

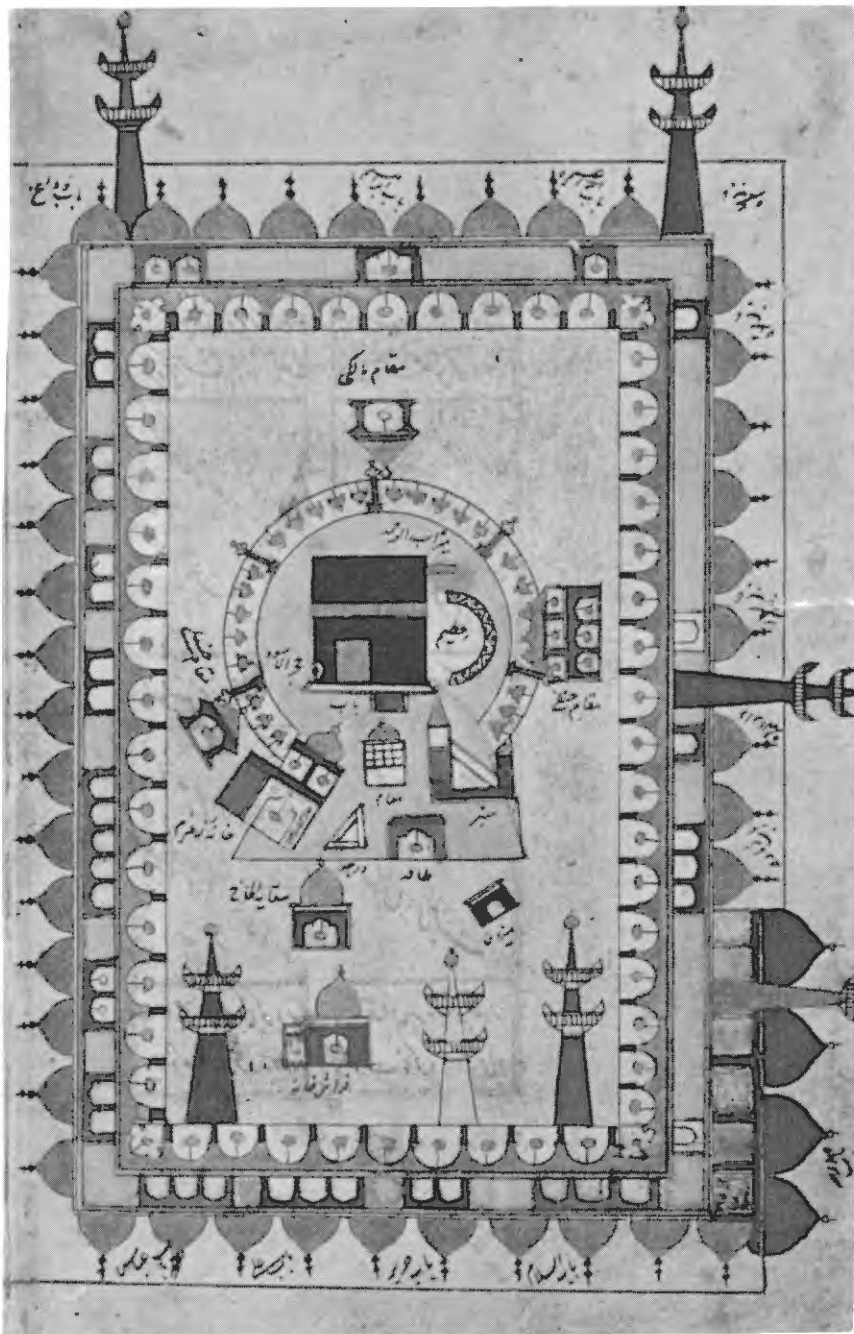


Alone with the Alone

Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabi



Henry Corbin with a preface by Harold Bloom



The Image of the Ka'aba

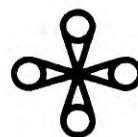
Miniature from Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, MS supplément persan 1389, sixteenth century

HENRY CORBIN

*ALONE WITH
THE ALONE*

*Creative Imagination in the
Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*

With a new preface by Harold Bloom



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terism is always a hard one, between the rock of literalism and the hard place of the dogmatic Doctors of the Law. The imaginal realm, to me a pragmatic entity, a common sphere where Shakespeare composes his poems and St. John of the Cross his prayers, is for Corbin the place of Shi'ite Sufi creativity, throughout tradition.

Corbin, like Scholem and Jonas, is remembered as a scholar of genius. He was uniquely equipped not only to recover Iranian Sufism for the West, but also to defend the principal Western traditions of esoteric spirituality. There are several lasting achievements fused together in *Alone with the Alone*: the major one is the restoration of the function of Creative Imagination in Shi'ite Sufi spirituality. Yet readers whose interests are literary-aesthetic or who turn to non-Muslim gnosticism will recognize their deepest concerns also. In a lecture given at Rome in 1956, now available in his *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (1983), Corbin traced the influence of the Gnosis of antiquity upon the Iranian Sufis: "Gnosis was not born in Islam in the Middle Ages, any more than it is a simple Christian heresy of the first centuries of our era; rather, it is something that existed long before Christianity" (p. 192).

Gnosis, and even Gnosticism, emanated from elements already present in archaic Jewish religion, preceding the times of David and Solomon, according to the researches of Idel. The so-called Sethian Gnostics were Jews, and gnosis was both a Judean-Samaritan and an Alexandrian Jewish phenomenon before the advent of Jesus. Persistent to this day among Jews, Christians, Muslims, and even secularists, "gnosis itself, in all its manifold forms and variants, also deserves to be called a *Weltreligion*" (*Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, p. 193). Of that world religion, we have only a handful of great scholars who are also prophetic guides: Corbin is one of them, together with Scholem, Jonas, and Idel. Of all these, Corbin had the widest range and the largest sympathies, and stands today as a wisdom writer of the highest eminence.

INTRODUCTION

1. *Between Andalusia and Iran: A Brief Spiritual*

Topography

A more complete title for the present book would have been "Creative Imagination and Mystical Experience in the Şūfism of Ibn 'Arabī." An abbreviation, however, is permissible, since the mere word "Şūfism" suffices to place "Imagination" in our specific context. Here we shall not be dealing with imagination in the usual sense of the word: neither with fantasy, profane or otherwise, nor with the organ which produces imaginings identified with the unreal; nor shall we even be dealing exactly with what we look upon as the organ of esthetic creation. We shall be speaking of an absolutely basic function, correlated with a universe peculiar to it, a universe endowed with a perfectly "objective" existence and perceived precisely through the Imagination.

Today, with the help of phenomenology, we are able to examine the way in which man experiences his relationship to the world without reducing the objective data of this experience to data of sense perception or limiting the field of true and meaningful knowledge to the mere operations of the rational understanding. Freed from an old impasse, we have learned to register and to make use of the intentions implicit in all the acts of consciousness or transconsciousness. To say that the Imagination (or love, or sympathy, or any other sentiment) *induces knowledge*, and knowledge of an "object" which is proper to it, no longer smacks of paradox. Still, once the full noetic value of the Imagination is admitted, it may be advisable to free the intentions of the Imagination from the parentheses in which a purely phenomenological interpretation encloses them, if we wish, without fear or misunderstanding, to relate the imaginative function to the view of the world proposed by the Spiritualists to whose company the present book invites us.

For them the world is "objectively" and actually threefold:

between the universe that can be apprehended by pure intellectual perception (the universe of the Cherubic Intelligences) and the universe perceptible to the senses, there is an intermediate world, the world of Idea-Images, of archetypal figures, of subtile substances, of "immaterial matter." This world is as real and objective, as consistent and subsistent as the intelligible and sensible worlds; it is an intermediate universe "where the spiritual takes body and the body becomes spiritual," a world consisting of real matter and real extension, though by comparison to sensible, corruptible matter these are subtile and immaterial. (The organ of this universe is the active Imagination; it is the *place* of theophanic visions, the scene on which visionary events and symbolic histories *appear* in their true reality.) Here we shall have a good deal to say of this universe, but the word *imaginary* will never be used, because with its present ambiguity this word, by prejudging the reality attained or to be attained, betrays an inability to deal with this at once intermediate and intermediary world.

The two essays that make up the greater part of this book were originally given as lectures at two sessions (1955 and 1956) of the Eranos conference, at Ascona, Switzerland. They are complementary and pursue the same design. They do not claim to provide a monograph on Ibn 'Arabī. The time for an over-all interpretation is far off; countless preliminary studies will still be needed before we can hope to orient ourselves amid all the aspects of so colossal an opus, the work of a spiritual genius who was not only one of the greatest masters of Ṣūfism in Islam, but also one of the great mystics of all time.¹ It is not even our ambition to make a "contribution to the history of ideas." A thematization of this kind often tends to "explain" an author by tracing him back to his sources, by listing influences,

1. Such an orientation is indispensable to the progress of our knowledge concerning Ibn 'Arabī. See, in this connection, the comprehensive work by 'Osmān Yaḥiā, *L'Histoire et la classification des œuvres d'Ibn 'Arabī*. (For full bibliographical data on references, see the List of Works Cited.)

and demonstrating the "causes" of which he is supposedly the mere effect. In speaking of a genius as complex as Ibn 'Arabī, so radically alien to literal, dogmatic religion and to the schematizations such religion encourages, some writers have employed the word "syncretism." This is the summary, insidious, and facile kind of explanation that appeals to a dogmatic mind alarmed at the operations of a thinking which obeys only the imperatives of its internal norm but whose personal character does not impair its rigor. To content oneself with such an explanation is to confess one's failure, one's inability to gain so much as an intimation of this norm which cannot be reduced to a school or other collective conformism.

Ibn 'Arabī is one of those powerful and rare spiritual individuals who are the norm of their own orthodoxy and of their own time, because they belong neither to what is commonly called "their" time nor to the orthodoxy of "their" time. What by a historical convention is termed "their" time is not really *their* time. Accordingly, to affect to believe that such masters are nothing more than representatives of a certain "tradition" is to forget their considerable personal contribution, is to neglect the perfect assurance with which an Arab of Andalusia like Ibn 'Arabī, or Iranians like Abū Ya'qūb Sejestānī (tenth century), Suhrawardī (twelfth century), Semnānī (fourteenth century), Mullā Ṣadrā of Shīrāz (seventeenth century) proclaim that such and such an idea, developed on such and such a page of their books, can be found nowhere else, because it is their discovery of their personal experience.

Our design is limited to meditating in depth, with the help of the texts themselves, on certain themes which run through the work as a whole. To our mind the best explanation of Ibn 'Arabī remains Ibn 'Arabī himself. The only means of understanding him is to become for a moment his disciple, to approach him as he himself approached many masters of Ṣūfism. What we have tried to do is to live his *spirituality* for a moment with him. And now we should like to communicate something of this

spirituality as we have experienced it to those who are seeking along the same path. We have used the word *spirituality* by design, fully aware of how misplaced it may seem. It concerns the most secret and most profound life of the soul; but more often than not age-old habits make it impossible for us to dissociate this personal life from its social frame, lead us to regard it as dependent on the mediation of an "ecclesiastical reality"—so much so that detachment from this reality appears equivalent to the irrevocable loss of spirituality itself. To those who are unable to effect this dissociation, the spirituality of an Ibn 'Arabī will have little to say. To those who seek an encounter "alone with the Alone," those who are capable of being like him the "disciples of Khidr" and for whom no conformism prevails over the personal imperative—to those Ibn 'Arabī and his school will unquestionably have much to say.

It may also seem misplaced to speak of spirituality in a study of the Imagination. We shall try to show in what sense this Imagination is creative: because it is essentially the *active* Imagination and because its activity defines it essentially as a theophanic Imagination. It assumes an unparalleled function, so out of keeping with the inoffensive or pejorative view commonly taken of the "imagination," that we might have preferred to designate this Imagination by a neologism and have occasionally employed the term *Imagatrix*. Here perhaps we should anticipate a question: Does not spirituality, does not mystical experience tend to cast off images, to forgo all representation of forms and figures? Yes indeed, some masters have sternly and implacably rejected all imaginative representation, all use of images. Here, however, we shall be dealing with an effort to utilize the image and the Imagination for spiritual experience. The inner, structural reasons for this will become apparent when we consider the themes themselves; they are already foreshadowed by the belief in the existence and ontological consistency of an intermediate world. But this belief in turn is embedded in other themes, which it has not been possible to

analyze in the main body of this book, but some knowledge of which must be presupposed.

Such a presupposition is far from lightening our task. For it implies in the reader a knowledge of the context embracing not only the work of Ibn 'Arabī, but also his life, a life so intimately mingled with his work that the events of his inner experience are projected upon his work and in it raised to the level of symbols. The bibliography concerning Ibn 'Arabī in French and other European languages takes up no more than a few lines. Thus there is little reason to suppose that a reader unfamiliar with Arabic will possess the requisite minimum of information. Moreover, both the man and his doctrine have suffered numerous misunderstandings. The Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī aroused alarm and indignation—and not only in Islam. If we set out to develop the idea, or to demonstrate the existence of an "orthodox Sūfism," we are in danger of being refuted and overwhelmed by the scope, the audacity, and the wide distribution of this incomparable mystical theosophy. If we try to reduce his doctrine to the categories of our Western philosophies (monism, pantheism, etc.), we run the risk of distorting its perspectives. As to whether a conciliation between mystical religion and legalist religion is thinkable, we shall have occasion to discuss later on. To raise the question is at the same time to inquire into the significance of Sūfism in Islam and consequently into the significance of its affinity with the other forms of mystical religion known elsewhere. But to do so it will be necessary to touch at least on certain things that happened in Islam in the medieval period when Islam and Christianity communicated their philosophies to one another. If we are to avoid an overhasty use of the categories by which we characterize our own philosophical systems, if we are to grasp the unique conjunction between prophetic religion and mystical religion presented by Sūfism, we must briefly consider the thinkers and the ideas which provide Ibn 'Arabī and his school with their context.

But in the present state of our knowledge it is no simple

matter to give a clear account of them. In any event we must start by breaking with two old habits: we must cease to draw a dividing line between the history of philosophy and the history of spirituality, and we must discard the picture so long presented by our handbooks on the history of philosophy, which persist in confounding philosophy in Islam with "Arab philosophy" pure and simple and reduce the latter to five or six great names, those known to our Latin scholastics. The context we are trying to delimit is infinitely larger and has nothing in common with this threadbare simplification. It was long a commonplace to suppose that the critique of the theologian al-Ghazālī was the death blow to "Arab philosophy," and that with Averroes, the great philosopher of Cordova, the same Averroes who expressed his eagerness to meet the young Ibn 'Arabī, it attained at once its apogee and its end. This may have been the case if we consider only the destinies of philosophy in Western, if not in all Sunnite Islam, but it would be absurd to identify the entire fate of philosophical thought in Islam with this struggle, however moving, between Ghazālī the theologian and the Andalusian philosopher who claimed, with perfect sincerity, to be nothing more than the pure interpreter of Aristotle. Or rather we should say that this is the view taken in the West, because the Occidentals who had witnessed the disappearance of Avicennism beneath the rising tide of Averroism failed even to suspect that Avicennism had continued to thrive at the other end of the Islamic world, in Iran. Seen from Iran, the situation takes on an entirely different aspect. Here no trace remained either of al-Ghazālī's "destruction of the philosophers," of Averroes' restoration of Aristotelianism, or even of the rearguard action in which the philosopher of Cordova disclosed his readiness to sacrifice Avicenna to the theologian of Islam in order to save at least the peripatetic philosophy. The event which followed the system of Avicenna was not the destruction of his Neoplatonism by the Aristotelian Averroes but the inauguration by Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) of the theosophy of Light (*ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*) as

"Oriental wisdom." The determining influence on Ṣūfism and spirituality was not Ghazālī's pious agnostic critique, but the esoteric doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī and his school.

Furthermore, the spiritual ferment arising from the coalescence of these two schools, that of Suhrawardī's *Ishrāq* and that of Ibn 'Arabī, created a situation which lent crucial importance to the relations between Ṣūfism and Shī'ism. The significance of both these currents in Islam was clarified, the one throwing light on the other. We shall see that the genealogies of the various branches of Ṣūfism lead back to one or the other of the Holy Imāms of Shī'ism, principally to the Sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) or the Eighth Imām 'Alī Riḍā (d. 203/819). This return of Shī'ism to the spiritual horizon prepared the way for a new answer to the question raised by the presence of Ṣūfism in Islam, by the Ṣūfī interpretation of Islam; it led to a situation which, though almost entirely disregarded in the West today, might radically change the conditions of dialogue between Islam and Christianity, provided the interlocutors were Spirituals. Related to this context, the triumph of Averroism in the West and Ibn 'Arabī's removal to the Orient are two events to which we shall here attach a symbolic significance.

Can this brief sketch stand by itself, or does it not call for a minimum of detail showing why the events of Ibn 'Arabī's biography can be taken as exemplary events? Without such an explanation this book as a whole might seem obscure.

We have just referred to a phenomenon of coalescence between the esoteric doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī and Suhrawardī's theosophy of Light; a similar coalescence occurred between the latter and Avicennism. The whole gives its coloration to the Shī'ite *Ishrāqī* Avicennism professed by the school of Ispahān at the time of the Ṣafavid renaissance. And it is this totality that we must bear in mind if we are either to appreciate the original consonances of Ibn 'Arabī's work with Shī'ism in general or with Imāmī Shī'ism in particular or to understand the determining

influence of Ibn 'Arabī on the subsequent development of Duodeciman Shi'ite gnosis in Iran. It must also be borne in mind if we are to appreciate, by contrast, these two concomitant facts: the collapse of Latin Avicennism under the violent criticism of the orthodox Scholastics and the rise of Latin Averroism, an ambiguous body of thought, from which both the currents of late theological Scholasticism down to the seventeenth century and the "impiety" of the philosophers hostile to Scholasticism and the Church were to draw nourishment.

Very briefly we may say that it was the Neoplatonic angelology of Avicenna, with the cosmology attaching to it and above all the anthropology it implies, which provoked alarm among the doctors of medieval Scholasticism and prevented them from assimilating Avicennism. In the present context of course it will not be possible to describe the Avicennan system as a whole.² We shall speak chiefly of the Figure which dominates its noetics, that of the "Active (or agent) Intelligence," that "Angel of humanity," as Suhrawardī was to call it, whose importance resides in its determining function for the Avicennan anthropology, the Avicennan conception of the human individual. Avicennism identifies it with the Holy Spirit, that is, with the Angel Gabriel as the Angel of Knowledge and of Revelation. Far from regarding this Figure, as has sometimes been done, as a rationalization, a reduction of the Spirit to the intellect, we, quite on the contrary, look upon it as the very foundation of the *prophetic philosophy* which plays so important a role among the followers of Avicenna, and which is intimately related to the spiritual existence on which we shall here be meditating.

This Intelligence is the tenth in the hierarchy of the Cherubim or pure separate Intelligences (*Angeli intellectuales*), and this hierarchy is paralleled by the secondary hierarchy of the Angels

2. We shall content ourselves with referring the reader to our *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* and our *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, pp. 295 ff. and 394 ff.

who are the Souls which move the celestial Spheres; at every degree of these hierarchies, at every resting place in the descent of being, couples or *syzygiai* are formed between them. Since these Angel-Souls (*Animae coelestes*) communicate to the Heavens the movement of their desire, the orbits of the heavenly bodies are characterized by an aspiration of love forever renewed and forever unstilled. At the same time these "celestial Souls," exempt from sense perception and its deficiencies, possess Imagination; they are indeed Imagination in its pure state since they are freed from the infirmities of sense perception. They are par excellence the Angels of this intermediate world where prophetic inspiration and theophanic visions have their place; their world is the world of symbols and of symbolic knowledge, the world to which Ibn 'Arabī penetrated with ease from his earliest years. Thus we can easily surmise the grave consequences that would result from their elimination in the cosmology of Averroes. As to the Intelligence, or Holy Spirit, it is the source from which our souls emanate, the source at once of their existence and of their light. All knowledge and all reminiscence are a light projected by the Intelligence upon the soul. Through the Intelligence the human individual is attached directly to the celestial pleroma without the mediation of any magistrery or ecclesiastical reality. This no doubt is what inspired the anti-Avicennan Scholastics with their "fear of the Angel." This fear had the effect of utterly obscuring the symbolic significance of such recitals of initiation as those of Avicenna or of Suhrawardī or of the mystical romances which are so plentiful in Persian literature. For fear of the Angel the anti-Avicennans saw nothing more than inoffensive allegories in these recitals. The human soul, whose initiation the recitals "image," has itself the structure of a pair, formed of the practical intellect and the contemplative intellect. In its superior state, the state of intimacy with the Angel of Knowledge and Revelation, the second of these "terrestrial angels," the contemplative intellect, is qualified as *intellectus sanctus* and prophetic spirit.

Thus taken as a whole, the Avicennan angelology provides the foundation of the intermediate world of pure Imagination; it made possible the prophetic psychology on which rested the spirit of symbolic exegesis, the spiritual understanding of Revelations, in short, the *ta'wil* which was equally fundamental to Sūfism and to Shī'ism (etymologically the "carrying back" of a thing to its principle, of a symbol to what it symbolizes). This Avicennan angelology provides a secure foundation for the radical autonomy of the individual, not in what we should simply call a philosophy of the Spirit but in a theosophy of the Holy Spirit. It is not in the least surprising that all this should have alarmed the orthodox; what Etienne Gilson brilliantly analyzed as an "Augustinism tinged with Avicennism" bears only the remotest resemblance to pure Avicennism.

