

BETWEEN SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
AND TEMPORAL POWER:
IBN KHALDUN'S VIEWS ON SUFISM

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Abstract

In the 9th/15th century the jurist and historian ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) became involved in a dispute that broke out in Andalusia about whether one needed a shaykh to tread the sufi path or whether books sufficed. The dispute was a very heated one and generated much discussion about the nature of sufism and spiritual realization. The response of Ibn Khaldun, as well as the other key figures who issued rulings (fatwas) on this question, are analyzed and Ibn Khaldun’s view is further examined in the light of a much neglected fatwa of his in addition to relevant passages from the Muqaddima and Shifa’ al-sa’il. It is argued that that Ibn Khaldun favored a sober pursuit of the spiritual path based on rigorous adherence to the Qur’an and Sunna while rejecting the monistic doctrines of Ibn al-‘Arabi and others whom he condemned in the strongest possible terms. Moreover, this condemnation was the result of what Ibn Khaldun perceived to be the dangers inherent in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s doctrine of the Perfect Man since it allowed for the possibility of individual saintly apotheosis that he further saw as an even more dangerous coinciding of spiritual authority and temporal power.

Introduction

Ibn Khaldun became involved in an intellectual dispute which arose in Andalusia on the nature of the sufi spiritual quest to which he devoted an entire treatise entitled *Shifa’ al-sa’il ila tahdhib al-masa’il* which despite its appearance in a critical edition in 1958

continues to be somewhat neglected.¹ He additionally made known his views on the potential dangers of certain kinds of sufism, sufis and sufi books in an also somewhat neglected *fatwa* of condemnation which comes down to us in three slightly different versions.² In what follows, we will examine Ibn Khaldun's view of what constitutes legitimate Sufism as set out in *Shifa' al-sa'il* together with his *fatwa* against certain sufi writings. We will conclude with a reflection on the possible reasons for Ibn Khaldun's position which we see as an instance of the tension between spiritual authority and temporal power.

The dispute in which Ibn Khaldun became involved was on the question of whether a sufi required a spiritual guide (*shaykh*), or whether books on sufism—assuming adherence on the part of the seeker to Islamic ritual—sufficed. That the latter debate retained its resiliency for centuries afterwards is indicated by a specific reference to it in one of the works of the 13th/19th century sufi Abu'l-'Abbas Ahmad b. Muhammad b. 'Ajiba al-Hasani (1160–1224/1747–1809),

¹ 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406), *Shifa' al-sa'il ila tahdhib al-masa'il*, ed. Muhammad Ibn Tawit al-Tanji (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyât Fakültesi Yayınları XXII, 1958). A doctoral study was devoted to this work by Youmna Adal, "Sufism in Ibn Khaldun: An annotated translation of the *Shifa' al-sa'il li tahdhib al-masa'il*," Ph.D. diss. Indiana University, 1990.

² The first version appears as an appendix to Muhammad Ibn Tawit al-Tanji edition of Ibn Khaldun's, *Shifa' al-sa'il li tahdhib al-masa'il*, 110–11. Ibn Tawit al-Tanji bases his text on two MSS, *Tanbih al-ghabi 'ala takfir Ibn 'Arabi* by Burhan al-Din al-Biqa'i (d. 885/1480), Şehit Ali MS 2734, fols. 39–69 and 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1143/1730) *al-Radd al-matin*, İstanbul Üniversitesi MS AY 3767, fol. 105. The former work has since been published as *Masra' al-tasawwuf aw tanbih al-ghabi ila takfir Ibn 'Arabi*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Wakil (Cairo: 1409/1989). The *fatwa* was most probably given sometime between 774 and 776 H (i.e. between 1372 to 1374), that is to say at approximately the same time as the composition of the *Shifa' al-sa'il*. The second version is quoted by Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition. The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1999), 191–92, 357 n. 160; citing Taqi al-Din Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Fasi in *al-'Iqd al-thamin fi ta'rikh al-balad al-amin*, 8 vols. Ed. Muhammad Hamid al-Faqi, Fu'ad Sayyid, and Mahmud Muhammad Tanahi (Cairo: Matba'at al-Sunna al-Muhammadiya, 1958–69), 2:180–1. The third version is quoted by the 11th/18th century Zaydi scholar Salih Ibn Mahdi al-Muqbil in his *al-'Alam al-shamikh fi ithar al-haqq 'ala al-aba' wa'l-masha'ikh* (Cairo: 1328), 428.

who not only mentions Ibn Khaldun but indicates the involvement of a large number of other scholars in the debate.³ After stating that the admonitions of the masters of the spiritual path (*shuyukh*) regarding the necessity of recourse to a spiritual preceptor and warnings against not doing so are legion, and quoting the warning of Abu Yazid⁴ that “He who lacks a *shaykh* has taken Satan as his *imam*,” Ibn ‘Ajiba informs us that,

Considerable dispute and debate arose toward the end of the eighth century [hijri] among the brethren in Andalusia so much so that they even struck each other with their shoes over whether it was sufficient to merely observe the rituals of the faith and study books about the path of the Sufis... or whether a spiritual guide (*shaykh*) was necessary. So they wrote to scholars far and wide and each answered according to his capacity, such as ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Abbad,⁵ may Allah be pleased with him; and such as Abu ‘Abdullah Ibn Khaldun, may Allah

³ Abu’l-‘Abbas Ibn ‘Ajiba (d. 1224/1809), *al-Futuhat al-ilahiyya fi sharh al-Mabahith al-‘aliyya* printed on the bottom of his *Iqaz al-himam fi sharh al-hikam*, 2 vols. in 1, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, no date), 147–148. This is a re-print of an edition which was printed, according to the notice on 2:461, in 1331 H, perhaps in Cairo. Moreover, on the same page we learn that *Iqaz al-himam* begun in Muharram 1211 H and completed on a Wednesday, 8 Jumada I of the same year, whereas *al-Futuhat al-ilahiyya* was completed on a Thursday in the middle of Ramadan 1211 H. The *Hikam*, or sufi aphorisms, upon which *Iqaz al-himam* is a commentary, is by the famous Shadhili master Ibn ‘Ata’illah al-Sikandari, whilst *al-Futuhat al-ilahiyya* is a poem on the spiritual path Abu’l ‘Abbas Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Yusuf known as Ibn al-Banna “al-Saraqusti” indicating his origin Saragossa, Spain. He should not be confused with the mathematician, astrologer/astronomer and occultist Ibn al-Banna who died in 721 H at Marrakech; see *EI*² 3:731 (H. Suter and M. Bencheneb). On Ibn ‘Ajiba see J. L. Michon, *The Autobiography of the Moroccan Sufi Ibn ‘Ajiba*, Trans. David Streight (Louisville, KY: 1999).

⁴ Presumably Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. 261/874 or 264/877-8). See *EI*² 1:162 (Helmut Ritter).

⁵ According to the entry on Ibn ‘Abbad by Paul Nwiya in *EI*² 3:670, he is Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad b. Ishaq Ibrahim al-Nafzi al-Himyari al-Rundi (d. 792/1390). See also Nwiya’s full study of him, *Ibn ‘Abbad de Ronda* (Beirut: 1961). He was from Ronda 36° N 44’’ 5° W 10’’, in present day Spain. See “Runda” in *EI*² 8:615 (Manuela Marin).

have mercy on him, who devoted a separate work to this question.

Ibn ‘Ajiba goes on to tell us that the views of Ibn Khaldun and Ibn ‘Abbad were summarized by Abu’l-‘Abbas Ahmad Ibn ‘Isa al-Barnusi al-Fasi, known as Ahmad al-Zarruq (d. 899/1493), in his *‘Uddat al-murid*.⁶ Not only do we find mention of these matters in the latter, but also in Zarruq’s *Qawa‘id al-tasawwuf*.⁷ However, these works provide only a terse summary of the dispute and none of these sources provide quotations – whether in full or in part – of the *responsa* that emerged as a result of the correspondence initiated by the Andalusian sufi brethren. For this we are indebted to Abu Ya‘qub Ibn Muhammad al-Wanshirisi (d. 914/1408) and his voluminous compendium of Islamic legal rulings, *Kitab al-Mi‘yar*, which preserves the *responsa* of Abu’l-‘Abbas al-Qabbab (d. 779/1377) and the sufi-scholar Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Ibn ‘Abbad al-Rundi (d. 792/1390)⁸ whose *fatwa* also appears as an epistle (no.16) in his letters of spiritual instruction, *al-Rasa’il al-Sughra*.⁹ These sources tell us that the controversy became so protracted and unresolved that the scholars of Granada finally decided to appeal to erudite scholars in the Maghrib, and it was only then that Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d. 790/1388), himself an eminent Maliki jurist of Granada, addressed a letter (*istifta’*) to several learned men in Fez which was the capital of the Marinid dynasty at the time and a center of intellectual activity. Among these were the aforementioned Maliki jurist al-Qabbab, who had also been one of al-Shatibi’s teachers, and the renowned sufi, Ibn

⁶ We have not been able to secure a copy of this work.

