellectual sciences and seems to have been influenced by the commentary of Mulla Sadra. Likewise, in his *Zad al-ma'ad* there are allusions to Islamic esoteric teachings, which implies that Majlisi was not completely alien to these subjects and perhaps spoke so vehemently against the hakims and Sufis because of the particular conditions of his time, which necessitated such a position for the defence of the Shari'a and the official religious institutions, In any case Majlisi left an indelible mark upon all later Shi'I though while his opposition to Hikmat only delayed its new flowering in the Qajar period.

#### *The Later Hakims of the Safavid Period*

Although the atmosphere was not favorable to the propagation of philosophy and theosophy from the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century to the Afghan invasion, which put an end to Safavid rule, several notable figures continued to propagate the tradition and make possible its renewal in the 13<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century. Among these figures one may mention Mulla hasan Lunbani (died 1094/1682-2683), a student of Mulla Rajab 'Ali Tabrizi,

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who combined philosophy and Sufism and even wrote a commentary upon the *Masnavi*. Due to his particular attraction to ishraq and 'irfan he was accused by some of the exoteric 'ulama of being a sufi and wrote a treatise in his own defence.

Another figure of the same period, Mirza Muhammad Sadiq Ardistani (died 1134/1721-1722), was more or less a follower of the teachings of Mulla Sadra. Like Mulla Sadra, he believed in the catharsis (*tajarrud*) of the inner faculties of the soul, particularly the faculty of imagination, and offers the same arguments in proof of this view. But on the question of the origin of the human soul (*nafs-I kulli*), he presents a view which is different from that of both Mulla Sadra and Ibn sina (Avicenna). On the question of the unity and principiality of being he also follows Sadr al-Din.

Ardistani was the most famous teacher of Hikmat of his time in Isfahan. His *Hikmat-I sadiqiyya*, which consists of his lectures assembled by his students, is a major work on the school of Hikmat during the Safavid

period. He was personally revered because of his extremely simple and ascetic life, but owing to the opposition of some of the religious authorities he finally fell out of favor with Shah Sultan Husain. Yet he was able to be of much influence and to train a number of students, of whom the best known is Mirza Muhammad Taqi Almasi, a descendant of the first Majlisi. Almasi was the first person to begin to teach the texts of Mulla Sadra in official lessons of the madrasas and was instrumental in propagating his work. It was his student Aqa Muhammad Bidabadi, who taught Mulla 'Ali Nuri, the great reviver of Hikmat during the Qajar period, and so through him the chain of transmission of Hikmat is preserved between the Safavid and Qajar eras. Another of Ardistani's students, Mulla Hamza Gilani, was also a well known master of Hikmat and was among the many people who lost their lives in the Afghan invasion of Isfahan.

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During the last phase of the Safavid period, the school of Mulla Sadra was as yet far from being completely dominant. A contemporary of Ardistani, Shaikh 'Inayat-Allah Gilani, who belonged to the school of Mulla Rajab 'Ali Tabrizi, continued the Peripatetic school of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and taught the sharat, Shifa and Najat. Likewise, there were masters who taught pure gnosis and ishq. One of them, Mir Sayyid Hasan Yaliganim was the outstanding gnostic of Isfahan at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century and taught the Fusus al-hikam of Ibn 'Arabi (al-Mursi), as well as the works of Suhrawardi such as the Hikmat al-ishraq and Hayakil al-nur along with their traditional commentaries. Yet he too was to some extent under the sway of the teachings of Mulla Sadra. Altogether, the general impression one has of the little known history of these last decades of Safavid rule is the gradual spread of the teachings of Mulla Sadra, especially in Isfahan, while at the same time other schools such as the Peripatetic and the gnostic continue in a climate which became ever more hostile to both Hikmat and 'irfan.

### *The Influence of the School of Isfahan in India*

Although interest in Islamic philosophy on the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent goes back to the 7<sup>th</sup>/13 and 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the real establishment of a school of Islamic philosophy on the (Indo-Pak) sub-continent dates from the Safavid period. During this epoch many Persian philosophers, scholars and scientists migrated or travelled to India, such as Qazi Nur-Allah Shushtari, author of the well known *Majlisis al-Mumin* and *Ihqaq al-Haqq*. Muhammad Dihdar Shirazi, author of several gnostic treatises such as *Isharaq al-Nayyirain*, Baha' al-Din Isfahani, known as *Fazil-i Hindi*, who summarized the metaphysics of the *Shifa*, and the already mentioned Mir Findiriski. Moreover, the teachings of Mir Damad and especially Mulla Sadra spread far and wide in India. The *Sharh al-Hidaya* of Mulla Sadra, to which we have already referred, became the most popular work in the (Indo-Pak) sub-continent. The very large number of glosses and commentaries upon

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the works of Safavid masters as well as manuscripts of their writings that are found today in the libraries of the (Indo-Pak) sub-continent are a witness to the remarkable spread of the teachings of the school of Isfahan in that region. In fact, except for Iraq, which was then as now religiously associated with Persia, the Muslim part of the (Indo-Pak) sub-continent represents the only other region of the Islamic world where this particular school of Islamic philosophy spread to an appreciable extent. The mystical and theological movements associated with such names as Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Val-Allah, as well as the Khairabadi school which is, properly speaking, philosophical and logical, cannot be fully understood without a study of the Safavid schools of thought.

In Persia itself after the interim period of confusion following the downfall of the Safavids, the school of Hikmat was revived again in Isfahan. The central figures of this revival were Mulla 'Ali Nuri, who taught the works of Mulla Sadra for seventy years, and his student Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabzavari, who made the teachings of Mulla Sadra so dominant and central as practically to exclude other schools of philosophy.

Through him and other Qajar masters the teachings of the Safavid sages have been transmitted to the present day and continue to exercise an appreciable influence, particularly the doctrines of Mulla Sadra, which have received so much attention in recent years and which act as the axis around which the revival of traditional philosophy in Persia is taking place. Furthermore, they have even attracted the attention of certain thinkers outside the orbit of Persian culture, as the labor of a small group of scholars, foremost among them Henry Corbin, has enabled the Western world to know Safavid philosophy for the first time and to study it not only for its historical interest but also as a living school of wisdom and thought, in which are combined the rigor of logic and the ecstasies of inner illumination."(329)

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As we have said above, for chronological reasons if nothing else, one most certainly cannot speak of the influence of the School of Isfahan on St. John of the Cross. However, note, however, that we find so many of the same elements in the works of St. John of the Cross and in the Shi'a sages of Isfahan: Sufis, which, as is universally recognized, has close relations with early Christian mysticism and with the later Byzantine mystics, especially St. Gregory Palamas: the Shi's Imams, especially the 1<sup>st</sup> Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Imam, Hussein ibn 'Ali; the 4<sup>th</sup> Imam, Zain al-Abidin; the 6<sup>th</sup> Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Imam, Ili Reza: Suhrawardi; Avicenna or Ibn Sina; al-Ghazzali; Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi; and a multitude of Persian sufi poets, especially



Rumi, Hafiz and Sa'di. So, a knowledge of the School of Isfahan perhaps gives one an in-septh understanding of St. John of the Cross perhaps not otherwise possible.

Besides, the School of Isfahan is fascinating in its own right; on occasion I have said: "My philosophical home is Isfahan".

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So, we find Suhrawardi, St. Gregory Palamas and St. John of the Cross intermingled. Therefore, a brief definition of the philosophy of Suhrawardi would be most useful, since, as Luce Lopez Baralt has noted, it is Suhrawardi who presents the closest parallels and affinities with St. John of the Cross.

**Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi:**  
**Founder of the Illuminationist School.**

By

Hossein Ziai

#### **THE MASTER OF ILLUMINATION**

"Shihab al-Din Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak Abu'l-Futuh Suhrawardi is well-known in the history of Islamic philosophy as the Master of Illumination (*Shaykh al-Ishraq*), a reference to his accepted position as the

founder of a new school of philosophy distinct from the Peripatetic (or Aristotelian) school (*madhhab*, or *maktab al-mashsha'un*). Suhrawardi was born in the small town of Suhraward in north-western Persia in the year 549/1154. He met a violent death by execution in Aleppo in the year 587/1191 and therefore is also sometimes called the Executed Master (*al-Shaykh al-Maqtul*).

Although the circumstances surrounding Suhrawardi's death are a matter of speculation, as I will touch upon further, information on his life is fairly extensive. The influential philosopher lived on thirty-eight lunar (thirty-six solar) years. In the year 579/1183, he traveled to Aleppo, where he completed his major work *Hikmat al-ishraq* (Philosophy of Illumination) in 582/1186. His main biographer, Shams al-Din Muhammad Shahrastari, states in his *Nuzhat al-arwah* (Pleasure of Spirits) that Suhrawardi was

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thirty years old when he completed another of his major philosophical works, *Al-Mashari wa'l-mutarahat* (Paths and Havens), completed c. 579/1183.

Suhrawardi first studied philosophy and theology with Majd al-Din al-Jili in Maraghah, then traveled to Isfahan (or Mardin) to study with Fakhr al-Din Mardini (d. 594/1198), who is said to have predicted his student's death. It is also known that Zahir al-Farsi, a logician, introduced Suhrawardi to *Al-Basa'ir* (Observations) of the famous logician 'Umar ibn Sahlan al-Sawi (fl. 540/1145). This fact is significant in that the latter work is among the first to depart from the standard nine-part division of logic - the nine books of the *Organon* - in favor of a two part division: formal and material logica.

Suhrawardi composed most of his major treatises over a span of ten years, which is not long enough for him to have developed two distinct styles of philosophy - a Peripatetic style followed by an Illuminationist one - as some scholars have suggested. In fact, in each of his major works Suhrawardi makes ample references to his other treatises. This indicates that the writings were either composed more or less concurrently, or that they were revised when taught with a consideration of others.

Soon after his arrival in Aleppo, Suhrawardi entered the service of Prince al-Malik al-Zahir Ghazi,

governor of Aleppo - also known as Malik Zahir Shah (obviously a Persian version of his name), son of Sultan Ayyubid Salah al-Din (who, remember, was Kurdish, i.e., Iranian but not Persian). The sultan is well known in the West as Saladin, the great champion of the wars against the Crusaders. Suhrawardi won the prince's favors, became his tutor and began a life at court. There in extended private sessions, the young philosopher reportedly informed the prince of his new philosophy. No doubt Suhrawardi's rapid rise to privileged position met with the usual medieval courtly jealousy and intrigue. That the judges, viziers and jurists of Aleppo were displeased with the distinguished tutor's increasing status could not have helped his case. Letters written to Saladin by the

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famous judge Qadi al-Fadil arguing for Suhrawardi's execution sealed the young thinker's fate. The sultan ordered the prince to have his tutor killed.

Medieval historians cite "heresy", "corrupting religion" and "corrupting the young prince, al-Malik al-Zahir" as charges against Suhrawardi. The validity of these accusations is controversial, however. As I have substantiated in publication elsewhere, the more plausible reason for Suhrawardi's execution is based on the philosopher's political doctrine revealed in his works on the Philosophy of Illumination, a political philosophy which I have termed the "Illuminationist political doctrine." The year of Suhrawardi's execution was turbulent with political and military conflict. England's King Richard I (Plantagenet) the Lionheart had landed in Acre, and major battles were taking place between Muslims and Christians over the Holy Land. The great sultan Saladin clearly had more pressing matters at hand than to bother with the execution of a wayfaring mystic, had he not deemed (him) to be a clear threat to political security.

Controversial though Suhrawardi's life may have been, one fact is certain: he had a major impact on subsequent philosophical thought, a fact on which all biographers concur.

**SUHRAWARDI'S WORKS**

Suhrawardi was a prolific author who wrote many works on almost every philosophical subject, including, for the first time in the history of Islamic philosophy, a substantial number of Persian philosophical symbolic narratives. Not all of his works have survived nor have all of the existing ones been published. His major published works are indicated here.

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The most important texts in the Philosophy of Illumination are Suhrawardi's four major Arabic philosophical works: the Al-Talwihat (Intimations), the Al-Muqawamat (Apposites), the Al-Mashari wa'l-mutarahat (Paths and Havens) and the Hikmat al-ishraq (Philosophy of Illumination). Based on textual evidence, I have found these works to constitute an integral corpus presenting the details of the Philosophy of Illumination. Though of lesser philosophical significance, the Arabic treatises, Al-Alwah al-'imadiyyah ('Imadian Tablets) and Hayakil al-nur (Temples of Light), and the Persian Partaw-namah (Epistle on Emanation) may also be added.

Based on Suhrawardi's own explicit statements, the four major works mentioned above were to be studied in a designated order: (1.) the Intimations, (2.) the Apposites, (3.) the Paths and Havens, and (4.) the Philosophy of Illumination. Among all of Suhrawardi's works, the Introductions of only two of them, the Paths and Havens and the Philosophy of Illumination, include specific statements concerning the methodology of the Philosophy of Illumination. In the Introduction to the Paths and Havens, Suhrawardi indicates that the book contains an exposition of the results of his personal experiences and intuitions, and further stipulates his view of how knowledge is to be obtained. Suhrawardi's account of the same methodological question in his Introduction to the Philosophy of Illumination is more elaborate and detailed but is essentially the same as the account given in the Paths and Havens.

Next in order of significance after Suhrawardi's major works and the treatises named above are his Arabic and Persian symbolic narratives. These include Qissat al-ghurbat al-gharbiyyah (A Tale of the Occidental Exile); Risalat al-tayr (The treatise of the Birds); Awaz-I par-I Jibra'il (The Sound of Gabriel's Wing); 'aql-I surkh (The Red Intellect); Razi ba jama'at-I sufiyan (A Day with a Group of Sufis); Fi halat al-tufuliyyah (On the State of Childhood); Fi haqiqat al-'ishq (On the Reality of Love); Lughat-I muran (The Language of Ants); and Safir-I simurgh (The Simurgh's Shrill Cry). In these writings Suhrawardi, as

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in Ibn Sina's Arabic tales before him, uses the symbolic narrative to portray philosophical issues, though usually simple ones intended for the novice. The tales are more significant in their use of language than in their philosophical content. But all are indicative of long-established views that the symbolic and poeic mode of discourse both elicit interest from readers and may also convey a certain experiential, subjective sense lost in purely discursive texts.

The next group of works by Suhrawardi consists of devotional prayers and invocations. Other minor treatise, aphorisms and short statements may also be grouped here. Of specific interest in terms of both language and content are two prayers and invocations composed in an especially rich symbolic and literary style, where Suhrawardi addresses "the great Heavenly Sun, Hurakhsh", and invokes the authority of "the Great Luminous Being (*al-nayyir al-a'zam*), praying to it for knowledge and salvation. The symbolism of such short prayers has led some scholars to believe them to contain an ancient Persian element of reverence for luminous astronomical bodies such as the sun.

#### **AN OVERVIEW OF SUHRAWARDI'S PHILOSOPHY OF ILLUMINATION**

Suhrawardi chose the title Philosophy of Illumination (*Hikmat al-ishraq*) to name his major Arabic work, and also to distinguish his philosophical approach from that of the established Peripatetic (Aristotelian) works of his time, predominantly the doctrine of Ibn

Sina (Avicenna), the great Islamic scientist and master of *mashsha'I* or Peripatetic philosophy. While Suhrawardi states that the *Intimations*, for example, is written according to the "Peripatetic method", this should not be considered an independent work written about Peripatetic philosophy. Rather, it indicates that the Philosophy of Illumination includes but is not defined by accepted Peripatetic teachings, parts of which Suhrawardi accepted and parts of which he rejected or refined.

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Throughout his works, Suhrawardi uses terms such as "Illuminationist theorem" (*qa'idah ishraqiyyah*); "Illuminationist rules" (*dawabit ishraqiyyah*); "Illuminationist lemma" (*daqiqah ishraqiyyah*) and similar phrases, to identify specific problems of logic, epistemology, physics and metaphysics - areas of thought which he reconstructs or otherwise reformulates in an innovative manner. These new terms indicate the essential components of the Philosophy of Illumination and distinguish Illuminationist methodology from the Peripatetic.

Suhrawardi adds the word "Illuminationist" (*ishraqi*) as a descriptive adjective to selected technical terms as a means of signifying their specific use in his system. For example, "Illuminationist relation" (*mushashadah ishraqiyyah*) specifies the epistemological priority of a primary mode of immediate cognition distinguished from the more general use of the word vision as applied to mystical experience. "Illuminationist relation" (*idafah ishraqiyyah*) specifies the non-predicative relation between subject and object, and is a new technical term signifying the Illuminationist position in the logical foundations of epistemology. "Illuminationist knowledge by presence" (*al-'ilm al-huduri al-ishraqi*) signifies the priority of an immediate, durationless, intuitive mode of cognition over the temporally extended essentialist definitions used as predicative propositions; and it also distinguishes the Illuminationist positions from the Peripatetic view of "acquired knowledge" (*al'ilm al-husuli*). Many other similar technical terms are also defined and used by Suhrawardi for the first time in an

Illuminationist philosophical sense to distinguish them from specific Peripatetic terms or from the general non-philosophical vocabulary of mystical and theological texts. Suhrawardi's attempt to attribute specifically chosen meanings to known expressions by adding qualifiers, and to coin new terms as well, is a basic characteristic of his philosophical reconstruction of previous modes of thought.

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Finally, Suhrawardi introduces the term "the Illuminationists" (*al-ishtaqiyyun*), subsequently adopted by commentators and historians, to describe thinkers whose philosophical position and method are distinguished from "the Peripatetics" (*al-mashsha'un*). It is clear, therefore, that the young philosopher intended his works to be recognized as incorporating a different system from the Peripatetic works of his time as manifest by language and meaning. All of the major Illuminationist commentators - Shams al-Din Shahrazuri, Ibn Kammunah and Qutb al-din Shirazi - agree that Suhrawardi's philosophical position is markedly different from that of the Peripatetic school.

An older Orientalist tradition, however, asserts that the Philosophy of Illumination is not essentially new, and considers Ibn Sina's short remarks concerning Oriental Philosophy (*al-hikmat al-mashriqiyyah*) to precede it. In this view, Ibn Sina's polemic or even politically motivated statements were not intended to reconstruct Aristotelian philosophy systematically but to garner wider acceptance for Greek philosophy by giving it more commonly accepted epithets. The same Orientalist tradition, moreover, does not consider Illuminationist philosophy to be essentially distinct from the Peripatetic and has, usually without careful examination of Illuminationist texts, generalized it as Ibn Sinan. This position is not altogether valid, however, as it does not take post-Ibn Sinan Arabic and Persian texts into account, considering them to be devoid of new and fresh philosophical arguments.

My position concerning the Philosophy of Illumination, which I have delineated here and elsewhere, is that it is a distinct, systematic

philosophical construction designed to avoid the logical, epistemological and metaphysical inconsistencies which Suhrawardi perceived in the Peripatetic philosophy of his day. While Suhrawardi quite obviously was deeply aware of the Ibn Sinan philosophical corpus, his Philosophy of Illumination cannot be totally attributed to Ibn Sina, nor can it be deemed to be merely its allegorical restatement. Suhrawardi does use Ibn Sinan texts, terms and methods,

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but he employs many other sources as well. Although he was deeply influenced by the great Peripatetic master al-Shaykh al-Ra'is, in my view the philosophical intention underlying the composition of works designated as "Illuminationist" is clearly Suhrawardi's own. It will be a challenging task for future researchers to determine if the Illuminationist plan is well defined and philosophically sound or given more to polemics. One thing is clear, however: a failure to examine actual Illuminationist texts, the majority of which remain unpublished and accessible only to a few specialists, has blurred the origins of Illuminationist philosophy. By briefly examining a few relevant passages here, I hope to put an end to these historical generalizations.

#### **SUHRAWARDI'S CRITIQUE OF IBN SINA'S POSITION**

In numerous places in his writings Suhrawardi argues against Ibn Sina's philosophical position while carefully delineating his own. In a few instances he even attacks the Peripatetic master directly. In perhaps his most bitter attack on Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi emphatically rejects the alleged position of Ibn Sina as a so-called Oriental (*Mashriqi*) philosopher. The implications of this passage are also significant for an understanding of the trends and schools of thought in the history of Islamic philosophy in general. The controversy concerns Ibn Sina's claims that he had plans for composing an Oriental philosophy more elevated in rank than his other, strictly Peripatetic works. Suhrawardi begins the passage by quoting texts by Ibn Sina concerning problems relating to the definition of simple things, with which he at first agrees -



namesly, that simple, non-composite essences can only be "described" and not defined. Suhrawardi here refers to a book titled *Kararis fi'l-hikmah* ("Quires on Philosophy"), attributed by Ibn Sina to the method of "Orientals" in philosophy. It is not clear what the *Quires* are, but the statement in question can be traced to Ibn Sina's Logic of the Orientals.

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Suhrawardi's initial remarks concerning Ibn Sinan thought are matter-of-fact. His attack against it begins rather abruptly and is directed towards the essential distinction between Peripatetic philosophy and Oriental philosophy. First, Suhrawardi casts doubt on Ibn Sina's claim that the *Quires* is based on Oriental principles. Then he goes on to refute intensely Ibn Sina's assertion that the *Quires* constitutes a new Oriental philosophy in a twofold argument, as follows. Firstly, no supposedly Oriental philosophy existed prior to Suhrawardi's own reconstruction of the Philosophy of Illumination, which should not be considered Oriental in a cultural or geographic sense, but rather as incorporating an "Illuminationist" (*ishraqi*, not to be confused with *mashriqi*) emphasis on intuitive, inspirational and immediate modes of cognition. (These philosophical issues should not be confused with the contemporary reading of an allegedly medieval nationalist ideology that is, at best, difficult to substantiate textually.)

Secondly, Suhrawardi takes pains to demonstrate that the *Quires* were, in fact, composed solely in agreement with established Peripatetic laws (*qawa'id al-mashsha'in*), comprising problems included only in what he specifies as *philosophia generalis* (*al-hikmat al-'ammah*). At best, as Suhrawardi is careful to indicate, Ibn Sina may have changed an expression or slightly modified a minor point, but the *Quires* is not significantly different from the standard Peripatetic texts. Suhrawardi concludes that simple modifications made by Ibn Sina do not make him an Oriental philosopher. Here is another instance at which Suhrawardi turns to polemics, perhaps for political reasons, as he invokes the authority of the "ancients" by claiming that his own principles of Oriental philosophy (*al-asl al-mashriqi*) reflect the earlier "wisdom" of Persian Khusrawani sages and many other

figures.

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It is necessary to bear in mind Suhrawardi's own philosophical intention in composing systematic works structurally distinct from the Peripatetic and that were specifically titled to emphasize the difference. Suhrawardi claims that his new system triumphs where the Peripatetic fails, that it is a sounder method for probing the nature of things and is, above all, capable of "scientifically" describing non-standard experiences (widely believed to be real in his time), such as "true dreams", "personal revelations", "unitive knowledge" of the whole, "ability to foretell the future", "out-of-body experiences", "reviving the dead" and other "miraculous" extraordinary phenomena. The underlying intention for Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination is to prescribe a clear path towards a philosophical life that is at once a more "scientifically" valid means of probing the nature of things and attaining happiness, and ultimately a way of reaching more practical wisdom that can and should be employed in the service of just rule.

#### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SUHRAWARDI'S WORK IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY**

A significant methodological principle is established by Suhrawardi when, for the first time in the history of philosophy, he clearly distinguishes a bipartite division in metaphysics: *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*. The former, as the new philosophical position holds, includes standard discussions of such subjects as existence, unity, substances, accidents, time, motion, etc.; while the latter is said to include a novel scientific approach to analyzing supra-rational problems such as God's existence and knowledge; "true dreams"; "visionary experience"; creative acts of the enlightened, the knowing subjects's "imagination"; the "proof" of the real; the objective existence of a "separate realm"

designated *mundus imaginalis* ('*alam al-khayal*); as well as many other similar problems. In fact, Suhrawardi's division of the subject matter of metaphysics, as well as his attempt to demonstrate the epistemological primacy of an objectified experiential mode of

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cognition, are among the distinguishing methodological and structural characteristics of Illuminationist philosophy. Since Suhrawardi's time, these principles have been employed by many commentators and historians to accentuate the differences between the Peripatetics and the Illuminationists.

Another area in which Illuminationist principles have had an impact is in the realm of semantics ('*ilm dalalat al-alfaz*). Suhrawardi, perhaps inspired by a Stoic-Megaric minor trend in Islamic philosophy up to his time, restates a number of problems in a different manner than the way in which they are named and discussed in the Ibn Sinan logical corpus. Problems in this area of logic include: types of signification; relation of class names to constituents (members) of the class; types of inclusion of members in classes (*indiraj, istighraq, indikhal, shumul, etc.*); and, perhaps most significantly from the standpoint of the history of logic, a fairly well-defined theory of supposition (the restricted and unrestricted use of quantification).

In the domain of formal logic Suhrawardi proves himself to be a remarkable logician. To a lesser or greater extent, Suhrawardi influenced a number of works on specific problems of logic in Persia. These include: iterated modalities; the construction of a super affirmative necessary proposition (*al-qadiyyat al-daruriyyat al-battatah*); the question of negation (*al-salb*), especially in the conversion of syllogism (*al'aks*); the reduction of terms; construction of a single "mother" figure for syllogism (*shakl al-qiyas*) from which all other figures are to be derived; temporal modalities (*al-qadaya al-muwajjah*); especially non-admittance of an unrestricted validity of the universal affirmative proposition (*al-qadiyyat al-mujibat al-kulliyah*) in obtaining certain knowledge (*al'ilm al-yqini*) because of future contingency (*al-imkan al-mustaqbal*); as well as many others.

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Another major area of Suhrawardi's influence is his theory of categories, to which most later philosophical works in Persia refer, especially within the later non-Ibn Sinan philosophical synthesis known as Transcendent Philosophy (*al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah*). Suhrawardi discusses the categories at great length in his major Arabic and Persian systematically philosophical works. He attributes his influential categorical theory to a Pythagorean scholar (*shakhs fithaghurithi*) by the name of Arkutus. What is later designated by Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra) as "motion in the category of substance" (*al-harakah al-jawhariyyah*), translated as "substantial motion" and "transubstantial motion", is a direct corollary to Suhrawardi's theory. Briefly the theory states that "intensity" (*shaddah wa da'f*) is a property of all categories which are reduced to five: substance (*jawhar*), quality (*kayf*), quantity (*kamm*), relation (*nisbah*) and motion (*harakah*). This concept is in direct agreement with Suhrawardi's special theory of being as continuum, as well as with his theory known as "theory of future possibility" (*qa'idat imkan al-ashraf* - literally, theory of the possibility of the most noble).

Taken as a whole, Suhrawardi's aim is directed towards theoretical as well as practical and achievable goals, first to demonstrate fundamental gaps in the logical foundations of Aristotelian epistemology and metaphysics, and then to reconstruct a system founded upon different, more logically consistent, epistemological and metaphysical principles. Although further analytic studies are required to evaluate the philosophical side of suhrawardi's thought, one fact is widely accepted by the traditional Islamic philosophers: the Philosophy of Illumination - its ideas, language and method - had a major impact on all subsequent thought in Islam, covering philosophical, mystical and even political domains. The influence of this philosophical system has been most widespread in Persia followed by Muslim

India, where it has also helped define the notion of poetic and philosophical wisdom as the principle means by which generations of Muslims have sought solutions to essential intellectual and existential questions.

**A REVIEW OF WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP  
ON SUHRAWARDI**

Despite Suhrawardi's monumental impact on the development of post-Ibn Sinan philosophy in Islam, evidenced by the widespread use of the epithet "Illuminationist" (*ishraqi*) to distinguish it from the Peripatetic approach, only a few analytical works (none comprehensive) are available on Suhrawardi's systematic philosophical works. Lack of serious interest in studying the philosophical dimension of Suhrawardi's thought has been due partially to, firstly, a misconception among some historians that Islamic philosophy did not develop beyond Ibn Sina in the East, and terminated in the West with Ibn Rushd (Averroes); and, secondly, misrepresentation of Suhrawardi's ideas by a number of scholars who have described the Philosophy of Illumination (and other non-Aristotelian philosophical endeavor) as "theosophy" "*sagesse orientale*", "transcendent theosophy" and the like. While the Islamic Peripatetic tradition has been studied from a philosophical perspective, the dominant focus of scholarly attention on post-Ibn Sinan thought has been on a presumed "spiritual" dimension of selected Arabic and Persian texts of Islamic philosophy covering the five centuries after Ibn Sina, including Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination (*Hikmat al-ishraq*), Mulla sadra's The Four Intellectual Journeys (*al-Asfar al-arba'at al-'aqliyyah*) and other similar texts. This type of emphasis has led some historians to categorize thinkers such as Suhrawardi as "esoteric" Sufis, which is a misleading designation to say the least. The more serious limitation of emphasis on the esoteric dimension of post-Ibn Sinan philosophical texts, appropriately stated by Fazlur Rahman, has been "at the cost ... of its purely intellectual and philosophical hard core, which is of immense value and interest to the modern

student of philosophy".

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Western interest in Suhrawardi has a long history. Since the early decades of the twentieth century Orientalists and historians of philosophy have noticed Suhrawardi to be an important figure in the formation of post-Ibn Sinan philosophical thought. Carra de Vaux and Max Horten wrote short essays on him. In the late 1920s, Louis Massignon gave a classification of Suhrawardi's works. Otto Spies edited and translated a few of his philosophical allegories a decade later; and Hlemut Ritter clarified a prevalent Orientalist confusion by distinguishing Suhrawardi from three mystics who bore the same attribution "Suhrawardi". It was, however, Henry Corbin's text editions of many of Suhrawardi's philosophical writings, as well as his interpretations, that started a new wave of infatuation with Illuminationist philosophy. Seyyed Hossein Nasr has also devoted a number of studies to the spiritual and religious dimension in Suhrawardi's teachings. Still, however, too few studies of the logical and epistemological foundations of the Philosophy of Illumination from a philosophical point of view are available. The few pages in Muhammad Iqbal's The Development of Metaphysics in Persia constitute one of the few general accounts of Suhrawardi's philosophical thought.

Some recent scholars, notably Henry Corbin and Mohammad Moin, have further imagined Suhrawardi to be a reviver of some form of ancient Persian philosophy which, however, cannot be substantiated. There is simply no textual evidence for an independent Persian philosophical tradition. The fact that Suhrawardi (as well as other thinkers in Islam) mentions names of Persian kings and heroes, and makes reference to Persian mythological events, is indicative more of an intention to invoke the authority of ancient, well-known Persian symbols, than to recover some lost systematic philosophy. Suhrawardi's critique of certain problems of logic, epistemology, physics, mathematics and metaphysics in his Philosophy of Illumination draws upon established Peripatetic texts. No other textual source can be presumed to have been available to him. The fact that he reformulates philosophical problems, rejects some or redefines others is indicative of his

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own philosophical intention to reconstruct a metaphysical system that aims, among other things, to establish the primacy of an intuitive mode of cognition. It is not indicative of a philosophical tradition known to him but lost to us.

However, the above certainly does not prove that philosophy did not exist in pre-Islamic Persia, as Mr. Ziai would no doubt be the first to agree. As we have noted, the Gospels and other sources affirm that Jesus was heir to Zoroaster as well as to the Old Testament prophets. I recall reading notices by Neoplatonists, especially Plotinus and Proclus, concerning philosophy taught in Persia. If Greece and India had flourishing schools of philosophy at an early date, why not Persia? What motive would Plotinus and Proclus have had to lie on this point?

To use the fact that no philosophical texts from pre-Islamic Persia have survived to infer that there was no philosophy in pre-Islamic Persia is to fall into what the Spanish call *positivismo atontado*, i.e., idiotized positivism, or worse, to be a sttoge of Stalin. For years, many scholars denied reports of the crimes of Lenin and Stalin, due to lack of documentation. Said documentation was not accessible to Western scholars because it had been destroyed or suppressed or carefully hidden. Since the downfall of

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the Soviet Union, abundant documentation concerning the crimes of the Soviet Regime has become available.

As we have noted in another place, much of Scotland was irretrievably lost in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, due to the so-called "Reformation" and English invasions, while in Ireland, especially in the 17<sup>th</sup> century a great deal was irretrievably lost due to English invasions. More recently, we have noted that there is no doubt that much was lost and obliterated due to the US Civil War and its aftermath. Since the time of Suhrawardi, much has undoubtedly been lost due to Turkish and Mongol invasions and simple neglect; also, there were more Zoroastrians in Persia in the time of Suhrawardi than is the case at the present time. So, it is very possible that there were sources concerning philosophy in pre-Islamic Persia which were still in existence in the time of Suhrawardi which have since been obliterated or simply neglected and forgotten.

Certainly Suhrawardi was not infallible, and may have been mistaken or misinformed; however, I am reluctant to say that he was a liar. Henry Corbin believed that Suhrawardi was telling the truth when he claimed to be reviving the teachings of pre-Islamic



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Persia (see: En Islam Iranien, Henry Corbin, Paris, 1971, Tome II, pp. 19-39.) To summarize, if or not Suhrawardi was influenced by pre-Islamic Persian philosophers, and, if so, to what extent, is an open question, and, barring unexpected - though not impossible - discoveries, will probably always remain so.]

**PROBLEMS, STRUCTURE AND  
METHOD OF THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF ILLUMINATION:**

The most obvious but too readily dismissed principal component of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy is its use of a special technical language. This distinct vocabulary uses the symbolism of light to describe ontological problems, and especially to depict cosmological structures. For example, the Peripatetic (Aristotelian) Necessary Being is called "Light of Lights"; the separate "intellects" are called "abstract lights"; and so on. It is important to note that these linguistic innovations are not just new terms but are also indicative of philosophical intention. Thus the light symbolism is deemed more suitable to convey the ontological principle of equivocal being, since it is more readily understood that lights may differ in intensity while remaining of the same essence. Also, it is deemed more acceptable to discuss "proximity" (*qurb*) and distance (*bu'd*) from the source as indications of degrees of perfection when light symbolism is used. For example, the closer an entity is to the source, the Light of Lights, the more luminous the light entity (*al-shay' al-mustanir*) will be.

The use of symbolic language is a significant and distinguishing characteristic of the Philosophy of Illumination as a whole. Symbolism is also applied to the epistemological primacy of the creative act of intuition, which proposes as a primary axiom that the soul's knowledge of itself - here a light entity - is the foundation and starting point of knowledge. This knowledge is described as an abstract light generated (*hasil*) from the source of light. The argument is that any light is observed to propagate itself once lit and is not emanated (*fayd*) either by will or at discrete intervals in time. This means that all light entities are obtained or generated from the source not in time but in a durationless instant once the source is lit, whenever that may be.

From the textual perspective, the Philosophy of Illumination begins in the *Intimations*, especially where Suhrawardi recollects a dream/vision in which Aristotle appears. This allegorical device allows Suhrawardi to present several important philosophical issues. Aristotle informs Suhrawardi through this dream/vision that the Muslim Peripatetics have failed to achieve the kind of wisdom achieved by mystics such as Abu Yazid al-Bastami and al-Hallaj. This is due, the narration continues, to the mystics having achieved union with the Active Intellect or by going beyond discursive philosophy and relying on their personal experience. The truths (*haqa'iq*) obtained in this way are the results of a special intuitive, experiential mode of knowledge, this text states. Thus the first critique of Peripatetic Philosophy is uttered through no less an authority than Aristotle, who informs Suhrawardi that true knowledge can only be based on self-knowledge and obtained through a special mode designated as "knowledge by illumination and presence".

What this epistemological mode means and how it is obtained must rest first on demonstrating the logical gaps in the Peripatetic system. This is achieved as Suhrawardi undertakes an elaborate critique of the Aristotelian concept and formula of definition. This critique, which will be examined here in some detail, is the first significant attempt to show a fundamental

gap in the Aristotelian scientific method, and indicates the first step in the reconstruction of the Philosophy of Illumination. The next major methodological step is to present an alternative epistemological foundation for constructing a holistic metaphysics. These are the primacy of intuition and the theory of vision-illumination - considered in Illuminationist Philosophy to be the means for obtaining principles to be used in compound deductive reasoning.

#### **SUHRAWARDI'S CRITIQUE OF THE ESSENTIALIST THEORY OF DEFINITION**

The problem of definition is fundamentally related to how the Philosophy of Illumination is constructed. Perhaps the most significant logical problem, which also has epistemological implications, is Suhrawardi's negation and thus rejection of the Aristotelian view of an essentialist definition, *al-hadd al-tamm*, which considers definition to be the most prior and thus the significant first step in the process of philosophical construction. The impact of Suhrawardi's critique of Peripatetic methodology on this issue is so direct and has had such a widespread impact on the subsequent development of philosophy in Persia that I am tempted to call it the triumph of Platonic method over the Aristotelian in Persia. The Platonic approach to definition seeks the unity of the thing defined in its Form, which is fully defined only as a person realizes what-is-to-be-defined (the *definiendum*) in his or her own self-consciousness.

Suhrawardi's critique of Aristotle's theory is marked by a combination of logical and semantic arguments. It begins by asserting that it is impossible to construct an essentialist definition, and that even Aristotle himself admits this. Thus, Suhrawardi points out a critical gap in the Peripatetic system, thereby undermining Aristotle's basis of philosophical construction. Suhrawardi's analysis of the essentialist definition is in itself of major philosophical value. In a celebrated passage in book 2 of the Posterior Analytics, Aristotle stipulates the position of definition to be that of the first step in a science,

and the premiss for demonstration. Therefore, only if a definition is obtained, or constructed, may one proceed to scientific knowledge. Thus if essentialist definition does not lead to unrestricted, primary knowledge of essence - as it must in the Illuminist position - then the entire philosophical system has to be reconstructed based on other means of achieving knowledge of essence.

How should a definition be constructed? Suhrawardi asks his Peripatetic adversaries for their answer. Let us assume we want to define a thing, *X*. This thing must be constituted in relation to its attributes, both essential and non-essential, such as concomitants, accidents and so on. We may designate these attributes as constituents of *X*, say *x*. Not considering simple, non-composite (*basit*), entities, we must, Suhrawardi argues, see whether *x* is real or only ideally known, and how it is known in relation to *X*. The next question pertinent in the Illuminationist position is that of priority (*taqaddum*). That is, in order to define *X* we must be able to know *Y*, itself consisting of *y* constituents, in relation to which *X* may be defined. And *Y* must be necessarily prior to *X* in respect to knowledge. Also, as with *X*, the question whether *Y* can be known through *y* will also have to be examined. Therefore, the definition of *X* will depend on what is known prior in knowledge. Thus, how the definition is obtained is, according to Suhrawardi, the primary philosophical step and first constructivist step in science.

Suhrawardi insists that the Peripatetic position on definition is reduced to: "A formula [*qawl*] which indicates the essence of the thing and combines [*yaajma'*] all of its constituent elements [*muqawwimat*]. In the case of principal realities, it [the formula] is a synthesis [*tarkib*] of their genera and differentiae.

So far, this formula of definition is in conformity with Ibn Sina's writings. Suhrawardi's novel position is his insistence that all constituents of a thing must be combined in the formula, a requirement not specified by the Peripatetic formula. Also, the formula must be a synthesis (*tarkib*), as applied to the manner in which the attributes or constituents of the

thing to be defined must come together in the essentialist definition, indicate a new approach to the problem. In this respect he is also presenting a position which is in opposition to Ibn Sina's views that conform to the standard Peripatetic ones. Suhrawardi's critique of definition also draws on the semantic options he had worked out regarding signification (*dalalah*), of meaning (*al-ma'na*) or idea, by the utterances (*al-lafz*) said of the things (*al-ashya*) to be defined. For the complete essentialist definition of "What is X?", according to the Peripatetics, is "the *summum genus* of X plus its *differentiae*". For Suhrawardi, this formula is inadequate. As he states, the Peripatetic formula for the complete essentialist definition of man is "rational animal", which only implicitly states the essence of animal, and adds nothing to our knowledge of the idea "man" (*al-hayawaniyyah*) and the utterance "rational" only indicates "a thing that has a soul". By Aristotelian definition, then, only rationality is established, and not the essence of "man".

The Peripatetics' position allows the essential to be more known than the thing defined, whereas Suhrawardi holds that the essentials are as unknown as the thing itself. Suhrawardi's own theory of unity is implied when he states "[One can obtain a definition only] by recourse to sensible or apparent things in another way [i.e., other than the Peripatetic formula of definition], and [only] if [and when] the thing pertains specifically to the sum total of the [sensible and apparent things] as a organic whole.

In the last paragraph of his argument, Suhrawardi attacks the Peripatetic formula of definition from yet another point of view which is related to his critique of induction. Suhrawardi's view in this regard holds that: to know something by means of its essentials, one must be able to enumerate each and every one of them, which is possible only if the sum total of the essentials is known. Suhrawardi explicitly states here for the first time that such knowledge of the total essentials by the method of enumeration is not possible. This is because the thing to be defined may have a multiplicity of non-apparent (*ghayr zahir*)

attributes, the set of essentials may be limitless and the elements of the set may not be discretely distinguishable from the set itself. Also, although knowledge of the set implies knowledge of the elements, it is not possible to know what the set itself is by knowing the elements separately.

Suhrawardi concludes from his arguments that the constituents of a thing (*muqawwimat al-shay'*) are not separate from the thing, neither "really" ('aynan) nor "mentally" (*dhihnan*). Therefore, an essentialist definition cannot be constructed, since that would require separating the constituents of a thing into genera and differentiae; but a thing can only be described as it is seen, which then and only then determines its reality. To define something according to the Illuminist position, it has to be "seen" as it is. As Suhrawardi explicitly states, these are his own additions to the Peripatetic method.

Does the definition of X simply rest on an intuition of it or of something else prior to placing its formula in some constructed structure? This problem will be discussed below. The emphasis here is on Suhrawardi's insistence that only "the collectivity of the essentials of a thing is a valid definition of it.

#### **THE ILLUMINATIONIST THEORY OF DEFINITION**

From a formal standpoint, Suhrawardi's theory elaborates upon the earlier one and also includes a Platonic component; as it requires that by definition we ultimately strive to know the Forms, or to obtain knowledge of them through vision-illumination. Suhrawardi's theory is, therefore, fundamentally experiential. It is based on the immediate cognition of something real and prior in being, which he identifies as "light" - the fundamental real principle of Illuminist metaphysics. For Suhrawardi, light is its own definition; to see it - i.e., to experience it

- is to know it: "If, in reality, there exists a thing which need not be defined nor explained, then that thing is apparent, and since there is nothing more apparent than light, then more than anything, it is in no need of definition."

Suhrawardi contends that the essentials may be ascertained only when the thing itself is ascertained, and this is the basis for his critique of the Peripatetic theory. It also serves as the impetus for his formulation of an alternate theory, as follows: "We obtain a definition only by means of things that pertain specifically to the totality (i.e., organic whole [*al-ijtima'*]) of the thing."

In contrast to the Peripatetic view, the Illuminationist system begins by accepting the absolute validity of an atemporal, primary intuition of the knowing subject (*al-mawdu' al-mudrik*), who is necessarily and always cognizant of its "I-ness" (*al-ana'iyah*) prior to spatial extension. In Illuminationist philosophy, self-consciousness and the self-conscious entities are depicted as lights and cover all of reality. Thus, for example, an abstract, non-corporeal light represents pure self-consciousness. Other corporeal entities are less "lit" but are also self-conscious, albeit to a lesser degree. Every thing is also potentially self-conscious, except for the purely "dark", which represents total privation of light.

Admittedly, one aspect of Suhrawardi's theory, namely the insistence on complete enumeration of the essentials of the thing synthesized in unitary formula, is, to say the least, enigmatic. However, considering the works of modern philosophers such as Bertrand Russell and Alfred J. Ayer clarifies the problem. Russell's theory is reduced to a distinction between definition by extension (a definition that seeks to enumerate the members of a "class") and definition by intension (a definition that mentions a defining property or properties). The Illuminationist theory can be seen as combining elements both of a definition by extension and of a definition by intension. Ayer distinguishes Aristotelian explicit definition from

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definition in use. This reduces to a set of symbols which, in turn, are translatable into symbolic

equivalents. This translatability must necessarily include, as an integral component, the experience of the truth underlying the symbol. Thus, the Aristotelian essentialist definition of "man" as symbol for a "rational animal" is only an explicit definition, and so becomes a tautology in the strict non-mathematical sense.

According to Illuminationist theory, the essence of man, which is the truth underlying the symbol "man", is recoverable only in the subject. This act of "recovery" is the translation of the symbol to its equivalent in the consciousness or the self of the subject. Since the soul is the origin of the thing by which the idea of humanity is ascertained, and since the soul is the "closest" (*aqrab*) thing to humans, it is therefore through the soul that one may first realize the essence of the human being and ultimately of all things. Subsequently, based on the subject's self-knowledge, the real sciences are constructed by employing the method of demonstration.

#### **ILLUMINATIONIST EPISTEMOLOGY**

Perhaps the most widespread impact of Suhrawardi's philosophy has been in the domain of epistemology. A basic Illuminationist principle is that to know something is to obtain an experience of it, tantamount to a primary intuition of the determinants of the thing. Experiential knowledge of a thing is analysed only subsequent to the intuitive total and immediate grasp of it. Is there something in a subject's experience, one may ask, which necessitates that what is obtained by the subject be expressed through a specifically constructed symbolic language? The answer to this question will be examined from multiple points of view, but it is clear, even at this juncture, that Suhrawardi's "language of Illumination" is intended as a specific vocabulary through which the experience of Illumination may be described. It is equally clear that the interpretation of the symbolism of Illumination and

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its implications, as detailed by Suhrawardi in the Paths and Havens, are the central aspects of the controversy over the basis of Illuminationist philosophy.



The Philosophy of Illumination, as described in Suhrawardi's works, consists of three stages dealing with the question of knowledge, followed by a fourth stage of describing the experience. The first stage is marked by preparatory activity on the part of the philosopher; he or she has to "abandon the world" in readiness to accept "experience". The second is the stage of illumination, in which the philosopher attains visions of a "Divine Light" (*al-nur al-ilahi*). The third stage, or stage of construction, is marked by the acquisition of unlimited knowledge, which is Illuminationist knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ishraqi*) itself. The fourth and final stage is the documentation, or written form of that visionary experience. Thus, the third and fourth stages as documented in Suhrawardi's writings are the only components of the Philosophy of Illumination, as it was practiced by Suhrawardi and his disciples, to which we have access.

The beginning of the first stage is marked by such activities as going on a forty-day retreat, abstaining from eating meat and preparing for inspiration and "revelation". Such activities fall under the general category of ascetic and mystical practices, though not in strict conformity with the prescribed states and stations of the mystic path or *sufi tariqah*, as known in the mystical works available to Suhrawardi. According to Suhrawardi, a portion of the "light of God" (*al-bariq al-ilahi*) resides within the philosopher, who possesses intuitive powers. Thus, by practicing the activities in stage one, he or she is able, through "personal revelation" and "vision" (*mushahadah wa mukashafah*), to accept the reality of his or her own existence and admit the truth of his or her own intuition. The first stage therefore, consists of (1.) an activity, (2.) a condition (met by everyone, since we are told that every person has intuition and in everyone there is a certain portion of the light of God) and (3.) personal "revelation".

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The first stage leads to the second, and the Divine Light enters the being of the human. This light then takes the form of a series of "apocalyptic lights" (*al-anwar al-haqiqiyah*) is obtained.

The third stage is the stage of constructing a true science (*'ilm sahih*). It is during this stage that the

philosopher makes use of discursive analysis. The experience is put to the test, and the system of proof used is the Aristotelian demonstration (*burhan*) of the *Posterior Analytics*. The same certitude obtained by moving from sense data (observation and concept formation) to demonstration based on reason, which is the basis of discursive scientific knowledge, is said to prevail when visionary data upon which the Philosophy of Illumination rests, are "demonstrated". This is accomplished through a process of analysis aimed at demonstrating the experience and constructing a system in which to place the experience and validate it, even after the experience has ended.

The impact of the specifically Illuminationist theory of knowledge, generally known as "knowledge by presence" (*al'ilm al-huduri*), has not been confined to philosophical and other specialist circles, as Illuminationist logic has been, for example. The epistemological status given to intuitive knowledge has fundamentally influenced what is called "speculative mysticism" (*'irfan-i nazari*) [as it is called in Persian] in Persia as well as in Persian poetry. By looking briefly at a paradigm concerning the poet-philosopher-mystic's way of capturing and portraying wisdom, this point will be made evident.

The paradigm involves a subject (*mawdu'*), consciousness (*idrak*) in the subject as well as relating to it, and creativity (*khallaqiyyah*). The transition from the subject (*al-mawdu' al-mudrik al-khallaq*) marks the transformation of the human being as subject in a natural state to the human as knowing subject in the first state where knowledge transcends simple knowing and the spiritual journey begins. This leads finally to the state of union, when the knowing subject enters the realms of power (*jabarut*) and the Divine (*Lahut*), and the human being obtains the reality (*haqiqah*) of things and becomes the knowing-creating subject. What are finally created are "poems".

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In my view, the most significant distinguishing characteristic of Persian poetry taken as a whole is its almost existential perspective regarding the outcome of philosophy (especially non-Aristotelian philosophy, equated with Ibn Sina's Oriental philosophy, as well as with Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination). From this

viewpoint, the end result of philosophy, which is wisdom, can be communicated only through the poetic medium. Innate poetic wisdom thus informs the human being - the philosopher-sage; the sage-poet; and, ultimately, simply the poet - of every facet of response to the total environment: the corporeal and the spiritual, the ethical and the political, the religious and the mundane. The ensuing perception of reality and historical process is constructed (as in the Persian *shi'r sakhtan*) in a metaphysical form - an art form, perhaps - that consciously at all stages employs metaphor, symbol, myth, lore and legend. The consequence is that Persian wisdom is more poetic than philosophical, and always more intuitive than discursive. This, in my view, is clearly the more popular legacy of Illuminationist philosophy and of its impact [and not only in Persia, as anyone familiar with the works of St. John of the Cross well knows].

The way Persian poetic wisdom (or Persian poetic *ishraqi* wisdom) seeks to unravel even the mysteries of nature, for example, is not by examining the principles of physics, as the Aristotelians (or Peripatetics) would, but by looking into the metaphysical world and the realms of mythm archetypes, dream, fantasy and sentiment. This type of knowledge forms the basis of Suhrawardi's views of Illuminationist knowledge by presence.

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#### **A SYNOPSIS OF ILLUMINATIONIST KNOWLEDGE BY PRESENCE**

In his introduction to the Philosophy of Illumination, Suhrawardi discusses the way in which the foundation of Illuminationist knowledge was obtained by him as follows: "I did not first obtain [the Philosophy of Illumination through cogitation, but through

something else, I only subsequently sought proofs for it."

That is, the principles of the Philosophy of Illumination (tantamount to the very first vision, and to the knowledge of the whole), was obtained by Suhrawardi not through thinking and speculation but through "something else". This, as we are told by Suhrawardi and by the commentators Shahrāzūrī (seventh/thirteenth century), Qutb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (eight/fourteenth century) and Harawī (eleventh/seventeenth century), is a special experiential mode of knowledge named "Illuminationist vision" (*al-mushahadat al-ishraqiyyah*). The epistemology of this type of vision is worked out in great detail by Suhrawardi. It is the subject of much discussion by all later commentators and is also reformulated and re-examined by one of the leading twentieth-century Muslim Illuminationist philosophers, Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Assar, in his study of ontological principles and arguments *Wahdat-I wujud va bada*, [as it is titled in Persian].

Suhrawardi's reconstructed theory of knowledge consists of intuitive judgements (*al-ahkam al-hads* - resembling the Aristotelian notion of *agkhinoia*) and what he holds to be the dual process of vision-illumination (*al-mushahadah wa'l-ishraq*), which together serve as the foundation for the construction of a sound, true science (*al-'ilm al-sahih*). These aspects also form the basis for a "scientific" methodology (*al-tariq al-'ulum*) which is at the core of Suhrawardi's concept of knowledge by presence. The visionary experience, which leads to knowledge not obtained by cogitation (*fikr*), takes place in a special realm called *mundus imaginalis* (*alam al-mithal*). The philosopher's experience in the realm of the imaginary

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determines what things are, which may ultimately be communicated only through non-ordinary language, such as poetic language or other symbolic modes of metalanguage. Thus poetry, which encompasses a metaphysics of metaphor and symbol, is theoretically given the status of the "most real".

Suhrawardi uses a favorite analogy to describe his view of knowledge. He compares physical astronomical observation (*irsad jismani*), spiritual astronomical observation (*irsad ruhani*), and states that the same

kind of certitude observed from the world of sense data (*al-mahsusat*) is obtained from observing or "seeing" the non-corporeal. He uses this analogy in its various forms in many places in his writings, and his commentators also use it to illustrate the fundamentals of the Illuminationist theory of knowledge.

*Mudus imaginalis* is in a sense an ontological realm. Beings of this realm, though possessing the categorical attributes - in other words, "having" time, place, relation, quality, quantity, etc. - are independent of matter. In Suhrawardi's theory of categories, he considers substance, quality, quantity, relation and motion in terms of degrees of intensity as processes rather than as distinct ontic entities. Thus an ideal being, or a being in the *imaginalis* sense, has a substance which is usually depicted symbolically as light. This substance differs from that of another being only in respect to the degree of its intensity, which is in a continuous state (*muttasil*) of, firstly, being connected to its substances, or light-monads, and, secondly, being part of the continuum, which is the Illuminationist cosmos. The being also has shape, which is imaginal, or ideal. Motion is a category and is an attribute of substances as well. Light entities in this realm move, and their movements are in relation to their degrees of intensity, or luminosity.

What enables the novice to gain such knowledge is the guide figure of this realm who serves a similar function as that of the Peripatetic *nous poietikos*. But while the Active Intellect of the Ibn Sinan cosmology, for example, is stationary and discretely distinct from the other nine intellects above it in rank, the guide

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in this clime (*al-nur al-isfahbad* in *Hikmat al-ishraq*) - which is equated in activity with a *dator spiritus* (*rawan bakhsh*) or *dator scientis* (*wahib al-'ilm*) and a *dator formarum* (*wahib al-suwar*) - is a light entity which is continuously moving and propagating its essence. This essence, which is a degree of light intensity, impregnates the imagination of the philosopher-sage with the imaginal forms.

The visionary experience, which provides knowledge in this realm, is due and related to the substantial

(*al-suwar al-jawhariyyah*) that have taken ideal, or imaginal, forms. They may appear as different forms, as they are in a state of continuous transubstantial motion, although they do not actually change their singularity. Thus, a vision of *al-isfahbad al-nasut* may appear as (the Archangel) Gabriel to one, as *Surush* to another, and so on. This phenomenon serves as a metaphor for what the Peripatetics call "connection with the Active Intellect" (*al-ittihad, aw al-ittisal bi'l-aql al-fa'al*). The result is the same: knowledge of the unseen, leading to Illumination, culminating in becoming a knowing-creating subject (*al-mawdu al-mudrik al-khallaq*).

The story of Aristotle appearing to Suhrawardi in a dream-vision is an allegory through which the philosopher exemplifies his own view of knowledge. This story has a number of characteristic components which may be analysed briefly as follows. Firstly, in the vision, which is a state accompanied by overwhelming pleasure (*ladhdhah*), flashes (*barq*) and a glittering light, stated to be one of the intermediary stages of Illuminationist visionary experience, Aristotle, the "master of philosophy" and "one who comes to the aid of souls", appears to Suhrawardi, who asks a question concerning knowledge (*mas'alat al-'ilm*), how it is obtained, what it is made of and how it is recognized. Aristotle's response is: "return to your soul (or self)". Self-knowledge is a fundamental component of the Illuminationist theory of knowledge. Knowledge as perception (*idrak*) of the soul is essential and self-constituted, because an individual is cognizant of his essence by means of that essence itself. Self-

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consciousness and the concept of "I" - the self-as-self, or its ipseity, its selfhood - are the grounds of knowledge. What is ultimately gained through the initial consciousness of one's essence is a way to knowledge, called the "science based on presence and vision" (*al'ilm al-buduri al-shuhudi*). For Suhrawardi, this is a higher type of knowledge than that obtained by the Peripatetic philosophers, who rely on union with the Active Intellect.

Concerning his views of the foundations of knowledge, Suhrawardi writes: "Should a thing be seen,

then one can dispense with its definition [*man shahadahu [al-shay'] istaghna 'an al-ta'rif*]", and in that case "the form of the thing in the mind is the same as its form in sense perception" (*suratuhu fi'l-'aql ka-suratihi fi'l-hiss*). This view of knowledge is a fundamental principle in the Philosophy of Illumination.

The Illuminationist's method of obtaining knowledge by means of a special mode of perception based on intuitive knowledge is said to be higher and more fundamental than predicative knowledge because the subject has an immediate grasp of the object without the need for mediation. His or her position is based on the unity of the subject and object by means of the "idea" of the object being obtained in the consciousness of the subject. Thus, the subject's immediate experience of the "presence" of the object determines the validity of knowledge itself, and the experience of such things as God, the self, separate entities, etc., is the same as knowledge of them.

One of the most significant statements made by Suhrawardi on this matter is his insistence on a complete correspondence between the idea obtained in the subject, and the object. In his view, only such a correspondence shows that knowledge of the thing as-it-is has been obtained. This means that, to obtain knowledge, a kind of "unity" has to be established between the subject and the object, and the psychological state of the subject is a determining factor in establishing this unity. For the Peripatetics, knowledge is ultimately established by a kind of "union" (*ittihad*) or "connection" (*ittisal*)

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with the Active Intellect after an initial separation or disjunction (*infisal*). Suhrawardi vehemently opposes the idea of disjunction, arguing that the unity of the subject and object is obtained in the knowing person by an act of self-realization, and that this can take place because there is no disjunction in reality, but only gradations of the manifestation of essence.

Suhrawardi refers in a number of his works to "judgements of intuition" (*ahkam al-hads, hukm al-hads*) which are used as valid forms of inference. In each instance, the validity of the judgement of intuition is unquestioned and is given the rank of demonstration, so with intuitive judgement, constructing demonstrations is

no longer necessary. Intuition, in the sense used here by Suhrawardi, is most probably an elaboration of the Aristotelian "quick wit" (*agkhinoia*), but Suhrawardi incorporates this particular type of inference into his epistemology. Using a modified Peripatetic technical terminology, he identifies intuition first as an activity of the "habitual intellect" (*'aql bi'l-malakah*) and, secondly, as the activity of the "holy intellect" (*al-'aql al-qudsi*), but he considers the most important act of intuition to be the subject's ability to perceive most of the intelligibles quickly without a teacher. In such a case, intuition grasps the middle term (*al-hadd al-awsat*) of a syllogism, which is tantamount to an immediate grasp of an essentialist definition - in short, of the thing's essence.