With Averroes the situation and doctrine change completely. Averroes wished to restore authentic Aristotelianism and severely criticized the Neoplatonism of Avicenna. He rejected Emanation because he regarded Emanationism as crypto-creationism and as a Peripatetic had no use for the idea of creation. In addition to the active Intelligence, which is separate and unique, he (unlike Alexander of Aphrodisias) accepts the existence of a human intelligence independent of the organic world, but this intelligence is not the individual. The individual is identified with the perishable; what can become eternal in the individual pertains exclusively to the separate and unique active Intelligence. It will be worthwhile, at some future date, to reconsider the doctrine of the *intellectus materialis* on the strength of what we have learned from recently published Ismailian texts, which throw an entirely new light on it. But even now it can be stated that this doctrine is far removed from the sense of imperishable individuality which the Avicennan philosopher or Spiritual derives from the mere fact of his conjunction with the active Intelligence; and still farther perhaps from the eternal hexeity, the absolute individual, of Ibn 'Arabi. And no less important: in his striving to be strictly faithful to

peripateticism, Averroes excludes from his cosmology the entire second angelic hierarchy, that of the celestial Angel-Souls, governing the world of the active Imagination or Imagination of desire, the world which is the scene of visionary events, of symbolic visions, and of the archetypal persons to whom the esoteric meaning of Revelation refers. The magnitude of the loss becomes apparent when we consider that this intermediate world is the realm where the conflict which split the Occident, the conflict between theology and philosophy, between faith and knowledge, between symbol and history, is resolved. The development of Averroism with its inherent ambiguity was to exacerbate this conflict.

This ambiguity extends to our own time. Renan looked upon Averroes as a hero of free thought, the source of every kind of impiety. By reaction other interpretations tend to make him a theologian, to bring him back into the bosom of orthodox Islam. Perhaps both parties have neglected to consider an essential point of his doctrine in the context with which we shall here be concerned. True, Averroes was inspired by the idea that all minds have not the same degree of discernment: to some men the literal aspect, the *ẓāhir*, is addressed, while others are capable of understanding the hidden meaning, the *bāṭin*. He knew that if what only the latter can understand were revealed to the former, the result would be psychoses and social disasters. All this is close to the "discipline of the arcanum" practiced in Ismailian Gnosis, and to the idea of the *ta'wil* professed in Sūfism. What is forgotten is that the *ta'wil* was not the invention of Averroes, and that to understand the way he makes use of it we must understand the way in which it is handled by the true Esoterics. The *ta'wil* is essential symbolic understanding, the transmutation of everything visible into symbols, the intuition of an essence or person in an Image which partakes neither of universal logic nor of sense perception, and which is the only means of signifying what is to be signified. And we have just called attention to the metaphysical

tragedy involved, from this point of view, in the disappearance of the world of the celestial Souls, the world of correspondences and substantive Images, whose specific organ of knowledge was the active Imagination. How, in the absence of this world, are we to apprehend symbols and carry out a symbolic exegesis?

At this point we must recapitulate the distinction, fundamental for us, between allegory and symbol; allegory is a rational operation, implying no transition either to a new plane of being or to a new depth of consciousness; it is a figuration, at an identical level of consciousness, of what might very well be known in a different way. The symbol announces a plane of consciousness distinct from that of rational evidence; it is the "cipher" of a mystery, the only means of saying something that cannot be apprehended in any other way; a symbol is never "explained" once and for all, but must be deciphered over and over again, just as a musical score is never deciphered once and for all, but calls for ever new execution. For this reason it will be necessary to undertake a comparative study of the *ta'wil*, to measure the difference between the way in which it is conceived and practiced by Averroes and the way in which Shi'ism and all spiritual movements deriving from it, ground their attitude toward prophetic Revelation, which is to say their striving to accomplish it, in the *ta'wil*. Beneath figures and events, for example, the Shi'ite *ta'wil* distinguishes references to earthly persons who exemplify celestial archetypes. It will be necessary to ascertain whether an Averroist *ta'wil* still perceives symbols, or merely elaborates a rational, metaphysically inoffensive allegory.

At this very point an analysis discloses the most significant contrasts. The *ta'wil* presupposes a flowering of symbols and hence the active Imagination, the organ which at once produces symbols and apprehends them; it presupposes the angelic world intermediate between the pure Cherubic intelligences and the universe of sensory, historical, and juridical facts. By

its very essence the *ta'wil* cannot inhabit the realm of everyday fact; it postulates an esoterism. Either the human community must offer a structure in which esoterism is an organic component; or else it must suffer all the consequences implied by a rejection of esoterism. There is a common ground between the ancient mystery religions, whose adepts are initiated into a mystery, and the initiatory brotherhoods within the revealed religions, whose adepts are initiated into a gnosis. But these adepts differ in status. In its official historical form neither Christianity nor Islam is an initiatory religion. But there is an initiatory version of these religions, a Christian as well as an Islamic gnosis. Nevertheless the questions remains: whether and to what extent do the fundamental dogmas of these religions justify or negate, necessitate or contradict the function of gnosis? Does the official doctrine of the Incarnation, for example, tie in with the historical consciousness of Christianity, or does it derive its true meaning from gnosis; does the prophetism essential to Islam call for a gnosis, because the truth of the Book postulates a prophetic hermeneutics, or does it exclude gnosis? There is also a question of fact which merits close investigation, namely, the comparative destinies of gnosis in Islam and in Christianity. We can perfectly well conceive of a metahistorical dialogue between the Basra "Brethren of Purity," an association with Ismailian connections, and the Rosicrucians of Johann Valentin Andreae; they would have understood each other perfectly. But the question remains: Was there in Christianity a phenomenon comparable to Ismailian Gnosis in Islam? Or at what date did such a phenomenon become impossible? There were in the Christian world Spirituals comparable to Ibn 'Arabī: did they exert a comparable influence? Is there in the Christian world a phenomenon comparable in scope and depth to Şūfism?—and here I am thinking first and foremost of Iranian Şūfism. Christian monasticism has been mentioned, but such facile comparisons must be approached

with caution; the phenomena are profoundly different. One may think of a Third Order or of a Lodge. But Ṣūfism is neither one nor the other.

An excellent introduction to these questions will assuredly be provided by comparison of two trends: that typified in the West by the rejection of Avicennism and the triumph of Averroism; and the contrasting trend represented in the Orient by the spread of the gnosés of the *Ishraq*, of Shī'ism and of Ibn 'Arabī. The phenomenon of the "Church" as established in the West, with its Magistery, its dogmas, and its Councils, is incompatible with the recognition of initiatory brotherhoods. This phenomenon has no equivalent in Islam. Nevertheless there was a clash between official Islam and the initiatory movements. It would be worth while to study in both spheres how the refusal of all the spiritual forms that can be designated by the term initiationism or esoterism marks the starting point of laicization and socialization. Like that of Christianity, the situation of Islam today cannot be understood in depth if this essential fact is disregarded.

This laicization or secularization goes far deeper than the separation or non-separation of the "temporal power" and the "spiritual power"; rather, it is the secularization which causes the question to be raised and to persist regardless of the solution adopted, for the very idea of associating such concepts as "power" and the "spiritual" implies an initial secularization. From this point of view the passing triumph of Ismailism under the Fātimids was unquestionably a success from the standpoint of political history; from the standpoint of initiatory religion it could only be a paradox. Shī'ite esoterism implies an invisible mystical hierarchy; its most profoundly characteristic idea is that of the occultation (*ghayba*) or absence of the Imām. And perhaps the idea of this pure mystical hierarchy in the doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī and in Ṣūfism in general bears the original imprint of Shī'ism. It is still very much alive in the Shaikhism of Iran. A comparison of this development with the development of

Averroism into political Averroism as represented for example by Marsilius of Padua (fourteenth century) suffices to show the differences. But the radical secularization disclosed in the work of Marsilius was possible only because Marsilius had before his eyes something capable of being laicized, namely, the reality of power to which the priesthood lays claim but ultimately fails to obtain, whereupon it projects a fiction of that same power into the realm of the supernatural. Another striking aspect of the ambiguity to which we have already referred is to be found in the fact that in the school of Padua Averroism became, and remained until the seventeenth century, at once a refuge of rationalistic thinkers and a fountainhead of late Scholasticism. And yet the exponents of both these currents would have been unable to understand either the spirituality of an Ibn 'Arabī or Imāmology, that is, the *walāya* or spiritual ministry of the Imām and his followers, the source of initiation into the esoteric meaning, the gnosis of the Revelations.

To say that laicization begins with the elimination of gnosis is to consider the phenomenon of essential *desecration*, a metaphysical decline of the *sacred*, which no canon law either codifies or compensates. This process of desecration begins with the individual, whom it strikes in his innermost depths. Averroism denies the human individual as such any possibility of becoming eternal. In his radical answer to the problem of the intellects, St. Thomas grants the individual an "active intellect," but not a separate intellect; the intellect of the individual is no longer a transcendent or celestial Intelligence. This seemingly technical solution implies a fundamental decision, the decision to do away with the transcendent dimension of the individual as such, that is, his immediate and personal relationship with the Angel of Knowledge and of Revelation. Or rather, if such a decision was inevitable, it is because the individual's relationship with the divine world depends on the Magistery, that is, on the Church as mediatrix of Revelation. The paradox is only apparent if what appears to insure the noetic autonomy of the individual

goes hand in hand with a socialization. This alienation of the individual's transcendent dimension was ineluctable, because the problem raised by the symptomatic problem of the intellects (beneath its seeming technical barrenness), namely, the problem of the intellectual autonomy of the individual, called for a solution which was neither the unique Intelligence of Averroism nor an active intellect which is merely immanent in the individual, but something of which the *Fedeli d'amore* were clearly aware when in their sophiology they designated the Active Intelligence as *Madonna Intelligenza*. *Madonna Intelligenza* was the separate active Intelligence of every spiritual individual, his Holy Spirit, his personal Lord and direct bond with the pleroma. This same figure can be identified under various names and our Spirituals searched for it by itineraries that are no less various. In the following we shall indicate its recurrences in Abu'l-Barakāt, in Suhrawardī, and in Ibn 'Arabī. Unfortunately, once the religious norm is socialized, "incarnated" in an ecclesiastical reality, rebellions of the spirit and the soul will inevitably be directed against it. But, preserved as an inner personal norm, it becomes identified with free flight of the individual. In the opposition which led to the failure of Latin Avicennism and concomitantly of other religious movements in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it is possible to discern the same causes as those which motivated the efforts of the Great Church in the first centuries of our era to do away with gnosis. But this elimination of gnosis foreshadowed the victory of Averroism with all its implications.

Very different is the situation in the Orient, resulting in particular from the influence of the two masters whose names have here been associated, not because they make it unnecessary to mention others, but because they are the most typical: the young Iranian master Shihābuddīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (1155-1191) and the Andalusian master Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240), the compatriot of Averroes, who at the age of thirty-six (the

same age at which Suhrawardī attained to the "Orient of the soul") resolved to set out for the Orient, never to return. The situation is so completely different that it inevitably goes beyond the schematic notion of "Arab philosophy" with which Western thinkers have too long contented themselves. Of course one can justifiably speak of "Arab" philosophy just as one can speak of "Latin" Scholasticism. But what justification has the term when our history of philosophy and spirituality comes to include Iranian authors who left essential works and wrote only in Persian?—such men as Nāṣir-e Khusraw (eleventh century), 'Azīzuddīn Nasafī (twelfth-thirteenth centuries), Afzāluddīn Kāshānī, a contemporary of the great Shī'ite philosopher Naṣīruddīn Ṭūsī (thirteenth century), quite apart from the fact that Avicenna himself was an Iranian who wrote Persian as well as Arabic. Then it becomes not only inadequate, but positively misleading to speak of "Arab philosophy." These men exerted an influence chiefly on non-Arabic Islam and moreover their thinking, associated in one way or another with Shī'ism, throws an entirely new light on the significance of Ṣūfism in Islam. Here I am not questioning the pre-eminence of Koranic Arabic in liturgy and theology; on the contrary, there is every reason to stress the grandeur of the term "Arab" when it is associated with investiture with the prophetic mission. But it must be acknowledged that today the concept of the prophetic mission is undergoing a laicization with predictable effects. To continue to employ the term employed by the Scholastics because they were unable to draw the ethnic distinctions that are inescapable today would be to encourage disastrous confusion.

Suhrawardī died a martyr at the age of thirty-eight in Aleppo, whither he had rashly journeyed (1191), a victim of the rabid intolerance of the doctors of the Law and of Ṣalāḥuddīn, the fanatic known to the Crusaders as Saladin. Though his life was cut off too soon, he succeeded in carrying out a great design: in reviving in Iran the wisdom of the ancient Persians, their doctrine of Light and Darkness. The result was the philosophy, or

rather, to take the Arabic term in its etymological sense, the "theosophy of Light" (*ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*) to which we find parallels in many pages of the work of Ibn 'Arabī. In accomplishing this great design, Suhrawardī was conscious of establishing the "Oriental wisdom" to which Avicenna too had aspired and knowledge of which reached Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century. But of this work of Avicenna only fragments remain, and Suhrawardī was of the opinion that because Avicenna was without knowledge of the sources of ancient Iranian wisdom, he had been unable to complete his project. The effects of Suhrawardī's theosophy of Light have been felt in Iran down to our own time. One of its essential features is that it makes philosophy and mystical experience inseparable: a philosophy that does not culminate in a metaphysic of ecstasy is vain speculation; a mystical experience that is not grounded on a sound philosophical education is in danger of degenerating and going astray.

This element in itself would suffice to place Suhrawardī and Ibn 'Arabī in the same spiritual family. It situates this theosophy on a spiritual plane higher than the rational plane on which the relations between theology and philosophy, belief and knowledge, are ordinarily discussed. The controversy concerning these relations, so characteristic of postmedieval Western philosophy, has its sources in the situation briefly analyzed above. Actually, Suhrawardī deals not with a problem but with an imperative of the soul: the fusion of philosophy and spirituality. The ecstatic heroes of this "Oriental theosophy" of Light are Plato, Hermes, Kay-Khusraw, Zarathustra, Muḥammad: the Iranian prophet and the Arab prophet. By the conjunction of Plato and Zarathustra (Zoroaster) Suhrawardī expresses a characteristic intention of the Iranian philosophy of the twelfth century, which thus anticipates by some three centuries the thinking of the famous Byzantine philosopher Gemistos Pletho. In contradistinction to the Peripatetics, the *Ishrāqīyūn*, the disciples of Suhrawardī, are designated as "Platonists" (*Aṣḥāb*

Aflāṭūn). Ibn 'Arabī was to be surnamed the Platonist, the "son of Plato" (*Ibn Aflāṭūn*). This clarifies certain co-ordinates of the spiritual topography which we are here trying to establish. Anticipating the projects of Gemistos Pletho and Marsilio Ficino, this oriental Platonism, this Zoroastrian Neoplatonism of Iran escaped the rising tide of Aristotelianism which invaded the Latin Middle Ages and for several centuries determined not only their philosophy but also their world feeling. Accordingly, when in Cordova the young Ibn 'Arabī attended the funeral of Averroes, the great master of medieval Aristotelianism, the melancholy scene becomes transfigured into a symbol which we shall do well to consider attentively.

Such resurgences of Platonism point up the contrast: in the West, the defeat of Latin Avicennism, overwhelmed first by the attacks of the pious Guillaume d'Auvergne, bishop of Paris, then by the rising tide of Averroism; in Iran, drawing fresh vigor from Suhrawardī's Zoroastrian Neoplatonism, Avicennism entered on a new life that has endured down to our own time. Iran moreover, knows no development corresponding to the disappearance, with all it implied, of the *Animae coelestes*, the hierarchy of the Angelic Souls rejected by Averroism. Along with the *Animae coelestes* Iranian Islam preserved the objective existence of the intermediate world, the world of subsistent Images (*'ālam al-mithāl*) or immaterial bodies, which Suhrawardī calls the cosmic "Intermediate Orient." Concomitantly it preserved the prerogative of the Imagination which is the organ of this intermediate world, and with it the specific reality of the events, the theophanies, enacted in it, a reality in the fullest sense, though it is not the physical, sensory, historical reality of our material being. This world is the scene of Suhrawardī's symbolic dramaturgy. His work includes a complete cycle of Recitals of Initiation in Persian, which are a continuation of the Avicennan Recitals. Their titles are suggestive: the "Recital of Occidental Exile"; the "Vademecum of the *Fedeli d'amore*"; "The Purple Archangel," etc. The theme is always the Quest of,

and encounter with, the Angel who is the Holy Spirit and the Active Intelligence, the Angel of Knowledge and Revelation. In the "Recital of Exile" the symbolic narrative is taken up where it was left off by the Avicennan recital of Ḥayy ibn Yaḡẓān, an episode which Avicenna himself transcended in the "Recital of the Bird," later translated into Persian by Suhrawardī. How irremediable was the defeat of Avicennism in the Occident is demonstrated by the fact that Westerners in our time still refuse to perceive the mystical implications of Avicenna's noetics as illustrated in his symbolic recitals.

In the Suhrawardian theosophy of Light, the entire Platonic theory of Ideas is interpreted in terms of Zoroastrian angelology. Expressing itself as a metaphysic of essences, the Suhrawardian dualism of Light and Darkness precludes the possibility of a physics in the Aristotelian sense of the word. A physics of Light can only be an angelology, because Light is life, and Life is essentially Light. What is known as the material body is in essence night and death; it is a corpse. Through the varying intensity of their luminescence, the Angels, the "lords of the species" (the Fravashis of Mazdaism), give rise to the different species, which the natural body can never account for. What Aristotelianism considers as the concept of a species, the logical universal, ceases to be anything more than the dead body of an Angel.

The Sage in whose person this sense of the universe culminates in a metaphysic of ecstasy, who combines the fullness of philosophical knowledge with that of mystical experience, is the perfect Sage, the "Pole" (*Qutb*); he is the summit of the invisible mystical hierarchy without which the universe could not continue to subsist. Through this idea of the Perfect Man (cf. the *anthropos teleios* of Hermetism), the theosophy of Ishrāq was spontaneously oriented toward an encounter with Shī'ism and its Imāmology; it was eminently equipped to provide a philosophical foundation for the concept of the eternal Imām and for its exemplifications in the pleroma of the Holy Imāms

(the "spiritual Guides"). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the masters of the school of Ispahān (Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, Qāḏī Sa'īd Qummī, etc.), *Ishrāqī* Avicennism became *the* Shī'ite philosophy, and the consequences of this development may be felt even in the most recent form of Imāmist philosophy, the school of Shaikh Ahmad Aḡṣā'ī and his successors, or Shaikhism. Mullā Ṣadrā might be called the "St. Thomas of Iran," if we had in mind a St. Thomas combined with a Jacob Boehme and a Swedenborg, a possibility which is perhaps conceivable only in Iran. But the way to Mullā Ṣadrā's work was paved by a long line of masters who integrated the doctrines of Ibn 'Arabī into the Shī'ism of the twelve Imāms (or perhaps we should speak of a re-integration, for a study of the origins of these doctrines suggests a return to their source). This work was carried on between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries by such men as Ibn 'Abī Jumhūr, Ḥaydar Amulī, 'Alī Turka Ispāhānī, etc. Moreover an entire philosophy of Light is at work in the doctrines of Ibn 'Arabī; it remains to be established to what extent Mullā Ṣadrā is indebted to Ibn 'Arabī for his own existential interpretation of the theosophy of *Ishrāq*, which Suhrawardī had conceived in terms of a metaphysics of essence.

All this, we are well aware, has been recalled in broad strokes and too quickly. Nevertheless, it has to be recalled, for in the present state of Islamic studies it is to be feared that these figures would not spontaneously group themselves in the reader's mind. And only through such a grouping can the reader gain an intimation of the perspectives we have set out to explore. The little we have said suffices to prove that the development of philosophical thought in Islam reached neither its conclusion nor its apogee with Averroes. We shall have occasion to analyze elsewhere the reasons why it was to reach its full flowering principally in Iran and to investigate the profound meaning of this fact. In this flowering the names of Suhrawardī

and of Ibn 'Arabī, with what they imply, are profoundly intermingled. But we are still far from having exhausted the benchmarks and co-ordinates of our spiritual topography. The biography of Ibn 'Arabī will itself provide us with an opportunity to group certain necessary complements, because the events that occupy it never reduce themselves to the simple material facts of a biography, but always seem to express, to symbolize, some inner happening. Even the dates to which they attach are only outward references; their true reference is "transhistorical"; most frequently it is situated in that intermediate world of subsistent Images, without which there would be no theophanies. We shall consider these events later on, grouped according to the sequence of three privileged symbols which orient the inner life curve of our *shaikh*. We should first like to consider them, as it were, in their polarizing function.

We have already gained a glimpse of the first event in evoking Ibn 'Arabī looking on as the body of Averroes was brought back to Cordova; in his mind there arises a question whose sadness falls back upon the person of the great dead philosopher. As though in standing there Ibn 'Arabī had felt himself in advance to be the silent victor in the conflict between theology and philosophy in the West, that conflict in which they were both to exhaust themselves, unaware that their very antagonism had its origin in common premises which are absent in esoteric gnosis, whether it be that of Ismailism, of the *Ishraqiyyūn*, or of an Ibn 'Arabī. The scene occurred only a few years before the moment when Ibn 'Arabī, becoming aware that his spiritual situation was without issue in the West, that is, in the Islam of Andalusia and North Africa, set out for the Orient, as though miming in his own life and on the stage of visible geography, the mystical drama of Suhrawardī's "Recital of Occidental Exile."

When Ibn 'Arabī was born (560/1165), Suhrawardī, who was to be in Iran the resurrector of the wisdom of the ancient Persians, was still a boy of ten; he was at school in Marāgha

in Azerbaijan. The date of Ibn 'Arabī's birth (17 Ramaḍān, 560) coincides in the lunar calendar with the first anniversary of what is perhaps the most crucial event in the history of Iranian Ismailism: the proclamation of the Grand Resurrection at Alamūt. This unusual synchronism may be imputed to chance. But is this a truly satisfactory answer? To mention the synchronism, in any event, is to introduce, if only in passing, the questions it will be possible to study as we pursue our parallel studies of Ibn 'Arabī and of Shī'ite theology. It seems paradoxical that the proponents of the Western movement that has been called "Neotraditionalism" should have taken so little interest in Shī'ism, which represents par excellence the esoteric tradition of Islam, whether we have in mind Ismailian Gnosis or the theosophy of Imāmism, that is, of Duodeciman Shī'ism down to its traditional modern elaborations, such as the Iranian Shaikhism to which we have already referred. It is evident, however, that the conditions for a *spiritual* dialogue between Islam and Christianity change radically accordingly as Christianity addresses itself to Shī'ite Islam or to another branch of Islam.