⁷ Ahmad al-Zarruq, *Qawa‘id al-tasawwuf* (Cairo: 1976), 40. An excellent study of Zarruq and complete English translation is Zeinab S. Istarabadi, “The Principles of Sufism (Qawa‘id al-Tasawwuf): An annotated translation with introduction,” Ph.D. diss. Indiana University, 1988.

⁸ al-Wansharisi, *al-Mi‘yar al-mughrib wa al-jami‘ al-mu‘rib*, 12 vols. Ed. Muhammad Haji (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, n. d.). al-Qabbab’s ruling is in 11:117–123 and Ibn ‘Abbad’s ruling is in 12:293–307.

⁹ Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Ibn ‘Abbad al-Rundi (d. 792/1390), *al-Rasa’il al-Sughra*, Ed. Paul Nwiya, a. k. a. Bulus Nawiyya (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-Kathulikiya, 1957), epistle no.16, pp. 106–115 and appendix C, pp. 125–138. The latter has been translated into English by John Renard as *Ibn ‘Abbad of Ronda: Letters on the the Sufi Path*. Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

‘Abbad. The most detailed response was Ibn Khaldun’s who produced a detailed study of the issue in his *Shifa’ al-sa’il ila tahdhib al-masa’il*.

Sufism and the Question of the Spiritual Master

The various responses given to al-Shatibi all seem to favour the necessity of a spiritual master to some degree or another, including Ibn Khaldun’s. We shall begin with al-Qabbab followed by Ibn ‘Abbad and then turn to Ibn Khaldun in a separate section.

As noted above, al-Qabbab was one of al-Shatibi’s teachers and a renowned Maliki jurist. He taught at Gibraltar and Fez.¹⁰ It is important to bear in mind that he was not only a jurist but had also practiced Sufism. In his view, no art whether it be grammar (*nahw*), law (*shari’a*), or medicine (*tibb*), can be mastered on the basis of mere formal book based-study alone; this was all the more true in the case of Sufism, for not only is it a discipline in which just that, namely *discipline* and *practice* are paramount, but a science whose deep truths were often conveyed in the form of symbols, allusions and technical language that only those who were experts in such matters could impart in person. Thus, he took a firm position in favour of the necessity of spiritual guidance imparted by a living master over the sole reliance on books by such masters. He clarified his position by noting that knowledge is in the “hearts of men” (*sudur al-rijal*) and it is there that the ultimate keys to such knowledge were to be found. Even if such knowledge was put in writing, the keys would still be retained in the hearts of the experts. He also viewed the science or discipline of *tasawwuf* as having two dimensions: an esoteric one, dealing with knowledge of mystical states (*ahwal*) and stations (*maqamat*), and an ethical one, dealing with the spiritual remedies for the baser tendencies of the soul. Having knowledge of this second ethic is incumbent on all Muslims and is much easier to acquire through books if a master cannot be found, in contrast with the first dimension which can only be learned from a master. Books that deal with the esoteric dimension can also be very dangerous as

¹⁰ al-Qabbab’s views are summarized from al-Wansharisi, *al-Mi’yar*, 11:117–123.

they may lead the practitioner astray.

Ibn ‘Abbad’s letter to al-Shatibi is longer than the response of al-Qabbab and can be viewed almost as an independent essay on the need for a spiritual guide on the Sufi path.¹¹ He refused to become directly involved in the Granada dispute and confines himself to discussing the role of the spiritual master. Ibn ‘Abbad states that one could hardly deny the necessity of a spiritual guide in Sufism and proceeds to outline the various types of guides: the *shaykh al-ta‘lim* and the *shaykh al-tarbiya*. The first is the “Master or guide who educates.” Not all seekers on the path need a *shaykh al-ta‘lim*. It is only those who have a dull mind and a rebellious lower self that must have recourse to this type of master who acts in fashion akin to a physician that heals a chronically ill person. Such persons cannot treat themselves and must seek out a competent physician. Those who have a more expansive mind and sufficient control over their lower selves only need a *shaykh al-tarbiya* who assigns them specific spiritual practices exactly suited to each individual, although they may still be in need of *ta‘lim*, i.e. the sort of instruction imparted by the first kind of *shaykh*. Thus, the two types are not mutually exclusive although the functions and qualities of the *shaykh al-tarbiya* encompass those of the *shaykh al-ta‘lim*, but not the reverse. As for books there is no harm in consulting them provided they are by people of true knowledge (i.e. that they are consistent with the *shari‘a*), yet one can only truly know this through the teaching of a living guide. Thus, the reading of books, though they have value, does not mean that one can dispense with a spiritual master. Nevertheless, Ibn ‘Abbad very realistically noted the difficulty of finding a genuine *shaykh al-ta‘lim* in his day. Given this difficult state of affairs, Ibn ‘Abbad concluded that rather than rely on books or masters, the seekers should rely on Allah. There is no point in searching for the *shaykh* since he is a divine gift, a

¹¹ Ibn ‘Abbad’s views are summarized from al-Wansharisi, *al-Mi‘yar*, 12:293–307; Ibn ‘Abbad, *al-Rasa’il al-Sughra*, 106–115 and 125–138. The references to Ibn ‘Abbad in Ibn ‘Ajiba are highly condensed and are culled from Ahmad Zarruq’s *Uddat al-murid*, a work which I have not been able to locate. However, Zarruq also refers to the debate and the views of Ibn ‘Abbad, also in highly condensed form, in his *Qawa’id al-tasawwuf* (Cairo: no publisher given, 1976), 40.

manifestation of divine grace and will be encountered at the appropriate time if it is one's destiny. Even so, in the meantime, one cannot relinquish practice for the ultimate goal is neither books nor masters but knowledge of Allah (*'irfan*), and thus such a person must continue to practice while remaining true and sincere, continually relying on Allah to send him guidance in the person of a master.

Ibn Khaldun's position on the need for a spiritual master in *Shifa' al-Sa'il*

In *Shifa' al-sa'il*, Ibn Khaldun reaches very similar conclusions, but discusses the question in relation to his understanding of sufism's history. Sufism for Ibn Khaldun is a science (*'ilm*), but like any other phenomenon pertaining to human existence, *tasawwuf* is also liable to change (*tabddul*) in its external, relative and contingent aspects and in this sense is a historical phenomenon. Ibn Khaldun observed that sufism had a history, for it emerged at a particular time, grew and, in his opinion had declined somewhat in his time. Like any other aspect of culture (*zahira 'umraniyya*) sufism was born out of a need. Approximately the first three or four generations of Muslims led virtuous and pious lives in perfect accord with the *shari'a* and focused primarily on their inner spiritual deportment and deeds rather than on external ones only¹². After this period of relative spiritual balance and equilibrium, differences and disagreements emerged among members of the Islamic community thus opening the door to deviations from the earlier period of virtuous adherence to the straight path. It thus became necessary for the jurists to standardize ritual observances (*'ibadat*) and to codify the laws pertaining to human relations (*mu'amalat*). This opened the way for many to forget the importance of the inner spirit and deeds. This diminishing focus upon actions stemming from the heart, along with the unfortunate infiltration of heretical beliefs and doctrines and their adoption by many Muslims, according to Ibn Khaldun, contributed to the emergence of *tasawwuf* around the year 200 H. Thus, in his opinion sufism emerged in the form of a distinct discipline as a kind of reaction to the growing entanglement and involvement of most of

¹² *Shifa'a al-sa'il*, 143.

Islamic society with externals and appearances and emphasis on the material side of life at the expense of the spiritual.

Ibn Khaldun sees the later tendency as an aspect of civilization (*hadara*) itself.¹³ He elaborated his analysis of sufism as it bears on the question of the spiritual guide by outlining a three-fold scheme of historical cycles which account for the emergence, development and decline of sufism. At the outset, sufism was simply an interior understanding of religion (*fiqh al-batin*). This he identified with an inner combat (*mujahada*) in which the seekers stood in fear of Allah and calls it *mujahadat al-taqwa*.