The twofold process of vision-illumination (*mushahahad-ishraq*) acts on all levels of reality, according to Suhrawardi. It begins on the human level, in outward sense-perception, as sight (*ibsar*). The eye (*al-basar*, or the seeing subject, *al-basir*) when capable of seeing, perceives an object (*al-mubsar*) when that object is illuminated (*mustanir*) by the sun in the sky. On the cosmic level, every abstract light sees the lights that are above it in rank, while instantaneously at the moment of vision the higher illuminates everything, and the Heavenly Sun, the "Great *Hurakhsh*", enables vision to take place. In effect, knowledge is obtained through this dual activity of vision-illumination, and the impetus underlying the

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operation of this principle is self-consciousness. Thus every being comes to know its own degree of perfection, an act of self-knowledge which induces a desire (*shawq*) to see the being just above it in perfection, and this act of seeing triggers the process of Illumination. By means of the process of Illumination, light is generated from its highest origin to the lowest elements.

Illumination is also the principle by means of which celestial motion is regulated. Illumination is propagated from the Light of Lights to the human level by means of certain intermediary principles. These are the "controlling lights" (*al-anwar al-ghahirah*) and "managing lights" (*al-anwar al-mudabbirah*). Among the latter, the principle lights which directly affect the human soul are the *isfahbad* lights.



The Light of Lights controls everything. It is the most apparent to itself, and thus it is the most self-conscious being in the Universe. All abstract are illuminated directly by the Light of Lights, whose luminosity (*nuriyyah*), Essence (*dhat*) and power are all one and the same. The Light of Lights is self-emanating (*Fayyad bi'l-dhat*), and its attributes and Essence are one. When the "heavenly illuminations" (*al-ishraqi al-'ulwiyyah*) reach the human soul through the intervention of *isfabad* lights, all knowledge is given to the person. Such moments are the visions of the apocalyptic lights (*al-anwar al-sanihah*), which are the foundation of visionary experience, and means of obtaining unrestricted knowledge. Human souls who have experienced the apocalyptic lights are called "souls separated from matter" (*al-nufus al-mujarradah*), because they have torn away from the physical bondage of body. They obtain an "idea of the light of God" (*mithal min nur Allah*), which the faculty of imagination imprints upon the "tablet of the *sensus communis*" (*lawh al-hiss al-mushtarak*). By means of this idea, they obtain control over a "creative light" (*al-nur al-khaliq*) which ultimately gives them power to know. The moment of illumination, which is experienced by the Brethren of Separation from Matter (*ikhwan al-tajrid*) and the Masters of Vision (*ashab al-mushahadah*), is described by Suhrawardi as a gradual

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experience of "light" in fifteen steps, starting with the experience of the "flashing pleasurable light" (*al-nur al-bariq al-ladhidh*) and ending with the experience of a light so violent that it may tear the body apart at the joints.

Suhrawardi's theory of vision applies to physics as well as to metaphysics. The analysis of the theory begins with a discussion of external vision (*ibsar*), what is called "vision, or seeing, by means of external senses" (*mushahadah bi'l-hiss al-zahir*). In physics, Suhrawardi rejects the corporeality of rays (*jismiyyat al-shu'a*). Next, he rejects the theory of rays to be colors (*lawniyyat al-shu'a*). Next, he rejects the theory of external vision which holds that "vision (*ibsar*) takes place solely because rays leave the eye and meet (*yulaqi*) objects of sight". Suhrawardi also rejects the view that the act of sight (*ru'ya*) takes place when the form of the thing (*surat al-shay'*) is imprinted in the

"vitreous humor" (*al-rutubat al-jalidiyyah*).

For Suhrawardi, the fact that vision has no temporal extension, and that there is no need for a material relation (*rabitah*) between the seer and the thing seen, means that sight or vision exists prior to thinking and is superior to it. This is because any enumeration of essential attributes, of the genera and the differentiae requires time. The construction of dialectical syllogism and induction also takes time. Vision, however, takes place in a durationless instant (*an*), and this is the "moment" of Illumination.

The theory of vision, as developed by Suhrawardi and portrayed in the metaphysics of the Philosophy of Illumination, is an application of his general theory of knowledge. Suhrawardi restates the conclusions reached in his theory of physics: "Theorem: [On Vision] You have now learned that sight does not consist of the imprint of the form of the object in the eye, nor of something that goes out from the eye. Therefore it can only take place when the luminous object (*al-mustanir*) encounters (*muqabalah*) a sound (healthy) eye."

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Thus, external vision takes place in accordance with Suhrawardi's general theory of knowledge, namely that the subject (the sound eye) and the object (the luminous thing) are both present and together necessitate the act of vision. For the act of vision to be consummated, the following conditions must be satisfied: 1.) the presence of light due to the propagation of light from the Light of Lights, (2.) the absence of an obstacle or "veil" (*hijab*) between the subject and the object, and (3.) the Illumination of the subject as well as the object. The mechanism which allows for the subject to be illuminated is a complicated one, and involves a certain activity on the part of the faculty of imagination. When an object is seen, the subject has acted in two ways: by an act of vision and an act of Illumination. Thus, vision-Illumination is actualized when no obstacle intervenes between the subject and the object.

In summary, one of the foundations of the Philosophy of Illumination is that the laws governing sight and

vision are based on the same rule, consisting of the existence of light, the act of vision, and the act of Illumination. Thus, in Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy, light, illumination, sight, vision, creative acts - and by extension all things - may be explained through the existence of light emanated by the Light of Lights."(330)

Suhrawardi was, of course, founder of a school of philosophy. Prof. Ziai continues on the topic of said school.

"To understand how philosophy has developed in the Islamic world, especially in Iran, it is of singular importance to examine Suhrawardi's Illuminationist tradition of philosophy, which has long been overlooked in the West, has had the most significant, widespread impact not only on Islamic philosophical thought *per se* but also in other areas of thought and creative activity, including speculative mysticism (*'irfan*) and poetry [including St. John of the Cross].

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It should be noted that these schools and traditions continue well after the sixth/twelfth century, and that the Peripatetic and the philosophical writings and teachings of many thinkers gave rise to yet another so-called new synthesis in Islamic philosophy known as the School of Isfahan.

This chapter will examine the tradition of Illuminationist philosophy after Suhrawardi, and will discuss selected details of its two dominant trends, focusing primarily on the seventh/thirteenth century. Thinkers of other periods considered to have been Illuminationists or to have favored Illuminationist philosophical positions in their writings will also be mentioned.

The Philosophy of Illumination grew out of reactions to certain aspects of Islamic philosophical texts, most of them associated with the Avicennan corpus. While Avicenna (Ibn Sina) may have been seriously intended to compose a separate and distinct "Eastern" philosophy - which he mentions briefly in his work Logic of the Easterners (*Mantiq al-Mashriqiyyin*) -

nowhere does he systematically develop and construct a philosophical system distinct from his monumental and predominantly Aristotelian composition, Healing. All of his works reflect a standard Peripatetic structure, terminology and philosophical intention.

A number of thinkers prior to Suhrawardi did compose works that incorporated different, sometimes anti-Aristotelian principles, however. Foremost among them is the philosopher Hibat Allah Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi. In his major anti-Aristotelian philosophic encyclopedia of the sixth/twelfth century Evidential (*al-Mu'tabar*), al-Baghdadi develops an alternate structure for a foundation of philosophy, especially of epistemology. As shown by Solomon Pines in his many detailed studies, al-Baghdadi also treats certain problems of physics from a distinctly non-Aristotelian perspective. Al-Baghdadi's intent was not to reject Avicennan philosophy, nor to prove its incoherence, as al-Ghazzali's polemics would suggest, but to improve the existing structure and rectify the perceived logical and metaphysical inconsistencies of the

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previous texts. The Evidential is the first evidence of a non-Aristotelian trend in Islamic philosophy, which was later systematized by Suhrawardi in his Illuminationist reconstruction of philosophy. Al-Baghdadi's three-part text - consisting of logic, physics, metaphysics - differs from Avicenna's Healing in both structure and method. Both al-Baghdadi and Suhrawardi base their constructivist philosophical ideas on the same foundation - that of a primary intuition of a knowing subject whose immediate grasp of the totality of existence, time and space, and of the whole as a self-constituted, inherently manifest and knowable object, determines both being and knowledge.

The fact that Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi is among the few philosophers Suhrawardi actually mentions in his works in reference to specific philosophical problems is indicative of the impact of the Evidential on Illuminationist philosophy. Also, Suhrawardi upholds al-Baghdadi's Platonist position. Concerning the significant question of the foundation of philosophy, both Suhrawardi and al-Baghdadi take an intuitionist stance, requiring that primary intuition must constitute the "first step" in philosophical construction. The

structure of the Evidential is also reflected in Suhrawardi's philosophical works. It is evident, therefore, that al-Baghdadi should be regarded as an important preliminary source for many of Suhrawardi's non-Peripatetic arguments.

Finally, the anti-philosophical works of the famous theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali - especially his Incoherence of the Philosophers (*Tahafut al-Falasifah*) - were known to Suhrawardi. Some of the terms used by al-Ghazzali, specifically in his Mishkat al-Anwar (Niche for Lights), are terms that were later modified and employed by Suhrawardi in his Philosophy of Illumination. However, al-Ghazzali's polemic intention must be distinguished from Suhrawardi's philosophical one. In spite of some similarities in terminology, Illuminationist philosophy should not be understood as resulting from theological polemics, which is basically anti-philosophical in intent. The purpose of Illuminationist thought, on the contrary,

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is a fundamentally philosophical one: to demonstrate logical gaps in the Peripatetic system and then to reconstruct a more consistent and holistic philosophical structure by solidifying its foundations, methods and arguments. The theologian (al-Ghazzali)'s aim, however, is not to construct a better philosophical system but to refute the very basis of philosophy. In support of this distinction, none of the major commentators of Illuminationist philosophy ever mentions al-Ghazzali's works as immediate sources for Illuminationist methodology or formal techniques, though they were obviously aware of the widespread appeal of such texts by al-Ghazzali, such as Mishkat al-Anwar, Tahafut al-Falasifah and Maqasid al-Falasifah.

Along with the Peripatetic school, the Illuminationist tradition is the only other systematic school of Islamic philosophy that has continued to be studied as a complete system of thought up to the present day. The epithet "Illuminationist" (*ishraqi*) is still used, especially in Iran, to characterize the method and philosophical views of individual thinkers. As described in the previous chapter, Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy fundamentally departs from Islamic Peripatetic philosophy in respect to the logical

foundations of its epistemology and its reconstructed metaphysical system. Illuminationist philosophy continues immediately after Suhrawardi, primarily in the form of several major commentaries on Illuminationist texts composed in the seventh/thirteenth century, though it is not confined to these.

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#### COMMENTATORS ON SUHRAWARDI'S PHILOSOPHY OF ILLUMINATION

Of the main figures in the tradition of Illuminationist philosophy, some were designated Illuminationist; others were not yet clearly influenced by Suhrawardi's thought. The earliest thinkers known for their Illuminationist position are the following seventh/thirteenth-century scholars, all of whom wrote commentaries on Suhrawardi's texts and also composed independent philosophical treatises that include specific Illuminationist positions: Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Shahrāzūrī and Sa'd ibn Mansur ibn Kammūnah (both of whom are called "Illuminationist") and Qutb al-Din Shirāzī. Other commentaries on Suhrawardi's texts were composed later, the most important of these being the tenth/sixteenth century writings of Muhammad Sharif Nizam al-Din al-Harawī. The principal commentators and their works are as follows.

Shams al-Din Muhammad Shahrāzūrī, al-Ishraqī, i.e., "the Illuminationist" (died after 688/1288) is the author of the well-known history of philosophy *Nuzhat al-Arwah wa Rawdat al-Afrah*, as well as the author of the first major commentary of Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination and his Intimations. Among all the commentators Shahrāzūrī is the most faithful to the original conception and philosophical constructivist

methodology of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy. His independent philosophical composition, Al-Shajarah al-Ilahiyyah, will be examined below to show the Illuminationist concepts, method and structure of this work.

Sa'd ibn Mansur ibn Kammunah (died 683/1284) created a major commentary, Al-Talwihat, that has earned the status of a textbook among Illuminationist philosophers in Iran. Perhaps the most significant impact of Illuminationist philosophy may be seen in Ibn Kammunah's philosophical work Al-Jadid fi'l-hikmah (literally, The New Philosophy, or Novum Organum). I have detected a serious attempt in this book to elucidate further certain anti-Aristotelian philosophical principles that originate with

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Illuminationist philosophy. The salient features of his Commentary on al-Talwihat will be briefly outlined here.

Qutb al-Din Shirazi (died 710/1311) is the author of the best-known commentary on Illuminationist philosophy, as well as the voluminous, encyclopedic Durrat al-Taj. However, on careful scrutiny, Shirazi's work indicates major borrowings from Shahrazuri's text that have previously gone unnoticed. Shirazi is a better-known figure in Islamic philosophy than Shahrazuri, simply because he is one of the first post-Suhrawardian philosophers in Iran successfully to synthesize Avicennan philosophy and Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy with Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi's "gnosis" of *wahdat al-wujud* in a coherent and accessible independent Persian composition. Durrat al-Taj marks the beginning of philosophical compositions in which Avicennan methodology and metaphysics are harmonized with Illuminationist theories of vision and illumination (epistemology and psychology), and where the accepted Illuminationist doctrine of the fourth ontological realm, the *mudus imaginalis*, is fully integrated into the reconstructed cosmological system. This work is also the first Persian philosophical text that accepts Suhrawardi's psychological doctrine of knowledge by and of the self-conscious separate "I" - generalized as "I-it-thou-ness" (*mani, tu'I, u'i*) - as the primary principle in epistemology as well as an alternative proof of prophecy. The only other epistemology that

concerns the self in this way is the Peripatetic theory of the holy intellect and its conjunction with the Active Intellect. Shirazi's work also discusses resurrection and metempsychosis (*tanasukh*) within the author's Illuminationist interpretation of gnosis (*irfan*). In my view this new grouping of ideas in Islamic philosophy was only the popular side of the theory, however, and is indicative of a trend that culminates with Mulla Sadra in the eleventh/seventeenth century. The more genuinely philosophical and theoretical Illuminationist legacy continued through less widely known texts, such as the works of Ibn Kammunah, which are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

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The most recent of the medieval commentaries on Suhrawardi's texts was composed by Muhammad Sharif Nizam al-Din al-Harawi, author of the most significant Persian commentary and translation of the Philosophy of Illumination. Harawi's work, composed in 1008/1600, includes a translation and commentary of Suhrawardi's Introduction and the majority of part two (*al-qism althani*) of Philosophy of Illumination. One of the most important characteristics of Harawi's commentary is his attempt to compare Illuminationist principles with the Advaita Vedanta system of Indian philosophy.

Anwariyyah is the only Persian translation and commentary on Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination known to have survived, though others have been composed and may be found through further research in manuscript collections. Its author was probably an Indian Chishti Sufi who also composed an independent Illuminationist work in Persian titled Siraj al-Hikmah. Anwariyyah consists of a Persian translation and commentary of selected sections of the second part of Suhrawardi's Arabic text, which is on metaphysics, cosmology and the Illuminationist accounts of visionary experience. The work is typical of the first trend in post-Suhrawardian Illuminationist interpretation (by Shahrastari), and is also indicative of the period's general lack of interest in logic and philosophical methodology. It emphasizes the fantastic side of Illuminationist philosophy and draws heavily on Qutb al-Fin's earlier commentary but adds a great many examples drawn from popular mystical sources, especially from Mathnawi by Jala al-Din Rumi



(604/1206-672/1274). Harawi's work is also of interest for the study of comparative mysticism and for its overall attempt at a mystical interpretation of Suhrawardi's text, which was not always intended by Suhrawardi. Often, when commenting on a section, Harawi adds "and this is in accordance with the views held by the Sufi masters", or "this argument lends support to gnostic views". These comments are valuable in illustrating how mystics made use of the Illuminationist epistemological priority of the experiential mode of cognition.

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Finally, *Anwariyyah* is also of specific interest for an understanding of how tenth/sixteenth century Muslims in India viewed the prevalent Hindu views on mysticism. On several occasions, the author attempts to compare Illuminationist views with those of the Indian Advaita Vedanta system, which he mentions by name. Examples are when he compares the Illuminationist cosmology, especially the *mundus imaginalis*, with the four-fold Sanskrit divisions of *andaja*, *arayuta*, *udbhija* and *khanija*, and Suhrawardi's discussion of eternal time with the Indian notions of *yuga*. The work is also replete with words of reverence for "Indian sages and Brahmins", whom, we are told, the author had consulted on questions relating to philosophical and mystical questions.

#### **OTHER ILLUMINATIONIST PHILOSOPHERS**

Many other authors are known for having incorporated certain Illuminationist principles in their works but do not qualify as pure Illuminationists. The following is a selected list of these thinkers.

Nasir al-Din Tusi (died 672/1274) is the well-known philosopher, astronomer, mathematician and statesman whose commentary on Avicenna's *Al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat* has become one of the standard textbooks for the study of Avicenna's Peripatetic philosophy. Many generations of philosophers in Persia came to learn of the quintessence of Avicenna's teaching through this

commentary. However, the epistemological priority given by Tusi to knowledge by presence does not qualify him as a purely Muslim Peripatetic. Given the impact that Tusi has had on all later Shi'ite authors, however, his Illuminationist attitude should not be overlooked.

Muhammad ibn Zayn al-Din Ibrahim Ahsa'I (died after 878/1479), known as Ibn Abi Jumhur Ishraqi Ahsa'I, is among those whom I have designated as "middle *ishraqi*" thinkers.

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Qadi Jalal al-Din Muhammad ibn Sa'd al-Din Dawani (died 908/1501) is the author of the celebrated work on ethics titled *Akhlaq-I Jalali*, and held the position of vizier under the Aqqyunlu rulers of north-eastern Persia. His commentary on Suhrawardi's *Hayakil al-Nur*, titled *Shawakil al-Hur fi Sharh Hayakil al-Nur*, is well known, though unpublished. It falls under the category of popular syncretistic philosophy, which had a strong impact on the generation of thinkers that followed him in Persia and who were instrumental in shaping the Shi'ite world view that has continued to the present.

Ghiyath al-Din Mansur Dashtaki (died 948/1541), too, wrote a commentary on Suhrawardi's *Hayakil al-Nur*, entitled *Ishraq Hayakil al-Nur li-Kashf Zulamat Shawakil al-Ghurur*. This is not an important theoretical work but, once more, it is indicative of Suhrawardi's widespread impact.

Muhammad Baqir ibn Shams al-Din Muhammad (died 1040/1631), well known as Mir Damad, is perhaps the most significant philosopher of his age, more original and systematically philosophical an author than his famous pupil, Mulla Sadra. In my view Mir Damad is to be counted among the few truly Illuminationist philosophers, a company that would include the immediate followers of Suhrawardi, Shahrzuri and Ibn Kammunah, as well as, in most recent times, Sayyid Muhammad Kazim 'Assar. Mir Damad's poetic *takhallus*, or pen-name, is "*Ishraq*" ("Illuminationist"), a clear indication of his alignment with Illuminationist philosophy. He considers himself a genuine upholder of the Illuminationist methodology of philosophy, combining discursive (*bahthi*) methods and principles (Avicenna's methodology of the

Shifa') with intuitive (*dhawqi*) ones (Suhrawardi's methodology of *Hikmat al-Ishraq*), carefully stipulated by Suhrawardi to be the fundamental Illuminationist position. This philosophical stance is exemplified in Mir Damad's publicly proclaimed characteristic as "the greatest teacher of the *Shifa'* of his time" and is clearly revealed in the structure as well as the philosophical intention of his philosophical works, especially in his

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*Al-Ufuq al-Mubin, Jadhwat* and in his best-known work, *Qabasat*. In his philosophical work, Mir Damad's intent is to construct a holistic philosophical structure based on the self-conscious I's ability to combine perfectly examination of sense-perceivable data with visions and illuminations.

Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, well known as Mulla Sadra (died 1050/1640), is recognized to be the main organizer of still another synthesis in Islamic philosophy which has had a major impact on Shi'ite thought up to this day.

The fourteenth/twentieth century Illuminationist philosopher Sayyid Muhammad Kazim 'Assar also deserves special mention. He has been hailed by Ashtiyani, himself one of the most important figures of [Shi'ite] Islamic philosophy of the contemporary period, as the foremost Illuminationist philosopher of recent decades. His *Wahdat-I Wujud wa Bada* represents the most recent example of a discussion of the special Illuminationist ontological principle of "equivocal being" (*Tashkik fi'l-wujud*).

The Illuminationist tradition and almost every other aspect of the intellectual dimension of Islam were revived and re-examined in the tenth/sixteenth century during one of history's most active and prolifically fruitful periods of Islamic philosophy. The tenth/sixteenth century revival of philosophy took place in Isfahan in central Persia, and is of such integral quality that it has been designated "the School of Isfahan". The two main figures of this school - Mir Damad (with the poetic name "*Ishraq*") ND Mulla Sadra, whose philosophical works are replete with Illuminationist terminology - studied and made use of

the Illuminationist tradition. By this time almost all problems covering the entire philosophical corpus were discussed from both the Peripatetic and Illuminationist perspectives. It had become common practice in constructing arguments to pose the two positions first, then demonstrate the superiority of one over the other, attempt a new synthesis between the two, or formulate different arguments.

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Philosophical activity from the eighth/fourteenth to the tenth/sixteenth centuries is not well known. From the Illuminationist standpoint, a few commentaries on Suhrawardi's texts by the two Dashtaki brothers and by Jalal al-Din Dawani are known, though none has been published or studied. There is also known to be an Illuminationist tradition in India. A major commentary and Persian translation of Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination, titled Anwariyyah, was composed in India by Harawi. This published work indicates the impact of the Illuminationist tradition on Islamic mystical philosophy in India.

#### **TWO MAIN TRENDS IN ILLUMINATIONIST PHILOSOPHY**

Although we cannot give here an examination of the entire scope of Illuminationist tradition from the time of Suhrawardi to the present, the following will identify the two main trends present in seventh/thirteenth century Illuminationist compositions, both of which had an impact on the School of Isfahan.

The twofold dimension of seventh/thirteenth century Illuminationist works is exemplified first by Shahrazuri. His commentaries on Suhrawardi's texts - Sharh Hikmat al-Ishraq, Sharh al-Talwihat and the encyclopedic Al-shajarah al-Ilahiyyah - not only emphasize the symbolic and distinctly anti-Peripatetic components of Illuminationist philosophy but further elaborate on them by extending their inspirational, allegorical and fantastic side. This trend, though of less philosophical significance than the one examined below, has had more impact in shaping views concerning mystical and religious philosophy with the most popular appeal.

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Second is Ibn Kammunah. In his *Sharh al-Talwihat*, commentaries of Suhrawardi's *Intimations*, in his major independent philosophical work, *Al-Jadid fi'l-Hikmah*, as well as in his shorter works, such as *Risalah fi'l-Nafs* and *Al-Hikmah*, Ibn Kammunah emphasizes the purely discursive and systematically philosophical side of the Philosophy of Illumination. These works go so far as to define Illuminationist symbolism and allegories in terms of standard Peripatetic doctrine, thus further elaborating on the scientific aspect of Suhrawardi's original intention.

In a way, both of these trends are valid interpretations and refinements on Suhrawardi's system in that both are present in the original Illuminationist texts, although distinguished in terms of choice and emphasis.

#### SHAHRAZURI'S WORKS

To determine why the more animated, symbolic and inspirational side of the Philosophy of Illumination, as emphasized by Shahrazuri, gained more popular appeal than Suhrawardi's own philosophical approach, one must first briefly examine the historical background of the Islamic medieval world concerning attitudes to philosophy in general. By the middle of the second/eighth century, Arab rule over most of Western Asia, the Near East, North Africa and Spain (mainly Andalusia) was well established. The 'Abbasid Empire, founded in 132/750 by the caliph al-Saffah, emerged as a new civilization that drew material as well as intellectual strength from the conquered peoples and lands. The Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's teachings and personal actions became the inspiration for a gradually codified set of laws. These laws, called the *Shari'ah*, were sanctioned and upheld by the state and regulated every facet of the public and private lives of the multitudes of Muslims from India to Spain. While it

can be argued that jurisprudence remained faithful to the letter of revelation and to the Prophet's own conduct, the powerful, rich, diverse and vast empire was in need of a world view to sustain itself as a world power. Therefore it arduously sought knowledge of

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science, medicine and technology beyond what was revealed and written in a single book. The Greeks, Persians and Indians possessed vast learning manifest in their books, art, architecture, technology, medicine and other disciplines. "Sciences of the ancients" (*al'ulum al-awa'il*) was the name given to every aspect of the sciences and of the techniques of the various civilizations encountered by the ruling Arabs. Baghdad, the new capital of the caliphate, was built from scratch near the ruins of Ctesiphon, the conquerer center of the Sassanian Empire (the winter capital, to be exact), and soon became the center of the new civilization. Persian statecraft and art of governance was employed to rule the vast dominion. Soon learned men of all nations gathered there, libraries were established, and book dealers travelled to faraway lands in search of ancient sciences.

By the end of the third/ninth century, a tremendous translation activity was fully under way, funded by state endowments. The *Dar al-Hikmah*, literally "Place of Wisdom - the new academy, as it were - had become a learning center of unprecedented dimension. Even the caliphs were in attendance at this academy, where the philosophy and the sciences of the ancients were being rewritten and transformed into a new world view. Of special significance was the translation into Arabic of the Greek philosophical and scientific tradition. By this time almost all of the Aristotelian corpus, plus much of the major Platonic works - including parts of the *Enneads* (of Plotinus), erroneously thought to be a work by Aristotle called the "theology" - Porphyry's *Isagoge*, works by Proclus, as well as numerous shorter Greek philosophical compilations, were all translated. The translations were initially from Syriac and eventually from Greek. The Greek heritage was the most influential element in the rise of rational thought in Islamic civilization at this time. Philosophy, which was reformulated in Arabic and eventually also in Persian, was expanded by such thinkers as al-Farabi (the "Second

Teacher") and Avicenna, whose philosophical methods survived in the Latin West for centuries.

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For a short while, the rational heritage of the Greeks was even triumphant in state-sanctioned theology. The Mu'tazilite rationalist theologians attempted to apply their principal view known as the "primacy of intellect" (*asalat al-'aql*), to find a rational basis for revelation. They even went so far as to say that the revealed word cannot be in contradiction to rational thought. Philosophy and philosophical techniques became the sought-after tool by the empire's ruling elite, as well as philosophers and scientists. But the opposing theological view, called "primacy of revelation" (*asalat al-wahy*), was perpetuated by the 'Asharite school and eventually won out. This ended the Mu'tazilah's dominance as the official theology of the land. Rational thought, for a number of complex reasons, did not continue to influence people beyond its few proponents and never gained dominance as a widely accepted world view in Arab society.

In many respects Arabic Aristotelian philosophy had a much deeper impact in the West than in the East. Avicenna's *Shifa'*, known as *Sufficiencia* in Latin, was the primary source for the Latin West's first encounter with Aristotle many decades before any direct translation from the original Greek texts. Other works in Hebrew and Latin translation - such as abridged versions of Avicenna's works, to a lesser extent of al-Farabi's works, and most important of the major works by the greatest Aristotelian Muslim commentator, Averroes - continued to keep the Greek philosophical heritage alive in the West as it was dying in the East.

This does not mean that philosophy did not continue in the Islamic world. Rather, it was reconstructed in the form of the Philosophy of Illumination. Peripatetic in method, Suhrawardi's philosophy employed a new and different technical language and revived many popularly held views concerning wisdom. It also included references to characters, themes, and sentiments of Persian mythological and religious beliefs, as well as Qur'anic decrees never discussed to such an extent in Islamic Peripateticism.

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Later religious philosophy in Islam, exemplified by Shahrazuri's works, embraced this new philosophy at least in principle and used it as a point of departure for the depiction of an animated, more personalized and recognizable universe. This is where Greek methodology, Qur'anic dicta and other Islamic religious sentiments and Persian popular beliefs converge.

For example, the Qur'an talks about *jinn*, or demonic spirits. The Mu'tazilah deny the existence of the *'ifrit*, al-Farabi avoids discussing them and Avicenna denies that they exist. Nevertheless, by the seventh/thirteenth century philosophers incorporate all manner of Qur'anic *jinn*, as well as a host of other demonic and benevolent creatures of the "unseen" world (*'alam al-ghayb*) - which is itself a cornerstone of Qur'anic proclamations - into their discussion of metaphysics. By doing so, the new philosophers became more accepted by both theologians and jurists as well as by the general public. Many people, learned as well as others, who had a hard time identifying with the abstract notions and terms of Peripatetic philosophy, were able to accept the new religious philosophy because it provided a scientific explanation of the world they had known and believed in as the real realm of prophecy as well as sorcery. Such an animated world is precisely what this larger audience found in Shahrazuri's works, some aspects of which are suggested in various places in Suhrawardi's texts but never fully explained.

#### SHAHRAZURI'S ILLUMINATIONIST PHILOSOPHY

Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Mahmud Shahrazuri (died after 688/1288), whose voluminous philosophical encyclopedia entitled *Al-Shajarah al-Ilahiyyah*, translated here as Metaphysical Tree or the "Divine Genealogy", is best known for his history of philosophy, *Nuzhat al-Arwah*. But it is the Metaphysical Tree that marks the denouement of Suhrawardi's primacy.



Shahrazuri's underlying method is Illuminationist. Philosophical construction based on a primary intuition of time-space, personal revelation and vision are given fundamental epistemological priority over the inherently rationalist, predicative Aristotelian principles. The Aristotelian *horos* is rejected as the primary epistemological method. Priority is given instead to the Platonist view of knowledge based on an activity of the soul whereby innate knowledge is recovered, which then serves as the first step in constructing syllogistic arguments. Thus, knowledge recovered, or "seen", by the inner disposition of a knowing subject serves as the foundation for all subsequent philosophical construction. The knowing subject, when related to the manifest object, comes to know the object in a time-less instant (*an*). From this standpoint, definition of an object by genus and differentiae is not a prerequisite. The "knowledge by presence" has no temporal extension and supercedes acquired knowledge. Reincarnation, immortality of the soul and a cosmology that constructs a separate realm of ideas (*'alam al-mithal*) as the real and lasting *mundus imaginalis* (*'alam al-khayal*) are cornerstones of Shahrazuri's cosmos.

Shahrazuri consciously invokes Plato's authority in proving the validity of these ideas. As the Illuminationist philosophers stipulated, "this incorporates the divine philosopher Plato's *Phawdo* where the Peripatetics fail". The real, separate Platonic Forms may be known not by the Aristotelian demonstration (*burhan*) of the *Posterior Analytics* but by intuition and vision-illumination. The notion of philosophical intuition is of central importance for the constructivist methodology of Illuminationist philosophy. Intuition here may be shown to be, first, similar to the Aristotelian "quick wit", *agkhinoia*, where the truth of propositions may be known immediately, or a conclusion arrived at prior to constructing a syllogism; or, secondly, recovery by the subject of universals, and of sensible objects. But intuition plays a further fundamental role as an activity of the self-conscious being in a state in

which the subject and object are undifferentiated. To use Illuminationist terminology, this means unity of perception, with the perceived and the perceiver (*ittihad al-mudrik wa'l-idrak wa'l-mudrik*) as an altered state in the consciousness of the knowing subject. This state exists when the subject is "linked", or otherwise related to the separate realm of the *mundus imaginalis*. This realm contains a multiplicity of self-conscious, self-subsistent "monads" designated as "abstract light" (*al-nur al-mujarrad*) in place of the finite number of Peripatetic "intellects" (*al-'uqul al-mujarradah*). Unlike the intellects, the abstract lights are continuous one with the other, differing only in their relative degree of intensity. Together they form a continuum designated as "the whole" (*al-kull*), which is also conscious of itself. Shahrzuri uses the term "intuitive philosophy" (*al-hikmah al-dhawqiyyah*) to distinguish Illuminationist thought from the purely discursive (*al-hikmah al-bahthiyyah*) Peripatetic approach.

Of further interest here is the manner in which fantastic beings - such as jinn, angels and so on - are incorporated within this religio-philosophical structure by Shahrzuri, specifically in his philosophical encyclopedia but also in his other works, notably the Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination. By philosophically explaining the existence of all manner of non-corporeal, "intelligent beings" - which were previously rejected by all the major Islamic Peripatetics - Shahrzuri paves the way for the prevalent Iranian and Indian (and Celtic) view of a world dominated by spirits. This view is incorporated into subsequent religious philosophy and further affects theological development, especially of Shi'ite theology, in the tenth/sixteenth century.

To appreciate the breadth of Shahrzuri's Metaphysical Tree, one must look at its overall structure, which consists of five main treatises (*risalah*) as follows:

1.) On methodology and the division of the sciences; which serves as an introduction - marking the first work of its kind in which methodological questions as well as problems of the philosophy of language are discussed separately and systematically.

2.) On logic - one of the most comprehensive compilations including the Islamic Peripatetic corpus plus Stoic fragments and additions such as the long commentary on the *Isagoge* by Ghiyath al-Din al-Abhari.

3.) On ethics, political philosophy and statecraft - a recompilation of such works as al-Farabi's commentary on Plato's *Republic*, titled The Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City (*Ara' ahl al-madinah al-fadilah*). Tusi's *Nasirean Ethics* and many other works on practical philosophy.

4.) On physics - a summary of Avicenna's *Physics* (*Shifa'*), plus arguments taken from other works, including those specifically designated as Stoic (*riwaqi*).

5.) On metaphysics.

The fifth treatise, On Metaphysical Sciences and Divine Secrets (*Fil-'ulum al-ilahiyyah wa'l-asrar al-rabbabiyyah*) is of particular significance here. It is divided into two major sections, each called *techne* (*fann*). The first deals with the subject of *metaphysica generalis* (*al-'ilm al-kulli*), and the second with *metaphysica specialis* (*al-'ilm al-ilahi*). The latter contains the most comprehensive and lengthy treatments of metaphysics in Islamic philosophy. The ontological position upheld in the first section - after elaborate discussion pertaining to various philosophical, theological and mystical views - is one designated, perhaps clearly for the first time, as "primacy of quiddity" (*asalat al-mahiyyah*). Briefly stated, this position holds "existence" (*wujud*) to be a derived mental concept while "essence" (*mahiyyah*) is considered to be primary and real. Of the seventeen chapters in this section, chapters 10, 11 and 17 are noted here.

Chapter 10 is entitled "On Determining Platonic Forms" (*Fi tahqiq al-muthul al-aflatuniyyah*); chapter 11 "On Determining the *Mundus Imaginalis*" (*Fi tahqiq al-'alam al-mithali [al-khayali]*); and the seventeenth and final chapter of the Metaphysical Tree is entitled "On the Jinn, Satans, Rebellious Angels; and Therein the Principle of the Devil and its State Are Explained" (*Fi'l-junn wa'l-shayatin wa'l-mardah, wa'l-ghul, wa'l-nasanis; wa fihi bayan asl Iblis wa ahwaluhu*). Ifrit, Ghul and Nasnas are categories of demons. According to Shahrazuri, they all dwell in the *mundus imaginalis*, where true dreams occur. This is the location of the sorcerers' power as well as the source of inspiration for saints and the revelations of prophets. Those who travel to this realm - not with the body but with the imagination - may, if they can withstand the terrible ordeal of the quest-journey, come to possess divineline powers, the least of which are walking on water, traversing the earth, ability to foretell the future and power over the elemental world. Visitors to the *mundus imaginalis* may tap the very source of the demons' powers and may even employ them for benevolent purposes back on earth, as did the kindly mythological Persian, Jamshid. According to Persian tradition, this phenomenon also explains the miraculous powers of biblical figures such as Solomon.

To gain a better understanding of these philosophical views, it is helpful to look at the Platonis Forms and the realm of Ideas in Islamic philosophy. In the Islamic Peripatetic scheme three realms are recognized: intellect, soul and matter. In his Illuminationist philosophy Suhrawardi adds a fourth realm, generally called "the world of forms". This is further elaborated upon and enlivened by Shahrazuri, who calls it "the intermediary realm" (*al'alam al-awsat*). Not confined to empirical appearance, this domain is between the purely intelligible and the purely sensory, where time and space are different from Aristotelian time as a measure of distance as well as from Euclidean space. The way to the intermediary realm is by the active imagination. In the Metaphysical Tree, the intermediary realm is considered a "real" place

where all manner of extraordinary phenomena, both good and evil, are said to occur, as Shahrazuir writes:

This realm is called the Realm of Ideas and the *mundus imaginalis*. It is beyond the world of sense perception and beyond extended space [*makan*] but below the realm of intellect [*'alam al-'aql*]. It is an intermediary realm between the two. Everything imagined by the mathematicians, such as shapes (round, oblong, square, etc.), quantities (large, small, one, two, etc.) and bodies (cubes, tetrahedrons, spheres, etc.) and whatever relates to them such as rest, position, idea shape [*hay'ah*], surface, line, point and other conditions all exist in this intermediary realm. This is why philosophers refer to the [study of] it as "intermediate philosophy" or "intermediate science". ... Everything seen [and heard] in dreams such as oceans, lands, loud noises and persons of stature, all of them are suspended Forms not in space nor situated. ... Archetypes of all known things on Earth exist as luminous Forms in this realm. ... There are numerous multiple levels in this realm, and only God knows their number. But two bordering levels are known. The virtuous luminous level which lies at the horizon bordering on the realm of intellects; and the lowly dark level, which borders the realm of sense perception. The numerous other levels are in between the two, and in each level dwell angels, jinn and Satans whose numbers are uncountable. Souls, when separated from the body will come to live in this realm. ... In this realm are rivers wider than the Tigris and the Euphrates and mountains taller than any on Earth. ... Souls of evil-doers will encounter scorpions and serpents larger than the largest mountain in this realm. ... Things that exist in this realm have "formal"

bodies and imaginary shapes [*abdan mithali wa ashkal khayali*]. ... Extraordinary events, miracles, sorcery and all manner of strange manifestations occur because of this realm. ... Sages on spiritual journeys, who learn how to unravel the signs have all attested to the powers that are manifest there.

The fourth dominion of the Illuminationist cosmos, the Realm of Forms, is the region of the dark (evil) forms, as well as the luminous (good). Together they are described as constituting a land beyond the corporeal, of the essence of the fabulous (*hargalya dhat al-'aja'ib*), or ab eighth clime (*al-iqlim al-thamin*). Access to this realm is gained through the active imagination when it becomes mirrorlike, turning into a place in which an epiphany (*mazhar*) may occur. One is said to travel in it not by traversing distances but by being witness to "here" or "there", unsituated and without co-ordinates. Seeing sights in this region is identified as effects suffered by the soul, or experiences within the self-consciousness of the objective self. The *mundus imaginalis* is an ontological realm whose beings, though possessing categorical attributes - such as time, place, relation, quality and quantity - are abstracted from matter. That is, they are ideal beings with a substance, usually depicted metaphorically as "light" (*nur*). These light beings differ from the substances of other beings only in respect to their degree of intensity, or "darkness" (*zubmah*) which is also expressed in gradations.

Creatures who dwell in this land exist in a space without Euclidean spatial extensions and in a time that is absolute, unrestricted and without duration. Things appear in this realm in what appear to be fleeting moments, but involve processes that cover eternity and infinity [once again, we find a mystic prefiguring what Einstein said concerning the relativity of time and space]. They possess shapes. This is why they may seem, although their "bodies" are imaginary or "ideal" (*badan mithali wa khayali*). This alnd has "cities" and "pavilions" with hundreds of thousands of gates and

tiers. For all its imaginal qualities, this world is, in the words of Henry Corbin, a "concrete spiritual universe". Like Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin before him, Corbin qualifies the *mundus imaginalis* in terms of what he calls a "neo-Zoroastrian Platonism". As he states, "it is most certainly not a world of concepts, paradigms, and universals", for the archetypes of the species that populate it have "nothing to do with the universals established in logic". Rather, they are an "autonomous world of visionary Figures and Forms" that belong to "the plane of angelology".

Despite the apparent relationship, it would be inaccurate to identify the *mundus imaginalis* totally with Plato's Realm of Ideas in the *Dialogues*. The Illuminationist philosophers are quite specific on this point and distinguish between the suspended forms (*al-suwar al-mu'allaqah*), which are real beings of the eighth clime, and the Platonic Forms. This is because Platonic Forms are considered to be discrete, distinct entities, or "things", in the realm of intelligible lights, while the beings of the intermediary realm, though considered to be real, are part of the continuum of the imaginal, whether light or dark. The significance of the realm of the *mundus imaginalis* to the history of Islamic philosophy is that it opens up an entirely new chapter, admitting an irrational [or perhaps transrational or suprarational] dimension that the Islamic Peripatetics had vehemently rejected.

Shahrazuri builds upon the visionary foundations of Illuminationist philosophy by seeking to substantiate the existence of creatures in the realm of the *mundus imaginalis*. The creatures of this realm, be they luminous or dark, are "proven", according to Shahrazuri, by the visions and intuitions of the divine philosopher-sages who have strengthened their intuitions and purified their imaginations by ascetic practices, not by mere recourse to rational demonstration. At every turn the author takes issue with the Peripatetics whose preoccupation with discursive philosophy, he claims, has weakened their ability to "see" (*mushahadah*), reality as it is. Although the Active Intellect is clearly considered a

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guiding force for the Peripatetics, there is never a

hint that it is personified, or in any way "seen" or perceived by the senses.

In contrast, by the sixth/twelfth century the Active Intellect appears in Illuminationist philosophy on several levels, sometimes personified as (the Archangel) Gabriel, the archangel of revelation in the Qur'an; as Surush, one of the immortals of Iranian Mazdayasnian cosmology; as Isfahbad al-A'zam, the great controlling archetypal light of Illuminationist cosmology; as Simurgh, the mythological bird of the Persian epic; as the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-qudus*) of popular mysticism equated with Rawan Bakhsh, *dator spiritus*, of Persian legends. Finally, by the seventh/thirteenth century in Sharazuri's Metaphysical Tree, the Active Intellect becomes fully personified as a rational creature who exists separately in the intermediary realm and who may appear to the adept who will actually see its ideal shape and *imaginalis* body and hear its shrill cry. This archetypal creature, now with enormous power, may serve, rule or crush the person who has, by use of magic (*nayrang*) and sorcery, or by other means, tapped into its power. To support this contention the new Illuminationist philosophy now invokes the memory of past philosophers and sages, as Shahrazuri states:

The ancient philosophers such as Hermes, Aghathadhasmon, Empedocles, Pythagoras and Plato, as well as others from among the ancients, have all claimed to have "seen" them [that is, the archetypal beings, angels, or demons]; and they have all clearly attested their existence by their visions in the realm of lights. Plato has related that when he elevated his soul from the dark shackles of the body he saw them. The Persian and Indian sages, as well as others, all adhere to this and are in agreement. Anyone who absolves himself of the body and rids himself of prime matter would certainly have a vision of these lights, the archetypal

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essences [*dhawat al-asnam*]. Most of what the prophets and other sages have indicated by



way of their metaphorical language refer to this.

At this juncture Shahrazuri turns to a rebuttal of Aristotelian methodology:

If the physical observations of a person in matters pertaining to astronomy are accepted, and astronomers accept Ptolemy's and Proclus' and others observations, and the First Teacher [Aristotle] even accepts the astronomical observations of the Babylonians, why should then one not rely on the spiritual observations [*irṣād ruhānī*] and the luminous visions [*mushāhadah wa mukashafah*] of the Pillars of Philosophy and Prophecy ... so spiritual observation is just as significant in providing knowledge [*ma'rīfah*] as physical observation [*irṣād jismanī*]. Rather, many types of error may occur in corporeal observation, as explained in *al-Majisti*, while spiritual observation, when based on the abstract, separate lights, which are all attested by Zoroaster and [King] Kay Khusraw [of Persian mythology], cannot fall into error.

The heritage of rational Greek philosophy so significant in shaping intellectual and even theological attitudes for several centuries in Islam now becomes but one dimension in Islamic Illuminationist philosophy which further defines religious philosophy. This new philosophical position characterizes religious philosophy in Persia from the seventh/thirteenth century to the present.

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The overall structure of Shahrazuri's Illuminationist elaborations is syncretic - that is, it is composed of divergent systems and beliefs that are

grouped together under one school of thought. This juxtaposition continues to characterize the fantastic, supernatural, demon-ridden and generally Shi'ite religious philosophy that allows Persian epic and religious figures to roam side by side with figures of Qur'anic and Islamic origin.

Equally significant is the fact the Shahrazuri's syncretic interpretation and elaboration of Illuminationist religious philosophy is not shunned by theologians nor even by jurists, as had been the case with earlier rational philosophies. In a recent major biographical study of philosophers in Persia from the tenth/sixteenth century to the present, some four hundred major thinkers, each with several works were enumerated. With the exception of only a few, all were graduates of *madrasahs*, and many at one time or another had assumed specific public, religious and judicial duties.

Islamic Illuminationist philosophy, as interpreted by Shahrazuri in a religious context, was able to accommodate revelation with all its metaphysical and fantastic implications to a degree Peripatetic philosophy was never able to do. It expanded and refined the powerful Greek analytical tools into well-defined domains comprising semantic, formal and material logic. Above all, it allowed for popular religious sensibilities, superstitions and beliefs to be given a "scientific" explanation within its reformulated cosmology. And finally, through its adoption in at least some of the higher-level school curricula, it even received legal sanction.

The seventeenth and final chapter of the Metaphysical Tree, titled "On the Jinn, Satans, Rebellious Angels: and therein the principle of the Devil and its state are explained", adds a new and significant dimension to Illuminationist thinking. The chapter begins with Shahrazuri stating that the philosophers both ancient and recent (*mutaqaddimin wa muta'akhhirin*) have different opinions concerning the existence of jinn and Satans. Among the Muslims, three

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groups are identified and their views rejected. Avicenna's position, stated in the Book of Definitions, is: "The jinn are [defined] as ethereal beings, and take on different shapes; this being a mere lexical

definition [*sharh al-ism*] of the utterance 'jinn', and this does not indicate an existence outside the mind (i.e., real). Shahrāzūrī discounts this reasoning because, he contends, arguments based on semantics do not necessarily reject (or prove) the real existence of the thing defined. That is, the reality of the jinn may or may not be indicated simply by naming them as such. Relying on arguments drawn from Illuminationist epistemology, which holds that intuitive experiential knowledge is prior to discursive knowledge, Shahrāzūrī asserts that since ancient philosophers, sages and prophets have "experienced" - or, in Illuminationist terms, have "seen" (*yushahid*) - the jinn, as the Qur'an also confirms, they must, therefore, have a separate existence. Here even Aristotle's authority is invoked along with that of a host of sages from Hermes to Plato - including Egyptian sages and Persian mythological figures, as well as Indian Brahmins - to prove the separate existence of such beings. Since actual experience of the phenomena is well verified by experts, the arguments go, therefore it must be real.

The statement concludes by claiming a substantial reality for the jinn who are embodied in the Realm of Forms and the *mundus imaginalis*, and have non-corporeal, formal bodies and imaginal shapes. Shahrāzūrī rebukes the Muslim theologians, insinuating that they should know better than to deny the separate reality of the jinn, who are after all authenticated in the Qur'an.

A summary of Shahrāzūrī's arguments in the final chapter of *Metaphysical Tree* also serves as a general account of his specific illuminationist ideas, as follows. In the intermediary realm, the *mundus imaginalis*, there are two types of entities: light and dark. Both are equally real, according to Shahrāzūrī, and are not simply the absence of the other. Suhrawardī's view that darkness is not real but simply the total lack of light, and the Peripatetic view that non-being is the privation of being (or that darkness

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is the privation of light), are both rejected. Light and dark entities differ in terms of intensity. Just as there is a continuum of light substances from weakest to strongest, there is also a parallel continuum of dark entities. Illuminationist philosophers vehemently deny that this position is a dualist one. Dualism in the

Islamic eriod was identified with ancient Persian infidel beliefs, referred to as Manichaeen [NOT Zoroastrian] idolatry (*ilhad Mani*). Shahrzuri defends his views against this attack by confining the existence of dark entities to substances which have assumed dark shapes, or forms - generally with *imaginalis* embodiment. All of these dark forms, he contends, exist in a limited tier of the intermediary realm of forms and the *mundus imaginalis*, while the light substances cover the whole of reality.

The dichotomy of light substance and dark entity in the Realm of Forms and the *mundus imaginalis* is a new addition to the Greek inspired cosmology of the earlier Islamic Peripatetic philosophy. Some scholars, notably Henry Corbin, have indicated that this cosmology represents an earlier Persian world view. While I disagree with Corbin that the Persian element of this new philosophy was based on an established textual philosophical tradition, I believe that the Mazdayasnian sentiments kept alive in popular and oral traditions and in poetic, epic and mystical compositions have been integrated into this new Islamic Illuminationist philosophy. The Qur'anic category of demons, satans and other such creatures is introduced by Shahrzuri along with others from the Persian traditions, such as the category of creatures called *peris* [word and concept related to the word *fairy*; both come from the same Indo-European origin; we have dealt with this topic in another place]. However they are all integrated into a dualist cosmological structure that decidedly reflects the earlier tradition in which the Platonic world of Forms is used to portray a universe permeated with archetypes, good and bad, who affect earthly existence. Nowhere is this continuity more apparent than in Shahrzuri's Mrtaphysical Tree, and especially in the few chapters examined here.

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#### **IBN KAMMUNAH'S ILLUMINATIONIST PHILOSOPHY**

The second trend in the interpretation of Illuminationist philosophy is exemplified by Ibn Kammunah, whose Commentary on the Intimations (*Sharh al-talwihat*) completes around 669/1270 emphasizes the

rational side of Suhrawardi's thought. It concentrates on the initial, discursive cycle of the reconstruction of the Philosophy of Illumination, but also recognizes Suhrawardi's text to be a fundamentally non-Peripatetic work.

Moshe Perlmann, who edited and translated Ibn Kammunah's Tanqih al-abhath li'l-milal al-thalath (1967) - translated as Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths (1971) - has examined every possible source for Ibn Kammunah's biography, and is the principal source for the following summary account.

Sa'd ibn Mansur ibn Sa'd ibn al-Hasan Hibat Allah ibn Kammunah was "a well-known oculist and teacher of philosophy, [and] lived in Baghdad during the seventh/thirteenth century. He was a distinguished member of the Jewish community." Perlmann translated the notice given for Ibn Kammunah in Ibn al-Fuwati's Al-Hawaddith al-jami'ah wa'l-tajarib al-nafi'ah under the events of the year 683/1284. This is perhaps the most significant source on Ibn Kammunah's life now available.

Leo Hirschfeld had in the last decade of the nineteenth century written a brief summary account of Ibn Kammunah's polemical work, titled Sa'd b. Mansur Ibn Kammunah und seine polemische Schrift, in which he identified several other treatises, including most of Ibn Kammunah's philosophical and logical works. These include:

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1.) A commentary on Avicenna's Al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat titled Sharh al-usul wa'l-jumal min muhimmat al-'ilm wa'l-amal (the title translated into German by Hirschfeld as Kommentar zu den Grundlehren und dem Gesamtinhalt aus dem Wichtigsten für Theorie und Praxis). It is important to note that during the same period two other major commentaries on the same work by Avicenna

were composed by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and by Nasir al-Din Tusi. Commentaries on the *Isharat* were the standard texts used by later Islamic philosophers to study Islamic Peripateticism. This, in my view, differs drastically from the manner in which the Latin West came to know Avicenna, which was mainly through translations of the *Shifa*. It remains to be seen how Ibn Kammunah's commentary differs, or reflects, the synthetic style of the other two works which later found their way into the higher level *madrasah* curricula.

2.) Commentary on Suhrawardi's Intimations (*Al-Talwihat*), to which I will turn later.

3.) An independent philosophical work which Hirschfeld titled Hikmah al-jadidah fi'l-mantiq (Neue Abhandlung uber die Logik) and has recently been published with the title Al-Jadid fi'l-hikmah, or Novum Organum.

4.) Another philosophical treatise by Ibn Kammunah, not listed by Hirschfeld or Brockelmann, is a short work called Risalah fi'l-nafs or Risalah fi baqa' al-nafs. Only one manuscript of this work is known to have survived, published by Leon Nemoy in facsimile, and later translated by him into English.

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5.) Finally, Perlmann has brought to my attention an additional philosophical work by Ibn Kammunah bearing the generic title Risalah fi'l-hikmah. Upon brief examination, I find it to be a different work from the one listed above. Apparently it is a summary of seventh/thirteenth century attitudes in philosophy which combines Peripatetic terms and techniques with Illuminationist epistemological principles.

In the philosophical compilations of the eleventh/seventeenth century, numerous specific references are made only to Ibn Kammunah's Commentary on the Intimations. Most notably, these references are found in Al-Asfar al-arba'ah an din Al-Qabasat. One example will serve to indicate the significance of Ibn Kammunah's Commentary for the study of the development of Islamic philosophy in the post-Avicennan period. The reference is in Mulla Sadra's famous work Al-Asfar al-arba'ah, in the section "Al-Safar al-thalith: fi'l-'ilm al-ilahi: al-mawqif al-Thalith: fi 'ilmihi ta'ala: al-Fasl al-rabi': fi tafsil madhahib al-nas fi 'ilmihi bi'l-ashya'". Mulla Sadra here distinguishes seven schools of thought: four philosophical, two "theological", and one "mystical" (which combines 'irfan and *tasawwuf*). This is typical of Mulla Sadra's classification of the history of philosophy, theology and mysticism and further reflects the same classification found for the first time in Shahrastari's Al-Shajarah al-ilahiyyah. The four philosophical "schools" - referred to as *madhhab* - which concern us here are:

1.) The school of the followers of the Peripatetics ("*madhhab tawabi al-mashsha'in*"). Included in this category are the "two masters" (*al-shaykhan*) al-Farabi and Avicenna, as well as Bahmanyar (Avicenna's famous student and author of Al-Tahsil). Abu'l-'Abbas al-Lawkari and "many later Peripatetics" ("*kathir min al-muta'akh-khirin*").

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2.) "The school of the Master Shihab al-Din [Suhrawardi] al-maqtul follower of the Stoics [*'madhhab shaykh atba' al-riwaqiyyah Shihab al-Din Al-Maqtul'*] and those who follow him, such as al-Muhaqqiq Muhammad al-Shahrastari, author of Al-Shajarah al-ilahiyyah.

3.) "The school attributed [*al-mansub*] to Porphyry, the First of the Peripatetics [*muqaddam al-mashsha'in*], one of the greatest followers of the First Teacher."

#### 4.) "The school of the divine Plato."

The "second school" represents the characteristic position of Ibn Kammunah's Commentary on the Intimations. It is distinguished from the other schools in all philosophical domains: methodology and the division of the sciences, logic, ethics and political philosophy, physics, metaphysics and eschatology. But the question of the immortality of the soul and its "ranks" after separation from the body is a fundamental eschatological position on which Ibn Kammunah wrote an independent treatise.

Suhrawardi, Tusi, Shirazi, Ibn Kammunah and Shahrazuri are together considered the followers of Stoic philosophy and form the group of major Illuminist philosophers, notably Shahrazuri as well as Mulla Sadra. The inclusion of Tusi in this group may also be doubtful in that his views on cosmology and ontology do not coincide with the overall Illuminist approach and philosophical technique, although his position in epistemology does.

Ibn Kammunah's specifically philosophical arguments may best be exemplified by considering sample problems taken from his Sharh al-talwihat. Before considering these, however, it is important to remember that Al-Talwihat is the first work in a series of four which constitutes the Philosophy of Illumination as Suhrawardi constructed it. As the first work in the series, this concise treatise tends to emphasize the

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discursive side of Illuminist philosophy. However it is not a Peripatetic work nor was it composed during Suhrawardi's youth when, as alleged by some scholars, his position had been that of a Peripatetic.

#### **METHODOLOGY AND THE DIVISION OF SCIENCES**

Al-Farabi's Enumeration of the Sciences is the model for Ibn Kammunah's methodology and division of the sciences, with minor modifications. However, it may be noted that by the seventh/thirteenth century every



philosophical work - be it a commentary or an independent composition - is prefaced with questions pertaining to these issues. The distinction between theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy is a matter of methodology. Theoretical philosophy is said to deal with things whose existence does not depend on human action. This type of philosophy leads to pure truth (*al-haqq al-sirf*). Practical philosophy is said to be a tool (*alah*) that aims to obtain the "pure good" (*al-khayr al-mahd*) to be utilized in the service of just rule, as well as for the attainment of happiness.

Ibn Kammunah follows Suhrawardi's divisions within theoretical philosophy, but further elaborates and fills in the gaps as follows. Theoretical philosophy is divided into three parts. First is the "highest science" (*al-'ilm al-a'la*), also called "first philosophy" (*al-falsafat al-ula*), also called "metaphysical science" (*'ilm ma ba'd al-tabi'ah*). This primary division is further divided into *metaphysica generalis* (*al-'ilm al-kulli*), having as its subject "being qua being" (substance, accident, one, many, etc.), and *metaphysica specialis* (*al-'ilm al-ilahi*, or *al-ilahi bi-ma'na al-akhass*), having as its subject Necessary Being (its essence and acts, God's knowledge, etc.).

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The second division is "middle philosophy" (*al-hikmah al-wusta*), having "quantity" (*al-kamm*) as its subject matter. This has two parts also: continuous quantities, such as geometry; and discrete quantities, such as arithmetic. Middle philosophy is of particular interest in Illuminationist philosophy because in the Illuminationist cosmological scheme the "fourth realm" is also called *mundus imaginalis*, and the Realm of Forms is designated "the intermediary or middle realm". Thus, the subject matter of both continuous imagination (*al-khayal al-muttasil*) and discrete imagination (*al-khayal al-munfasil*) falls under the branch of metaphysics. The third division is "physics", whose subject matter is corporeal bodies.