The first question we shall ask about Ibn 'Arabī is: Exactly how much of Ismailian esoterism, or of a related esoterism, can he have assimilated before leaving the Maghrib forever? We find indications in his familiarity with the school of Almería and in the fact that he composed a commentary to the only surviving work of Ibn Qasī, initiator of the movement of the Muridīn in southern Portugal, where many characteristic traits of Ismailian-Shī'ite inspiration are discernible. We shall take account of a remarkable phenomenon which occurred simultaneously at both geographic limits of Islamic esoterism: the part played by the teachings of Empedocles, transfigured as a hero of prophetic theosophy. Asín Palacios carefully noted the importance of this Neoempedoclistism in the school of Almería in Andalusia, while at the same time he saw fit to regard the disciples of Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931) as the heirs to Priscillian's

gnosis. Simultaneously in Iran, the influence of this same Empedocles made itself felt in a philosopher who corresponded with Avicenna, namely, Abu'l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī and in the cosmogonies of Suhrawardī and of Ismailism.

The second question will concern the immense opus of Ibn ʿArabī's maturity. Certain chapters of the great book of the *Futūḥāt* might have been written by a pure Shīʿite. Such is the case for example with Chapter xxxix⁸, dealing with the secret of Salmān (Salmān Pārsī, Salmān the Persian, or Salmān Pāk, "Salmān the Pure"). This is the secret which gained admittance to the "members of the Prophetic House" (*Ahl al-Bayt*), that is, to the Holy Imāms, for this son of a Mazdean knight of Fārs (Persis), turned Christian, who set out in quest of the True Prophet, whom he found in Arabia, and in whose house he assumed the angelic ministry of an initiator into the secret meaning of past Revelations. The indications become more precise. Ibn ʿArabī regards as his heirs—along with Salmān—those whom the Ṣūfīs called the "poles"; in terms to which any Shīʿite might subscribe, he interprets the Koranic verse (xxxiii: 39), which is one of the scriptural foundations of Shīʿism (a verse sanctifying the persons of the Fourteen Most-Pure: the Prophet, his daughter Fātima, and the twelve Imāms). These indications, and they are not alone of their kind, are worthy of meditation. They explain in any case the reception given his work by those Shīʿites who were preparing the way for the Ṣafavid renaissance to which we have referred above. We shall have to determine in what measure the influence of Ibn ʿArabī was responsible for the feeling which may have enabled Ṣūfism to find the secret of its origins, witness for example Ḥaydar Amulī (fourteenth century), himself a Shīʿite commentator of Ibn ʿArabī, who proclaimed that the true Shīʿism was Ṣūfism and that reciprocally the true Ṣūfism was Shīʿism.

This chain of thinkers in itself gives us an idea of the development of a philosophy and of a spirituality incommensurably

broader and deeper than the schema to which our handbooks on the history of philosophy have accustomed us. They already lead us to ask the question: How is it that the philosophical ferment remained alive in the Shīʿite world and nowhere else in Islam, and that in the sixteenth century school of Ispahān a renaissance occurred whose effects have been felt down to our own time? Shīʿite sentiment must in itself imply or provoke a certain number of speculative and spiritual possibilities to which thus far the philosophers and theologians of the West have accorded very little interest. And yet they would find in this body of ideas a number of themes at once familiar and strange. Shīʿite Imāmology indeed arouses reminiscences of a Christology, but of a Christology which knows nothing of Paulinism. Many chapters of the history of dogmas considered as closed and "superseded" would then have to be reopened, revealing unsuspected possibilities that have burgeoned elsewhere.

All the great themes constitutive of Shīʿite thought provide the theological reflection they arouse with material incomparably richer than the contribution of Sunnite Islam. Their dominant is the idea of the Theophany in Human form, the divine anthropomorphosis which fills the gulf left open by abstract monotheism. Here I am not speaking of the Christian dogma of the Incarnation, of the hypostatic union defined by the Councils, but of the manifestation of the unknowable God in the angelic form of the celestial Anthropos, of which the Holy Imāms were the exemplifications on earth, the "theophanic forms" (*mazāhir*). Whereas the idea of the Incarnation postulates a unique material fact situated among the chronological facts of history, and upon that fact builds the ecclesiastical reality which sociological monism would laicize as a "social Incarnation," the theophanic idea, as we shall see in the course of this book, will call for a celestial assumption of man, the return to a time that is not the time of history and its chronology.

The recurrence of the theophanies, the perpetuation of their mystery, postulate neither an ecclesiastical reality nor a dogmatic maglatery, but the virtue of the revealed Book as

the "cipher" of an eternal Word, forever capable of producing new creations (cf. in the second part of this book, the idea of "recurrent creation" in Ibn 'Arabī). This precisely is the Shī'ite idea of the *ta'wil*, the esoteric spiritual exegesis which apprehends all material data, things and facts as symbols, transmutes them, and "carries them back" to symbolized Persons. All appearance, every exoteric meaning (*ẓāhir*) has an esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*); the book "descended from Heaven," the Koran, limited to the apparent letter, perishes in the opacity and servitude of legalist religion. It is necessary to bring out the transparency of its depths, the esoteric meaning. And that is the mission of the Imām, the "spiritual Guide," even if as in the present period of the world he is in "great Occultation"—or rather, this meaning is himself, not to be sure his empirical individuality, but his theophanic Person. His "magistry" is an initiatory "magistry"; the initiation to the *ta'wil* is a spiritual birth (*wilādat rūḥānīya*). Because here, as among all those who have practiced it in Christianity, that is, those who have not confused spiritual meaning with allegory, the *ta'wil* enables men to enter a new world, to accede to a higher plane of being.

Although it may seem arbitrary to a philologist reduced to the plane of the *ẓāhir* (the exoteric), to a phenomenologist attentive to structures, *ta'wil* (spiritual hermeneutics) reveals the rigorous laws of its objectivity. And it is the philosophy of Light, represented by Suhrawardī as well as Ibn 'Arabī, which provides the foundations for this objectivity of the *ta'wil* and regulates the "science of the Scales," the "symbolism of the worlds" practiced by Shī'ite theosophy. Indeed the numerous esoteric meanings merely corroborate, by spiritual experience, the geometric laws of the science of *perspective* as it is known to our philosophers.⁴

4. For further details, see our study, "L'Intériorisation du sens en herméneutique soufie iranienne" ('Alī Turka Ispāhānī and 'Alā'uddawīa Semnānī).

The *ta'wil*, Shī'ite hermeneutics, does not deny that prophetic Revelation was concluded with the prophet Muḥammad, the "seal of prophecy." It postulates, however, that prophetic hermeneutics is not concluded and will continue to bring forth secret meanings until the "return," the *parousia*, of the awaited Imām, of him who will be the "seal of the Imāmate" and the signal for the resurrection of Resurrections. All this, it is true, alarmed official Sunnite Islam, which felt the Law shaking on its foundations and reacted accordingly, as the tragic history of Shī'ism bears witness.

Thus, because Averroes the great Aristotelian also practiced a *ta'wil*, whose foundations and the questions it led him to ask have been evoked above, the scene of Ibn 'Arabī attending the funeral of Averroes, appears as a symbol, polarizing the themes we have just recapitulated. For Ibn 'Arabī was himself a great master of *ta'wil*—we shall see him at work in the course of this book—and it is impossible to speak of *ta'wil* without speaking of Shī'ism, for *ta'wil* is basic to its attitude toward Scripture. Thus we are introduced to an Oriental spirituality which, unlike that of the Occident, was unaware of the problems raised by Averroism, or rather an environment whose spiritual situation was alien to the problems of which Averroism and Thomism are symptoms.

Three years after this funeral another event was to assume a symbolic significance in the life of Ibn 'Arabī. Resolved to leave his native Andalusia, Ibn 'Arabī set out for the Orient without hope of return. Concurrently, at the extreme eastern limits of the Islamic world, tragic events had led to an exodus in the opposite direction. For us this movement derives symbolic significance from the fact that it came, as it were, to meet Ibn 'Arabī, himself returning to the land of his origins. The meeting place was the Middle East. Ibn 'Arabī was to die in Damascus in 1240, exactly sixteen years before the capture of Baghdad by the Mongols announced the end of a world. But for years the ravages of the Mongol onslaught had induced a

reflux of Islam from Central Asia across Iran toward the Middle East. (Among the famous refugees: Najmuddīn Daya Rāzī, Mawlānā Jalāluddīn Rūmī and his father, etc.) One of the greatest masters of Central Asian Ṣūfism, Najm Kubrā, met a martyr's death resisting the Mongols at Khwārezm (Khiva) in 618/1220. It was this same Najm Kubrā who imprinted upon Ṣūfism a speculative, visionary tendency which clearly distinguishes it from the way of life of the pious ascetics of Mesopotamia who had taken the name of Ṣūfīs in the first centuries of Islam.⁵

Among the first generation of the disciples of Najm Kubrā there occurred an event of great importance for the question which concerns us here and which has never been adequately dealt with—the question, namely, of the affinity and reunion between the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabī and the theosophy of the Ṣūfism originating in Central Asia, and consequently of Shī'ite Ṣūfism. One of the greatest disciples of Najm Kubrā, the *shaiḥh* Sa'duddīn Hammū'ī (d. 650/1252) wrote a long letter to Ibn 'Arabī, in which he questions him on matters of high theosophy

5. The etymology of the word "Ṣūfī" employed to designate the Spirituals of Islam has been a subject of research and controversy. Most students of the matter have accepted the explanation given by several masters of Ṣūfism, who derive the word from *ṣūf*, the Arabic word for wool. According to this theory, a woollen garment was the distinguishing mark of the Ṣūfīs; hence, the word *taṣawwuf*, to profess Ṣūfism. But is this explanation truly satisfactory? We know that there have always been ingenious grammarians prepared to trace foreign words in Arabic back to Semitic roots. Certain Western orientologists have simply regarded the word "Ṣūfī" as a transliteration of the Greek *sophos*, sage (*ṣūfiya*, Ṣūfism, is indeed the Arabic spelling of Hagia Sophia). That was too good to be true. And yet Birūnī, the great tenth-century scholar, as he made clear in his book about India, was still well aware that the word was not of Arabic origin. He, too, regarded it as a transcription of the Greek *sophos*. The conclusion was all the more inescapable in that the idea of the sage embodied in Ṣūfism corresponded, if not to our idea of the sage, at least to that set forth by Empedocles of Agrigentum, namely, the sage-prophet, whose importance has been stressed in the present book; cf. 'Izzuddīn Kāshānī, *Misbāḥ al-Hidāya*, pp. 65–66.

and *ta'wīl* and refers expressly to one of Ibn 'Arabī's works.⁶ In turn his most noted disciple, 'Azīzuddīn Nasafī, left a considerable opus all in Persian, in which Hammū'ī recognized the quintessence of his own doctrine and of his own works, which have today been largely lost. The work of 'Azīz Nasafī is perhaps eminently suited to illustrate our vision of an Orient coming to meet the eastbound pilgrim.

Finally, there is a high place of the spirit in Iran, which cannot remain absent from our topography: Shīrāz, the capital of Fārs (Persis) in the southwest of Iran. There another contemporary, Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209), produced in Persian and in Arabic an opus of the utmost importance for the orientation of Iranian Ṣūfism; his religion, which, as we shall see below, was that of a true *Fedele d'amore*, made him not only a precursor of Ḥāfiz, another famous Shīrāzī poet, whose *Drwān* is still treated as a Bible by the Iranian Ṣūfīs; moreover, the religion of Rūzbehān is in perfect and striking consonance with the passages of Ibn 'Arabī's "dialectic of love" that will be quoted here.⁷

We have established a certain number of co-ordinates, indicated a few benchmarks in our spiritual topography. These indications are far from complete, but they suffice to provide the reader with a preliminary orientation. The two events of Ibn 'Arabī's life chosen thus far as polarizing symbols will assume their deepest significance if we associate them with a dominant and permanent trait of our *shaiḥh's* personality. In

6. We owe our knowledge of this letter (so important for the history of Iranian Ṣūfism) to M. Marian Molé, who found it in the private library of Dr. Minossian in Ispahān (MS 1181). In this Arabic letter (eight pages of seventeen lines each), Sa'duddīn refers expressly to the "Book of Theophanies" (*tajalliyāt*); unfortunately, to judge by an appended note, Ibn 'Arabī does not seem to have ever sent an answer.

7. See Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī, *Le Jasmin des Fidèles d'amour* (*K. 'Abhar al-'Ashiqin*), *Traité de soufisme en persan* and *Commentaire sur les paradoxes des Soufis* (*Sharḥ-i Shaḥīyāt*).

the presence of a Spiritual, one asks almost automatically: who were his masters? Ibn 'Arabī had many and met many; his numerous journeys and peregrinations brought him into contact with almost all the Ṣūfī masters of his day. Yet essentially he never had more than one, and that one was none of the usual visible masters; we find his name in no archives; we cannot establish his historical co-ordinates or situate him at any particular moment in the succession of the human generations. Ibn 'Arabī was, and never ceased to be, the disciple of an invisible master, a mysterious prophet figure to whom a number of traditions, both significant and obscure, lend features which relate him, or tend to identify him, with Elijah, with St. George, and still others. Ibn 'Arabī was above all the disciple of Khidr (Khādir). We shall attempt further on to indicate what it signifies and implies to be "the disciple of Khidr." In any event such a relationship with a hidden spiritual master lends the disciple an essentially "transhistorical" dimension and presupposes an ability to experience events which are enacted in a reality other than the physical reality of daily life, events which spontaneously transmute themselves into symbols.

Ibn 'Arabī, the disciple of Khidr, presents a kinship with those Ṣūfīs who called themselves Uwaysīs. They owed this name to a pious ascetic of Yemen, Uways al-Qaranī, a contemporary of the Prophet, who knew the Prophet without ever having seen him in his lifetime; the Prophet in turn knew him without ever having laid eyes on him, and it was to him that he referred in this saying preserved in a *ḥadīth*: "I feel the breath of the Compassionate coming from the direction of Yemen." Thus Uways had no visible human guide; it was only after the Prophet's death that he went to the Ḥijāz, where he became one of the first martyrs of Shī'ism dying in the battle of Šiffin (36/657) for the cause of the first Imām. All those among the Ṣūfīs who had no visible *murshid* (guide), that is, an earthly man like themselves and a contemporary, called themselves Uwaysīs. One of the most famous was Abu'l-Ḥasan

Kharraqānī (d. 425/1034), an Iranian Ṣūfī, who left us the following saying: "I am amazed at those disciples who declare that they require this or that master. You are perfectly well aware that I have never been taught by any man. God was my guide, though I have the greatest respect for all the masters." More specifically, according to a tradition reported by Jāmī, it was the "Angel" (*rūhānīya*) of an other great Iranian Ṣūfī, Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 261/875) who guided Abu'l-Ḥasan along the spiritual Path. Such was also the case with the great mystical poet Farīduddīn 'Aṭṭār of Nīshāpūr (d. 617/1220) who, again according to Jāmī, had for master and guide the "being-of-light" of Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj (d. 309/922).⁸

If we carry our analysis a little deeper, we shall see once again how, beneath its various technical solutions, the problem of the Intellects and of their relation to the active Intelligence conceals a crucial existential decision. The solution—the decision, rather—prefigures and conditions a whole chain of spiritual development with far-reaching consequences. For it announces either that each human being is *oriented* toward a quest for his personal invisible guide, or that he entrusts himself to the collective, magisterial authority as the intermediary between himself and Revelation. The spiritual autonomy of an Ibn 'Arabī goes hand in hand with the characteristic trait of the *Fedeli d'amore*, referred to above. Thus we shall not be surprised to find that his doctrine of love is similar to theirs. In other words, the figure of the Angel-Intelligence—as Holy Spirit, Angel of Knowledge and of Revelation—commands all orientations, all the approaches and withdrawals which occur in the spiritual topography here outlined, accordingly as we accept or as we sidestep the personal relation it suggests, the co-responsibility for personal destiny assumed by "the alone with the Alone."

8. See *Nafahāt al-Uns*, p. 540, in which Jāmī relates that the Light (نور) of Ḥallāj was manifested, "epiphanized" (*tajallī kard*) to the spirit (رُوح) of 'Aṭṭār and was his preceptor (*murabbī*).

One of those who gained the best insight into the scope and resonance of the problem of the Intelligence raised in medieval philosophy was perhaps Abu'l-Barakāt, a profound and original Jewish thinker who was converted to Islam toward the end of his life (d. 560/1165). He envisaged an answer which is neither the separate Active Intelligence, one for all, nor an active Intelligence immanent in each individual, but a plurality of separate and transcendent active Intelligences, corresponding to the specific divergencies among the multitude of souls. "Some souls . . . have learned everything from invisible guides, known only to themselves. . . . The ancient Sages . . . taught that for each individual soul, or perhaps for a number of souls with the same nature and affinity, there is a being of the spiritual world who, throughout their existence, adopts a special solicitude and tenderness toward that soul or group of souls; it is he who initiates them into knowledge, protects, guides, defends, comforts them, brings them to final victory, and it is this being whom these Sages called the *Perfect Nature*. And it is this friend, this defender and protector, who in religious language is called the *Angel*."⁹

Suhrawardī referred on several occasions to the vision of this Perfect Nature by a Hermes in ecstasy, who was perhaps his own pseudonym. Just as we can recognize in this mysterious figure the features of the Mazdean Daēnā-Fravashi, the commentators identify it with the Angel Gabriel, denoting the Holy Spirit of each individual; in the pages that follow we shall observe, through the experience of Ibn 'Arabī, the recurrence of this Figure, which imposes itself with the insistence of an archetype. A great Iranian mystic of the fourteenth century, 'Alā'uddawla Semnānī, was to speak in similar terms of the "invisible master," the "Gabriel of your being." His esoteric exegesis, his *ta'wil*, carries the figures of Koranic revelation to a sevenfold depth; to attain to the "Gabriel of your being"

9. See our *Avicenna*, pp. 89–90.

is to pass successively through the seven esoteric levels and to be reunited with the Spirit which guides and initiates the "seven prophets of your being." This striving is also designated as Jacob's contest with the Angel, which was so interpreted in the symbolic exegesis of the Jewish mystic Joseph ben Judah: the intellectual soul struggling to be united with the Angel, with the active Intelligence, until the rising of the light (*ishrāq*), at which time the soul emerges, delivered, from the darkness that imprisoned it.¹⁰ Thus no doubt we should speak not of a combat with, that is against, the Angel, but of a combat *for* the Angel, for the Angel in turn needs the response of a soul if his being is to become what it has to be. A whole series of Jewish speculative mystics found the same symbolism in the *Song of Songs*, where the Beloved plays the role of the active Intelligence, while the heroine is the thinking human soul.¹¹

Here let us pause, for it seems to us that with the symbol of Ibn 'Arabī as disciple of Khiḍr we have reached the center which dominates the co-ordinates of our spiritual topography. Whatever name we may give to the disciple's relationship with his personal invisible guide, the events it determines do not fall within quantitative physical time; they cannot be measured according to homogeneous, uniform units of time and chronology regulated by the movements of the stars; they find no place in the continuous chain of irreversible events. These events, to be sure, are enacted in time, but in a time that is peculiar to them, a discontinuous, qualitative, pure, psychic time, whose moments can be evaluated only according to their own measure, a measure which in every instance varies with their intensity. And this intensity measures a time in which the past remains present to the future, in which the future is already present to

10. According to Salomon Munk, quoted in E. Renan, *Averroès et l'Averroïsme*, p. 181.

11. See the fine comprehensive study by Georges Vajda, *L'Amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du Moyen Âge*, esp. pp. 142–45.

the past, just as the notes of a musical phrase, though played successively, nevertheless persist all together in the present and thus form a phrase. Hence the recurrences, the possible inversions, the synchronisms, incomprehensible in rational terms, beyond the reach of historical realism, but accessible to another "realism," that of the subtle world, *'alam al-mithal*, which Suhrawardī called the "Middle Orient" of celestial Souls and whose organ is the "theophanic Imagination" that will concern us here.

Once he has recognized his invisible guide, a mystic sometimes decides to trace his own *isnād*, to reveal his spiritual genealogy, that is, to disclose the "chain of transmission" culminating in his person and bear witness to the spiritual ascendancy which he invokes across the generations of mankind. He does neither more nor less than to designate by name the minds to whose family he is conscious of belonging. Read in the opposite order from their phenomenological emergence, these genealogies take on the appearance of true genealogies. Judged by the rules of our historical criticism, the claim of these genealogies to truth seems highly precarious. Their relevance is to another "transhistoric truth," which cannot be regarded as inferior (because it is of a different order) to the material historic truth whose claim to truth, with the documentation at our disposal, is no less precarious. Suhrawardī traces the family tree of the *Ishrāqiyūn* back to Hermes, ancestor of the Sages, (that Idrīs-Enoch of Islamic prophetology, whom Ibn 'Arabī calls the prophet of the Philosophers); from him are descended the Sages of Greece and Persia, who are followed by certain *Ṣūfīs* (Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī, Kharrāqānī, Ḥallāj, and the choice seems particularly significant in view of what has been said above about the *Uwaysīs*), and all these branches converge in his own doctrine and school. This is not a history of philosophy in our sense of the term; but still less is it a mere fantasy.

Here it has been necessary to provide a minimum of information. We can only hope for the coming of an integral humanism

which will make it possible to depart from the horizons of our classical programs without being taken for a "specialist" who shocks and wearies the "average enlightened reader" with his incomprehensible allusions. We all have a general idea of the Middle Ages; everybody knows that there is an "Arab" philosophy and an "Arab" science but fails to suspect that there *was* much more, and that in this "much more" there *is* a sum of human experience, ignorance of which is not without its bearing on the desperate difficulties besetting our times. For no dialogue is possible without common problems and a common vocabulary; and such a community of problems and vocabulary does not arise suddenly under the pressure of material events, but ripens slowly through a common participation in the questions that mankind has asked itself. Perhaps it will be argued that Ibn 'Arabī and his disciples, or even Shī'ism as a whole, represent only a small minority within the great masses of Islam. That is true, but have we come to the point where we can appreciate "spiritual energy" only in statistical terms?

We have tried to bring out some of the reasons that impose on us a vision more complex than that with which people ordinarily content themselves in speaking of Islam or of "Oriental philosophies." These are usually taken to comprise Arab, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese philosophy. It has become imperative—we shall have more to say on the subject further on—that Iranian philosophy be included in this list. Ancient Iran is characterized by a prophetic religion, the religion of Zoroaster, from which the religion of Mānī cannot be dissociated. Islamic Iran is marked by a philosophy and a spirituality which polarized elements that are elsewhere not assimilable. This is more than sufficient reason why our topography cannot dispense with this intermediary between Arab Islam and the spiritual universe of India. Having made this point, we shall gladly agree that such a philosophical geography is not yet enough. We must advance still further to the point where Ibn 'Arabī will lead us at the end of the present book, at least to the threshold of the mystical Ka'aba, when we shall see what we enter in entering

It, and shall also see with whom we enter it. But this mystical Ka'aba is in the "center of the world," a center which cannot be situated by the methods of common cartography, any more than the mission of the invisible guide depends on historical co-ordinates.