In this first ‘cycle’ the individual seeker must—just as did the early Muslim community—seek to avoid all transgression of the *shari‘a* and strive all-out for righteousness. This leads into the second cycle, *mujahadat al-istiqama*, the attainment in the constancy of righteousness, i.e. of being established in moral rectitude and virtuous behaviour. Some of those believers, according to Ibn Khaldun, who had achieved such constancy moved to a third and final cycle of struggle, *mujahadat al-kashf*, in which the the veil separating the sufi from his Lord is finally lifted. However, according to Ibn Khaldun, these sufis failed to sustain the tradition of careful approach toward truth as exemplified in the first two cycles. Due to this neglect, some later sufis pursued the third *mujahada* outside of the protective perimeter of the rigorous adherence to *shari‘a* which was so strongly cultivated in the first two *mujahadas*. This led to a proliferation of speculations and abstractions which had no relation to spiritual truth because they were not the result of genuine spiritual practice and thus, many went astray.¹⁴ In the *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldun singled out for censure this elaborately speculative sort of sufism, particularly the rigorously uncompromising monism associated with Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 638/1240)¹⁵ and

¹³ *Ibid.* 146–147.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 208.

¹⁵ The best biography of Ibn al-‘Arabi remains Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society), to which should be added the papers of Gerald Elmore, New Evidence on the Life of Ibn al-‘Arabi,” *JAOS* 117 (1997): 347-349; “New Evidence on the Conversion of Ibn al-‘Arabi to Sufism,” *Arabica* 45 (1998): 50-72; “Poised Expectancy: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Roots in ‘Sharq al-Andalus;”” *Studia Islamica* 90 (2000): 51-66; and “Shaykh ‘Abd

‘Abd al-Haqq Ibn Sab‘in (d. 699?/1270?),¹⁶ as well as the antinomian tendencies associated with ecstatic utterances (*shatahat*) related to figures such as al-Hallaj (executed in Baghdad, 310/922).¹⁷

How does his theory of combative cycles relate to the need for a spiritual guide? Here Ibn Khaldun invokes the hadith. He identifies these three cycles of *mujahada* with the three levels of *islam* (submission), *iman* (faith) and *ihsan* (excellence in worship) as mentioned in a very well known statement of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁸ In the combative cycle of *mujahadat al-taqwa*, which corresponds to the level of *islam*, a spiritual guide is not absolutely necessary and one may traverse this stage with the aid of books, although it is more difficult to do so without a *shaykh*. Thus, though not an absolute necessity, the significance of the *shaykh* is in no way diminished. In the second combative cycle of *mujahadat al-istiqama*, which corresponds to the level of *iman*, the seeker must actualize the virtues of the Qur’an in him or herself and thus rid the heart of its imperfections. This form of struggle—unlike the first one—is not an obligation on every person and here too the *shaykh* is not an absolute necessity as there are some who may traverse this stage by themselves through recourse to the relevant books dealing with the Qur’an and the *hadith* but it is once again better to have a *shaykh* and this is more so than in the first *mujahada*. In the third and final combat, *mujahadat al-kashf*, which corresponds to the level of *ihsan* and is also not incumbent on all Muslims, a *shaykh* is absolutely necessary. None can pass through this stage without the guidance of a spiritual master.¹⁹ The response of Ibn Khaldun to the controversy

al-‘Aziz al-Mahdawi, Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Mentor,” *JAOS* 121 (2001): 593-613.

¹⁶ His death date is uncertain and was either 668 or 669 H, corresponding to the period 1269-71 CE. On his life see *EP* 3:921 (A. Faure) and Abu’l-Wafa’ al-Taftazani, *Ibn Sab‘in wa falsafatuhu al-sufiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Misri al-Lubnani, 1973).

¹⁷ *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*. 3 vols. 2nd ed. Trans. Franz Rosenthal. Bollingen Series XLIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 2:187-88, 3:92. 101-2, 278.

¹⁸ It is a very widely reported hadith. See for example Abu’l-Husayn Muslim b. al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naysaburi, *al-Jami’ al-Sahih*, 2 vols. (Vaduz, Lichtenstein: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2000), 1:23-25, kitab al-Iman, bab 1-2, hadiths 102-107 [the first five hadiths from the beginning of kitab al-iman];

¹⁹ *Shifa’ al-sa’il*, 241-244.

which began in Granada is not terribly different from those of al-Qabbab and Ibn ‘Abbad. All of them indicate that the *shaykh* may not be entirely dispensed with and emphasize a sort of sober spirituality based on a practice of superogatory worship (*nawafil*). In the case of Ibn Khaldun this was described by his three cycles of *mujahada*. It is also true that none of the three scholars completely denounced books as a source of mystical knowledge either, although all of them consider books to be subordinate to personal instruction especially regarding ultimate truths, the cycle Ibn Khaldun called *mujahadat al-kashf*, which he saw as the most perilous in its potential for leading to deviation from the *shari’a*. Books purporting to deal with such ultimate truths were deemed particularly misguided and are the subject of his *fatwa*.

Ibn Khaldun’s censure of a certain species of Sufism in his *fatwa*

We have seen that for Ibn Khaldun it is not simply a question of yes or no to the need of a spiritual guide. Books have their place but the master is paramount especially in the final combative cycle of *mujahadat al-kashf*. However, apparently some masters and their books were both regarded with more than a little suspicion. At the very end of the critical edition of the *Shifa’ al-sa’il*, prepared by Ibn Tawit al-Tanji, we find, in the form of an appendix, a *fatwa* which has not received much attention. It is a very forceful text of the genre of what are known as “*fatwas* of condemnation” to which genre we have devoted a major study.²⁰ Ibn Khaldun calls for the physical destruction of books by Ibn al-‘Arabi and other sufis associated with the mystical tendency personified by him which Ibn Khaldun deemed

²⁰ Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Fatwas of Condemnation: Islam and the Limits of Dissent* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2006). The first and second versions of this *fatwa* were first translated into English and studied in the latter work. Another translation of the first version of the *fatwa* appeared in an article by James Morris entitled “An Arab ‘Machiavelli’? : Rhetoric, Philosophy and Politics in Ibn Khaldun’s Critique of ‘Sufism.’” Apparently the article was published in the *Proceedings of the Harvard Ibn Khaldun Conference* edited by Roy Mottahedeh. Unfortunately, I have not seen this published version but have been compelled to rely on the version publically posted by the author on the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society website: www.ibanrabisociety.org. Knysh also discusses the *fatwa* in its third version in *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 191–92,

dangerous to the public good.²¹ The text speaks for itself and is translated below.

The sufi path consists of two methods: The first, which is the path of the [adherents to] the Prophetic Norm (*Sunna*) is the path of their forebears, that was in accord with the Qur'an and the Prophetic Norm (*Sunna*), and consists of adhering to the Pious Forebears (*al-salaf al-salih*) from among the Companions (*sahaba*), and the generation that immediately followed them (*tabi'un*). The second method—which is contaminated by innovations (*mashubatun bi'l-bida'*)—is a latter day tendency on the part of some to render the first path merely a means to lift the veil of sense perception (*kashf hijab al-hiss*), as that is one of its results.

Among such sufis are Ibn 'Arabi,²² Ibn Sab'in,²³ Ibn Barrajan,²⁴ and their followers who adopted their method and embraced their doctrine. They have authored numerous works filled with clear expressions of unbelief (*mashabatu bi sarih'il-kufr*), conspicuous innovations

²¹*Shifa' al-sa'il*, 110–11 and footnote 2 of this paper.

²² His *Fusus al-hikam* was critically edited by Abu'l-'Ala al-'Afifi (Cairo: 1365/1946), however the latter was not based on the most important MS, namely Evkaf Musesi 1933 which was dictated by Ibn al-'Arabi to his disciple Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi at Damscus in 630 H. We have prepared a critical edition of it based on this MS to be published by the German Oriental Institut, Beirut (OIB) in 2014. His most important work, *al-Futuhat al-makkiya*, was being edited by Osman Yahia until his death a few years ago. To my knowledge, fourteen volumes appeared under the auspices of the General Egyptian Book Organisation from 1972–1991. The 4 volume Bulaq edition of 1293/1876 is available in a number of pirated printings. The most relevant work on the reception of Ibn 'Arabi's thought is Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi and the Later Islamic Tradition. The making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: Sate University of New York press, 1999) to which must be added Haji Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, *The Ocean of Unity: Wahdat al-Wujud in Persian, Turkish, and Malay Poetry* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa, 1994).