Ibn Kammunah assigns subdivisions, called *furu'*, to

each of the three major divisions. Subdivisions within metaphysics include such areas of inquiry as revelation, resurrection, angels and demons, dreams and extraordinary acts. Subdivisions within middle philosophy are more clearly defined and numbered as "twelve sciences": addition and subtraction, algebra, computational geometry, mechanics (*'ilm al-hiyal al-mutaharrakah*), cranes and pulleys (*'ilm barakat al-athqal*), measures and weights, war machines, optics, mirrors, hydro-dynamics, astronomical tables and calendars, and musical instruments. Finally, physics has the following seven subdivisions: medicine, astronomy, physiognomy, interpretation of dreams, talismans, occult sciences (*'ilm al-nayranjiyyat*) and alchemy.

### LOGIC

One of the characteristics of Illuminationist logic is that its structure divides logic into three parts: semantics, formal and material. There is no "book" of categories. As in the Stoic-Megaric tradition, the categories are first examined in physics and then in metaphysics. This structure is upheld by Ibn Kammunah in his Commentary as well as in his other works.

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Two fundamental problems of universal propositions (*al-qadaya al-kulliyah*) is introduced in formal logic. In the Illuminationist scheme, a conclusion reached by using a formally established syllogism has no epistemological value as a starting point in philosophical construction. The argument for this rests on the mode "necessary" (*al-wajh al-daruri*) and the modal "always" (*da'iman*). For a universal affirmative proposition to have philosophical value as a foundation of logic, it must be "necessary and always true". By introducing the mode "possibility" (*imkan*) and giving it an extension in time as in "future possibility" (*al-imkan al-mushaqbal*), the universal affirmative proposition cannot be "necessarily true always", the Illuminationist position contends. This is because of the impossibility of "knowing", or deducing, all possible future instances. The epistemological implication of this logical position is clear. Formal

validity ranks lower than certitude obtained by the self-conscious subject who, when alerted to a future possible event through knowledge by presence, will simply "know" it; the future event cannot be "deduced". Therefore, philosophical intuition has precedence over deductive reasoning, and this intuitive knowledge is renewed in every age by the philosopher-sages of that era. In other words, formal structure without philosophical "wisdom" has no actual (*haqiqi*) validity.

The second philosophical problem introduced by Ibn Kammunah is the rejection of the Aristotelian essentialist definition, *horos*, and of the Avicennan complete essentialist definition, *al-hadd al-tamm*, as once again not a valid first step in the construction of philosophy. Following Suhrawardi, Ibn Kammunah holds that true knowledge cannot be obtained from the formula which brings together the *summum genus* and the *differentiae*. Knowledge must depend on "something else", which is stated to be a psychological process that seeks the unity of the thing defined in its Form, which is fully defined only by and in the person's self-consciousness as the individual recognizes the thing to be defined (the *definiendum*).

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These two philosophical problems bear directly on the methodology of the Philosophy of Illumination. Ibn Kammunah makes numerous references to other works by Suhrawardi, is clearly familiar with the range of his works and is capable at every turn of applying germane arguments to the whole of the tradition. As such, the Commentary serves well to indicate the entire scope of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist compositions. Other significant areas of the numerous aspects of logic covered by this work include semantics and problems of formal logic.

Suhrawardi's theory of semantics (*'ilm dilalat al-alfaz*) indicates a Stoic-Megaric influence, and is specifically mentioned by Ibn Kammunah to be different from the "standard" Avicennan. Problems in this area of logic include: types of signification; relation of class names to constituents (members) of the class; types of inclusion of members in classes (*indiraj*, *istighraq*, *indikhal*, *shumuli*, etc.); and perhaps most significantly from the standpoint of the history of logic, a fairly

well defined theory of supposition (the restricted and unrestricted use of quantification).

There are a number of problems in formal logic, such as iterated modalities; the construction of a superaffirmative necessary proposition (*al-qadiyyat al-daruriyyat al-battatah*); the question of negation (*al-salb*), especially in the conversion of a syllogism (*al-'aks*); reduction of terms; construction of a single "mother" figure for a syllogism (*shakl al-qiyas*) from which all other figures are to be derived; temporal modalities (*al-qadaya al-muwajjahah*); especially non-admittance of an unrestricted validity of the universal affirmative proposition (*al-qadiyyat al-mujibat al-kulliyah*); and future contingency (*al-imkan al-mustaqbal*). All these problems, as well as others, are identified by Ibn Kammunah to be part of the significant changes made by Suhrawardi to Peripatetic logic. In every case Ibn Kammunah's analysis both distinguishes the problem and provides a fuller account than Suhrawardi's own short description.

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### **EPISTEMOLOGY**

Perhaps the most widespread impact of Illuminationist philosophy has been in the area of epistemology. The impact of Illuminationist knowledge by presence, *al-'ilm al-huduri*, which posits a posterior epistemological position to acquired knowledge, *al-'ilm al-busuli*, has not been confined to philosophical and other specialist circles, as has Illuminationist logic, for example. The epistemological status given to intuitive knowledge has fundamentally influenced what is called "speculative mysticism" (*'irfan-I nazari*) in Iran as well as informing Persian poetry. The way Persian poetic wisdom, for example, seeks to unravel the mysteries of nature is not through the principles of physics (as with Aristotelians, for example) but by means of the metaphysical world and the realm of myths, dreams, fantasy and the emotions.

Ibn Kammunah starts his commentary on Suhrawardi's dream-vision of Aristotle by stating that "this story includes five philosophical problems" (*tashtamil*

*hadhihi'l-hikayah 'ala khamsah masa'il 'ilmiyyah*). There are: (1.) unity of the intellect, thinking and the object in the rational soul, in the state when the subject and the object are not differentiated. Knowledge by presence takes place when the rational soul, aware of its essence, is related (by Illuminationist relation, *al-idafah al-ishraqiyyah*) to the object. This tantamount to the recovery of prior unity, which is how the soul by knowing itself can know other things. (2.) The soul's knowledge of something other than itself is not by acquiring a form of that thing within itself - which is the Peripatetic position - but by the mere presence (*bi-mujarrad budur*) of the other thing. (3.) Types of thinking (*aqsam al-ta'aqqul*) are described. (4.) How God knows its essence and knows other things is said by Ibn Kammunah to be based on the principle of knowledge by presence. But since God's essence and existence are the same - in other words, God's consciousness as subject and as object are never differentiated, then God's knowledge by presence never ceases. For God, there is no process of recovering a prior state because prior and future conditions do not

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apply to God. "God's knowledge of other things is by virtue of the other's presence to it" (*'ilmuhu bi-ma 'adahu'l-huduruhu lahu*), to use Ibn Kammunah's own phrase. (5.) On the meaning of union and connection (*al-ittihad wa'l-ittisal*), the principle of "knowledge by presence" is explained by comparing it to the Peripatetic notion of union with the Active Intellect. Union or connection with the Active Intellect is a corporeal phenomenon, whereas the "relation" (*al-idafah*) between the knowing subject and the manifest object allows the subject to know with certainty and takes place without temporal or spatial extension. In a sense, the soul recovers essences that are already present and have an independent as well as real existence.

[In another place we have noted that many Western critics consider St. John of the Cross to be a "strange poet" because in so many ways both his poetry and his prose follow patterns of Persian literature. The simple fact is that one of the ways in

which St. John of the Cross was influenced by Suhrawardi is that his works are informed by the Illuminationist epistemology of Suhrawardi and his school.]

### ONTOLOGY

Ibn Kammunah's views on the Illuminationist ontological position, called "primacy of quiddity", is a longstanding problem that is said to distinguish philosophical schools in the development of Islamic philosophy in Iran up to the present day. It is also a matter of considerable controversy. Those who believe in the primacy of existence (*wujud*) consider essence (*mahiyyah*) to be a derived, mental concept (*amr I'tibari*); while those who believe in the primacy of quiddity consider existence to be a derived, mental concept. The Illuminationist position, elaborated by

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Ibn Kammunah, is this: should existence be real outside the mind (*mutahaqqaq fi kharij al-dhihn*), then the real must consist of two things - the principle of the reality of existence, and the being of existence, which requires a referent outside the mind. And its referent outside the mind must also consist of two things, which are subdivided, and so on, *ad infinitum*. This is clearly absurd. Therefore existence must be considered an abstract, derived, mental concept devoid of a real existence which may be referred to outside the mind.

### PHILOSOPHICAL ALLEGORY

Finally, among the distinguishing marks of Ibn Kammunah's Commentary is the manner in which he analyses the metaphorical passages in Suhrawardi's work. What I have called the "fourth stage" of Illuminationist constructivist methodology is the use of a special language, a symbolic mode of expression designated as *Lisan al-Ishraq* (Language of Illumination). Shahrastari and later Harawi are the only Illuminationist philosophers after Suhrawardi who continue using this special language in their works. Most others, including Ibn Kammunah, attempt to explain the symbolism in terms of standard philosophical language.

One such instance concerns Suhrawardi's allegory of the dream-vision of Aristotle. Another example is the story of Hermes having a vision in which he meets God, which in my view is further indication of the fact that Suhrawardi's Intimations includes a clear Illuminationist siade. The story is short and reads as follows:

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One night when the sun was shining, Hermes was praying in the Temple of Light (*haykal al-nur*); when the pillar of dawn ripped asunder. He saw a land, with cities, upon which the wrath of God had descended. They were entering into an abyss [disappearing] therein. So Hermes cried out: "O father, deliver me from the abode of the evil neighbors." He was thus summoned: "Catch the edge of [our] rays and fly to the Heavens." So he ascended and saw the Earth and the sky beneath him.

Ibn Kammunah calls this story "one of the difficult metaphors" (*al-rumuz al-mushkilah*) and makes the following attempt at a "rational" interpretation. The ripping of the pillar of dawn is equated with the appearance of the light of knowledge to man; the earth symbolizes the body, or matter in general; the cities are equated with embodied souls, or with their faculties, and so on. Clearly, his intention is somehow to make "philosophical" sense of Suhrawardi's allegorical style.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that Ibn Kammunah's interpretation of Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination as presented in his Commentary on the Intimations greatly influenced the later development of

philosophy in Persia. Specifically, both Mir Damad and subsequently Mulla Sadra refer to his interpretations and employ many of his arguments in their own work. Part of Ibn Kammunah's purpose was to clarify and explain Suhrawardi's often terse and difficult style. He further attempted to reduce the philosopher's symbolic language - which was so characteristic of Suhrawardi - to a more standard analytical one. In so doing, Ibn Kammunah helped the Philosophy of Illumination to become, in my view, more easily accepted by philosophers and accessible to them."(331)

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Though for chronological reasons if nothing else, it is quite impossible to speak of the influence of the great Shi'a philosophers of the Safavi Period, the famous "School of Isfahan", on St. John of the Cross, however, I believe it interesting for our purposes to briefly deal with them, as, like St. John of the Cross they were profoundly influenced by the Shi'a Imams, by Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Suhrawardi, numerous Persian Sufis, and, indirectly, i.e., by way of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Ibn Masarrah (on Ibn Masarrah, see Chapter 8). Suhrawardi was a Persian, while Ibn Masarrah and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi were Spaniards. Thus, like St. John of the Cross, the School of Isfahan combined Spain and Persia; if one cannot really imagine St. John of the Cross without Suhrawardi and the Persian Sufi poets, one cannot imagine the



School of Isfahan without those great Spaniards Ibn Massarah and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi.

We begin with Mir Damad, generally considered to have been the founder of the School of Isfahan.

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**MIR MUHAMMAD BAQIR DAMAD**

**By**

**HAMID DABASHI**

In the history of Islamic philosophy during the Safavi period, Mir Damad is remembered with uncommon affection and unceasing admiration. Muhammad Tunikabuni, the author of the biographical dictionary *Qisas al'ulama*, reports that one day Mulla Sadra, when the celebrated Shi'a philosopher of the Safavi period was still a student of Mir Damad, was waiting for his teacher to enter the room and start their discussion. The door is opened and in comes a local Isfahani merchant who needs to ask Mir Damad a question. While the merchant and Mulla Sadra are alone in the room, the merchant asks whether Mir Damad is superior in his learning to a prominent cleric in Isfahan. "Mir is superior", Mulla Sadra says. What about Ibn Sina, the merchant inquires further, how does he compare with the master of Peripatetic philosophy? "Mir is superior", Mulla Sadra repeats. What then of the Second Teacher, al-Farabi (second only to Aristotle)? Mulla Sadra hesitates for a moment. "Do not be afraid", Mir Damad encourages his student from the adjacent room, "tell him Mir is superior."

The same hagiographical affection is also present

in yet another story reported by another biographer, Tabrizi Khiyabani. Muhaqqiq-i Karaki is reported to have seen in a dream the first Shi'a Imam (Ali ibn Abi Talib), who instructs Muhaqqiq-i Karaki to give his daughter in marriage to Shams al-Din Muhammad. "She will give birth to a son who will inherit the knowledge of the prophets and the sages." Muhaqqiq-i Karaki does as he is told. But later that daughter, now wife to Shams al-Din Muhammad, dies before giving birth to a son. Muhaqqiq-i Karaki is puzzled by the event. Soon after the original dream is repeated, and this time the first Shi'a Imam identifies another daughter of the learned cleric as the appointed bride. Muhaqqiq-i

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Karaki proceeds by giving his second daughter to Shams al-Din Muhammad, to whom is born Muhammad Baqir, the future Mir Damad, who will prove right the dream of his distinguished grandfather.

Mir Burhan al-Din Muhammad Baqir Damad, whose poetic *nom de plume* was "Ishraq" and who was also referred to as "the Third Master" (after Aristotle and al-Farabi, who have been known as the First and the Second masters, respectively), was born into a distinguished religious family. Another honorific title by which Mir Damad has been known is Sayyid al-Afadil, or the "Master of the Most Learned". His father, Mir Shams al-Din, was the son-in-law of 'Ali ibn 'Abd al-'Ali, known as Muhaqqiq-i Thani or Muhaqqiq-i Karaki, the prominent Shi'a cleric of the Safavi period. Because of this relationship, the honorific title "Damad", which means "son-in-law", remained in Mir Shams al-Din's family and was given to his son Mir Muhammad Baqir. That Mir Damad himself is considered the son-in-law of Muhaqqiq-i Karaki is a mistake. The report that Mir Damad was Shah Abbas' son-in-law has also been discounted. Mir Damad's grandfather, Muhaqqiq-i Thani, was by far the most distinguished cleric of the early Safavi period and, during the reign of Shah Tahmasp (ruled 930/1524-984/1576), enjoyed unprecedented power. Astarabad, the city in the northeastern part of Persia from which Mir Damad's family emerged, enjoyed particular economic and social significance during the Safavi period. Mir Damad's father is also known as

"Astarabadi". Mir Damad was recognized as a prominent and distinguished philosopher in his own time. Iskandar Bayk Turkaman, the author of *Ta'rikh-I 'alam ara-yi 'abbasi*, pays considerable attention to his achievements and prominence.

Mir Damad was born in Astarabad but raised in Mashhad. He received his early education in this religious capital of Shi'a Persia where he studied Ibn Sina's texts closely. Prior to coming to Isfahan during the reign of Shah 'Abbas, he also spent some time in Qazvin and Kashan. In Isfahan, Mir Damad continued his education. He paid equal attention to intellectual and

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transmitted sciences. His contemporary, Iskandar Bayk Turkaman, reports of Mir Damad's prominence and significance as a philosopher and a teacher. At the time of Iskandar Bayk's writing, 1025/1616, Mir Damad was active in teaching and writing. During his own lifetime, Mir Damad was recognized as an accomplished philosopher, mathematician, jurist, hermeneutician and traditionalist. In jurisprudence, his judgement was canonical for other jurists. In most of these areas he had written influential treatises. His fame was such that, when Iskandar Bayk wrote about him, he knew not only of his published work but also of his writings in progress. Mir Damad died in 1041/1631 when he fell ill on his way to Karbala, in the entourage of Shah Safi (ruled 1038/1629 - 1052/1642), and was buried in Najaf.

#### **MIR DAMAD THE PHILOSPHER**

As is evident from his contemporary sources, Mir Damad was recognized simultaneously as a jurist, a mystic and a philosopher - a rare but not altogether impossible accident in Islamic intellectual history. His writings were recognized by his contemporaries as reflecting his comprehensive and encyclopedic interests in various disciplines. He wrote on philosophy and theology, prophetic and Imami traditions, Shi'a law. Qur'anic commentary, ethics and mysticism as well as logic. He was recognized by his contemporaries as having a prodigious memory. Although he was a gifted poet, his biographers are reluctant to recognize him as a poet.

"Although it is beneath his great status", one biographer concedes, "sometimes he composed some popems." In 1025/1616, Iskandar Bayk Turkaman reports that "today he lives in the capital city of Isfahan. I hope that his most gracious being for years will adorn the garden of time, and that the seekers of knowledge will be graced by the illuminating rays of his sun-like mind". Mir Damad's ascetic exercises have been noticed particularly by some of his biographers. These exercises are combined, if his biographers' sometimes hyperbolic tone is to be believed, with a precocious attention to philosophy. It is reported that his

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earliest philosophical writings began when he was still in Mashhad. By 988/1580 his reputation as a distinguished philosopher was known. When in this year he came to Kashan, one of his biographers, Husayni Kashani, went to visit him and to pay his respects. Contrary to Iskandar Bayk Turkaman, Husayni Kashani began is not hesitant in his admiration for Mir Damad's poetry. "Although he has achieved perfection in every field, his inclination more than anything else was to poetry, and most of the time beautiful poems came to his mind. Like other great masters, he was much inclined towards quatrains." When, in 933/1526, Husayni Kashani again sees Mir Damad in Kashan he continues to praise the philosopher's poetic gifts not only in quatrains but also in *qasidahs* and *mathnawis*.

Despite his prominent status as both a mystic and a jurist [something which would have been incomprehensible to Ibn Abbad of Ronda], an uneasy combination made possible by certain specific features of the "School of Isfahan", it was principally as a philosopher that Mir Damad recognized, praised and distinguished himself, as seen in many of his self-praising poems, e.g.:

I conquered lands of knowledge,  
 I lent old wisdom to my youth.  
 So that I made the earth with my al-Qabasat  
 The envy of the heavenly bodies.  
 I made my heart the treasure of Divine Secrets.  
 In the world of Intellect I reigned  
 In al-Qabasat I became the sea of certitude.  
 The script of doubt and certainty I destroyed.

He bore proudly and confidently the attribution of "the Third Teacher", after Aristotle and al-Farabi.

Mir Damad's general philosophical discourse has been identified as primarily "gnostic": "in the sense that the intellectual activity of the mind is conducive toward the experience of spiritual visions while the visionary experience stimulates the function of rational thinking giving both to new concepts and ideas". Anticipating Mulla Sadra's attempt to

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synthesize all the competing discourses of Islam's intellectual dispositions, Mir Damad brings together the Peripatetic (Aristotelian-Ibn Sinan) and the Illuminative (Neoplatonic-Suhrawardian) traditions of Islamic philosophy. The result is a peculiarly successful philosophical discourse in which, as Izutsu has stated, "beneath the surface of ... [his] dry thinking and through the veils of the abstract concepts which he handles with remarkable dexterity, we notice the presence of swarming visions originating from an entirely different source, the living experience of a mystic. This combination of rational and metarational orientation in philosophical disposition, when properly anchored to the doctrinal principles of the Shi'a faith, would constitute the major characteristics of what we now call the "School of Isfahan". ...

#### MIR DAMAD'S WRITINGS

Until quite recently there was no critical edition of *La-Qabasat*. The definitive edition was critically edited, annotated and published in 1977. The full title of the book is *Al-Qabasat Haqq al-Yaqin fi Huduth al'Alam*. *Al-Qabasat* consists of ten *qabas* ("a sparkle of fire") and three successive conclusions. The central question of this book is the creation of the world and the possibility of its extension from God. Mir Damad wrote *al-Qabasat* in 1034/1624. The first *qabas* discusses the variety of created beings and the divisions of existence. In the second *qabas*, Mir Damad argues for a trilateral typology of essential primacies (*al-sibaq al-dhati*) and his preference for the primacy of essence (*dhat*). The duality of perspectives through which

existence is subdivided and an argument to that effect through pre-eternal primacies constitute the third *qabas*. In the fourth *qabas*, Mir Damad provides Qur'anic evidence, as well as references from the Prophetic and Imami traditions, to support his preceding arguments. The fifth *qabas* is devoted to a discussion of the primary dispositions through an understanding of natural existence. The connection (*ittisal*) between

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"time" and "motion" is the subject of the sixth *qabas*. In this section, Mir Damad also argues for a "natural order" (*al-nazm al-tabi'i*) in time. Here he argues for the finality of numeral order and against the infinity of numbers in time-bound events (*al-hawadith al-zamaniyyah*). He then devotes the seventh *qabas* to a refutation of opposing views. In the eighth *qabas*, he verifies the Divine Authority in the establishment of such orders and the role of reason in ascertaining this truth. The ninth *qabas* proves the archetypal substance of intellect (*al-jawahir al-'aqliyyah*). In this chapter Mir Damad provides an argument for the presence of an order in existence, a cycle of beginning and return. Finally, in the tenth *qabas*, he discusses the matter of Divine Ordination (*al-qada' wa'l-qadar*), the necessity of supplication, the promise of His reward and the final return of all things to His Judgement.

In *Al-Qabasat* Mir Damad engages in the age-old debate over the priority of "essence" (*mahiyyah*) versus the priority of "existence" (*wujud*). After a long discussion, he ultimately decides in favor of the priority of essence, a position that would later be fundamentally disputed by his distinguished pupil Mulla Sadra. *Al-Qabasat* has remained a central text of Islamic philosophy since its first appearance. A number of philosophers of later generations have written commentaries upon it, including those by Mulla Shamsa Gilani and Aqa Jani Mazandarani. Mir Damad wrote *Al-Qabasat* in response to one of his students who had asked him to write a treatise and in it prove that the Creator of creation and being is unique in His pre-eternality, pre-eternal in His continuity, continuous in His everlastingness and everlasting in His post-eternality. In this text, he set for himself the task of proving

that all existent beings, from archetypal models to material manifestations, are "contingent upon nothingness" (*masbuqun bi'l-'adam*), "inclined towards creation" (*tarifan bi'l-huduth*), "pending on annihilation" (*marhunun bi'l-halak*), and "subject to cancellation" (*mamnuwwun bi'l-butlan*). The question of

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the pre-eternity (*qidam*) or createdness (*huduth*) of the world is one of the oldest and most enduring questions in Islamic philosophy, deeply rooted in the early Mu'tazilite codification of Islamic theology. Mir Damad reminds his readers that even Ibn Sina considered the nature of debate on this question to be "dialectical" (*judali*) rather than based on "proof" (*burhan*). (For Ibn Sina "proof" was a mode of logical argument superior to "dialectic").

"Creation" (*ibda'*) is the "bringing-into-being" of something from absolute-nothing. That which is "evident" (*ma'lum*), if left to its own "essence" (*dhat*), would not be. It is only by virtue of something outside it, i.e., its cause, that it is or, more accurately, it is brought-into-being. Things in their own essence have an essential, not a temporal, primacy over things that are located outside of them, such as their cause for becoming evident and manifest. Thus the secondariness of the causal over the primacy of its cause is an essential not a temporal secondariness. From this it follows that unless the relation between the cause and the caused is a temporal one, not every caused is created in time, i.e., not every *ma'lul* ("caused") is a *muhdath* ("created-in-time"). Only that caused is created-in-time which is contingent upon time (*zaman*), motion (*harakah*) and change (*taghayyur*). That created-being which is not subsequent to time is either subsequent to absolute nothingness, whose creation is called *ibda'* (or "brought-into-beginning"), or subsequent to not-absolute-nothingness, in which case its creation is called *ihdath* (or "brought-into-being-in-time"). If the created-being is subsequent to time, it can have only one possibility, which is its being-in-time subsequent to its being-in-nothingness.

There is also a hierarchical conception of time that Mir Damad begins to develop, mostly from previous

arguments made by Ibn Sina, Nasir-i Khusraw and Khwajah Nasir Tusi. First there is "time" (*zaman*), to which the "atemporal" (*dahr*) and ultimately the "everlasting" (*sarmad*) are superior and more expansive. This hierarchy of time-span is also to be

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understood in terms of relationship. *Sarmad* postulates the relation of the permanent to the permanent; *dahr*, the relation of the permanent to the changing; and *zaman*, a relation of the changing to the changing. From this trilateral conception of time, Mir Damad reaches for his unique understanding of creation. Both *huduth* ("creation") and *qidam* ("pre-eternity") are of three kinds: *dhati* (or "essential"), *dahri* (or "atemporal") and *zamani* (or "temporal"). Essential pre-eternity (the counterpart of the essential createdness) is that whose being and actuality are not subsequential to its not-being (*laysiyyah*) and/or nothingness ('*adam*). Atemporal pre-eternity (the counterpart of temporal createdness) is that temporal-thing whose being is not specific to a time and whose already-being (*husul*) is constantly present in the course of all time, and for the beginning of its being there is no temporal beginning.

Mir Damad proceeds to systematize further the received Ibn Sinan conception of "createdness" (*huduth*), with particular reference to *al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat*, by arguing that "temporal createdness" (*al-huduth al-zamani*) contains the other two "creatednesses" as well. "Temporal createdness" is the only kind of *huduth* that consists of three different kinds: gradual, instant and timely - which means that temporal createdness can be realized either gradually and by incremental achievements in correspondence to specified divisions of time, in instant realization without any division of time, or finally in a timely space between points A and B. Contemporary commentators of Mir Damad have traced the origins of his ideas on the question of pre-eternality and createdness as being primarily to Plato, Aristotle and Ibn Sina, and then chiefly to Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi.

As a believing Muslim, Mir Damad must advance, perforce, the argument of the createdness of cosmic existence. Neither "essential createdness" (*al-huduth*



*al-dhati*) nor "temporal createdness" (*al-huduth al-zamani*) is subject to disagreement among philosophers because they are self-evident. It is only in the

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question of "atemporal createdness" (*al-huduth al-dahri*) that disagreement arises. God's creation of the universe, Mir Damad concludes, is of the *ibda'* (brought-into-beginning") and *sun'* ("brought-into-createdness") kind as it pertains to "temporal createdness".

By the common consensus of many of his commentators, *Al-Qabasat* is Mir Damad's most significant philosophical text. His principal contribution in this text to the continuous debate over the pre-eternity (*qidam*) or createdness (*huduth*) of the world is his concept of *al-huduth al-dahri* ("atemporal createdness"). He argues that the created world cannot be considered as merely "essentially" (*dhati*) created, because in that case only its "essential" non-being (*al'adam al-dhati*) precedes it. "Essential" non-being is a relative and not a self-evident attribute. The created world can be "essentially" contingent upon non-being and yet, in a relative sense, be. Moreover, the created world cannot be considered as contingent upon "temporal" non-being, because in that case, time itself, which is a dimension of the created world, must be contingent upon its own non-being in time; and in the space thus considered time cannot be and not be in the same instant. There is also a theological problem in making the created world contingent upon a "temporal" non-being, because the postulation still necessitates a state of being when God was and His bounty to the world was not.

Mir Damad proceeds to distinguish between three kinds of "world". First is the "Everlasting World" (*al'alam al-sarmadi*), which is the space for Divine Presence, His Essence, and Attributes; second is the "Atemporal World" (*al'alam al-dahri*), which is the space for the pure archetypes (*al-mujarradat*); and third is the "Temporal World" (*al-'alam al-zamani*), which is the space for daily events, created beings, and generation and corruption. There is a hierarchical relationship among those three worlds; the Everlasting World encompasses the Atemporal and the Temporal. The Temporal World is the weakest and least enduring of the three.

As temporal events are contingent upon time, i.e., there are times when they are not and then they are "produced", or brought-into-being, in time, the same contingency governs the hierarchical order of *sarmad* (everlasting), *dahr* (atemporality), and *zaman* (temporality). (See Izutsu in Mir Damad [1977]: 4, the English introduction, where Izutsu prefers "no-time" for *sarmad*, "meta-time" for *dahr*, and "time" for *zaman*.) Every inferior stage, such as *zaman*, as in an actual state of non-being in relation to its superior state, in this case *dahr*. The real existence of the superior stage is identical to the actual non-being of the inferior stage. Reversing the order, the accidental defectiveness of the inferior stage - *zaman* to *dahr*, or *dahr* to *sarmad* - is not present in the superior stage. The in-itself existence of the superior stage, in other words, is the *ipso facto* non-existence of the inferior stage in-itself. Mir Damad then concludes that the contingent non-being of the world of the archetypals of the *dahri* stage in the stage of *sarmadi* existence is a real and self-evident non-being. Thus all created beings and their archetypes are consequent to real and self-evident non-being. Their creation is an atemporal (*dahri*) creation and not, as theologians maintain, a temporal (*zamani*) creation (Musawi Bihbahani in Mir Damad (1977): LXVI-LXVII), From this it follows that beyond their "essential creation" (*al-huduth al-dhati*) all temporal events are contingent upon and consequent to three real modes of non-existence: temporal, atemporal and everlasting. All the archetypal beings in the stage of temporal being are also contingent upon and consequent to one kind of non-being, namely the everlasting. And of course the everlasting world is not contingent upon and consequential to anything.

What Mir Damad achieves through this systematic separation of a trilateral stipulation of existence is the effective separation of God at the top of the hierarchy where He can initiate and sustain the world and yet not be subsequent to temporal corruption, to which all visible creations must yield. Moreover, the necessary contingency of an agent of creation, which is evidently active in the *zamani* and *dahri* stages of

existence, is not necessary in the superior stage of *sarmadi*. As one of Mir Damad's commentators rightly observes, "By devising the concept of *huduth-I dahri* (temporal creation), he [Mir Damad] has succeeded in establishing a compromise between the theologian and the philosopher, in other words, between religious law and reason" (Musawi Bihbani in Mir Damad [1977] LXIX).

### JADHAWAT

Mir Damad's *Jadhawat* is also devoted to an understanding of the nature of existence, for him a theophany distanced from the Divine Essence, a movement which is complemented by a reversal of this emanation back to its Origin. There are gradations and stages in this descending/ascending act of creation. In the descending order, first there is the *Nur al-anwar* ("Light of Lights") (the Suhrawardian First Principle) from which are issued *anwar-I qahirah* or "archetypal lights", *primus inter pares* (first among equals) among which is *'aql-i kull* or "the universal intellect". *Anwar-i qahirah* constitutes the first order of existence in close proximity to the source of all being, the pure Light, the Light of All Lights, or *Nur al-anwar*. In the second order of descending creation of existence is yet another constellation of lights called *anwar-i mudabbirah* or "the governing lights" *primus inter pares* among which is *nafs-i kull* or "the universal soul". *Nafs-i kull* receives its light and existential energy from *'aql-i kull*, as the latter does from *Nur al-anwar*. In the same order, the *anwar-i mudabbirah* receive their authority and existential energy from the *anwar-i qahirah*, themselves in turn created and energized by *Nur al-anwar*. In this second order of descending existence, the *anwar-i mudabbirah* and *nafs-i kull* chief among them constitute the *nufus-i falakiyyah* or "the heavenly souls" from which descended all the lower stages of existence. The third order of descending creation directly under the authority of *nufus-i falakiyyah* are *nufus-i muntabi'ah* or "the natural souls", which contain the archetypal sources of all that exists in the heavens and earth.

From these archetypal sources descend the fourth order of existence, which is *surat-i jismiyyah* or "the bodily form", itself the source of *hyle* of physical matter. In the ascending order, first there is *jism-i mutlaq* or "absolute body"; then the composite bodies, the vegetative soul in plants, the animal soul in animals, and penultimately the intellectual soul of human beings, which stands right below the Truth Itself.

### ONTOLOGY

As is evident in both *Al-Qabasat* and *Jadhawat*, for Mir Damad being is circulated through a cycle of emanation from the Divine Presence to the physical world and then a return to It. In a progression of distancing emanations, the material world is gradually emanated from the Divine Presence. From the Light of Lights (*Nur al-anwar*) are first emanated the archetypal lights (*anwar-i qahirah*), of which the universal intellect (*'aql-i kull*) is the first component. From this stage is emanated the "heavenly souls" (*nufus-i falakiyyah*), the "ruling lights" (*anwar-i mudabbirah*), of which the "universal soul" (*nafs-i kull*) is the primary member. The "natural souls" (*nufus-i muntabi'ah*) were subsequently created by the "universal soul". The archetypes of the heavens, planets, elements, compounds and the four natures are thus created. The final stage of the ontological emanation of being is the creation of matter from these archetypal origins. There is then a reversal order through which matter is sublimated back to light. Through this order, absolute or irreducible body (*jism-i mutlaq*) is advanced to the mineral stage of compound compositions. The minerals are then sublimated to the vegetative stage and then upward to the animal. Humanity is the highest stage of this upward mobility before the absolute matter rejoins the Light of Lights. At the center of this descending/ascending order, stands the human being, who is the existential microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm of the universe of Being.

Another principal aspect of Mir Damad's ontology is his philosophical preference for the "priority of essence" (*asalah al-mahiyyah*) over the "priority of existence" (*asalah al-wujud*). The debate over the priority of *mahiyyah* (essence, or, more accurately, quiddity) or *wujud* (existence) is a long contentious problematic in Islamic philosophy. While Mir Damad believed in the priority of *mahiyyah*, his celebrated student Mulla Sadra became the most ardent propagator of the priority of *wujud*. The priority of quiddity considers the appleness of the apple which is its essence to be real and its existence to be a mere accident, a necessary attribute for the actualization of the appleness. All existent beings share this accidental necessity of existence, but what distinguishes them and thus constitutes their unique ontological status is their quiddity, their what-it-isness, their appleness as opposed to orangeness. The philosophical genealogy of this position is to be traced back to Suhrawardi and Platonism. Mulla Sadra resounding disputed his teachers' firm belief in the priority of quiddity over existence and in a moving passage announced:

In the earlier days I used to be passionate defender of the thesis that the quiddities are extramentally real while existence is but a mental construct, until my Lord gave me guidance and let me see His own demonstrations. All of a sudden my spiritual eyes were opened and I saw with utmost clarity that the truth was just the contrary of what philosophers in general had held. Praise be to God, who, by the light of intuition, led me out of the darkness of the groundless idea and firmly established me upon the thesis which would never change in the present World and the Hereafter. As a result [Inow hold that] the individual existences of things are primary realities, while the quiddities are the "permanent archetypes [*a'yan thabitah*] that have never smelt even the fragrance of existence". The

individual existences are nothing but beams of light radiated by the true Light which is the absolutely self-subsistent Existence. The absolute Existence in each of its individualized forms is characterized by a number of essential properties and intelligible qualities. And each of these properties and qualities is what is usually known as quiddity.

Mir Damad's position, however, is founded squarely on the originality of essence over existence. Here is how he argues his case in the second chapter of the Qabasit:

The essence of a thing (*al-shay'*), in whatever shape or format it might be, is the occurrence [*wuqu'*] of the essence [*nafs*] of that very thing in that form [*zarf* = literally "vessel", "container"], not the attachment or appendage of something to it. Otherwise, simple matter [*al-hal al-basit*] would be turning into compound matter [*al-hal al-murakkab*]. Yet the bringing into being [*thubut*] of a thing in itself is the bringing-into-being of that thing in that thing. Thus whoever considers the existence of the essence [*al-mahiyyah*] an attribute [*wasf*] among the actual attributes, or an aspect [*amr*] among the mental aspects, above and beyond the concept of the Originating Existence, he would not be among those worth talking to, and he would not be among those in search of truth, as indeed it has been said by our [two] foregone companions in the act [of philosophy, i.e., Ibn Sina and al-Farabi].

## TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOUL

As an example of this descending/ascending order of existence, there is the treatise called Risalat al-khal'iyah attributed to Mir Damad. In which he describes the momentary transmigration of his own soul. He writes that on Friday 16 Sha'ban 1023 (21 September 1614), as he was engaged in a rigorous solitary self-reflection, after an intense period of remembering God Almighty, calling Him by His Most Bounteous Name, he was completely isolated from the physical world. At this point he felt himself totally surrounded by the sacred precinct of God's Presence. His Light cast totally upon him, Mir Damad remembers having left his physical body, abandoned the network of his sense perceptions, and been completely released from the bounds of nature. He soars towards the Absolute Presence of Truth, having completely left his body behind. He transcends everything that there is, supersedes temporality and reaches the realm of atemporality. He transcends the physical and the metaphysical, the sacred, the material, the atemporal, the temporal, the division between faith and blasphemy, Islam and ignorance, transcends all degrees, all stages, all who came before, all who will come later, for ever and ever. He transcends everything that ever was, everything that can ever be, small and large, permanent and mandatory, present and yet-to-come. Then everything in solitude or in group was ready at the gates of His Majesty and there he saw His Most Majestic Presence, with the eye of his inner intentions, in a way he could not understand. In utter annihilation everything recited His Name, pleading, begging, asking for His help, calling Him "O Thous the Rich, Thou the Giver of Richness!". These all were said in a way not known to them. Mir Damad persists in that state of utter mental unconsciousness, forgetting the substance of his faculties of understanding, in a total state of non-being. Then he comes out of that absolute state of unconsciousness and returns to the material world.

Comparing this experience to the Ibn Sinan "visionary recitals", (Henry) Corbin gave a full enthusiastic interpretation of this account., considerably emphasizing the significance of the middle of Sha'ban, the Prophet Muhammad's reported favorite month. Referring to the Isma'ili significance of this month, Corbin adds that: "The Isma'ili traditions insist on the esoteric meaning of that Night. To the question of an adept who asks why one speaks of the excellence of the 'day' (*qawm*) of mid-Sha'ban, the reply is that it is reported than in a *hadith* attributed to the Prophet, it is a question of the *night* and not the *day* - he responded here (in this *hadith*) that the *day* and the *night* indicate respectively the positions of the Prophet and of the Imam. The Prophet declared: 'Sha'ban is my month', to which he refers in his message the *Risalat*". Corbin's interpretation is based on a text that gives the date of Mir Damad's vision as "Friday 14 Sha'ban 1023". There is no such date in the year 1023 of the Islamic calendar (i.e., there is a 14 Sha'ban 1023, but it does not fall on a Friday). As the text indicates, the night in question is "Friday 16 Sha'ban 1023" which corresponds to Friday 21 September 1614. In the year 1023/1614, 14 Sha'ban was on Wednesday 17 September, and not on a Friday. The Friday in question was 16 Sha'ban, and Corbin's interpretation must be modified accordingly.

The notion of the transmigration of the human soul from the material body into the realm of Divine Presence must be understood in the context of Mir Damad's meta-epistemology whereby all the uncertainties of the material faculties are eliminated in a realm of metarational experience that the human soul leaves the body and ascends all the stages of existence he has identified in both the *Qabasat* and *Jadhawat*. What substantiates this assessment is the attribution of many ascetic exercises to Mir Damad. His nocturnal solitude, best discussed by Corbin, would have created a favorable condition for such conceptions. Mir Damad, in

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effect, translated a mystical conception of reunion with the Truth into a metaphysics of his own, in which the



transmigration of soul from body, through excessive concentration in ascetic exercises, into the Divine Presence constitutes the ultimate state of achieving certitude. ...

### POETICS

...Mir Damad was a gifted poet who left a collection of poetry in both Persian and Arabic. As convoluted and twisted as his philosophical prose is, his poetic voice is crystal-clear and rather elegant. Much "poetic license" was conventionally given and tolerated by the visceral literalism of the dogmatists. Mir Damad took full advantage of this "poetic license" and expressed considerable aspects of his philosophical and gnostic ideas in poetry.

There is a rather remarkable self-confidence in Mir Damad's poetic voice. He repeatedly boasts of his learning and erudition in his poetry. "I am the nightingale of virtue, art is my garden/I have cauterized the forehead of knowledge with my seal". In full confidence he announces that "I am twenty lunar years old/and yet in knowledge older than wisdom." He then proceeds to claim:

I am the lord of virtues, prince of knowledge,  
Intellect is my throne, wisdom is my seat. ...  
If like the moon kings borrow  
Their majesty from the crown and throne,  
I make my crown from my knowledge of the Divine,  
Of natural sciences I make my throne. ...  
My fortress is my knowledge of subjects in Arabic,  
My palace is my knowledge of sciences in poetics.  
I am like an aged wine, the universe is my container.  
I am like pure wine, the world is my bottle. ...

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As the repeated apologies of a recent editor of Mir Damad's poems indicate, it was considered below the status of a distinguished philosopher to engage in

poetry. Among philosophers poetry appears to have been considered a light avocation for momentary distraction from more serious discourses. The nature of this dismissive attitude towards poetry seems to stem from both a metaphysical and a social disdain for what is considered to be a frivolous distraction. Although the frequency and volume of poetic output attributed to Mir Damad prevent us from assuming that the poet himself considered his poetry as frivolous, it is also true that in his poetry we fail to detect a poetic voice distinct from his philosophical ideas expressed elsewhere in prose. Even when he engages in a poetic dialogue with Nizami in his famous response to *Makhzan al-asrar*, Mir Damad is still an effective and eloquent translator of his philosophical prose into poetry. Poetry qua poetry, with an independent aesthetic presence and a marked difference from a logocentric disposition, has no particularly discernible place in Mir Damad's *Kitab mashriq al-anwar dar jawab-i markhzan al-asrar*. Be that as it may, *Mashriq al-anwar* is still an eloquent *mathnawi* that Mir Damad composed in dialogue with Nizami's *Makhzan al-asrar*. This *mathnawi* follows the traditional sections canonized by Nizami. First there is a prologue in praise of God, followed by two supplicative prayers (*munajat*) and a seeking of forgiveness (*talab-i maghfirat*). Then there are two conventional praises of the Prophet, followed by two successive praises of "Ali (ibn Abi Talib), a section on all Shi'a Imams, and a concluding praise of the Twelfth Imam.

Mir Damad's significance as a poet should not be underestimated. Poetic "license" gave philosophers like Mir Damad the possibility and the imaginative discourse of seeing and thinking at a level beyond the immediate logocentricity of their philosophy and jurisprudence proper. Husayni Kashani's overwhelming praise for Mir Damad's poetry leaves no doubt that his contemporaries recognized and praised him more as a

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poet than as a philosopher. He, in fact, considers Mir Damad in the same league as the greatest poets of Khurasan, Fars or "Iraq, by which he means western Persia. His commentary on Nizami's *Makhzan al-asrar* is

particularly noted as his greatest poetic achievement.

### THE "SCHOOL OF ISFAHAN"

The term "School of Isfahan" was established most successfully by (Seyyed Hossein) Nasr, (Henry) Corbin and (Sayyid Jalal al- Din) Ashtiyani, and then extended by others as a generic term identifying the syncretic discourse that emerged in the Isfahan of Mir Damad's period. Mir Damad himself is credited with having established this school. The three prominent figures that Corbin studies in his discussion of this school are Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra Shirazi and Qadi Sa'id Qummi (died 1103/1691). To these names Nasr adds those of Shaykh Baha' al-Din 'Amili (Shaykh Baha'i), Mir Findiriski, Mulla 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Lahiji (died 1072/1661) and Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani. Mulla Rajab 'Ali Tabrizi (died 1080/1609), Aqa Husayn Khwansari (died 1098/1686) and Mulla Shasma Gilani (died 1081/1670) are also studied in the same group of philosophers.

Before the star and the highest achievement of the "School of Isfahan", Mulla Sadra, could emerge as the leading philosopher of the Safavi period and of the "School of Isfahan", much preparatory work had to be done by Mir Damad's generation. Protected by his eminent religious family, particularly his grandfather, Muhaqqiq-i Karaki, and his own learning in juridical sciences, Mir Damad engaged in philosophical writings with a particular penchant for mystic and Illuminationist tendencies. His attempt to wed Suhrawardi and Ibn Sina was matched by an unyielding concern with mystical possibilities of "understanding". Mir Damad, Mir Findiriski and Shaykh Baha'i were the dominant figures of the pre-Mulla-Sadra period, all sharing this simultaneous interest in gnostic, Peripatetic, Illuminationist and juridical (doctrinal) positions of Shi'ism. As Shi'a men of learning, Mir

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Damad, Mir Findiriski, Shakh Baha'i and ultimately Mulla Sadra were at the receiving end of the collective philosophical legacies of Ibn Sina, al-Ghazzali, al-Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi

[and, indirectly, by way of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Ibn Massarah; on Ibn Massarah see Chapter 8. Note that Ibn Sina, al-Ghazzali and Suhrawardi were Persians, while Ibn Massarah and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi were Spaniards, and all the five mentioned above profoundly influenced St. John of the Cross].

The ultimate objective of the Shi'a philosophers of the Safavi period was to demonstrate the central and meta-epistemological harmony among all these discourses. In his person, Mir Damad exemplified this synthetic ambition of the "School of Isfahan". As a Shi'a philosopher/jurist/mystic, he wrote logical treatises and juridical edicts with the same ease and competence with which he composed mystical poems. "He expounded a rigorously logical philosophy and yet wrote a treatise on a mystical vision he had received in Qom. He harmonized Ibn Sinan cosmology with Shi'ite imamology and made the 'fourteen pure ones' (*chahrdah ma'sum*) of Shi'ism the ontological principles of cosmic existence".

The flourishing of the "School of Isfahan" in general and the political possibilities of engaging in philosophy for Mir Damad in particular were due to a considerable degree to the exclusive attention paid to religious learning by Shah 'Abbas the Great. As the greatest and perhaps most powerful of all the Safavi kings, Shah 'Abbas was particularly concerned, anxious even, about his relations with the religious establishment at large. Other than Mir Damad and Shaykh Baha'I, for both of whom the Safavi monarch had a particular affection and reverence, there were a number of other prominent religious authorities with whom he regularly associated. Mulla 'Abd al-Muhsin Kashi, Mulla

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Muhsin Fayd, Mawlana 'Abd Allah Shustari and Shaykh Lutf Allah maysi 'Amili are among these high-ranking authorities. They would regularly attend his court where he would arrange for discussions and arguments around a religious issue. Particularly during the month of Ramadan, he would break his daily fast with the religious authorities. Each of these high-ranking

clerics would have his individual dining cloth, on which would be served an extravagant array of dishes, which included sweets and chocolates imported from Europe. Whatever was left of this sumptuous meal was sent home with the clerics. This was in addition to regular sums of money the Shah 'abbas would give to his high-ranking religious dignitaries.

Religious dignitaries like Shaykh Baha'I and Mir Damad were regularly among Shah 'Abbas' entourage, even when he was on a military campaign. There are even reports that he visited these great men of religious learning at their places of residence. His respect for his religious dignitaries ought to be seen, at least partially, in light of his pious devotion to his faith. One of Shah 'Abbas' servants, who had evoked his wrath, appealed to Shaykh Ahmad Afshar Ardabili, known as Muqaddas, a particularly revered cleric. Muqaddas wrote a letter to Shah 'Abbas: "The custodian of the transitory kingdom should know that if this man had once committed a transgression, now he appears to be transgressed against; if you forgive him, maybe God Almighty may forgive some of your own sins. Signed the Servant of the King of Absolute Sovereignty ['Ali], Ahmad Ardabili". Shah 'Abbas responded in utter humility: "May 'Abbas humbly report that your command has been heartily obeyed. May you not forget this devotee of yours in your prayers. Signed, the dog at the door of 'Ali, 'Abbas". The more humble Shah 'Abbas would appear in front of these religious dignitaries, the more legitimate his own power and authority would be *vis-à-vis* his subjects.

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The two major urban settings that flourished in this period were Isfahan and Shiraz. This may, in fact, fundamentally modify the "School of Isfahan" appellation, unless we give the Safavi capital its due political significance. One prominent member of the "School of Isfahan", Mulla Sadra Shirzai, not only was born, raised and received his early education in Shiraz but, in fact, was chased out of Isfahan by Shi'a dogmatists. Mulla Sadra's most productive writing years

were spent in the remote village of Kahak near Qom. As early as the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century, Shiraz was the scene of considerable philosophical activity. Mulla Jalal Dawani (died 908/1502) had a flourishing teaching career in Shiraz. Amir Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Dashtaki Shirazi (died 903/1497) and his son Amir Ghayath al-Din Mansur advanced the cause of philosophical studies in Shiraz. And ultimately Mulla Sadra taught for years at the *madrasah* of Khan in this city. This is not to underestimate the significance of Isfahan as a great cosmopolitan center of learning under the Safavis. When Shah 'Abbas I ascended the Safavi throne, Isfahan became a particularly favorable setting for a number of leading philosophers. Mir Damad, Mir Findiriski and Shaykh Baha' al-Din Amili became the great figures of philosophical learning in the Safavi capital.

Under favorable conditions created by the Safavi monarchs, and despite severe expressions of hostility by the nomocentric jurists, an array of distinguished philosophers, with more or less similar epistemological orientations, emerged in tenth/sixteenth century Persia. The principal core of the "School of Isfahan" was an attempt to bring together the diverse and opposing forces of Islamic intellectual history into a harmonious epistemological and ontological unity. Until the culmination of this movement in Mulla Sadra Shirazi, the efforts of Mir Damad's generation must necessarily be considered as preparatory groundwork. Out of necessity or conviction, or a combination of both, Mir Damad's generation of Shi'a scholars wrote on a range of diverse issues, including Peripatetic and Illuminationist philosophy, Mu'tazilite theology (See

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Chapter 8 on the great significance of this), Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's school of mysticism, Qur'anic commentary, juridical edicts, Shi'a dogmatics, and even on such popular topics as pious supplications to Shi'a Imams, etc. The earliest traces of this synthetic tendency among the Shi'a scholars in particular are to be seen in such encyclopedic collections as Husayn 'Aqili Rustamdari's *Riyad al-abrar*, composed in 979/1571. In this book, the Shi'a encyclopedist brings together an array of theological, philosophical and mystical topics,

plus such issues as "occult sciences" (*'ulum-i gharibah*), with a consistent penchant for the primacy of Shi'a sentiments and creedal dogmas. Mir Damad's *Risalat al-I'dalat fi funun al-'ulum wa'l-sina'at* is a text in this genre. Other prominent figures of the "School of Isfahan", such as Mir Abu'l-Qasim Findiriski, wrote similar treatises on the variety of "sciences". Mir Findiriski's *Risalah sana'iyyah*, Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani's *Fihrist al-'ulum* and Muhaqqiq-i Sharwani's (died 1099/1687) *Unmudhaj al-'ulum* are among the most notable examples of this genre of writings. In such encyclopedic collections of texts, we witness, although with no articulate epistemological or ontological statement, an attempt to bring the diverse array of Islamic intellectual discourses into some sort of harmony.

The emergence of the "School of Isfahan" was predicated on the continued success of the Peripatetic and Illuminationist discourses dominant in Islamic philosophy since the time of Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi, respectively. These two philosophical discourses were equally matched by widespread concern with Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's school of mysticism. The most prominent figures of the "School of Isfahan", including Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra Shirazi, reached for a level of philosophical discourse that combined these three dominant traditions and then in turn sought to wed the result to the Shia doctrinal positions. Through the active articulation of such key conceptual categories as "the unity of being" (*wahdah al-wujud*), "the priority of being" (*asalah al-wujud*), "transubstantial

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motion" (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*) and "the unification of the knower and the known" (*ittihad al-'aqil wa'l-ma'qul*), the "School of Isfahan" shifted the philosophical preoccupation of Islamic philosophers to a plane of operation more responsive to mystical sensibilities. The synthetic discourse with which the "School of Isfahan" was gradually identified was *hikmah*. Central to this discourse was an attempt to combine the doctrinal teachings of the Shi'a Imams with the wide range of theoretical speculations in gnosis, philosophy and theology.

The triumphant development of the "School of

Isfahan" as a distinct philosophical orientation ought to be seen in the context of the Safavi state and the self-assuring confidence it engendered and sustained in the Shi'a intellectual disposition. Mir Damad and the "School of Isfahan" were the supreme cultural products [among a multitude of cultural products] of a confident, prosperous and self-assertive Safavi state. With Mir Damad's generation of Shi'a philosophers, mystics, jurists and legal theorists, a new mode of intellectual confidence was created that could attend, with perfect authority, the whole gamut of Islamic intellectual history. The formation of the "School of Isfahan" is the institutional expression of a daring synthetic discourse set to bring together three conflicting thrusts in Islamic intellectual history - the philosophical, the mystical and the (Shi'a) doctrinal. Regardless of their degree of success or failure, the chief exponents of the "School of Isfahan", from Mir Damad to Mulla Sadra, its most celebrated achievement, contributed towards the emphatic establishment of a level of unprecedented philosophical discourse which saw no fundamental difference between the intellectual configuration of reality and its mystical comprehension or between these two modes of coming to terms with a significant truth (a truth that signifies) and the doctrinal mandates of the Shi'a faith. What would later be known as *al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah* ("the transcendental philosophy") is the theoretical culmination of this synthesis, a cutting deep through all the dominant, and

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fundamentally hostile, intellectual discourses in Islam. Mir Damad's rather distinctive self-confidence (repetition of his poetic boasting of what a profound philosopher he is, a rather surprising phenomenon given the timidity and humility with which the Muslim literati usually describe their history, and his authoritative voice when attending to any number of philosophical, mystical, doctrinal, Qur'anic, hermeneutic, and other Shi'a discourses) is the reflection of a triumphant Safavi dynasty reimbursing Shi'ism for centuries of persecution and humility. The ambitious terms with which Mir Damad and other members of the "School of Isfahan", particularly Mulla Sadra, thought they could conceive to



bring together the whole universal repertoire of Islamic intellectual history could have been possible only in a kingdom under "the Shadow of God on Earth".

Among the earlier generations of philosophers preceding the "School of Isfahan", Qadi Maybudi (died 910/1505) had already combined a Peripatetic orientation in his philosophical writings with a mystical disposition best represented in his poetry. He was a student of Mulla Jalal Diwani. Because of his Sunni beliefs, Qadi Maybudi was murdered at the order of Shah Isma'il. Qadi Maybudi wrote extensively on Peripatetic philosophy. His commentaries on Hidayah al-Hikmah of Athir al-Din Abhari (died 633/1235) and Hikmah al-'ayn of Najm al-Din Dabiran (died 675/1276) were widely read and discussed. In theology, he wrote a commentary on Tawali' al-anwar of Qadi Baydawi (died 685-1286). But the traces of a synthetic discourse, wedding philosophy and mysticism, are more immediately evident in his Jam-i giti-namah, a treatise he wrote in Persian and in which he combined aspects of the philosophical and mystical discourses.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ghayath al-Din Mansur Dashtaki Shirazi (866/1463-948/1541) was another distinguished philosopher of this earlier generation, anticipating the "School of Isfahan". He is considered the Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi of the tenth/sixteenth century. In fact, many of the honorific titles with which he has been praised are identical

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with those of Khwajah Nasir. When Shah Isma'il conquered Shiraz in 909/1503, he ordered Ghayath al-Din Mansur to repair the Maraghah Observatory. During the reign of Shah Tahmasp (930/1524-984/1576), for a period of time, between 936/1529 and 938/1531, he became a vizier to the Safavi king. A rivalry developed between him and Muhaqqiq-i Karaki, Mir Damad's maternal grandfather, which led to his dismissal from the Safavi court. He subsequently returned to Shiraz and resumed his writings on philosophy in his Mir'at al-haqa'iq, Ghayath al-Din Mansur begins to work his philosophical ideas into a synthetic discourse between the Peripatetic and Illuminationist schools of philosophy. In his critical commentaries on Mulla Jalal Dawani's exegesis on Suhrawardi's Haykil al-nur, he puts forward a vigorous

Peripatetic twist to the Illuminationist discourses of both Suhrawardi and Dawani.

Mir Findiriski is perhaps the most distinguished example of this ecumenical and synthetic spirit rising simultaneously with Mir Damad. He travelled as far as India, became acquainted with Zoroastrian and Hindu ideas, and even wrote a notable commentary on *Yoga Vaiseska*. His *Risala-yi sana'iyah* is an encyclopedic collection of all "rational" and "transmitted" sciences. Other than his philosophical treatises, like *Mqaulat al-harakah wa'l-tahqiq fiha*, in which he challenges the notion of Platonic ideas, Mir Findiriski reproduced much of his philosophical ideas in his poetry. The opening lines of one of his most famous *qasidahs* is a good example of this philosophical poetry:

The Universe with stars in it is all so beautiful,  
pure, and in harmony,

Whatever is in the heavens has a form down here on  
earth.

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The ambitious challenge that the "School of Isfahan" sought to meet was wedding together all the diverse and opposing discourses of legitimate understanding that had historically divided Muslims and then have doctrinal Shi'ism preside over them all. The principle points of contention were not only the philosophical traditions of the Peripatetic and Illuminationist branches, but also the gnosis of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and the Shi'ism of the post-*Ghaybah* period. Luminaries of the "School of Isfahan", such as Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra, became the chief protagonists of this new philosophical discourse, took the possibilities of ascetic exercises and of gnostic Illumination seriously, and saw the result in perfect harmony with the Shi'a doctrinal position. In the figure of Mir Damad, for example, were combined the otherwise conflicting characters of a logocentric philosopher, a

practicing mystic and a powerful jurist. Even if the report that Shah 'Abbas was actually afraid of him and plotted to kill him is not true, still the assumption is a good indication of the philosophical implications of such a constructed image of social and metaphysical authority.

Mir Damad's principal work in the "School of Isfahan" was his reconstruction of a Peripatetic philosophical orientation with a practical mysticism akin to the Illuminationists. Separation from the physical body, in this meta-epistemology, becomes the necessary precondition of conceptual cognitions. Mir Damad's ascetic exercises, thus rooted in his epistemology, become equally constitutional in his appeal to the mystics. The optimum balance that Mir Damad was able to maintain between delicate intrusions of philosophical and mystical doctrines into the dogmatic and juridical principles of the faith was not continued by his pupils. By the time Mulla Sadra (died 1050/1640) sought to carry Mir Damad's suggestions to their logical conclusions, he had managed to antagonize the Shi'a clerics considerably, so much so that he had to flee to the remote village of Kahak. Mulla Sadra, in fact, manages to antagonize both the Sufis and the

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jurists. In his *Al-Asfar al-arba'ah, Kasr asnam al-jahiliyyah* and *Risalah-yi sih asl* he severely criticizes both the intoxicated Sufis and the literalists jurists.

