

Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation

*Texts and Studies in Honor of William C. Chittick
and Sachiko Murata*

Edited by

Mohammed Rustom



BRILL

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*The author has no share save the post of translator, and no portion
but the trade of speaker.*

From the preface of Jāmī, *Lawā'ih*, trans. William C. Chittick in Sachiko
Murata, *Chinese gleams of Sufi light: Wang Tai-yü's* Great learning of the
pure and real and *Liu Chih's* Displaying the concealment of the real realm,
Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000, 134



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Some Notes on Ibn ‘Arabī’s Correlative Prophetology

Gregory Vandamme

1 Introduction*

In his *Kitāb al-Isfār ‘an natā’ij al-asfār* (*The secrets of voyaging*), Muhammad and Adam are presented by Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) as “respectively father and son to one another.”¹ In this early treatise in which Ibn ‘Arabī describes a series of journeys taking place at certain ontological and cosmological levels of a perpetually moving universal existence, the journey of Adam is described as being the exact opposite of the preceding journey of Muhammad, “yet following the same course.”² These unusual ascriptions contrast with the classical qualifications of Adam as the father of mankind and Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets, and clearly indicate an intricate correlation between the two figures that exceeds their chronological succession.

As I have already shown elsewhere,³ the notions of “relation” (*nisba*) and “correlation” (*munāsaba*) are absolutely central to the ontology of Ibn ‘Arabī. Only the infinite being of God truly “is,” whereas everything else is but a web of intertwined relations in that unique being. Ibn ‘Arabī often asserts in a famous provocative formulation that everything that is found in existence is at the same time “Him not Him” (*huwa lā huwa*). In consequence, every existing reality is thus implicated in ambiguous ontological correlations which Ibn ‘Arabī sometimes describes in the classical philosophical and theological terms of his time, but above all by resorting to the symbolic discourse of the Quran, Hadith, and the Sufi tradition. It is therefore necessary to consider carefully the mul-

* I want to express my gratitude to Professor Cécile Bonmariage for her careful reading of the article and her useful comments that greatly improved this work.

1 Ibn ‘Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *Kitāb al-Isfār ‘an natā’ij al-asfār* (*The secrets of voyaging*), ed. Denis Gril, Abrar A. Shahi, and Angela Jaffray, Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2016, 71. All translations are mine in order to retain consistency in technical vocabulary.

2 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Isfār* 71.

3 Vandamme, Gregory, “L’ontologie corrélatrice d’Ibn ‘Arabī: Métaphysique de l’être et de ses relations,” in Jean-Michel Counet (ed.), *La non-dualité: Perspectives philosophiques, scientifiques, spirituelles*, Leuven: Peeters, 2021, 89–102.

tiple aspects and the peculiar formulations of Ibn ‘Arabī regarding any given reality described in his works. Ibn ‘Arabī himself gives this clear advice in the chapter dedicated to Adam in his *Kitāb al-Isfār*: “Connect what we have left unsaid with what we already said, according to the correspondence, and you will be well guided, God willing!”⁴

In this study, we will see through the example of the relation between Adam and Muhammad that this correlative approach seems also crucial to understand the intricacies of Ibn ‘Arabī’s prophetology. By applying his own advice, gathering, and collecting the scattered common elements shared by Adam and Muhammad in several of his writings, we will see how these two figures appear correlated, and ultimately depend on each other. Rather than provide a comprehensive survey and a thorough analysis of the question, this paper will propose some introductory notes to a problem that merits much closer scholarly consideration.⁵

2 Adam and Muhammad: A Meta-History

The first thing we need to consider in order to understand the correlation between the figures of Adam and Muhammad in Ibn ‘Arabī’s prophetology is their respective ahistorical—or more precisely meta-historical—dimension. Since the very beginning of Quranic exegesis, Adam has been considered as a cosmological figure and a historical prophet, and the father of mankind. His story usually begins long before his creation and is filled with legends involving angels and *jinn*s. As demonstrated by Cornelia Schöck in her *Adam im Islam*, the formative period of Islamic theology has given great importance to the figure of Adam in questions regarding universal salvation, eschatology, and freewill, as well as the prophetic and cosmological functions of Muhammad.⁶ Early Sufi literature already used those motifs to evoke the divine aspect of

4 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Isfār* 79.