²³ Abu Muhammad Qutb al-Din 'Abd al-Haqq b. Ibrahim b. Nasr al-'Akki al-Mursi, known Ibn Sab'in (d. 669/1270).

²⁴ 'Abd al-Salam Ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Lakhmi of Seville, known as Ibn Barrajan (d. 536/1141). On him see *EP* 3:732 (A. Faure).

(*bida'*) and interpretations that could not be more repulsive and remote from the apparent meaning of texts, so much so that one is at a loss to ascribe such works to Muslims or consider them to be works of *Shari'a*. The esteem in which these people are held by some is of no value—regardless of how eminent such an admirer might be, because the Qur'an and the Prophetic Norm (*Sunna*) are ever more eminent and authoritative than anyone.

As for the ruling regarding these books containing those misguided doctrines and their copies in circulation among the people (*wa ma yujadu min nusakhiha bi aydi'l-nasi*), such as the *Fusus*, and *al-Fuṭḥat al-makkiyya* of Ibn 'Arabi, the *Budd* of Ibn Sab'in,²⁵ and the *Khal' al-na'layn* of Ibn Qasi²⁶ These books and those like them are to be physically destroyed (*idhhab a'yaniha*), whenever copies are found by consigning them to the flames, or washing away the ink of their texts so that no trace of the writing remains visible. This is to safeguard the general welfare of the religion (*al-maslaha al-'amma fi'l-din*). It is incumbent on the ruler (*waliy'l-amr*) to burn these books in order to

²⁵ *Budd al-'arif*, Ed. Jurji Kattura (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus/Dar al-Kindi, 1978).

²⁶ Ahmad Ibn Qasi (d. 546/1151). On him see Ibn Khaldun, *Kitab al-'Ibar wa diwan al-mubtada' wa'l-khabar fi ayyam al-'arab wa'l-'ajam wa'l-barbar wa man 'asarahum min dhawi'l-sultani'l-akbar*, 7 vols, (Bulaq: Amiriya Press, 1284/1867), 6:485; 'Umar Rida Kahhala, *Mu'jam al-mu'allifin* 15 vols. (Damascus: Matba'at al-Tarraqqi, 1957-61), 2:51; Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, *al-A'lam*, 8 vols., (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li'l-malayin, 1979), 2:58; Hajji Khalifa (Kâtib Çelebi), *Kashf al-zunun 'an asami al-kutub wa'l-funun* 2 vols., Eds. Şerefettin Yaltkaya and Kilisli Rifat Bilge (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaasi, 1941-3), 1:722; *EP* 3:816-17 (A. Huici-Miranda); Carl Brockelmann *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Supplement, 3 vols., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937-42), 1:776; his *Khal' al-na'layn* remains unpublished in a unique MS: Şehit Ali 1174. The latter seems to be the only complete MS of this work and also contains the commentary of Ibn al'Arabi. The Arabic text minus the commentary appeared in David Richmond Goodrich, "A 'Sufi' Revolt in Portugal: Ibn Qasi and his "Kitab Khal' al-na'layn" (Arabic Text)", Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, 1978. This researcher is preparing a critical edition *Khal' al-na'layn* of the latter with Adam Sabra based on additional manuscript sources.

safeguard the general welfare. Moreover, whoever has them should offer them for burning.

The authors condemned above, Ibn al-‘Arabi, Ibn Sab‘in, Ibn Barrajan, and Ibn Qasi all evince similar concerns in their writings, namely the notion of the absolute unicity of *Allah* and the utter nothingness and illusory nature of all that is other than God. In addition, each one espoused a cosmology and Qur’anic theurgy based on the Divine Names. Indeed, Ibn al-‘Arabi speaks highly of both Ibn Barrajan, and Ibn Qasi in his works. We will examine these dimensions further in our concluding reflections, but first we must present the other versions of this *fatwa*.

A Second Version of Ibn Khaldun’s *fatwa* of condemnation

A second version of this *fatwa* exists. Although nearly identical, the text singles out additional figures and their works for censure. We have had to rely on Alexander Knysh’s study of Ibn ‘Arabi for the text of this *fatwa* and it is his translation that we cite below.²⁷

Among those Sufis (*mutasawwifa*) were Ibn ‘Arabi, Ibn Sab‘in, Ibn Barrajan, and those who followed their creed. They composed many works which they circulated among themselves. These works reek of downright unbelief and reprehensible innovation. [Any attempt to] explain their underlying meaning allegorically produces results that are as far-fetched as they are abhorrent. This makes the inquirer wonder whether these people can at all be treated as members of this [Muslim] community and counted among [the followers of] the *shari‘a*... Now, as regards the books which contain these erroneous beliefs and are passed around by people, for example, the “Bezels” and the “Revelations” of Ibn ‘Arabi, the “Removal of the Sandals” of Ibn Qasi, “The Eye of Certainty,”²⁸ and

²⁷ Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 191–92.

²⁸ Arabic: *‘Ayn al-yaqin*. A work by Ibn Barrajan. We have not been able to locate this work. Either it is lost or remains in MSS.

many poetic lines by Ibn al-Farid and al-‘Afif al-Tilimsani, as well as the Ibn al-Farghani’s commentary on the “Ta’iyya” of Ibn al-Farid. The judgment with respect to these and similar books is as follows: When found, they must be destroyed by fire or washed off by water until the traces of writing disappear completely. Such an action is beneficial to the religion [of Islam] because it leads to the eradication of erroneous beliefs.

As in the first version, here we also meet Ibn al-‘Arabi, Ibn Sab’in, Ibn Barrajan, and Ibn Qasi, but the second paragraph includes ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid (d. 632/1234), ‘Afif al-Din al-Tilimsani (d. 690/1291), and Sa‘id al-Din al-Farghani (d. 699/1300). Of these three figures al-Tilimsani was a disciple of Ibn al-‘Arabi and wrote a commentary on his *Fusus al-hikam* (which remains in manuscript); in addition to being an accomplished sufi poet.²⁹ ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid is considered by many to be the finest sufi poet in the Arabic language.³⁰ al-Farghani was a student of Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (d. 672/1274) who was perhaps Ibn al-‘Arabi’s most eminent disciple. At al-Qunawi’s behest, al-Farghani wrote an important commentary on Ibn al-Farid’s most celebrated poem, which is known as the *Ta’iyyat al-suluk* or “Ode Rhyming in the Letter Ta’ on the Spiritual Path.” Ibn al-Farid’s poetry was highly esteemed by the school of Ibn al-‘Arabi. Thus, all three additional figures are closely linked with Ibn al-‘Arabi and his school as well.

²⁹ An edition of his *diwan* was published by Yusuf Zaydan as *Diwan ‘Afif al-Din al-Tilimsani* (Cairo: 1989). His commentary on the *Fusus* may well predate that of Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi which is usually regarded as the first commentary by a disciple of Ibn al-‘Arabi. Until all the known manuscripts of al-Tilimsani’s commentary on the *Fusus* are located and studied it will not be possible to say. We know of 2 MSS in Turkey: Haci Mahmud Efendi 2654 and Şehit Ali Paşa 1248. Unfortunately, neither bears a dated colophon.

³⁰ See Muhammad Mustafa Hilmi, *Ibn al-Farid wa’l-hubb al-ilahi* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘arif, n.d.). Hilmi mentions the same *fatwa*, citing his teacher, Abu’l-Wafa’ al-Taftazani, *Ibn Sab’in wa faslsafatuhu al-sufiya* (Cairo: Dar al-Lubnani, 1973), 156 to illustrate the hostility toward Ibn Sab’in. See also Ibn al-Farid, *Diwan Ibn al-Farid*, 3rd revised edition, Ed. ‘Abd al-Khaliq Mahmud (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1428/2007).

A Third Version of Ibn Khaldun's *fatwa* of condemnation

We first came across this version in a work on the life of al-Farid. The author cites the *fatwa* to illustrate the controversy generated by his work even centuries after his death. He gives as his source *al-'Alam al-shamikh fi ithar al-haqq 'ala al-aba' wa'l-masha'ikh* of the 11th/18th century Zaydi scholar Salih Ibn Mahdi al-Muqbili.³¹ The version quoted by al-Muqbili differs from the other two versions and also seems to be an incomplete quotation. The differences between it and the other versions are also of interest.