Mulla Sadra's antagonism against some of the practicing Sufis seems to have stemmed from a necessary desire to distance his adaptation of a mystical discourse into his general philosophical narrative from such functional Sufism associated with the Sufi orders which had neither theoretical sophistication nor social prestige at that time. As is evident in both Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra's writings, the "School of Isfahan" is the collective expression of an intellectual enterprise that seeks to denounce the ecstatic mysticism of a more popular orientation in favor of an articulate adaptation of Sufi gnosis integrated into a principally philosophical discourse. But at the same time this systematic logocentricity has to maintain a safe and necessary distance from the literal nomocentricity of the jurists

with its quintessentially anti-philosophical and anti-mystical convictions.

The synthetic nature of the *hikmat al-muta'aliyah*, as the highest theoretical achievement of the "School of Isfahan", is also evident in its constant references to the works of Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali in his later works, where he had already achieved a balanced equilibrium among the existing discourses of his time. In his *magnum opus*, *Al-Asfar al-Arba'ah*, Mulla Sadra demonstrated the viability of the mystical discourse by adopting its formal narrative for his otherwise most ambitious philosophical project. An ambitious synthesis of a logocentric discourse, combined with mystical observations, and ultimately governed by the Qur'anic language is perhaps the most enduring legacy of the "School of Isfahan" as represented in its best spokesmen Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra and their respective students.

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Mulla Sadra was perhaps the greatest figure and the most celebrated representative of the "School of Isfahan". As Mir Damad's principal student, he gave the fullest account of the principal doctrines of the "School of Isfahan". Since there are separate chapters on Mulla Sadra in this volume, I need not discuss him fully here. Suffice it to say that he generously benefitted from the work and achievement of his three principal teachers - Mir Damad, Mir Findiriski and Shaykh Baha'I - and in his *magnum opus*, *Al-Asfar al-Arba'ah*, as well as in such major treatises as *Al-Masha'ir*, *Alshawahid* and *Al-Hkimah al-'arshiyah*, he gave the synthetic discourse of the "School of Isfahan" its most successful expression.

In addition to Mulla Sadra, the generation of Mir Damad, Mir Findiriski and Shaykh Baha'I trained a number of other distinguished philosophers, among whom is Mulla Rajab 'ali Tabrizi (died 1080/1669), the author of *Kilid-i Bihisht*. Tabrizi had studied with Mir Findiriski and became a prominent religious authority during the reign of shah 'Abbas. Mulla Shamsa Gilani (died

1081/1670) was another student of Mir Damad. He continued his teacher's interest in the Divine Act of creation and wrote a treatise on it. He also wrote a commentary on Mir Damad's *Al-Qabasat*. Like his teachers, Mulla Sahmsa was under the influence of Suhrawardi, and in opposition to Ibn Sina, in considering the comprehensive nature of Divine Knowledge above and beyond the knowledge of the essence. In the same generation of post-Mir Damad philosophers is Aqa Husayn Khwansari (died 1098/1686), who wrote extensive commentaries on Ibn Sina's *Al-Shifa'*.

With the third generation, of the "School of Isfahan", Mulla Sadra's students had already learned to be more cautious in the formulation of their ideas. In his *Shawriq*, Mulla 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji (died 1072/1661), Mulla Sadra's student and son-in-law, reformulates an originally Ghazzalian position that mystical observations are the ultimate tests of preceding rational conclusions. The viability of the mystical discourse as a meta-epistemological basis of

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legitimate understanding continued to occupy a central position in the theoretical apparatus of the "School of Isfahan". The principal problems that led the philosophers of the "School of Isfahan" towards the viability of the mystical discourse were created by the confrontation between the Peripatetic school of philosophy and the theological mandates of the Islamic faith. Such central dogmas as the nature of prophetic knowledge, the possibility of revelation, the plausibility of a day of judgement and of its corollary doctrine of bodily resurrection and, of course, ultimately the Existence and Attributes of God were paradigmatic problematics created for Islamic philosophy by virtue of its epistemological operation in the context of the Islamic creed. Islamic philosophy proper, as best represented in its Peripatetic tradition by Ibn Sina, could go only so far in stipulating the ontological viability of the Necessary Being. As best exemplified in Ibn Sina's *Al-isharat wa'l-Tanbihat*, even the master of Peripatetic philosophy had recognized the inherent limitations of reason and of logocentricity to ascertain the revelatory mandates of the faith and sought to explore the possibilities promised in the

mystical discourse. While in the mystical discourse proper, at least up until Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi, there is a fundamental suspension of reason in favor of an alternative certitude that bypasses the intermediary of intellect, in the Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah of the "School of Isfahan" the attempt is made to adapt the possibilities of the mystical discourse, especially in its Ghazzalian and Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursian formulations, into the working operation of an otherwise logocentric discourse when it finds it impossible to reach for a comprehensive conception of the metaphysical doctrines of the faith. Whereas both mysticism and philosophy proper had gone separate ways in their respective conception of existence, *al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah* sought to hold to the initial logocentricity of a philosophical inquiry into the nature of being and then, when it reached the impasse of not being able to account for the doctrinally mandated principles of the

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faith, it turned to the mystical discourse and the possibilities of the metarational perceptions it promised.

In his Gawhar-i Murad, Mulla 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji compared and contrasted the philosopher's method and the mystic's path, concluding that while the former "confirmed" all preliminary existent beings in order to reach or the Final Cause, the latter "negated" all preliminary stages of existence until it reached a positive annihilation in Being. It is this mystic path that made the prophetic state conceivable to the philosophers of the "School of Isfahan". In his philosophical orientation, Lahiji is much more cautious than his teacher Mulla Sadra in openly identifying with mystical conceptions. But there are many occasions in Gawhar-i murad, which is more than anything else a text of philosophical kalam, where he openly identifies with the "Illuminationist" and mystical attainment of certitude. For example, in his chapter on prophethood he devotes a section to proving the necessity of prophethood by a tradition of the Sixth Shi'a Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, followed by successive sections arguing in the same way according to theologians, philosophers and finally the mystics. For years Lahiji taught the texts of Mulla Sadra, including Al-Shawahid al-

Rububiyah. His most famous student was Qadi Sa'id Qummi (dies 1104/1692). His choice of both texts to teach and philosophical projects to undertake confirms the assessment: that Lahiji's understanding of mystical metacertainty beyond the limited achievements of Philosophy proper corresponds to the later works of al-Ghazzali, especially his Al-Mundiqidh min al-Dalal. His preference for the mystical discourse over the philosophical in Gawhar-i Murad has also been compared to al-Ghazzali in Kimiyat-yi sa'adat.

Another student and son-in-law of Mulla Sadra, Mulla Muhsin Fayd (died 1091/1680), belongs to the same philosophical school. He, too, represents a synthetic attempt to wed mystical perceptions with dogmatic principles and brings forth both into a legitimate philosophical discourse. Shah 'abbas II (ruled 1052/1642-1077/1666) was particularly respectful of

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him. In his Al-Muhakimah bayn al-Mutisawwifah wa ghayrahim, Mulla Muhsin tries to distinguish between popular (what he calls "ignorant") Sufism and the gnostic discourse he finds legitimate and useful in matters of philosophical pursuits. He has a treatise, called Al-Insaf fi Bayan al-Farq Bayn al-Haqq wa'l-I'tisaf, in which he identifies four major groups of Muslims: the philosophers, the mystics, the theologians and "the deviates" (*muta'assif*). Although none of these groups are infidels, they have all gone astray in their respective pursuits. He particularly condemned the philosophers for having abandoned the book of God and adopted the books of the (Classical) Greeks in their pursuit of truth. By philosophers here, he means the rationalistic philosophers because his own Usul al-Ma'arif is an important text in the tradition of the Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah. But mystics and theologians are equally to blame. The implicit conclusion of this sweeping dismissal of all existing Islamic discourses is the validation of Mulla Muhsin's own contribution to the continued validity of the *hikmat al-muta'aliyah*. The principal foundations of this discourse, Mulla Muhsin insists are the Qur'an and the Prophetic and Imami traditions. Any kind of philosophical speculation which is not traceable to the Qur'an and *Hadith* is to be discarded. Mulla Muhsin Fayd's commentary on al-

Ghazzali's Ihya 'Ulum al-Din, called Al-Mahajjat al-Bayda' fi Tahdhib al-Ihya, has rightly been considered the indication of a renewed interest in a mature combination of logocentrism and gnostic orientations. He achieves in Al-Mahajjat al-Bayda' a systematic reconstruction of al-Ghazzali's mature reflection on the nature of religious ethics on the foundations of Shi'ism and its traditions.

The adaptation of a supplementary mystical discourse in their otherwise logocentric orientation made the members of the "School of Isfahan" particularly sensitive to and critical of the more popular forms of Sufism. Thus, a major characteristic of the philosophers of the "School of Isfahan" is their denunciation of practicing popular Sufis of their

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period, whom they identify with reckless endangerment of the faith. Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra, Mulla 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji, and Mulla Muhsin Fayd all prefaced their theoretical adaptations of gnostic discourses with a visceral condemnation of popular mysticism. Mir Abu'l-Qasim Findiriski went one step further and, in his Risala-yi Sina'iyyah, accused the popular Sufis of disrupting the social order. Shaykh Baha'I wrote a satirical treatise, Mush wa Gurbah, in which he condemned and dismissed the decadent type of Sufism of the more popular sort although he himself was a Sufi.

But no matter how diligent the philosophers of the "School of Isfahan" were in their attempts to distance themselves from popular Sufis and subject their gnostic/philosophical discourse to Shi'a doctrinal principles, considerable hostility was still directed against them by the dogmatists. Mulla Muhammad Tahir Qummi (died 1100/1688) wrote two treatises against mystics and philosophers. His Al-Fawa'id al-Diniyyah fi'l-radd 'ala'l-Hukama wa'l-Sufiyyah, is as perfectly evident in the title, is on the classical model of the appropriation of the faith by the clerical establishment through a visceral denunciation of philosophy and mysticism. In this classical genre of disputation, the particular literalist version of the faith is identified as al-Din ("the Faith"), and the alternative readings are condemned as aberrations of al-Hukama and al-



*Sufiyyah*. Yet not all jurists were anti-mystical or anti-philosophical in their nomocentric disposition. The greatest traditionalist of the period, Shaykh Muhammad taqi (the First) Majlisis (died 1070-1659), looked favorably upon mysticism and, in fact, wrote a treatise against Mulla Muhammad Tahir Qummi's anti-mystical position. Still, both this Majlisi and his son Mulla Muhammad Baqir (the Second) Majlisis (died 1111/1699) distinguished fundamentally between "traditional" Sufism of the patristic generation and what they observed among their contemporary Sufis. The Majlisi's tolerance of "traditional Sufis", however, does not extend to philosophers as well. Both Majlisis considered the human intellect to be insufficient for grasping the

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nature of the prophetic message. That message has to be accepted as a Divine mandate and in terms *sui generis* to it. The Second Majlisi, in his *I'tiqadat*, took strong exception to the philosophers' interpretation of the Qur'anic and Prophetic truths so that they would coincide with "an infidel Greek's ideas". It is with the continuity of precisely the same sentiments that, during the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein (ruled 1105/1694-1135/1722), one of the most distinguished philosophers of the period, Mawlana Muhammad Sadiq Ardistani, was harassed, persecuted and forced to leave Isfahan. He left Isfahan under such difficult circumstances that his infant child succumbed to the cold weather in the highway.

#### CONCLUSION

The central, yet subtextual, problematic of Islamic philosophy, its theocentricity, was initially reactivated but ultimately further consolidated in the gradual but persistent formation of the "School of Isfahan". The *a priori* certainty of the mystical discourse was transformed into the timid logocentricity of Peripatetic philosophy, and both were considerably assimilated into Shi'a doctrinal dogmas. Aspects of Shi'a liturgical piety, forces of mystical metacertainty, and remnants of Aristotelian logic were brought together under the general rubric of a philosophical discourse that remained quintessentially theocentric and

cross-referential with the revelatory language of the Qur'an. This remained the case without the slightest recognition of the legitimacy of the philosophical discourse on the part of Shi'a legal orthodoxy. Shi'a philosophers, in or out of the "School of Isfahan", remained the constant targets of suspicion. Mir Damad sought refuge from anti-philosophical doctors of the law in his convoluted discourse. Mulla Sadra practically fled persecution and lived a life of exile for some years in a small village. Mir Findiriski and Shaykh Baha'I sought a poetic or satirical discourse as a haven. That they did produce a philosophy in which they sought to bring together the conflicting discourses of philosophy,

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(Shi'a) theology and mysticism is a testimony to the relentless grip of their inquiring minds. That they could never escape or supercede the relentless theocentricity of their discourse, that all successive paradigmatic breakthroughs in Islamic philosophy (from Peripatetic to Neoplatonic to Illuminationist to "School of Isfahan" and its highest achievement, Transcendental Philosophy) remained shy of a fundamental epistemic revolution as found in the modern West, are more commentaries on the Islamic tradition within which these philosophers thought and functioned than their generic concern with the rule of reason, the uninhibited pursuit of truth or reality or, perhaps more accurately, the ironic possibilities of two counter-dogmatizing quotation marks around every theoretical claim to "truth". (332)

Hamid Dabashi's language is somewhat cryptic; if he means that what passes for philosophy in the modern West is the highest achievement of philosophy in history, I must beg to differ with him. This is, of course, a large topic, to put it briefly, but I want the reader to at least have an idea as to where I stand.

We now turn to Mulla Sadra, generally considered to be the

greatest thinker of the renowned "School of Isfahan".

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**MULLA SADRA: HIS LIFE AND WORKS**

**By**

**HOSSEIN ZIAI**

Sadr al-Din Shirazi is one of the most revered of all philosophers in Islam, especially among Muslim intellectuals today. His full name is Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Qawami al-Shirazi, and he is commonly known as "Mulla Sadra" to multitudes of Muslims, especially in Persia, Pakistan and India. His honorific title, Sadr al-Din ("Pundit of Religion"), indicates his accepted rank within traditional theological circles, while his designation as "Exemplar, or Authority of Divine Philosophers" (*Sadr al-Muta'allihin*) signifies his unique position for generations of philosophers who came after him. He was born in Shiraz in southern Persia in circa 979/1572 to a wealthy family. His father was reportedly a minister in the Safavi court., but was also a scholar. Sadr al-Din is said to have made the pilgrimage to Mecca six times, and on his seventh journey died in 1050/1640 in Basra, where he is buried and where his grave was known until recent times. Fairly extensive and accurate information on his life, his studies, his students and his work are available. Owing in part to the relative proximity of his time to ours, several autographs of his works, many letters and glosses on earlier textual traditions have survived, giving us a better insight into his personality than most of the philosophers of earlier periods. Most

historians and commentators of his works divide his life into three distinct periods.

### STUDY

Upon completing preliminary studies in his native Shiraz, the young thinker travelled to Isfahan, the seat of Safavi rule and perhaps the most important center of Islamic learning in the tenth/sixteenth century. There he first enrolled in courses on traditional Islamic scholarship, commonly called the

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"transmitted sciences (*al-'ulum al-naqliyyah*), in which the great jurist Baha' al-Din Muhammad al-'Amili (died 1031/1622) was laying the foundations of a new, well-defined Shi'a jurisprudence. Sadr al-Din's comprehensive early studies of Shi'a views concerning jurisprudence and *Hadith* scholarship and his exposure to Qur'anic commentary by the great Shi'a thinker distinguish him from almost all the earlier philosophers of medieval Islam, whose knowledge of such subjects was elementary at best. This side of Sadr al-Din's intellectual formation deeply marked his thinking and represents one of the two main trends in his works.

During the same period, Sadr al-Din began his studies of what are commonly known as the intellectual sciences (*al-'ulum al-'aqliyyah*) under the tutelage of one of the greatest and most original Islamic philosophers, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Astarabadi, well known as Mir Damad (died 1040/1631). This famous, erudite philosopher, known as the "Seal of Philosophers" (*Khatam al-Hukama'*) and the "Third Teacher" - after Aristotle and al-Farabi - was overwhelmed by his pupil's unusual competence in constructing philosophical arguments and bestowed lavish praise on him. Had it not been for Sadr al-Din's eclipsing prominence, Mir Damad might have been remembered more than he currently is for his collection and revisions of the complete textual corpus of Islamic philosophy. In many ways Mir Damad's endeavors, funded by the enlightened endowments of the arts and sciences by the Safavi court (into which he had married), led to the establishment of superior libraries where the older manuscript traditions were collected, copied and published. Evidence for this profuse activity

are the impressive numbers of Arabic and Persian manuscripts now housed in major collections all over the world, all produced in Isfahan during this period. In his court-supported patronage as well as in his own works on philosophical subjects, especially his *Qabasat* and his unpublished *Al-'Ufuq al-Mubin*, Mir Damad's work was the impetus for the revival of philosophy known as the "School of Isfahan". Sadr al-Din's lengthy studies with this visionary thinker mark the philosophical

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aspect, or second trend, in Sadr al-Din's works. It represents the height of yet another "new" synthesis and reconstruction of metaphysics in Islamic philosophy after Suhrawardi. This philosophical trend soon became one of the main schools of Islamic philosophy, if not the dominant one to this day, and bears the name of metaphysical philosophy (*al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah*). This name was chosen specifically by Sadr al-Din to indicate his specific philosophical intention, which needs to be adequately examined.

#### **COMPLETE RETREAT FROM SOCIETY**

After a formal period of study, Sadr al-Din withdrew from society and from city life altogether, choosing the seclusion of the small village of Kahak, near the holy city of Qum. This period marks Sadr al-Din's increased preoccupation with the contemplative life and also the years in which he laid the ground work for most of his major works. This period is marked by long periods of meditation and spiritual practice complementing that of formal study, thus completing the program for the training of a real philosopher according to Suhrawardi. It was during this period that the knowledge which was to become crystallized in his many works was attained.

#### **TEACHING AN PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEMPLATION**

Sadr al-Din's fame as master of the two branches of Shi'a learning - the transmitted and the intellectual - soon spread across the Safavi capital. Many official positions were offered to him, which he shunned, as his biographers all agree. His disregard for material

rewards and refusal to serve the nobility in any form is evidenced by the fact that not one of his works bears a dedication to a prince or other patron, although such inscriptions were common practice of the day. Historians also state that Sadr al-Din's new fame met with typical jealousy on the part of members of the scholarly community, whose unfounded charges of blasphemy were a factor in his rejecting the limelight of Safavi circles in Isfahan. He did,

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however, agree to return to public life and teach in the *madrasah* which was built and endowed by the Safavi nobleman Allahwirdi Khan in Shiraz. The new institution of learning, away from the political ambiance of the capital, suited Sadr al-Din's increasing preoccupation with both teaching and meditation.

The language used to describe Sadr al-Din's contemplative life strongly indicates his Illuminist attitude to philosophy in general and the Illuminist position of the primacy of the intuitive, experiential mode of cognition in particular. Suhrawardi had demonstrated the validity of vision-illumination (*mushahadah was ishraq*) as the means for recovery of eternal truths to be used in philosophical construction. The Illuminist tradition had repeatedly employed the allegory of the inner yst objectified journey into the *mundus imaginalis* ('*alam al-khayal*) as the highest method for obtaining sound principles of philosophy. Suhrawardi had called for a prescribed sequence of specific actions as a necessary first step toward achieving this vision, which was believed to lead to the atemporal, immediate cognition of the whole of reality. Sadr al-Din evidently took these *dicta* quite seriously. All of his biographers mention his ascetic practices (*riyadat*) and his visionary experiences (*mushahadah, mukashafah*). Many of Sadr al-Din's philosophical compositions inform the reader that the essence of a specific philosophical argument was first revealed to him in a visionary experience, which he then analyses within the discursive system.

It is also during this period of his life that Sadr al-Din trained a number of students who went on to become significant in subsequent philosophical activity in Persia. His two most important pupils produced works

that have been widely studied to this day. The first of these note worthy students, Muhammad ibn al-Murtada - well known as Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani - wrote a treatise titled Al-Kalamat al-Maknunah, which emphasizes the two sides of the master's thinking: the gnostic ('*irfan*) and the Shi'a interpretation of the Qur'anic realm of the "unseen" (*al-ghayb*) as the source of inspiration. Second is 'Abd al-Razzaq ibn al-

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Hussein al-Lahiji, whose Persian summaries of the master's more Peripatetic inclinations have been especially popular in Persia. His Shawariq al-ilham deserves special mention here for its inclusion of an older Ibn Sinan view of ethics. Both of these young scholars were also married to two of Sadr al-Din's daughters, revealing an increasingly intimate relationship between master and teacher in Shi'a learned circles, which is prevalent to this day. Several other students are mentioned in biographical sources, including two of the master's sons.

Monumental though the impact of Sadr al-Din's works and thinking has been on Islamic intellectual history, very few comprehensive, systematic studies of his philosophy are available in Western translation. The earliest extensive study was done by Max Horten, whose Das Philosophische System von Schirazi is still a good source, despite the author's use of modern philosophical terminology and older Orientalist views.

In more recent decades Henry Corbin's text edition and pioneering studies opened a new chapter in Western scholarship on Islamic philosophy, producing an awareness of the existence of original trends in the post Ibn Sinan period, if not a complete analytical understanding of their philosophical significance. Corbin's emphasis on the presumed esoteric dimension of Sadr al-Din's thought has tended to hinder a modern, Western philosophical analysis of "metaphysical philosophy", however, Following Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's study of Sadr al-Din's thought, and James Morris' study and translation of a less significant philosophical work by Sadr al-Din, called 'Arshiyah (translated by Morris as Wisdom of the Throne), also emphasize the non-systematic aspect of this philosophy. Their choice of terms such as "transcendent theosophy" does not indicate the philosophical side of the original

genius of Sadr al-Din's thinking. To date the only in-depth study of Sadr al-Din's "metaphysical

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philosophy" is Fazlur Rahman's The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra. Rahman's use of contemporary philosophical terminology and approach to the Islamic philosophical system of thought represents a meaningful introduction in English that is comparable in scope and analysis to many European works of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

How original a thinker is Sadr al-Din? And how logically consistent and philosophically sound is his new synthesis and reformulation of what he believed to be the whole of philosophy, to which he gave the name metaphysical philosophy? These are questions that can be answered only once further studies have been undertaken by philosophers interested in these questions, and who with a trained eye can look deeper than the presumed "theosophical" aspect of Sadr al-Din's thought. This is not an easy task, for to date only a few of his works have been properly edited; fewer still (if any) have been meaningfully translated from a technical philosophical perspective.

The only scholar known to me who has analysed and written on various aspects of Islamic philosophy from a modern philosophical perspective using contemporary language and analytic approach is the distinguished Islamic philosopher Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi. While most of his works are in Persian, thus not widely accessible, his most recent study in English, titled Knowledge by Presence, represents a serious attempt to open a dialogue with the contemporary Western philosopher. In this work, students of modern philosophy can follow the centuries-old philosophical arguments concerning the epistemological priority of the special intuitive and experiential mode of cognition, which was fully re-examined and verified by Sadr al-Din. Students may still prefer the purely predicative, propositional mode, accepting the logicist position, but they will no longer be confused by the plethora of polemical works that have



generally dismissed the Illuminationist epistemological concept of "seeing" (*mushahahadah*) - the mode of knowledge by presence - simply as "mystic experience" (generally called Sufi experience). Some readers of Islamic epistemological arguments may find a

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remarkable resemblance to Western ideas, such as Brouwer's "primary intuition" in his Intuitionist foundation of mathematics, for example. Some may also find parallels with contemporary thinking on the problem of intuition that regards it as the result of the knowing subject's grasp of an object when the subject-object dichotomy does not apply - in other words, when they are one. Quite simply, this is what is meant by "the unity of the knower, the known, and the mind" (*al-ittihad al-'aqil wa'l-ma'qul wa'l-'aql*), introduced by Suhrawardi and further analysed by Sadr al-Din. Much scholarship remains to be done, the first step being the editing and philosophical translation of Arabic and Persian texts. Generations of philosophers in Islam, most of whom did not consider themselves to be Sufism have studied Illuminationist texts as well as texts in the tradition of Sadr al-Din's "metaphysical philosophy" and have found them to represent well-thought-out, rational systems while confirming the centrality of Illumination.

#### MAJOR WORKS

More than fifty works are attributed to Sadr al-Din. They may be divided into two main trends of his thought: the transmitted sciences and the intellectual sciences. Sadr al-Din's works on subjects that predominantly relate to the transmitted sciences, covering the traditional subjects of Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'anic commentary, *Hadith* scholarship and theology, are best exemplified by : (1.) *Sharh al-usul al-kafu*, a commentary on Kulayni's famous work, the first Shi'a *Hadith* compilation on specifically juridical and theological issues; (2.) *Mafatih al-ghayb*, an incomplete Qur'anic commentary (*tafsir*); (3.) a number of short treatises each devoted to commentary on a specific chapter of the Qur'an; (4.) a short treatise called *Imamat* on Shi'a theology; and (5.) a number of glosses on standard *kalam* texts, such as Qushchi's *Sharh*

Sadr al-Din's more significant works, widely accepted by Muslims to represent the pinnacle of Islamic philosophy are those that indicate the intellectual sciences. His major works in this group include: (1.) Al-Asfar al-arba'at al-'aqliyyah (Four Intellectual Journeys). Sadr al-Din's definitive philosophical corpus, which includes detailed discussions on all philosophical subjects; (2.) AlShawahid al-rububiyah (Divine Testimonies), generally accepted to be an epitome of the Asfar, and (3.) glosses on Ibn Sina's Shifa' and on Suhrawardi's Hikmat al-ishraq. Both of these glosses, available only in facsimile editions, are indicative of Sadr al-Din's mastery of elaborating, refuting or refining philosophical arguments. Unlike many previous commentaries and glosses, he is not content simply to elucidate a difficult point, but is concerned with demonstrating or refuting the consistency and philosophical validity of the original arguments. Mulla Sadra also wrote a number of shorter treatises some of which, such as Al-Hikmat al'arshiyah (Wisdom from the Divine Throne), Al-Mabda' wa'l-ma-ad (The Beginning and the End) and Kitab al-masha'ir (The Book of Metaphysical Sciences) have become very well known and taught in philosophical circles in Persia. In India Mulla Sadra's Sharh al-hidayah (Commentary upon the Book of Guidance of Athir al-Din Abhari) became the most famous of his works and is taught in traditional madrasahs to this day.

To conclude one can say that in more ways than one Sadr al-Din's "metaphysical philosophy" represents a new trend in Islamic philosophy. Sadr al-Din makes every effort to examine fully every known philosophical position and argument concerning principle and method. He then selects what he considers to be the best argument, often reformulates it and finally goes about constructing a consistent system. His systematic philosophy is neither Peripatetic nor Illuminationist but a novel reconstruction of both, serving as testimony to the continuity of philosophical thought in Islam. That Sadr al-Din's system differs from today's

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emphasis on a specific aspect of "rationality" does not mean that its founder conceived it to be "irrational" nor predominantly given to "mystical experience". The system does, however, emphasize a world view in which intuitive vision is integral to knowledge."(333)

In the above we have seen how the philosophers of the "School of Isfahan" traveled to India and even compared their own philosophies with Advaita Vedanta, of which we shall have a great deal more to say. The 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Indian mystic poet Kabir is to this day claimed by both Hindus and Muslims. As Evelyn Underhill notes:

"A beautiful legend tells us that after his (the mystic poet Kabir's) death his Muslim and Hindu disciples disputed the possession of his body; which the Muslims wished to bury, the Hindus to burn. As they argued together, Kabir appeared before them, and told them to lift the shroud and look at that which lay beneath. They did so, and found in the place of the corpse a heap of flowers; half of which were buried by the Muslims at Maghar, and half carried by the Hindus to the holy city of Benares (or Varanasi) to be burned - fitting conclusion to a life which had made fragrant the most beautiful doctrines of two great creeds."(334)

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**MULLA SADRA: HIS TEACHINGS**

**By**

**Seyyed Hossein Nasr**

Sadr al-Din Shirazi, known as Mulla Sadra, appeared nearly a thousand years after the rise of Islam and his works represent a synthesis of the millennium of Islamic thought which preceded him. He was thoroughly versed in the Qur'an and *Hadith*, Islamic philosophy and theology, Sufism and even the history of Islamic thought, and must have had access to an unusually rich library. To all his knowledge must be added his own intellectual powers as a philosopher and visionary and intuitive capabilities as a gnostic ('*arif*) who was able to have direct experience of Ultimate Reality or what in the later school of Islamic philosophy and theosophy is called "gnostic experience" (*tajruba-yi 'irfani*). His knowledge of the revealed sources of Islam was probably more extensive than that of any other Islamic philosopher. It included intimacy not only with the Qur'an but also well-known commentaries, not only prophetic *Hadith* but also the sayings of the Shi'a Imams whose philosophical significance he revealed for the first time. His Qur'anic commentaries and *Sharh usul al-kafi* (Commentary upon the *Usul al-kafi* of Kulayni) and commentary upon the Light Verse (*ayat al-nur*), both among the premier masterpieces of Islamic thought, attest to his incredible mastery of the Qur'an and *Hadith*.

### MULLA SADRA AND EARLIER ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Mulla Sadra was also knowledgeable in the deepest sense in the schools of Islamic philosophical thought before him. He knew Peripatetic (*mashaha'i*) philosophy intimately, especially the thought of Ibn Sina, upon whose *Shifa'* he wrote a major commentary. But he was also wellacquainted with later Peripatetics, such as Nasir al-Din Tusi and Athir al-Din Abhari, upon whose *Al-Hidayah* (The Guide) he wrote a commentary which was destined to become one of his most popular works, especially in India. He was also a master of *ishraqi* thought and copied a number of visionary recitals of Suhrawardi in his own hand as well as writing a major commentary in the form of glosses upon the *Hikmat al-ishraq* (Theosophy of the Orient of Light) of the master of the School of Illumination. He was also well versed in both Sunni and Shi'a *kalam* or theology, especially the works of al-Ghazzali and Imam Fakr al-Din Razi whom he cites often especially in the *Asfar* (The Four Journeys) which is his masterpiece and like the mother of allhis other books. Moreover, he was well acquainted with the Shi'a *kalam* which included Twelve-Imam Shi'ism to which he belonged as well as Isma'ilism whose works he studied carefully including philosophical tracts such as the *Rasa'il* (Treatises) of the Ikhwan al-Safa'.

Finally, it is most important to realize Mulla Sadra's mastery of the doctrines of Sufism or gnosis (Sanskrit: *jnana*) especially as taught by Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi. In certain issues such as eschatology, he borrows heavily from the Andalusian (or *Mursi*, i.e., *Murciano*) master, and the last book of the *Asfar*, in which he deals with *al-ma'ad* or eschatology is in fact replete with extensive quotations from Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi's *Al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah* (The Mecca Illuminations). Moreover, he had a special love for Persian Sufi poetry and quotes from its masters such as 'Attar and Rumi even in the middle of his Arabic works. Part of this knowledge is derived from the earlier

masters of the School of Isfahan such as its founder Mir Damad, a school to which Mulla Sadra belonged, but his knowledge in these matters goes beyond any of his teachers and represents his own extensive study of the major works and sources of Islamic thought.

**THE SYNTHESIS OF PREVIOUS SCHOOLS  
OF THOUGHT AND MODES OF KNOWING**

Mulla Sadra synthesized not only various schools of Islamic thought but also the paths of human knowledge. His own life based upon great piety, deep philosophical introspection and reasoning and purification of his inner being until his "eye of the heart" opened and he was able to have a direct vision of the spiritual world, attests to the unity of the three major paths of knowledge in his own person. These three paths are according to him revelation (*al-wahy*), demonstration or intellection (*al-burhanm al-ta'aggul*) and spiritual or "mystical" vision (*al-mukashafah, al-mushahahadah*). Or, to use another terminology prevalent among his school, he followed a way which synthesized *al-Qur'anm al-burhan* and *al-'irfan*, which correspond to the terms above.

Mulla Sadra's epistemology is directly related to that of Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination in general, a school in which distinction is made between conceptual knowledge (*al-'ilm al-husuli*) and presential knowledge (*al-'ilm al-huduri*), forms of knowledge which are unified in the being of the possessor of knowledge on the highest level, a person whom Suhrawardi calls *hakim muta'allih*, literally a wise man, philosopher or theosopher who has become imbued with Divine Qualities and become "God-like". Conceptual knowledge is gained through concepts in the mind of that which is to be known whereas presential knowledge implies the presence of the very reality to be known in the human intellect without the intermediary of mental concepts such as when one knows oneself, the intelligibles or the divine realities. Such knowledge is illuminative and beyond the realm of ratiocination, but it is not without intellectual content. Mulla Sadra accepted this *ishraqi*

thesis, to which he added the significance of revelation as a foundational source for knowledge of a philosophical and theosophical order. The tradition of Islamic philosophy in Persia accepted fully this truth and awarded to Mulla Sadra the title of Sadr al-muta'allihin, that is, foremost among those who according to Suhrawardi belong to the highest category of possessors of metaphysical knowledge. No higher title could be given to anyone in the context of the world view in which later Islamic philosophy functioned.

In any case the grand synthesis of Islamic thought created by Mulla Sadra is based on the synthesis of these three ways of knowing through which he was able to integrate the earlier schools of Islamic thought into a unified world view and create a new intellectual perspective known as *hikmat al-muta'aliyah* which a number of leading scholars of Islamic philosophy who have written on him in European languages, such as Henry Corbin and Toshihiko Izutsu, have translated as the "transcendent theosophy" while a number of scholars have protested against using such a term. In any case the "transcendent theosophy" marks the birth of a new intellectual perspective in the Islamic world, one which has had profound influence during later centuries in Persia as well as in Iraq and India, while the term *wl-hikmat al-muta'aliyah* had been used in a more general and less defined sense by a number of earlier Islamic thinkers such as Qutb al-Din Shirazi. In analyzing the various aspects of Mulla Sadra's thought we are in reality studying the *hikmat al-muta'aliyah* which became a distinct school of Islamic thought much like the Peripatetic (*mashaha'i*) and Illuminationist (*ishraqi*) schools. Mulla Sadra was in fact so devoted to this term that he used it as part of the title of his major opus which is *Al-Asfar al-arba'ah fi'l-hikmat al-muta'aliyah* (The Four Journeys Concerning Transcendent Theosophy).

The foundation of the "transcendent theosophy" and the whole metaphysics of Mulla Sadra is the science of being (*wujud*), which is used by him to denote both existence, in the sense of the existence of objects, and existence that is not in any way privative but which also includes the Divine Principle. Pure Being and even the Absolute, which is beyond Being as ordinarily understood. Much of his writings, including nearly all of the first book of the *Asfar*, is devoted to this issue and he returns again and again to it in such works as *Al-Shawahid al-rububiyah* (Divine Witnesses), *Al-Hikmat al-'arshiyah* (The Wisdom of the Throne), *Al-Mabda' wa'l-ma'ad* (The Origin and the Return) and especially *Kitab al-masha'ir* (The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations) which is the most important summary treatment of this subject in his writings.

### THE STUDY OF BEING

At the heart of the whole philosophical exposition of Mulla Sadra stands the gnostic experience of Being as Reality. Our usual experience of the world is that of things which exist, this ordinary experience serving as the basis of Aristotelian metaphysics which is based on existents (*mawjud*). For Mulla Sadra, however, there occurred a vision in which he saw the whole of existence not as objects which exist or existents but as a single reality (*wujud*) whose delimitations by various quiddities (*mahiyyat*) gives the appearance of a multiplicity which "exists" with various existents being independent of each other. Heidegger complained that Western metaphysics had gone astray since the time of Aristotle by studying the existent (*das Seiende*), to use his (German) vocabulary, and that the proper subject of metaphysics was existence itself or *das Sein* with whose study he was starting a new chapter in Western philosophical thought. As far as Islamic philosophy is concerned, such a distinction was made three centuries before Heidegger by Mulla Sadra who according to himself received through inspiration a vision of reality in which everything was seen as acts



of existence (*wujud*) and not objects that exist (*mawjud*). The vast development of Sadrian metaphysics is based upon this basic experience of Reality and subsequent conceptual distinctions made on the basis of this experience of *wujud* as being at once one, graded and principal.

Mulla Sadra distinguishes clearly between the concept of being (*mafhum al-wujud*) and the reality of being (*haqiqat al-wujud*). The first is the most obvious of all concepts and the easiest to comprehend while the second is the most difficult for it requires extensive mental preparation as well as the purification of one's being so as to allow the intellect within to function fully without the veils of passion and to be able to discern *wujud* as Reality. That is why one of Mulla Sadra's most famous followers, Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, writes in the *Sharh al-manzumah*, which is a summary of the master's doctrines,

Its [*wujud*'s] notion is one of the best known things,  
But its deepest reality is in the extremity of hiddenness

A consequence of the gnostic experience of being is the realization of its unity, which is called *wahdat al-wujud*. This fundamental doctrine of Sufi metaphysics is associated with 'Ibn Arabi al-Mursi but has possessed many interpretations ranging from the extreme interpretation of it by the Andalusian Sufi and philosopher Ibn Saba'in, according to whom only God is real and nothing else exists in any way, to Ibn 'Arabi al-Mursi's interpretation, which sees the manifested order as theophanies (*tajalliyat*) of the Divine Names and Qualities upon the mirror of nothingness, to the view of Mulla Sadra, who conceives the unity of being in relation to the multiplicity of existence as the rays of the sun in relation to the sun. The rays of the sun are not the sun and at the same time are nothing but the sun. In the *Asfar*, which contains a history of Islamic philosophy as well as his own teachings, Mulla Sadra deals extensively with various understandings of this central doctrine before turning to the exposition

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of his own views. In any case, *wahdat al-wujud* is a

cornerstone of Sadrian metaphysics without which his whole world view would collapse.

A companion doctrine is *tashkik al-wujud* or the gradation of being. Being is not only one but it also participates in a gradation or hierarchy from the Being of God to the existence of the pebble on the beach. Every higher level of *wujud* contains all the reality that is manifested below it. Here Mulla Sadra bases himself upon the Suhrawardian doctrine of differentiation and gradation according to which things can be distinct from each other through the very element that unites them such as the light of the candle and the light of the sun which are united by being both light and yet are distinct from one another also by the light which is manifested in the two cases according to different degrees of intensity. Being is like light in that it possesses degrees of intensity while being a single reality. The universe in its vast multiplicity is therefore not only unified but is also thoroughly hierarchical. One might say that Mulla Sadra accepted the idea of the "great chain of being" which has had such a long life in the West from Aristotle to the eighteenth century but in the light of the unity of being which gives a completely different meaning to the doctrine of cosmic and universal hierarchy.

The views of *wujud* are complemented by the principle of *asalat al-wujud* or principality of existence. To understand this doctrine, it is necessary first of all to turn to the classical distinction in Islamic philosophy between existence (*wujud* in its meaning of being related to the world of multiplicity) and *mahiyyah* or quiddity which in its original (Medieval) Latin form is derived directly from the Arabic *mahiyyah*. All objects are composed of these two components, the first corresponding to the answer given to the question "is it?", and the second to the question "what is it?". The question posed in later Islamic philosophy, and especially by Mulla Sadra, is which of these elements is principal and bestows reality upon an object. Mulla Sadra's own teacher Mir Damad and Suhrawardi are considered as followers of the

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school of principality of quiddity (*asalat al-mahiyyah*) while Ibn Sina is considered as a follower of *asalat al-*

*wujud*, although in his case this doctrine takes on a completely different meaning than in Mulla Sadra since the former did not believe in *wahdat al-wujud*.

In any case in his youth, Mulla Sadra followed his teacher Mir Damad and only after another visionary and gnostic experience came to realize that it is *wujud* which bestows reality upon things and that the *mahiyyate* literally nothing in themselves and are abstracted by the mind from the limitations of a particular act of *wujud*. When we say that a horse exists, following common sense we think that the horse is a reality to which existence is added. In reality, however, what we are perceiving is a particular act of *wujud* which through the very fact that it is manifested is limited to a particular form which we call horse. The form or *mahiyyah* of the horse has no reality but derives all of its reality from the act of *wujud*.

Reality is then nothing other than *wujud*, which is at once one and graded, existentiating the reality of all things. The metaphysics of Mulla Sadra can in fact be understood by understanding not only these principles but also their interrelations. *Wujud* is not only one but also graded. And it is not *only* graded but also principal or that which bestowed reality upon all quiddities, which in themselves possess no reality at all. The vast metaphysical edifice created by Mulla Sadra and his whole theology, cosmology, psychology and eschatology rely upon the three principles of *wahdat al-wujud*, *tashkik al-wujud* and *asalat al-wujud* and it is only in the light of these principles that his other doctrines can be understood.

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TRANS-SUBSTANTIAL MOTION AND THE  
CREATION OF THE WORLD

One of the most striking doctrines of Mulla Sadra is trans-substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jawharriyyah*) which is the basis of his explanation of many of the most difficult problems of traditional philosophy including the creation of the world and the whole meaning of becoming in light of the Immutable and the Eternal. As is well-known, earlier Islamic philosophers, especially Ibn Sina, had followed Aristotelian natural philosophy in accepting motion (*al-harakah*) only in the categories of quantity (*kayf*), situation (*wad'*) and place (*'ayn*), all of which are accidents and denied explicitly the possibility of motion in the category of substance. Ibn Sina's main argument was that motion requires a subject that moves and if the very substance of an object changes through transubstantial motion, then there will be no subject for motion.

Mulla Sadra opposes this these directly by saying that any change in the accidents of an object requires in fact a change in its substance, since accidents have no existence independent of substance. He asserts that there is always "some subject" (*mawdu'un ma*) for motion even if we are unable to fix it and delimit it logically. Mulla Sadra asserts that the whole of the physical and even psychic or imaginal universes which extend up to the Immutable or luminous Archetypes are in constant motion or becoming. Were it to be otherwise, the effusion (*fayd*) of Being could not reach all things. This trans-substantial motion, which Henry Corbin calls *l'inquietude de l'etre* (the inquietude of being) referring to the existence of the universe below the level of the intelligible and archetypal realities, is not to be, however, confused with the re-creation of the world in every instant as taught by the Sufis. In the Sufi doctrine at every moment the universe is annihilated and re-created. Previous forms return to the Divine Order and new forms are manifested as theophany. That is why this doctrine is called *al-labs ba'd al-khal* (literally, dressing after undressing of forms).

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In contrast Mulla Sadra's doctrine has been called *al-labs ba'd labs* (that is, dressing after dressing). This implies that the form and matter of an existent become themselves the matter for a new form and that this process goes on continuously as if one were to put on one coat on top of another. All beings in this world

are moving vertically as a result of trans-substantial motion until they reach the plenum of their archetypal reality. The sperm becomes a foetus and grows to the form of a baby who is then born and continues to grow from one form to another until he or she reaches full maturity and the body becomes weaker as the soul grows stronger until one dies and reaches the "imaginal world" and finally the Divine Presence. Each state of this movement contains the forms of its earlier states of existence, while this transubstantial movement continues throughout all these stages.

It is important to emphasize that Mulla Sadra's dynamic vision of the world in constant becoming, which implies the continuous intensification of the act of *wujud* within a particular being, must not in any way be confused with Darwinian evolution. For Mulla Sadra, the beings of this world are manifestations of the light of *wujud* cast upon their archetypal realities which through the arc of descent (*al-qaws al-nuzuli*) bring various creatures into the realm of physical existent. Trans-substantial motion marks the arc of ascent (*al-qaws al-su'udi*) through which the ever-increasing intensity of light of *wujud* allows existents to return to their archetypal realities in the supernal realm. For Darwinism, on the other hand, there are no such things as archetypal realities and the species, far from reflecting celestial archetypes, are merely forms generated by the flow of matter in time. Furthermore, for evolution the role of *wujud*, its unity, gradation and principality are meaningless whereas for Mulla Sadra they constitute the very foundations of his metaphysics. Also for Mulla Sadra trans-substantial motion is teleological and has an important spiritual role to play. The universe is moving toward a perfection which is its purpose and end and the spiritual progress of humanity is also achieved through

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a mode of trans-substantial motion. A saint is not only more perfect than others. It might be said that he or she is more than others in the sense that the act of *wujud* in him or her is of a more intense degree than in less perfect human beings. It would therefore be a grave mistake, as committed by a number of modernist Muslim thinkers, to equate *al-harkat al-jawhariyyah* with

Darwinian evolution.

The doctrine of trans-substantial motion is the key for the solution of many problems for Mulla Sadra, including that of the creation of the world debated for eight centuries before him by the Islamic philosophers and theologians. As is well known, the *falasifah* believed the world to have had no origination in time but to have been originated beyond time by God, the world thus being eternal (*qadim*) while the *mutakallimun* claimed that the world was created in time (*hadith*), an issue which was discussed in many classical works of Islamic thought such as al-Ghazzali's *Tahafut al-falasifah*. The philosophers claimed that if the world were created in time, it would require a change in the Divine Nature which is impossible because God is immutable. The theologians believed that if the world were *qadim*, then something eternal would exist besides God and would not even be caused by Him. Different Islamic thinkers sought to solve this problem in various ways, including Mulla Sadra's own teacher Mir Damad, who came up with the idea of *al-huduth al-dahri*, which means origination of the world not in time (*zaman*) not in eternity (*sarmad*), but in *dar* or aeon, and he became celebrated for the exposition of this doctrine.

Mulla Sadra rejected this dichotomy of views altogether by pointing to the doctrine of trans-substantial motion. If the cosmos is changing at every moment, at each instance of its being, it is different from what it was before and what it is now was non-existent before (*masbuq bi'l-'adam*). Therefore, one can accept the doctrine that the world was created from nothing (*ex nihilo*) while accepting the continuous and uninterrupted effusion (*fayd*) of the light of Being

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which is none other than the Divine Light. He thus seeks to provide a philosophical explanation for one of the most difficult of philosophical issues in not only Islamic thought but Jewish and Christian thought as well.

**THE UNION OF THE INTELLECT AND  
THE INTELLIGIBLE**

Another of Mulla Sadra's major doctrines, again related inextricably to the rest of his metaphysics, is that of the union of the intellect and the intelligible (*ittihad al'aqil wa'l-ma'qul*). This doctrine was asserted by Abu'l-Hasan al-Amiri in the fourth/tenth century but rejected thoroughly by Ibn Sina and later Islamic philosophers. But it was resurrected by Mulla Sadra and given a new meaning in the context of the unity of *wujud* and trans-substantial motion. According to him at the moment of intellection the form of the intelligible (*ma'qul*), the possessor of intellect (*'aqil*), and even the intellect itself (*'aql*) become united in such a way that one *is* the other as long as the act of intellection lasts.

This doctrine is not only important for Mulla Sadra's theory of knowledge, but is also of great significance for the understanding of the role of knowledge in human perfection. Through trans-substantial motion the act of knowing elevates the very existence of the knower. According to a *hadith* of the Prophet, "knowledge is light" (*al-'ilm nurun*), a principle which is also foundational to Mulla Sadra's thought. The unity of the knower and the known implies ultimately the unity of knowing and being. The being of man is transformed through the light of knowing and being. The being of man is transformed through the light of knowledge and also our mode of being determines our mode of knowledge. In this profound reciprocity is to be found the key to the significance of knowledge for Mulla Sadra and of the idea that

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knowledge transforms our being even in the posthumous state. The writings of Mulla Sadra are replete with various applications of this doctrine and he returns again and again to the principle of the ultimate unity of being and knowing.

#### **THE IMAGINAL WORLD AND THE ARCHETYPES**

Mulla Sadra accepted the reality of the archetypes

(*al-a'yan al-thabitah* or *al-muthul al-nuriyyah*) in conformity with the view of Suhrawardi and against the claims of Muslim Peripatetics such as Ibn Sina. And he brought many philosophical arguments to refute those who have denied them. There is in fact no doubt concerning the major role performed in Mulla Sarda's thought by the archetypes or "Platonic Ideas", pure intelligibles belonging to the domain of immutability which many have confused with forms in the imaginal world which although beyond matter nevertheless still participate in becoming and transubstantial motion. The latter play a crucial role in the "transcendent theosophy" without in any way replacing the immutable archetypes or luminous "ideas" in the Platonic sense.

Considering the absence of the imaginal world in Western philosophy for many centuries, it is necessary to delve more deeply into the meaning of *'alam al-khayal*, the *mundus imaginalis*, which Corbin and I have translated as the imaginal rather than imaginary world, considering the pejorative connotation of the latter term in modern European languages. The traditional hierarchy of being in the mainstream of Western thought goes from the realm of material existence, to the psyche, to the intelligible or angelic world with its own vast hierarchy and finally to God who is Pure Being and for some Western metaphysicians, the Beyond-Being. This scheme was more or less followed by early Islamic philosophers with adjustments related to the fact that they were living and philosophizing in an Islamic universe. Suhrawardi was the first person to speak of the imaginal world at least in the microcosm. He was soon followed by Ibn Arabi al-Mursi who elaborated upon

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this theme and expanded the understanding of the imaginal world to make it a central pillar of his metaphysics. Henceforth, the imaginal world became part and parcel of the understanding of the Islamic universe upon which numerous Sufis and philosophers were to write important treatises.

It was, however, Mulla Sadra who gave the first systematic and philosophical explanation of this world. He added to the view of Suhrawardi that this world was connected to man's microcosmic reality (*khayal al-muttasil*), the thesis that the imaginal world has also a



macrocosmic and objective reality independent and disconnected from man (*khayal al-munfasil*). He emphasized that this world has even more reality than the physical world. As for its characteristics, it is a world possessing forms called *al-suwar al-khayaliyyah* (imaginal forms), which, however, are not wed to matter, at least not the matter of the physical world,. That is why they are also called *al-muthul al-mu'allaqah* (suspended forms). Nevertheless they are forms having colors, shapes, odors and everything else that is associated with the forms of this world. This is a world of concrete realities which, however, are not physical, the world immediately above the physical, identified with the mythical cities of Jabulqa and Jabulsa, a world which the seers can experience in this life and into which human beings enter at the moment of death. It is a world in which we have subtle or imaginal bodies (*al-jism al-khayali*) as we have a physical body in this world.

#### ESCHATOLOGY AND RESURRECTION

No Islamic philosopher has dealt in such great detail as Mulla Sadra with eschatology and resurrection (*al-ma'ad*) concerning both the individual and the cosmos. The fourth book of the *Asfar*, much of it based on Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, is the vastest and most detailed study in Islamic philosophy of the soul (*nafs*) from its birth to its final meeting with God and includes elements concerned with the phenomenology of death. If

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we were to seek something like the Tibetan Book of the Dead in Islamic sources, probably this fourth book of the *Asfar* would be the best candidate. Moreover, Mulla Sadra devoted much space in his other major writings such as *al-Mabda' wa'l-ma'ad* and *al-Shawahid al-rububiyah* to the subject and wrote separate treatises devoted only to this subject such as the Risalat al-hashr (Treatise on Resurrection).

Basing himself completely on traditional Islamic description of the posthumous states and eschatological events, Mulla Sadra seeks to interpret such terms as the Bridge of *Sirat*, the Balance and the lower paradisaal

states as well as the infernal states in terms of the imaginal world. All these events related to death, judgement and the like as mentioned in the Qur'an and *Hadith* take place in this world which itself is an intermediate realm (*al-barzakh*) between the physical world and the world of purely angelic or intelligible substances. Moreover, this world is comprised of many intermediate realms (*barazikh*) stretching from the *al-barazikh al-a'la* or higher intermediate realms to *al-barazikh al-asfal* or lower ones. The higher comprise paradisaal states although still not the supreme heavens and the lower infernal ones. This realm is in fact also a kind of purgatory through which souls pass on their way to their final beatitude or damnation.

Mulla Sadra speaks of a doctrine which at first seems somewhat strange and can be understood only in the light of the doctrine of trans-substantial motion. He claims that the soul (*nafs*) is created with the body but becomes immortal and spiritual through the Spirit, or, using his own terminology, the *nafs* or soul is *jismaniyyat al-huduth was ruhaniyyat al-baqā'*. Its vertical ascent through trans-substantial motion in fact does not cease in this world but continues after death as the soul journeys through various intermediate realms in conformity with the types of actions it has performed and its mode of being in this world.

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In the great debate about whether resurrection is spiritual (*rahani*) or bodily (*jismani*), Mulla Sadra categorically favors bodily resurrection but he points out that, upon death, individuals are bestowed with subtle bodies (*al-jism al-latif*) which correspond in many ways to the astral body of Paracelsus. After death they are therefore not simply disembodied souls but possess bodies which are "woven" of the actions that they have performed in this world. They also enter a world which conforms to their inner nature. In a sense an evil soul chooses hell because of the nature of its being at the moment of death. Moreover, the reality of the body in this world is the form of the body and not its matter. In the final resurrection all of the levels of one's being are integrated including the form of the physical

body, which *is* the reality of the body, so that one can definitely accept bodily resurrection as asserted by the Qur'an and *Hadith* and at the same time provide intellectual demonstrations for it on the basis of the general principles of Sadrian metaphysics.

#### GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD

Another difficult question discussed by numerous Islamic philosophers and theologians is that of God's knowledge of the world. Al-Ghazzali in fact considered the Peripatetics' view that God only knows universals and not particulars as one of the views of the philosophers which were not only erroneous but heretical. In his *Al-Asfar*, Mulla Sadra discusses and rejects seven different views of earlier thinkers concerning this issue, while in *Al-Shawahid al-rububiyah* he claims that God knows everything in a special way which was unveiled to him by God and because of its complexity and the difficulty of understanding it by the great majority of men he finds it wiser not to reveal it fully. In other writings, including one of his letters to his teacher, Mir Damad, he insists that he gained full knowledge of this great mystery through inspiration (*ilham*), unveiling (*kashf*) and the "eye of certainty" (*'ayn al-yaqin*).

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What Mulla Sadra does reveal of God's knowledge of the world is based on the thesis that whenever *wujud* is not mixed with non-existence and not veiled by it, it is manifest to itself and never absent from itself. Therefore the essence of this *wujud* knows itself and its essence as both knowledge of itself and known by itself, since the light of *wujud* is one, the veil covering the reality of things being nothing but non-existence. And since the Necessart Being possesses an Essence which is beyond all composition and contingency, it is at the highest level of perceiving and being perceived, of knowing and being known. This means that since ultimately there is but one *wujud* which is the *wujud* of all things, therefore His Essence knows all beings that exist and there is not an atom that He does not know as

asserted by the Qur'an. The very presence of the Divine Essence to Itself is none other than undifferentiated knowledge which is at the same time also differentiated knowledge. And God's differentiated knowledge is none other than their *wujud*. God's knowledge of existents is the very cause of their existentiatio.

Mulla Sadra also asserts that God's knowledge of things has its own hierarchy. There is first of all the level of solicitude (*al-'inayah*) which is His knowledge of things on the level of His own Essence. The second level is that of undifferentiated decree (*al-qada al-ijmali*) which is interpreted as the Pen (*al-Qalam*). As for forms which subsist by the *Qalam*, their subsistence is subsistence by emergence (*al-qiyam al-suduri*) for the *Qalam* has full dominion over all forms below it. The third level is the Tablet (*al-lawh*), also called differentiated decree (*al-qada al-tafsili*), which contains the archetypes and Platonic Ideas of things and their relation to the forms of this world is that of principles o their reflections. The fourth level is destiny through knowledge (*al-qadar al-'ilmi*) comprising the imaginal world and that of suspended forms discussed above. The fifth level is destiny through objectification (*al-qadar al-'ayni*), which consists of the forms of the physical world. Mulla Sadra considers this last level to be below the level

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of direct Divine Knowledge since it marks the mixture of forms with matter. But it is indirectly the subject of Divine Knowledge since the principles of these forms belong to the worlds above which God knows in an absolute and direct sense. Moreover, every level mentioned by Mulla Sadra possesses *wujud* which gives it reality and, according to the argument given above, since there is only one *wujud* as asserted by the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, God knows all existents by virtue of knowing His own Essence which is none other than absolute *wujud*.

#### **SOME OTHER PRINCIPLES OF SADRIAN TEACHINGS**

There are numerous other principles expounded by Mulla Sadra and founding elements of the "transcendent

theosophy". In fact whereas Muslims inherited some two hundred topics from Greek philosophy, Mulla Sadra discusses over six hundred, many of which are drawn from further encounters between philosophy and the Islamic revelation and others are philosophical and theosophical meditations upon the sayings of the Shi'ite Imams along with the Qur'an and *Hadith*. Here, because of the constraint of space, we shall mention only two of the best known of these principles, not already discussed above. One is the famous thesis that "the Truth in its simplicity contains all things" (*basit al-haqiqah kull al-ashya'*) which is a direct consequence of the unity and principality of *wujud*. By this principle Mulla Sadra means that the truth (*al-haqiqah*) in its state of pure simplicity and before becoming "combined" with quiddity (*al-mahiyyah*), that is, Pure Being, contains the reality of all things. Mulla Sadra appeals to this principle in many of his writings in solving some of the most complicated philosophical issues.

Another well known principle is that "the soul in its unity is all of its faculties" (*al-nafs fi wahdatihi kull al-quwa*). This is also a consequence of his ontology as well as trans-substantial motion. It means that the various faculties of the soul are not like accidents added to the substance of the soul.

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Rather, the soul is each of its faculties when it identifies itself with this or that function related to a particular faculty. That is why the perfecting of any faculty affects the soul itself in its unity and the perfection of the soul through trans-substantial motion also affects its faculties. It also emphasizes the unity of the soul above and beyond what one finds in the faculty psychology of the Peripatetics.

Also many of the older topics of philosophy are changed completely by seeing them in the light of Sadrian metaphysics. An outstanding example is the question of cause and effect or causality (*al'illah wa'l-malul* or *al'illiyyah*). Mulla Sadra accepts the Aristotelian doctrine of the four causes and commentaries upon it by Ibn Sina and other earlier Islamic philosophers, but transforms them completely by considering the relation between cause and effect in light of the doctrine of the principality of *wujud*. He thereby combines horizontal and vertical causes and his

discussion of this subject in all his works contain some of his most exalted gnostic (*'irfani*) expositions. In studying them one is presented with a knowledge which satisfies both the mind and the heart and can lead those who can understand and have sympathy for gnosis and sapience practically into a state of ecstasy. There are many other principles transformed by Sadrian metaphysics which we cannot discuss here because of the limitation of space. What has been presented here is only by way of example.