It has seemed to us that three exemplary elements or traits assume the character of symbols for the characterology of Ibn 'Arabī. They seem most eminently to attract and to constellate the very themes which it is necessary to interrelate. These three motifs, the witness of Averroes' funeral, the pilgrim to the Orient, the disciple of Khidr, will now enable us to follow the curve of our *shaiikh's* life while becoming more intimately acquainted with him. Insofar as the events of his life take on the appearance of autobiographical data, charged with a trans-historic meaning, it will be their function to throw an anticipatory light on that twofold dimension of the human person, of which the active Imagination, investing the human person with his "theophanic function," will subsequently give us a glimpse. Ibn 'Arabī himself teaches us to meditate the facts of his autobiography in this way: in his *Kitāb al-Isrā'*, an imitation and amplification of the nocturnal assumption of the Prophet from Heaven to Heaven, he sees himself as a "pilgrim to the Orient," starting for Jerusalem from Andalusia.

2. The Curve and Symbols of Ibn 'Arabī's Life

At Averroes' Funeral

The earthly existence of Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī (abridged as Ibn 'Arabī) began in Murcia, in the southeast of Spain, where he was born on 17 Ramaḍān, A.H. 560 (July 28, A.D. 1165). The synchronism has been noted above: According to the lunar calendar, this date marks the first anniversary of the proclamation of the "Great Resurrection" at Alamūt in Iran by the Imām Ḥasan ('*alā dhikrihi's-salām*, peace be upon his

memory), instituting the pure spiritual Islam of reformed Iranian Ismailism, 17 Ramaḍān, A.H. 559 (August 8, A.D. 1164). Our *shaiikh's* surnames are well known: Muḥyi'd-Dīn, "Animator of the Religion"; al-Shaikh al-Akbar, "Doctor Maximus"; Ibn Aflāṭūn, "The Son of Plato" or "The Platonist." At the age of eight he went to Seville where he studied and grew to adolescence, leading the happy life made possible by his noble, well-to-do family, entered into a first marriage with a girl of whom he speaks in terms of respectful devotion, and who seems indeed to have influenced him in his orientation toward Ṣūfism.¹²

It was at this time that Ibn 'Arabī's visionary aptitudes became apparent. He fell gravely ill; his fever brought on a state of profound lethargy. While those about him thought him dead, he in his inward universe was besieged by a troop of menacing, diabolical figures. But then there arose a marvelously beautiful being, exhaling a sweet perfume, who with invincible force repulsed the demonic figures. "Who are you?" Ibn 'Arabī asked him. "I am the Sūra Yaṣīn." His anguished father at his bedside was indeed reciting that sūra (the thirty-sixth of the Koran), which is intoned specifically for the dying. Such was the energy released by the spoken Word that the person corresponding to it took form in the subtle intermediate world—a phenomenon not at all rare in religious experience. This was one of Ibn 'Arabī's first entrances into the '*ālam al-mithāl*, the world of real and subsistent Images, to which we have referred at the beginning of this book.

The experience was soon repeated. Ibn 'Arabī's memory of

12. For the whole, see the material gathered by Miguel Asín Palacios in his great work *El Islam cristianizado, estudio del sufismo a través de las obras de Abenarabi de Murcia*. The pious sentiment which inspired the great Spanish Arabic scholar with this strange title is perceptible throughout the work, which is still of the utmost value. But it is regrettable that he should have applied language and ideas befitting a Christian monk to a Ṣūfi like Ibn 'Arabī; their vocations are different, and in employing such a method one runs the risk of blurring the originality of both types.

his youth seems to have been especially marked by his friendship with two venerable Ṣūfī women, two *shaikha*, Yasmin of Marchena and Fāṭima of Cordova. The latter was a spiritual mother to him; he speaks with devotion of her teaching, oriented toward a life of intimacy with God. An extraordinary aura surrounds their relations. Despite her advanced age, the venerable *shaikha* still possessed such beauty and grace that she might have been taken for a girl of fourteen (*sic*), and the young Ibn 'Arabī could not help blushing when he looked at her face to face. She had many disciples, and for two years Ibn 'Arabī was one of them. Among other charismas that divine favor had conferred on her, she had "in her service" the Sūrat al-Fāṭiḥa (the opening sūra of the Koran). On one occasion, when it was necessary to help a woman in distress, they recited the *Fāṭiḥa* together, so giving it its consistent, personal and corporeal, though subtle and ethereal form.¹⁵ The sūra fulfilled its mission, after which the saintly woman Fāṭima recited a profoundly humble prayer. Ibn 'Arabī himself gives an explanation of these events in the pages that will here be analyzed, describing the effects of the creative energy produced by the concentration of the heart (*himma*). We shall also recall this episode in studying Ibn 'Arabī's "method of theophanic prayer," the creative prayer that becomes dialogue, creative because it is at once God's prayer and man's prayer. Often the venerable *shaikha* said to her young disciple: "I am your divine mother and the light of your earthly mother." And indeed, he goes on to relate, "Once when my mother paid her a visit, the *shaikha* said to her: 'O light! this is my son, and he is your father. Treat him with filial piety, never turn away from him.'" We shall hear these same words again (Part One, *in fine*), applied to the description of the state of the mystic soul, at once mother and daughter of the God of his ecstasy. This was the exact term, "mother of her father" (*umm abīha*), which the Prophet gave to his daughter

15. *Futūḥat*, II, 348.

Fāṭimat al-Zahrā, Fāṭima the Radiant. If the venerable *shaikha* of Cordova, homonym of the Prophet's daughter, saluted Ibn 'Arabī's mother in this way, she must have had a premonition of the unique spiritual destiny in store for her young disciple.

Ibn 'Arabī was approaching the age of twenty when he became aware of his definitive entrance upon the spiritual path and of his initiation into the secrets of mystical life. This brings us to the episode which seemed to us so eminently symbolic in the context developed above. Actually the episode consists of two scenes, separated by an interval of several years. Between his encounter as a young man with Averroes and the day of the funeral, Ibn 'Arabī did not see the great Peripatetic of Cordova, not at least in the sensible, physical world. He himself tells us that his own father, who was still living, was a close friend of the philosopher. This facilitated the interview desired by Averroes, an interview which ought to have figured prominently in our history of philosophy and spirituality. On some pretext, Ibn 'Arabī's father sent him to the house of the philosopher, who had heard a good deal about the young man and was curious to meet him. We shall let Ibn 'Arabī describe the encounter between the integrist Aristotelian master and the young man who was to be surnamed the "son of Plato."

"And so, one fine day, I went to Cordova, to the house of Abu'l Walid Ibn Rushd (Averroes). He had expressed the desire to meet me personally, because he had heard of the revelations that God had accorded me in the course of my spiritual retirement, and he had made no secret of his astonishment at what he had been told. For this reason my father, who was one of his intimate friends, sent me to his house one day, pretexting some sort of errand, in reality to enable Averroes to have a talk with me. At that time I was still a beardless youth. When I entered, the master arose from his place, received me with signal marks of friendship and consideration, and finally embraced me. Then he said: 'Yes.' and I in turn said: 'Yes.' His joy was great at noting that I had understood. But then taking

cognizance of what had called forth his joy, I added: 'No.' Immediately Averroes winced, the color went out of his cheeks, he seemed to doubt his own thought. He asked me this question: 'What manner of solution have you found through divine illumination and inspiration? Is it identical with that which we obtain from speculative reflection?' I replied: 'Yes and no. Between the yes and the no, spirits take their flight from their matter, and heads are separated from their bodies.' Averroes turned pale, I saw him tremble; he murmured the ritual phrase 'There is no power save in God'—for he had understood my allusion.

"Later, after our interview, he questioned my father about me, in order to compare the opinion he had formed of me with my father's and to ascertain whether they coincided or differed. For Averroes was a great master of reflection and philosophical meditation. He gave thanks to God, I was told, for having allowed him to live at such a time and permitted him to see a man who had gone into spiritual retirement and emerged as I had emerged. 'I myself,' he declared, 'had said that such a thing was possible, but never met anyone who had actually experienced it. Glory be to God who has let me live at a time distinguished by one of the masters of this experience, one of those who open the locks of His gates. Glory be to God who has accorded me the personal favor of seeing one of them with my own eyes.'

"I wished to have another interview with Averroes. God in His Mercy caused him to appear to me in an ecstasy (*wāqī'a*) in such a form that between his person and myself there was a light veil. I saw him through this veil, but he did not see me or know that I was present. He was indeed too absorbed in his meditation to take notice of me. I said to myself: His thought does not guide him to the place where I myself am.

"I had no further occasion to meet him until his death, which occurred in the year 595 of the Hegira [1198] in Marakesh. His remains were taken to Cordova, where his tomb is. When the coffin containing his ashes was loaded on the flank of a beast

of burden, his works were placed on the other side to counterbalance it. I was standing there motionless; with me was the jurist and man of letters Abu'l Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Jubayr, secretary of the *sayyid* Abū Sa'īd [an Almuhad prince] and my friend Abu'l-Ḥakam 'Amr ibn al-Sarrāj, the copyist. Abu'l-Ḥakam turned toward us and said: 'Have you not observed what serves as a counterweight to the master Averroes on his mount? On one side the master [*īmām*], on the other his works, the books he wrote.' And Ibn Jubayr answered him: 'You say I do not observe, O my child? I assuredly do. And blessed be your tongue!' Then I stored up within me [Abu'l-Ḥakam's words] as a theme of meditation and recollection. I am now the sole survivor among that little group of friends—may God have mercy on them—and then I said: 'On one side the master, on the other his works. Ah! how I wish I knew whether his hopes have been fulfilled.'"¹⁴

Is not all of Ibn 'Arabī in this extraordinary episode, this threefold meeting with Averroes? On the first occasion it is "the disciple of Khidr," he who does not owe his knowledge of spiritual experience to human teaching, who bears witness. On the second, it is the author of the "Book of Theophanies" who speaks, he who has full access to the intermediate suprasensory world, *'ālam al-mithāl*, where the Active Imagination perceives events, figures, presences directly, unaided by the senses. Finally, overwhelming in its simplicity, fraught with the mute eloquence of symbols, the return of the mortal remains to Cordova. A last homage is rendered to the master, whose essential work has been to restore integral Aristotelianism in all its purity, by the "son of Plato," contemporary of the Platonists of Persia (Suhrawardī's *Ishrāqīyūn*) who, unbeknownst to the Occident, inaugurated a development which anticipated and surpassed the projects of a Gemistos Pletho or

14. Cf. Asín Palacios, *El Islam cristianizado*, pp. 39-40; *Futūḥāt*, I, 153-54.

of a Marsilio Ficino. And in the presence of this scene with its unpremeditated symbolism, of the books counterbalancing the corpse, the melancholy question: "Ah! how I wish I knew whether his hopes have been fulfilled."

The same desire—"how I wish I knew"—rose to the lips of the "interpreter of ardent desires" some years later when on a night of pensive melancholy he circumambulated the Ka'aba. It is of no importance whether he actually performed the rite or whether it was only an inner vision. That night in any case he heard the answer—from the lips of Her who as long as he lived would remain for him the theophanic figure of *Sophia aeterna*. We shall have occasion to meditate the answer below (Ch. 11). It contains the secret on which depended the fulfilment of the desires of the man of desire, because as soon as he consents to his God, he himself becomes a pledge for this God who shares his destiny; and it is a secret which also determines that the dawn of resurrection risen over the mystic soul will not be reversed to become the dismal twilight of doubt, the cynical rejoicing of the Ignorant at the thought that transcendence has at last been overcome. If that should happen, yes indeed, the momentary survivors would behold nothing more than the mocking spectacle of a bundle of books counterbalancing a corpse.

But Ibn 'Arabī knew that this triumph is obtained neither by the effort of rational philosophy, nor by conversion to what he was later to term a "God created in dogmas." It depends on a certain decisive encounter, which is entirely personal, irreplaceable, barely communicable to the most fraternal soul, still less translatable in terms of any change of external allegiance or social quality. It is the fruit of a long quest, the work of an entire lifetime; Ibn 'Arabī's whole life was this long Quest. The decisive encounter took place and was renewed for him through Figures whose variants never ceased to refer to the same Person. As we know, he read many books. For this very reason an inventory of his "sources" is perhaps a hopeless undertaking,

especially if we persist in speaking of syncretism instead of applying ourselves to the true measure of this spiritual genius who accepted only what was consonant with his "inner Heaven" and who is above all his own "explanation." Moreover, far more is involved than a question of literary sources. There is the secret of a structure whereby the edifice was closely related in style to the edifice which sprang up in eastern Islam, where Shi'ism observed the precept "Do not strike at the face"—that is, preserve the outer face of literal Islam, not only because it is the indispensable support of the symbols, but also because it is a safeguard against the tyranny of the ignorant.

In addition there are all the invisible, inaudible factors, all that which rests on no other proof than personal testimony to the existence of the subtle world. There are, for example, the visitations of persons belonging to the esoteric, invisible hierarchy, to the confraternities of spiritual beings who form a bond between our world, or rather between each existence, and other universes. They dominate the parallelism of the cosmic hierarchies in Ismailism and live on in the Shaikhism of our time. Undoubtedly they were present to mystic consciousness long before Islam, but is it possible that they should have deserted the place of Koranic Revelation?¹⁵ These are elements of the Spiritual Diary dispersed through the work of Ibn 'Arabī (as of Swedenborg). And all this is beyond the domain of philology or even of psychology, especially a psychology that has already

15. The idea of this mystic hierarchy recurs in variants throughout the esoterism of Islam. In Ibn 'Arabī the degrees of esoteric dignity or perfection are the following: (1) the *Qutb* (Pole) around which the sphere of the world's spiritual life revolves; (2) two *Imāms* (Guides), who are the vicars of the "Pole" and succeed him at his death; (3) four *Awlād* (Pillars), who perform their mission at each of the four cardinal points; (4) seven *Abdāl* (Substitutes), who perform their mission in each of the seven climates; (5) twelve *Naqīb* (Chiefs) for the twelve signs of the Zodiac; (6) eight *Najīb* (Nobles) for the eight celestial spheres (Asin, *El Islam cristianizado*, p. 41, n. 2). In addition, for each of the degrees or "abodes" along the spiritual path, there is in each epoch a mystic who is the pole around which revolve the acts, specific to that "abode," of all those who occupy it in this world (ibid., p. 56).

formed an idea of the limits of man and of the negative character of mystic experience. But it is eminently the subject matter of the prophetic psychology which held the attention of every philosopher in Islam.

Finally, there are the innumerable spiritual masters, the *Şūfī shaikhs*, his contemporaries on earth, whom Ibn 'Arabī met and whose teaching he wished to know. He himself left a journal of these encounters in his *Risālat al-Quds*. Moreover, though he read books, though he had visible and invisible masters, the earnestness of his Quest forbade him to rely on second-hand reports; further, his complete inner freedom left him indifferent to the fear of so-called "dangerous" associations. Consequently, we can trust him and rely on the authenticity of what he relates: "I know," he says, "of no degree of mystic life, no religion or sect, but I myself have met someone who professed it, who believed in it and practiced it as his personal religion. I have never spoken of an opinion or doctrine without building on the direct statements of persons who were its adepts." This visionary master provides an example of perfect scientific probity; every student of religions, every theologian, might well adopt his maxim, even when their aim is not the specific aim of Ibn 'Arabī's quest.

The Pilgrim to the Orient

Bearing all this in mind, we shall now follow our *shaikh* in the life of wandering which was one form of his earthly calling and which began at the approach of his thirtieth year. Between 1193 and 1200 he visited different parts of Andalusia and made several journeys of varying duration to North Africa. But these restless wanderings were only a prelude to the inner call, or rather the imperious vision, which would lead him to leave Andalusia and the Maghrib forever, and make of him a symbolic pilgrim to the Orient.

Encounters with holy men, mystic conferences, sessions of instruction and discussion mark the stages of his successive or

repeated itineraries: Fez, Tlemcen, Bougie, Tunis, etc. It would be of the utmost interest to co-ordinate the pages of his *Spiritual Diary* noting personal events occurring in the invisible dimension with the physical happenings of this period in his life. Ibn 'Arabī was actually in Cordova when the vision came to him, but it was not "in Cordova" that he contemplated the persons who were the spiritual poles of all the peoples who had succeeded one another before the coming of Islam; he even learned their names in the course of this inner vision which accorded with his secret and fundamental preoccupation with an eternal religion, extending from the origin of origins down through the history of the human race, whose Spirituals it gathers together, at all times, in a single *corpus mysticum*. Visionary event, ecstatic initiation, whose time and place are the *'alam al-mithāl*, the world intermediate between the corporeal and the spiritual state and whose organ of perception is the active Imagination.

It was actually in Tunis that one evening, withdrawn in a prayer niche of the Great Mosque, he composed a poem which he communicated to no one. He did not even commit it to writing, but registered the day and the hour of his inspiration in his memory. A few months later, in Seville, a young man unknown to him, approached him and recited the verses. Overwhelmed, Ibn 'Arabī asked him: "Who is their author?" And the other replied: "Muḥammad Ibn 'Arabī." The young man had never seen Ibn 'Arabī and did not know who was standing before him. Then how did he know the verses? A few months before (the very day and hour when the inspiration had come to Ibn 'Arabī in Tunis) a stranger, an unknown pilgrim, had ninged, here in Seville, with a group of young men, and had recited a poem which they, delighted, had begged him to repeat in order that they might learn it by heart. Having done so the stranger had disappeared without making himself known or leaving any trace. Similar events were well known to the masters of *Şūfism*; the experience was frequent, for example, with the

great Iranian *shaiikh* 'Alā'uddawla Semnānī (fourteenth century). The parapsychology of our days registers them with care, but neither dares nor is able to draw any conclusions from this suspension, or rather transcending, of the spatiotemporal conditions of sense perception. The cosmology of Ṣūfism possesses a dimension—lacking in our view of the world—which takes account of such experience. It guarantees the "objective" reality of the supersensory world in which are manifested the effects of a spiritual energy whose source is the *heart* and whose organ is the active Imagination.

It is "on earth," however, in the vicinity of Ronda, that Ibn 'Arabī had a long discussion with a self-assured Mu'tazilite scholastic. They argued, disagreeing about the doctrine of Names which, as we shall see, is the central pillar of our *shaiikh's* theophanic edifice. In the end the Mu'tazilite capitulated. And it was "actually" in Tunis that Ibn 'Arabī began to study an exceptionally important work of mystic theosophy: the *Khal' al-na'layn* (Removal of the sandals), the title being an allusion to Koran verse xx:12, to the command heard by Moses on approaching the burning bush: "Remove thy sandals." It is the sole surviving work of Ibn Qasī, whom we have already mentioned as the founder in the first half of the twelfth century in southern Portugal (Algarbes) of the Murīdīn, an insurrectional movement directed against the Almoravides. The movement, or at least the foundations of its esoteric doctrine, was of Ismailian Shī'ite inspiration. Ibn 'Arabī himself wrote a commentary on the book; a study of it will assuredly help to throw light on the affinities that have been noted between the doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī and Shī'ite theosophy, affinities which account for his rapid assimilation by the Shī'ite Ṣūfism of Iran.

Ibn Qasī's movement of the Murīdīn (the adepts) had as its original source the school of Almería to which Asín Palacios inclined to relate Ibn 'Arabī's esoteric initiation. The teachings of the school of Almería, in turn, can probably be traced back, through the Ṣūfī master Ibn al-'Arīf, to Ibn Masarra (d.

319/931), and his Neoempedoclean doctrines, certain aspects of which have obvious traits in common with the Ismailian cosmology and that of Suhrawardī's *Ishraq*. Of course we should not look to this notion of Ibn Masarra as precursor for a complete explanation of Ibn 'Arabī. The fact remains, however, that it was the ample quotations provided by Ibn 'Arabī which enabled Asín Palacios to reconstitute in its broad outlines the lost work of Ibn Masarra; and Ibn 'Arabī's friendship with Abū 'Abdallah al-Ghazzāl, who was Ibn al-'Arīf's disciple and continued his teaching, also suggests a profound tie.¹⁶

Be that as it may, it is in Almería that we find our *shaiikh* in 1198—the year of Averroes' funeral—after the above-mentioned peregrinations and a brief return to his native Murcia. The month of Ramaḍān, unpropitious for traveling, was beginning. Ibn 'Arabī took advantage of his stay in Almería to write an opusculum whose content announces the great works to follow. This little book, which he entitled *Mawāqif al-nujūm* (the orbits of the stars), was written in eleven days under stress of an inspiration confirmed in a dream, which commanded him to write an introduction to spiritual life. "It is a book," he writes elsewhere, "which enables a beginner to dispense with a master, or rather: it is indispensable to the master. For there are eminent, exceedingly eminent masters, and this book will help them to attain the highest mystic degree to which a master can aspire." In it, under the veil of the astronomical symbols, our *shaiikh* describes the Light that God bestows on the Ṣūfī in the course of the three stages of the Way. The first stage, purely exoteric, consists in the outward practice of the *shari'a*, or legal religion. Ibn 'Arabī symbolizes it by the stars whose brilliance darkens as soon as the full moon of the other two

16. Cf. Asín Palacios, "Ibn Masarra y su escuela: origines de la filosofia hispano-musulmana," in *Obras escogidas*, I, 144-45, and "El Místico Abu'l-'Abbās ibn al-'Arīf de Almería," *ibid.*, I, 222-23. We have referred above to the links established by Asín between the school of Almería and Neoempedocleism as well as the gnosis of Priscillian; cf. Asín, "Ibn Masarra," I, 98 ff.

stages rises, the stages in the course of which the Ṣūfi is initiated into the *ta'wil*, the symbolic exegesis which "carries back" the literal statements to that which they symbolize and of which they are the "cipher,"—taught, in other words, how to interpret the external rites in their mystic, esoteric sense. Now, as we have said, it is not possible to utter the word *ta'wil* without suggesting Shi'ism, whose fundamental scriptural principle it is that every exoteric meaning (*ẓāhir*) has an esoteric counterpart (*bāṭin*). And throughout Western Islam this sufficed to alarm the authorities, jealous of the legalitarian religion and of the literal truth.