... As for the ruling regarding these books containing those misleading doctrines and the lofty rank acquired by them among the general populace, namely the *Fusus*, and *Futuhat* of Ibn 'Arabi, the *Budd* of Ibn Sab'in, *Khal' al-na'layn* of Ibn Qasi, *'Ayn al-yaqin* of Ibn Barrajan,³² also worthy of mention is much of the poetry of Ibn al-Farid, 'Afif al-Tilimsani not to mention the commentary of al-Farghani on *The Ode Rhyming in Ta'* by Ibn al-Farid. The ruling regarding these books and those like them is that they should be physically destroyed wherever copies are found by consigning them to the flames or washing away the ink of their texts so that no trace of the writing remains visible in order to safeguard the general welfare of the religion (*al-maslaha al-'amma fi'l-din*). It is incumbent on whomever has them to offer them for burning, and if not then the ruler must confiscate them and punish him for opposing him in not allowing them to be burnt, since the ruler cannot be opposed in matters of general welfare (*al-maslaha al-'amma*).³³

Here the two introductory paragraphs seem to have been omitted altogether. Clearly, al-Muqbili is only quoting the portion he

³¹ al-Muqbili, *al-'Alam al-shamikh* (Cairo: 1328), 428.

³² As noted above, a work by Ibn Barrajan. Which is either lost or remains in manuscript.

³³ al-Muqbili, *Ibid.*, 428.

is interested in. Nevertheless, all of the persons mentioned in the other two versions appear in this one. Recall that passages in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* corroborate the negative attitude toward Ibn 'Arabi and these poets.³⁴ This leads me to believe that these three versions of the *fatwa* are not mutually exclusive and, taken together, give an indication of examples of the sort of sufism that Ibn Khaldun's considered to be deviant. We may conjecture that Ibn Khaldun included all of Ibn al-'Arabi, Ibn Sab'in, Ibn Barrajan, Ibn Qasi, Ibn al-Farid, 'Afif al-Tilimsani, and al-Farghani in the original text of his *fatwa* of condemnation, and that the MSS relied on by Ibn Tawit al-Tanji in his critical edition are incomplete in this regard. Finally, al-Muqbili's version ends on a more severe note. In this redaction, those who possessed copies of the condemned works were to hand them over and if they did not, they were to be punished by the ruler for he was not to be opposed in matters of public welfare. In the first version, although Ibn Khaldun is quoted as saying that those that have the proscribed books should offer them for burning (*wa yata'ayyanu 'ala man 'indahul-tamkinu minha lil-ihraq*), one is at least left with the impression that this is somewhat voluntary; there is no explicit indication here of the ruler using coercive authority to confiscate the books for destruction. Conspicuously absent from both versions is the text of the *istifta'* – if indeed there was any – which would have been indispensable in reconstructing the immediate historical context of this *fatwa*. It does not appear that Ibn Khaldun's *fatwa* gave rise to any kind of official hunt for the works of Ibn al-'Arabi in his time, but it is certain that Ibn al-'Arabi continued to be controversial and remains so to this day.³⁵ We may now approach the matter of Ibn Khaldun's motivations for his strong condemnation of these Sufis and their works, as well as the most relevant

³⁴ *The Muqaddimah*, 2nd ed. Trans. Franz Rosenthal, 2:187–88, 3:92. 101–2, 278.

³⁵ The reactions to Ibn al-'Arabi have been examined in detail in the already cited study by Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, passim. For a listing of *fatwas* both for and against Ibn al-'Arabi, see Osman Yahia, *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'ibn 'Arabi*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut Francais de Damas, 1964), 1:122–135. For a treatment of more recent reactions see Th. Emil Homerin, *Ibn Arabi in the People's Assembly: Religion, Press, and Politics in Sadat's Egypt*, *Middle East Journal* 40.3 (Summer 1986): 462–77.

dimensions of their doctrines in our concluding reflections.

Concluding Reflections

Ibn Khaldun is certainly no salafi of the Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328)³⁶ or al-Barabahari³⁷ variety. However, Ibn Khaldun *was opposed* to much of the Sufism of his day, and particularly the type inspired by Ibn al-‘Arabi. All of the figures mentioned in his *fatwa* in its three versions, as well as in passages in the *Muqaddima* have some association with Ibn al-‘Arabi whether directly or indirectly or with his school.³⁸ Ibn Sab’in — while not associated with Ibn al-‘Arabi and his school — is regarded as having espoused a “radical monism” of the *wahdat al-wujud* (unicity of being) variety associated with the name of Ibn al-‘Arabi.

‘Afif al-Din al-Tilmisani was also a disciple of Ibn al-‘Arabi and also authored a commentary on the *Fusus al-hikam* which remains in manuscript.

Sa‘id al-Din al-Farghani was a student of Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi who maybe regarded of as Ibn al-‘Arabi’s chief disciple. Farghani authored a commentary, one version in Persian and another in Arabic, at the behest of Sadr al-Din on the *Ta’iyya* of ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid who although not a disciple of Ibn al-‘Arabi, had his poetry highly esteemed by Ibn al-‘Arabi and his followers.³⁹

Ibn al-‘Arabi speaks favourably of Ibn Qasi in his *Fusus*⁴⁰ and also wrote an entire commentary on his *Khal‘ al-na‘layn* (“Doffing

³⁶ On him see Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³⁷ al-Hasan b. ‘Ali b. Khalaf al-Barabahari (d. 329/941). See *EI*² 1:1039 (H[enri]. Laoust) and *EI*³ (Christopher Melchert), www.brillonline.nl.

³⁸ See William C. Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabi and his School” in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ed. *Islamic Spirituality. Manifestations* (New York, Crossroads Publications, 1991), 49–79.

³⁹ The Arabic commentary was published as *Muntaha al-madarik*, 2 vols. (Cairo: 1293) and subsequently in a critical edition by Wisam al-Khattawi also in two volumes of which we have only seen the first volume, *Muntaha al-madarik wa muntaha kulli kamil wa ‘arif wa salik* (Qum: Matbu‘at-i Dini, 1386 hijri solar).

⁴⁰ *Fusus al-hikam* MS Evkaf Musesi 1933 fol. 15v, line 12. This MS was dictated by Ibn al-‘Arabi to his disciple Sadr al-Din Qunawi and contains a statement to that effect in his handwriting with his signature. See fol. 1r of the same.

of the Two Sandals”). In fact, it appears that the latter is transmitted solely by Ibn al-‘Arabi.

Ibn Barrajan’s prowess in the occult noetic theurgy of the Arabic letters (*‘ilm al-huruf*)⁴¹ is highly esteemed by Ibn al-‘Arabi in his own treatment of the subject in the second chapter of the *Futuhat* where he mentions that Ibn Barrajan unambiguously predicted with mathematical accuracy the year of the victory of the Salah al-Din over the Crusaders occupying al-Quds on the basis of the opening verses of the Thirtieth Sura of the Quran (al-Rum (30): 1–4).⁴² Ibn Barrajan made this prediction in 520 H. Salah al-Din attained victory in Rajab 583/1187. Ibn Barrajan died in 536 or 537 of the Hijra. Moreover, the figure most associated with recondite arcana of the Islamic occult sciences, namely Abu’l-‘Abbas Ahmad Ibn ‘ali Ibn Yusuf al-Qurashi known as al-Buni⁴³ while not mentioned in any of

⁴¹ On *‘ilm al-huruf* see Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, “Glimpses of ‘Ilm al-Huruf”, unpublished manuscript.

⁴² See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Sa’in al-Din Turka Isfahani (1369-1342) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran,” Ph. D. diss., Yale University, 2012, 284-306.