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**MULLA SADRA'S QUR'ANIC  
COMMENTARIES**

None of the philosophers throughout the history of Islamic philosophy has paid as much attention to the Qur'an as source of philosophical and theosophical knowledge and none has written as many commentaries upon the Qur'an as has Mulla Sadra, whose commentaries are the continuation of his "transcendent theosophy" and the "transcendent theosophy" an organic outgrowth of the inner meaning of the Qur'an as understood by Mulla Sadra who asserts again and again the harmony between revelation (*al-wahy*) and intellect/reason (*al-'aql*). He in fact asserts that the intellect, of which reason is the reflection upon the mental plane, is humanity's inner prophet which manifests itself only in those who are, in the language of the Qur'an, "firmly rooted in knowledge" (*al-rasikhun fi'l-'ilm*).

Mulla Sadra wrote commentaries upon a number of chapters and verses of the Qur'an: *al-Fatihah* ("The

Opening"), *al-Baqarah* ("The Cow), *ayat al-kursi* ("The Throne Verse"), *ayat al-nur* ("The Light Verse"), *Sajdah* ("Prostration"), *Ya Sin* ("YS"), *al-Waqi'ah* ("The Event"), *al-Hadid* ("Iron"), *al-jum'ah* ("The Congregation"), *al-Al'la* ("The Most High"), *al-Tariq* ("The Morning Star"), and *al-Zalzal* ("The Earthquake"). Moreover, he wrote a number of works dealing with the science of Qur'anic commentary. These include *Asrar al-ayat* ("Mysteries of Qur'anic Verses"), which deals especially extensively with eschatological matters to which the Qur'an refers; *Mutashabih al-Qur'an* ("On the Metaphorical Verses of the Qur'an"), dealing with those verses of the Qur'an whose outward meaning is not clear in contrast to the *muhkamat* or "firm" verses whose outward meaning is clear, and *Mafatih al-ghayb* ("Keys to the Invisible World"), which is one of his most important works and in which he discusses his method of Qur'anic commentary.

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Mulla Sadra distinguishes between commentators who see only the outward meaning of the Sacred Text and who are like those who see only the shell of a nut and disregard the fruit therein, and those who pay attention only to what they consider the inner meaning while disregarding the outer form. He opposes both methods and states that, if these were to be the only choices, he would prefer the exoteric commentaries because they at least preserve the outward container of the revelation. But the best method is to deal with the inner meaning without going against the external sense of the words of the Qur'an as understood by the Islamic community. And he adds that only those whom the Qur'an calls "firm in knowledge" (*al-rasikhun fi'l'ilm*), who have received their knowledge through divine inspiration without any spectre of doubt in their minds and hearts, have the right to carry out spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wil*) of God's Word.

Mulla Sadra considers the Qur'an to be the same as Being itself. Being, like the Qur'an, possesses the letters (*huruf*) which are the "keys to the invisible world" and from their combinations verses (*ayat*) are

formed and from them the chapters the chapters (*suwar*) of the Sacred Book. Then from the combinations of chapters, there results "the book of existence" (*kitab al-wujud*) which manifests itself in two ways as *al-furqan*, or discernment, and *al-qur'an*, or recitation (both of these terms being names of the Qur'an). The *furqani* aspect of the Book is the macrocosm with all its differentiations, and the *qur'ani* aspect is the spiritual and archetypal reality of man or what is generally called universal man (*al-insan al-kamil*). Therefore, the keys (*mafatih*) to the invisible world, as far as the revealed Qur'an is concerned, are also the keys to the understanding of the invisible dimension of the world of external existence and man's inner being and vice versa. The Qur'anic commentaries of Mulla Sadra occupy an exalted place in the annals of Qur'anic commentaries as well as in the philosophical hermeneutics of a sacred text, and it is a pity that so little mention has been paid to them in scholarship in Western languages.

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#### **THE INFLUENCE OF MULLA SADRA**

The vast synthesis created by Mulla Sadra was to have a profound influence upon later Persian thought as well as in India and Iraq. It is not true that his thought dominated the whole philosophical scene in Persia, because it has had its detractors to this day, but it has certainly been the most important influence on the intellectual scene in Persia during the past three and a half centuries. Temporarily eclipsed after his death because of adverse political conditions, the "transcendent theosophy" was revived during the Qajar period in both Isfahan, the older center of Islamic philosophy, and Teheran which was now becoming the foremost center for the study of *hikmah*. Revived by the great masters of Isfahan, Mulla 'Ali Nuri and Mulla Isma'il Khwaj'I, it was continued by later authorities in the Sadrian school such as Hajji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari in Khursan and Mulla 'Ali Mudarris in Tehran. They continued very much in the lines of Mulla Sadra although they began to write more in Persian rather than Arabic in accordance with the general tendency of the period which was witness to the revival of philosophical Persian. And this tradition has continued unbroken to



this day to such an extent that the extensive group of students studying Islamic subjects in the traditional *madrasahs*, especially those of Qum, and who are interested in the "intellectual sciences" (*al-'ulum al-'aqliyyah*), are mostly followers of Mulla Sadra.

In India the influence of Mulla Sadra began to manifest itself from the middle of the eleventh/seventeenth century almost from the time of his death. His writings, especially the *Sharh al-hidayah* ("Commentary upon the 'Guide'" of Athir al-Din abhari) became widespread, and the latter book even came to be known as the *Sadra*. This tradition affected many later figures and has survived to this day. It is interesting to recall that Mawlana Mawdudi, the founder of the Jama'at-I islami of Pakistan and India, that is, the founder of one of the most important politico-religious movements in the Islamic world in the

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fourteenth/twentieth century, translated parts of the *Asfar* into Urdu in his youth. As for Iraq, Mulla Sadra has been taught continuously during the past three centuries especially in centers of Shi'ite learning such as Najaf. One of Iraq's foremost Islamic thinkers of the fourteenth/twentieth century, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, displays in a typical fashion the influence of Mulla Sadra upon contemporary Iraqi religious scholars with a philosophical bent.

In conclusion it is interesting to note that the revival of Islamic philosophy in Iran during the Pahlavi period, especially from the 1950s onward even in semi-modernized circles, was primarily around the figure of Mulla Sadra, many of whose works have been edited and printed during the past forty years while numerous analyses of the "transcendent theosophy" have been made in Persian as well as Arabic. At the same time Mulla Sadra has now been introduced to the West and other parts of the non-Islamic world by such scholars as Henry Corbin, Toshihiko Izutsu, S.H. Nasr and Mehdi Mohaghegh, with the result that there is now a great deal of interest in his works in the West as well as in parts of the Islamic world such as the Arab countries, Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia which did not show much interest in later Islamic philosophers in general and Mulla Sadra

in particular until recently. Moreover, numerous theses are being written throughout the world on him and his school. In any case Mulla Sadra is not only one of the greatest intellectual figures of Islamic history, but his thought is very much a part of the contemporary Islamic world and continues to exercise great influence upon many aspects of current Islamic thought, especially the philosophical, theological and theosophical."(335)

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As we have said above, for chronological reasons if nothing else, it is not possible to speak of the influence of the School of Isfahan on St. John of the Cross. Nevertheless, St. John of the Cross and the School of Isfahan were under many of the same influences: the Shi's Imams, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazzali, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Haidar Amoli, and, indirectly, by way of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Ibn Masarra, Suhrawardi and the Persian Sufi poets. Therefore, at least a superficial knowledge of the School of Isfahan is recommendable for those who wish to understand St. John of the Cross in depth.

Below is an essay which may help the reader to understand certain parts of the philosophy of Suhrawardi which may seem a bit opaque. As we said above, understanding Suhrawardi is essential to

understanding both St. John of the Cross and the School of Isfahan in depth. The word "ISHRAQ" means "Illumination".

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**NUR AL-FU'AD: A NINETEENTH-CENTURY PERSIAN TEXT  
IN ILLUMINIST PHILOSOPHY BY SHIHAB AL-DIN KUMIJANI**

by

**Hossein Ziai**

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's well-known pioneering studies on the great Iranian philosopher, Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, have helped demonstrate the continuation of philosophical discourse within Islamic philosophy after Avicenna (Ibn Sina). In his seminal work, Three Muslim Sages, as well as in his numerous articles, Nasr has made major contributions to the analysis and explication of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist [which, for reasons given above, I believe John Walbridge's definition "The Science of Mystic Lights" to be preferable, even though it is not a literal translation of *Hikmat al-Ishraq*] philosophy. In part due to Nasr's careful and penetrating studies we are now in a better position to revise the earlier Orientalist view that Islamic philosophy ends with Averroes (Ibn Rushd), and that the spirit of free philosophical analysis and discourse ceases to exist after the end of the twelfth century. On the contrary, Islamic philosophy after Avicenna is developed in ways even more innovative than before,

where the earlier dominant Greek element is transformed within new reconstructed holistic systems with their own distinguishing characteristics. There are many such distinguishing components of post-Avicennan developments in Islamic philosophy, specifically in the Illuminist system (some will be discussed later in this essay). Foremost is the principle position of "knowledge by presence (*al'ilm al-huduri*) as a unified epistemological theory which is capable of describing types of knowing, including the obtaining of primary principles. Also the Illuminationist theory of light and vision, and the principle ontological position of the "sameness of knowing and being" rank among the technical refinements

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specifically of the Illuminationist system. As demonstrated in the works of such scholars as H. Corbin, S.H. Nasr, S.J. Ashtiyani, M. Ha'iri Yazdi, Gh.H. Dinani-Ibrahimi, S.J. Sajjadi, J. Walbridge, M. Aminrazavi, and others, the main conduit for post-Avicennan developments in Islamic Philosophy has been Suhraqardi's holistic reconstructed system named "Philosophy of Illumination"[once again, I prefer John Walbridge's definition "The Science of Mystic Lights" for reasons given above]. The epistemology of knowledge by presence serves to distinguish the new system from the earlier Avicennan Peripatetic philosophy.

Soon after his execution in Aleppo in 1191, Suhrawardi's innovative philosophical work was hailed as a major achievement and he was bestowed with the epithet "founder" of the new system and given the title "master of Illumination" (*Shaykh al-Ishraq*). Foremost among the thirteenth-century philosophers who wrote commentaries on Illuminationist texts was Shams al-Din Shahrazuri, author of *Sharh Hikmat al-Ishraq*. The Illuminationist tradition became widely recognized as the second school of Islamic philosophy (after Avicenna's Peripatetic), and following Shahrazuri, thinkers such as Qutb al-Din Shirazi and Sa'd b. Mansur Ibn Kammunah (thirteenth century); Qiyas al-Din Mansur Dashtaki and Jalal al-Din Dawwani (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries); Nizam al-Din Harawi (sixteenth century); and Sadr al-Din Shirazi (seventeenth century), among others, wrote extensive commentaries on Illuminationist texts. The last great

Illuminationist work is recognized to be Sadr al-Din Shirazi's Al-Ta'liqat Ala Sharh Hikmat al-Ishraq. However, considerable further research is required in order to ascertain the nature and extent of texts composed in the Illuminationist tradition after the seventeenth century. The discovery of the manuscript of the text Nur al-Fu'ad, here introduced for the first time, is a clear indication that during the nineteenth-century Illuminationist texts were studied and independent works were written in this tradition.

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During my research on Arabic and Persian manuscripts of UCLA's Special Collections I have discovered a Unicom autograph Persian manuscript titled Nur al-Fu'ad written by the nineteenth-century Illuminationist philosopher, Shihab al-Din Kumijani. The author is reported to have been a strict follower of the Illuminationist school and was given the title "The Second Master of Illumination", which is of historical significance indicating the status of Illuminationist philosophy as a living tradition in the nineteenth century. The work is an original and engaging Illuminationist text of a period in Islamic philosophy which has remained mainly neglected in Western scholarship. The author, Kumijani, was one of Hadi Sabziwari's students for nearly two decades in the city of Sabzivar in northeastern Iran. The author's full name, as it appears in the manuscript, and also reported by Manuchehr Saduqi in his pioneering study of post Sadr al-Muta'allihin philosophers in Iran, Tarikh-I Hukama' Wa "Urafa-I muta'akhhir bar Sadr al-Muta'allihin is: Shihab al-Din Muhammad b. Musa al-Buzshallu'I al-Kamijani with the title The [Second] Master of Illumination as reported by Badi' al-Zaman Furuzanfar. The style and contents of the text plus the author's presumed title are clear indications of the significance of Illuminationist philosophy in nineteenth century Iran.

This innovative, and on occasion creative philosophical text is important for several reasons, some philosophical *per se*, and some of relevance to the study of nineteenth-century intellectual history of

Iran. Given the Orientalist view that creative philosophy suddenly died out altogether after Avicenna in eastern Islam [Averroes or Ibn Rushd, an Andalusian, was, of course of western Islam], such fresh discoveries will help the new revisionist trends in Islamic philosophy. These trends address philosophical problems systematically, and this point is evident in the present text here introduced. Kumijani's text is testimony to the fact that philosophy in the eastern lands of Islam did not die, nor did it deteriorate to some kind of ill-defined *sagesse orientale*. There has

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been, it seems at this point, a continuous line of creative thinkers who kept the creative endeavor of philosophy alive; and this activity found a renewed energy in nineteenth-century Iran.

The text Nur al-Fu'ad is written in an elegant philosophical Persian, it is replete with standard Illuminationist terminology, but also introduces a number of new technical terms. The text itself is divided into four main chapters with the heading *Ishraq* (Illumination); with a few lemmas and corollaries added. In what follows I will present a synopsis of the text's contents:

#### THE FIRST ISHRAQ

Introduction; discussion of methodology of Illuminationist philosophy named "the science of lights" (*'ilm al-anwar*); and establishing the priority of knowledge by presence.

#### *Tajalli I*

A correspondence is shown between the demonstrated science (that is, deductive metaphysics) and the purely empirical - the sense-data prior to demonstration. Here a most significant methodological principle informing of Illuminationist "realist" principles is discussed.

#### *Tajalli II*

Light is self-evident and cannot be known by definition and is known by "sight" which informs of the

Illuminationist epistemological principle of the correspondence of *mushahada* and *ibsar*.

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#### THE SECOND ISHRAQ

On the reality of light and the sameness ('*ayniyyat*) of light with the sequence of all existent entities.

##### *Tajalli I*

Examines the term "Allah".

##### *Tajalli II*

Discusses the stated main purpose of the work which is analysis of the proposition sameness ('*ayniyyat*) of the essence light with each and every existent entity in reality. The discussion informs us of the sameness of knowing and being from the perspective of Illuminationist principle epistemological and ontological views.

##### *Tajalli III*

To know light is to see light. The Illuminationist ontological position is that "light" is the most well-known real thing and cannot be known primarily by the construction of essentialist definitions. Epistemological priority is given to knowledge by

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presence when established by the "Illuminationist relation" (*idafah ishraqiyyah*) between the knowing subject and the manifest object in durationless time.

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THE THIRD ISHRAQ

On Platonic Forms.

*Tajalli I and II*

Makes the distinctions among Form, image, and paradigm.

*Lemma I*

The epistemology of unified vision requires the proper functioning of the subject as instrument (say, eye); visibility of object (say, li entity); and the medium (say, light). Relational, identity preserving correspondence between subject and object is thus defined.

*Lemma II and III*

On the Illuminationist theory of sight and vision.

This part of the text is indicative of one of Illuminationist philosophy's significant principles regarding the unified theory of knowledge and incorporates a rather novel view of physical sight. From the Illuminationist perspective, theories of the natural philosopher Peripatetics, and others are discussed and mostly rejected: the corporeality of rays (*jismiyyat al-shu'a*), the view that holds rays to be colors (*lawniyyat al-shu'a*), and the theory which holds that sight (*ibsar*) takes place solely because rays leave the eye and meet (*yulaqi*) objects of sight, are all rejected. The Illuminationist also rejects the view that the act of "sight" takes place when the form of the thing (*surat*



*al-shay'*) is imprinted in the "vitreous humor" (*al-rutubat al-jalidiyya*). Illuminationists argue that "vision" has no temporal extension, so there is no need for a material relation (*rabitat*) between the "seer" and the "thing seen", which means that "sight" or "vision" are prior to syllogistic deductive reason and superior to it. The mechanism which allows for the subject to be

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"illuminated" is a complicated one and involves a certain activity on the part of the faculty of imagination. When an object is "seen", the subject has acted in two ways: by an act of vision and an act of illumination. Thus, vision-illumination is actualized when no obstacle intervenes between the subject and the object. This general theory of vision intervenes between the subject and the object. This general theory of vision requires the description of reality as a continuum. Let us explain further: this world of sense-data is a "segment" continuous with and in the whole, wherein its locus time is the usual Peripatetic time as measure, and space as the extended - Euclidean, to put it simply. But, as the "subject" moves away from the center of this segment, strange things begin to happen. This is when the subject actually "enters" the intermediary realm - a "boundary" realm - called "*'alam al-khayal*", or "*'alam al-mithal*", which is as real as the other segments, all of them part of the existing whole as continuum. As in all immense (qualitative) and critical changes associated with the boundary-value problems (that is,  $1/x$ , as  $x$  nears the "boundary zero"), things: time, space, motion, shape, and so on, rapidly and suddenly change. This is a wondrous, amazing realm, *Hurqalyadhat al-'ajayib*, but the fundamental principles and mechanisms that regulate things remain the same. For example as with sight in the corporeal, in the "boundary" realm, "visions" take place where the subject, whose material body has changed qualitatively to an "Imagined, or Forma" one (*badan khayali aw mithali*) will move in a time-frame, not as measure, from "here" to "there" in a different space where no longer the shortest distance between the two points "here" and "there" is necessarily the single straight line between them - rather "here" is some kind of space which we may name non-Euclidean.

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THE FOURTH ISHRAQ

On cosmology and generation.

*Tajalli I and II*

Discusses the effects of Heavenly principles on existent entities in the sub-Lunar realm.

*Illuminationist Corollary*

Relates Shi'a principles regarding *Imamat* and *Vilayat* (Arabic: *Wilayat*) to Illuminationist cosmological and epistemological principles.

The treatise is fraught with Illuminationist technical terminology, but more significantly a number of basic Illuminationist principles that clearly distinguish this system from the Peripatetic are presented, discussed, and in a few cases, philosophically refined. Perhaps the most technically refined philosophical argument is where Kumijani elaborates the idea of "sameness" between subject and predicate, and/or substance and attribute said of specific constructed and formulated propositions that relate to primary principles, and from the distinctly Illuminationist perspective, between light (*nur*) as subject, and "evidence" (*zuhur*)/"presence" (*hudur*), as attribute, or object. The discussion of the related epistemology of knowledge by presence also serves further to confirm the distinct Illuminationist nature of the text Nur al-Fu'ad. I will later discuss the distinguishing Illuminationist epistemology in more detail. Before doing so, however, it is important to examine views concerning the position and nature of schools of Islamic philosophy, thus to recognize and confirm the place of the text Nur al-Fu'ad as an Illuminationist text.

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It is generally accepted that Sadr al-Din Shirazi's interpretations of Islamic philosophy have played the dominant role in scholastic centers in Iran from the seventeenth century to the present. Therefore, it is against his views that Kumijani's position will be gauged.

While the development of philosophy in Iran from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century has not yet been systematically studied, one of the main characteristics of this period that can be identified is its fundamentally non-Aristotelian "attitude" to philosophical investigation and construction [thus we find it in agreement with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Victorines, Dante, St. Gregory Palamas and St. John of the Cross]. This also serves to characterize Illuminationist philosophy [remember, to a great extent, St. Gregory Palamas and, even more so, St. John of the Cross were disciples of Suhrawardi]. This "attitude" is explained by Mulla Sadra in his Al-Asfar al-Arba'ah in terms of the divisions within philosophy. He makes specific references to many works he designates "Illuminationist", such as Ibn Kammunah's Commentary on the Intimations (al-Tanqihat fi sharh al-talwihat), Shahrazuri's Commentray on the Philosophy of Illumination and his Al-Shajarat al-Ilahiyyah, as well as others. The references are notably to be found in the Asfar where Mulla Sadra discusses problems taken from logic, physics, epistemology, metaphysics, and eschatology, in relation to which he carefully delineates the philosophical positions of the various "schools".

One of the many such specific references is the following taken from Mulla Sadra's Al-Asfar al-Arba'ah: Al-Safar al-Thalith: Fial-'ilm al-Ilahi: Al-Mawqif al-Thalith: Fi 'Ilmihi ta Ata: Al-Fasl alRabi: Fitafsil Madhahib al-Nas fi 'Ilmihi bi-al-Ashya'. Here Mulla Sadra distinguishes seven schools of thought, four philosophical, two "theological", and a "mystical" (the latter combining 'irfan and tasawwuf). This is typical of Mulla Sadra's classification of the history of

philosophy, theology, and mysticism, and also reflects an earlier, albeit incomplete, classification

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found in Shahrazuri's Al-Shajarat al-Ilahiyyah three centuries before the composition of the Asfar. Only the four philosophical "schools" - referred to as *madhhab* - need concern us here, for the theological and mystical fall outside the domain of philosophy proper. The four in Mulla Sadra's order are:

1.) "The school of the followers of the Peripatetics (*madhhan tawabi' al-mashsh'in*)". Included in this category are the "two masters" (*al-shaykhan*) al-Farabi and Avicenna. Followers of the two masters such as Bahmanyar (Avicenna's famous student and author of Al-Tahsil), Abu al-'Abbas al-Lawkari, and "many later Peripatetics" (*kathir min al-muta'akhhirin*) are also included in this group. Mulla Sadra's group "later Peripatetics" is confined to philosophers in Islam, but al-Kindi is not included. The philosophical position of this group concerning being is called "primacy of being" (*asalat al-wujud*), adherents of this school are said to uphold the principle of eternity of the world (*qidam*); they are said to reject bodily resurrection and posit that the soul is separated from the body, but their position is said to be unclear on the question of the immortality of the individual soul. Of their views Mulla Sadra only accepts the ontological principle of the "later Peripatetics".

2.) "The school of the Master Shihab al-Din (Suhrawardi) al-Maqtul, follower of the Stoics (*madhhab shaykh atba al-riwaqiyyah Shihab al-Din al-Maqtul*), and those who follow him, such as al-Muhaqqiq al-Tusi, Ibn Kammunah, al-Allamah (Qutb al-Din) al-Shirazi, and Muhammad al-Shahrazuri, author of Al-Shajarat al-Ilahiyyah. The addition of the attribution "Stoic" to the Illuminationist school appears in many places in the Asfar. However, concerning certain "novel" philosophical issues, such as the distinction between the idea of "intellectual form" (*al-surat al-'aqliyyah*) and the idea of "archetypal form" (*al-surat al-mithaliyyah*) - the latter also as "the idea shape", or "imagined shape" - Mulla Sadra is careful to use only the attribution "Illuminationist". In general, the epithet "Stoic" is

added to the Illuminationist

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designation only in conjunction with questions that relate to logic and physics, but in matters that pertain to epistemology, cosmology, and eschatology, "Illuminationist" is understood alone. Among the central doctrines of this "school" is said to be the position that upholds the real existence of the forms of things outside the mind (*al-qawl bu kawn wujud suwar al-ashya fial-kharij*), be the things corporeal or not (*mujarradat aw maddiyyat*), or simple or not (*murrakabat aw basa'it*). As I explained elsewhere, this type of a (Platonic) "realism" (i.e., recognition of the "reality" of the Platonic Forms) is a cornerstone of the philosophy of Illumination.

3.) "The school attributed (*al-mansub*) to Porphyry, the first of the Peripatetics (*muqaddam al-mashsha'in*) one of the greatest followers of the First Teacher." It should be noted that the reference to Aristotle in relation to Porphyry includes views of "Aristotle" of the *Uthulujiya*, i.e., to Plotinus. Among the views associated with this "school", their view of the "unity" (*ittihad*) of the intelligible (Platonic) Forms (*al-suwar al-ma'qulah*) with God, and through the Active Intellect with a "select" number of humans, is considered central to their philosophical belief (*'aqidah*). Aristotle himself is not always associated with a "school", but is deemed an exemplum against whom every philosophical position is to be judged.

4.) "The school of the divine Plato". It is possible that Mulla Sadra here means Plato himself and not a "school of thought" that may have continued after him. I so surmise from this statement: *ma dhahaba ilayi Aflatun al-ilahiyyah*. The distinction would indicate an attempt on the part of Mulla Sadra to define the philosophical position of Plato himself as distinct from later syncretic texts designated "Platonic". For example, Mulla Sadra in the *Asfar* (Volume III, 509), clearly attempts to refer specifically to Plato himself by stating "*la Aflatun al-sharif*", and not as elsewhere "*fi madhhab al-aflatuniyyah*". The central philosophical doctrine here is said to be the "objectified" reality of the Separate Forms (*al-suwar*

*al-mufaraqah*) and the Intelligible Platonic Forms (*al-muthul al'aqliyyat al-aflatuniyyah*), a position upheld strongly by Mulla Sadra, who adds that in reference to this position God's knowledge of all existent entities (*'ilm Allah bi-al-mawjudat kulluha*) is proven.

The "second school" of philosophy here mentioned, namely the Illuminationist, is distinguished from the other schools in every philosophical domain: methodology and the division of the sciences, logic, ethics and political philosophy, physics, metaphysics and eschatology. This school's main philosophical position, as examined and identified by Mulla Sadra throughout the *Asfar*, gives it a distinct position in the history of philosophy. The main philosophical position may be outlined as follows: Philosophical construction is founded on a primary intuition of time-space, and visions and personal revelations are valid epistemological processes. Knowledge by presence is considered prior to predicative knowledge, and the separate intellects (*al-'uqul al-mujarrahdah/al'uqul al-mufaraqah*) are considered multiple, and said to be uncountable (*bi-la nihayah*). The ontological position of this school is one designated "primacy of quiddity" (*asalat al-mahiyyah*), which, briefly stated, holds "existence" (*wujud*) to be derivative.

This "realist" position is one of the most essential overall features of Mulla Sadra's characterization of the Illuminationist position, which he also discusses in great detail in his *al-Ta'liqat* (Glosses on Hikmat al-ishraq). Intensity, or its lack (more and less) is considered an attribute of categories, in which motion does enter - a view itself related to Mulla Sadra's own notion of transubstantial motion (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*). The immortality of the soul and its "ranks" after separation from the body is a fundamental eschatological position of this school. The Platonic Forms are considered objectified, and the *mundus imaginalis* of Illuminationist cosmology is considered a separate realm whose existence is attested by experience.

Finally, metaphysics is divided into two parts: *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*, which was so indicated for the first time in the history of Islamic philosophy systematically by Shahrastari in his *Al-Shajarat al-Ilahiyyah*. The Illuminationist treatment of *metaphysica specialis* (*al-ilahi bi-ma'na al-akhas*) gradually departs from the Avicennan view of a pure ontology (*wujud bi-ma huwa wujud*) and includes discussion of such subjects as mystical states and stations, love, secrets of dreams, prophecy, sorcery and the arts of magic. Though we may characterize this philosophical attitude as Platonist, which it is in many essential ways, it is best described as a "new" non-Aristotelian philosophical constructivist endeavor. The problems discussed from the distinct perspective of Illuminationist philosophy, taken together, overturn the foundation of the Aristotelian scientific method, the imprint of early Islamic philosophy, and pave the way for every major philosophical (and gnostic [or esoteric]) reconstruction culminating with the seventeenth-century Transcendental Philosophy (*al-Hikmat al-muta'aliyah*) of Mulla Sadra himself. Regarding all of the above stated philosophical positions, *Nur al-fu'ad* must be indeed seen as a distinctly Illuminationist text.

Mulla Sadra's view of the Illuminationist methodology of philosophy may be further summed up as follows. This philosophy posits that philosophical construction is founded on a primary intuition of time-space, and that visions and personal revelations are valid epistemological processes. Illuminationist philosophy, Mulla Sadra surmises, holds that knowledge by presence (*al-'ilm al-huduri*) is prior to predictive knowledge (*al-'ilm al-husuli*), and he further contends that the multiplicity of intellects is an "improvement" of the Peripatetic model. We are finally told that the ontological axiom known as "primacy of quiddity" (*asalat al-mahiyyah*), is central to the Illuminationists' view of being, but must be rejected in favor of Mulla Sadra's own position "primacy of being" (*asalat al-wujud*).

Illuminationist epistemology, as I indicated, is the single most significant distinguishing characteristic of this school in Islamic philosophy, a view upheld by Kumijani as well. Here knowledge, according to the Illuminationist theory of knowledge by presence, is not founded on the input of sense-data and the extrapolation of universal concepts. At best the universals established in logic are nothing but relative truths. Knowledge rests on: (1.) a knowing subject, *al-mawdu' al-mudrik*, who is self-conscious and knows its "I" necessarily - *al-'ana'iyat al-muta'aliyah* - by means of the principle of self-consciousness, the "I" recovers, intuitively, primary notions of time-space, accepts the validity of such things as the primary intelligibles, and confirms the existence of God (unlike the host of philosophical and quasi-philosophical proofs for the existence of God, like the so-called "ontological proof" of Avicenna). Thus knowledge is founded on the knowing subject's being. (2.) Knowable objects, in accordance with Illuminationist cosmology, are part of the continuum of luminous entities (*al-anwar al-mujarrada*) and are inherently knowable. (3.) An "atemporal" relation between the knowing subject and the object takes place in a durationless "instant" (*an*). This type of knowledge is called "knowledge by illumination and presence" (*al-'ilm al-ishraqi al-hudur*), which is activated whenever an Illuminationist relation (*al-idafat al-ishraqiyyah*) is obtained between the subject and the object. The religio-mystical and political implications of this epistemology are to be held premier in our understanding of all subsequent *hikmah* compositions in Iran, and the text of *Nur al-Fu'ad* falls within this category, as is evident in the Third Ishraq of the text outlined above.



Intuition (*hads*), personal revelation (*ilham*), and insight (*mukashafah*) are integral constituents of Illuminationist theory of knowledge by presence. And knowledge at every age rests on a "superior" individual's personal experience of reality. Illuminationists argue that just as astronomers observe the heavens - *irṣād jismani* - and arrive at certitude vis-à-vis planetary motion and are thus able to predict such phenomena as eclipses and so on, so too the divine philosophers, *al-hukama al-muta'allihun* (who combine discursive philosophy with intuitive philosophy to a perfect degree), observe reality as-it-is and are thus the most perfect potential "leaders" of society, which in the text *Nur al-Fu'ad* are the Shi'a Imams who act according to the principal of *Vilayat* (Arabic: *Wilayat*). The result of such non-Aristotelian philosophizing paves the way for the triumph of *al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah* in Iran, and is indicative of the victory of practical reason over theoretical science in Islamic philosophy by the seventeenth century. Theoretical philosophy fails because of the impossibility of constructing valid universal, always true, propositions, formalized and employed as the building block of science. In the stead "living" sages at every era determine what "scientific" attitude the society must have, which is based on their own individual experiential, and subjective knowledge. The real, separate Platonic Forms may be known, not by the Aristotelian demonstration (*burhan*) of the *Posterior Analytics*, but by intuition and vision-illumination, which is a coupled atemporal epistemological process initiating from the knowing "I" of the subject, and is considered prior to the Peripatetic conception-assent (*tasawwar-tasdiq*) which is temporally extended.

The notion of philosophical "intuition" is of central importance for the constructivist methodology of Illuminationist philosophy. Intuition, in the Illuminationist sense is: (1.) similar to the Arsitotelian "quick wit", *agkhinoia*, where the truth of propositions may be known immediately, or stated otherwise, prior to constructing a syllogism the conclusion may be struck at once; and (2.) recovery by the subject of universals, and of sensible objects. But intuition plays a further fundamental role in that it is an activity of the self-conscious being in a state where the subject and the object are undifferentiated (of things existing in the separate realm of the *maginalis*). To use the Illuminationist technical terminology, this activity is the "unity of perception, the perceived and the perceiver" (*ittihad al-mudrik wa'l-idrak wa'l-mudrik*) as an altered state in the consciousness of the knowing subject. This altered state, when it is "linked" or "related" to the separate realm, is the *mundus imaginalis*. This philosophical position further posits a multiplicity of self-conscious, self-subsistent "monads" designated "abstract light" (*al-nur al-mujarradah*). The 'abstract lights' which are continuous one with the other, differing only in their relative degree of intensity, form a continuum as the whole (*al-kull*), also conscious of its self.

This type of a cosmology bears directly on the question of God's knowledge. The designation "intuitive philosophy" (*al-hikmah al-dhawqiyyah*) is employed to distinguish Illuminationist philosophy from the purely discursive (*al-hikmah al-bahthiyyah*). Kumijani in his *Nur al-Fu'ad*, by clearly stipulating the essential priority of knowledge by presence of the sage-philosopher (but also of the inspired knowledge of the Imams), hence the essential priority of Vilayat (Arabic: *Wilayat*), has further expanded on the basic views of Suhrawardi.

Finally, the use of the term "sameness" ('ayniyyat) by Kumijani is perhaps philosophically the most significant aspect of the text Nur al-Fu'ad. Here the term 'ayniyyat is employed to present the idea of the unity of the knower and the known which, in Peripatetic texts, is normally presented in the form of the proposition *ittihad al-aqil wa'l-ma'qul*. The term "unity" (*ittihad*)/"conjunction" (*ittisal*) was seen by the Illuminationist philosophers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to be problematic for a complex number of reasons, but mainly because the relation "sameness" must be an identity-preserving relation, and concepts such as *ittihad* and/or *ittisal* do not fulfill this requirement. It seems that by his statements "sameness of light and manifestation" ('ayniyyat-*I nur va tajalliyat-i vujud* (Arabic: *wujud*) and "sameness of light and presence" Kumijani has refined the argument pertaining to the problem of the sameness of being and knowing, and of knower and object of thought. It is testimony to the living legacy of Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination that Kumijani was recognized as "The Second master of Illumination" in nineteenth-century Iran." (336)

In the above we have a brief definition of the philosophy of Suhrawardi. It should make obvious the affinities with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Victorines, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, and, finally, St. John of the Cross, among others. We now continue with The commentary of Seyyed Hossein Nasr concerning the above essay by Hossein Ziai.

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REPLY TO HOSSEIN ZIAI

By

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

"Professor Ziari is one of the foremost scholars of the School of Illumination (*ishraq*) today and his essay containing an unexpected discovery of a new *ishraqi* work is a further contribution to the field of study of this important philosophical school. At the same time it affords me the opportunity to clarify further some of my views concerning the School of Illumination to which I have devoted a number of studies over the years. At the outset I should mention that I became deeply attracted to the School of *Ishraq* and its founder Suhrawardi in my twenties, and he has remained a most appealing figure to me throughout my scholarly and philosophical life. His mastery of discursive philosophy in combination with spiritual vision, his universalist view of philosophy along with his espousal and explicit use of the term "perennial Philosophy", and his combining the rigor of logic and beauty of poetic expression so evident especially in his Persian works, which took me many years to edit critically for the first time, are all close to my mind and heart. My own thought and its expression have in fact sought to incorporate these and other elements associated with his philosophy. Just the title of the treatise analyzed by Ziari, namesly, Nur al-fu'ad or The Light of the Heart, so rich in symbolism and of such poetic quality, reveals something of the characteristics of the School of Illumination and more particularly its incredible founder, Suhrawardi.

Of all the major figures of Islamic thought, there are a few with whom I have always felt a very close personal affinity for one reason or another and have studied not only their thoughts but also their lives, carefully. These figures include Ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Ghazzali, (Algazel), Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Rumi, Afdal al-Din Kashani, Shabistari and Mulla Sadra. Each has left an indelible mark upon my thought and has been a constant source of inspiration for me. In the

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field of philosophy, in the more technical sense of the term, no person has attracted me, *qua* person, more than Suhrawardi, whose life combines such brilliance and

tragedy. I remember when I stood long ago inside the fort of Aleppo and within the prison room in which Suhrawardi was incarcerated just before his death and where he perhaps dies, I felt as if his very presence were there. He was also the only figure about whom I consented to make an hour-long film, which I did for the National Iranian Television in the '70s when I was living in Iran. For that occasion I flew with a helicopter to the completely isolated village of Suhraward in the heart of the rugged Zagros Mountains and wondered how a philosopher of the magnitude of Suhrawardi could have hailed from such a far away place and yet was able to illuminate the Islamic world with the light of his *ishraqi* philosophy (which Henry Corbin and I have also called "theosophy" in the original sense of the term). The sources of his philosophical knowledge, especially the elements drawn from the Mazdean (Zoroastrian) tradition, as well as of his personal inspiration, remain obscure, but the results of what he drew from these sources are luminous in both form and content. To understand fully my synthesis of the perennial philosophy in its contemporary expression and traditional Islamic philosophy, the role of Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination remains of great importance.

Ziai writes of the importance of the *Ishraqi* School in later Islamic philosophy. This goes without saying but needs to be repeated again and again because those who hold tenaciously to the old view that considers Ibn Rushd (Averroes) as the end of Islamic philosophy do not want to relinquish such a view despite the vast amount of evidence to the contrary. There is in fact a new wave in the Arab world which in face of such figures as Suhrawardi, Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra [could this be related to the fact that all three of these figures were Persians?], still considers Ibn Rushd (Averroes) to be the last so-called Arab philosopher (which for them means Islamic), because its

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members believe that, since these later philosophers were not rationalists, they were not really philosophers at all. Therefore they can be dismissed as not being real philosophers while they themselves, being out and

out rationalists, are good second-rate philosophers in the modern Western definition of the term, while Ibn Rusd as seen by them in his Latin incarnation as Averroes, the arch rationalist, is of course a true philosopher. It is against such unbelievable misinterpretations of Islamic philosophy that the words of Ziai serve as a precious response. If Suhrawardi were not a philosopher, then neither were Pythagoras, Empedocles, Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, (John Scotus) Erigena, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, and even Aristotle.

Coming back to the later *ishraqi* tradition, years of studying later Islamic philosophy in Persia, and to some extent India and the Ottoman world, have made it clear to me that Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra were of course deeply influenced by Suhrawardi and the latter integrated many *ishraqi* teachings into his *hikmat al-muta'aliyah* or "transcendent theosophy", but the vast influence of these figures, and especially Mulla Sadra, was not the only channel through which Suhrawardi's teachings were propagated in later centuries. Rather, parallel with the Sadrian school, the *Ishraqi* School continued to be cultivated as a distinct philosophical tradition.

In Persia itself today many people think that as soon as the teachings of Mulla Sadra were propagated, they dominated the whole philosophical scene. That is in fact not true. For some time his teachings were eclipsed and *mashsha'i* thought continued to be widely cultivated as we see in the works of Mulla Rajab 'Ali Tabrizi NS Sayyid Ahmad 'Alawi. Even when in the Qajar period the philosophy of Mulla Sadra became resurrected by Mulla 'Ali Nuri and others, and soon became the most dominant school of philosophy, three other philosophical schools survived and were in fact active outside the dominant Sadrian School. These three schools were the *mashsha'I* of Ibn Sinan, represented by Mirza Abu'l-Hasan Jilwah, the philosophical Sufism

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of the school of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, whose most luminous representative in that period was Aqa Muhammad Rida Qumsha'I, and the school of Suhrawardi, represented by Kumijani whose important treatise has been brought back to life by Ziai. When I was studying Islamic philosophy

with traditional masters in Persia in the late '50s, as well as the '60s and '70s, they attested to this fact. Especially Sayyid Muhammad Kazim 'Assar would often mention the continuation of the *ishraqi* tradition even after the spread of the school of Mulla Sadra. 'Assar was himself in a sense both an *ishraqi* philosopher and a Sadrian one; that is, he could place himself in each perspective and teach it in a masterly fashion as one possible metaphysical formulation of the truth.

In the Ottoman world there is hardly a trace of the influence of Mulla Sadra's philosophy until quite recently, while there is definitely a whole *ishraqi* tradition in that world which has not been as yet fully investigated. The recent study of Isma'il Kuspinar is a good example of the richness of this tradition. As for India, there the situation was different from both Persia and the Ottoman world. Islamic philosophy itself first spread to India on the wings of Suhrawardi's *ishraqi* philosophy, rather than through the works of al-Farabi and Ibn sina (Avicenna), who became widely known in that land only after the fourteenth century. But the teachings of Mulla Sadra also spread to India rapidly even in his own lifetime. The *Ishraqi* School, however guarded its independence from Sadrian teachings fully and the *ishraqi* current remained stronger and more distinct as an independent school of thought than in the case in Persia. In Persia the *Ishraqi* School continued while the Sadrian School became the most dominant, but in India probably the reverse is true. Of course one cannot judge fully the relative significance of the two schools until a thorough study is made of later Islamic philosophy in the Subcontinent, a task which has not been accomplished as yet. But judging from the presence of many *ishraqi* texts in India, one of which has been edited and published by Prof. Ziai himself, and the

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importance of the Nizami curriculum for Islamic *madrasahs* in which *ishraqi* teachings played a major role, one can only conclude that this school of Suhrawardi remained of major intellectual concern for many Muslims in the Subcontinent. Can it be an accident that the most philosophically minded of the modern Muslim reformers of the Subcontinent, Muhammad Iqbal, should have devoted his doctoral thesis, published later as The Development of Metaphysics in Persia, primarily to

*ishraqi* teachings?

To understand fully the history of the later *ishraqi* school one would have to know in detail the development of the School of Illumination not only in Persia, the Ottoman world (including the Arab east, especially Iraq and Syria and to some extent Egypt) and the Indian Subcontinent, but also the development of *ishraqi* teachings in Jewish philosophy, medieval Christian philosophy and even certain strands of medieval Hindu thought. When I wrote Three Muslim Sages nearly forty years ago, the text serving as the basis of a series of lectures delivered at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University in 1962, I already referred to some of these influences, and in later essays I pointed out the necessity of pursuing the study of all these branches of the *ishraqi* School. Since then, a number of important studies have been carried out on later *ishraqi* tradition by a number of scholars, foremost among them Ziai himself; but much remains to be done as the author himself mentions. The presentation and analysis of Kumijani in this essay is itself a step in this effort and therefore has provided me with the occasion to return to the question of the importance of the later *ishraqi* tradition.

In mentioning later *ishraqi* thinkers the author includes the name of Sadr al-Din Shirazi whose Ta'liqat 'ala sharh hikmat al-ishraq he calls "the last great Illuminationist work". I agree completely with this assessment, at least given our present state of knowledge of later *ishraqi* texts. But I want to take this occasion to add that this work is also one of Mulla Sadra's own greatest masterpieces, a work which has not received its due until now. I am glad that

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Professor Ziai has prepared a critical edition of this text and hope that it will see the light of day soon. The study of this work reveals Mulla Sadra's incredible depth of understanding of Suhrawardi, and at the same time shows his vast knowledge of other earlier schools of Islamic thought. Paradoxically enough, therefore, Mulla Sadra is at one a philosopher who created a new school which integrated much of *ishraqi* thought and became dominant in the philosophical scene in Persia



from the Qajar period onward, and himself an *ishraqi* philosopher in the line of Muhammad Shams al-Din Shahrazuri and Qutb al-Din Shirzai. The interaction between the Sadrian and the *Ishraqi* Schools from the seventeenth to the twentieth century in Persia would constitute the subject of amost fascinating and revealing study, because these two major metaphysical synthses, one based on the principality of essence and the other on the principality of existence, both remained realities to be contemplated and studied by those attracted to the intellectual sciences in general and to philosophy in particular.

Ziai mentions that Kumijani was given the title of "The Second Master of Illumination". One wonders when this title began to be used because it is certainly significant and points possibly to the singular importance of Kumijani in Qajar Persia as the foremost authority in *ishraqi* teachings of that time. We know that Aqa Muhammad Rida Qumsha'I, his contemporary, was given the title of "The Second Ibn Arabi" because he stood out as the foremost expositor of theoretical gnosis (Sanskrit: *jnana*) (*'irfan-i nazari*) of the nineteenth century in Persia. If the title given to Kumijani is born out in other documents, it would put him in a position parallel with Qumsha'I and would be further reason for turning to his other writings and studying him as the torch bearer of the *Ishraqi* School in his day. Unfortunately, this subject has been neglected not only in Western scholarship, as mentioned by Ziai, but by contemporary scholarship in Iran as well.

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Ziai writes quite justly that "Kumijani's text is testimony to the fact that philosophy in the eastern lands of Islam did not die." Then he adds, "nor did it deteriorate to some kind of ill-defined '*sagesse orientale*'". In defense of Henry Corbin who used this term, let me say that in a world in which philosophy is reduced to rationalism or sub-rationalism, and in which positivists believe that there was no serious philosophy before Hume and Kant, it necessary to take recourse to terms which do not share this limitation in definition

and meaning. If we define philosophy as love of *Sophia*, then there is no need of using any other term than "philosophy" when speaking of a Suhrawardi or a Mulla Sadra, but if philosophy is confined to logical positivism or existentialism, then a term such as *sagesse orientale* can be a means of opening the reader's intellectual horizon and showing that there is more to philosophy than rationalism or sub-rationalism, as Suhrawardi would be the first to accept. Besides, Corbin translated *al-hikmat al-mashriqiyyah* as *sagesse orientale*, a term which has had a long honored history in Islamic thought, and while not confined to rationalism, has always emphasized the necessity of logical rigor in the understanding of *hikmah*.

There is no need for me to go over again Ziai's analysis of the text itself which is carried out in a clear and masterly fashion. There are only a few points upon which I would like to make brief comments. In enumerating the schools of philosophy according to Mulla Sadra, Ziai mentions under the second category the *riwagi* or "Stoic" which Mulla Sadra identifies with the school of Suhrawardi. Despite a few studies carried out on the subject, the usage of the term "Stoic" in this context is still a mystery to me, seeing how different Stoic philosophy is from that of Suhrawardi. Since in more specific cases Mulla Sadra adds the epithet "Stoic" to *ishraqi* only when issues of physics and logic are concerned, could one say that in these two domains the Stoics influenced Suhrawardi, or that Mulla Sadra, having studied directly through some source unknown to us Stoic logic and physics, saw

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such a parallel and therefore equated the two? When one studies Stoic physics as expounded by specialists such as Samuel Sambursky and compares it with *ishraqi* physics, one does not find such close resemblances, although there are points of accord. The case of logic is somewhat easier and one could make a case the Suhrawardi's criticism of Aristotelian formal logic reflects his knowledge of Stoic logic. In any case I have not been able to find a solution to this enigma and hope that Professor Ziai, who is well versed in classical logic and physics as well as *ishraqi* teachings,

will be able to cast light on this matter.

I confirm fully Ziai's emphasis on the *ishraqi* theory of knowledge by presence (*al-'ilm al-hudur* and its difference from predicative knowledge (*al-'ilm al-husuli*). But I do not understand his assertion that "such non-Aristotelian philosophizing...is indicative of the victory of practical reason over theoretical science in Islamic philosophy." Even in the case of the Imams, "who act according to the principle *Vilayat* (Arabic: *Wilayat*)", to quote Ziai, knowing always preceded acting. Perhaps Ziai has something in mind of which I am not aware. As far as I can see, in Islamic thought the *nazari* or theoretical element has always accompanied the *'amali* or practical element and has preceded it in principle. In the teachings of traditional philosophy the theoretical branches of philosophy were in fact held in higher esteem than the practical, while at the same time all masters of traditional thought emphasize that knowledge without the appropriate action is like a tree that bears no fruit (repeating the famous Arab aphorism)>

One of the most interesting parts of Ziai's essay is the last part of the analysis where he speaks of Kumijani's views of the inspired knowledge of the Shi'ite Imams and the priority of *Vilayet* (Arabic: *Wilayet*). In the writings of Suhrawardi there are no signs of distinct and explicit Shi'ite doctrines, although he was accused by his opponents of *Batini* (that is, Isma'ili) sympathy. The Nur al-Fu'ad seems to present Suhrawardi in Shi'ite dress in the same way

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that Haydar Amoli integrated Ibn Arabi al-Mursi into the matrix of Shi'ite gnosis. If such is in fact the case, there is added significance to Kumijani. The early schools of Islamic philosophy continued and were revived in the Shi'ite Persia of the Safavid period by being brought into the Shi'ite intellectual universe and being made "Shi'ite". We have ample evidence of this process in the case of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Arbi al-Mursi, and even al-Ghazzali. Now with Kumijani we see the same process taking place for Suhrawardi and his *ishraqi* teachings.

I am grateful to Professor Ziai for not only

unveiling another monument of *ishraqi* thought in his indefatigable effort to bring back to life the major works of the *ishraqi* tradition, but also for affording me the opportunity to clarify further some of my own views on this school. As I wrote nearly forty years ago, I still believe that the School of Illumination founded by Suhrawardi is not only one of the richest philosophical schools in the Islamic world, but it is also one that is still alive today and that has much to offer to both the contemporary Islamic world and to those in the West in quest of a philosophy which combines the rigor of logic and the ecstasy of spiritual vision." (337)

As was said above, I agree with Luce Lopez-Baralt that Suhrawardi is the Sufi, perhaps the person, who most influenced St. John of the Cross. Keeping this in mind, it seems wise to give the reader at least an inkling of the philosophy of Suhrawardi. Indeed, in the case of St. John of the Cross and Suhrawardi, one goes beyond mere verbal parallels or even affinities, as in many ways St. John of the Cross appears as the very "personification" or "plasmation" of the philosophy of Suhrawardi.

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Note that Professor Ziai emphasizes the "non-Aristotelian" method of Suhrawardi; in this, Suhrawardi agrees with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Victorines, i.e., Hugh of St. Victor, Richard of St. Victor, and, most especially, the lesser known Walter of St. Victor, as well as St. Gregory Palamas, and the Eastern Orthodox Church in general. In addition, the **Uncreated Light** in which St.

Gregory Palamas puts such emphasis has obvious affinities with the Philosophy of Illumination, or, **The Science of Mystic Lights**, the definition used by John Walbridge of the philosophy of Qutb al-Din Shirazi, a thirteenth century follower of Suhrawardi. All of these, especially Suhrawardi, greatly influenced St. John of the Cross as well as having close affinities among themselves.

I hope we have given an outline of the affinities and interrelations between Ruzbehan, the trobadors, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, Dante, Hafiz and St. John of the Cross. A full treatment of this topic (which has yet to be written) would require a book unto itself.(338)

St. Cyril of Salonika (or *Thessaloniki*) (Early to mid 9<sup>th</sup> century) is known as the "Apostle to the Slavs". Having learned a Slavic dialect during his childhood in Salonika, St. Cyril did

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much missionary work among the Slavs of the Balkan Penninsula and Moravia. He devised the Cyrillic Alphabet, based on the Greek Alphabet, but adapted to the sounds of the Slavic languages. To the day the Cyrillic Alphabet is used to write Bulgarian, Serbian, Russian and Ukrainian. St. Cyril also developed Church Slavonic, a literurgical language which is closer to Old Bulgarian than to any

other tongue, but containing neologisms and Greek words necessary to translate some theological and philosophical terms to a Slavic language. Church Slavonic continues to be the liturgical language of the Bulgarian, Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches. We shall not enter into the polemic concerning the status of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Ukraine *vis-à-vis* the Russian Orthodox Church; in any case, Church Slavonic is the liturgical language of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

It was a custom in Byzantium that the heir to the Imperial Throne select his bride from among the most beautiful and distinguished maidens of Byzantine Society.

The Slavonic Life of Cyril was originally written in Greek, shortly after his death in 869, probably by his brother St. Methodius, and later translated to Church Slavonic, the Greek original being lost.

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According to the Slavonic Life of Cyril, in his youth St. Cyril of Salonika had a vision in which the *strategus* (military governor) and the civil governor of the area of Salonika convened all the city's maidens so that he (St. Cyril) might choose a wife. After looking at all of them, St. Cyril chose the most beautiful girl, whose face glowed and who was adorned with pearls and gold

necklaces, in every way splendidly attired. Her name was *Sophia*, which means "Wisdom". The author of the Slavonic Life of Cyril says that the above demonstrates that St. Cyril of Salonika chose not a woman as his companion, but rather Wisdom itself (or herself), *Hagia Sophia*, the *Daena*.(339)

As Fr. Pavel Florensky has noted,

"And this symbol (*Daena* or *Hagia Sophia* in the vision of St. Cyril of Salonika) became the first essence of the infant Russia that was to receive of the royal bounties of Byzantine culture."(340)

Of course, Russia received the vision of St. Cyril of Salonika, along with the Cyrillic alphabet and Church Slavonic as a liturgical language, by way of the Danubian Bulgars, as Kieven Russia was not converted to Christianity until 130 years after the death of St. Cyril of Salonika.

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Fr. Pavel Florensky says:

"The many aspects of (Hagia) Sophia in the creaturely world have a single deep root - *spiritual beauty*, the incorruptible, first-created *beauty of creation*. (Hagia) Sophia is the true adornment of the human being, which penetrates through all his pores, shines in his eyes, flows out through his smile, exults in his heart in ineffable joy (shades of the trobadors, with whom Fr. Florensky apparently was **not** familiar), is reflected in his every gesture, surrounds him in moments of spiritual uplifting with a fragrant cloud and

a radiant nimbus (halo or aura), makes him higher than the world's union, so that while remaining in the world he becomes not of the world, becomes supra-worldly. (Hagia) Sophia is Beauty. (Hagia) Sophia is the spiritual principle in the creaturely world and in man which makes them beautiful. (Hagia) Sophia alone is the essential Beauty in all creation; the rest is mere trumpery." (341)

Like the trobadors, as we have seen and noted above, and at times Dante Alighieri in Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso of La Divina Commedia, Fr. Pavel Florensky identifies the Virgin Mary as a manifestation, or, as he says, the "chief bearer" of the *Hagia Sophia*, *Daena*, or *Sophia Perennis*. (342) As we noted above, there is nothing which indicates that Fr. Pavel Florensky was familiar with the trobadors and their works, though he may have heard of them.

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Sergei Symeonovich Sakharov (1896-1993), known in the Russian Orthodox Church as "Archimandrite Sophrony", was one of the great thinkers of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though he lived most of his life in exile. A theologian of mystical orientation, very much in the Russian Orthodox tradition, Archimandrite Soprony thought very highly of St. John of the



Cross, as Hieromonk Nicholas V. Sakharov, great nephew of Archimandrite Sophrony, notes:

"Fr. Sophrony works out a distinction between two types of godforsakenness. The first one is when "man deserts God": 'To the extent that we live in this world, to that same extent we are dead in God.' The second one is when God hides from man - a dreadful state of godforsakenness. When man has no more life in this world, that is, cannot live by this world, the memory of the divine world draws him "there", yet despite all this, darkness encompasses his soul. He (Fr. Sophrony) explains: 'these fluctuations of the presence and absence of grace are our destiny until the end of our earthly life.' Fr. Sophrony saw suffering as a *necessary stage* in ascetic development: 'Divine grace comes only in the soul that has undergone suffering.' Fr. Sophrony thus parallels his own experiences with that of the Dark Night of The Soul in St. John of the Cross, whose writings assisted his comprehension of ascetic suffering. He calls (St. John of the Cross) a "genius" and admits that the description of states, while being different in terminology from ("*not identical to*" *would perhaps be more accurate*) the eastern fathers, in its main dogmatic statements it is in accord and on a par with the greatest writers of eastern asceticism.

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Fr. Sophrony highlights other important points in St. John of the Cross, such as the determination to follow the hard path against utmost resistance; the concern to preserve the mind pure of any image in his striving toward the divine; and the understanding of the spiritually perfect life as the unity of love. He points out that St. John of the Cross' book does indeed excite the soul toward determination to follow patiently through the dry and dark wilderness toward the "promised land." (343)

As we have noted, St. John of the Cross was familiar with the works of the Eastern Church Fathers. However, in his terminology

St. John of the Cross was also influenced by the medieval western Catholic mystics, by the trobadors and by the Sufis, both Hispano-Muslim and Persian.

Nicholas V. Sakharov continues:

"It is tempting to see in Fr. Sophrony a borrowing from Carmelite spirituality, largely because of the emphasis he places on godforsakenness (very much in the Russian Orthodox tradition). Fr. Sophrony, as we mentioned in chapter one, was acquainted with the writings of St. John of the Cross and, in contrast to (Vladimir) Lossky, estimated them rather positively. Some commentators have indeed drawn parallels between Silouan (a 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian Orthodox *staretz* or mystic who also died in exile) and St. John of the Cross. As we mentioned earlier, Fr. Sophrony himself admits a certain affinity between St. John of the Cross' experience and his own. For example, St. John of the Cross sees the dark night (of the soul) as "a mark of God's intimacy" (Williams), "a part of the relationship" (Cugno); for Fr. Sophrony godforsakenness is a gift of God's love.

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The question of the potential dependence of Fr. Sophrony on St. John of the Cross fits well within the context of the debates about the place of dark-night spirituality in the east. (Vladimir) Lossky's opinion, outlined above, has been contested by (Irenée) Hausherr, (Heinrich von) Baltasar and (Cardinal Jean) Danielou, who highlight the similarities concerning godforsakenness in the east and the west. (Fr. Irenée) Hausherr concludes that the (Christian) East possesses all the elements that constitute these purifying nights. Others, however, are more careful in drawing such parallels. Puech argues that the patristic use of the terms *gnophos* (gloom) and *skotos* (darkness) is metaphorical: they do not represent an experiential reality, as they do in the dramatic and affective mysticism of St. John of the Cross.

Any attempt to subsume St. John of the Cross' mysticism of the dark night (of the soul) under a single definition fails to do justice to the complexity of the experience. The association of dark night (of the soul) merely with dereliction/absence of God, or an unqualified equation of dark night (of the soul) with Dionysius (the Pseudoareopagite)'s and St. Gregory of Nyssa's *gnophos* and *skotos* as the manifestation of God, would be onesided and thereby misleading. To begin with, St. John of the Cross distinguishes *different types* of dark night (of the soul) on various experiential levels. In Ascent of Mount Carmel it signifies purification and purgation. He distinguishes between a night of the senses and the night of the spirit, as well as between active and passive purification. He thus calls the journey toward union with God a "night". He further extends the imagery of night and its application to faith: "for the intellect faith is also like a dark night". The notion is also related to God Himself: "God is also a dark night to man in this life". In the Dark Night of the Soul he also relates the night to contemplation, when the soul is watching in darkness, divested of thoughts and images.