Thus it is not to be wondered at if Ibn 'Arabī had a presentiment that life in Andalusia would soon become impossible for him. There were tragic precedents (Ibn Qasī, Ibn Barrajān). Whoever departed from literalism was suspected of fomenting political disorder. Ibn 'Arabī was not concerned with politics, but once he had started on his path, the alternative was to remain unknown to official circles or to arouse their suspicions. It is no easy matter for a man like Ibn 'Arabī to pass unnoticed. He himself speaks of violent religious discussions between himself and the sultan Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr. His only hope of finding a wider audience, of meeting with greater tolerance, lay in leaving Andalusia, the Maghrib, and the atmosphere created by the Almuhad sultans, for the Eastern Islamic world where indeed so many of his disciples were to thrive down through the centuries.

His decision was taken in consequence of a theophanic vision: He saw God's throne supported by an incalculable number of flashing columns of fire. The concavity of the Throne, which conceals its treasure, the celestial Anthropos, projected a shadow which veiled the light of the Enthroned One, making it enduring and contemplable; in the softness of this shadow there reigned an ineffable peace. (Thus the vision configures with precision the mystery of divine anthropomorphism in the celestial world, which is the foundation of the theophanic idea,

of the dialectic of love, and also the central secret of Shi'ite imāmology). A bird whose marvelous beauty surpassed the beauty of all other celestial birds was circling round the Throne. It was the bird who communicated to the visionary the order to set out for the Orient: he himself would be his companion and celestial guide. At the same time he disclosed to Ibn 'Arabī the name of an earthly companion who was awaiting him in Fez, a man who had expressed the desire to leave for the Orient but who had received a divine premonition that he should wait for the companion who had been reserved for him. In this bird with his celestial beauty, it is not difficult to recognize a figuration of the Holy Spirit, that is, of the Angel Gabriel, Angel of Knowledge and Revelation, to whom the philosophers "traced back" their active Intelligence. This is an infinitely precious datum, enabling us at this decisive moment to appreciate the form of Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual experience. The visionary image that rose to his consciousness shows us that this was the very Figure whose identity under many variants has been disclosed to us in connection with the Uwaysīs. He is the personal Holy Spirit, in his own words the "companion and celestial guide"; we shall meet with him elsewhere in other forms, notably "around the mystic Ka'aba." Against this visionary setting Ibn 'Arabī, the pilgrim to the Orient, seems to stand out as a personification of the hero of Suhrawardī's "Recital of Occidental Exile."

With this departure begins the second phase of our *shaiikh's* life of wandering. Between 597/1200 and 620/1223 it would lead him to various regions of the Near East, until at last he settled in Damascus, where he was to pass the last seventeen years of his life in peace and arduous labors. In 598/1201 when he reached Mecca, the first goal of his pilgrimage, Ibn 'Arabī was thirty-six years of age. This first stay in the holy city was to be so profound an experience that it formed the basis of what we shall read later on about the "dialectic of love." He received the hospitality of a noble Iranian family from Ispahān, the head of the house being a *shaiikh* occupying a high post in Mecca. This

shaikh had a daughter who combined extraordinary physical beauty with great spiritual wisdom. She was for Ibn 'Arabī what Beatrice was to be for Dante; she was and remained for him the earthly manifestation, the theophanic figure, of *Sophia aeterna*. It was to her that he owed his initiation into the *Fedeli d'amore*. We shall find ample traces of this incident below (Ch. II). Not to understand, or to affect not to take seriously Ibn 'Arabī's conscious intention, in addressing the young girl Sophia, 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. For 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, because he is perceived in the light of another world.

His frequentation of the *shaikh's* family and of the small élite circle surrounding it, gave Ibn 'Arabī the quiet intimacy, the confident peace of which he seems to have been deprived during his years in the West. His stay in Mecca was the beginning of his extraordinary productivity. His mystic life became more intense; his circumambulations, real or imagined, of the Ka'aba internalized as a "cosmic center," nourished a speculative effort to which inner visions and theophanic perceptions lent experimental confirmation. Ibn 'Arabī was received into the Ṣūfī brotherhood as he had been years before in Seville. But this, after all, was only an outward sign.

The real and decisive event was similar to that which had been at the source of his departure for the Orient. It could be only provoked by meditation "around the Ka'aba," because such

events occur only "in the center of the world," that is, at the pole of the internal microcosm, and the Ka'aba is the "center of the world." It was here that the visionary once again met his personal Holy Spirit, who, in communicating to him the order to undertake his pilgrimage, had announced himself as Ibn 'Arabī's companion and celestial guide. Later on we shall examine the form of this encounter, this theophany of the divine Alter Ego which is at the origin of the immense book of the *Futūḥat*, the book of the divine revelations received in Mecca. These privileged theophanic moments cut across the continuity of profane, quantified and irreversible time, but their *tempus discretum* (the time of angelology) does not enter into that continuity. This must be borne in mind when we attempt to link the theophanies together, that of the young girl Sophia, for instance, with that of the mystic youth in the prologue to the *Futūḥat*. An encounter with theophanic persons always postulates a return to the "center of the world," because communication with the *'alam al-mithāl* is possible only at the "center of the world." Many other statements of our *shaikh* bear witness to this fact.¹⁷ Finally, it is to the order of things implied by theophanies that we must relate the dominant trait of Ibn 'Arabī's character, the trait which made him not only, like most of the Ṣūfīs, a disciple of human masters, but above all and essentially the "disciple of Khidr."

The Disciple of Khidr

This trait in Ibn 'Arabī has already been seen to be a symbol guiding the curve of his life, and it has given us occasion to

17. For example (Asín, "Ibn Masarra," I, 89): The son of the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, Aḥmad al-Sabati, a great spiritual who died in the second century of the Hegira, appeared to Ibn 'Arabī in corporeal form and spoke to him: "I met him when I was performing the ritual circumambulations of the Ka'aba, one Friday in the year 599, after public prayer. I questioned him and he replied; but it was his spirit that had taken on sensible form in order to appear to me as I was turning about the temple, just as the Angel Gabriel appeared in the form of a young Arab."

identify him with those Ṣūfis who are termed Uwaysīs. The spiritual individuality which this qualification presupposes has already enabled us to anticipate the existential choices on which are grounded, most often implicitly, the solutions given to the technical problem of the intellects, to the problem of the relation between the individual soul with the active Intelligence as the Holy Spirit which bestows existence and light. The mere fact that Ṣūfism recognized and approved the situation typical of the Uwaysīs (we have mentioned the cases of Abu'l-Ḥasan Kharraqānī and of Farīduddīn 'Aṭṭār) would suffice to forestall any hasty comparison between Ṣūfism and Christian monachism, for the latter does not seem capable of offering anything comparable.

It has seemed to us that the fact of having Khidr for a master invests the disciple, as an individual, with a transcendent, "tranhistorical" dimension. This is something more than his incorporation into a brotherhood of Ṣūfis in Seville or Mecca; it is a personal, direct, and immediate bond with the Godhead. What remains to be established is the place of Khidr in the order of theophanies: How is he, as an unearthly, spiritual guide, related to the recurrent manifestations of that Figure in which, under various typifications, we can recognize the Holy Spirit, or in other words, what is his relation to the supreme theophany proclaimed in the *ḥadīth* which we shall meditate below: "I contemplated the Lord in the most beautiful of forms" (cf. below, Ch. VI). In seeking an answer to this question we are led to ask whether the disciple's relation to Khidr is similar to the relation he would have had with any visible earthly *shaiikh*—a relation implying a numerical juxtaposition of persons, with the difference that in the one case one of these persons is perceptible only in the *'ālam al-mithāl*. In other words, does Khidr in this relationship figure as an archetype, according to the definition established by analytical psychology, or as a distinct and enduring personality? But is the dilemma involved in our question not dissipated once we become aware that the answers

to two questions—*Who is Khidr?* and *What does it mean to be a disciple of Khidr?*—illuminate each other existentially.

For a complete answer to the question *Who is Khidr?* we should have to compile a very considerable mass of material from very divergent sources: prophetology, folklore, alchemy, etc.; but since we here consider him essentially as the invisible spiritual master, reserved for those who are called to a direct unmediated relationship with the divine world—that is, a bond seeking no historical justification in a historical succession of *shaiikhs*—for those who owe their investiture to no authority, we can confine ourselves to certain essential points: his appearance in the Koran, the meaning of his name, his connection with the prophet Elijah,¹⁸ and in turn the connection between Elijah and the Imām of Shī'ism.

In Sūra xviii (vv. 59–81) Khidr figures in a mysterious episode, a thorough study of which would require an exhaustive confrontation with the earliest Koran commentaries. He is represented as Moses' guide, who initiates Moses "into the science of predestination." Thus he reveals himself to be the repository of an inspired divine science, superior to the law (*shari'a*); thus Khidr is superior to Moses in so far as Moses is a prophet invested with the mission of revealing a *shari'a*. He reveals to Moses precisely the secret, mystic truth (*ḥaqīqa*) that transcends the *shari'a*, and this explains why the spirituality inaugurated by Khidr is free from the servitude of the literal religion. If we consider that Khidr's mission is likewise related to the spiritual mission of the Imām through the identification of Khidr with Elijah, it becomes evident that we have here one of the scriptural foundations on which the deepest aspiration of Shī'ism is built. And indeed Khidr's pre-eminence over Moses ceases to be a paradox only if we consider it in this light; otherwise, Moses remains one of the six pre-eminent prophets

18. On this important point, see Louis Massignon's study "Élie et son rôle transhistorique, *Khadiriya*, en Islam," *Élie le prophète*, II, 269–90.

charged with revealing a *shari'a*, while Khidr is merely one of the hundred and eighty thousand *nabis*, mentioned in our traditions.

True, his earthly genealogy raises a problem which defies historical analysis. According to certain traditions, he is a descendent of Noah in the fifth generation.¹⁹ In any case, we are far from the chronological dimension of historical time. Unless we situate these events in the *'alam al-mithal*, we shall never find a rational justification of the Koran episode in which Khidr-Elijah meets Moses as if they were contemporaries. The event partakes of a different synchronism, whose peculiar qualitative temporality we have already noted. And moreover, how can "objective" historical methods be applied to the most characteristic episode of Khidr's career? He is described as he who has attained the source of life, has drunk of the water of immortality, and consequently knows neither old age nor death. He is the "Eternal Youth." And for this reason no doubt, we should discard the usual vocalizations of his name (Persian *Khezr*, Arabic *Khidr*) in favor of *Khādir* and follow Louis Massignon in translating it as "the Verdant One." He is indeed associated with every aspect of Nature's greenness. But let us not, for that reason, interpret him as a "vegetation myth," which would be meaningless unless we presupposed the special mode of perception implied by the presence of *Khādir*.

Such a mode of perception is indeed involved; it is bound up with the extraordinary pre-eminence, still unexplained it must be admitted, accorded to the color green in Islam. Green is "the spiritual, liturgical color of Islam"; it is the color of the 'Alids, that is, the Shī'ite color par excellence. The twelfth, "hidden Imām," the "lord of this Time," dwells on the Green Island in the middle of the Sea of Whiteness. The great Iranian Šūfī Semnānī (fourteenth century) inaugurated a subtle physiology, whose *centers* are typified by "the seven prophets of thy being."

19. Cf. 'Abbās Qumml, *Safinat Biḥār al-Anwār*, I, 389.



1. *Elijah and Khidr at the Fountain of Life*
 Persian, School of Herat, late fifteenth century

Each has its specific color. Whereas the subtle center of the arcanum, the "Jesus of thy being" has luminous black (*aswad nūrāni*, "black light") as its color, the color of the supreme center, the "mystery of mysteries," the "Muḥammad of thy being," is green.²⁰

It is impossible within the limits of this introduction to explain why Khidr and Elijah are sometimes associated to form a pair and sometimes identified with one another.²¹ The Shī'ite traditions, notably certain dialogues with the Fifth Imām, Muḥammad Baqīr, tell us something concerning the persons of Elijah and Elisha.²² What concerns us here, in connection with the person of Khidr-Elijah as initiator of the mystic truth which emancipates one from literal religion, is the bond with the person of the Imām which these traditions establish. One must have read certain of the homilies attributed to the First Imām in order to understand what Shī'ism is: there is incomparable power in its incantation of the prophetic Word, its flashing lyricism. If the "historicity" of these homilies has been doubted, such doubt perhaps is merely the profane aspect of the impression made by a speaker who seemed to be uttering the Word of an eternal Imām rather than that of an empirical and historical person. In any case they exist, and their content is by no means the legitimist political polemic to which certain writers have tried to reduce Shī'ism, forgetting that it is a religious phenomenon, hence a primordial, original datum (like the perception of a color or of a sound) which cannot be "explained" by a causal derivation from something else.

In these homilies Shī'ism shows its power to encompass the secret meaning of all Revelations. In one of them the Imām utters the names under which he has been successively known by all nations, those who have a revealed Book (*ahl al-Kitāb*) and those who have none. Speaking to the Christians, he says: "I

20. See our "L'Intériorisation du sens."

21. Cf. Massignon, "Élie et son rôle transhistorique."

22. Cf. 'Abbās Qumml, *Safinat*, I, 27-29; II, 733.

am he whose name in the Gospel is Elijah."²³ Here Shī'ism in the person of Imām proclaims itself to be the witness to the Transfiguration, the metamorphosis; Moses' meeting with Elijah-Khiḍr as his initiand in the eighteenth Sūra has as its counterpart the colloquy between Moses and Elijah (that is, the Imām) on Mount Tabor. This typology is extremely eloquent as to the intentions of the Shī'ite mind. It would be a simple matter to compile testimonies showing how Shī'ite thinking, if we hearken to it, upsets our current idea of the relations between Christianity and Islam. Ismailian esoterism has another homily in which the Imām proclaims: "I am the Christ who cures the blind and the lepers [which means the second Christ, we read in a gloss]. I am he and he is I."²⁴ And if elsewhere the Imām is designated as Melchizedek, we easily discern the connection between this imāmology and the christology of the Melchizedekian Christians who saw in this supernatural person the true "Son of God," the Holy Spirit.

Here we have only thrown out a few indications concerning the person of Khiḍr-Elijah. Set in context, they suffice to give us an idea of the vast sum of human experience concealed behind this theme. But in the presence of such complexity, of a Figure that discloses so many associations and undergoes so many metamorphoses, our only hope of arriving at a significant result lies in the phenomenological method. We must lay bare the implicit intentions of the mystic consciousness, discern what it *shows* itself of itself when it shows itself the figure of Khiḍr-Elijah in all its many aspects and implications. In the present instance, however, our sole purpose in envisaging such a phenomenology is to suggest an answer to the question of *who is* Khiḍr, considered as the invisible spiritual master of a mystic subordinated to the teaching of no earthly master and of no collectivity—precisely what Averroes had admired in the young

Ibn 'Arabī. Phenomenologically speaking, the question is equivalent to this other question: What does it mean to *be* the disciple of Khiḍr? To what act of self-awareness does the fact of recognizing oneself to be the disciple of Khiḍr correspond?

We have already intimated that the question thus formulated enables us to dispel in advance the dilemma that might be stated in these terms: are we dealing with an archetype or with a real person? It is not hard to see how great a loss either answer would involve. If, taking the standpoint of analytical psychology, we speak of Khiḍr as an archetype, he will seem to lose his reality and become a figment of the imagination, if not of the intellect. And if we speak of him as a real person, we shall no longer be able to characterize the difference in structure between Khiḍr's relationship with his disciple and the relationship that any other *shaiḥh* on this earth can have with his. In this case Khiḍr, numerically one, faces a plurality of disciples in a relationship which is hardly compatible with the fervent sentiment of the one consorting with the one. In short, these answers are not adequate to the *phenomenon* of Khiḍr's person.

But perhaps there is another path that will lead us to an understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs among our Ṣūfīs. Suhrawardī seems to open up such a path in an intention that is quite consonant with that of Ibn 'Arabī. In one of the recitals that make up Suhrawardī's spiritual autobiography, that of "The Purple Archangel," the mystic is initiated into the secret which enables him to ascend Mount Qāf, that is, the cosmic mountain, and to attain to the Spring of Life. He is frightened at the thought of the difficulties of the Quest. But the Angel says to him: "Put on the sandals of Khiḍr." And his concluding words: "He who bathes in that spring will be preserved forever from all taint. If someone has discovered the meaning of the mystic Truth, it means that he has attained to the Spring. When he emerges, he has gained the aptitude that makes him resemble that balm, a drop of which distilled in the palm of the hand, if you hold it up to the sun, passes through to the back of

23. Ibid., I, 389 and Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, IX, 10.

24. Ja'far b. Mansūri'l Yaman, *Kitābu'l Kashf*, p. 8.

the hand. If you *are Khidr*, you too can ascend Mount Qāf without difficulty." And the "Recital of Occidental Exile" describes the journey leading to the summit of Mount Qāf, at the foot of the *emerald* rock, the mystic Sinai, where resides the Holy Spirit, the Angel of mankind, whom the philosopher in this same recital identifies as the "Active Intelligence" and situates at the base of the hierarchy of the cherubic Intelligences. The essence of this answer is to be sought in the words: *If you are Khidr*. For this *assimilation* fits in with the meaning which, as we shall soon see, Ibn 'Arabī was to attribute to his own investiture with the "mantle" of Khidr, a happening which he relates to the general significance of the rite, for its effect indeed is to identify the *spiritual* state of him who receives the investiture with the spiritual state of him who confers it upon him.

This suggests what it means to *be* the disciple of Khidr. And this meaning is such that though the person of Khidr does not resolve itself into a simple archetypal schema, the presence of his person is experienced in a relationship which transforms it into an archetype; if this relationship is to *show* itself phenomenologically, a situation corresponding to its two fundamental terms is required. Such a relationship implies that Khidr be experienced simultaneously as a person and as an archetype, as a person-archetype. Because he is an archetype, the unity and identity of Khidr's person is compatible with the plurality of his exemplifications in those who *are* by turn Khidr. To have him as a master and initiator is to be obliged to *be* what he himself *is*. Khidr is the master of all those who are masterless, because he *shows* all those whose master he is how to *be* what he himself is: he who has attained the Spring of Life, the Eternal Youth, is, as Suhrawardī's recital makes it clear ("If you are Khidr . . ."), he who has attained *ḥaqīqa*, the mystic, esoteric truth which dominates the Law, and frees us from the literal religion. Khidr is the master of *all* these, because he shows *each one* how to attain the spiritual state which he himself has attained and which he typifies. His relationship with each

one is the relationship of the exemplar or the exemplified with him who exemplifies it. This is what enables him to be at once his own person and an archetype, and it is by being one and the other that he is able to be each man's master, because he exemplifies himself as many times as he has disciples, and his role is to reveal each disciple to himself.

Indeed, Khidr's "guidance" does not consist in leading all his disciples uniformly to the same goal, to one theophany identical for all, in the manner of a theologian propagating his dogma. He leads each disciple to his own theophany, the theophany of which he personally is the witness, because that theophany corresponds to his "inner heaven," to the form of his own being, to his eternal individuality (*'ayn thābita*), in other words, to what Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī calls the "part allotted" to each of the Spirituals and which, in Ibn 'Arabī's words, is that one of the divine Names which is invested in him, the name by which he knows his God and by which his God knows him; that is the interdependence between *rabb* and *marbub*, between the lord of love and his vassal (see Ch. I). In Semnānī's words, we should say that the Khidr's mission consists in enabling you to attain to the "Khidr of your being," for it is in this inner depth, in this "prophet of your being," that springs the Water of Life at the foot of the mystic Sinai, pole of the microcosm, center of the world, etc. This is also in keeping with the vision of our Uwaysīs: Guided and initiated by Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj's being-of-light, his "Angel," 'Aṭṭār attains to the "Maṣṣūr of his being," becomes Maṣṣūr in the course of the fifty passionate last pages of his *Haylāj-Nāma*. It also falls in with 'Alī Wafā's (fourteenth century) saying to the effect that in the voice of a Khidr every Spiritual hears the inspiration of his own Holy Spirit, just as every prophet perceives the spirit of his own prophecy in the form of an Angel Gabriel. And this merely echoes the words of 'Abd al-Karīm Jīlī (which we shall read below) concerning the Holy Spirit, the divine Face, of every being. To become Khidr is to have attained an aptitude for theophanic vision, for the

visio smaragdina, for the encounter with the divine Alter Ego, for the ineffable dialogue which the genius of Ibn 'Arabī will nevertheless succeed in recounting.

Once again we are carried back to the Figure whose recurrences we have noted not only in mystic theosophy but also in the philosophers when through the problems of noetics the Active Intelligence makes itself known to them as the intelligence of the Angel of Knowledge and Revelation, that is to say, the Holy Spirit (according to Koranic Revelation itself, which identifies Gabriel, the Angel of the Annunciation, with the Holy Spirit). We have pointed out the existential implications of this problem (in Abu'l-Barakāt, in Avicenna, in Averroes), insofar as each individual's solution of it defines the status of his spirituality. Khidr as a personal invisible guide, free, and in turn freeing the man he guides from any legalistic or authoritarian servitude, bears a marked kinship to the "Perfect Nature" of Abu'l-Barakāt and Suhrawardī, while for Avicenna no doubt the "Khidr of his being" took the name of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān. The panic aroused by Latin Avicennism among the orthodox believers of the West might perhaps be defined as the fear of having to recognize the individual ministry of Khidr. It is true that Avicennan noetics and angelology led to an exaltation of the idea of the Angel, which was utterly shocking to orthodox scholasticism; but in reality Avicennism and scholasticism were in every way worlds apart: in their vocabulary, their ideas, and their existential situations. This Angel is not a simple messenger transmitting orders, nor the usual "guardian angel," nor the angel evoked by the Sunnites in their discussions of which is superior, the man or his angel. This angel is bound up with the idea that the Form under which each of the Spirituals knows God is also the form under which God knows him, because it is the form under which God reveals Himself to Himself in that man. For Ibn 'Arabī the Angel represents the essential correlation between the form of a theophany and the form of him to whom it is disclosed. He is the "part allotted" to each Spiritual,

his absolute individuality, the divine Name invested in him. He is the essential *theophanism*; every theophany has the form of an angelophany, because it is determined by this correlation; and precisely in this essential determination, without which the divine Being would remain unknown and inaccessible, lies the significance of the *Angel*. Once this has been understood, the way in which Ibn 'Arabī as a disciple of Khidr meditates the philoxeny of Abraham (see below, Ch. I, §3), leads to the very heart of his theosophy and mystic experience, to a secret which is also that of the *Cherubinic Wanderer* of Angelus Silesius, which to the mystic means: to feed the Angel from one's own substance.