5 I should mention here the article by Singh, David E., “An onto-epistemological model: Adam–Muhammad as the traditional symbols of humanity’s all-comprehending epistemic potential,” in *MW* 94.2 (2004), 275–301. Although this study presents some interesting aspects of the question, it is above all based on commentaries on the *Kitāb Shajarat al-kawn* (*The tree of existence*) usually attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī, but which has proven to be by ‘Abd al-Salām Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī (d. 678/1280). See Alaoui Mdaghri, Younes, “Critical study of the erroneous attribution of the book *Shajarat al-kawn* to Ibn ‘Arabī instead of to Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī,” in *The Journal of Rotterdam Islamic and Social Sciences* 1 (2010), 1–16.

6 Schöck, Cornelia, *Adam im Islam: Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna*, Berlin: Schwarz, 1993.

human nature, as exemplified in a verse of al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922): "What is Adam if not yourself? And the one who stands in between is Iblīs."⁷

It is thus not surprising to see Ibn 'Arabī describing Adam in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The bezels of the wisdoms*) as a reality out of time that largely exceeds the usual mythical-historical figure: "He is the new (*ḥādīth*) and eternal (*azalī*) human, the continuous and perpetual emergence (*nash'*), and the dividing and synthetic word."⁸ It is probably more unexpected to see Ibn 'Arabī declaring elsewhere that "God created one hundred thousand Adams."⁹ This appears in chapter 367 of his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan illuminations*), where he gives an account of his spiritual journey through the heavens, which clearly reminds of the spiritual ascension (*mi'rāj*) of the Prophet Muhammad. In the first heaven, Ibn 'Arabī faces Adam and all the blessed and the damned among his progeny, before seeing himself at the right of the father of mankind, troubled by this sudden ubiquity. Later, in the fourth heaven, Ibn 'Arabī discusses with Idrīs the eternity of the world and the age of Adam. Among other things, Ibn 'Arabī tells him of a visionary experience he had during which one of his ancestors—older than forty-thousand years—explained to him that God created many Adams. The number "one hundred thousand" is drawn by Ibn 'Arabī from a *ḥadīth* that is absent from the canonical collections, but which he considers authentic according to his own spiritual unveiling.¹⁰

These two contrasting dimensions of the figure of Adam, who is presented by Ibn 'Arabī both as a unique meta-historical reality and as multiple historical instances, should probably be approached from the perspective of the micro-cosmic and macrocosmic aspects of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*).¹¹ Ibn

7 Al-Ḥallāj, al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr, *Kitāb al-Ṭāwasīn* (*Le livre "Tāwasīn" de Hallāj*), ed. Stéphane Ruspoli, Paris: Albouraq, 2007, 346.

8 Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*Facsimile of oldest copy (dated 630H, TIEM 1933) and édition critique*), ed. Mahmud Erol Kılıç and Abdurrahim Alkiş, Istanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2016, 28 (50). (From now on, abbreviated as "*Fuṣ*." The pages correspond to the recent edition by Kılıç and Alkiş, while the pages in the classical 'Afīfī edition are indicated between hyphens).

9 Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, 4 vols., iii, Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, n.d., 549. (From now on, abbreviated as "*Fut*.")

10 It should be noted that we find a close *ḥadīth* in Shi'ī collections, where the Imam Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir is quoted thus: "God created a million (*alf alf*) worlds, and a million Adams." See Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Tihirānī, Qom: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 2008, 271.

11 See Chittick, William C., *Imaginal worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the problem of religious diversity*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994, 31–38, and Takeshita, Masataka, *Ibn 'Arabī's theory of the Perfect Man and its place in the history of Islamic thought*, Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1987.