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Some of these multiple experiences can certainly be paralleled in Fr. Sophrony. He praises St. John of the Cross for his determination to follow the hard path: the way toward union with God is through trials, kenosis, and abandonment. There are striking parallels between the dark night of contemplation in St. John of the Cross and the second period of ascetic life in Fr. Sophrony, discussed above. For St. John of the Cross, the soul feels that all creatures have forsaken it, and that it is condemned by them. Particularly by its friends. Inasmuch as God is purging the soul according to its interior and exterior faculties, the soul must be in all its parts reduced to a state of emptiness, poverty, and abandonment and must be left dry and empty and in darkness. Dark night "has hindered its faculties and affections in this way; it is unable to raise its affection or its mind to God, neither can it pray to Him, thinking that God has set a cloud before it through

which its prayers cannot pass. It thinks that God neither hears it (the soul) nor pays heed to it." The soul believes God to be against it, that God has cast it away. Finally, St. John of the Cross and Fr. Sophrony both know of the darkness of divestiture, when the mind is stripped of any thought or image.

We may nonetheless rule out any immediate dependence on St. John of the Cross (on the part of Fr. Sophrony). Fr. Sophrony's ideas on *kenosis* and godforsakenness must have taken shape before he read St. John of the Cross. The first extant mention of St. John of the Cross is in 1932, but he read the whole book Dark Night of the Soul only in 1943. His interest in St. John of the Cross' experience was stimulated by the intensity of his own experience of godforsakenness. In connection with *kenosis* (literally "self-emptying"; in the Russian Orthodox tradition, Sts. Boris and Gleb, (of whom we shall speak in the following chapter), are considered to be splendid examples of *kenosis*) and godforsakenness, Fr. Sophrony points rather to the experience of his teacher (*guru, sheikh, pir*) the *starets* Silouan, than to St. John of the Cross. (344)

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*Starets* Silouan almost certainly **DID NOT** read the works of St. John of the Cross. The above obviously indicates a strong affinity with and resemblance to the works of St. John of the Cross (and also, though perhaps to a lesser degree, the works of Ibn Abbad of Ronda) on the one hand and the teachings of *Staretz* Silouan on the other. Certainly it is no surprise to find strong affinities and parallels with St. John of the Cross not only among the Byzantine mystics and ascetics, but also perhaps most especially among the Russian Orthodox *startsi* (plural of *starets*).

Also, it should be noted that among those mentioned above by Nicholas V. Sakharov, none were familiar with Sufism, Persian and Hispano-Muslim, especially Ibn Abbad of Ronda, from whom St. John of the Cross drew much of the inspiration for his Dark Night of the Soul, Fr. Irenée Hausherr and Cardinal Danielou being the only possible exceptions; *nota bene* that I said "possible" exceptions, **NOT** "certain" exceptions.

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The standard work on Islamic influences in Dante's Divina Commedia is still La Escatologia Musulmana en la Divina Comedia (Muslim Eschatology in the Divina Commedia) by Miguel Asin Palacios, of which, unfortunately, no complete English translation has ever been published. Said work is quite a large tome, so we will deal with only certain parts of it, mainly those which compare concerned with Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, whose influence connects Dante not only with St. John of the Cross, but also with Suhrawardi and the *Ishraqi* school of Islamic philosophy, and with a long line of

Persian Shi'a thinkers, beginning with Haidar Amoli. We start with the *Mi'raj*, sometimes called "The Miraculous Journey of Muhammad", of which we have spoken before.

Said Fr. Asin:

"The functions of the Archangel Gabriel in all the stages of the ascension (of Muhammad in the *Mi'raj*) are these: to elevate Muhammad from sphere to sphere, guiding him, instructing him and comforting him. These are exactly the same functions as Beatrice in relation to Dante (in the Divina Commedia). Besides, in many cases Gabriel prays to God in favor of Muhammad and invites Muhammad to accept from God the sublime favor in which he is granted in being raised to Heaven, an invitation accepted by Muhammad.

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We find an identical scene in Canto X of Dante's Paradiso: on arriving at the sphere of the Sun, Beatrice says:

"Give thanks", Beatrice said, "With all devotion  
Give thanks to the Sun of Angels, by the grace of  
whom  
You have been elevated to this sensible sphere!"  
Paradiso, X:52-54.

In the following verses, Dante pours out his heart in effusions of gratitude and divine love. On the other hand, in Cantos XXXI & XXXIII of Paradiso we find the prayers of Beatrice and St. Bernard of Clairvaux in favor of Dante. However, the strangest analogy which we find in this parallel, is that Beatrice guides Dante only up to a certain point in his ascension, because, on arriving at the final stage, she abandons Dante, her place being taken by St. Bernard of Clairvaux:

I anticipated one thing, but found another  
I thought I would find Beatrice there; but in her  
stead I found  
An elder (St. Bernard of Clairvaux) in the robes  
of glory. Paradiso XXXI: 58-60.  
And the Holy Elder said: "I am sent  
By prayer and divine love to aid you so that you  
may reach  
The perfect consummation of your ascent

Therefore, look around this garden, so that you  
may  
By contemplating its radiance, be prepared  
To lift your eyes to the Trinal Ray.

The Queen of Heaven (Virgin Mary), for whom in pure  
devotion  
I burn with love, will grant us all graces  
Because I am Bernard, her faithful servant."  
Paradiso, XXXI: 92-102.

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Now, Gabriel does not accompany Muhammad in the  
ultimate stage of his ascension, because when they  
arrive at the Throne of God, Gabriel departs, his place  
taken by a luminous and spiritual crown which which  
leads the prophet to the Divine Presence.

Nor may we ignore the similarity between this  
luminous crown which descends from the heights to guide  
Muhammad with that mentioned by Dante:

From the heights of Heaven came a torch of glory,  
Shaped as a circle or crown, and spinning around  
her (Virgin Mary)  
It wound about her and crowned her with a living  
flame

Paradiso XXIII: 94-96

Which Dante in the Eighth Heaven sees descend from the  
Most High to accompany the Virgin Mary, the same as the  
luminous crown ascends to the Divine Throne accompanying  
Muhammad.

In relation to the solutions which Beatrice or

another of the blessed ones give to the theological or philosophical problems which Beatrice or Dante himself express in the various celestial spheres, these have a close parallel in the similar scenes of the Muslim ascension, in which, principally Gabriel or the angels of death and Hell, explain to Muhammad esoteric points concerning the eschatology of Islam. Above all, compare the final episode of the Muslim ascension when Gabriel, before beginning the descent from the highest sphere, explains to Muhammad the nature, hierarchies and mysteries of the various choirs of angels that populate the celestial heights, with the long theological discussion attributed to Beatrice, on arriving at the ninth sphere, concerning the angelic choirs, their hierarchies and diverse functions and natures. Also, Beatrice, like Gabriel, coincides in assigning to the Cherubim a place in the first circles which surround God, the other circles being reserved for the inferior orders of angels. Obviously, the doctrines differ on

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certain points, since the Christian and Islamic angelologies are not identical, although both derive from the Hebraic (and Zoroastrian) theology and from the Alexandrian metaphysics, but from a purely literary viewpoint this is of no importance.

The angels who intone canticles of glory, soaring with their golden wings above the Mystical Rose which symbolizes Dante's *Paradiso*, the mansion of the blessed.

Then, in the semblance of a white rose, the angelic host  
Of the sacred host appeared to me  
All those whom Christ had redeemed with His own blood.

But that other host, who soar, intoning and beholding  
His Glory, who, to bestow on them His love,  
Made them such a multitude in such bliss,

Like a swarm of bees who in unison descend  
Into the flower and thence carry



The nectar of their labors to the hive,

Flew without ceasing to the many-petaled rose  
And without ceasing returned to that light  
In which endless love has its abode

Like living flames their countenances glowed  
More dazzling white than any earthly snow.

On entering the great flower the spread about  
From tier to tier, the ardor and peace  
That they had acquired flying near to Him.  
Nor did this great multitude in flight  
Between the white rose and that which is above it  
Block in the least the glory of that light.  
Paradiso, XXXI: 1-21.

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Also appear to be copies of the angel whom Muhammad encounters in the first sphere, and whose two halves, of fire and of snow, unite in spite of their opposite natures. Those angels, in effect, have "countenances of living fire" and the rest, of such whiteness that it is superior to that of the snow.

All the researches of the experts on Dante which were done with wise and patient study have sought in the precursors of the Divina Commedia the archetypes or models of Dante's artistic conceptions, have failed before the original beauty of this sublime apotheosis: the religious legends which Labitte, D'Ancona, Ozanam and Graf analyzed with insuperable erudition, offer nothing similar in relation to the design or geometric pattern of the concentric circles which the angels form, ceaselessly revolving around the Divine Light. For this reason, the striking identity which Dante's design shows with the Muslim legend, acquires for us an irrefutable demonstration. Observe, in effect that in the Muslim legend the dense files of angelic spirits which surround the Divine Throne are also composed of innumerable angels; how each file corresponds to a hierarchy or class of spirits; that the nearest to God is that of the Cherubim; how they intone canticles in

honor of God; how all of them radiate rays of light; how the total number of the files is also nine; how each file revolves around the circle immediately below it, constituting nine concentric circles, and how, in summary, all of them revolve with an incessant circular motion around the Throne of God, which also is, as in Dante's vision, a focus of indescribable light. Muhammad, like Dante, twice describes his beatific vision: once, before the final stage of his ascension, when, still accompanied by Gabriel, discerns, for the first time in the heights, yet distant, the Divine Apotheosis, the same as Dante discerns it for the first time, from the ninth Heaven, still accompanied by Beatrice; the second time, when, abandoned by his guide, Muhammad ecstatically contemplates the Light of the Divine Essence, the same as Dante in the final canto of Paradiso.

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The analysis of the psychological phenomena which make up the ecstasy of Muhammad during his vision, gives the same result as that of the Florentine poet: Muhammad, in effect, begins to feel so overcome, that he fears that he is going blind; soon he discovers that his sight is strengthened and sharpened, and that he can now fix his vision on the Divine Light; he obtains from God the grace of continuity in his vision; declares himself incapable of describing it; and only recalls that his contemplation of it produced a sort of suspension of the spirit, ecstasy or spoor, preceded by intense joy.

After noting so many coincidences, how can one not recognize that there exists a close kinship, better let us say relation, between this Muslim redaction, which dates from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and Dante's Paradiso? Also, take into account that other aspects of lesser importance, common to both legends, have been excluded from the parallel described above, so as not to make it too prolix." (345)

Fr. Asin continues, speaking now of the Sufis:

"The most interesting model (of the *Mi'raj*) are the work of the prince of Hispano-Muslim mysticism, the

Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, who died in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, twenty-five years before the birth of Dante. In one of these adaptations, based on the text of the *Mi'raj*, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi discovers an allegorical-moral meaning, id est, an esoteric teaching of the successive intuitions and revelations which the soul of the mystic receives in his ecstatic ascension, in its journey towards God. This work of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, which unfortunately is as yet inedited, is titled The Book of the Nocturnal Journey Towards the Majesty of the Most Generous. By way of the poetic fragment which we are about to analyze, we may discern the outline of his allegorical adaptation.

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The Sufis or mystics, heris of the Prophet, are the imitators of his life and doctrine; separating themselves from allthe things of this world, consecrating their whole lives to the mediatation and practice of the mysteries of the Qur'an and maintaining vivid the memory of their Beloved, they achieve the ecstasy and presence of God. For this mystical journey, the swift steed which transports them is Divine Love, symbolized by *Buraq*; the holy city of Jerusalem, mystical symbol of light and certainty, is the first stage of the journey. There they are detained (as the Prophet was detained before his ascension to the Heavens) by the wall which denies access to the worldly ones, the wall that symbolizes purity of heart; and after nourishing themselves with milk, symbol of the straight path of the revealed doctrine, they knock on the door of Heaven, allegory of the mortification of the flesh, and, having passed through the door, Heaven and Hell are revealed to their eyes; with the right eye smilingly contemplating the happiness of the blessed, with the left eye shedding a living tear for the sufferings of those in Hellfire. Having arrived at the *Lotus*, symbol of faith and virtue, they sate themselves with its fruit, and with it all the most sublime human faculties are perfected. Now they can rise to the final stage of their journey; to the intuitive vision of the

Divine Essence, which appears to them as it is, without the veil of the creatures hiding it from their eyes, which they contemplate from nearby and with the total clarity which in secret guards the mystery of mysteries.

Even the most superficial perusal of this poem by the Murciano poet must excite the interest of the students of Dante's allegories. In the Divina Commedia and in the Convivio, Dante also proposes to conceal, and says so clearly, the three esoteric senses under the veil of the words of his poetry: one allegorical-personal, another allegorical-moral, and the third anagogical or spiritual and mystical. By this criterion the most authentic for purposes of interpretation, because it was given by the author himself the Divina Commedia is a complex allegory of the personal life of

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Dante and of the moral redemption of humanity. Dante, or man, lost, due to ignorance and passions, has deviated from the straight path which will lead him to happiness, gradually achieves, guided by natural reason and by faith and grace, frees himself from the slavery of sin, by way of expiation and purification from his sins, symbolized in the journey to Hell and Purgatory; and when moral perfection is obtained, he ascends by the way of contemplation, inspired by charity, to his eternal happiness, which consists of the vision and manifestation of the Divine Essence. Dante, like the Muslim Sufis in general, and most especially like the Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, uses the supposedly real and historical fact of the ascension of a man to Heaven, using it to symbolize the mystical drama of the moral regeneration of souls by faith and theological virtues.

To the basic analogies which between them guard the Divina Commedia and the Muslim Mi'raj, one must undoubtedly include the new and surprising coincidence in reference to the allegorical intention by which both legends are inspired. Since this symbolic character which the divine poet wished to give to his immortal work is for all the critics the highest proof of his original inspiration, it would be wise for us to immerse ourselves a bit more in the study of these marvelous coincidences, examining another Muslim mystical allegory, also a work of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, in which

the affinities with Dante make themselves clear with no effort at all.

There is an allegorical-mystical ascension inserted in the masterful and voluminous book by Ibn Arabi al-Mursi , titled Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya, id est, "the Meccan Revelations", and form the main topic of a whole chapter titled "The Alchemy of Happiness" which suggest the esoteric meaning of the allegory. It is preceded by a brief prologue, in which is enclosed the key to the exegesis of the whole fable. Later we shall analyze the contents.

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Human souls, on being united with their bodies by God, tend towards their ultimate end and to know the essence of their beginning, which is God. Seeking the path which will lead them to this goal, there is here an individual of the same human nature, who, after having lived in this world, presents himself as the messenger of God and is offered a guide in order to achieve the knowledge of God in which his happiness lies. Some docily and gratefully accept the guide sent from Heaven; others, on the contrary, disdain this help, because they do not acknowledge in the guide any superiority of cogniscent faculties. The first group follows the guide of the doctrine revealed by God to His messenger, while the other group only follow the lights of their own natural reason.

So here begins the mystical allegory, whose protagonists are two travelers from each of the above categories, id est, a theologian and a rationalist philosopher, who simultaneously begin the journey which will take them to God. The first stages of the journey, before beginning the ascension to the celestial spheres, symbolize the natural perfection and happiness of souls, which is obtained by way of discipline and correction of the passions and the physical mortification of the body. In these preliminary stages, philosophy and theology coincide almost completely in their teachings, and thus, both travelers, guided by reason and faith respectively, succeed in freeing themselves from the bonds which tie them to the earth,

freeing themselves from the nefarious influence of the passions.

From this point begins the celestial ascension in the strict sense, whose stages are now shown in the Muslim legend of the *Mi'raj*. The first seven stages correspond to the astronomical sky or celestial spheres: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. One after the other they are successively reached by our symbolic travelers, who ascend at the same velocity, each on his proper vehicle: *Buraq*, the celestial horse of the Prophet, allegory of reason, is the steed ridden by the philosopher; *Rafraf*, the luminous cloud which elevates Muhammad to the Divine Throne, personifies the Light of

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Divine Grace, guide of the theologian in his ascension. Though both arrive simultaneously at the gates of each of the astronomical heavens, they do not receive the same welcome nor the same benefits as reward for their visit; the theologian is received and celebrated by the prophets which inhabit each sphere; on the contrary, the philosopher is obliged to remain far from his companion, and, in place of conversing with God's messengers, the philosopher must limit himself to dealing with the *intelligences* who, according to the neoplatonic cosmology move the celestial spheres and who in this allegory are limited to the humble task of serving and ministering to the prophets. This difference of treatment received by the two travelers, which fills the theologian with satisfaction and fills the philosopher with sadness and pain, who, from a distance discerns the treatment of which his companion is the object, and vaguely learns of the sublime mysteries which are revealed to him by the prophets. Nevertheless, the philosopher does not remain completely defrauded in the seven astronomical mansions of his ascension: the *intelligence* of each sphere instructs him in the problems of physics or cosmology, whose solution depends on the natural influence which each planet exercises on the phenomena of this lower world; but his satisfaction diminishes when he discovers that the solutions to all the problems of philosophy are also given to the theologian in the teachings of the prophets, and with an elevation, clarity and simplicity superior to that of the natural sciences.

This ingenious literary device permits the author of the allegory, id est, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, to introduce into it a great part of the questions of his own theological system, a virtual encyclopedia of philosophy, theology and occult sciences, in the form of conferences or discourses put in the mouth of each of the prophets. These discourses appear at times only in passing, but at other times extensively developed.

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On entering the final astronomical sphere, that of the Zodiac, it is revealed to the traveler the cause of all the phenomena of the heavenly paradise, which depend on the virtue of each sphere. Then the traveler reaches the level in which the feet of God are resting, symbols of His Mercy and His Justice, thanks to which the traveler is informed concerning the grave problem of Eternity and of the rewards and punishments of the future life.

The ineffable light which emanates from the Throne of God enfolds the traveler in its brilliance, and the sweet harmony of the spheres resonates the strings of his heart. He falls in profound ecstasy, and on recovering, he finds himself elevated to the Throne of God, symbol of His infinite mercy, which is sustained by five angels and three prophets: Adam, Abraham and Muhammad, from whose lips the traveler learns in sublime synthesis the mystery of the Cosmos or material world, which is inscribed within the sphere of the universal body, which is the Throne of God.

After this stage, all the others belong to the spiritual world or to the platonic ideas: matter, nature, the soul and the universal intellect, id est, the four substances of the Plotinian hierarchy, emanations of the *One*, which are gradually manifested under Qur'anic symbols. The final journey raises the traveler to the heart of the mist, which is the primitive epiphany or manifestation of God *ad extra* and symbol of the *material prima*, common to creature and Creator, in the neoplatonic system of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi. In the heart of the mist, the traveler, in ecstasy.

Contemplates successively all the ineffable mysteries of the Divine Essence and of its attributes and perfections, the absolutes as well as those relative to the creatures; the sublime vision finishes with this final apotheosis, the theologian begins to descend in search of his companion, the philosopher, who, having returned to the world, converts to Islam in order to gain the high mystical contemplations which were denied to him in his frustrated ascension.

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Few comments are necessary to place in sharp relief the points of contact which the above allegorical-mystical journey presents with the works of Dante. It is enough to read closely the brief lines of Monarchy by Dante and his Epistola a Can Grande della Scala in which Dante speaks of the esoteric meaning of his Divina Commedia, to see clearly how the interpretation of his work given by the Florentine poet himself coincides with that given by Ibn Arabi al-Mursi to his allegorical journey which we have just discussed.

In his Epistola a can Grande della Scala, Dante says:

"The subject of the Divina Commedia according to the way of allegory, is that man, in so far as he has freedom of the will, meriting and demeriting and the justice of reward and punishment is to be apposes. The reason for which the soul is removed from where this life is lived, from its state of misery, is to direct it towards the state of happiness."

In Monarchy, Dante says:

"The blessedness of this life, which consists in the operation of the correct virtue, is the portrait of earthly paradise. The blessedness of eternal life, which consists in the manifestation of the divine aspect, is what is understood as celestial paradise. Thus it is that blessedness, which must come by diverse means. For the first (earthly paradise) we are brought to by philosophical training. To the second (celestial



paradise) we are led by spiritual training, which transcends all human reason (remember St. John of the Cross: 'Transcending far all temporal lore'), operates according to theological virtue."

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For both Dante and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi. In effect, the journey is a symbol of the moral life of human souls in this world, in which they have been placed by the Creator so that they might earn their happiness or ultimate goal, which consists in the gaining of the beatific vision; for both, also, this ultimate happiness is inaccessible without the aid of the supernatural learning or theology, since philosophical reason alone, although it is able to guide man in various stages of his mystical journey, id est, in the practice of the moral and intellectual virtues, cannot raise him to the sublime spheres of Paradise, symbol of the theological virtues, inaccessible without illuminative grace. The most notable difference between the two allegories is that Ibn Arabi al-Mursi proposes two different travelers, the philosopher and the theologian, in order to put in sharp relief the fundamental thesis which inspired his allegory, while Dante proposes one traveler only, guided successively by two mentors, Virgil and Beatrice, who symbolize, respectively, philosophy and theology. Note another difference: Virgil, or philosophy, does not guide Dante in his ascension to the astronomical heavens, to all of which, in contrast, ascends the philosopher in the Muslim allegory; but this follows the cosmological system of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, in which the spheres of the planets, which belong to the physical or corporeal world, do not transcend the natural forces of philosophical speculation; and it is obvious that Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was more logical and coherent than the Florentine poet, concerned less with the exact representation of Beatrice-symbol than with the glorification of Beatrice-real person. However, this difference vanishes almost completely when we note that

Dante, taught by Virgil in the first two parts of his journey, can, when he begins his ascension guided by Beatrice, represent in his own person a double role: that of philosopher, due to the experiences of his journey and the teachings received from Virgil, and that of theologian, by the guidance and illumination of Beatrice. Thus we observe that in some spheres Dante reasons like a philosopher on cosmological and

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astronomical questions, independently of the teachings of Beatrice or the blessed ones whom he encounters, while the teachings of Beatrice mostly offers supernatural and mystical points of view. This is what blinds the philosopher and the theologian of the ascension of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi in the astronomical world: the philosopher comes to know in each sphere the cosmological phenomena which acquire their physical virtues in the sublunar world, while the theologian received the teachings of the prophets, as does the philosopher, but the theologian also receives the transcendent and mystical illuminations which fall within the realm of mystical theology."(346)

Fr. Asin continues:

"We have attempted, in the preceding pages, to give a general outline concerning the origins and historical development, within Islam, of the religious legend of the nocturnal journey and ascension of the Prophet Muhammad to the mansions of the afterlife, by way of a prolix and detailed analysis of its various redactions and glosses, adaptations and imitations. At the same time, we have proceeded to compare them with Dante's Divina Commedia and put into sharp relief the similarities between them. These parallels are, for our purposes, rather like the partial results of a great mathematical equation or the loose threads of a complex tapestry. We shall see, ergo, before going to another topic, if we can synthesize the similarities which we have analyzed, add up the partial results which we have obtained, and reunite, tie up and weave the loose central threads of the tapestry, to give an impression of the whole.

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Around a verse of the Qur'an, in which a marvelous journey of Muhammad to the regions of the afterlife, popular imagination forged, by way of the traditionists, a multitude of redactions of said religious legend, in which is described in great detail the stages and episodes of that journey in its two principal parts: the visit to Hell and the ascension to Paradise. All these redactions had been circulating in the lands of Islam since the 9<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. Some of them, earlier than the 9<sup>th</sup> century, offer, the same as Dante in the Divina Commedia, the two parts of the legend, id est, the nocturnal visit to Hell and the ascension to Paradise, fused into a single dramatic whole.

Muhammad, protagonist of the journey, is, in nearly all said redactions, is the supposed author of the legend, the one who narrates the action and describes the surroundings in which it occurs, the same as Dante. Both journeys commence at night, when the protagonist has awakened from a deep sleep. Before arriving in Hell, a wolf and a lion bar Dante's way, a literary imitation of the Muslim journey, as are the panther, lion and she-wolf who also assail Dante at the beginning of the journey. Jayta'ur, poet of the Jinn, whom the Muslim traveler encounters in a leafy garden, between Heaven and Hell, place of the Jinn, is the obvious parallel to Virgil, the classical Roman poet (though Virgil was quite proud of his very non-Roman, Celtic ancestry), who leads Dante to the garden of limbo, in which dwell the heroes and wise men of pre-Christian antiquity. Virgil offers to become Dante's guide, by order of Heaven, as Gabriel in relation to Muhammad; and in both cases they answer to the curiosity of the pilgrim.

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The vicinity of Hell is announced in both legends by identical signs: chaotic tumult and violent bursts of flame. In both legends, severe and ill-humored guards block the path of the traveler in the gates of the city of pain; but the guide calms their anger by invoking the orders from Heaven, and the gates open. The scene in which Muhammad is pursued by a demon with a fiery pitchfork at the very beginning of the nocturnal journey, is clearly analogous to the scene from Dante's Inferno, in which Dante, reaching the fifth trench of the fourth circle, is pursued by a demon, leading a gaggle of minions armed with tridents; Virgil restores peace, causing the hellish furor to cease with imperative phrases, as Gabriel quenches the fire of the incandescent pitchfork by way of a prayer which he teaches to Muhammad.

The architecture of Dante's Inferno is merely a faithful copy of that of the Muslim legend in its general outlines: both coincide in being an inverted cone, forming a series of circular terraces, steps or layers, which gradually descend to the center of the earth, and each one of which is the prison of a certain category of sinners; the lower the level, the more serious the sin and the greater is the pain and suffering; each level is in its turn subdivided in other layers, which correspond to the various subcategories of sinners. One also finds a similar moral structure in both Hells, as between the sins and their punishment there is always a law of correlation, inspired by analogy or by counterposition; the placement of the two Hells is the same: under the city of Jerusalem.

Nor is there any lack of close analogies between the torments of the two Hells: in the various redactions of the Muslim legend we find adulterers violently subjected to a hurricane of fire, the same as in Dante's Inferno; the first level of the Muslim Hell is described in exactly the same way as the city of Dite in Dante's Inferno: an ocean of fire in which are

innumerable fiery tombs; the usurers in both versions of Hell swim in lake of blood, vainly attempting to

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reach the shore, from whence demons force them to submerge by throwing fiery stones at them (I am reminded of the Russian proverb: "In the afterlife, the usurers will count red hot coins with their bare hands."); the gluttons and thieves in Dante's Inferno are tortured in various levels by terrible serpents, as are the tyrants, thieves and usurers in the Muslim Hell; the raging thirst which torments the fraudulent ones in Dante's Inferno, serves to torment the drunkards, and the other fraudulents with swollen bellies have their parallel in the analogous torment of the Islamic legend. Graffolino d'Arezzo and Capochio of Siena, scratching with their own finger nails the leprosy which covers them, is the punishment meted out to slanderers in the Islamic legend; the swindlers are held by hellish tridents in a laje of pitch, the same as bad children when they ask for mercy from the demons in the lake of fire in which they are submerged; finally, the terrible punishment described in Dante's Inferno, in which the heretics are condemned to be eternally stabbed by demons, but immediately resuscitated to be stabbed again, which is the same punishment meted out to murderers in the Muslim Hell.

The Muslim traveler, in the footsteps of his guide and animated by his exhortations, painfully climbs the steep ramp of the vertical mountain, the same as Dante, encouraged by Virgil, climbs the mountain of Purgatory; allegorical visions are equally abundant in both legends, and, at times they coincide in both the symbolic image and its meaning: thus, for example, the woman who, in spite of her terrible ugliness, attempts to seduce Dante in the fourth circle of Purgatory, is almost exactly the same as the old and ugly woman who tempts Muhammad when he begins his nocturnal journey, and even more important: Gabriel and Virgil interpret the vision in the same way, id est, as symbol of the false attractions of worldly happiness. A river separates Purgatory from Paradise in both legends, and both travelers drink of its waters before continuing their journey. Nor is this all: in order to escape purified

from the pit of Hell, and thus be able to begin the ascent to Paradise, Dante submits to a triple

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purification: on leaving Hell, Virgil, advised by Cato, washes Dante's face with his own hands, thus enabling Dante's face to recover its natural color lost by being covered by the residue of the air of Hell; on leaving Purgatory, Matilda and Tacio are submerged successively in the waters of the rivers Lethe and Eunoe, which erase the memory of sin and renew the supernatural forces. This same triple ablution purifies the souls in the Muslim legend: before reaching Heaven, successively submerged in the waters which irrigate the Garden of Abraham. In order to whiten their faces and purify their souls of all sin. At the entrance to Paradise, the Muslim traveler encounters a beautiful girl whom God has destined to be his personal servant; she greets him in a friendly manner, and with him goes through the smiling gardens, until, on the banks of a tranquil river, there appears a group of very beautiful *houris*, who accompany the beloved of the poet Imru'-l-Qays. Likewise Dante, at the entrance to the earthly paradise, encounters the beautiful Matilda, who responds affably to his questions and with him walks through the flowery meadows, until on the banks of a river Dante is surprised by a marvellous procession of young girls and old men, who are the heralds of Beatrice, the sweet beloved of the Florentine poet, who has descended from Heaven to greet him.

The architecture of the heavenly spheres, by which the ascension is verified, is also identical in both legends, as both were inspired by the astronomy of Ptolemy; in the nine heavens the travelers encounter the souls of the blessed, distributed according to their respective merits; but at the center is the ultimate sphere, where at last they are reunited; the names of the nine spheres are, in some cases, the same, *id est*, the names of the respective planets. At times, the same moral structure reigns in the two Heavens, the Muslim Heaven and that of Dante, demonstrated by a close relations between each sphere and a certain virtue, proper to the souls who there reside.

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The portrait of Heaven in some redactions of the Muslim legend reveals the same spiritual character, exempt from all crass materialism, which has immortalized Dante's *Paradiso*: color, light and music, luminous and acoustic phenomena, are the only descriptive elements which appear to both travelers, the Christian and the Muslim, to suggest to the reader the supernatural ideal of the blessed life. At each new stage in the ascension, both travelers are overwhelmed by the progressively greater brilliance of each sphere, they believe themselves to be blinded, and instinctively cover their eyes with their hands; but their respective guides, Gabriel or Beatrice, comfort them and God sharpens their vision and at last they are able to easily contemplate the brilliance of the new light. The impossibility of describing what they see is a topic common to both travelers. Both equally ascend flying through the air, led by their respective guide, and the velocity of their flight both compare to the wind and a crossbow bolt. To both guides is attributed an equally multiple function: not only do they lead and comfort the pilgrim at each stage, but they also instruct him, satisfying his curiosity, pray to God for him, and they invite him to be grateful for the great favor which God has bestowed upon them. Thus, as St. Bernard takes the place of Beatrice as Dante's guide when the last stages of the ascension are achieved, also Gabriel abandons Muhammad near the Throne of God.

In each of the astronomical heavens and in the various mansions to which the Muslim traveler ascends, he encounters some of the Biblical prophets, not alone, but surrounded by a multitude of souls that in this world followed the doctrines of their respective prophet, and to whose teachings they continue to listen in Heaven; besides the prophets, Muhammad encounters other Biblical and Muslim people, and in a literary imitation of the Islamic legend, a vast number of men and women of various conditions, social class, beliefs and professions, although mainly literatos famous in

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the history of Islam, even some known personally to the traveler, appear grouped in circles. This same wealth of episodic persons, so much in evidence in the Divina Commedia, is also visible in said literary imitation of the Muslim ascension, in both Heaven and Hell, and both travelers use the same method to introduce a new personage; asking about him to those with whom he is conversing, or appearing without warning and without being recognized, until the guide or the circumstances inform him as to name and deeds. With all the souls, in Hell and Heaven, both travelers converse equally, concerning theological problems, literary topics, or happenings of the life of this world. The same generous criterion appears to inspire the Florentine poet and the Muslim traveler, in conversing with the souls of both mansions of the afterlife, although at times they reveal a professional sympathy or antipathy, to save or condemn; and equally give free reign to their sentiments of joy, compassion, irony and blood thirsty ridicule, before the spectacle of rewards and punishments.

Besides these general indications in which Dante's ascension and the Muslim ascension coincide, we must add various episodes of specific paradisaical visions, in which the resemblances at times become identities.

In the sphere of Jupiter, Dante sees a gigantic eagle, formed by an agroupation of myriads of splendid angels of light, which only consist of wings and faces; this angelic monster moves its wings, while intoning Biblical cantos exhorting the practice of justice, and later rests. Muhammad sees in the sky a gigantic angel in form of a rooster, which moves its wings while singing religious hymns exhorting prayer, and later rests; he sees other angels, each one of which is a monstrous giant. formed by an amalgam of infinite faces and wings, shining with light and singing with their infinite tongues. Combining these two visions into one spontaneously suggests Dante's eagle.



Dante sees in the sphere of Saturn a golden staircase, which rises to the highest sphere; on its steps descend the blessed spirits; Beatrice invites him to climb it, and in less time than it takes one to remove a finger from the fire, Dante climbs with his guide. Muhammad sees a staircase which ascends from Jerusalem to the highest point of Heaven; on its steps of gold, silver and emerald climb the blessed souls; angels flank it; guided by Gabriel, they climb it in less time than an opening and closing of the eyes.

In Heaven Dante meets Picarda of Florence and Cunizza of Padua, women who were contemporaries of Dante and well known to him, as the Muslim traveler (in a literary imitation of the ascension of Muhammad) also finds two ladies who are his contemporaries and well known to him: Hamdua of Aleppo and Tawfiq of Baghdad. In both cases the ladies give their names and birthplaces to the respective pilgrim, who is struck with admiration for their splendid beauty or laments of his unhappy married life in the material world.

The same Muslim traveler finds, like Dante, Adam in Heaven and converses with him concerning the primitive language spoken in Paradise.

The examination concerning the theological virtues, to which Dante is subjected when he reaches the eighth heavenly sphere, is analogous to that to which the blessed soul is subjected when it ascends to Paradise (in some allegorical adaptations of the *Mi'raj*) being also questioned concerning the faith and the religious virtues.

The angels who fly over the Mystical Rose of Dante's *Paradiso* have faces of living flame and the rest of the body whiter than snow. In his ascension, Muhammad encounters an angel, of whom one half is fire and the other half snow.

From the top of the astronomical heavens, both travelers, Dante and Muhammad, are both invited by their guides, Beatrice and Gabriel, to contemplate the created world which they have left behind, and both are astounded by the smallness of its proportions.

The final apotheosis of both ascensions is the same; the traveler, now lifted to the presence of God, describes the beatific vision in the following terms: God is the focal point of a vivid light, surrounded by nine concentric circles formed by dense files of innumerable angelic spirits who emanate rays of light; one of the circular files nearest the focal point is that of the Cherubim; each circle surrounds that immediately below it, and all nine wheel without ceasing in a circular movement around the divine focal point. Twice does the traveler contemplate the spectacle of this grandiose apotheosis; once from a distance, before arriving at the end of the journey and again in front of the Throne of God. The phenomena which the beatific vision inspires in the spirit of the traveler are also identical in both ascensions: first, the traveler is so stunned by the brilliance of the divine focal point that he believes himself to be blinded; but, little by little, his vision is sharpened and cleared, and he becomes able to see even the interior of the focal point, and contemplates it with a fixed and stable gaze; he feels incapable of describing what he sees; he only recalls that he felt ecstasy or spiritual spoor, preceded by intense happiness.

However the resemblances between the two journeys, Dante's and the Muslim, are not limited to the decisive results which we have just summarized; besides the general outline of the dramatic action, without narrating the many analogous episodes, both legends are animated by the same spirit.

The alegorical-moral sense with which Dante wished to infuse the Divina Commedia, had been previously used by the Sufis or Islamic mystics, and in particular by the Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi; they, in effect, utilized the dramatic action, as did Dante, supposed real and historical, of the journey of one man, Muhammad, through the regions of the afterlife and his ascension to Heaven, in order to symbolize the moral regeneration of human souls by faith and theological virtues. For Dante as for Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, the journey is a symbol of the moral life of men, placed on earth by God so that they may earn their final reward,

the sum of all happiness, which consists in the beatific vision, a goal which cannot be reached without theology as guide, because natural reason can only guide us through the first stages of the journey, the symbol of intellectual and moral virtue, not to the sublime mansions of Paradise, symbol of the theological virtues, inaccessible without illuminating grace. Thus, for Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and for other authors of allegorical or literary imitations of Muhammad's ascension, the pilgrim, who is the protagonist, now is neither Muhammad, nor even a saint, but a simple man, sinner and imperfect as is Dante, and, at times, like Dante, a philosopher, theologian and poet. The episodeic persons are also now, even in Heaven, real and historic personages, sinners and even repentant infidels; and here the Muslim journey fuses in itself, as does the Divina Commedia, these two characters, in appearance antithetical: idealist allegory and profoundly human realism.

The profoundly obscure, enigmatic style, full of oracles and mysteries, characterizes both Dante's poem and the allegorical ascension of the Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, and both authors reveal the same pride of encyclopedic erudition, putting in the mouths of their episodic personages, especially the guides, long and involved discourses on topics of philosophy, theology, astronomy, etc. If to all this we add the fact that the Muslim ascension, the same as that of Dante, and, obviously, earlier than Dante's version, has innumerable commentarists who attempt to interpret the multiple senses of even the smallest elements, and if, besides, we see that some of the literary imitations of the Islamic legend (e.g., that of the poet Abu-l-'Ala) are written with an obvious intention of leaving to posterity a masterwork of literary art, elaborated, known as the Divina Commedia, with all the delicacies and refinements of language, in a truly poetic style and overcoming in their rhymed prose the technical difficulties of the form, as arduous and possibly greater than those offered by Dante, we end by inferring, of this accumulation of analogies and coincidences, the following facts, undeniable from any point of view.

Six hundred years at least before Dante Alighieri conceived his marvelous poem, there already existed in the lands of Islam a religious legend in which is narrated the journey of Muhammad, founder of this religion, through the regions of the afterlife. Throughout the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, the Muslim traditionists, theologians, commentarists, mystics, philosophers and poets slowly worked over the fundamental base of this legend, producing a great number of amplified narrations, allegorical adaptations and literary imitations. Taken as a whole, all these various redactions of the Islamic legend, compared with the Divina Commedia, present to us a multitude of coincidences, of similarity and even identity, in the general architecture of Hell and Paradise, in the moral structure, in the description of punishments and rewards, in the general outlines of the dramatic action, in the episodes and incidents of the journey, in the allegorical meaning, in the roles assigned to the protagonist and the episodic personages, and, at last, in the artistic merit of both literary works." (339)

"The Muslim Hell is not given a precise topographic description in the Qur'an; but the Muslim traditions agree with Dante in localizing it under the earth's mantle. In these traditions, Hell is a black and dark abyss or concavity in the interior of the earth, so deep that a stone or ball of lead, dropped from its mouth, would take seventy years to reach the bottom. The emplacement of its entrance, as in the Divina Commedia, is placed in the territory of Jerusalem, and, more precisely, alongside the eastern wall of Solomon's temple. Within the unity of the architectonic concept found in the Divina Commedia, the earthly Jerusalem, mouth of Hell, coincides in a vertical line with the Heavenly Jerusalem. This same correspondence or vertical projection is found in the architecture of the Muslim Paradise.

One of the Muslim mystical theologians who lived before Dante is the Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, whose allegorical ascensions, as we have seen, offer such suggestive similarities with the Divina Commedia. In his monumental and masterful work Futuhāt al-Makkiyya he devotes long chapters to the description of Hell, as related in the Qur'an and the *hadiths*, but, besides this, these are manifested in ecstatic revelations, as they are by the mystics. His description coincides in general outline with traditional sources in conceiving Hell as a well or abyss of fabulous depth, made up of seven steps, staircases or circular levels, whose names were known before Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's time; but the innovations introduced by the Murciano Sufi are very interesting. Each of the seven levels is destined for a category of sinners, whose condemnation is the result of a certain sin, committed with one of the seven bodily organs, id est, from top to bottom: eyes, ears, tongue, hands, stomach, sexual organ and feet. We see, then, this division, like Dante's, an ethical and not a dogmatic criterion, which we find in the earliest Muslim traditions. However, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi blends both criteria, since he subdivides each level or circle in four quadrants, each one destined to these four categories of dogmatic sinners: the unbelievers, the polytheists, the atheists and the hypocrites in the faith. Also, each circle is subdivided, from another point of view, in two halves or semicircles: one for the sinners of external sins (vision, hearing, etc.), or of a completed action; another, for the internal sins of thought or desire. Finally, each circle encloses one hundred secondary steps or sublevels, subdivided in mansions, cells or huts, which in total are equal in number to the heavenly mansions. However, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi does not limit himself to this; fond of geometrical schemes as a means of illustrating the obscure and metaphysical, we must not omit this resource when we attempt to visualize his description of Hell. This plan is circular, exactly like Dante's.

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi says that the Spanish Sufis of the school of Ibn Masarra of Almeria, especially Ibn Qasiyy, the famous chief of the *muridin*, imagined the external aspect of Hell as being like the figure of a serpent."(347)

Though the doctrine of Purgatory is often thought to be exclusively Catholic, in Islam we find something which resembles it, as Fr. Asin noted:

"The Islamic Purgatory is portrayed as a place next to Hell, but distinct from it and separated from it. Thus, as Hell properly speaking is localized in the interior of the earth, Purgatory is described as being on the exterior of the earth. Here is a *hadith* which clearly indicates this topographical feature, at the same times offering a vision of the state of temporal expiation of souls in the Islamic Purgatory.

'There are two Hells or *Gehennas* or fires: one is called interior and the other exterior. From the interior, no one escapes. The exterior, by contrast, is the place in which God punishes the faithful sinners, during the time of their purification. Later, God permits the angels, prophets and saints to intercede for them and raise them, now carbonized, from the fire. Later they take them to the banks of the River of Paradise, called the River of Life; sprinkled with the waters of the River of Life, they are reborn like a seed in moist earth. After their bodies have been restored, they are told: "Enter in the river." And they enter and drink of its waters and wash and leave the water. At last they are told: "Enter into Heaven". In Heaven, they are stigmatized as "the Hellish ones", until they ask God that the stigma be removed, and God orders that it be erased. In exchange is inscribed on their foreheads "Freed by God".'

In the final episode of Dante's Purgatorio, id est, his entrance into the Garden of Earthly Paradise, after the stigma of guilt has been erased, and after his double ablution in the two rivers, Lethe and Eunoë, offers us the Muslim legend with its typical feature, analogous to those we have seen in some of the redactions of the *Mi'raj*. However, leaving aside these episodic analogies, we call attention to what this legend conveys in regards to the topography of Purgatory, described as outside Hell. Other legends of the same cycle call this the place of expiation a gate or level, but adding that it is the first, id est, the highest, the superior, of all the mansions which serve to punish the souls of sinners.

However, all these features, though consistent with Dante's topography, are yet vague and imprecise; we limit ourselves to saying that the Islamic Purgatory is, like that of Dante, a place that is outside Hell and above Hell.

The Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, in his Futuhāt al-Makkiyya, gives a gloss on the words attributed to Muhammad on this point, saying, in effect, that

"The souls who do not enter into Hell will be detained in the *Sirat*, where will be taken a strict account of their guilt and where they will be punished". He adds: "The *Sirat* rises from the earth in a straight line up to the edge of the sphere of the stars, and at its end is a meadow, which extends to the outside of the walls of the Heavenly Paradise. Said meadow, called the Paradise of Delights, is where the souls of men first enter."

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi could not have more clearly described the topographical features of Dante's Mountain of Purgatory, which rises in a straight line from the earth to touch the celestial sphere, and on whose is found the Garden of Earthly Paradise, the vestibule of Paradise." (348)

Another Hispano-Muslim author, Shakir ibn Muslim of Orihuela (near Alicante), had interesting things to say concerning the earthly paradise, vestibule of Heaven, as Fr. Asin notes:

"A simple glance at the outlines of these legends suggests, without foing into detail, a close relation with Dante's description of the earthly paradise; for this reason, it would be a good idea to detain ourselves a bit more in its study. For this purpose, nothing serves us better than a redaction of these legends which, besides being the richest in picturesque details, has the double attraction of being the most literary, being written in rhymed prose, and having been written by an Hispano-Muslim author, born in Orihuela, called Shakir ibn Muslim, who flourished in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a century before the time of the Florentine poet. It is evident that this redaction has a remote origin in another work, this one far more sober and very ancient, attributed to Ali ibn Abbas and whose text is given as a commentary on a vers of the Qur'an:

'The first which is offered to those who are going to enter into the earthly paradise are two springs; from one of which they drink and God causes to disappear from their hearts all anger and hate; they then immerse themselves in the other spring and bathe in it, and their skin becomes bright and their faces become pure and in them is recognized the beautiful splendor of happiness.'

From these brief lines Shakir ibn Muslim of Orihuela was inspired to write a considerable tome, whose most interesting passages we translate below, since its great length does not allow us to include it in its entirety:



'Thus, when the souls have passed over the *sirat* (id est, the path of Purgatory) and have followed it to its full extent, and have left behind Hell, they enter into the plain which is the road to Paradise, accompanied by angels of divine mercy who guide them and encourage them to continue with canticles of praise and glory to God, until they are led to Him, giving them hope of salvation and congratulating them for their victory. When they are near and about to enter Paradise, they begin to feel a soft and subtle zephyr, fresh and aromatic, the zephyr which reigns here, which brings rest to their souls and makes them forget all the pains which they have suffered in the various parts of judgement and the unfortunate ones who had to endure in their diverse places. Rising to the gate of Paradise are two large trees: nowhere in the world can one encounter anything like the aroma of these trees, like their shady branches, like the perfection, beauty and elegance of their limbs, the beauty of their flowers, the perfume of their fruits, the luster of their leaves, the sweet harmony of the birds which warble in their branches, the fresh breeze which one breathes in their shade. At the foot of each of these trees flows a rill of sweet waters, fresh and pure, which form two green rivers, similar to crystal in transparency, whose bed is of clean rocks which are pearls and rubies, more translucent than beryl, fresher than melted snow, whiter than milk. On their two banks spread gardens and woodlands filled with flowering trees, laden with fruit and populated with song birds. The souls are led to those two rivers and they submerge themselves twice in the current: once in which they wash and clean themselves completely of bodily blemishes, of the black spots which they retain from the fire of Purgatory, and return to their bodies the integrity, the luster and brilliance of health and joy to their faces; later they drink of the water of that spring a drink which refreshes their vital organs and their breasts, causing to disappear all anger and hate, all envy, all the painful worries of their past life; later, they are led to the other spring and in it they wash themselves once again; they leave the water later and in the shade of

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those two trees they rest and placidly repose. The

angels, on God's command, cry: "Oh friends of God! These two trees are not your mansion and abode; with God you will have your fixed abode. Arise, then, and continue the march: thus you will arrive at the abode of perpetual rest and happiness. And so they arise and march forward along the garden paths, preceded by the voice of the herald angel who guides them from garden to garden, until there comes to greet them a cavalcade of servants mounted on swift steeds richly caparisoned, who greet them and congratulate them for their salvation and triumph. Welcome, oh friends of God; enter in your mansion, covered with glory and honor! Thus they enter, here being that in a tabernacle they are offered a maiden, superior in beauty to all others, dressed in various colors. and whose face radiates with such a living splendor, that the brilliance of her beauty, the perfection and grace which God has granted her and the splendid robe which she wears dazzles the eyes and bears away the hearts. If God had not granted to the blessed ones extraordinary vision, they would certainly have been blinded and struck dumb by the intensity of the light which they see in her, and by the splendor which radiates from her. The voice of a herald angel says to the blessed ones: "Oh friend of God! This is your beloved spouse and your dear and well-beloved wife; this is the lady of the nymphs, the chaste virgin, hidden from the gaze of strangers." And when she sees him, being unable to control the impulse of her love, runs swiftly to meet him and saying to him: "Oh friend of God! For what a long time have I wished to meet you!"

We will examine each of the principal points of resemblance which the above Islamic legend presents with the episode of the earthly paradise in the Divina Commedia. The topographic elements, for example, reveal their identity immediately: the garden is described with the same rhetorical elements of flowers, aromatic atmosphere, harmonies of song birds, sweet climate, subtle zephyr, etc.; the rivers for the ablutions of the souls are two, neither more nor less, while in the Biblical paradise they are four; the garden, finally,

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is contiguous with or very near the path of Purgatory and serves as the last station of it, as the definitive purification from all blemishes of sin, so that the soul may at last enter pure into glory. To the topographical

features are added the same succession of scenes: the soul is also bathed in two rivers, of whose waters it also drinks; the effects of the double ablution are analogous: to erase all physical and moral trace of sin and reanimate the spirit; on leaving the purifying bath, the soul reposes at the foot of a tree. Finally comes the nuptial procession which precedes the spouse of the blessed, their meeting and the scene of mutual recognition.

Until now, in spite of long and painstaking searches, no one has found precedents that explain this last scene. This scene is, however, in reality and according to the judgement of Dante scholars, the moment of all the Divina Commedia, by which is revealed all the solutions of the enigmas which precede it, and one is able to glimpse that which is coming; without this scene, of the encounter of Dante and Beatrice, neither the descent into Hell nor the ascension to Paradise can be adequately explained. In spite of this, one must recognize that this scene contains little of the Christian spirit; it is unique, strange and inexplicable within the ambience of austerity, asceticism, and horror of sexual love which characterizes the ecclesiastical literature in general, and especially in the Middle Ages. To put, as the crowning episode of a journey in the afterlife the encounter of the traveler with his fiancée, who has died before him, is a poetic resource for which one looks in vain in the Christian literature before the time of Dante and his Divina Commedia. Concerning this unique resource, the Florentine poet is on safe ground: this glorification of Beatrice, the goal of all the anxieties of the redaction of his poem, was for Dante such an exceptional novelty, so without precedent in classical and Christian literatures, that before doing it, when he was yet planning the Divina Commedia, while redacting La Vita Nuova he said, referring to the poem which was already taking form in his mind: I hope to speak of her that which has never before been said by

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anyone". We know very well that this glorification of Beatrice has its immediate antecedents in the chivalrous spirit of the Provençal troubadours, (of whom Dante was a disciple, as we have seen) and the Italian poets of the

*dolce stil nuovo* (sweet new style), in the theories of spiritual and romantic love for women which inspired the literary current, and in that hybrid mix of mysticism and sensuality which Dante's temperament, as a poet and as a man, is revealed to us. However, all these explanations which have been given and which no one denies, are, if you wish, the key to the psychology of the internal spiritual process, but leave unexplained the specific enigma of the external literary form, in relation to which that psychology is revealed in the episode of the earthly paradise. This, without entering into the remote origins of the *dolce stil nuovo*, without analyzing the extra-Christian elements which might have influenced in its gestation and which as yet have not been so well studied as they should be; without alluding to the problem of romantic love in Islam, which before the beginnings of the trobadoresque literature in Occitania had for several centuries inspired Arabic and Persian poets and influenced in the subtle analyses of the Muslim Mystics, or Sufis. Because, even if one disdains all these aspects of the problem, the concrete fact which inevitably comes to mind is that an episode so typical as that of the encounter between Beatrice and Dante, whose character has little about it that is Christian and which has no models in similar Christian legends (though the vision of St. Cyril of Salonika [or *Thessaloniki*] of the *Daena*, which had such an impact on the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria, Russia and Ukraine, bears at least a distant resemblance to it) has its parallels, of a most obvious analogy, in those Islamic traditions which we have just translated (there is no doubt whatever that the Islamic traditions to which Fr. Asin refers bear a far closer resemblance to Dante's encounter with Beatrice in the Divina Commedia than does St. Cyril of Salonika's vision of the *Hagia Sophia* or *Daena*). Nor is the above tradition an isolated case, rather, as we have said, it is the final result of the

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evolution of a series of legends which have as their subject matter the entrance of the blessed souls into Paradise. The Muslim Paradise, as we shall see later, is not always the sensual and crass paradise which the letter of the Qur'an and many Islamic traditions

indicate, and which have crystallized in the opinion current among Christian apologists and the common opinion of Europe. Besides the above descriptions, there are a great many others, no doubt the product of a more spiritual imagination and of the purer and more delicate aspirations of the Muslim ascetics, in which the sexual love of the Muslim Paradise becomes Platonic love, in effect a serene and sweet friendship, inspired by supernatural motives. Because, apart from the *houris* of limpid eyes, of the pretty maids, of the legitimate wives that the blessed one may have had on earth and who in Paradise are his pleasure and delight, the asceticomystical writers speak, in their legends of the afterlife, of a bride, of a fiancée of the blessed one, who in Heaven awaits her beloved, who from the heights follows anxiously the path of his moral life, his steps on the path of virtue, who inspires in his dreams holy ideas and encouraging suggestions so that he does not cease in the struggle until the final triumph which will eternally unite them in Paradise, and which, at last, when death leads the blessed one to Paradise, she comes out to meet him and to present herself, beautiful and enchanting, but not as a gross instrument of carnal pleasure, but as a friend of the soul, as a moral redeemer, as the *Hagia Sophia* or *Daena* who inspired his good works, who congratulates him for his virtues and reprimands him for his failings, if at any time he has forgotten her for his earthly loves. This Islamic portrait of the bride or fiancée of the soul is - as one can clearly see - analogous to Beatrice as portrayed by Dante in the Divina Commedia (but far less analogous to the *Daena* of the vision of St. Cyril of Salonika). For this reason, it would be useful for us to analyze some of the Muslim legends which bring to mind Dante's portrait of Beatrice in the Divina Commedia.

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Perhaps the most interesting of these legends which has survived is that of Samarqandi (10<sup>th</sup> century AD), when he describes the entrance of the blessed soul into Paradise in his Qurrat al-'uyun:

'The angel Ridwan, the introducer of souls, leads

the soul to the tabernacle in which his bride awaits, who greets him with these words: 'Oh friend of God, for how long a time have I waited to meet you! Blessed be the Lord who has united us! God created me for you and engraved your name on my heart. When you serve God in the world, praying and fasting day and night, God orders His angel Ridwan to bear me on his wings so that I may contemplate your good works from the celestial heights, though you are not aware of it. When in the dark of night you say your prayers, that pleases me and I say to you: serve and you will be served! Sow and you will reap! He who seeks will in the end find! He who wastes his time, he will repent of it! God has raised your level of glory, because your virtues have been pleasing in His eyes, and we will be united in Paradise, after you have lived for much time in the world, consecrated to divine service. In exchange, if He finds you negligent and lukewarm, it will make me sad.'

Another description, of the same legendary cycle, introduces in the discourse of the heavenly bride Dante's theme of the reproaches of the heavenly bride to the soul of the blessed because of his earthly loves. This is of a very early date, as it is attributed to the traditionist Ibn Wahb (8<sup>th</sup> century Ad). Here it is:

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'To a woman, one of the women of Paradise, you will say to her while she is in Heaven: - Do you wish that we would permit you to see your earthly husband? She will answer: - Yes. And if you open the curtains and the doors which separate her from him, so that she sees him and recognizes him and speaks to him face to face, since she has been awaiting the arrival of her husband in Paradise, as a woman on earth desires to reunite with

her absent husband. Perhaps between him and his earthly wife there have been quarrels and resentments which are common among married couples, then the heavenly bride will be angry with him, and resentful because of it, and will say: Woe to you, unfortunate one! Why do you not abandon those loves associated with mine, which loves only last for a few nights?'

It is sufficient to compare the above Islamic descriptions with the scenes in the Divina Commedia in which Beatrice comes down from Heaven to serve as moral support for her beloved poet, for the analogy to be evident. Beatrice sees, from the heights of glory, that Dante is in peril, that his eternal salvation is insecure, that, for this reason, he cannot become reunited with her in Heaven; and, motivated only by her love, she descends from the Heavenly Throne in which she reposes and goes to request Virgil to aid the Florentine poet, guiding his steps to the straight path of penance which leads to Heaven.

We now turn from the above scene, which is a sort of prologue to the Divina Commedia, the scene in the earthly paradise in which Beatrice comes to meet Dante and reproach him for his moral failings, for his earthly loves, for the little notice he gave to her holy suggestions. In both scenes one notes the basic features of the two Islamic legends; the inspiration of good ideas, suggested by the heavenly bride to the blessed one in the form of dreams, and the reproach for infidelity in affection.

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Visions in dreams, inspired by this cycle of legends, are abundant in Islamic literature: in all cases they appear to the subject as a beautiful and angelic maiden who inspires in them holy ideas and inspires them to serve God, promising to meet in the afterlife. Here are a few:

❖ 1.) Attributed to Ali al-Talhi, earlier than the

10<sup>th</sup> century AD:

`I saw in a dream a woman who did not resemble any of the women of this world, and I said to her:- "Who are you?" She answered: "a *hour*i." I said to her:- "I ask you to be my wife." She answered:- "Ask for my hand from my Lord and show me the dowry." I said to her:- "And what is the dowry?" She replied:- "That you keep your soul free of all blemish."

- ❖ 2.) Attributed to Ahmad ibn Abu-l-Hawari, 9<sup>th</sup> century AD:

`In a dream I saw a maiden of the most beautiful that may be imagined and whose face shone with celestial splendor. I said to her:- "From whence comes the glow of your face?" She answered:- "Do you recall that night in which you wept with devotion?" "yes", I answered. The she added:\_ "I took your tears, and with them washed my face and since then it glows as you see."

- ❖ 3.) Attributed to Utba al-Ghulam, earlier than the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD:

`I saw in a dream a *hour*i with a beautiful figure, who said to me:- "I love you with passion and hope that you do nothing which might be the cause of separation." I replied:- "Three times I have abandoned all the things of this world and I do not intend to ever possess them again, so that I may meet you in Heaven."

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- ❖ 4.) Attributed to Sulayman al-Darani, great ascetic of the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD:

`I saw in a dream a beautiful maiden, splendid as the moon, dressed in a robe which appeared to be made of light. She said:-"You sleep, of joy of my hearts! Do you not know that I am your wife? Arise, for your prayer is light and your Lord deserves



gratitude! And, letting out a cry, she left, flying through the air.'

Another cycle of pious legends, related to those given above, has as its protagonists, not the ascetics, but the martyrs of the holy war, a profession of intermingled soldiery and asceticism, equivalent in Islam to the military orders which later arose in Christian Europe for the same purpose of defending the borders against the enemies of religion. Below are analyzed some of these legends, in which the theme of the encounter with the celestial bride, alone or accompanied by maidens and servants, is repeated with features analogous to the examples in the Divina Commedia, in the description of the scene, and in the allusions to the earthly loves of the blessed.