It remains for us only to single out, in Ibn 'Arabī's life, a few *memorabilia* concerning his encounters with Khidr. Two episodes of his youth bear witness to Khidr's latent presence in his mind. This presence, manifested by a piety which was so much a part of his life and person that it never wavered, attained its culmination on the day when, in a garden in Mosul, Ibn 'Arabī was invested with the "mantle" (*khirqa*) of Khidr at the hands of a friend, who had himself been directly invested with it. The ritual of this investiture is shrouded in mystery.

A first memorable encounter took place in the days of his youth, when he was studying in Seville, but it was not until afterward that the young Ibn 'Arabī knew *whom* he had met. He had just left his master (Abu'l Ḥasan al-Uryānī), with whom he had had a rather violent discussion concerning the identity of the person whom the Prophet had favored with his apparition. The disciple had stood firm and then, somewhat vexed and dissatisfied, taken his leave. At a turn in the street a stranger spoke to him affectionately: "O Muḥammad! Trust your master. It was indeed that person." The young man retraced his steps, meaning to inform his master that he had changed his mind, but on seeing him the *shaiikh* stopped him with these words: "Must Khidr appear to you before you trust your master's words?" Then Ibn 'Arabī knew whom he had met. Later in Tunis, on a warm night of full moon, Ibn 'Arabī went to rest in the cabin of a boat

anchored in the port. A feeling of uneasiness awakened him. He went to the edge of the vessel while the crew was still plunged in sleep. And he saw coming toward him, dry-shod over the waters, someone who approached and talked with him for a moment and then quickly withdrew into a grotto in the mountainside, some miles distant. The next day in Tunis a holy man unknown to him asked him: "Well, what happened last night with Khiḍr?"²⁵

And now comes the far more important episode of his mystic investiture, which occurred in the year 601/1204. After a brief stay in Baghdād Ibn 'Arabī had gone to Mosul, whither he had been attracted by the reputation of the Ṣūfī master 'Alī ibn Jāmi', who had been invested with the *khirqā*, the Ṣūfī mantle by Khiḍr "in person." On the occasion of what theophanic event, with what ceremonial? Ibn 'Arabī does not tell us, but he does say that in investing him with the mystic mantle the *shaiḥh* had observed the same ceremonial in every detail. Here again it will be best to let Ibn 'Arabī speak for himself.

"This consociation with Khiḍr," he writes,²⁶ "was experienced by one of our *shaiḥhs*, the *shaiḥh* 'Alī ibn 'Abdillāh ibn Jāmi', who was one of the disciples of 'Alī al-Mutawakkil and of Abū Abdillāh Qaḍīb Albān. He lived in a garden he owned in the outskirts of Mosul. There Khiḍr had invested him with the mantle in the presence of Qaḍīb Albān. And it was in that very spot, in the garden where Khiḍr had invested him with it that the *shaiḥh* invested me with it in turn, observing the same ceremonial as Khiḍr himself had observed in conferring the investiture upon him. I had already received this investiture, but more indirectly, at the hands of my friend Taqiuddīn ibn 'Abdirraḥman, who himself had received it at the hands of Sadruddīn, *shaiḥh* of *shaiḥhs* in Egypt, whose grandfather had received it from Khiḍr. It was then that I began to speak of the investiture with the

mantle and to confer it upon certain persons, because I discovered how much importance Khiḍr attached to this rite. Previously I had not spoken of the mantle which is now so well known. This mantle is for us indeed a symbol of confraternity, a sign that we share in the same spiritual culture, in the practice of the same *ethos*. It has become customary among the masters of mysticism that when they discern some deficiency in one of their disciples, the *shaiḥh* identifies himself mentally with the state of perfection he wishes to communicate. When he has effected this identification, he takes off the mantle he is wearing at the moment of achieving this spiritual state, and puts it on the disciple whose spiritual state he wishes to make perfect. In this way the *shaiḥh* communicates to the disciple the spiritual state he has produced in himself, and the same perfection is achieved in the disciple's state. Such is the rite of investiture, well known among us; it was communicated to us by the most experienced among our *shaiḥhs*."

This commentary shows that the rite of investiture with the mantle, whether at the hands of Khiḍr himself or through an intermediary, effects not only an affiliation, but an actual identification with Khiḍr's spiritual state. From that moment on the initiate fulfils the requisite condition—the condition indicated to Suhrawardī by the Angel—for ascending Mount Qāf and attaining at the Spring of Life: "If you are Khiḍr . . ." Henceforth the mystic is Khiḍr, he has attained the "Khiḍr of his being." Phenomenologically speaking, the real presence of Khiḍr is experienced simultaneously as that of a person and as that of an archetype, in other words as a person-archetype. This is the situation we have analyzed above, showing how it resolves the dilemma presented in terms of formal logic.

Let us carefully note the significance of the circumstances indicated by Ibn 'Arabī: investiture with the mantle can be conferred directly by Khiḍr, by an intermediary who has himself received it directly from Khiḍr, or even by one who has received it from the first intermediary. This does not detract from what

25. *Futūḥāt*, I, 186.

26. *Futūḥāt*, I, 187.

we have shown to be the *transhistorical* significance of the rite, but provides, rather, a striking illustration of it. The ceremonial of investiture is always the ceremonial observed by Khidr himself; unfortunately Ibn 'Arabī leaves it shrouded in mystery. The rite implies in any case that the desired identification is not with a spiritual state or a state of perfection acquired from any other source by the *shaikh* who transmits the investiture, but only with the state of Khidr himself. Whether there are one or several intermediaries or none, the affiliation by identification with Khidr's state is accomplished in the longitudinal order connecting the visible with the invisible, an order cutting vertically across the latitudinal order of historical successions, generations, and connections. It is and remains a direct affiliation with the divine world, transcending all social ties and conventions. Accordingly, its significance remains transhistorical (a kind of antidote to the widespread obsession with the "trend of history").

It is also significant that Ibn 'Arabī accepted the investiture more than once. The first time there had been three intermediaries between Khidr and himself; now, in the garden in Mosul, there was only one. This implies the possibility of abridging the distance, the possibility of a contraction tending toward perfect synchronism (as in the case of the meeting between Khidr-Elijah and Moses in Sūra xviii or on Mount Tabor). This synchronism results from a quantitative intensification which modifies temporal relations and is conceivable only in purely qualitative psychic time; in quantitative, continuous, and irreversible physical time such a bridging of distances is inconceivable. If, for example, you are chronologically separated from a spiritual master by several centuries, it is not possible for one of your contemporaries to bring you chronologically closer to him, as though he were that master's sole intermediary in time. We cannot do away with the intervals of quantitative time that serve to measure historical events; but the events of the soul are themselves the qualitative measure of

their own characteristic time. A synchronism impossible in historical time is possible in the *tempus discretum* of the world of the soul or of the '*alam al-mithal*. And this also explains how it is possible, at a distance of several centuries, to be the direct, synchronous disciple of a master who is only chronologically "in the past."

We have seen what it means "to be the disciple of Khidr" (as were all the *Uwaysīs*), and this is what Ibn 'Arabī meant when he said that he attached the utmost importance to the rite of investiture with the mantle and stated his intention of conferring it in turn on other persons. Through this rite he makes known his intention of guiding each one of his disciples to the "Khidr of his being." "If you *are* Khidr . . ." you can indeed do what Khidr *does*. And this is perhaps the secret reason for which the doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī was so feared by the adepts of the literal religion, of the historical faith hostile to the *ta'wil*, of the dogma imposed uniformly upon all. He, on the other hand, who is the disciple of Khidr possesses sufficient inner strength to seek freely the teaching of all masters. Of this the biography of Ibn 'Arabī, who frequented all the masters of his day and welcomed their teachings, offers living proof.

This biography, whose characteristic measure we have endeavored to grasp in the rhythm of its three symbols, discloses an exemplary coherence. In the witness to Averroes' funeral, becoming the "pilgrim to the Orient" at the call of his "Holy Spirit," we have discerned a living exemplification of Suhrawardī's "Recital of Occidental Exile." The hero of the recital is led to the Spring of Life, to the mystic Sinai, where, having attained to the esoteric Truth, the *haqiqqa*, he passes through and beyond the darkness of the Law and of the exoteric religion, just as the drop of balm, in the light of the sun which induces transparency, passes through to the back of the hand. And it was likewise to the Spring of Life that the "pilgrim to the Orient," Ibn 'Arabī the "disciple of Khidr," was led when he forsook Andalusia, his earthly homeland.

His Maturity and the Completion of His Work

Ibn 'Arabī had now attained the age of maturity; he was in his fortieth year, which most masters (the "Brothers of Purity," for example, in their "philosophical ritual") regard as the earliest age at which the spiritual state entailing the decisive encounter with the personal "Guide" and all those tendencies involved in "being the disciple of Khidr" can come to fruition. Now we are in a position to follow our *shaiikh* through the prodigiously full years of his maturity. Two years after the mystical investiture in the garden in Mosul (in 1204), we find him in Cairo in the company of a small group of Ṣūfīs, some of whom were his compatriots. The little community seems to have cultivated an intense mystical life, accepting the phenomena manifested among its members (photism, telepathy, mind reading) with simplicity and enthusiasm. One night Ibn Arabī contemplated a vision which seems to have reproduced certain traits of the vision which figures in the prelude to his great book, the *Futūḥāt* (see below, Ch. VI). A marvelously beautiful being entered the house and announced to him: "I am the messenger whom the Divine Being sends you." What the heavenly messenger revealed to him would be his own doctrine.

But to relate such visions and their teachings in hermetic language is one thing; to indulge in over-transparent allusions that may come to the ears of the redoubtable doctors of the Law, the *fuqahā'* of Cairo, is another. Undoubtedly Ibn 'Arabī held the *fuqahā'* in horror; he made no secret of his disgust at their stupidity, ignorance, and depravity, and such an attitude was not calculated to win their favor. The tension rose, giving rise to denunciations and arrests; our *shaiikh* was in mortal peril. At this critical moment the irreducible antagonism between the spiritual Islam of Ṣūfism and legalitarian Islam became patent. Saved by the intervention of a friendly *shaiikh*, Ibn 'Arabī had but one concern, to flee far from Cairo and its hateful, bigoted canonists. Where was he to seek refuge? He returned to Mecca

(1207). Six years after his first arrival in that city, he revisited the small élite group that had been his refuge on the first occasion, when he had known peace for the first time in his life and his literary production had soared. Once again he found the figure of pure beauty which for his contemplative imagination had been the theophany of divine Beauty, the figure of *Sophia aeterna*. He resumed his circumambulations of the Ka'aba, the "center of the world."

And yet this was to be merely a stage in his journey. Three years later (1210) he was in the heart of Anatolia, in Qunya, where the Seljuk emperor, Kay Kaus I accorded him a magnificent reception (similar to that which some thirty years before another Seljuk, the amir of Kharput, had given Suhrawardī, the resurrector of the philosophy of ancient Persia). Ibn 'Arabī's stay in Qunya was to assume an extraordinary importance for the destiny and orientation of the spiritual life of Ṣūfism in eastern Islam. Here his principal disciple was the young Ṣadrud-dīn Qunyawī (who became his son-in-law). It was in the person of Ṣadrud-dīn that the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī and Oriental Ṣūfism found their meeting place. Ṣadrud-dīn's work was considerable in itself; like that of many other Orientals, it was waiting for a "pilgrim to the Orient" who would reveal it to the West. He constitutes a nodal point in the spiritual topography outlined in the early pages of this book. The still-unpublished correspondence between him and Naṣīrud-dīn Ṭūsī, one of the great figures of Iranian Imāmism, treats of high questions of philosophy and mysticism; he was the teacher of Quṭbaddīn Shīrāzī, one of the most famous commentators on Suhrawardī's "philosophy of Light"; he was the friend of Sa'duddīn Hammū'ī, of whom we have spoken above; he was the teacher of one of the greatest Iranian mystic poets and *Fedeli d'amore*, Fakhrud-dīn 'Irāqī of Hamadān, whose famous theosophical poem in Persian (*Lamī'āt*, "Divine Reflections") was directly inspired by the lessons of Ṣadrud-dīn commenting on one of Ibn 'Arabī's books. This poem, on which numerous commentaries were written,

helped to introduce the doctrines of Ibn 'Arabī into Iran and India. Ṣadrud-dīn, the disciple of Ibn 'Arabī, was the intimate friend of Mawlānā Jalālud-dīn Rūmī and died in the same year as he (1279).

This friendship was of the utmost importance, for through it Ṣadrud-dīn became the connecting link between the Shaikh al-Akbar and the author of the immense mystic *Mathnawī*, which the Iranians call the *Qorān-e fārsī*, the Persian Koran, and cultivate as such. An interval of ten years prevented physical encounter between the two men, who were perhaps the most representative figures of Ṣūfī spirituality. As a child, Mawlānā had fled from the Mongol invaders of Transoxania with his father, the venerable *shaikh* Bahā'ud-dīn Walad (whose ample collection of mystic sermons, the *Ma'ārif*, cannot be disregarded if we wish to understand his son's spiritual doctrine). Their travels had carried them through Iran (where their meeting, in Nishapur, with the great mystic poet Farīdud-dīn 'Aṭṭār assumes a prophetic character) to Mecca; thence they had made their way slowly, by way of Damascus, to Asia Minor.

At first sight the teachings of Jalālud-dīn Rūmī and of Ibn 'Arabī seem to reflect two radically different forms of spirituality. Mawlānā took no interest whatever in philosophers or philosophy; certain of his remarks might even have been compared with Ghazālī's attacks on philosophy in his "Destruction of the Philosophers." From this point of view he contrasts sharply with Suhrawardī, who wished his disciples to combine philosophical education with mystic experience, because both are necessary to the perfect Sage. A similar synthesis is effected in the work of Ibn 'Arabī, where pages of high theosophy alternate with the pages of a *Diarium spirituale*, so that the aim of speculation becomes a metaphysic of ecstasy. Yet it would be quite superficial to dwell on the contrast between the two forms of spirituality cultivated by Mawlānā and Ibn 'Arabī. Both are inspired by the same theophanic sentiment, the same nostalgia for beauty, and the same revelation of love. Both tend toward

the same absorption of the visible and invisible, the physical and the spiritual, into an *unio mystica* in which the Beloved becomes a mirror reflecting the secret face of the mystic lover, while the lover, purified of the opacity of his ego, becomes in turn a mirror of the attributes and actions of the Beloved. Of this Ṣadrud-dīn, as well as Mawlānā's disciples, were well aware. References to the works of Ibn 'Arabī are frequent in the abundant commentaries on the *Mathnawī* produced in India and Iran. Indeed, it is necessary to study these commentaries if we wish to learn what Mawlānā's spirituality meant to his mystic following.

Ibn 'Arabī then continued on toward eastern Anatolia. We find him in Armenia, on the banks of the Euphrates, and subsequently in Diyarbekr. In the course of this journey he almost reached Iran; actually, he was to penetrate Iran in another way, invisibly and all the more durably (just as Suhrawardī, who never saw Iran again but nevertheless caused the ideas he had lived for to flower anew in Iran). In 1211 we find him in Baghdad, where he met the famous *shaikh* Shihābuddīn 'Umar Suhrawardī (a celebrated Ṣūfī, not to be confused with the famous *shaikh* Shihābuddīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī, the *shaikh al-Ishrāq*, so often mentioned in these pages). In 1214 he revisited Mecca, where "the interpreter of ardent desires" became his own commentator (see Ch. II), in order to confound his old adversaries the *fuqahā'* and expose the hypocrisy of their censure of the *Drwān* in which, thirteen years before, he had sung his pure love for the young girl Sophia. Next he went to Aleppo, where he made friends with the amir al-Mālik al-Zāhir, one of Saladin's sons, who twenty years before had also been the friend of Suhrawardī, approximately his contemporary, whom he had tried in vain to save from the fanaticism of the *fuqahā'* and of his own father. The young *shaikh al-Ishrāq* must have been evoked more than once in intimate conversations between Ibn 'Arabī and the prince, whose guest and friend he in turn had become.

Numerous princes had tried to attract Ibn 'Arabī, whose reputation had spread throughout the Orient, and showered him with gifts, which, jealously guarding his freedom, he gave away in alms. Finally, Ibn 'Arabī acceded to the pleas of the sovereign of Damascus; it was there that he settled in 1229 and spent the remaining seventeen years of his life. The prince and his brother who succeeded him (al-Mālik al-Ashraf) became his disciples, attended his lessons and obtained from him a certificate (*ijāza*) permitting them to instruct others in his books. So we learn that at that time Ibn 'Arabī's bibliography (the "list of his writings") comprised more than four hundred titles, though he was far from having completed his work.²⁷ His labors had been enormous during the whole period of his travels. Yet he surmounted his weariness as well as the illness brought on by his long and arduous journeys, and perhaps also by the physiological repercussions of his frequent mystical experiences. From this time on the *shaiikh* lived in material security and peace of mind, surrounded by his family and his numerous disciples. He was able to complete his work, if such a work, whatever limits it may attain, can ever be said to be completed.

Here I shall discuss only two of his principal works, those which will be often cited here and which are at present the best known, no doubt because they are the most representative. The *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* ("The Gems of the Wisdom of the Prophets") was written in consequence of a vision that came to him in a dream during the year 627/1230. The Prophet had appeared to Ibn 'Arabī, holding a book whose title he pronounced and had bidden him to write down its teachings for the greater good of his disciples. After relating the vision that had inspired his book, the author describes the spirit in which he had set to work: "I am neither a prophet (*nabī*) nor an envoy (*rasūl*); I am simply an heir, someone who plows and sows the field of

his future life." The twenty-seven prophets (from Adam to Muḥammad), to each of whom a chapter is devoted, are not envisaged in their empirical reality as historical persons. They are meditated upon as typefying "wisdoms," to which their names serve as indices and titles, or mark their respective tonality. Thus it is to the metaphysical individuality, the "eternal hexeity," of these prophets that their various wisdoms must be related. This book is no doubt the best compendium of Ibn 'Arabī's esoteric doctrine. Its influence was enormous. It elicited a large number of commentaries in all the languages of Sunnite as well as Shī'ite Islam; a comparative study of these commentaries will provide us with valuable lessons.

It still remained for the *shaiikh* to complete his *Futūḥāt*, the book that has been called the "Bible of esoterism in Islam" (very much as the mystic *Mathnawī* of Jalāluddīn Rūmī has been termed the "Persian Koran"). The complete title is: *Kitāb al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya fī ma'rīfat al-asrār al-malikiyya wa'l-mulkiyya* ("The Book of the Revelations Received in Mecca concerning the Knowledge of the King and the Kingdom"). (We shall here have occasion, following an indication of the great mystic Jāmī, to suggest a variant of this translation, permitting us to dispense with the word "revelations" which already serves as an equivalent for so many terms of the Arabic Ṣūfī vocabulary, whose shadings it is difficult to capture in our languages.) He originally conceived this work during his first stay in Mecca; the idea was related to the inspirations and visions which burgeoned in his soul during his ritual circumambulations of the Ka'aba, though we do not know whether to think of an internalization of a physically accomplished rite or of its mental repetition. Here we have already noted the relationship between the theophanic moments experienced while circumambulating a mentally transfigured Ka'aba, imaginatively perceived and actualized as the "center of the world": the apparition of Sophia emerging from the night, the vision of the mystic Youth rising up from the Black Stone, and the vision at the source of the

²⁷ For further details about the personal bibliography of Ibn 'Arabī (which far exceeds the above-mentioned figure), see 'Osmān Yaḥiā, *L'Histoire et la classification des œuvres d'Ibn 'Arabī*.

Futūḥāt, which will be evoked in detail at the end of the present book.

The enormous work was not composed in a continuous flow. The beginning of Volume IV was written in 1280, the end of Volume II in 1296, Volume III in the following year. The work took several years to write, and this is explained not only by its length but also by Ibn 'Arabī's method of composition: "In this work, as in all my works," he writes, "the method followed in the works of others is not observed, nor do we conform to the method ordinarily employed by the authors of other works, regardless of their nature. Indeed, every author writes under the authority of his free will, although it is said that his freedom is subordinated to divine decree, or under the inspiration of the science that is his specialty. . . . But an author who writes under the dictation of divine inspiration often registers things that are without (apparent) relation to the substance of the chapter he is engaged in writing; they will strike the profane reader as incoherent interpolations, although to my mind they pertain to the very soul of the chapter, though perhaps for reasons of which others are unaware."²⁸ And again: "Know that the composition of the chapters of the *Futūḥāt* was not the outcome of a free choice on my part or of deliberate reflection. Indeed God, through the Angel of Inspiration, dictated everything I have written, and that is why between two developments I sometimes insert another that is connected neither with what precedes nor with what follows."²⁹

In short, the process of composition appears to be a hermeneutics of the individual, alert to the secret sympathies between the concrete examples it juxtaposes. The method of thought shows an affinity with Stoic logic; it resists the conceptual dialectic of a development carried on according to the laws of Aristotelian logic. This marks the difference between this book

28. Asín Palacios, "Ibn Masarra," p. 102.

29. al-Sha'rānī, *Kitāb al-Yawāqit*, I, 51 (according to chs. 89 and 348 of the *Futūḥāt*).

and the books of the *falāsifa*, of Avicenna, for example. And for this reason it is virtually impossible to sum up or even to outline such a work. It is a *summa* of mystic theosophy, at once theoretical and experimental. It comprises speculative developments often highly abstruse and bearing witness to the author's thorough grounding in philosophy; it also includes all the elements of a *Diarium spirituale*; and finally it contains an abundance of information about Ṣūfism and the spiritual masters known to Ibn 'Arabī.³⁰ It is a voluminous work; its five hundred and sixty chapters in the Cairo edition (1929/1911) take up some three thousand pages in quarto.³¹ And yet Ibn 'Arabī confesses: "Despite the length and scope of this book, despite the large number of sections and chapters, I have not exhausted a single one of the ideas or doctrines put forward concerning the Ṣūfī method. How, *a fortiori*, can I have exhausted the entire subject? I have confined myself to a brief clarification of some small part of the fundamental principles on which the method is based, in an abridged style, holding a middle course between vague allusion and clear, complete exposition."