⁴³ The entry on al-Buni in the Supplement to *EL*² 12:156 by A. Diterich is now obsolete, as are the following: Mohamed M. El-Gawhary, *Die Gottesnamen im magischen Gebrauch in den al-Buni zugeschriebenen Werken*. Bonn: 1968; Dorothee Anna Maria Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit: Die arabische magie im Spiegel des Usul al-Hikma von Ahmad Ibn ‘Ali al-Buni*. Band 8. Arabistische Texte und Studien Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995; Edgar Walter Francis IV, “Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals for Protection and Healing: Religion and Magic in the Writings of Ahmad ibn Ali al-Buni (d. 622/1225)”, Ph.D. diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 2005; Jan Just Wikam, “Gazing at the Sun. Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Buni and his Work” in Arnoud Vrolijk and Jan P. Hogendijk (Eds.), *O Ye Gentleman. Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007, p. 183–199; and Jaime Coullaut Cordero, “El-Kitāb Sams al-Ma‘arif al-Kubra (al-yuz al-awwal) de Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Buni: Sufismos y ciencias ocultas,” Ph.D. diss., Universidad de Salamanca, 2009. I am grateful to Dr. Sajjad Rizvi, University of Exeter for giving me a copy of this work. There have been several new studies which now call for revision of these earlier attempts. These new studies on al-Buni are: John D. Martin III, “Theurgy in the Medieval Islamic World: Conceptions of Cosmology in al-Buni’s Doctrine of the Divine Names,” MA diss. American University in Cairo, Dec. 2011, Noah Gardiner, “Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production, Transmission, and reception of the Major Works of Ahmad al-Buni,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012): 81–142; Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, “Navigating the ‘Corpus Bunianum’ I:

the versions of the *fatwa*, is singled out for censure together with Ibn al-‘Arabi in the *Muqaddima*.⁴⁴ al-Buni is strongly associated with Ibn al-‘Arabi not just in “spirit,” so to speak, but through a common teacher as well. In a seminal paper on al-Buni just published by Noah Gardiner, we learn that al-Buni and Ibn al-‘Arabi shared the same spiritual master in the person of Abu Muhammad ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn Abi Bakr al-Qurashi al-Mahdawi (d. 621/1224).⁴⁵ Both Ibn al-‘Arabi and al-Buni, not to mention Ibn Qasi as well as Ibn Barrajan, espoused both a doctrine of the theophany of the Divine Names as well as a theurgy of the Divine Names which enabled the adept to perform directly manipulate the underlying forces and principles of the cosmos. Clearly there are strong links and similarities between the figures singled out by Ibn Khaldun for censure. It would seem that the reason Ibn Khaldun so strongly opposed these figures was because of the allegiance of all of them to the doctrine of the unicity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) with which Ibn al-‘Arabi is strongly associated. This is indeed true, but in our view neither the sole nor decisive reason for Ibn Khaldun’s condemnation: the decisive reason is Ibn al-‘Arabi’s doctrine of the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*). To better understand the rationale behind Ibn Khaldun’s condemnation we must discuss this doctrine in some detail.

The *locus classicus* of the doctrine of the Perfect Man in Ibn al-‘Arabi is the opening paragraph of his *Fusus al-hikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom) and it is with a key passage from the *Fusus* that we shall begin.⁴⁶ Before doing so, I should like to note the lamentable fact of

A Survey and Analysis of Key MSS ascribed to Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Buni (d. 622/1225),” unpublished, an earlier version of it was presented at the Eighth Annual Islamic Manuscripts Conference of the Islamic Manuscript Association, July 9-11, 2012 at Queens’ College, University of Cambridge; Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, “Navigating the Corpus Bunianum II: An Inquiry into the Art and Science of Talismans in the Occult Technology of Ahmad b. ‘Alī al-Būnī (d. 622/1225?),” *The Occult Sciences in Pre-Modern Islamic Culture*, Beirut: Beirut Texts und Studien, forthcoming 2014.

⁴⁴ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 2nd ed. Trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3:172.

⁴⁵ Gardiner, *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁶ According to Masataka Takeshita, the Arabic term for the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) occurs seven times in the *Fusus*, see his “Ibn ‘Arabi’s Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought,” Ph. D. diss., University of Chicago, 1986, 49.

this important work having never been properly critically edited until now despite the existence of a MS dictated by the master himself to one of his chief disciples, Sadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī.⁴⁷ None of the published editions prior to ours (which will appear soon) are to be trusted.⁴⁸ We have relied upon the aforementioned MS in all of our work. We will begin by quoting our translation of the opening paragraph in its entirety.⁴⁹

The Transcendent Wisdom of Divinity in the Matrix of Adam.

Whereas the Absolute (may He be glorified), in respect of his Most Beautiful Names which are beyond number, wished to see their essences—or in other words to see Himself—in an all inclusive object encompassing the

⁴⁷ Evkaf Musesi 1933 currently in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, İstanbul. All references in this paper will be to Evkaf Musesi 1933. Other highly significant MSS have also been examined but will not be cited: Carullah 986, Carullah 1070, Kılıç Ali Paşa 618, Ragib Paşa 1453, Şehit Ali Paşa 1351, all in the Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, İstanbul. For further details of the MSS of the *Fusus*, see Osman Yahia, *Histoire et classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1964), 1:240–241.

⁴⁸ The most well-known published editions are: Abu al-‘Ala’ al-‘Afifi, *Fusus al-hikam* (Cairo: 1365/1946) *Sharḥ Fusus al-hikam min kalam al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyi al-Din Ibn al-‘Arabi*, Ed. Maḥmud Maḥmud al-Ghurab (Damascus: self-published, 1405/1985), *Fusus al-hikam*, Ed. Nawaf al-Jarraḥ (Beirut: Dar Ṣadir, 1426/2005). Only al-Afifi’s is a critical edition, but it is based on a very late MS of no real significance.

⁴⁹ Evkaf Musesi 1933, folio 2r, lines 11–20 to folio 2v, lines 1–3. In preparing our translation we have benefited greatly from *Ibn al-‘Arabi. The Bezels of Wisdom*, Trans. and Introduction by R. W. J. Austin. Preface by Titus Burckhardt. The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 50. Austin’s translation reads the best in English. It is also the only one in which the translator also consulted the MS Evkaf Musesi 1933 in addition to the published edition of al-‘Afifi. There are only two other English translations done directly from the Arabic: Aisha Bewley, *The Seals of Wisdom*. The latter is now out of print and I no longer have my personal copy. If I am not mistaken, it was first published in the mid-1980s after Austin’s translation. It is now available online, for some reason minus not only the translation of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s preamble, but also minus the introduction by Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit which were both in the published version, at <http://bewley.virtualave.net/fusus.html>; and Caner K. Dagli, *The Ringstones Wisdom (Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam)*. Great Books of the Islamic World. Series Editor: Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Chicago; Kazi Publications, 2004).

Divine command in its totality, which qualified by existence would reveal to Him His own mystery—for the seeing of a thing, itself by itself, is not the same as its seeing itself in another, as it were in a mirror, for it appears to itself in a form that is invested by the location of the vision by that which would only appear to it given the existence of the location and its self-disclosure to it—the Absolute bestowed being upon the whole cosmos as an undifferentiated thing not having anything of the spirit in it. So, it was akin to an unpolished mirror. And it is in the nature of the Divine determination that He does not set out a locus (*mahall*) except to receive a divine spirit, which He describes as the breathing into him [Qur'an 21: 91]. The latter is nothing other than the coming into operation of the undifferentiated form's innate disposition to receive the inexhaustible overflowing of self-revelation which has always been and will ever be. There remains only the receptive and the receptive can only be from the Most Holy Superabundance (*al-Fayd al-Aqdas*), for the whole affair, in its entirety, is from Him (*minhu*), in the beginning and the end—and to Him returns the whole affair [Qur'an 2: 210]—just as it began with Him. {NB: An alternative reading: “for the whole affair, in its entirety, is from Him in its beginning and its end—and to Him returns the whole affair [Qur'an 2: 210]—just as it began with Him”}.

As noted earlier, the Arabic term for the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) occurs seven times in the *Fusus*.⁵⁰ Whilst the term itself does not occur in the paragraph quoted, the essence of the doctrine is expressed therein. Moreover, Ibn al-'Arabi authored his own brief commentary on the *Fusus*, known as the *Naqsh al-Fusus* (The Imprint of the Bezels). His remarks on the entire chapter are both brief and highly significant and thus also deserve to be quoted in

⁵⁰ Masataka Takeshita, “Ibn ‘Arabi’s Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought”, 49.

full.⁵¹ After an analysis of these passages we shall consider the explicit occurrences of the term in the *Fusus*.

The Transcendent Wisdom of Divinity in the Matrix of Adam.