- 1.) Narrated by Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zayd, 8<sup>th</sup> century AD:

'A quite young man, moved by a spiritual lecture, sold all his rich patrimony, distributed it to the poor, retaining only that necessary to buy a horse and arms, and went to the holy war. During said war, he fasted by day and passed the nights in holy vigil of prayer, while he watched the horses of his sleeping comrades. One day he began to cry like a madman:- "Ah! How I wish to meet the virgin of the gazelle eyes! His comrades asked him what was the meaning of those cries, and then he told them that in a dream he had seen that his soul was in a beautiful garden by a river, on whose banks were beautiful maidens, dressed in costly tunics, who welcomed him saying:- "This is the husband of the virgin of the gazelle eyes and we are her maidservants." I kept

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walking and found another river with other maidens who repeated what was said before. At last, a few steps further, I encountered a celestial virgin seated on a golden throne decorated with precious stones and within a rich tabernacle, carved from a concave pearl. When she saw me and recognized me as her fiancé, she greeted me and congratulated me for having come to her, although adding that her arrival

was not definitive. Now, the spirit of life yet animates you; but this night you will break your fast in my company. When he heard these words, the young man awoke.'

- 2.) Legend referred to by Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak, 8<sup>th</sup> century AD:

'A soldier, near death in the holy war, told of this vision which he had when he was wounded on the battle field: "It seemed as though I was being led to a mansion made of rubies, where I encountered a woman who enchanted me with her glow, beauty and splendor. She gave me a welcome and added that she was not like so-and-so, my wife, who did this and that with me. She then related point by point that which my wife had done with me in the world. I began to laugh, extended my hands toward her, and she detained me, saying: "Tomorrow afternoon you will come to me, and I began to weep because she did not let me come closer. The legend ends by saying that the next day that soldier was killed in action.

- 3.) Analogous to the anterior, told by Ismail ibn Hayyam, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. In it, another soldier martyr in the holy war speaks of a vision he had while unconscious:

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'I was led by a man who took me by the hand up to the mansion of the celestial virgin, by way of paradisaical castles inhabited by slender maidens, whose beauty beggared description. At last there appeared a beautiful woman who said that she was my wife and, walking towards me, began to me and reminded me of the women of the world in such detail as if she had read it in a

book.'

Summarizing the results of this long comparison between the Islamic legends and the episode in the Divina Commedia concerning the earthly paradise, we find the following analogies:

❖ 1.) In both literatures is imagined, on the one hand, the paradisaical scene of a splendid garden on top of a very high mountain, which rises from the surface of the earth, in the middle of an island in the Ocean. On the other hand, a garden at the gates of the Heavenly Paradise or the Theological Paradise is described in other Islamic legends as the vestibule of glory and the goal or end of the *Sirat* or Purgatory, and in this garden the purification of souls is finished by means of ablution in the waters of two rivers; finally, in this same garden the soul is greeted by the heavenly fiancée or bride, whose physical and moral portrait and even the topics of her conversations with the blessed soul present close resemblances to the portrait of Beatrice given by the Florentine poet.

❖ 2.) Now, in order to appreciate the total value of this comparison, recall that in various redactions of the legend of the *Mi'raj* or ascension of Muhammad, we see repeated with great insistence the description of a garden watered by one or by three rivers in whose waters the souls are purified before they enter Heaven. In some redactions this is called the Garden of Abraham. In Islam, therefore, there exists a triple garden of the

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afterlife, described as having analogous features: that of Abraham, equivalent to Limbo; the earthly paradise of Adam and Eve, and the Heavenly Paradise, the garden between the *Sirat* or Purgatory and the Theological Paradise. The fusion, or rather confusion among them was very easy, especially between the last two, which appear fused or identical in the Divina Commedia, without this

fused topography having any precedent in the Christian legends before the time of Dante.

- ❖ 3.) In reference to the scene of the encounter with the celestial bride, also recall that in the Risala of Abu-l-Ala al-Ma'ari, a literary imitation of the ascension of Muhammad, the supposed traveler encounters, at the entrance to the Heavenly Paradise, in a garden and on the banks of a river, a maiden destined by God to guide him and serve him, who, like Matilda in relation to Dante, greets him in a friendly manner and leads him to the presence of the beloved of the poet Imru'-l-Qays, who arrives preceded by a splendid group of maidens of great beauty.

Within the framework of the legend of the ascension, it is possible to perfectly fit all the other legends of the afterlife which we have analyzed and whose themes are so congruent with it. The idea was, in truth, suggestive and tempting for a skilled artist who, like Dante, was saturated with the classic culture and Christianity and Medieval Christian Culture, including the Provençal troubadors and the Arthurian legends, and dominating all technical resources, succeeded, in interweaving with the basic episodes of the journey of Muhammad and with scenes from other esoteric Islamic legends, all the features and allusions which the classical mythology, the art of the Provençal troubadors, the Arthurian romances (with their Celtic and Iranian base) and general Christian erudition in order to weave a definitive tapestry, like this, the earthly paradise, in which appear fused the Biblical Eden, the Greco-Latin Parnassus and the Muslim Paradise." (349)

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Fr. Asin noted:

" No one like our Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi succeeded in systematizing all the paradisaical doctrines of the earlier Sufis, harmonizing them, with data from the Qur'an and the tradition and with the neoplatonic philosophers and *Ishraqi* or Illuminationist

speculations Suhrawardi and his followers, including Ibn Masarra of Almeria. Completing it with picturesque description, product of his rich and fertile imagination, and, what for us is the most interesting, illustrating his total conception of Paradise with drawings which enable us to visualize the general outline of his vast vision."(350)

In fact, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's description of Paradise coincides with Dante's not only in general topography, but even in a great many small details, such as the location of the mansions of glory within the circles or levels of Paradise. However, without the aid of drawings and diagrams, this is very difficult to visualize or comprehend.. In any case, no one can compare the topography of Paradise according to Ibn Arabi al-Mursi with that given by Dante in the Divina Commedia and believe that the resemblances between them could be mere coincidence.

Fr. Asin makes a digression which is interesting from our point of view:

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"In all this legendary cycle, which D'Ancona summarized within the legends or visions of a political sort, is repeated an episode. Whose immediate source, though not its remote origin, is Muslim. The protagonists of these legends are the Emperors Charlemagne and Henry III and king Rudolph of Burgundy:

'Leading them to the divine tribunal to be judged, the demons place the heavy weight of the individual's

sins on one dish of the balance or scale; but, at the moment in which the dish is about to descend, a saint appears, such as St. James of Galicia or St. Denis or St. Lawrence, who place in the other dish of the balance or scale all the good works of the respective prince, the sanctuaries which he built to the Glory of God, the ornaments donated to the churches and abbeys, etc., so that the balance or scale inclines to the favorable side and the soul is freed from Hell.'

The remote Egyptian origin of the religious myth or metaphor of the balance or scale for the weighing of souls in the divine judgement is well known: in the presence of various funereal gods and forty-two judges presided over by Osiris, the heart of the dead person is weighed by the gods Horus and Anubis in a balance or scale, the god Thot taking note of the result of the weighing.

The same myth or metaphor reappears in the Persian eschatology found in the *Avesta*: at the entrance to the *Chinvat* bridge, there is a tribunal, made up of *Mithra*, god of justice, *Sraosha*, the angel of obedience, and *Rashnu Razishta*, the angel of the balance or scale, in one of whose dishes are put the good works and in the other the evil deeds. The confession of sins and the act of faith by the soul of the dead person sometimes makes the balance or scale incline toward good works.

Before Islam spread to Egypt and Persia, the myth or metaphor of the weighing of souls penetrated in Arabia, and Muhammad included it in the Qur'an, although only in one concise allusion:

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"We will establish just balances on the Day of Resurrection. No soul will be unjustly treated, although the deeds which we must judge weigh less than a grain of mustard seed."

The *hadiths* refer to this in great detail, giving picturesque details and realistic scenes, some of which are identical in content to certain Christian legends:

A Muslim is led before the Divine Judgement on the Day of Judgement; ninety-nine records, which speak of

his sins, are read, and, after the sinner has confessed his guilt, they are deposited on the left-hand dish of the balance or scale which, as is natural, descends; but, in that instant, God Himself places in the opposite dish of the balance or scale a small piece of paper on which is written the profession of faith which the sinner had said in life, and the balance or scale inclines to the other side, and the Muslim is saved. In other legends it is Muhammad and not God Himself who procures a favorable outcome for the tragedy, depositing in the right-hand dish, destined for good deeds, a small piece of paper which symbolizes the prayers said by the sinner in honor of the Prophet.

Sometimes, a work of mercy, done in favor of someone in need, is enough to incline the balance or scale in his favor. Other legends do not use the papers in which the good deeds are recorded, but rather use physical and material objects, thus giving a more concrete reality to the legend; thus, a small bag, put on the right-hand dish, compensates for a multitude of sins; in another legend, the small bag contains a fist-full of earth which the sinner dropped on the tomb of his neighbor for the salvation of his soul. The cooperation among the sinners, aiding those rich in good works to the virtuous (or deserving) poor with the loaning of merits to help incline the balance or scale with the loaning of merits to help incline the balance or scale is the topic of many other legends of this cycle, in which the poor sinner wanders among groups of souls, seeking one of his friends who will loan him for charity a virtue which he lacks and whose weight he hopes will incline the balance or scale in his favor.

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This cycle is so copious that one could fill a whole chapter with it. The scene, finally, is adorned with the necessary descriptive features: the balance or scale is imagined as having two dishes of enormous size, one of light, the other of darkness, situated on the right and the left of the Divine Throne, near, respectively, Heaven and Hell; the angel Gabriel is put in charge of the weighing, as are Horus and Anubis in the Egyptian eschatology and Rashnu Razishta in the Zoroastrian eschatology.

Not much effort is needed to understand, after 11

this, the the Egyptian and Zoroastrian Persian myths or metaphors were not the immediate source of the Christian legends of Charlemagne, Henry III and Rudolph of Burgundy. It is practically impossible that the Egyptian and Zoroastrian myths or metaphors could have reached Western Christendom by direct influence. On the other hand, once assimilated to Islam, the myth or metaphor of the balance or scale, the enigma is solved, and its influence by way of the Islamic *hadiths* is undoubtable: noting that, in effect, that in the Islamic *hadiths* one finds the same episodes as in the Christian legends, id est, the unexpected supernatural intervention which determines, with its weight on the dish of good deeds, the salvation of the soul.

This influence of Muslim dogma on the psychostasis of the Christian legends may illuminate an artistic enigma studied by Emile Mâle in his book L'arte religieux du XIII siecle en France. (351)

Says Emile Mâle:

"But the chief actor in the scene of the Judgement is the Archangel Michael, who, clothed in long, straight pleated drapery - in the 13<sup>th</sup> century he did not yet wear knightly romor - stands with the balance in his hands. Near him a trembling soul awaits the verdict, for in (one of the dishes of) the scale his good actions have been placed, in the other his sins. The Devil is present as plaintiff before the Supreme Tribunal, and performs prodigious feats of dialectic. He dares to use any means to gain his end. Convinced

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that the noble archangel, who is gazing straight before him, will not suspect his ruse, the Devil gives a push to the scales. The baseness of that grocer's trick does not affect St. Michael, who disdains to notice it, and the balance in his hand does its duty and inclines on the side of justice. Satan is defeated, and the archangel tenderly caresses the little soul."

This impressive scene, unauthorized by the Gospels, sprang from a metaphor (NOT a myth) as old as humanity. Ancient Egypt and primitive India and Persia believed that the virtues and vices would hang in the balance at the judgement of the dead, and the Fathers



of the Church used the metaphor freely, "Good and evil actions", says St. Augustine, "shall be as if hanging in the balance, and if the evil predominates the guilty shall be dragged away to Hell." And St. John Chrysostom says: "On that day our actions, our words, our thoughts will be placed in the scales, and the dip of the balance on either side will carry with it irrevocable sentence."

The metaphor, constantly used by writers and preachers in the Middle Ages, struck the popular imagination, and was realized in art."(352)

Fr. Asin Continues:

"In the porticos of the Gothic cathedrals of medieval France, St. Michael is represented with a balance in one hand weighing the good and bad actions of men. Male, after exploring all the Biblical and Patristic traditions of Christian dogma, concludes that said representation has no roots in the Gospels; he only finds a few metaphorical phrases in the works of St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom, which might suggest said images to the artists, phrases which affirm that actions will be judged and weighed "as in a balance". However, it is not easy to admit the direct influence of the Persian myth or metaphor, and even less the Egyptian, on the sculptors of the 13<sup>th</sup> century; Male himself concludes that said metaphorical phrases played little or no part in the origins of these images, which arose by spontaneous evolution in the popular imagination. This image of St. Michael was later communicated to the artists.

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The spontaneous generation theory is discredited by art history, as it is in the vital phenomena of all types. The Islamic legends of which we have spoken, which were imitated in similar Christian legends, cut the Gordian knot in a more scientific manner: the Muslim myth or metaphor of the balance or scale existed long before the 13<sup>th</sup> century and passed to the popular imagination; there only remains the question of the rôle of St. Michael. In the Islamic *hadith* it is the Archangel Gabriel who plays said role. In Biblical and Christian doctrine there is nothing that justifies the attribution of the balance to St. Michael, who is always considered to be the *princeps militae coelestis*, id est, as the chief of the angels who fight against the

dragon of Hell. And thus he is represented, in the armor of a warrior, in primitive mediæval monuments: a stained glass window, for example, in the cathedral of Chalons Sur marne of the 8<sup>th</sup> century illustrates this. However, in the bas relief sculptures of the Final Judgement, of a later period, one always sees St. Michael with the balance, ee.g., the Final Judgement by Van der Weyden in the Hospital of Beaune, and that of Memling in Danzig (or Gdansk). One may infer, therefore, that around the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> centuries was introduced the adaptation of the myth or metaphor of the balance, with St. Michael taking the place of the Islamic Gabriel (or *Jibril*). One of St. Michael's functions, according to the Catholic liturgy, is to present the souls of the dead before the Divine Throne and introduce them to Heaven. This function of his, intervening to obtain a favorable verdict for the virtuous soul, may have contributed to his taking the place of the Islamic Gabriel. Note that this adaptation of the myth or metaphor into Christian legends and art, not only was not authorized by the Church, but earned the energetic and reasoned condemnation of some learned and discrete critics such as Fr. Interian de Ayala, who in his book El pintor cristiano y erudito condemns that practice by the artists as lacking all traditional and theological basis, and says that he does not know the origin in the following words:

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"Perhaps it causes more difficulty to see painted the Archangel Michael himself with the balance in his hand, whose origin I honestly and plainly confess that I do not know." (353)

Says Emile Mâle:

"The variants found in the scene of the weighing of souls as conceived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, show that a work of art of this kind was not the outcome of the formal teachings of the Church. Much liberty was allowed to the artist's imagination. At Chartres, for example, one of the balances holds a little figure with clasped hands - the symbol of good deeds - while the other holds toads and a hideous head - symbols of the vices. Nothing

could be clearer. In the porch of Notre Dame de la Couture at Le Mans a similar little pleading figure is seen in either balance, as if even from the midst of our sins a prayer could rise to God. At Amiens where the artists would teach that salvation is gained through the merits of Christ and that men's so-called virtues are but the gift of His Grace, the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) is in (the right-hand dish of) one balance and the ignoble head of a reprobate in the other (id est, the left-hand dish of the balance). At Bourges another idea finds expression; man's salvation depends on his vigilance. The lamp of the Wise Virgins is in (the right-and dish) of the balance and a hideous figure with enormous ears in (the left hand dish of the balance)." (354)

Fr. Asin continues:

"These cases so typical of Muslim influence on Christian artistic representations are not isolated nor exceptional: Emile Mâle, in his work cited above, notes various scenes of the Final Judgement, common to the religious art of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, for which he can find no explanation in Christian dogma, and, for this reason Emile Mâle attributes them to the spontaneity of the popular imagination or to the original conception of the artists. However, nearly all these have antecedents in Muslim Eschatology.

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It is well-known that, beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Final Judgement is frequently represented in ecclesiastical decoration; in the sculptures of various French cathedrals of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in the Final Judgement of Andreas Orcagna in the campo Santo of Pisa (14<sup>th</sup> century) or in that of Fra Angelico in the Academy of Florence (15<sup>th</sup> century), is represented, at the side of the Throne of Jesus the Judge, the Virgin Mary, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by St. John the Baptist, interceding on her knees for the salvation of sinners (we have noted elsewhere in this book that in Shi'a literature Fatima and the Holy Imams, especially Imam Hussein, are said to intercede for the souls of sinners). Everyone knows how contrary is this scene to that of the *dia de ira*, in which there is now no pardon nor will there be an occasion to beg

for intercessors. For this reason, Fr. Interian de Ayala agrees with Emile Mâle in classifying those artistic representations as alien to the Catholic tradition (though not the Shi'a tradition).

On the other hand, these representations fit the Muslim (especially the Shi'a) credo perfectly: all the treatises of theology and books of devotion devote whole chapters to the dogma of intercession on the day of Final Judgement. Al-Ghazzali - not to quote less renowned theologians - develops the theme with some amplification in his Ihya 'Ulum al-Din, in which he affirms, in a chapter heading, that after the condemnatory sentence of the believing sinners to the fire of Hell, God, in His mercy, accepts the intercession in their favor of the prophets and saints most worthy in His eyes. Al-Ghazzali then cites, as proof of the dogma, many passages from the Qur'an and the *hadiths* in which the scene is represented in great detail:

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Muhammad, in front of all the prophets and as their representative, draws near to the Throne of the Divine Judge, directs his compassionate gaze towards the condemned ones of his own party, who are behind him, sad and weeping; and seeing the failure of all the prophets who interceded in vain for their salvation and that they hope for success only from Muhammad, moved to pity by the supplications of his faithful and by the special invitation of Jesus, he directs himself to the Throne of God, and, falling to his knees obtains the desired pardon." (355)

Unlike Fr. Asin, for reasons given in other parts of this bok, I cannot summarily dismiss the possibility of a direct Zoroastrian Persian influence in the metaphor of the balance or

scale so frequent in the art of medieval Europe. However, the relatively late date of said representations certainly makes the theory of Islamic origin far more likely. Also, the Islamic metaphor bears a far closer resemblance to the medieval Christian legends and artistic representations than does the Zoroastrian Persian metaphor; the mentions of the balance or scale by the Early Church Fathers such as St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom, are very brief and very vague, and I agree with Fr. Asin and Emile Mâle that they could not, by themselves, have inspired the later medieval legends and artistic representations.

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We also wish to note the close resemblance between, on the one hand, the paintings of the Final Judgement by Fra Angelico in the Academy of Florence (15<sup>th</sup> century) and that of Andrea Orcagna in the Campo Santo of Pisa (14<sup>th</sup> century) in which the Virgin Mary is shown, on her knees, in one case alone, in the other accompanied by St. John the Baptist, interceding for the salvation of sinners, and, on the other hand, the Shi'a legends of Fatima interceding for the souls of sinners, at times alone, at times accompanied by the Holy Imams, especially Ali and Hussein.

Quite a number of times in the present book we have quoted Allamah Sayyid Husayn Tabataba'i's masterful and monumental commentary on the Qur'an, which he has titled Al-Mizan, which means "The Balance" or "The Scale".

Father Asin continues:

"Dante's thought appears to be oriented in the same Islamic direction as revealed by his artistic portrayals of the afterlife. Should more proof be necessary, we will begin an investigation which will finally explain Dante's philosophical thought by means of its genuine Islamic antecedents, for which one must search, not so much in the works of Islamic philosophers, but rather in the works of the Sufis, *Ishraqis* or mystics, and, more precisely, in the system of the Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi. In 1914 I had already discerned the relation between Dante's thought and that of the *Ishraqi* philosophy. [Note: the founder

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of the *Ishraqi* school, was, as we have said, Suhrawardi, who was very much a Persian and who wrote more in Persian than in Arabic; hence, to refer the potent Sufi element in Dante's thought as "Arabic" or "Semitic" is a gross error], by way of an exegesis of certain passages of Paradiso, in which the metaphysical doctrine of light, essential to the Muslim *Ishraqis* (followers of the Persian Suhrawardi) appears exemplified by the same symbols of illumination, mirrors, circles, center, etc., in which is revealed a conception of creation as an emanation or diffusion of the Divine Light, whose theological source is love and whose first effects are matter and universal form. Dante was now for me another thinker, exceptional only for the brilliant splendor of his art within the *Ishraqi* school (id est, the followers of Suhrawardi), transmitted by the Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and the scholastics of that branch known as "Augustinian". Such as Gundisalvi, St. Bonaventure, William of Auvergne, Alexander of Hales, John Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon and Ramon Llull.

Nardi's solid and well documented demonstration has come later to strengthen my first suspicions, which have since been transformed to convictions, when I saw reproduced in the Divina Commedia almost all the artictic constructions of the kingdoms of the afterlife traced a century earlier by the Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, principal follower of the *Ishraqi* ideas of Suhrawardi. So, here is the new field whose horizons suddenly appear before our eyes: is much of the *Ishraqi* philosophy of Dante derived from Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, rather than that of the other Islamic philosophers (id est, the neoplatonist Avicenna and to a much lesser extent, the Aristotelian Averroess) whose system Nardi has compared with Dante's thought? (Note: if one classifies dante's thought as *Ishraqi*, for which a most excellent case can be made, it cannot be derived in its major part from a neoplatonist such as Avicenna (Ibn Sina), and very much less from an Aristotelian such as Averroess (Ibn Rushd), who were most definite NOT *Ishraqis*; rather one must look to Suhrawardi, the founder of the *Ishraqi*

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school, though Dante's thought, Like that of Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, does contain some neoplatonic elements, it is fundamentally NOT neoplatonic and very much less is it Aristotelian.)

It is not possible at this time to resolve a problem which would require long and painstaking textual analyses of the works of a thinker so diffuse and labyrinthian as is Ibn Arabi al-Mursi. However, without resorting to a painstaking analysis, it is suggestive that there exists a general parallel between the two thinkers, Dante and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, which is a good omen concerning that which investigations more thorough and systematic might reveal. In this general parallel, we must insist that it concerns the ideas common to both, the images and symbols with which they express them, and expository procedures and literary resources which both use. As we have said in another place, the coincidences in the imaginative aspects (Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, with his "imaginal realm" and "creative imagination" would certainly agree) are more demonstrative than the doctrinal similarities,

although, evidently, if the ideas and the images coincide, so much the better.

In relation to images, the whole metaphysic of light (so typical of Suhrawardi and his *Ishraqi* followers) essential to Dante's ideas, appears in the systems of [Suhrawardi and] Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, and is expressed in analogous symbols: God is Pure Light, free of all mixture of shade, shadow and darkness. His manifestation is exemplified by the luminous symbols of diffusion, illumination, reflection and irradiation, so typical of Dante's imagination. The example of the mirror, which the Florentine poet uses to give concrete reality to the influence of superior beings over the inferior ones, is also typical of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, the same as the candle flame. The geometric symbol of the circle and its center to represent the cosmos and its Divine Principle, is of *Ishraqi* (or, to put it another way, Suhrawardian) origin and is used even more frequently by Ibn Arabi al-Mursi than by Dante, both paradoxical analogies being based upon the relation

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between the circumference of a circle and its central point. As light is the symbol of God and His manifestations, darkness is the symbol of matter. Opaqueness and transparency, grossness and subtlety, characterize. Respectively, the body and the spirit, for Dante and for Ibn Arabi al-Mursi.

The literary resource of the personification of abstract ideas appear a few times in La Vita Nuova: the psycho-physiological powers of spirits, the *élan vital*, the animal, the visionary, the natural, etc., reason and dialogue among themselves, as though they were real live beings. Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was a master of the use and abuse of the prose epic with the same dialectical purposes: God and His Names, being and nothingness, matter and form, the faculties of the soul, etc., converse and reason among themselves throughout the Futuh al-Makkiyya as though they were persons of flesh and blood.

Passages of La Vita Nuova and the Divina Commedia, which, though literary fiction appear to be autobiographical, are filled with visions while asleep, whose mystical interpretation Dante offers with a quasi-



religious seriousness. Ibn Arabi al-Mursi resorts to the same fictions (which in his *Ishraqi* spirit were realities) and narrates a multitude of visions, under whose veil he discovers the loftiest metaphysical ideas.

Of all Dante's visions, one stands out in sharp relief because of its enigmatic character, which appears in La Vita Nuova:

Dante saw in a dream a young man, dressed in a very white tunic, which, sitting next to him in a pensative mood, looked at him, and afterwards sighed and called to him and spoke to him. Dante believed that he recognized him as the same young man who had appeared to him in other visions, and asked him why he was in a gloomy mood, and received this reply (in Latin): "*Ego tumquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentiae partes; tu autem non sic.*" Dante asked him to clarify the obscure enigma of the geometrical symbol, but the young man explained in Italian: "Do not demand that which is not of use to you."

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Very common among the Sufis is the vision of God, appearing in dreams as a young man. This must have originated in a *hadith*, collected by the traditionist Tabrani (9<sup>th</sup> century AD), in which it is supposed that Muhammad himself had this vision for the first time:

"I saw my Lord - says this *hadith* - during a dream, in the form of a handsome young man, with long curly hair, sitting on a bench, his feet shod with golden sandals, his head crowned with a brilliant crown which clouded the vision, his face covered with a veil of pearls and his body wrapped in a green robe."

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and many other Sufis recognize the vision as authentic, though they take it to be allegorical, as they find repugnant the idea that God could take on a body. Ibn Arabi al-Mursi claimed to have received visions similar to those of the Prophet, in which he sees his Beloved, i.e., God, in human form.

"I did not feel able to look at him - says Ibn Arabi al-Mursi as he narrates these visions - He spoke to me, I listened to Him and understood. These apparitions left me in such a state, that for several days I was unable to eat; every time I sat at a table, there He was, standing, at times at the other end of the table, looking at me and saying to me with words that I really heard, "Do you eat while I am watching

you?" And I found it impossible to eat; although, truly, I was not hungry; rather, I was so weary of His presence that I became agitated even by looking at Him because He was, during those days, that to which I directed my vision, whether I was standing or seated, moving or reposing."

It is true that none of these visions of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi does God say the same enigmatic words which Dante attributed to the young man; but also it is true that these words, not explained by Dante and even incoherent within the context of the narration, have a full and undeniable interpretation within the geometric symbolism of the metaphysics of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi according to which the essential difference between God and the world, between the Necessary Being and the contingent beings, is symbolized by the circumference of a circle and its midpoint: God is the center and the

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creatures are the points of the circumference (remember the words of the young man in Dante's vision, translated from the Latin: "I am the center of the circle, in the same way that the circumference has parts"), the relation of dependency between all those points and the center is one and the same: all need the center in order to exist, while the existence of the center is independent of the circumference. Thus, the goal of all created beings in their mystical ascension is God, the center of gravity, towards which all eternally move, attracted eternally by that which is inspired in them by the infinite beauty of the Divine Essence which is revealed to them.

One could say of this exegesis, given by Ibn Arabi al-Mursi to the geometrical symbol of the circle and its center, is not the incontestable key to the enigma of Dante; but it cannot be denied that with this exegesis the enigma now makes sense. We say, in effect, that Dante, in order to put into sharp relief the universal and necessary dominion which God, as object of love, exercises over His creatures, and in particular over Dante, would have made the young man who appeared (and who in effect personifies Love), to Dante say the obscure words which he condensed under the geometric symbol the attraction of God, center of all beings, was felt by his heart in love. The same is the doctrine

which Dante developed in his Divina Commedia, when he affirmed that the whole universe is moved by the love of God, efficient principle and theological goal of all movement.

All these coincidences in the use of the same artistic resources of allegorical character, which one notice between Dante and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, are accentuated in a more concrete manner if one compares the Cancionero and the Convito of the Florentine poet with the books of the Murciano mystic, conceived according to analogous literary norm, id est, The Interpreter of Love and its commentary, titled The Treasures and Precious Things. Above all, the mixture of rhyme and prose, which characterize the Convito, are in all the works of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi his usual artistic resource; all the chapters of the Futuh al-Makkiyya

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are headed, like the treatises of the Convito, with a poem more or less long, which summarizes the chapter, later developed in prose. The majority of his minor works offer the same mixture, but none of them, like the commentary of The interpreter of Love, also coincides with the Convito in the theme and in the form of expression and in the autobiographical fable or fiction used by both poets.

In the final pages of the Convito and in other passages of it, Dante says that he proposes to declare or interpret the esoteric sense of fourteen songs, composed by himself at an earlier date, which, because they have an amorous topic, had caused the readers to falsely believe that they deal with sensual and not intellectual love. Thus, motivated by fear of public infamy and to free himself of the reputation of being a sensual man, with which malicious and ignorant readers had blemished his reputation, Dante redacted the Convito as a commentary on said songs, thus lifting the allegorical veil in which the literary significance was enveloped.

The allegory was double:

- ❖ 1.) First the letter of each song, then the allegory. The literal sense is that of a love song by the poet to a beautiful young woman, full of

sweetness, adorned by honesty, admirable for her knowledge, pious, humble and courteous, whose physical and moral qualities he praises and ponders with sincere and passionate verses. However, beneath this outer shell, of voluptuous eroticism, Dante declares that there is hidden the love of theology and philosophy, personified by the maiden: her eyes symbolize the demonstrations of wisdom, her smiles are the persuasions of the same; the rays of love which from the sphere of Venus descend on the heart of the lover, are the books of philosophy; the anxiety of the sighs that the lover exhales, is the symbol of the struggles of a spirit tormented by doubt and for the desire to reach the light of truth. Thus, the allegorical commentary is the resource which Dante uses to develop his metaphysical, astrological and moral theories and his theories of mystical psychology.

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❖ 2.) Finally, Dante explains the occasion which motivated the redactions of his songs in the Convito: sometime after the death of his beloved Beatrice, Dante, alone, unexpectedly encountered a gentle maiden, young, wise and beautiful, with whom he fell Platonically in love, and, without declaring himself, released his passion contemplating it ecstatically and singing in melancholy rhymes the contradictory emotions of his disturbed heart.

An identical occasion motivated the redaction of the amorous poems of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi contained in his Interpreter of Love and its commentary, titled The Treasures and Precious Things.(356)

We have already spoken of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and his Persian Beatrice, a native of Ispahan, whose name is Nizam or *Harmony*, surnamed "The Eye of the Sun and of Beauty", which is: *Ayn al-Shams wa'l-Baha* in Arabic, and *Chashm-i-Aftab va Khoshgelee* or *Chashm-i-Khorshid va Zibayee* in Persian, daughter of Zahir ibn

Rustam.

Fr. Asin Continues:

"In honor of his Persian Beatrice, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi explains that his "Beatrice" is the symbol of divine wisdom, (*Daena, Hagia Sophia*) her virginal breasts represent the sweet nectar of his teachings, her smile signifies the illumination of his theology, her eyes are symbols of the light of revelation, her sighs, whimpers and sadness of lover for her beloved are the longing of the soul, that sighs for its return to its origin, to achieve union with the spiritual world. We give no more details here, but the whole

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commentary is filled with allusions to moral, astrological, mystical, psychological, theological and aesthetic topics, such as the origin, destiny and nobility of the soul, the ecstasy, the intuition of the Divine Essence, the ascension of the spirit to God, the nature and phenomena of mystical love, the essence of spiritual beauty, the relations between faith and reason, the transcendent worth of the Universal Religion compared to particular religions, Islam being considered as a religion of love, etc.

These coincidences of Dante's Convito with The Treasures and Precious Things by Ibn Arabi al-Mursi have a suggestive force, which cannot be neglected by the experts on Dante, in order to explain in some manner, perhaps the definitive one, the obscure origins of the Italian lyric verse, known as the *dolce stil Nuovo*. Guido Guinizelli, Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri, three contemporaries, are the creators of this new poetic school. Its essential characteristics (except for the metre, which we will not discuss here) are these:

- ❖ 1.) The theme of all the songs is erotic; all express the amorous emotion experienced by the poet at the sight or the memory of his beloved. This emotion offers two cardinal modalities:

- I.) It is a mystical adoration, a sweet beatitude of the soul in ecstasy which, desiring a spiritual union with the beloved, rises to the heavens,
- II.) or it is an affliction of the soul lacerated by pain, a morbid seizure which runs through the veins of the lover, a terrible upset which dominates his whole being, which makes him feel near death, which he hails as a liberator.

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A psychological analysis of the complex emotive processes of love is a dominant preoccupation of all the poets of this school. Cavalcanti is best of all in the subtlety of introspection, especially when dealing with love as a pain or painful affliction; his songs are tragic explosions of this emotive modality, whose topics are the trembling, sighs, tears, whimpers, frights, fainting, sadness and melancholy, anxiety, torture and pains of the soul in love, which consume it and take it to the point of death. In Ginzelli and Dante this modality is not lacking, though without reaching such violent extremes: love is a soft melancholy, an ecstatic contemplation, a mystical and a quasi-religious aspiration.

- ❖ 2.) Another characteristic of the poetry of the *dolce stil nuovo* is the philosophical explanation or interpretation of those amorous emotions previously analyzed. The poets argue, as though they were psychologists by profession, about love, its nature, cause and effects; they distinguish between the potencies, the faculties and psychophysiological spirits that intervene in the life of the soul, and, personifying them, have them speak and work like living, concrete beings. Cavalcanti, in his song *Donna mi Prega*,

abuses this scholastic procedure, which being so conventional and abstract, loses much of the spontaneity proper to poetry.

The woman beloved is not for these poets the female who has the sexual union as her only attraction. On the contrary, she is seen only as an aethereal and spiritual image, chaste and pure, worthy to be a Platonic beloved, excluding all carnal appetites, as a means to morally ennoble the soul of the lover. For them, therefore, true love is outside matrimony, in the perpetual virginity which inhibits the sexual instinct by way of jealousy, and the shyness, disdain and modesty of the lovers. This image of the woman beloved

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acquires, in the eyes of these poets, a double idealization: at times she is an angel from Heaven; at other times she is the symbol of Divine Wisdom (once again, *Hagia Sophia*, the *Daena*), of philosophy. In both cases the beloved is the instrument which God uses to inspire the lovers with noble ideas and sentiments. Thus the love of the woman and the love of God become fused.

Karl Vossler has placed in sharp relief the classical and Christian precedents in order to explain the origin of this hybrid theory of love, which is at one and the same time divine or spiritual and physical, of this curious new form, in his own words, of Platonism which does derive immediately from Plato (and not by way of the neoplatonists). Neither the doctrine of the Church, nor even less that of Ovid, nor certainly not that of Aristotle, offer anything which explains the birth of such an idealistic and romantic concept of woman, of spiritual love for the female, which, as Vossler said, must appear as something monstrous in the eyes of medieval philosophers and theologians. With an ingenuity and erudition more admirable than convincing, Vossler attempts to fill this vacuum, resorting to the psychology of the Germanic race and its chivalrous ideas, liberators of woman, which ideas are transformed in moral doctrine when communicated to the more cultured races of southern France (or, rather, Occitania), and later acquiring the form of a psychological and literary theory in the hands of the Provençal (not French)

trobadors and the Italian poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*.

However, all these labyrinthine transformations of social psychology to which Vossler must resort, prove to be useless in the presence of a brute fact (several brute facts, really; Vossler projected the Celtic psychology onto its Germanic enemies and contraries; even Richard Wagner, fanatical German nationalist that he was [some even call him a proto-Nazi] had to resort to Celtic material and models - Tristan and Isolt - when he wished to compose a romantic-tragic operas in

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which love is idealized, and when he wished to compose an opera concerning the perfect chivalrous hero, he once again had to resort to Celtic material and models, in this case Percival. So fanatic a German nationalist was Richard Wagner that if he could have found Germanic models for his operas Tristan und Isolde and Parzifal, there is no doubt that he would have used them rather than the Celtic models he actually used. Vossler was more of a proto-nazi than even Richard Wagner.): long before the first stages of this long and complex evolution to which, according to Vossler, Christian Europe had been subjected, the concept of the female and love, achieving the idealization of the woman beloved, converted to an angel or a symbol of philosophy (*Hagia Sophia*, *Daena*), Islam, especially the Spanish and Persian Islam, had created literary works, in prose and verse, in which the romantic love of woman demonstrates identical characteristics to those found in the lyric of the Italian poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*.

The prejudice, as vulgar in its diffusion as unscientific in its bases, which attributes to the Arab race and to the Muslim peoples in general a sensualist psychology, which excludes all idealization of sexual love, is disproven by the facts. The tribe of the Banu Udra, who originated in the heart of Yemen, were of pure Arab blood, and, nevertheless, their name became renowned, because it means "The Sons of Virginity", which meaning was never negated by their concept of love. "I am of the people who when they love, they die," said one of them. Their poets sing in deeply felt verse of their amorous passion, free of all sensuality. Jamil, one of their most celebrated poets, dies in madness for



the love of Butayna, his lady, without ever having touched her. Urwa and his beloved Afra, two other lovers of the same tribe and also poets, died in the same instant, both consumed by the force of their passion, which had been born in childhood and preserved until death without detriment to virginity. This romanticism, which prefers to die rather than to stain the chaste communion of souls with bodily union, glows in all the elegaic and melancholy songs of these poets. The example of the Christian monks of Arabia (who

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developed the Arabic alphabet by adapting the Syriac alphabet to fit the sounds of the Arabic language), whose continent life, whose celibacy and perpetual virginity so contrasted with the violent passions of the pagan Bedouins, was perhaps not unconnected with the flourishing of Platonic love among the Banu Udra; remember, the Banu Udra were of Yemen, near to the flourishing Christian community of Nejran). The mysticism of the Sufis, heirs of Christian monasticism in part, made their own this double example offered by the romantic poets of Bedouin race in their lives and verses and that of the Christian monks in their heroic asceticism. Although neither in the Qur'an nor in the conduct of Muhammad do we find anything to justify this idealistic interpretation of love, nevertheless, in a *hadith* attributed to Muhammad we find this sentence, a text and compendium of the most delicate romanticism:

"He who loves and remains chaste and dies, he dies a martyr."

Ibn Arabi al-Mursi in his work *Muhadara* prominently cites the above *hadith*. Many Sufis, inspired by this doctrine, left heroic examples of perpetual virginity, within their married lives. The wife, thus idealized by religious sentiment, for these Sufis ceases to be a female and becomes the companion

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or sister in asceticism, beloved only in God and for God.

The literature soon reflected these new psychological currents, in the East as well as in the

West. Abu Dawud of Ispahan (a Persian, obviously), in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, studied, analyzed and defended romantic love in his Book of the Flower. Ibn Hazm of Cordoba, a Spaniard by birth and ancestry, who said

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"You can keep your pearl of China: I prefer my ruby of Spain",

in the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD wrote a book titled The Necklace of the Dove, better known as The Book of Love, and in it and in his book of moral philosophy, character and Conduct, has given us a psychological treatise, a literary and anecdotal treatise of the amorous passion, filled with autobiographical episodes, of erotic short stories and songs, in which a delicate romanticism glows. For Ibn Hazm of Cordoba, the essence of love does not consist in bodily union, but in the communion of souls. Beauty does not consist so much in provoking sexual passion, as in producing in he who contemplates it a noble emotion of sympathy and serene meditation. This psychological doctrine was not exceptional: perfectly historical anecdotes are abundant in The Necklace of the Dove, whose protagonists, Spanish Muslims of all social classes and distinct ethnic groups (though Spanish in the large majority), idealize their loves with the purest Platonism, rendering to their beloveds a silent worship, a quasi-mystical adoration, which at times provokes crises of pain, wetting with tears the letters in which the lover begs an alms of love, or writing said letters with their own blood, or ending tragically in a paroxysm of desperation, leading to madness or death.

However, this romantic modality of sexual love, sung by the poets of the Banu Udra and codified in the books of Abu Dawud of Ispahan (a Persian) and Ibn Hazm of Cordoba (a Spaniard by birth and ancestry), mainly depends on religious motives; they do not deal with ascetic continence, in title of a voluntary sacrifice of passion on the altar of Divine Love, and much less of an

exquisite and decadent refinement, wearied and sated by abuse, but rather of a healthy repugnance toward gross sensuality. It appears in three geographical nuclei and in three historical periods which had reached a high point of hyper-sensuality: in the heart of Arabia, whose pre-Islamic poets had worn out the theme of sexual love, and in certain highly cultured and refined courts in Baghdad and Cordoba,

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where existed a morbid exacerbation of sensuality, which characterizes all great centers of civilization when they begin to decay. Then, in reaction to this appears a healthy reaction in which excessive sensuality becomes transformed into continence.

We are, therefore, yet far from the Platonic concept of the female, idealized as an *agel* and as symbol of philosophy (the *Daena*, which concept is really Persian rather than Platonic). The hybrid and almost monstrous mixture of which this concept is composed, in its original form, has as its explanation, in my opinion, in an idealistic elaboration of the gross sensuality of the Qur'anic Paradise (Fr. Asin was entitled to his opinion, but in this case I do not agree with him). The *houris* of the Qur'an are females, although celestial, and the only reason for their existence in Paradise is as instruments of carnal pleasure. This concept, perfectly adapted to the fervent and violent psychology of the pre-Islamic, pagan Arabs, was not compatible with the spiritual aspirations of the Muslim mystics or Sufis, profoundly influenced by the doctrines of asceticism and continence of Christian monasticism. However, they could not erase from the Qur'an those verses whose literal meaning consecrated that gross sensuality (there are those who say that "*houri*" is a Syriac word which means "white grapes", a mystical symbol in Syriac Christianity, indicating that said perceived sensuality is allegorical, the result of incomprehension of the Syriac word and its symbolism; as I am unfamiliar with the Syriac language, I have no opinion on this, though I find it fascinating). For this reason they very soon created eschatological legends in which they proceed to almost suppress the Qur'anic *houris* and substitute for them the celestial bride, the angelic maiden, prepared by God as wife for each blessed

soul, which is pure spirituality and chaste love (if those who say that "hourī" is a Syriac word which means "white grapes" are correct, then the Sufis' concept is very near to the literal, original meaning of said Qur'anic verses). Rereading the legends of this cycle, to which we refer in our study of

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Dante's earthly paradise, one finds in almost all of them that the image of the beloved woman already has all the idealized qualities of an angelic being, leaving no room for rich in mystical teachings). The woman beloved is for them a symbol of Divine Wisdom (*Hagia Sophia, Daena*), of the intellect which is one of God's emanations, and the love with which she is desired is an allegory of the union of the soul of the mystic with God. The concupiscence to inject itself in the chaste love that her vivid memory inspired in the heart of the lover, functioning as an aid to better serve and love God in this life.

Later, when the Sufis added neoplatonic metaphysics to the asceticism inherited from Christian monasticism, in their hands the idealization of love between the sexes reached the height of subtlety and refinement. We have just seen this in the erotic songs of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, the most subtle metaphysician which Muslim mysticism has produced (this point is arguable: Fr. Asin obviously was unfamiliar with the great Shi'a thinkers of Persia, beginning with Haidar Amoli and culminating in Mulla Sadra Shirazi, in whose vast synthesis the *Ishraqi* philosophy of Suhrawrdi combined with the Sufism of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, the neoplatonism of Avicenna or Ibn Sina, and the *hadiths* of the Shi'a Imams, so psychological phenomena which accompany love are analyzed, in all the books of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and especially in his Futuhat al-Makkiyya, with a delicacy and a surprising insight, much superior to that of the Italian poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*, including Guido Cavalcanti. Who only achieved a pallid reflection of the genius and subtle introspections of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi. Because Ibn Arabi al-Mursi did not limit himself to establishing those nuances which separate love from sympathy, from tenderness, from passion and from desire, but rather he also studied the psychological phenomena which

accompanies them, and penetrated even the subconscious states of the soul, which he observed and classified and also interpreted in a mystical sense. The illness of love, the erotic insanity, the amorous slavery, the weeping, the exhaustion, the spiritual consummation, the languidness, the ardor, the sighs, the melancholy, the consternation, the secret and the choleric sadness, the stupor, the stupidity, the jealousy, the

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speechlessness, the hyper-sensitivity, the insensibility, the ecstasy, the sleeplessness, all the vast gamut of the psychology of love has its detailed analysis in the pages of the Futuhāt al-Makkiyya, in prose as well as verse, and in its metaphysical exegesis. Because, after admitting that love has a triple objective:

❖ 1.) the union of the bodies;

❖ 2.) the union of the souls; and

❖ 3.) the supernatural union with God, he affirms with sublime audacity that God is what is manifested to all lovers, under the veil of the beloved, who could not be adored if in her was no representation of divinity, which disguises the Creator, so that we will love him, under the appearance of the beautiful Zainab, Su'ad, Hind or Laila (not to mention Ibn Arabi al-Mursi's Persian Beatrice Nizam or harmony, native of Ispahan, surnamed "Eye of the Sun and of beauty", Arabic: *Ayn al-Shams wa'l-Baha*, Persian: *Chashm-i-Aftab va Khoshgelee* or *Chashm-e-Khorshid va Zibayee*) of all the amiable maidens whose physical attractions the poets celebrated in elegant verse, without suspecting that which only the illuminationist mystics, followers of Suhrawardi, could understand, id est, that in their verses and erotic songs they spoke only of God, the only real beauty, hidden behind the veil of corporeal forms.

Looking behind, once we have arrived at this juncture, so that we may definitively tie up the loose ends of our argument, which we have planted in this, the

last part of our study.

All the symptoms of interest or sympathy towards Islamic culture (mainly Persian and Hispano-Muslim), which we have discovered in the works of Dante, must demonstrate to us that his psychology, far from being hostile to the imitation of the scientific and literary

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modes of the Muslim peoples, was, in fact, inclined to assimilate them. We have also previously demonstrated how probable and how easy was the transmission of said models to Italy and finally to the Florentine poet. In the first parts of our study we have demonstrated what an enormous collection of Islamic elements are found in the Divina Commedia. In the third part we have seen how the majority of Christian legends which preceded the Divina Commedia also derive from Islamic literature. It would therefore seem that the avenues are firmly closed to any serious and fundamental objection to the fact of imitation once we have established the *similarity* between the model and the copy, and the *communication* between the two.

We do not believe that it is possible to deny to Islamic literature the place of honor which it merits in the splendid assembly of the predecessors of the Divina Commedia. By itself, Islamic literature solves more enigmas than all the other precedents, taken together or separately in relation to the origins of the Divina Commedia.

However, through all the long road which we have traveled in this exploration of the Islamic models of the Divina Commedia, the Hispano-Muslim Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, a mystical theologian and an exquisite poet, has at every step been revealed to be the most typical and suggestive of said models, thus as being the master key to the enigmas relating to Dante's works. In the works of Ibn Arabi al-Mursi. Especially in the Futuh al-Makkiyya, the Florentine poet could have found the general outline of the Divina Commedia, id est, the poetic fiction of a mysterious journey to the regions of the afterlife and its allegorical meaning, the geometric plans which produce in schematic form the architecture of Hell and Paradise, the general characteristics which adorn the scenario of the sublime drama, the vivid description of the glorious life of the

blessed ones, the beatific vision of the Divine Light and the ecstasy which accompanies it. Besides, it would be very difficult to find two thinkers who show more affinities and coincidences in their psychology as

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theologians and poets than Dante and Ibn Arabi al-Mursi: not only in their illuminationist ideas which proceed from Suhrawardi, but also in the symbols and images in which they are incarnated or manifested and in the literary resources to which they resort in order to express them, the parallelism is of an extraordinarily sharp relief; and if all this were not enough, the obvious identity with which both conceived and redacted their respective books Convito and Treasure and Precious Things for the same purpose and personal objective and following an identical method in the allegorical interpretation of their amorous songs, all these elements seal with a definitive and profound impression the conviction, with which we began when we initiated this study. The portion of glory which the thinker, Spanish though Muslim (not that there could be any contradiction or incompatibility with being both a Spaniard and a Muslim), id est, the Murciano Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, should have as his share of the credit for the work of literary genius which Dante Alighieri carried to a glorious fulfillment with the Divina Commedia, is now beyond dispute and must be recognized.

The gigantic figure of the inspired Florentine poet cannot lose even an inch of the sublime greatness which, thanks to his writings, he achieved in the eyes of his compatriots and of all men, who love the beauty of his exquisite art. Nor is blind and irrational admiration worthy of Dante's genius. Nor can the cult of Dante's memory inspired by a vile criterion of fatherland or race satisfy that great man, whose immense culture enveloped all that the science and art which his century treasured as traditional and as innovation, of whatever precedence, and which Dante always knew how to place the high ideals of humanity and religion far above particularist love of Florence, of Italy and of the Latin peoples in general, proudly proclaiming himself a citizen of the world, proclaiming human brotherhood as the first principle of the political life and infusing the marvelous *terzinas* (three-line strophes) of the Divina Commedia a universal

spirit of morality and mysticism which spontaneously flowed from the deepest recesses of his sincerely Christian heart." (357)

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In the Middle Ages, southern France, "Occitania" "Provence" (Provençal: *Proensa*,) land of the *Langue d'Oc* (Provençal), was not considered to be part of France; at that time, France was the land of the *Langue d'oïl* (Old French), what is today northern France minus Brittany. The Provençal and Old Catalan "oc", the Old French "oïl" and the Italian, Spanish and Modern Catalan "si" all meant "yes". "Oc" is derived from the Latin "hoc", meaning "this": "oïl" is derived from the Latin "hic ille", meaning "this that", while "si" is derived from the Latin "sic", meaning "thus". So it is the the expressions *Langue d'Oc* and *Langue d'Oïl* both literally mean "Language of Yes". What is today northern France was in the Middle Ages was, like Old Castile, a land of the epic. However, in reference to the Castilian Epic, only the Cantar de Mio Cid has survived, the other Castilian epics having come down to us only in fragments or drastically reworked in the Romancero, while the number of Old French epics which have come down to us is quite large. Why such is the case is a question which need not occupy us here.

Of the Old French epics, by far the most popular and well known is the Chanson de Roland, which indeed has some



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unforgettable scenes. I will give only two examples, the first being the scene of the French or Frankish Army crossing the Western Pyrenees:

High are the mountains and gloomy the valleys,  
Dark are the rocks, fearful the defiles.  
That day the French traversed them, enduring great hardship  
Their sighs and groans could be heard for fifteen leagues  
around.

The second scene from the Chanson de Roland which we shall recall here is the death of the very valiant, stalwart and resolute but somewhat reckless and undisciplined Roland in a place called *Roncevaux* in Old French, *Ronsavals* in Provençal and Catalan and *Roncesvalles* in Castilian:

Roland feels that the end is near  
On a steep slope, his face turned toward Spain.  
He beats his breast with one hand:  
"Mea culpa (Latin "My guilt"), Almighty God,  
For my sins great and small,  
Which I did commit from the day I was born  
To this day when I am mortally stricken here!"  
He offered his right gauntlet (armored glove) to God,  
Angels from Heaven descend upon him.

Offering of the glove or gauntlet was a sign of vassalage. The dying Roland is offering his gauntlet as symbol of submission and vassalage to the Supreme Liegelord. I really do not understand people who say that they do not enjoy epic literature.

Says Albert B. Lord concerning the Chanson de Roland:

"...No lengthy analysis has been made of the formula structure (see Chapter 2) in the Chanson de Roland, although Rychner's work leads in this direction. However, an examination of a passage, chosen at random, illustrates the extent to which formulae are used in the Chanson de Roland. Only the Oxford manuscript of the Chanson de Roland has been employed as material for the analysis of ten lines in Chart IX.

It seems clear from the chart that the Chanson de Roland is formulaic beyond any question. The first part of the line is obviously much more hospitable to formulae than the second part. This is undoubtedly because of the assonance at the end of each line. Nevertheless, at least half of the lines are formulaic in their second part, and there are parts of formulae even in most of the other lines.

From Chart IX and its notes we can readily discern formula systems such as the following, which shows how useful *tient*, *trait*, or *prent* in first position in the line is with a three-syllable noun-object extending to the line break. ... Such analyses seem to indicate that the Chanson de Roland as we have it in the Oxford manuscript is an oral composition.

When one approaches the problem of the relationship between several manuscripts of the same song (e.g., Diogenes Akritas or the Chanson de Roland), the knowledge that we are dealing with oral compositions, coupled with an understanding of how such songs are collected, is helpful. We have seen from Yugoslav (i.e., Serbo-Croatian; see Chapter 2) examples that variation, sometimes not great, sometimes quite considerable, is the rule in oral compositions. When there is exact line-for-line, formula-for-formula correspondence between manuscripts, we can be sure that we are dealing with a written tradition involving copied manuscripts or with some circumstance of collecting in which a fixed text has been memorized.

If one were to disregard all other elements and

parts of the manuscripts and to judge only from this

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single passage, one would conclude after perusing Chart X that the Italianized Venice IV is either copied directly from the Oxford manuscript or is a copy of a copy. In line 3 "des Sarrazins" has been interpreted as "de qui de Spagna" by Venice IV, and the tenth line of Oxford has been omitted; line 10 in Venice IV is the eleventh line in the Oxford manuscript. The second half of line 11 of Venice IV does not correspond, nor does line 12. In spite of these differences it would seem that this passage has been either memorized and turned into Italianate French or copied from manuscript.

On the other hand, a comparison of the same *laisse* in the Chateauroux manuscript with the Oxford (Chart IX) seems to show a relationship which might be that of oral texts of the same song. The first line is quite different; the second agrees in the very common first half-line formula, *tint Durendart*; the third line is the same, but it is a common line; lines four through eight in Chateauroux are quite different; but line 9 of Chateauroux is the same as line 8 of Oxford; and line 10 of Chateauroux corresponds in its first half to line 9 of Oxford, although this is a very common formula (*li.XII.per*). Chateauroux line 11 begins with the last half of Oxford line 10, but finishes differently; the first half of line 12 and the first half of line 13 in Chateauroux correspond to the beginnings of line 11 and 12 respectively in Oxford, but the rest of the *laisse* is quite different. And we might note that the words of the archbishop in Venice IV correspond in part to his words in Chateauroux. At the end of the *laisse*, Venice IV (as elsewhere in fact) has been influenced by the Chateauroux type of manuscript, in spite of its closeness to Oxford. This is still a kind of relationship that is within a written manuscript tradition.

In Chart XII, which places the same passage from the Chateauroux manuscript side by side with the corresponding passage from the Cambridge manuscript, we can see that the relationship between these two, *on the basis of this passage*, is that between copies. This is apparent although there is some confusion in the order of lines toward the end of the passage, and although one

line has been omitted in Cambridge that is in Chateauroux, while there is one line in Cambridge that is not in Chateauroux.

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It is easy to divide these four manuscripts then into two groups. We believe that the Oxford-Venice IV group (that is Venice IV insofar as it follows Oxford, namely to line 3865 at least) is oral as shown by our analyses. The relationship between Oxford and Chateauroux looks like that between two oral versions and may be such, but one must note that Oxford is assonantal and Chateauroux is rhymed. And although the "author" or scribe of Chateauroux is not always consistent, he seems to have changed the lines that do not end properly for his rhyme scheme, which is -age. So he changes line 1, but neglects to change line 2 (an oversight that Cambridge remedies), keeps line 3, because it already has his rhyme, but changes lines 4-7, because they do not have it, and so forth. Strangely enough he also changes line 12, in spite of the fact that it ends with *barnage*! We had best agree with the majority that the relationship between Oxford and Chateauroux is a written one, a conscious literary changing of one manuscript (or manuscript group) characterized by assonance in order to produce a rhymed text. But I should like to suggest that the whole question of these *remaniements* should be reviewed again in light of oral composition. For the present we begin with an oral Oxford manuscript, from which the others named have been derived." (357)

Obviously, in its origins the Chanson de Roland was a traditional, oral composition which later received literary treatment. As an oral epic, its origins must go back to the time of Charlemagne, or shortly thereafter

The Old French Chanson de Roland which has come down to us in various manuscripts is, essentially, a product of the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. There are various theories concerning its origin. One is the "individualist" theory, which holds that the

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Chanson de Roland is the work of a single individual, presumably Tuoldus, who took some rather scanty data from Latin chronicles and used them as the core around which to construct a long epic poem. On the other hand, the "traditionalist" school holds that Tuoldus was merely the last in a long series of traditional epic poets. It is obvious that Albert Bates Lord agrees with the "traditionalist" school, and, in fact, his researches would appear to confirm it beyond a doubt.

As we note above, it is the traditionalist school which has triumphed. Ramon Menendez Pidal has demonstrated that the Chanson de Roland contains elements which cannot be typical of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, nor can be found in Latin chronicles, but which must proceed from an epic tradition which goes back to the time of Charlemagne:

"In the manuscripts 61 and 62 (of the Oxford version of the Chanson de Roland), the Emperor (Charlemagne) has a bow in his hand which he gives to Roland when he name him to lead the rearguard of the Frankish Army; this bow is never mentioned again in the poem, because in the X century the bow had ceased to be a noble weapon, seen rather as a detestable deadly weapon, a weapon of cowards, (much as the Safavi Persians long despised the use a firearms as unworthy of a brave man) only remembered in popular verse, for example, in the Robin Hood ballads." (358)

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Even Robin Hood, a Norman and not a Saxon whose real name was Robert Fitzurse or Robert Fitzooth, and therefore a nobleman, at first uses the bow only for hunting, believing that only a craven coward would use a bow as a weapon of war. Robin Hood only with very great reluctance comes to use the bow as a weapon of war after he had become an outlaw and a fugitive.

The exact date of the composition of that version of the Chanson de Roland which we have today is unknown. The first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century would seem to be the most likely date. Some say that the Chanson de Roland cannot have been written as late as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, because no mention is made of the Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. This is perfectly silly. The Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela began in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, not long after the time of Charlemagne. Indeed, there is a local legend in Santiago de Compostela that Charlemagne himself made the pilgrimage, though this legend has rightly been rejected as anachronistic. Turolodus did not mention the Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, because he knew that said pilgrimage did not begin until after the time of Charlemagne.

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Another reason sometimes given for saying that the version which we have today of the Chanson de Roland cannot have been written at so late a date as the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is the fact that it, or parts of it, were sung by the Normans at the battle of Hastings in 1066. The traditionalists have an easy answer for this.

As the traditionalists say, Turoldus followed an epic tradition which goes back to the time of Charlemagne, though of course it was reworked over the centuries. Therefore, there is no reason whatever to assume that the version of the Chanson de Roland sung by the Normans at the battle of Hastings was the same version which we have today and is said to be the work of Turoldus. The version of the Chanson de Roland sung by the Normans at the battle of Hastings was simply an earlier version, not the version of which Turoldus was author, though it was no doubt the basis for Turoldus' great work. As we shall see, there are evidences that the Turoldus version of the Chanson de Roland, which is the version that has come down to us and which we read today, was indeed written in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, though it was based on earlier versions.