A fortiori, we may say with Ibn 'Arabī, it is impossible in the present work to exhaust any theme or aspect of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. We have meditated in his company some of the basic themes of his thinking and of his practical doctrine. Truly to *understand* them, it seems to us, presupposes the will to evaluate them positively. It goes without saying that the form in which each of us receives the master's thought *conforms* to his "inner heaven"; that is the very principle of the theophanism of Ibn 'Arabī, who for that reason can only guide *each* man individually to what he alone is capable of *seeing*, and not bring him to any

30. The six main sections announced at the beginning of the work treat of the following themes: (1) the doctrines (*ma'ārif*); (2) the Spiritual practices (*mu'āmalāt*); (3) the Mystic States (*aḥwāl*); (4) the degrees of mystic perfection (*manāzil*); (5) the consociations of the Godhead and the soul (*munāxalāt*); (6) the esoteric abodes (*maqāmāt*).

31. And it is well known that an Arabic text at least doubles in length when translated into a European language.

collective pre-established dogma: *Talem eum vidi qualem capere potui*. The truth of the individual's vision is proportional to his fidelity to himself, his fidelity to the one man who is able to bear witness to his individual vision and do homage to the guide who leads him to it. This is no nominalism or realism, but a decisive contemplation, far anterior to any such philosophical choice, a distant point to which we must also return if we wish to account for the deformations and rejections which the spirituality of Ibn 'Arabī has so often incurred, sometimes for diametrically opposed reasons, but always because men have sidestepped the self-knowledge and self-judgment that this spirituality implies.

Ibn 'Arabī died peacefully in Damascus on the 28th day of Rabi' II, A.H. 638 (November 16, A.D. 1240), surrounded by his family, his friends, and his Ṣūfī disciples. He was buried north of Damascus in the suburb of Salihīya, at the root of Mount Qāsiyūn. The curve of his life ended in accordance with its immanent norm, for the place where Ibn 'Arabī was buried, where his remains still repose with those of his two sons, was already a place of pilgrimage, sanctified in Muslim eyes by all the prophets, but especially by Khidr. In the sixteenth century Selim II, sultan of Constantinople, built a mausoleum and *madrassa* over Ibn 'Arabī's tomb.

Today pilgrims still flock to the tomb of the "disciple of Khidr." One day we were among their number, savoring in secret—but who knows with how many others?—the paradoxical triumph: the honors and popular cult devoted to this man whose disciples traditionally salute him as *Muḥyi'd-Dīn*, "Animator of the Religion," but whom so many doctors of the Law in Islam have attacked, inverting his honorific surname into its antitheses: *Māhi'd-Dīn*, "he who abolishes the religion," or *Mumituddīn*, "he who kills the religion." What the paradox of his tomb guarantees is the presence of an undeniable testimony, perpetuating something which, in the very heart of the religion of the letter and the Law, prophetically surmounts and

transcends them both. And another paradoxical image comes to the mind of the pensive pilgrim: Swedenborg's tomb in the cathedral of Uppsala—a mental diptych attesting the existence of an *Ecclesia spiritualis* reuniting all its own in the triumphant force of a single paradox.

3. The Situation of Esoterism

This title merely states the theme of the inquiry that would normally follow from the preceding pages, which in suggesting it also limit its scope. Our purpose here should be to analyze the situations of esoterism in Islam and in Christianity in order to determine in what degree these situations are comparable. But even in thus restricting our field of inquiry we find that it would require a minimum of preliminary investigation that is still lacking. Moreover, every student is necessarily limited by the range of his own experience and observation. What we shall have to say here can be no more than a sketch.

Insofar as the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī leads us to raise it, the question becomes essentially an inquiry into the position, the function, and the significance of Ṣūfism as an esoteric interpretation of Islam. To deal with it exhaustively would require a large volume, for which the time is not yet ripe: the writings of Ibn 'Arabī have been insufficiently explored; too many works emanating from his school or preparing the way for it are still in manuscript; too many of the connections and relationships to which we have referred remain to be investigated in detail. But at least it will be worthwhile to specify the meaning of the question, for it involves very different tasks from those undertaken by history and sociology. It concerns the phenomenon of Ṣūfism as such, in its essence. To create a phenomenology of Ṣūfism is not to derive it causally from something else or to reduce it to something else, but to look for what reveals itself to itself in this phenomenon, to distinguish the intentions

implicit in the act which causes it to reveal itself. To that end we must consider it as a spiritual perception and by that same token as a phenomenon as basic and irreducible as the perception of a sound or of a color. What is made manifest in this phenomenon is the act of mystic consciousness disclosing to itself the inner, hidden *meaning* of a prophetic revelation, for the characteristic situation of the mystic is a confrontation with a prophetic message and revelation. The situation of Ṣūfism as such is characterized by the interpenetration of mystic religion and prophetic religion. Such a situation is conceivable only in an *Ahl al-Kitāb*, a "people of the book," that is to say, a community whose religion is grounded on a book revealed by a prophet, for the existence of a celestial Book imposes the task of fathoming its *true meaning*. Parallels can no doubt be established between certain aspects of Ṣūfism and, for example, of Buddhism; but such parallels will not be as profound as those that can be drawn with the Spirituals in another community of *Ahl al-Kitāb*.

This is the basis of the fundamental kinship between Shī'ism and Ṣūfism. Some may impute the stress I put upon this tie to the long years I have spent in Iran, to my familiarity with Shī'ite Ṣūfism, to my cherished friendships with Shī'ites. I make no secret of my heartfelt debt to Shī'ism; there are too many things of which I should never have become aware if not for my familiarity with the spiritual world of Iran. And it is precisely this that leads me to insist on a fact which has too seldom been taken into account. The conviction that to everything that is apparent, literal, external, exoteric (*ẓāhir*) there corresponds something hidden, spiritual, internal, esoteric (*bāṭin*) is the scriptural principle which is at the very foundation of Shī'ism as a religious phenomenon. It is the central postulate of esoterism and of esoteric hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*). This is not to doubt that the prophet Muḥammad is the "seal of the prophets and of prophecy"; the cycle of prophetic Revelation is closed, no new *sharī'a*, or religious Law, is awaited. But the literal and

apparent text of this ultimate Revelation offers something which is still a potency. This potency, calls for the action of persons who will transform it into act, and such is the spiritual mission of the Imām and his companions. It is an initiatic mission; its function is to initiate into the *ta'wīl*, and initiation into the *ta'wīl* marks spiritual birth. Thus prophetic Revelation is closed, but precisely because it is closed, it implies the continued openness of prophetic hermeneutics, of the *ta'wīl*, or *intelligentia spiritualis*. Upon the homology between the celestial and terrestrial hierarchies Ismailian Gnosis founded this idea of the Sacred Book whose meaning is potential. It finds the same relationship between the esoteric potential meaning and the Imām as between that one of the angelic intelligences (the third) which is the celestial Anthropos, the Adamic form of the pleroma, and that other Intelligence, emanating directly from the archangel Logos, which transforms it into act. Here we cannot even list all the forms and ramifications of esoterism in Islam. We merely note the impossibility of dissociating them, of studying separately Ismailian Gnosis, the theosophy of Duodeciman Shī'ism (notably Shaikhism), and the Ṣūfism of Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī, or Semnānī.

The *intelligentia spiritualis* brings about the union between prophetic religion and mystic religion (see below, Ch. I). From this complex derives a threefold preoccupation with the *method*, *organ*, and *source* of this hermeneutics. We have tried to characterize the method above by drawing a careful distinction between symbol and allegory.⁵² As for the organ which the spiritual perception of symbols presupposes, it motivates the most characteristic chapters of Shī'ite and of Ṣūfī theosophy, dealing with themes that can be subsumed under the title "prophetic psychology." We have already noted the importance accorded to this organ by the Avicennans in their noetics. Here the con-

⁵². For further details on the following, see our "L'Intériorisation du sens."

templative intellect in its higher form, designated as holy intellect or holy spirit, is the organ common to the perfect Sage and to the prophet, the vehicle of a perception whose object is no longer the logical concept or universal, but presents itself in the form of a typification. Ḥamīduddīn Kermānī (eleventh century), one of the most profound thinkers of Ismailian Shī'ism, gives an extraordinary explanation of this prophetic psychology and its noetics. He related it to the motion of the eternal emanation in the archangelic pleroma, a movement *ab intra ad extra*, which also characterizes the operations of the Imagination as an active power, independent of the physical organism. Unlike common knowledge, which is effected by a penetration of the sense impressions of the outside world into the interior of the soul, the work of prophetic inspiration is a projection of the inner soul upon the outside world. The active Imagination guides, anticipates, molds sense perception; that is why it transmutes sensory data into symbols. The Burning Bush is only a brushwood fire if it is merely perceived by the sensory organs. In order that Moses may perceive the Burning Bush and hear the Voice calling him "from the right side of the valley"—in short, in order that there may be a theophany—an organ of trans-sensory perception is needed. We shall hear Ibn 'Arabī repeat the same remarks in connection with the apparitions of the Angel Gabriel in the form of Dahyā Kalbī, the beautiful Arab youth.

This theophanic perception is accomplished in the *'ālam al-mithāl*, whose organ is the theophanic Imagination. That is why we have alluded here to the consequences to the Western world of the disappearance of the *Animae coelestes* which were still retained in Avicennism. Since the Imagination is the organ of theophanic perception, it is also the organ of prophetic hermeneutics, for it is the imagination which is at all times capable of transmuting sensory data into symbols and external events into symbolic histories. Thus the affirmation of an esoteric meaning presupposes a prophetic hermeneutics; and

this hermeneutics postulates an organ capable of perceiving theophanies, of investing visible figures with a "theophanic function." This organ is the active Imagination. And a study of the creative Imagination in Ibn 'Arabī will disclose this same thematic sequence. All this calls for a prophetic philosophy going hand in hand with an esoterism to which the philosophical oppositions by which we tend to "explain" everything (nominalism and realism, for example) may well seem absurd. Such a prophetic philosophy moves in the dimension of a pure theophanic historicity, in the inner time of the soul; external events, cosmologies, the histories of the prophets, are perceived as the history of spiritual man. Thus it obliterates the "historical trend" with which our epoch is obsessed. Prophetic philosophy looks for the meaning of history not in "horizons," that is, not by orienting itself in the latitudinal sense of a linear development, but vertically, by a longitudinal orientation extending from the celestial pole to the Earth, in the transparency of the heights or depths in which the spiritual individuality experiences the reality of its celestial counterpart, its "lordly" dimension, its "second person," its "Thou."

As to the source of this hermeneutics, we must first go back to what has been said above concerning the figure of the Active Intelligence as Holy Spirit, Angel of Knowledge and of Revelation, and then follow the connecting lines leading from Avicennan or Suhrawardian noetics to Shī'ite and Ṣūfī esoterism. Here we can deal with this subject only allusively. In Ismailian Gnosis the Imām is the terrestrial pole of the Tenth Intelligence, corresponding functionally to the Angel Holy-Spirit of the Avicennan or Suhrawardian philosophers. In Duodeciman Shī'ism the "hidden Imām," hidden between Heaven and Earth in the *'ālam al-mithāl*, assumes a similar function, acting upon what Mullā Ṣadrā calls the treasure of celestial origin, the Imāmate concealed within every human being. Other parallels will present themselves in the course of this book, notably in respect of the Holy Spirit, the divine Face of every being.

Thus recalled in broad outlines, these aspects of esoterism in Islam, seen as an initiation into the meaning hidden beneath the literal appearance of Revelation and shown to postulate a prophetic philosophy, already provide us with a basis of comparison permitting us to raise the question of whether there is in Christianity an analogous situation pointing to a "Christian esoterism." Insofar as this term may strike some readers as odd or even offensive, a question of fact imposes itself. Can we, in a community of *Ahl al-Kitāb* such as Christianity, find a phenomenon comparable to that of esoterism in Islam? In regard to the affirmation of a hidden meaning and the necessity of a prophetic hermeneutics, such as we have just found attested in the esoterism of Islam, a first observation is in order. Christian Gnosis has left us texts embodying the secret teachings which Jesus, in his body of light, dispensed to his disciples after his resurrection. The idea of this gnosis has its parallel in the Shī'ite idea of the esoteric meaning of Koranic revelation, whose initiator is the Imām. But the fact which dominates Christianity and relates to the question here raised is that with the condemnation of the Montanist movement in the second century any possibility of a new prophetic revelation dispensed by the Angels, or of a prophetic hermeneutics, was cut off, at least for and by the Great Church. From that time on the authority of the Great Church substituted itself for individual prophetic inspiration; this authority presupposes and at the same time legitimizes the existence of a dogmatic magistry, and the dogma states everything that can or should be said. There is no room for "the disciples of Khidr"; esoterism has lost its concept and justification. Nevertheless it persevered, and from time to time prophetic hermeneutics exploded irrepressibly, but outside the confines of the established orthodoxy. At first sight this suffices to mark a profound difference from Islam, which never knew either a dogmatic magistry or a Council. Not even the Shī'ite Imāmate has the character of a dogmatic pontifical authority; it is the source, not of dog-

matic definitions, but of the inspiration of the *ta'wil*, and it is all the adepts, from degree to degree of the esoteric hierarchy, who form the "Temple of light" of the Imāmate, which from degree to degree repeats the aspect of an initiatic companionship (that of Salmān the Persian with the Prophet).

The contrast is striking. And in view of the phenomenology of this contrast, any speculative dogmatic construction tending to reduce one of these forms to the other can only falsify the phenomenon to the great detriment of what each of the two forms represents and expresses. The theosophy of Ṣūfism invests with the dignity of *nabī* every Spiritual who allies himself with the Active Intelligence because it is the Holy Spirit; a corresponding promotion occurs in certain circles of Christian Spirituals. In both cases analysis discloses the idea of a spiritual state that can be termed contemplative prophetism. Falsification sets in when, by a deliberate confusion, an attempt is made to find it in contexts where it is not present. Some writers then feel obliged to reconstruct it arbitrarily, to show that such a phenomenon can only exist within an ecclesiastic reality, that it must not transgress against the law of the community but must subordinate itself to the dogmatic magistry, which is its repository par excellence. But we have just pointed out why the whole idea of contemplative prophetism presupposes precisely the absence of such a magistry. The calling of a *nabī* is the most personal of callings; it is never a function conferred (and still less exercised) by a collectivity or a magistry. Theophanies reveal no dogmatic proposition, nor is anything in the nature of a "Council of prophets," that would decide on such a proposition by majority vote, even conceivable. The phenomenon of "orthodoxy" presupposes the end of prophecy. The coming of dogma puts an end to prophetism, and at this stage men conceive the idea of a "past," of a latitudinal direction, an "expansion" in history.

The coming of historical consciousness is concomitant with the formation of a dogmatic consciousness. In the official form

given to it by the definitions of the Councils, the fundamental dogma of Christianity, that of the Incarnation, is the most characteristic symptom of this, because the Incarnation is a unique and irreversible fact; it takes its place in a series of material facts; God in person was incarnated at a moment in history; this "happened" within the framework of a set chronology. There is no more mystery, consequently esoterism is no longer necessary; and that is why all the resurrected Christ's secret teachings to his disciples have been piously relegated to the *Apocrypha* along with the other Gnostic books; they had no connection with history. Such an Incarnation of "God in person" in empirical history and, consequently, the historical consciousness which goes hand in hand with it, are unknown to the traditional Orient. Some have expressed this by saying that the traditional Orient was fundamentally monophysite, others have used the word "docetic"; both qualifications apply to the same way of looking at the phenomenon.

All esoterism in Islam, in Shi'ism and in Sūfism, recognizes a divine anthropomorphosis, a divine Manifestation in human form; this anthropomorphosis is essential to the Godhead, but it takes place "in heaven," on the plane of the angelic universes. The celestial Anthropos is not "incarnated" on earth; he is manifested on earth in theophanic figures which draw his followers, those who recognize him, toward their celestial assumption. All the traits which reveal an affinity between Imāmology and a Christology of the Ebionite or Gnostic type underline its remoteness from every variety of Pauline Christology. The theophanism of Ibn 'Arabī will show us why no history, or philosophy of history, can be made with theophanies. Their time does not coincide with historical time. God has no need of coming down to earth, because He "removes" His people, just as He "removed" Jesus from the hatred of those who had the illusion of putting him to death (Koran iv: 156). Gnostic esoterism in Islam has always known this, and that is why it can never regard the fatidic cry "God is dead!" as anything more

than the pretention and delusion of people blind to the profound truth of the "docetism" that is so much ridiculed in our history books.

These are only a few of the differences that must be noted before, replying to the question stated above, we can go on to determine what parallels there may be in the respective situations of esoterism in Islam and in Christianity. By now one thing has become clear: a theoretical reply to the question cannot be adequate; we must start from the view of esoterism taken by the religious mind both in Islam and in Christianity. Phenomenology discerns very different "intentionalities" accordingly as it investigates the phenomenon of esoterism from the standpoint of a radically hostile mind or from that of the adept. To this distinction we must add another, that which manifests itself accordingly as we consider mystic esoterism in relation to a pure prophetic religion, moving in the pure theophanic dimension (the dimension in which Khidr-Elijah and Moses are contemporaries), or in relation to a religion of Incarnation involving all the implications of historical consciousness. In the first case the demands of the *ta'wil* shake the stability of the Law, though preserving the letter as the foundation of its symbols. In the second case, the same demands shake the authority of the magistry in bond with the historicity which it establishes and from which it derives justification. For this reason we can discern in both quarters a common hostility to the very postulate of esoterism, just as in both quarters we find minorities which adhere fervently to this same esoterism. Taking the differences into account, we may then, pursuing our phenomenological approach, try to determine what there may be in common between the implicit intentions expressed in both quarters by these positions. Accordingly, the problem of parallels raised above will lead necessarily to the search for a religious typology which will thematize the data while removing them from the state in which they present themselves to positive history or sociology.

One is struck by the way in which the adversaries of esoterism recognize and agree with one another, as do its adepts. Islam offers us numerous examples of implacable adversaries. Ibn Taymīya made himself famous by his virulent polemic against the *ta'wil* of the esoterics of all shadings. The theologian Ghazālī is responsible, through his unfounded polemic, for the idea of Ismailian esoterism that long prevailed.⁹⁹ As for the attacks and *takfir* (anathemas) leveled against Ibn 'Arabī and his school, this is not the place to enumerate them. But it is striking to see how these condemnations of esoterism by the Islamic doctors of the Law appeal to the adversaries of esoterism in the Christian camp. They seem to be overjoyed at the good work done by the doctors of the Law, the *fuqahā'*, in disposing of interlocutors whom the Christian doctors would find it embarrassing to meet. And this same embarrassment reveals what there is in common between the disturbers who are thrust aside in both camps, as though they threatened to trouble the program of the dialogue or controversy between Islam and Christianity.

As for this program, it suffices to apply the Ismailian principle of the Scales to gain an idea of its broad outlines. Once such esoterism as that of Ibn 'Arabī, with all it implies in Islam, is put aside, it is thought that the tenets of orthodox Christianity will weigh more heavily in the scales. The Christians will then be in a better position to play the doctors of the Law and the Ṣūfis against each other. They will support the first when they say that the ultimate revelation is definitive in its literal accept-

99. Indeed, it has remained virtually unknown to this day that as early as the twelfth century a monumental work was written by the fifth Yemenite Dā'ī in response to Ghazālī's polemic. We shall have more to say of this unpublished work of 1400 pages. It will provide us with an occasion to observe the misunderstandings to which we were exposed in regard to Ismailian Gnosis as well as to ancient Gnosticism as long as we were deprived of the original texts and were dependent for our information on polemicists whose ignorance of the substance of Gnosticism was equalled only by the psychological unsoundness of their method.

ance, that the supposition of an esoteric meaning or any effort at internalization aimed at accomplishing this meaning transgresses the *shari'a* and falls under a well-deserved *takfir*. On the other hand, they will recognize the legitimacy of the Ṣūfis' striving for an inner religion, but only to make them admit that such an inner religion is attainable only by transgressing the law. Then it will be a simple matter to turn against the *fuqahā'* once again, precisely on the basis of what has been conceded: prophetic religion is not self-sufficient, God cannot be encountered through the sole intermediary of a book, even revealed; abstract monotheism and religion of the Book do not provide a sufficient counterweight to the other pan of the scales: the idea of the Incarnation and the phenomenon of the Church.

Even this bare outline may suffice to suggest why the intervention of esoterism threatens to upset the scales, that is, the conditions of dialogue between the doctors of the two faiths, and why the Christian doctors try so hard to discredit it by citing the condemnations of esoterism by the authorities of Islam. Suddenly, indeed, the religious values which the doctors have put in their own pan of the scales are opposed by the counterweight which was lacking in the orthodoxy of the *fuqahā'*. In other words, one of the parties in the dialogue triumphed too easily; in choosing to eliminate esoterism, it deliberately set aside everything in Islam that might have constituted an answer to the questions which the Christians raised with a view to proposing "objective" answers. Abstract monotheism and literalist religion do not suffice to permit an effective divine encounter—but it is precisely this insufficiency that Shī'ism and all related varieties of spirituality set out to remedy. To ignore Shī'ism in its various forms or to put aside the esoterism of an Ibn 'Arabī is to refuse from the outset to consider the replies given in Islam itself to the questions asked of Islam. The hostility of orthodox Islam to these replies originating in esoteric Islam detracts in no way from their importance.