Know that the Most Beautiful Divine Names entail by their very nature the existence of the cosmos, for Allah bestowed being on the cosmos as an undifferentiated body and made its spirit “Adam”. By “Adam”, I mean the very being of the realm of humanity. And he taught him [i.e. Adam, primordial man] the Names, all of Them. [Qur’an 2:31]. For truly the spirit is none other than that which governs the physical body by its faculties. Similarly, the Names are for the Perfect Man as faculties. Thus is it said concerning the cosmos that it is the mega-anthropos but only on condition of the existence of Man therein. Man, then, is the epitome of the Divine Presence and it is for this reason that he was singled out for “the Image” for thus did he [i.e. the Prophet Muhammad] say: “Verily, Allah created Adam in His own Image” and in another narration “in the Image of the Infinitely Compassionate (*al-Rahman*)”. Allah made him [primordial Man] the sought-after goal [*telos*] of the cosmos, just as the rational soul is in the individual human being. Therefore, the cosmos is destroyed with his demise, and the entire [cosmic]

⁵¹ The version in the Hyderabad edition of the miscellaneous treatises of Ibn al-‘Arabi is quite useless: *Rasa’il Ibn ‘Arabi* (Daiirat al-Ma‘arif al-‘Uthmāniya in 1361/1948). The latter is based on Asafiyah 376 (dated 997/1589). We have prepared a critical edition of the latter based primarily on Carullah 2080 (dated 791 H, copied from an original in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s handwriting) which is to be published together with our edition of the *Fusus*. There are some significant differences between it and the text that William. C. Chittick printed in his critical edition of ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami’s (d. 898 H) *Naqd al-nusus*, a commentary on *Naqsh al-Fusus*, which was embedded in the MSS he used. We relied on the following additional MSS all in the Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, İstanbul: Şehit Ali Paşa 1351 (dated 690 H), Bağdatlı Vehbi 2023 (dated 691 H), Şehit Ali Paşa 2717 (dated 977 H), and Nafiz Paşa 685 (dated 1096 H). For further details of the MSS of the *Naqsh al-Fusus*, see Osman Yahia, *Histoire et classification de l’œuvre d’Ibn ‘Arabi*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1964), 2:407.

edifice will pass into the End (the Hereafter) because of him [i.e. by reason of the Perfect Man being transferred there]. Thus, he is the first in intention, yet the last in existention; the outwardly-manifest in form, yet the inwardly-hidden in rank; [but] a [mere] servant in relation to Allah, yet a lord in relation to the cosmos. It is for this reason that He made him a vicegerent (*khalifa*) and his offspring vicegerents (*khulafa'*). And therefore none of the creatures of the world has claimed lordship for themselves but Man due to the power he possesses and [in the same fashion] none of the creatures of world has mastered the station of [divine] servanthood (*'ubudiyya*) but Man. Thus, did he worship stones and [other] inanimate objects which are the lowest of existing things. Hence, there is nothing more exalted than Man in lordship; yet none more lowly than him in his servitude. If you have understood, then I have made clear to you what is intended by "Man", look then to his grandeur by virtue of the Most Beautiful Names and the fact that they seek him. From the fact of their seeking him is known his grandeur and from his manifestation by them, is known his lowliness. So understand! And thence it is revealed that he is a paradigm of the two images: the Absolute (*al-Haqq*) and the cosmos (*'alam*).

Careful consideration of the foregoing passages, as well as an understanding of the relevant portions of the Qura'n as well as the relevant hadiths to which Ibn al-'Arabi only gives the slightest of allusions, leads to a number of important conclusions. First, Ibn al-'Arabi is expounding a metaphysical cosmology in which the Perfect Man is identified with the Qur'anic Adam. The second chapter of the Qur'an (2:30–34), speaks of the creation of Adam. God informs the angels that He is to create and place upon the Earth a vicegerent (*khalifa*). The angels reply by saying that the new creature will make mischief upon the Earth and shed blood therein, whereas, in contrast, they constantly glorify God and sanctify His

Name. God responds by saying that He knows what they know not. He then proceeds to teach Adam—and we must not forget that Ibn al-‘Arabi is reading “Adam” in the sense of primordial humanity—“the names, all of them” (*al-asma’a kullaha*, Qur’an 2:31). This is considered by Ibn al-‘Arabi to mean the Divine Names which are beyond number. At this point God commands the angels to prostrate to Adam in acknowledgement of his superiority. This knowledge of the Divine Names is how he also construes the ḥadīth, quoted in the *Naqsh al-Fusus* (the second passage above) which states that God created Adam in His Image.⁵² It is against this backdrop that the *Fusus* opens. Ibn al-‘Arabi indicates that Adam, who is, once again, a symbol for man *qua* man or if one prefers the human being *per se*, was created by God through an act of self-contemplation “when”—(quotation marks to indicate the latter word must be construed non-temporally since time as we know it did not yet exist)—He wished to contemplate his own visage, so to speak, in another. The latter is likened by Ibn al-‘Arabi to a mirror. Since man is the reflection of the Divine Names, he is created in His Image and is thus worthy of being his vicegerent. Another Qur’anic passage and image is evoked when he speaks of God breathing into man of his Spirit. This too is taken as symbolizing the Divine Names, which, through a sort of Divine “exhalation”, animate not only Adam, but Adam himself by virtue of his existence in the cosmos as the vicegerent of God, in turn, animates the world. Thus, the Perfect Man is the very soul of the cosmos (*anima mundi*) and, through God, sustains it. The existence of the Perfect Man is entailed by the Divine Names, and it is through the existence of the Perfect Man in the world that it is sustained. The cosmos is incomplete without the Perfect Man whose existence is its ultimate teleological end, and the cosmos will cease to exist with the demise of the Perfect Man. Who

⁵² See Muḥammad b. Isma‘il al-Bukhari (d. 256 H), *al-Jami‘ al-sahih*, 3 vols. (Vaduz, Lichtenstein: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2000), kitab al-isti’dhan, bab bad’ al-salam, v. 3, p. 1268–1267, no. 6299, kitab ahadith al-anbiya’, bab qawl Allah wa idh qal rabbuka li’l-mala’ika... , v. 2, p. 648, no. 3361; and Muslim b. al-Ḥajjaj al-Naysaburi (d. 261 H), *al-Jami‘ al-sahih*, 2 vols. (Vaduz, Lichtenstein: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2000), kitab al-janna wa sifat na’imihā wa ahliha, bab yadkhul al-janna aqwam af’idatuhum mithl af’idat al-tayr, v. 2, p. 1198–1199, no. 7342.

is this extraordinary being? If Adam signifies primordial humanity, man *qua* man, the human being *per se*, does that mean everyone is the Perfect Man? In order to answer this and other questions we must examine how Ibn al-‘Arabī has used the term elsewhere, in the *Fusus*. However, we will not burden the reader with further quotations.

The first occurrence of the term in the *Fusus* is in the first chapter after Adam has been identified with the macrocosm as the “great man”, mega-anthropos (*al-insan al-kabir*) as well as God’s vicegerent. Here the Perfect Man is likened to the seal (*khatm*) which a king places on his treasury and thus, just as none dare opens his treasury as long as the seal remains and the treasury is protected thereby, so too is the existence of the Perfect Man the means by which the cosmos is preserved.⁵³

The second occurrence refers to how the Perfect Man has been fashioned by the Divine Attributes of Majesty (*al-Jalal*) and Beauty (*al-Jamal*) which are symbolized as the “two hands” of God.⁵⁴

Shortly thereafter we have the third occurrence of the term where we find the explicit declaration that none maybe the vicegerent of God but the Perfect Man. Here another ḥadīth is alluded to in which God Himself declares that He becomes the very sight and hearing of the Perfect Man.⁵⁵

The fourth use of the term unequivocally declares the Perfect Man to be at the apex of the hierarchy of engendered existence (*a’la al-mawjadat*).⁵⁶

The fifth instance of the term is in the context of the heart of the gnostic (*qalb al-‘arif*). Here it is stated, somewhat elliptically, that whilst the Perfect Man is the locus of manifestation of the Divine Names — which by their very nature entail his existence — to be more precise it is the heart of the Perfect Man which is the physical locus of these Names. The sixth and seventh occurrences of the term elaborate this idea further and indicate that the [heart of the] Perfect

⁵³ Evkaf Musesi 1933, fol. 3r, line 3.

⁵⁴ Evkaf Musesi 1933 fol. 5r, line 6.

⁵⁵ Evkaf Musesi 1933 fol. 5r, line 20.

⁵⁶ Evkaf Musesi 1933 fol. 14r, line 10.

Man epitomizes *all* of the Divine Names.⁵⁷ This is highly significant since Ibn al-‘Arabi indicates in the opening words of the *Fusus* that the Divine Names, are beyond enumeration. Moreover, for this reason the entire cosmos is subjugated to the Perfect Man and subject to his command. That the whole universe has been subjugated to the will of the Perfect Man is also stated in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *‘Uqlat al-mustawfiz*.⁵⁸

There is another dimension in the use of the term in the latter text as well as in the seventh occurrence in the *Fuṣūṣ* which allow us to answer the question posed earlier, namely who is the Perfect Man? These two citations contrast the “Perfect Man” with what Ibn al-‘Arabi calls the “Animal Man”. The latter signifies all those human beings who, despite being made in the image of God, fail to actualize this dei-formity which is only potential. Thus, the Divine Names were “blown” into the physical matrix of the Qur’anic Adam, as well as into all humans since Adam symbolizes all persons. The Divine Names then exist in a potential state in all people, but must be made actual. Therefore, it is not given to the ordinary man to reach the station of the Perfect Man. In the third occurrence of the term in the *Fusus*, Ibn al-‘Arabi alludes to a hadith which he identifies with the path of sainthood that culminates in the station of the Perfect Man. The ḥadīth is a well known one and implies that only those who wholeheartedly draw nigh to God through acts of supererogatory worship reach this station and God becomes their very hearing by which they hear and sight by which they see.⁵⁹ Thus, only the

⁵⁷ Evkaf Musesi 1933 fol. 66r, lines 14, 19.