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If the absence of any mention of the Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is proof that the Chanson de Roland must have been composed before the 12<sup>th</sup> century, what this means is that it must have been composed in the time of Charlemagne in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, which, for a number of reasons, is impossible, at least if one refers to the manuscript copies which have come down to us, though it is very possible, indeed virtually certain, that the original, purely oral version of the Chanson de Roland must date from the time of Charlemagne, or at the very least cannot have been much later than the early 9<sup>th</sup> century

Some say that because the word "crusade" is never used, that the Chanson de Roland must be earlier in date than the time of the First Crusade. Tuoldus was near enough in time to the First Crusade to know that the word "crusade" coined only very late in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and so was unknown in the time of Charlemagne, and so he did not use it in the Chanson de Roland. Tuoldus also knew that Catalunya, Aragon and Navarra, where the action of the Chanson de Roland takes place, is NOT the Holy Land, and that the Muslims whom Charlemagne and Roland encountered in Spain (not always as enemies) were not Turks.



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There is at least one thing which indicates that the date of the manuscript versions of the Chanson de Roland is later than the time of the First Crusade, namely the mention of the tip of spear of Longinus, which pierced the side of Jesus at the Crucifixion. This relic had been lost for centuries, virtually forgotten, but was said to have been rediscovered under the floor of a church in Antioch during the First Crusade. There is no mention anywhere of the tip of the spear of Longinus during the time of Charlemagne; it was an incident during the First Crusade which restored this relic to the mind of Christendom.

King Alfonso I of Aragon, "the Battler" took Saragossa from the Muslims in 1118 and Tudela in 1120. Perhaps the earliest known trobador is *Coms* (Count) Guilhem VIII of *Peitieu* (Poitiers), later *Duc* (Duke) of *Aquitania* (Aquitaine), of whom we have spoken in an earlier chapter. After the conquest of Saragossa, the Muslims launched a fierce counteroffensive against Aragon. Guilhem led a force of six hundred knights to go to the aid of Alfonso I of Aragon, "the Battler". Guilhem distinguished himself at the battle of Cutanda and in the conquest of Calatayud and Daroca.(359)

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Thus, it is easy to see how the lore of the Mozarabs and Mudejares of the Valley of the Ebro reached the trobadors.

It has been noted that in the Chanson de Roland are described Tudela and other parts of the Valley of the Ebro. There are notices that in 1128 Roger de Sai and his companion *Guillaume Turolodus* visited a mosque in Saragossa. This *Turolodus* is listed among the *Normans* present in the kingdom of Alfonso I of Aragon, "the Battler".(360) In medieval Spain, "Norman" could mean "Viking", "Norman" or simply any northern Frenchman, from the land of the *Langue d'Oil* (Old French) in contrast to Provence (Provençal *Proensa*) or Occitania, land of the *Langue d'Oc* (Provençal). In England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Sicily and Southern Italy in the Middle Ages any northern Frenchman (except perhaps a Breton) was most likely to be called a "Norman", for obvious historical reasons. To this day in Spain if one wishes to make it clear that one is referring to Normans and not Vikings, one must say *franco-normando*, literally "French-Norman". There would seem to be every reason to assume that the *Guillaume Turolodus* mentioned above is the *Turolodus* considered to be at least the principle author of the Chanson de Roland. Besides the motives

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given above, there is another powerful reason: Turolodus was certainly a northern Frenchman, though probably not a Norman, as the Old French of the Chanson de Roland is not typical of Normandy; however, as we shall see, the language of the Chanson de Roland contains Provençalisms, Catalanisms, and, to coin a word, "Aragonisms". The Church of the Magdalene, which Turolodus must have seen, dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when Tudela was under Muslim rule; it is a Mozarabic church in the most precise meaning of the word. In the tympanum of the portal of said church is a carving of *fourteen* persons, eight on one side and six on the other, with the dove which symbolizes the Holy Spirit descending on them. The number fourteen has no special significance in the Christian Tradition, but we have already explained its significance in Shi'a Islam: the Prophet Muhammad, Fatima and the Twelve Holy Imams.(361). As we shall see in the following chapter, there is nothing strange in the idea that Mozarabs should have absorbed a great deal from Shi'ism. It is also well to remember that in 1128 both Saragossa and Tudela were very largely (probably predominantly) populated by Mozarabs and Mudejares. Some of both groups, Mozarabs and Mudejares, were descendants of old families

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of Saragossa, Tudela and the Valley of the Ebro in general, but others were descendants of refugees from al-Andalus fleeing the Almoravides, who brutally persecuted Sufis and Shi'as as well as Mozarabs and Jews. Among the Mudejares of Saragossa, Tudela and the Valley of the Ebro in general, the proportion of Sufis and/or Shi'as must have been very high indeed, and the Mozarabs of this region must have been imbued with Sufism and Shi'ism.

In the Chanson de Roland we read:

(Charlemagne) laced on his helmet of gold wrought with gems  
Girded *Joyeuse* - ever without peer -  
Which thirty times per day changes color.  
Much we can say about the Lance  
With which Our Lord (Jesus) was wounded on the Cross.  
Charlemagne has its tip, thanks be to God,  
He had it mounted in the golden pommel of his sword (*Joyeuse*)  
Because of this honor and because of this grace,  
The name *Joyeuse* was given to the sword.  
French knights must never forget it:  
From it they derive their battle cry *Munjoie*  
That is why no people on earth can withstand them.

Obviously, *Joyeuse* does not mean "joyous" (in which case it would, in Old French, have been some form of *gogue*), but rather "jewel" or "a most precious object". Now, *joie* or *joyau* was not used in Old French in the sense of "jewel" or "precious object"; its use in that sense does not occur before the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.(362) So, the name *Joyeuse* is not French. Here

we have a Provençalism or a Catalanism; here we have the Provençal and Catalan *joios* in the sense of "jewel-like" of "most precious". Also, the name *Joyeuse* is grammatically of masculine gender, which is consistent, since in Provençal we have *joi*, *joell* or *joyal*, which are of masculine gender, and in Catala we have *joia*, which is feminine, and *joiell*, which is masculine. The battle cry *Munjoie* is also a Provençalism or Catalanism; *mnt*, pronounced *mun*, the "T" being silent, is the Catalan word for "mountain". Thus, *Munjoie*, difficult to translate literally, means something like "Mountain of Jewels", or, more symbolically, the "Greatest of Jewels" or "Most Precious Object".

Note that *Joyeuse* changes color thirty times per day. We have spoken of the Persian *Simurgh*, whose name in Persian means "Thirty", and who is without color, because it possesses all colors. As we have said, the *Simurgh* is the prototype for the "solitary bird" of St, John of the Cross. Also note that thirty is the symbolic number of the Holy Imams of Shi'a Islam.(363)

Note that the sword of Baligant, one of the Muslim leaders in the Chanson de Roland is named *Precieuse*, a name roughly synonymous with *Joyeuse*, the name of the sword of Charlemagne.

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We see some of the ways in which the lore of the Persian Sufis and Shi'as reached the trobadors, Turolodus, and, finally, St. John of the Cross. Not that the ways mentioned above are the only ones, but, besides their own interest, they give us many clues as to what other ways might be.

Earlier in this chapter we have discussed the problem as to how St. John of the Cross could have had knowledge of the works of the Persian Sufis, since no one can seriously believe that such a multitude of parallels is mere "coincidence": as a general rule it may be said that the credibility of coincidences is in inverse proportion to their number, and in this case the number of "coincidences" is so large that no one can seriously believe that they are mere "coincidences".

I am much indebted to Luce Lopez-Baralt for being able to redact the above dealing with the solitary bird of St. John of the Cross. However, her judgement is sometimes clouded by a too "Arabist" understanding of Muslim Spain, perhaps a result of the the common error made by many Spaniards who think that the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" or "Islamic" to be synonymous, of the tendency in Spanish universities to classify Islamic Studies under the "Semitic" category, and also of taking seriously the arrant nonsense of Americo Castro. For example, Ms. Lopez-Baralt says:

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"Any direct reading - in Persian! - of the works of Suhrawardi, Attar, Hafiz, Saadi and Rumi would be historically very difficult and most improbable, given that St. John of the Cross was at the time just a (Discalced Carmelite) friar, who, so far as we know, did not read or write Arabic." (364)

I would like to inform Ms. Lopez-Baralt that I know a number of people who read Persian but not Arabic, as they are two fundamentally different languages. All the languages with which St. John of the Cross was familiar - Castilian, Latin, Greek, Italian, Catalan, French, Provençal - are all Indo-European languages, as is Persian. From personal experience I can testify that for a person whose native tongue is an Indo-European language, Arabic is enormously difficult, while Persian is one of the easiest of languages. The fact that St. John of the Cross apparently knew no Arabic, save perhaps a few words and phrases of Andalusian Vulgar Arabic, has no bearing whatever on the question as to whether or not he could read Persian. Had there been anyone in Spain at that time who knew Persian, a man with such high native intelligence as St. John of the Cross could have learned to read it in a short time.

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During the Muslim period in northwest India, very few Indians learned to read Arabic, but a very large number learned to read Persian; Urdu, Punjabi, and, to a lesser extent Hindi are today hybrids between Persian on the one hand and Indo-Aryan vernaculars derived from Sanskrit on the other. Sanskrit is an Indo-European language, and so are those vernaculars derived from it, as Latin is an Indo-European language, and so are the vernaculars derived from it. So, to a north Indian, learning Persian is very easy, while learning Arabic is enormously difficult. Hence the North Indian saying:

"Arabic is learned (because it is so difficult to learn), Persian is sweet and Urdu is polite."

St. John of the Cross would have found Persian very much easier to learn than Arabic, for exactly the same reason as a North Indian; for a speaker of an Indo-European language, another Indo-European language is very much easier to learn than is a Semitic tongue.

Ms. Lopez-Baralt also says:



"In the first place one must venture to consider the possible influence which an Islamic literary school may have had on a Christian, Spanish poet, and in the second place one sees that the most significant influence would appear to have come from Sufis writing in Persian [and by a large margin] and not from Sufis writing in Arabic, which are the poets closest in historical, cultural and even geographic terms to St. John of the Cross."(365)

Now, of course, there is no doubt that poets writing in Arabic were geographically closer to St. John of the Cross than were poets who wrote in Persian. Exactly what Ms. Lopez-Baralt means by "historical (terms)" I am not very certain, so I will let it pass. However, when she refers to "cultural (terms)" she is simply mistaken.

Throughout this book we have noted the ethnic and cultural affiliations between the Iranian peoples on the one hand and the Celts, Alans and Visigoths on the other. In other words, a Spaniard, whether Christian or Muslim, carries in his very genes and chromosomes strong affinities with Persia. We have shown that the Romans - though they strove mightily to do so - were unable to erase Spain's Celtic heritage which is visible everywhere in Spain, in every way imaginable. Nor did the Arabs erase the Celtic, Alanic and Visigothic heritage of Spain, though, of course they did not try very hard.

We have also spoken of the many Persian cultural elements that came to Spain during the Muslim Period. St. John of the Cross was far closer culturally, psychologically and spiritually to poets writing in Persian than he was to poets writing in Arabic, and even some of those who mainly wrote in Arabic were either Persians by birth, i.e., Avicenna, al-Ghazzali, al-Hallaj - or else were Spaniards, i.e., Ibn Arabia al-Mursi, Ibn Abbad of Ronda. It is no doubt due to the heritage of Celts, Alans and Visigoths, and their affinity with Persia, which made Muslim Spain a greater center of Sufism than any other Islamic country west of Persia. St. John of the Cross would have found the Persian language very much easier to learn than Arabic, and would have found the Persian poets more to his liking, more his "kindred spirits".

In her excellent San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam, Luce Lopez-Baralt devotes a chapter to possible intermediaries between St. John of the Cross and Islamic, i.e., Arabic and Persian, with the Persian being by far the more numerous sources. We must note that there are no possible intermediate sources - except the Moriscos - for many of the Islamic Sufi elements in the works of

St. John of the Cross; this is particularly true of the very numerous Persian elements. Persian literature is now fairly well known in the West, but this was not true in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Even for those Islamic Sufi elements in the works of St. John of the Cross for which there might seem to be non-Morisco intermediaries, all of these are proven false for a simple reason: in each and every case St. John of the Cross is closer to the original Islamic Sufi source than he is to the supposed intermediaries. In summary, for most, virtually all, in fact - of the Islamic Sufi elements in the works of St. John of the Cross there is no possible non-Morisco European intermediary; even those elements which at first glance seem to have non-Morisco intermediaries, this possibility is in practice shown to be false, because in each and every case St. John of the Cross is closer to the Arabic or Persian original than to any possible non-Morisco intermediary.(366) To look for non-Morisco intermediaries between the Sufies, Hispano-Muslim and Persian, and St. John of the Cross, is, as the Spanish say, *buscar cinco pies al gato*, "to look for five feet on the cat".

For all my respect and admiration for the work of Luce Lopez-Baralt, I must once again call attention to a persistent error which occurs throughout her work, and this is not merely *macho iberico* machismo or male chauvinism, as some will no doubt claim. By her own admission, and she does not really know how right she is on this point, in the works of St. John of the Cross the parallels with Persian literature, including philosophical works, such as those of Suhrawardi, are far more numerous and, in general, far closer than are the parallels with Arabic literature. **Now, Persian is an Indo-European language, as we have said above, ergo, Persians are NOT Semites. Persian literature is an Indo-European literature, NOT a Semitic literature.** Yet, Ms. Lopez-Baralt repeatedly makes statements such as this:

"The Semitic literatures have yielded to us some of the most important secrets of the literary art of St. John (of the Cross), which has never ceased to astound his readers, from the humble nuns of Beas to the erudite master Marcelino Menendez Pelayo." (367)

That the statement by Ms. Lopez-Baralt cited above is a gross error, inexplicable for someone as learned as Ms. Lopez-Baralt is a fact so obvious that no further comment is really necessary.

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For example, Ms. Lopez-Baralt states - and I thoroughly agree - that arguably it is Suhrawardi who, of all Sufis, both Hispano-Muslim and Persian, perhaps even more than any other individual, whether Muslim or Christian - most influenced St. John of the Cross. Now, Suhrawardi was very much a Persian, Persian was his first language, and almost certainly the **ONLY** language that he spoke fluently, who wrote very largely in Persian, and is perhaps the most thoroughly Persian of all Sufis. Ergo, Suhrawardi was **NOT** a Semite, no more of a Semite than I am, I who am bilingual English-Spanish and whose recent ancestors spoke only Gaelic. The examples could be multiplied, as the Persian Sufis who influenced St. John of the Cross are quite numerous. To repeat, and to emphasize so as to leave no room for doubt nor confusion, Persian literature is **NOT** a Semitic literature, but, rather, is Indo-European, as Indo-European as are, for example, the Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Lithuanian, English, French, Provençal, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Gaelic, Welsh, Breton, Old Norse, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and Church Slavonic literatures.

As we noted earlier, all theories of transmission between St. John of the Cross and the Persian Sufis fail because of the fact that St. John of the Cross is far closer to the Persian originals than to the supposed "intermediaries".

The answer is simple. As we know, many Persian Sufis and Dervishes came to the Kingdom of Granada during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. We have also noted abundant Persian cultural influences in the Kingdom of Granada. So, the simple answer is that the lore of these Persian Sufis and Dervishes was preserved among the Mudejares and later the Moriscos of Granada after the reconquest of Granada by the armies of Castile and Aragon, and that this lore was later passed on to St. John of the Cross by learned Moriscos. To say that the surviving Morisco or *Aljamiado* literature gives little hint of so high a cultural level among the Moriscos is meaningless. No one doubts that only a very small part of the Morisco literature has survived, and much of that is inedited and untranslated, gathering dust in libraries and museums. Fortunately, from time to time caches of Morisco literature are discovered, so one may hope.

As we noted before, the arguments against my theory are weak, because they depend on what the in Spain we call *positivismo atontado*, i.e., "idiotized positivism". If one does not accept my theory then one must believe either that St. John of the Cross was in telepathic contact with Persian Sufis and Dervishes, or that he was visited by the spirits of the Persian Sufi poets. Those who attack my theory must either find a better one or keep quiet.

As we said before, it seems unlikely that there were any Moriscos who had knowledge of the Persian language. However, in light of what we have said above, it no longer seems so unlikely.

In the states of Indiana and Illinois there are descendants of the original French colonists of those states who still speak French among themselves, and not "School French" either, but Creole-Canadian French. Not long ago some folklorists published a book called French Folklife in Old Vincennes (Terre Haute, Indiana, 1989) which among other things is a collection of French folksongs which have survived among the descendants of the French founders of the city of Vincennes, Indiana; all this after more than two centuries of living as French-speaking nuclei in a vast

sea of English-speakers. This is not comparable to the survival of the French language in Louisiana, where the number of French-speakers was very much larger and formed large blocs, not tiny, scattered nuclei.

So, there is nothing impossible about the idea that descendants of the Persian Sufis and Dervishes who came to Granada in the 14<sup>th</sup> century may have preserved a knowledge of the Persian language among themselves - which they certainly did and later passed this on to their descendants, who, after various generations, in turn passed it on to St. John of the Cross, who would have found Persian very much easier to learn than Arabic.

We now turn to our master, Fr. Miguel Asin Palacios. Below Fr. Asin refers to Dante Alighieri and Muslim sources for some of the imagery of the Divina Commedia, but it is perfectly applicable to St. John of the Cross and his works and possible Sufi origins. Change "Dante (Alighieri)" to "St. John of the Cross" and the Divina Commedia to "the works of St. John of the Cross", and change "the future life" to "mysticism", and the fit is perfect.



"Every problem of imitation demands, in order to be resolved with all the moral certainty possible with historical problems, the previous recognition and solution of the three partial questions which compose it:

❖ 1.) Between the supposed copy and the hypothetical model, do there exist analogies and similarities in sufficient number and quality, that it would be morally impossible to explain them by mere coincidence or derivations from a common source?

❖ 2.) Once one has established the relation of strict analogy between the two facts or objects which have been compared, is it possible to demonstrate the chronological primacy of the supposed model with respect to its copy or imitation? (In clearer terms, **is it possible to demonstrate that the supposed model is of an earlier date than the supposed copy or imitation?**)

❖ 3.) The author of the supposed copy, could he have known the hypothetical model and empathize with it, or, on the contrary, does there exist between the two such a profound abyss of physical and moral separation, such a separation in space (distance) and in reference to the spirit, that communication between them appears to be morally impossible? (**In Other words, not honestly possible to accept.**)

Of these three questions, the first two similarity and chronological primacy have been sufficiently established in our study. Besides, these two questions are the real key to the problem. The third question, on the other hand, without denying its importance, is of a very secondary interest. Although the data which history has preserved in relation to communication between the model and the copy be vague and

uncertain, the analogies and similarities between model and copy do not lose their probatory force, above all, when these similarities are so typical, so concrete and strict, and, besides, so large in number, that they cannot be honestly attributed to chance or coincidence.

And this is the case in reference to our problem, Because one could ascribe to coincidence or parallels and independent derivations of a common Christian model the *general* similarities that one encounters between the Dantesque and the Islamic solutions to the theological problem of the future life, the common *ideas* or *doctrines* which form both eschatological conceptions, but when these doctrines appear dressed in the same artistic garb; when the ideas have been cast in identical imaginative molds; when fantasy is expressed in the same symbols, adorned with similar descriptive characteristics, then one cannot accept the hypothesis of mere coincidence.

And the difference is obvious. The *ideas*, the abstract doctrines, the metaphysical solution to problems, are limited in number (we have already demonstrated the universality of mysticism) , must always be reduced to a few basic categories, as they are all fruit of a common human nature, of an abstract idealization analogous in all men and all periods. (How true this is of mysticism!) But the same does not occur in regards to *images* which, as an immediate and concrete reflexion of the real forms of external objects, are so vast in number and as varied in type as the objects themselves: and, for this reason, the concrete coincidence between the characteristics of two imaginative conceptions of one idea, it is not honestly possible that it could be born in two brains unrelated one to the other. Besides, who would be able to conceive and enumerate *a priori* all the infinite plots and combinations that human fantasy could form with the images of real objects, innumerable in themselves, which are provided by the senses?" (368)

In summary, St. John of the Cross was a Sufi initiate, as has been amply proven. It is the Persian-language rather than Arabic-language poets and thinkers who most influenced St. John of the Cross, and by a large margin. The Arabic-language poets and thinkers who did influence St. John of the Cross were, with the notable exceptions of the Shi'a Imams, either Persians by birth or Hispano-Muslims, Spaniards as was St. John of the Cross himself. The thinker, not only the Sufi, who arguably most influenced St. John of the Cross was Suhrawardi, who wrote only in Persian and who was, in all probability, the most thoroughly Persian of all Sufis. All attempts to find non-Morisco intermediaries between St. John of the Cross and Sufism, Persian and Hispano-Muslim, have failed, because in each and every case St. John of the Cross has been shown to be far closer to the Hispano-Arabic or Persian original than to the supposed "intermediary".

Fascinating indeed is the interrelation between Sufism, *Ishraqism* and Theosophy of Persia on one hand and that of Muslim Spain on the other, which so profoundly influenced St. John of the Cross, the Christian Sufi, *Ishraqi* and *Hakim*, and thus indirectly entered into the spiritual formation of Pope John Paul II. Though

it would be a blunt anachronism to say that St. John of the Cross was influenced by the later Persian Shi'ite **Hakims** or Theosophers such as Mulla Sadra Shirazi, nevertheless, St. John of the Cross, particularly in Living Flame of Love and Gloss of the Divine, does seem to echo Suhrawardi, more closely even than he does al-Ghazzali. For example, in the prose commentary of Living Flame of Love, St. John of the Cross refers to:

"God, Infinite Light and Infinite Fire",  
which al-Ghazzali does not. Pursuing this point further would lead us too far from our main topic, and I do not have the research material to do so.

Among the founders of Hispano-Muslim Sufism was ibn Massarah of Almeria, who, if not openly a Shi'a was a follower of the Shi'a *Kalam*. Among the followers of the school of ibn Massarah were ibn Saba'in, who was indeed openly a Shi'a, an Ismaili to be exact, and the great ibn Arabi al-Mursi, in whom the influence of the Shi'a *Kalam* is obvious enough, as well as Abul Abbas ibn al-Arif of Almeria, of whom we have spoken before.

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This work specifically deals with St. John of the Cross and

Sufism, and we have also noted many connections between St. John of the Cross and the Shi'a Imams, as well as Haidar Amoli's saying: "Shi'ism is Sufism and Sufism is Shi'ism". In other words, St. John of the Cross, Sufism and Shi'ism are closely interconnected. In the following chapter we shall deal at some length with the complex interrelations between Sufism on the one hand and Shi'ism on the other. Because of the connections between St. John of the Cross and both the Sufis and the Shi'a Imams, it might seem advisable at this point to briefly touch on one aspect of this complex topic.

In one of his lectures on the Qur'an, Ayatollah Khomeini (most certainly a high-ranking Shi'a scholar) noted:

"We must first understand what is being said, and in the case of the mystic, we must comprehend the inner state that prompts him to express himself in a certain way. Light may sometimes enter his heart in such a manner that he finds himself saying: "Everything is God." Remember that in the prayers you (Shi'as) recite, expressions occur such as "the eye of God", "the ear of God", and all of these are in the same vein as the terminology of the mystics. There is also the tradition (*hadith*) to the effect that when you place alms in the hands of a pauper, you are placing them in the hands of God. Then, too, there is the Qur'anic verse: "When you cast the dust, you did not cast it, but rather God cast it." (Qur'an VIII:17). What does it mean? That God cast

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the dust instead of the Prophet (Muhammad)? That is the literal meaning, which you all accept, but those who experience the reality that is indicated in this verse cannot see matters in the same way, and are bound to

express themselves differently. Nonetheless, you will find the expressions that the mystics use throughout the Qur'an **and especially in the prayers of the (Shi'a) Imams.**"(369)

Mystical expressions are indeed abundant in the prayers and other works and sayings or traditions (*hadith*) of the Shi'a Imams. Below is a saying of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Shi'a Imam, i.e., Imam Hussein, the Martyr of Karbala, which expresses one of the most universal and archetypal of Sufi concepts:

"He (Imam Hussein) once said, describing the difference of worship and motives for it:

"There are those who worship God only in fear (i.e., of Hell), and that is the worship of slaves; there are those who worship God in covetousness (i.e., of Paradise), and that is the worship of merchants; but there are those who worship God in thankfulness and this is the worship of free men; it is the best of worship."(370)

Compare the above saying of Imam Hussein with a somewhat later Sufi aphorism by the woman Sufi Rabi'a Al-Adawiyya:

"O God! If I worship You for fear of Hell, send me to Hell; and if I worship You in hopes of Paradise, withhold Paradise from me; but if I worship You for Your own sake, then do not withhold from me the Eternal Beauty."(371)

As Mahmoud Ayoub has noted:

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"The following selection is a truly mystical colloquy between man, the friend (*wali*) of God, and his Lord. It shows at one and the same time the humility of the servant in worship and the intimate love which the Lord has for him.

One day Imam Hussein passed with Malik ibn Anas, a

famous companion, by the tomb of Khadijah, the Prophet's first wife and Imam Hussein's grandmother. Imam Hussein began to weep, and asked Malik to leave him alone for a while. After long prayers, Malik heard Imam Hussein saying:

"My Lord, o my Lord, you are my master. Have mercy therefore on a servant who seeks refuge in You. On You, o Most High, is my reliance, blessed is he whose Master You are. Blessed is he who is a vigilant servant bringing all his troubles before you, Lord of Majesty, alone. Where in him there would be neither disease nor sickness, rather only his love for his Master. When he complains of his trouble and tightness of throat (with tears) [*Remember certain modes of expression used by Ibn Abbad of Ronda and St. John of the Cross.*], God would answer him and remove his sorrow. When in darkness he comes in supplication, God would grant him His favors and draw him near (*Remember the "Dark Night of the Soul" of Ibn Abbad of Ronda, and St. John of the Cross in Dark Night of the Soul and Ascent of Mount Carmel, as well as certain Russian mystics or **startsi**, such as Sergei Symeonovich Sakharov, known in the Russian Orthodox Church as the Archimandrite Sophrony, and his **guru, pir or sheikh, the Staretz [singular of startsi]** Silouan*). Then he shall be addressed 'Lo, I hear the labbayka. O my servant, for you are in my bosom (*kanaf*) and all that you said We have heard. Your voice delights my angels, behold We have heard your

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voice. Your invocations are before Me moving behind veils of Light [*Remember Suhrawardi and his Philosophy of Illumination, which some call "The Science of the Mystic Lights", as well as al-Ghazzali in Mishkat al-Anwar or Niche for Lights, and St. John of the Cross in Living Flame of Love], behold, We have removed the*

curtains for you [*Once again, remember al-Ghazzali in Niche for Lights and St. John of the Cross in Living Flame of Love*]. Ask me, therefore, without fear or hesitation, or any reckoning, for I am God." (372)

Thus, St. John of the Cross was a disciple of the Shi'a Imams, as well as a Sufi initiate, of that there can be no doubt.

In Abul Abbas ibn al-Arif of Almeria, ibn Saba'in and ibn Arabi al-Mursi is clearly visible the mark of the Ishraqi school of Suhrawardi. The Persian roots of Hispano-Muslim Sufism are thus clear enough, though much could be said on this matter, particularly in reference to the later Hispano-Muslim Sufis such as ibn Abbad of Ronda. When the doctrines of ibn Arabi al-Mursi (who traveled a great deal in the East but received his mystical formation in Seville under the very old woman Sufi Fatima bint ibn al-Muthanna [known in some sources as Fatima bint Waliyya] of Cordoba) were later accepted by the great Persian Shi'a theosophers of the school of Ispahan, in the words of Henry Corbin:

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"We see the closing of the great circle of the return to the origins". (373)

A manifestation or plasmation of the allegorical and symbolic work



of Suhrawardi's Qisat al-Garbat al-Garbiyya, i.e., Narration of the Exile in the West, whose object is, by way of initiation, to return the mystic to his origin, his "Orient". The word "orientation" thus is seen to acquire a new significance. Once again the great affinity between Persia on one hand and al-Andalus on the other is brought into sharp relief.

In Persia Islam was imposed on an Iranian base, while Muslim Spain possessed a strong Celtic substratum. Thus, the affinity between the two is not surprising. Ibn Saba'in, in particular was most definitely of Hispanic rather than Arab or Berber origin, as were other Hispano-Muslim Sufis. Ibn Saba'in is said to have been of Visigothic origin, though in al-Andalus there existed the tendency to refer to all pre-Muslim or Christian Spaniards as "Goths", and thus this only indicates that Ibn Saba'in was of Hispanic origin, descendant of Mozarabs who converted to Islam.

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The connections of Ibn Saba'in with Granada have been mentioned before. Though the Mora de Ubeda was a follower of al-Ghazzali, she must have been aware of the great thinker Ibn

Saba'in, who for some time lived very near indeed to where she lived, perhaps in the same house or at least on the same site as her own dwelling, which, like the sort of convent where ibn Saba'in lived in Granada, was very near the Gate of Elvira. It would thus not be surprising if works by or about ibn Saba'in were included in her library. We have already spoken of the many Persian Sufis and Dervishes who sought refuge in the Naziri Kingdom of Granada due to the Mongol invasion; these were certainly familiar with the Ishraqi philosophy or Theosophy of Suhrawardi. Of course, one must certainly not confuse the ***Ishraqi***, literally **Illuminatist**, philosophy and theosophy of Suhrawardi with the "alumbrados", contemporaries of St. John of the Cross and who were such a plague to him, nor to the utterly evil, pernicious and malignant "Illuminists" or *Illuminati* of 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, so ably chronicled by Abbe Augustin Marruel

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in his masterful Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism. For this reason, I prefer John Walbridge's definition of the philosophy of Suhrawardi, i.e., *The Science of Mystic Lights*, because this eliminates any possibility of confusion with the

*alumbrados* or the 18<sup>th</sup> century *Illuminati*.

As we said before, no one has really compared the works of St. John of the Cross with the whole corpus of Persian Sufi verse, nor with the all the works of Suhrawardi. To say that the great Shi'a thinkers of the Safavi period might have influenced the works of St. John of the Cross is a gross anachronism, as these great Persian Shi'a thinkers of the Safavi period are all later than the time of St. John of the Cross. However, a comparison between the works of St. John of the Cross and the Shi'a thinkers of Safavi Persia would still be of interest. We now proceed to explain why.

Firstly, as we said before, there is indeed much evidence for the prevalence of Shi'ism and Shi'a influence in Muslim Spain, as well as specifically Persian influences in a great many fields, as well as ethnic kinship between Celts and Iranians.

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As we mentioned earlier, though he was at least nominally a Sunni, the great Hispano-Muslim Sufi Ibn Arabi al-Mursi, like so many other Hispano-Muslim Sufis, philosophers and theologians, shows unmistakable influences of the Shi'a *kalam*, *hikmat* and

esoterism. Now, the works of Ibn Arabi were very influential among the great Shi'a thinkers of Safavi Persia.(374)

Also, ibn Abbad of Ronda was a member of the *Shadhiliyyah* Order of Sufis. Abul Abbas al-Mursi, (note that "*Mursi*" means "from Murcia", so Abul Abbas al-Mursi was a Murciano, as was ibn Arabi of Murcia or ibn Arabi al-Mursi) founder of said Order, claimed to be an initiate of a direct line of spiritual succession (i.e., an unbroken chain of spiritual masters, a sort of Apostolic Succession) begun by Hasan ibn Ali, Second Shi'a Imam and son of Ali ibn Abi Talib, First Shi'a Imam, as we said above. Thus, by way of ibn Abbad of Ronda, St. John of the Cross could in a very real sense be considered a spiritual master in direct line of succession from Hasan ibn Ali, Second Shi'a Imam. We have already spoken of the connections between St. John of the Cross on one hand and the Shi'a Imams, especially Imam Hasan, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Imam, Imam Hussein, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Imam, and Ja'afar as-Sadiq, the 6<sup>th</sup> Imam.

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Ibn Arabi al-Mursi and St. John of the Cross are both representatives of Spanish Mysticism. We have seen how the influence of certain Hispano-Muslim Sufis is obvious in the works of St. John of the Cross.

We have spoken much of Persian influence in Spain. In the foregoing we have an example of Spanish influence in Persia.

Though he died in Syria, Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was born in Murcia Spain of Hispanic ancestry, spent most of his life there, and there received his mystical formation and initiation. Ibn Arabi al-Mursi was one of the greatest Spaniards who ever lived.

In this chapter we have mentioned that in the works of St. John of the Cross one finds echoes not only of those universally considered to be the great figures of Sufism, but also Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy on the one hand and the role of Fatima on the other. Fatima, of course was the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, wife of Ali ibn Abi Talib and female ancestor of eleven of the twelve Holy Imams. However, since these topics are of such importance to a full, rounded understanding of St. John of the Cross and, in particular, his relation to Sufism and therefore

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Shi'ism, it is well to touch on these topics at this time, and also to indicate the linkage between this chapter and the following chapter.

The following sayings are attributed to the Prophet Muhammad:

"As for my daughter, Fatima, she is the mistress of the women of the worlds, those that were and those that are to come, and she is part of me. She is the human *hourī* who, when she enters her prayer chamber, before God, exalted be He, her light shines to the angels of Heaven as the stars shine to the inhabitants of the earth. Thus when I saw her I recalled what will be done to her after me. I could see how humiliation shall enter her home, her sanctity shall be violated, her rights usurped, her inheritance denied and her troubles multiplied. She shall lose her child (through miscarriage), all the while crying out, "Oh my uhammad, but no one will come to her aid. After me she will remain sorrowful and grieved and weeping, at times recalling the cessation of revelation (*wahī*) from her house, at other times my departure from her. When night comes upon her, she shall feel lonely, missing my voice which she was accustomed to hearing, as I recited the Qur'an by night. She shall find herself humiliated after being loved and well treated during the lifetime of her father. Then God will console her with angels who will address her with the words he addressed to (the Virgin) Mary, the daughter of Imran (Biblical "Joachim"). They will say to her "Oh Fatima, God has chosen you, and purified you, He has chosen you above all women. (Fatima) be obedient to your Lord, prostrating and bowing before Him."

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Then her pains will commence and she will fall ill. God will send to her Mary, daughter of Imran, to nurse and console her in her sickness. She shall then say, "Oh Lord, I truly despise this life and have become troubled by the people of this world; let me therefore depart to my father." Thus she will be the first to come to me from my family. She will come to me sorrowful and heavy with grief, persecuted and martyred. Then will I say, "Oh God, curse those who wrong her, punish those

who humiliate her, and consign eternally into Your fire him who hit her side so that she lost her child." Then the angels will reply: Amen."

"A Bedouin from one of the tribes in the neighborhood of Medina came to the Prophet (Muhammad) who was sitting with his companions, reviling him and calling him a magician and a liar. He had hidden in his sleeve a small lizard (*dabb*) which he had caught in the desert. He let the animal go and the Prophet (Muhammad) called it to him, asking it, "Do you know who I am?" the animal answered, "You are Muhammad, the Apostle of God." In astonishment and recognition of the Prophet's claims and forbearance, the Bedouin embraced Islam. But he was poor and hungry and none of the companions had anything to give him to eat. Confident of Fatima's generosity and compassion, the Prophet sent Salman the Persian to her seeking food for the hungry man. She had nothing but her own clothes, so she sent her cloak to be pawned with Simon the Jew for a bushel of barley and a tray of dates. She baked the barley, after grinding it with her own hands, and sent the bread and dates to feed the new Muslim. With joy the Prophet came to her, but found her pale with hunger and her two children, Hasan and Hussein, asleep, trembling like slaughtered birds from hunger as no one in the house of Ali (ibn Abi Talib) had tasted anything for three days. The prophet saw this and his eyes were filled with tears, and he did not know what to do.

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Fatima then entered her chamber and prayed a few *rakahs*, after which she invoked God saying; "Oh Lord, send to us a banquet (*ma'idah*) from Heaven as You have sent to the children of Israel. They disbelieved it, yet will we be believers in it." As she finished her prayer, a banquet was sent from Heaven and they all ate. The Prophet, with joy and gratitude, exclaimed, "Thanks be to God Who had granted me a child like (the Virgin) Mary who, whenever Zechariah went in to her in the Sanctuary, he found her provisioned. "Mary", he said, "How comes this to you?" "From God", she

said."(375)

Here are some sayings of Hussein ibn Ali, 3<sup>rd</sup> Shi'a Imam and the Martyr of Karbala:

"He (Imam Hussein) once said, describing the difference of worship and motives for it: "There are those who worship God only in fear (i.e., of Hell) and that is the worship of slaves; there are those who worship God in coventousness (i.e., of Paradise), and that is the worship of merchants, but there are those who worship God in thankfulness and that is the worship of free men; it is the best of worship."(376)

Below are two prayers of Imam Hussein, Martyr of Karbala which are warm with the glow of piety and genuine mystical love of God. The first was heard by Sharih, one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad when Imam Hussein was praying after offering his obligatory prayers at the mosque of Medina:

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"My Lord and Master, it is for the instruments of torture in Hell that You have created my members and You have made my entrails to be filled with the *hamim* (the boiling waters of Hell). My God, if You would require of me reckoning for my sins, I would request of You magnanimity. If you would imprison me with the transgressors, I would tell them of my love for You. My Lord, as for my obedience to You it can benefit You not. And as for my disobedience, it can do you no harm. Grant me, therefore, I pray that which benefits You not, and forgive me that which does You no harm, for You are the most Merciful."(377)



Below is another prayer of Hussein ibn Ali, 3<sup>rd</sup> Shi'a Imam and Martyr of Karbala. In reality, it is a mystical colloquy between man, the friend (*wali*) of God, and his Lord. It shows at one and the same time the humility of the servant in worship and the intimate love which the Lord has for him. One day Hussein, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Imam and Martyr of Karbala, along with Malik ibn Anas, passed by the tomb of Khadijah. The Prophet Muhammad's first wife and Imam Hussein's grandmother. Imam Hussein began to weep and asked Malik to leave him alone for a time. After saying long prayers, Malik ibn Anas heard Imam Hussein praying thusly:

"My Lord, O my Lord You are my Master. Therefore have mercy on a servant who seeks refuge in You. On You, Oh Most High, in my reliance, blessed is he whose Master You are. Blessed is he who is a vigilant servant bringing all his troubles before You Lord Who alone is the Lord of majesty. Where in him there would be neither disease nor sickness, rather only his love for his Master. When he complains of his trouble and tightness of throat (with tears), God would answer him

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and remove his sorrow. When in darkness he comes in supplication, God would grant him His favors and draw him near. Then he shall be addressed "Lo, I hear the *labbayka* O my servant, for you are in my bosom (*kanaf*) and all that you did say We have heard. Your voice delights my angels, behold We have heard your voice. Your invocations are before me moving behind veils (of light), behold We have removed the curtains for you. Ask me therefore without fear or hesitation, or any reckoning, for I am God." (378)

There can be no doubt whatever that the Shi'a Imams,

particularly Ali ibn Abi talib the 1<sup>st</sup> Imam, Hussein ibn Ali, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Imam, Ali Zain al-Abidin, the 4<sup>th</sup> Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq, the 6<sup>th</sup> Imam, and Ali Reza, the 8<sup>th</sup> Imam were mystics. Taking this into account, it becomes impossible to disagree with Haidar Amoli when he said: "Shi'ism is Sufism and Sufism is Shi'ism,".

In this chapter we have demonstrated that St. John of the Cross was not only heir to the mysticism of the Early Church Fathers and of the medieval Catholic mystics, as is generally known and accepted, but also of the later Eastern Orthodox mystics, both Byzantine and Russian Orthodox. Of course, it would be a gross anachronism to say that St. John of the Cross was heir to the later Russian Orthodox mystics; indeed, as we have shown, if anything the reverse is true. The many special affinities between

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St. John of the Cross and the Russian Orthodox mystics of all periods are a manifestation of the many particular characteristics and special affinities shared by Spanish Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy.

A Jesuit once told me: "Catholicism is one, but Catholicity is extremely varied". This means that all great religions which

come to include a great many cultures and ethnic groups will develop particular characteristics among the various cultures and ethnic groups, as the above-mentioned Jesuit noted. This is candidly recognized in the Eastern Orthodox Church, hence we have Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Bulgarian Orthodox, Rumanian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Georgian Orthodox, et cetera.

It has been observed so often that traditional Catholicism and traditional Eastern Orthodoxy possess a great many affinities with Shi'ism. In the following chapter we shall note that Spanish Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy possess special affinities with Shi'a Islam which go far beyond the general Catholic Shi'a affinities and Eastern Orthodox affinities with Shi'ism. This is why I devote so much space to Russia and Ukraine

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and to the Russian Orthodox Church. As my good friend Seyyed Hossein Nasr noted in a personal communication:

"you are completely right in emphasizing the unique rapport between Shi'ism and Sufism on the one hand and certain elements of Spanish Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy on the other."

We have also demonstrated that from a purely literary

standpoint, St. John of the Cross was heir of the Provencal trobadors, of Dante, and of the Persian Sufi poets. We have also demonstrated that St. John of the Cross was heir to the Muslim Sufi mystics, both Hispano-Muslim and Persian, Sunni and Shi'a, and of the Twelve Shi'a Imams, particularly Ali ibn Abi Talib, the 1<sup>st</sup> Imam, Hussein ibn Ali, 3<sup>rd</sup> Imam and martyr of Karbala, Ali Zain al-Abidin, the 4<sup>th</sup> Imam, Ja'afar as-Sadiq, the 6<sup>th</sup> Imam, and Ali Reza, the 8<sup>th</sup> Imam. Which leads us to the following chapter, "Shi'ism in Muslim Spain".

It is very possible or probable that there exists a certain connection between St. John of the Cross on the one hand and Imam Ali Reza, the 8<sup>th</sup> Shi'a Imam(s), on the other: it would appear that they both had Hispano-Muslim mothers. A bit of explanation is needed here.

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As we have noted, the father of St. John of the Cross was Gonzalo de Yepes, who, as the Spanish say, was "old Christian on all four sides", while his mother, Catalina Alvarez, was a "Morisca", in other words Spanish by origin, but whose family had been Muslims for an unknown number of generations. So, it could be said that the mother of St. John of the Cross was an Hispano-

Muslim woman.

Imam Ali Reza (s) was born in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. Let us briefly deal with Conditions in Muslim Spain or al-Andalus at this time.

In the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, al-Andalus was ruled by amirs of the Umayyad dynasty who were vassals of the Abassid Caliphs of Baghdad; the independent Caliphate of Cordoba would come later.

The population of al-Andalus was heterogenous, composed of Arabs, mostly Syrian, Berbers, Jews and the non-Jewish indigenous population (the large majority of the Jews could also be considered "indigenous", as their ancestors had lived in Spain for many centuries). *Mozarabs* were Christians who had never converted to Islam. *Muwallads*, called *Mawalīs* or *Muladis* in different parts of al-Andalsu, were, in modern parlance, "Muslim

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Spaniards". The number of Arab immigrants in al-Andalus was small, and the old idea that massive numbers of Berbers came to al-Andalus and permanently settled there has long been disproven. This is a large topic, and we will give only one of the proofs of what we are saying. Andalusian Vulgar Arabic, of which a surprisinglt large amount survives in written form, was a

linguistic *mélange* or "fruit salad", including not only Arabic words, but also words derived from Latin, Celtic, Gothic, Greek, and even a surprising number of Persian words. However, Andalusian Vulgar Arabic apparently contained only a single word which may have a Berber etymology, and even this is highly dubious.(379) If massive numbers of Berbers had come to al-Andalus and permanently settled there, this would be totally inexplicable.

So, Mozarabs or Christian Spaniards, Muladis or Muslim Spaniards, and Jews made up between 95 per cent and 97 per cent of the population of al-Andalus in the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Though there is disagreement on details, there is agreement that by the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century AD Islam had made considerable headway in al-Andalus, but there were still a great many Mozarabs.

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Relations between the two faiths were very cordial; much later certain events would occur which to some extent would embitter relations between the two communities, but this was still far in the future. Also, all Muwallads, Mawalis or Muladis had Christian parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great grandparents, or, at the absolute maximum great-great-great-

grandparents. Some Muwallads, Mawalis or Muladis had Christian brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins. The above was even true of some of the Syrian Arabs.

Arabization in the linguistic sense had made very little headway in the al-Andalus of the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. There are essentially two reasons for this:

- 1.) the number of Arab immigrants was small &
- 2.) for a person who grows up speaking an Indo-European language, Arabic is very difficult to learn.

The predominant spoken language in al-Andalus in the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century AD and for sometime thereafter was the language which the Arabs called *Lisan al-Ajjam*. Some call this language "Mozarabic", but this is very inaccurate, as it was spoken by all elements of the population, Muslims and Jews as well as

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Christians. Other people refer to the *Lisa al-Ajjam* as "Romance", which is accurate, but may also be confusing, since "Romance" is a generic term for all languages derived from Latin. So, we will call this language *Lisan al-Ajjam*, which is both accurate, and, in this case at least, precise.

Each language has its own character. What is generally called

"Spanish" should more properly be called *Castellano* or "Castilian", as other languages are also spoken in Spain. The character of Castilian was well defined by someone in the Middle Ages, who said of it: "It resounds like a trumpet and a cymbal". The pure *castizo* Castilian as spoken in the area of Burgos, Valladolid and Salamanca, is a sonorous, dignified, very masculine language, so much so that some people consider it to be harsh.

Significantly, as we noted in Chapter 2, Castilian had an epic tradition from the very beginning, but for a long time in the Kingdom of Castile and Leon lyric verse was written only in Gallego-Portuguese. Even as late as the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, King Alfonso X *el Sabio* (the Wise) of Castile and Leon wrote his lyric songs and verses in honor of the Virgin Mary in Gallego-Portuguese rather than Castilian, his native speech.

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*Lisan al-Ajjam*, like Castilian and Gallego-Portuguese, belongs to the Romance branch of the great Indo-European family of languages. Within the Romance languages, the closest relative of *Lisan al-Ajjam* is Gallego-Portuguese, though it also has special affinities with Catalan and Provençal. Like its near relative Gallego-Portuguese, *Lisan al-Ajjam* is a "pretty" or "sweet"



language, soft, musical, lyrical, euphonious. There is good reason to believe that *Lisan al-Ajjam* had both epic and lyric verse, though there survive of it only a relatively few short lyric poems written in Arabic letters. We have dealt with this in great detail in Chapter 3. Below is an account of the mother of Imam Ali Reza by Bu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Hussein ibn Musa ibn Babawayh al-Qummi, known as "Sheikh Sadooq", who was born around 920 AD and died in 990 AD:

"In the year 235 A.H. (849 AD) al-Hakim Abu Al-Hussein ibn Ahmad al-Bayhaqi narrated from his home in Nishapur that Muhammad ibn Yahya al-Sowly said that Abul Hasan Al-Reza (s) is Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Al-Hussein ibn Abi Talib (s). His mother was an *Umm Walad* who was called *Toktam*. She was named *Toktam* when Abul Hasan Musa ibn Ja'far (s) became her master (i.e., husband).

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Al-Hakim Abu Ali Al-Hussein ibn Ahmad al-Bayhaqi quoted on the authority of al-Sowly, on the authority of Own ibn Muhammad al-Kendy quoted on the authority of Abul Hasan Ali ibn Maysam - Imam al-Kazim's mother - who was one of the Persian ladies called *Hamideh*, bought a female slave of the ***Muwalladeh*** type named *Toktam*. *Toktam* was one of the noblest ladies in regards to intelligence religion and respect for her master and his mother *Hamideh*. She respected Lady *Hamideh* so much that she would never sit down in her presence. Then Lady *Hamideh* told her son - Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (s), 'O my son! *Toktam* is a female slave. I have never seen any female slave better than her. I have no doubt that God will purify any generations from her offspring. Therefore, I

will bestow her on you. Treat her with kindness. When she gave birth to Ima Al-Reza (s), Imam Al-kazim (S) called her *Taherah*.

Then Ali ibn Maysam added, "Imam Al-Reza (s) drank a lot of milk and was a chubby baby. Then his mother asked for a wet-nurse to breast-feed the baby. She was asked if she had run out of milk. She replied, 'No, I swear by God that I have not run out of milk, but since the birth of this baby I cannot attend to my own prayers and supplications.'

Al-Hakim Abu Ali quoted on the authority of al-Sowly, 'One proof that the name of Imam Al-Reza's mother is *Toktam* can be found in this poem composed about Imam Al-Reza (s):

*The Noble Ali is the best of the people  
Who has the best father, forefathers and tribe.  
Toktam gave birth to him  
Who is the eighth Leader.  
With his knowledge and patience  
He will stress God's covenant with the people.*

Al-Sowly said, 'And some people have ascribed this to my paternal uncle - Ibrahim ibn Abbas - but no such thing has been narrated for me or what I have not heard. However, the following poem was undoubtedly composed by my paternal uncle - Ibrahim ibn Abbas:

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*The deeds of just men are just witnesses for their  
doers  
O yes, they have some considerable amount of new  
wealth  
That is not at all similar to what they had  
before.  
They give you only one percent of your own wealth,  
Yet they mention it as if they are doing you a  
favor.  
Whoever eulogizes your enemies, has not eulogized  
God.  
You are nobler than your eighth-generation cousin*

(al-Mamun)

*Just as your forefathers were nobler than his forefathers.*

Al-Sowly said, 'I found these verses written in my father's notebook in his own handwriting. My father used to say that his brother had recited these poems and said that our uncle had composed them about Ali. There is a note in the margin of one of the pages of that notebook stating, 'What is meant by eighth-generation cousin is Al-Mamun, since both Imam Al-Reza (s) and Al-mamun were eighth generation descendants of Abdul Muttalib.'

Moreover, *Toktam* is an Arabic name that is often seen in Arabic poetry. Al-Sowly said, 'My uncle - Ibrahim ibn Abbas - had composed a lot of eulogies about Imam Al-Reza (s). He used to recite them in public. However, he was finally forced to hide them. Later he searched for them and compiled them again.'

Some people have narrated that the name of Imam Al-Reza's noble mother was *Sakam An-Nawbiyeh*. She was also called *Arwa*, *Najma*, and *Somayeh*. Her nickname was *Ummul Banin*.

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Tamim ibn Abdullah ibn Tamim al-Quraishi - may God be pleased with him - narrated that his father quoted on the authority of Ahmad ibn Ali Al-Ansari, on the authority of Ali ibn Maysam, on the authority of his father, 'When the mother of Imam Al-Kazim (s) - Lady *Hamideh* - bought (the female slave) *Najma* who later gave birth to Imam Al-Reza (s), she said, 'I had a dream. In my dream God's Prophet (s) told me that *Najma* and Musa (s) will have a child who will be the best man on Earth. Then I gave her to my son Musa (s).' When *Najma* gave birth to Imam Al-Reza (s), Imam Musa Al-Kazim (s) named her *Taherah*. She also had other names including *Najma*, *Arwa*, *Sakam*, *Samaneh* and *Toktam*.

*Toktam* was her last name..' Ali ibn Maysam added on the authority of his father, 'I heard my mother say that *Najma* was a girl when Lady *Hamideh* bought her.'

(The author of the book narrated) my father - may

God be pleased with him - narrated that Sa'd ibn Abdullah quoted on the authority of Al-Hasan ibn Mahboob, on the authority of Yaqoob ibn Ishaq, on the authority of Zakariya al-Wasety, on the authority of Hisham ibn Ahmed that Abul Hasan the first (Imam Al-Kazin (s) said, 'Do you know anyone from the West who has come here?' I said, 'No.' Imam Al-Kazim (s) said, 'Yes, a man has come here. Let's go to see him together.' We mounted our horses and rode over to see him. He was a Western man with several slaves. Imam Al-Kazim (s) said, 'Show us your slaves.' The man showed the Imam (s) nine of his female slaves. About each one of them Imam Al-Kazim (s) said, 'I do not need her.' Then he said, 'Show us the rest of them. The man said, 'I do not have any more.' The Imam (s) said, 'Yes you do. Show them to us. The man swore to God and said, 'I swear by God that I do not have any more. There is just an ill female slave left.' The Imam (s) said, 'What would happen if you also show her to us?' The man refused and then the Imam (s) left. The next day Imam Al-Kazim (s) sent me to that man, instructed me to ask him what the last price was for her and to accept whatever price he quoted for her. Then I went to see that man. He said, 'I will not sell her for less than so much. I said, O.K. I accept the amount. Here is the

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money. It is yours.' He said, O.K. That female slave is yours. But please tell me who the man with you was.' I said, 'He is from the *Hashemite* tribe.' He asked, 'Which branch?' I answered, 'He is from the noble men of the *Hashemite* tribe.' The man said, 'Please explain more.' I said, I do not know anymore than this.' Then the man said, 'O.K. Let me tell you then. I bought this female slave from one of the farthest towns away in the West. A woman of the People of the Book saw me and asked me, 'What is this female slave doing with you?' I said, 'I have bought her to be with myself.' She said, 'It is neither proper nor possible for her to be with people like you. She must live with the best of people on the Earth. She will give birth to a child after living in their house for a short while to whom all the people of the East and the West will be humble.' Hisham said, After buying her, I took her to Imam Al-Kazim (s). Then after a short while she gave birth to (Imam) Ali ibn

Musa Al-Reza (s). Muhammad ibn Ali Majiluwayh - may God be pleased with him - quoted the same tradition in the same form for me on the authority of Hisham ibn Ahmed."  
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It is generally supposed that the mother of Imam Ali Reza (s) was a Berber woman. However, this is really a supposition with no evidence to support it.

Note that Sheikh Sadooq says only that Imam Ali Reza's mother was from "one of the towns farthest away in the West." Now, at the time in which Sheikh Sadooq was writing, "farthest West" could have referred to Morocco, but it could also have referred to al-Andalus, in which case "farthest West" could have been what

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is today western Andalusia, say Seville, Cadiz, or Huelva, or perhaps the Portugues Algarve, Santarem or Lisbon. As we shall see, there is good reason to believe that in this case "farthest West" meant al-Andalus.

We have already used the term *Muwallad*, *Mawali* or *Muladi*. Now, in correct Arabic, the base word, with no grammatical suffix, would be *Muwallad*, which, as we have said, meant a Muslim of Spanish blood, or, as we would say today, a Muslim Spaniard. Sheikh Sadooq specifically says that the mother of Imam Ali Reza

(s) was a *Muwallad*. At the time Sheikh Sadooq was writing, the word *Muwallad* (and/or its Andalusí pronunciations *Mawali* or *Muladi*) was in current use, at least in al-Andalus and in reference to al-Andalus. Ali Peiravi, Ph.D., the translator of the citation from Sheikh Sadooq given above, translates *Muwallad* in the following manner:

"*Muwallad* applies to slaves born among the Arabs and raised by them. Such slaves are familiar with Arab traditions and customs." (381)

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However, Jasim al-Rasheed translates *Muwallad* as:

"... being among the noble non-Arabs." (382)

Now, these translations are not only confused, they are mutually contradictory. Obviously, to said translators said word was unfamiliar, perhaps exotic, archaic or obsolete. However, to Sheikh Sadooq, writing in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, said word needs no explanation. Also, any expert in Hispano-Muslim studies could have informed said translators concerning the precise meaning of the word *Muwallad*, that, in effect, Sheikh Sadooq was saying that Imam Ali Reza's mother was a Muslim woman of Spanish, i.e., Iberian,

Celtic and Visigothic, origin, and in his day there was no need to give more information.

Also, Sheikh Sadooq recounts the following tradition:

"Let me tell you then. I bought this female slave from one of the farthest towns away in the West. A woman of the People of the Book saw me and asked me ..."(383)

Now, no doubt in the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century AD there were People of the Book in Morocco. However, in al-Andalus at this time People of the Book, Jews and most especially Mozarabs or Christians, were literally everywhere, which was not the case in Morocco. Was said

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woman of the People of the Book a Mozarab and a relative of *Toktam*, later the mother of Imam Ali Reza(s)? It is most certainly possible, in fact rather likely.

Some will no doubt say that my proofs are inconclusive, that I have said nothing which precludes the idea that the mother of Imam Ali Reza (s) was a Berber woman. True, but my proofs, if not conclusive, are neither deniable nor negligible. The only "proof" for the supposition that the mother of Imam Ali Reza (s) was a Berber woman is the statement that she was from "one of the towns farthest away in the West". Please note that there is absolutely nothing to indicate that said statement refers to Morocco and not

to al-Andalus. However, the use of the word *Muwallad* to refer to the mother of Imam Ali Reza indicates that she was a Muslim woman of Spanish origin, with Iberian, Celtic and Visigothic blood in her veins. Also, People of the Book were far more numerous in al-Andalus than in Morocco.

To summarize, my proofs that the mother of Imam Ali reza (s) was an Hispano-Muslim woman may not be conclusive (though they very nearly are), but the proofs for the supposition that she was a Berber woman are non-existent.

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St. John of the Cross and Imam Ali Reza (s) had at least one thing in common: their mothers were both Hispano-Muslim women.

A great many Christian mystics were superb prose stylists. However, so far as I am aware, no other Christian mystic is even in the same league as St. John of the Cross as a lyric poet. That said, many Persian Sufis were supremely great lyric poets. So, what is it that makes St. John of the Cross unique? The answer is this: in the works of St. John of the Cross one finds the early Christian mystics, those who wrote in Greek or Syriac as well as those who wrote in Latin, the later medieval Christian mystics, both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, the Hispano-Muslim Sufis, the



Persian Sufis, the Shi'a Imams, and even a touch of Vedanta. The word "Catholic" is a Latin transliteration of the Greek *Katholikos*, which means "Universal". So, what makes St. John of the Cross so unique is his Catholicity, in the most literal and exact sense of the word.

Though for reasons too complex to explain here, the prevalence of Shi'ism in Muslim Spain is impossible to measure. However, as we shall see in the following chapters, Shi'ism was so prevalent in Muslim Spain that it influenced even the Mozarabs or

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Christians, and the impress of Shi'ism on Spanish Catholicism is very visible to this day. Thus, one should not be surprised to find echoes of the Shi'a Imams in the works of St. John of the Cross.

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