Let us recapitulate a few of these answers: the idea of an eternal Imām (primordial theophany, divine anthropomorphosis "in Heaven," but also designated by many other names), exemplified in earthly persons who are not its incarnations but its theophanic figures; the idea of the "awaited Imām," the Resurrector, explicitly identified with the Paraclete of the Gospel of St. John (xv:26); the idea of the *ta'wil*, which is not an allegorical exegesis but a transfiguration of the literal texts, referring not to abstract truths, but to Persons; initiation into the *ta'wil*; initiation into the encounter with Persons, spiritual birth; the transformation of all history of events into a symbolic history of spiritual man, enacted in a temporality in which are accomplished all the synchronisms that are inconceivable in historical time; the pre-eminence of the Active Imagination, that organ of prophetic inspiration which perceives, and at the same time confers existence upon, a reality of its own, whereas for us it secretes only "imaginings"; an organ without which we can apprehend neither the meaning of the extraordinary sermons of the first Imām, nor the *ḥadīth* in which God speaks in the first person through the intermediary of the Angel, nor those in which the holy Imāms, speaking in the plural, bear witness to their theophanic investiture, nor those theophanic visions that exemplify the *ḥadīth* of the vision upon which we shall meditate in the last pages of this book, nor even, finally, the paradoxical phenomenon of Shī'ite religious iconography, which upsets all our notions about the official iconoclasm of Islam (notably the iconography of the "hidden Imām," the Awaited One, represented by the figure of a youth closing the circle of the Twelve). All these are matters that cannot be taught uniformly to all, because each man is the measure of what he can understand and of what, in accordance with the "economy" of esoterism, it is fitting to set before him.

Shī'ite Imāmology is equally far removed from the abstract monotheism of Sunnite Islam and from the Christianity of the historical Incarnation. It bears witness to an originality which

should lead us to reopen our history of dogmas, even chapters that are regarded as closed and in which the dogmatists feel fully secure. Accordingly, if we are to compare the situations of esoterism in Islam and in Christianity, we must start by situating what the contestants in both camps rejected as a corruption. The reasons for this rejection, the intentions it implies, show what the adversaries of esoterism in Islam and in Christianity have in common. And consequently the comparative question must, at some point, be formulated in terms of religious *typology*.

Such a typology becomes still more imperative when we turn to the adepts of esoterism in both camps. Still more, because in considering the adversaries we were dealing largely with a community of negative traits; here we have positive affinities. Such studies in comparative esoterism are extremely complex and are thus far in their barest beginnings. They require familiarity with a vast body of literature in several languages. The first point in the program will, in any case, have to be a study in comparative *ta'wil*. Investigations aimed at a religious typology are obliged to transgress such frontiers as are imposed by the very nature of their subject matter on the historical sciences, because the types which a philosophical anthropology will be looking for are distributed on either side of the historical frontiers. The lines of cleavage corresponding to such a typology do not by any means coincide with historical frontiers; they cut across the formations officially and denominationally defined by history. Here above all we must not be too sanguine in our judgments. Ineluctably every spiritual formation that achieves official status becomes ensnared in orthodoxy and literalism. Even Shī'ism, which in the beginning and for many centuries was the refuge of bold spirits, preserving in Islam the heritage of the older Gnooses, was sorely tried when it became a State religion. Under the Šafavids in Iran there developed a Shī'ite neo-orthodoxy, which persecuted the philosophers of the school of Mulla Šadrā, the Šūfīs and theosophists as well as the

shaikhis, all more authentically Shi'ite than the *mullās* who harassed them. Once again the invisible frontier separated mind from mind, but the mere fact that we can speak of such a cleavage shows that the prophetic leaven was preserved and continued to act.

While in Christianity the inspiration of new prophetic revelations was definitively closed with the condemnation of the Montanist movement, one thing was never stifled: a prophetic hermeneutics attesting the vitality of the Word in each spiritual individual, a vitality too powerful to be contained within the limits of pre-established dogmatic definitions. We shall speak in the present book of the striking consonance between certain utterances of Ibn 'Arabī and certain distiches of the *Cherubic Wanderer* of Angelus Silesius. But what we must insist on if we are to assemble the data that will make possible a comparison between the situations of esoterism in Islam and in Christianity is the community of prophetic hermeneutics, the community of the *ta'wil*.

To understand what such an invisible and always virtual community can mean we must bear in mind the existential implications of the *ta'wil*; we have recalled some of them above. Just as it is clearly contradictory to invest a dogmatic magistracy with a prophetic function, so it is hopeless to attempt to integrate an esoteric tradition with the dogmatic tradition of a magistracy, which by its very nature excludes it. Such an esoterism may be tolerated thanks to its caution; it will never be recognized. It will have to attune itself to the "historical trend," to a latitudinal (horizontal) expansion, to that obsession of the historical mind, the notion of a linear and irreversible progression. The "transgressive" vigor of symbolism will inevitably wither away into inoffensive allegory. What we have learned about the "disciples of Khidr," the transhistorical meaning of the affiliation which unites them vertically with the invisible celestial assembly, implies the idea of a *tradition* whose line is vertical, longitudinal (from Heaven to Earth), a tradition whose moments are independent of the causality of continuous physical

time but relate to what Ibn 'Arabī calls the *tajdid al-khalq*, the recurrence of the creative act, that is, the Theophany. Iconographically speaking, the contrast between the two concepts of tradition might be likened to the contrast between an image whose elements are disposed according to the laws of classical perspective and an image in which they are superimposed in accordance with a vertical projection, as in Chinese painting or in the image of the Ka'aba reproduced in the frontispiece of the present book.⁹⁴

94. This image is drawn from a Persian manuscript (Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, supplément persan 1989, fol. 19) of the sixteenth century; the manuscript contains the Persian poem "Futūḥ al-Ḥaramayn" of Muḥyī Lārī (d. 1527) describing the holy places of Medina and Mecca and the practices to be observed in the course of a pilgrimage to them. It is not without reason that the iconographic method here followed has been compared to the Iranian representations of *paradise* (a word which comes to us, through the Greek *paradeisos*, from Persia, where it figures in the *Avesta* in the form of *pairi-dāza*, Persian *ferdaws*); the iconography of this Iranian motif par excellence figures an enclosure planted with trees, *hortus conclusus*, at the center of which ("center of the world") stands a pavilion, which here seems to have its correspondence in the Ka'aba (cf. L. I. Ringbom, *Gratempel und Paradies*, pp. 54 ff.). The iconographic method embodied in this image calls for the following brief remark, in reference to the contrast of which we here take it as a symbol. There is not, as in classical perspective, a foreground behind which the secondary levels recede in foreshortening (as the past and future in relation to the present, the historic *nunc*, in our linear, evolutionary representation). All the elements are represented in their real dimensions ("in the present"), in each case perpendicularly to the axis of the viewer's vision. The viewer is not meant to immobilize himself at a particular point, enjoying the privilege of "presentness" and to raise his eyes from this fixed point; he must *raise himself* toward each of the elements represented. Contemplation of the image becomes a mental itinerary, an inner accomplishment; the image fulfills the function of a *mandala*. Because each of the elements is presented not *in* its proper dimension but *being* that same dimension, to contemplate them is to enter into a multidimensional world, to effect the passage of the *ta'wil* through the symbols. And the whole forms a unity of qualitative time, in which past and future are simultaneously in the *present*. This iconography does not correspond to the perspectives of the historical consciousness; it does respond to the "perspective" by which the disciple of Khidr orients himself, and which permits him, through the symbolic rite of circumambulation, to attain to the "center of the world." Here, unfortunately, it will not be possible to speak at length of the relationship between *ta'wil* and the treatises on perspective.

If we wish to inquire where in Christian spirituality the *dimension* of such a tradition can be found, there is no lack of signs by which to recognize the witnesses. We shall accord special mention to the Protestant representatives of mystic theosophy because of the amplitude of their works and because they are very seldom asked the questions we shall put to them here. The idea of assembling this community of the *ta'wil* in a single study does not so far seem to have figured in the program of the religious sciences; the main reason for this is perhaps the inaccessibility of the sources; it is to be hoped that the little we shall be able to say here will suffice to show how valuable such an inquiry would be.

For the way in which Jacob Boehme, J. G. Gichtel, Valentin Weigel, Swedenborg, and their disciples read and understand the story of Adam in Genesis, for example, or the story of the prophets, as the invisible history of the "celestial" and spiritual man, enacted in a time of its own and always "in the present"—this has something in common with the way in which an Ismailian theosophist, Ibn 'Arabī, Semnānī, or Mullā Ṣadrā, for example, understands this same story as he reads it in the Koran (and in so doing raises the standing of those books which we call apocryphal but certain fragments of which were taken into the text of the Koran). But this must be clearly understood: the inquiry we are undertaking has nothing in common with what is ordinarily disparaged as syncretism or eclecticism. We do not wish to confuse elements that should be kept apart or reduce them to their poorest common denominator; quite the contrary, our purpose is to recognize the most personal originalities, because all notion of divergence or deviation is done away with where it is admitted that individual spontaneities arise freely from a mode of perception common to all of them, from the participation of all in a common prophetic religion. It is this community of perception, this unpremeditated mode of perception which remains to be studied typologically in its variants, because its perspectives develop according to the laws

of one and the same vision. There is no syncretism to be constructed, but only isomorphisms to be noted when the axis of symmetry is governed by one and the same *intelligentia spiritualis*, when, unbeknownst to them, a pre-established harmony gathers all these "esoterics" fraternally in the same temple of Light, the same kingdom of spiritual man, which is limited by no other frontiers than those set up against it by In-science, *a-gnosia*. For in Christianity as in Islam, in Islam as in Christianity, there have always been "disciples of Khidr."

What they have in common is perhaps the perception of an over-all unity, calling for perspectives, depths, transparencies, appeals, which the "realists" of the letter or of dogma have no need of or reject. And this contrast is far more fundamental than any opposition conditioned by time or climate, for in the eyes of "esoterics" all this "realism" lacks a dimension or rather the many dimensions of the world which are revealed by the *ta'wil* (the seven levels of esoteric meaning, or, in Semnānī, the "seven prophets of thy being"). There is no need to construct this multidimensional world; we discover it by virtue of a principle of equilibrium and of harmony. Ismailian Gnosis effects this intuitive discovery through the universal science of the Scales, which indicates the invisible that is the necessary counterweight to the visible. The theosophies of Light have merely applied the laws of their own perspective, interpreting esoterically the geometrical laws of optics; the *ta'wil* is this esoteric science of the Scales and of optics. Here again it would be fitting to illustrate the function of the active Imagination, for this is a science which eludes rational demonstrations and dogmatic theorems alike. Nor should it be condemned as a mere theoretical view. It is not theory; it is an initiation to vision. Is it possible to see without *being* in the place where one sees? Theophanic visions, mental visions, ecstatic visions in a state of dream or of waking are in themselves *penetrations* into the world they *see*. These penetrations into a world of another dimension will be described for us in a fine text of Ibn 'Arabī:

And it is likewise the sense of a twofold dimension of individual being, implying the idea of a celestial counterpart, its being "in the second person," that provides the foundation of the mystical anthropology which has been so much misunderstood, because it has been judged in terms of the common anthropology which places individualities, reduced to the single dimension of their selves, equidistant from a universal God standing in the same relation to all. It is for this reason that the greatest importance should be attached to the pages in which Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes between *Allah* as God in general and *Rabb* as the particular Lord, personalized in an individualized and undivided relation with his vassal of love. This individualized relationship on both sides is the foundation of the mystical and chivalric ethic of the *fedele d'amore* in the service of the personal Lord whose divinity depends on the adoration of his faithful vassal and who, in this interdependence, exchanges the role of lord with him, because he is the First and the Last. It is impossible to see how what we call monism or pantheism in the West could have led to anything comparable to Ibn 'Arabī's method of theophanic prayer, the prayer which draws its inspiration from a God whose secret is sadness, nostalgia, aspiration to know Himself in the beings who manifest his Being. A passionate God, because it is in the *passion* that his *fedele d'amore* feels for him, in the theopathy of his *fedele*, that He is revealed to himself. And this always individually, in an "alone to alone," which is something very different from universal logic or from a collective participation, because only the knowledge which the *fedele* has of his Lord is the knowledge which this personal Lord has of him.

This is the very relationship we outlined above in the idea of the Angel compounded with the idea that every theophany necessarily has the form of an angelophany. This should avoid any misunderstanding when we come to speak of the "Self" and the knowledge of "self." The "Self" is a characteristic term by which a mystic spirituality underlines its dissociation from all

the aims and implications of denominational dogmatisms. But it enables these dogmatisms to argue in return that this Self, experienced as the pure act of existing, is only a natural phenomenon and consequently has nothing in common with a supernatural encounter with the revealed God, attainable only within the reality of the Church. The term "Self," as we shall employ it here, implies neither the one nor the other acceptance. It refers neither to the impersonal Self, to the pure act of existing attainable through efforts comparable to the techniques of yoga, nor to the Self of the psychologists. The word will be employed here solely in the sense given it by Ibn 'Arabī and numerous other Ṣūfī theosophists when they repeated the famous sentence: He who knows himself knows *his* Lord. Knowing one's self, to know *one's* God; knowing one's Lord, to know one's self. This Lord is not the impersonal self, nor is it the God of dogmatic definitions, *self*-subsisting without relation to *me*, without being experienced by *me*. He is the he who knows himself through myself, that is, in the knowledge that I have of him, because it is the knowledge that he has of me; it is alone with him alone, in this syzygic unity, that it is possible to say *thou*. And such is the reciprocity in which flowers the creative Prayer which Ibn 'Arabī teaches us to experience simultaneously as the Prayer of God and the Prayer of man.

Then it will become clear to some of us that the problems which our philosophical systems exhaust themselves trying to deal with have been left far behind. To others the rational foundations of this transcending will seem very fragile. But can it be otherwise? There are so many troubling facts: there is the fact that Imāmology and Koranic Christology are docetic; and we are in the habit of ridiculing the docetism of the Gnostics, which, it seems to us, has reduced the reality of Jesus, the man, to a "phantasm," when in truth this docetism is a strictly theological critique of knowledge, of the law governing the *apparition* of religious phenomena to a religious consciousness and governing the reciprocity of which we have just spoken.

There is the idea of a God whose divine personal reality depends on the service of his *fedele d'amore*; this seems so much in contradiction with the imperial idea of the Pantokrator, that it may well seem absurd to claim not only that such a God is meaningful, but also that it is meaningful to pray to such a God. We learn in the company of Ibn 'Arabī how this rejection can be rejected. There is finally the shattering of all the self-evident truths concerning the historicity of history, of those truths which bear so heavily on our modern minds that failure to attach importance to the historical meaning or to the *historical* reality of a religious phenomenon may seem equivalent to denying it *all* reality. Here we have tried to show that there is another "historicity." But the modern passion for material facts stops at nothing; it has fictions of its own, such as the supposed "eyewitness reports," which would have seemed blasphemous to a pious Gnostic reader of the Acts of St. John, well aware that on the evening of Good Friday the Voice revealed the mystery of the Cross of Light to the disciple who had been drawn into the Grotto. "For the True Cross is not this wooden cross that you will see when you come down here again." And this is a truth which was well known to Ismailian Gnosis.³⁵

If the cry "God is dead" has left many on the brink of the abyss, it is because the mystery of the Cross of Light was long ago done away with. Neither pious indignation nor cynical joy can alter the fact. There is only one answer, the words that Sophia, emerging from the night, murmured in the ear of the pensive pilgrim circumambulating the Ka'aba: "Can it be that you yourself are already dead?" The secret to which Ibn 'Arabī and his companions initiate us impels those whom that cry has shaken to the depths of their being to recognize *what* God has died and *who* are the dead. To recognize this is to understand the secret of the empty tomb. But the Angel must have removed the stone, and we must have the courage to look into the bottom

35. See our article, "L'Ismaélisme et le symbole de la Croix."

of the tomb if we are to know that it is indeed empty and that we must look for Him elsewhere. The greatest misfortune that can befall the shrine is to become the sealed tomb before which men mount guard and do so only because there is a corpse in it. Accordingly, it takes the greatest courage to proclaim that it is empty, the courage of those able to dispense with the evidence of reason and authority because the only secret they possess is the secret of love that has seen.

Our meaning is expressed in the following anecdote which we owe to Semnānī, the great Iranian Ṣūfī: Jesus was sleeping with a brick for pillow. The accursed demon came and stopped at his bedside. When Jesus sensed that the accursed one was there, he woke up and said: Why hast thou come to me, accursed one?—I have come to get my things.—And what things of thine are there here?—This brick that thou retest thine head on.—Then Jesus (*Rūḥ Allāh, Spiritus Dei*) seized the brick and flung it in his face.

The purpose of an introduction as of a prelude is to announce, to give an intimation of, the themes of a work. It is thus to be hoped that certain of our leitmotifs have been set forth with some clarity in the foregoing pages. In concluding our introduction, we shall make no attempt to summarize the book itself, but merely indicate the link between its two parts.³⁶

PART ONE. We start by noting the encounter—characteristic, as we have seen, of Ṣūfism in Islam—between prophetic religion and mystic religion. It is this encounter which gives mystic religion its prophetic resonance (the "seven prophets of thy Being" in Semnānī); and through it, conversely, prophetic religion ceases to be dissociated from mystic experience: the

36. Parts One and Two appeared previously in a somewhat different form in *EJ* XXIV (1955) and XXV (1956), with the titles "Sympathie et théopathie chez les 'Fidèles d'Amour' en Islam" and "Imagination créatrice et prière créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī."

celestial assumption of the Prophet (*Mirāj*) becomes the prototype of a spiritual experience which the mystic in turn must relive in a mental vision or assumption, which makes of him too a *nabī*. The spirituality thus established develops what we have characterized as theophanism. From this encounter between prophetic religion and mystic religion rises the idea of *unio mystica* as *unio sympathetica*; far from conflicting with such a "sympathetic union," it is the co-passion of the *fedele d'amore* and his God; the *praesentia realis* of his God is in the passion that this *fedele* experiences for Him, his *theopathy*, which puts him into sympathy with the being or beings which have been invested by him and for him with the theophanic function. The prayer of the heliotrope in Proclus is perhaps the most subtle prefiguration and annunciation of this sympathy; it is a prelude to that other Prayer which is simultaneously the Prayer of God and the Prayer of man. As for the theophanic function invested in men, it is the secret of the dialectic of love. In the nature of mystic love this dialectic discovers the encounter (con-spiration) between sensory, physical love and spiritual love. Beauty is the supreme theophany, but it reveals itself as such only to a love which it transfigures. Mystic love is the religion of Beauty, because Beauty is the secret of theophanies and because as such it is the power which transfigures. Mystic love is as far from negative asceticism as it is from the estheticism or libertinism of the possessive instinct. But the organ of theophanic perception, that is, of the perception through which the encounter between Heaven and Earth in the mid-zone, the *'alam al mithal* takes place, is the active Imagination. It is the active Imagination which invests the earthly Beloved with his "theophanic function"; it is essentially a theophanic Imagination and, as such, a creative Imagination, because Creation is itself theophany and theophanic Imagination. From this idea of Creation as theophany (the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* being excluded) arises the idea of a sophiology, the figure of *Sophia aeterna* (the Eternal Womanly) as she appears in the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabī.

PART TWO. Recapitulation of the basic theme: Imagination and theophany. If Creation is understood as a divine theophanic Imagination, how does the mystic communicate through the organ of the Imagination with the worlds and interworlds? What are the events perceived by the active Imagination? How does it create, that is, manifest, Being? This question introduces the motif of the "subtle physiology," whose center is the heart; the heart is the focus in which creative spiritual energy, that is, theophanic energy, is concentrated, whereas the Imagination is its organ. Our analysis then culminates in the experimental verification of a twofold demonstration: on the one hand, the method of theophanic prayer by which he who prays becomes aware that his prayer is simultaneously Prayer of man and Prayer of God; on the other hand, the theophanic vision which surmounts the void and hiatus, the contradictions which abstract monotheism leaves wide open: on the one hand, the impossibility of vision and the people's rejection of Moses; on the other, the testimony of the Prophet and of all those who ground their spiritual experience in his celestial assumption: "I have seen my Lord in the most beautiful of forms." And the secret of the Imagination which configures the features of this *Forma Dei* must be sought in experimental verification of the maxim commented above: "He who knows himself knows his Lord."

Perhaps a word is in order about the unfamiliar vocabulary employed in this book. We have learned it from our authors themselves. If it seems unusual, it is because, writing in Arabic or Persian, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī, Semnānī and others say things which our customary philosophical language is not always equipped to express. The most characteristic Arabic or Persian terms have been interpolated in parentheses. In the course of the present introduction the terms "theophany" and "theopathy" have already been employed in contexts that make their meanings clear.

Still, 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 *theophanisms* of Ibn 'Arabī has a good deal in common with the ideas of the symbolist interpreters of Dante (Luigi Valli), 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 'Arabī in Mecca 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 invoked as *Madonna Intelligenza*). The problem is similar to that raised by the person of Khidr the prophet, both individual person and, by virtue of his investiture with a theophanic function whose organ is the active Imagination, an archetype. If we fail to grasp this twofold dimension simultaneously, we lose the reality both of the person and of the symbol.

It has not been our intention to re-open the great debate, inaugurated by Asín Palacios, concerning the actual historical relations between those to whom we can give the name of *Fedeli d'amore* in the East and West. It has seemed more important to indicate the undeniable typological affinities between them. We shall observe that this term *Fedeli d'amore* (the Arabic or Persian equivalents will be given below) does not apply indiscriminately to the entire community of Ṣūfīs; it does not, for example, apply to the pious ascetics of Mesopotamia, who in the first centuries of Islam took the name of Ṣūfī. In making this distinction we only conform to the indications provided by the great Iranian mystic Rūzbehān Baqlī of Shīrāz (d. 1209) in his beautiful Persian book entitled *The Jasmin of the Fedeli d'amore*. Rūzbehān distinguishes between the pious ascetics, or Ṣūfīs, 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. Rūzbehān's doctrine falls in with Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love. It creates a kinship between him and Fakhr 'Irāqī, the Iranian who was Ibn 'Arabī's disciple through the intermediary of Ṣadr Qunyawī, and also makes Rūzbehān the precursor of that other famous man of Shīrāz, the great poet Ḥāfīz, whose *Diwān* is still observed today by the Ṣūfīs of Iran as a Bible of the religion of love, whereas in the West it has been solemnly debated whether or not this *Diwān* has a mystic meaning. This religion of love was and remained the religion of all the minstrels of Iran and inspired them with the magnificent *ta'wil* which supplies a link between the spiritual Iran of the Ṣūfīs and Zoroastrian Iran, for according to this *ta'wil* the Prophet of Islam in person proclaims Zarathustra to be the prophet of the Lord of love; the altar of Fire becomes the symbol of the Living Flame in the temple of the heart.