⁵⁸ Cited in Masataka Takeshita, “Ibn ‘Arabi’s Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought”, 112. See also Şehit Ali Paşa 1341, fols. 151-165. This is an important manuscript of *‘Uqlat al-amastawfiz* which bears a colophon dated 18 Rabi‘ al-Awwal, 625 H which means it was copied in the lifetime of Ibn al-‘Arabi. However it is not in his handwriting. The scribe gives his name as Muzaffar Ibn Sayyid ‘Ali al-Huwayni (or al-Juwayni as there are no dots here). It was copied in the city of Sivas in what is today central Turkey.

⁵⁹ Muḥammad ibn Isma‘il al-Bukhari (d. 256 H), *al-Jami’ al-sahih*, kitāb al-riḥāq, bab al-tawadu’, v. 3, p. 1319, no. 6581. Ibn al-‘Arabi also quotes it in his own ḥadīth collection. See his *Mishkat al-anwar* published with facing-page french translation as *La niche des lumières*, Ed. Michel Valsan (Paris: Les Editions l’Œuvre, 1983), 119–120, no. 91. On Ibn al-‘Arabi and ḥadīth see Ali Vasfi Kurt, *Endülüs’de Hadis ve İbn Arabi* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1988?).

choicest saints (*awliya'*) are worthy of this station which is the culmination of sanctity (*wilaya*). Yet, there is a hierarchy of sanctity and of saints. At any given time there is only one supreme saint called by the sufis, Ibn al-'Arabī included, the *qutb* or "axial saint" around which the firmament of sanctity revolves. All saints however, and the axial saint in particular, do not attain to sanctity directly since the Divine aid does not flow to them directly.⁶⁰ It reaches them only via the Prophet Muhammad. It is here that we encounter what is known as the Muhammadan Reality (*al-haqiqat al-Muhammadiya*) and also as the Light of Muhammad (*al-nur al-Muhammadi*). It is held by Ibn al-'Arabi that the Prophet Muhammad was not a mere man like other men and that he existed prior to all other things as the first delimitation of Being after the ontological plane of the Divine Attributes. Ibn al-'Arabi devotes the final chapter of the *Fusus al-hikam* to the doctrine of the Light of Muhammad⁶¹ as well as making mention of it in innumerable number of places in his massive *al-Futuḥāt al-makkiya* a work of some four thousand pages in the Cairo edition of 1293 H. The relationship between the doctrines of the Light of Muhammad and the Perfect Man is nicely summarized by M. Chodkiewicz:⁶²

These various expressions can strictly be applied only to the *haqiqa muhammadiyya*, for it alone possesses these attributes *ab initio* and in full measure. In another sense, however, they are adequate to designate the *qutb* and any beings who are able to assume his cosmic function. In any case, the terms *haqiqa muhammadiyya* and *insan kamil* are not purely synonymous, but express differing views of man, the first seeing him in terms of his

⁶⁰ This understanding expressed in this paragraph is heavily indebted to Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints. Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), *passim*. Regarding hadījiths on the issue of the hierarchy of the saints see Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 H), *al-Khabar al-dall 'ala wujud al-qutb wa'l-awṭad wa'l-nujaba' wa'l-abdal wa yalih al-qawl al-jali fi ḥadīth al-wali*, Ed. 'Abd al-Hadi Mansur (Dar al-Albab, 1426/2005).

⁶¹ Evkaf Musevi 1933, folios 72r–78v.

⁶² *Seal of the Saints. Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 71.

primordially and the second in terms of his finality. The *kamal* or perfection of the *insan kamil* should not be understood in a 'moral' sense (so as to correspond with the 'heroic virtues'), but as meaning 'fulfillment' and 'completion'. Properly speaking, this perfection is possessed only by Muhammad, the ultimate and total manifestation of *haqiqa muhammadiyah*. Yet, on the other hand, it is equally the goal of all spiritual life and the very definition of *walaya*. Hence, the *walaya* of the *wali* can only be participation in the *walaya* of the Prophet.

Thus, the doctrine of the Perfect Man only finds its fullest manifestation in the Prophet Muhammad. All who attain to any degree of sanctity (*walaya*) no matter how great or small, do so only through participation in the sanctity of Muhammad. Muhammad's sanctity has always been because the existence of his luminous reality precedes all else. Indeed, it is through this very light that all the subordinate "Perfect Men" are sustained, and thereby the cosmos is sustained.

After this lengthy, but necessary examination of the doctrine of the Perfect Man in Ibn al-'Arabi, we are in a much better position to comprehend Ibn Khaldun's harsh condemnation of works like the *Fusus* which espoused this doctrine. Ibn Khaldun was opposed to Ibn al-'Arabi and those closely associated with him or his school because of the radical implications and potentialities of the doctrine of the Perfect Man for uniting spiritual authority and temporal power. Ibn Qasi made mahdist claims and led a rebellion against the ruling Almoravids (*al-Murabitun*) in the Algarve region of Andalusia (*gharb al-Andalus*) and created a short-lived polity. Ibn Barrajan played an equally important and prominent role in the rebellion and was acknowledged as *imam* in 130 villages. In addition to his prowess in '*ilm al-huruf*' he authored an esoteric commentary on the Qur'an as well as a similar work devoted to the Divine Names, which is *the central concern* in the arcane theurgy of all of these Sufis. Ibn Khaldun was an expert in the history of Andalusia and the Maghrib and was well aware of this revolt and others like it, including the role

played by chiliastic claimants and doctrines in generating the necessary *'asabiyya* — as he called it — for the success of such millenarian political adventures.⁶³ Ibn al-'Arabi, especially in his work entitled *al-'Anqa al-mughrib* (“The Fabulous Gryphon”) had himself made claims of being the seal of sanctity (*khatm al-wilaya*), as well as of playing a key role in an apocalyptic vision of the future heralded by the impending appearance of a world-redeemer.⁶⁴ Both the *Fusus* as well as the *Ta'iyya* were read as extended commentaries on the notion of the Perfect Man by the commentators on these works singled out for condemnation by Ibn Khaldun. *All of this leads one to the conclusion that these figures all shared notions of a kind of apotheosis of the saint much akin to the Twelver and Isma'ili doctrine of the Imamate.*⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldun not only rejected all such notions of spiritual authority, but even went so far as to dismiss all hadiths regarding the Mahdi as either being weak or forgeries, amounting to a rejection of the Mahdi doctrine itself.⁶⁶ Also in the *Muqaddima*, he explicitly identifies this sort of sufism with “shi'a extremists,” but does not mention the doctrine of the Perfect Man.⁶⁷

Ibn Khaldun's position on the debate which arose in Andalusia on the need for a shaykh as set out in detail in his *Shifa' al-sa'il* indicates he favoured a sober, ascetic sufism based on his three cycles of *mujahada*. His rejection of the “monistic” teachings of Ibn al-'Arabi and Ibn Sab'in in his *fatwa* and in key passages of the *Muqaddima*, also amount to repudiation of Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine of the Perfect Man as well. Thus, Ibn Khaldun's *fatwa* of condemnation must be seen as a rejection of all notions of individual, saintly

⁶³ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 2nd ed. Trans. Franz Rosenthal, 2:195–96.

⁶⁴ See Gerald T. Elmore's monumental study and translation of this work, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time. Ibn al-'Arabi's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), *passim*.

⁶⁵ On the doctrine of the imamate see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Shi'i Islam*, Trans. David Streight (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), *passim*; and his *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 2011), 103–304.

⁶⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 2nd ed. Trans. Franz Rosenthal, 2:156–200, esp. 157, 195, 196.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 3:92. See also Alexander Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in Later Islamic Tradition*, 192–97 and James Morris, “An Arab “Machiavelli”? : Rhetoric, Philosophy and Politics in Ibn Khaldun's Critique of Sufism,” 14–18.

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apotheosis that he saw as resulting in the coinciding of spiritual authority and temporal power.