‘Arabī repeatedly claims in the *Fuṣūṣ* and the *Futūḥāt* that Adam is a name for the Perfect Man, which is the focal point of the whole process of Creation: “God condensed the cosmos in a synthetic existence that contains all its meanings in the most perfect aspects, and He named him Adam.”¹² The synthetic function of the Adamic Perfect Man is often described by Ibn ‘Arabī as the “mirror” created by God to contemplate Himself.¹³ More precisely, it is the world in its entirety that acts as “an unpolished mirror” for the Divine Manifestation, while Adam is “the shine of this mirror and the spirit of this form.”¹⁴ The mirror of the Adamic Perfect Man is described as a double-sided mirror, one face reflecting the image of God and the other reflecting the image of the Perfect Man: “Whenever we contemplate Him, we contemplate ourselves. Whenever He contemplates us, He contemplates Himself.”¹⁵ Only the Adamic Perfect Man is able to see those two aspects together, whereas “the world is a veil on itself,” for contrary to Adam, “it cannot perceive the Real through its perception of itself.”¹⁶ We will see further that this duality plays a central role in the articulation between the Adamic and Muhammadan aspects of the Perfect Man.

The synthetic cosmological function of the Adamic Perfect Man is also symbolized by the motif of the “seal” (*khatm*) throughout the opening chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*: “He is the Seal of the treasures of the other world from all eternity ... He is called ‘Caliph’ for that reason, because [God] Most High guards His Creation by him, like the seal guards the treasures.”¹⁷ We will have to come back to the notion of the seal that is well known for being associated with the figure of Muhammad, and to its relation to the “Caliphate” of the Perfect Man.¹⁸

For Ibn ‘Arabī, every human being inherits the synthetic Adamic nature from the “supreme parent” (*al-wālid al-akbar*), and the perfect human mode of existence is nothing but the actualization of this potentiality inherited from him. The human being who does not completely realize that perfect Adamic nature is only “an animal whose form resembles the outward appearance of

12 *Fut.* iii, 10.

13 *Fuṣ.* 27 (48).

14 *Fuṣ.* 27 (49).

15 *Fuṣ.* 31 (53). Ibn ‘Arabī comments elsewhere on the famous *ḥadīth*: “The faithful (*al-mu’min*) is the mirror of the faithful,” by saying that because the name “the Faithful” is one of the Divine names, we can actually read the *ḥadīth* either as: “God is the mirror of the faithful,” or “The faithful is the mirror of God,” *Fut.* i, 112. See also Chodkiewicz, Michel, *Un océan sans rivage: Ibn ‘Arabī, le livre et la loi*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992, 175.

16 *Fuṣ.* 32 (54).

17 *Fuṣ.* 28 (49–50).

18 See Chodkiewicz, Michel, *Le sceau des saints: Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d’Ibn Arabī*, [Paris]: Gallimard, 2012, 70–82.

humans,"¹⁹ because he does not acknowledge the eminence of his reality, and his cosmological function in the Divine Manifestation. In other words, only those who recognize and realize the reality of the Perfect Man actually inherit from Adam the cosmological function of Caliph: "Every human being is not Caliph. For us, the animal human being is not Caliph."²⁰

The figure of Adam in Ibn 'Arabī should therefore always be read as alluding to both the universal and cosmological reality of the Adamic Perfect Man, as well as to the fundamental aspect of the Adamic human condition that is potentially shared by every individual. As a matter of fact, Ibn 'Arabī seems to be principally concerned with the later aspect of the Adamic reality, as he declares in his *Kitāb 'Anqā' mughrib* (*The stupefying phoenix*):

My goal, in everything I write in accordance with that spiritual art (*fann*), is not knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of Creation (*kawn*). Rather, it is the instruction of the heedless about what constitutes the essence (*'ayn*) of the human being and the Adamic individual (*al-shakhṣ al-Ādamī*).²¹

In short, the figure of Adam seems to designate three distinct yet correlative dimensions for Ibn 'Arabī: the meta-historical Perfect Man, the mythical-historical father of humanity, and the commonly shared Adamic nature, potentially inherited from him by every human being. Remarkably, those three dimensions seem to have some precise correspondences with his use of the figure of Muhammad.

As it is the case with Adam, we can also find expressions of a meta-historical dimension of Muhammad in early sources of the Islamic tradition, as for example in the famous canonical *ḥadīth*, often commented upon by Ibn 'Arabī, in which the Prophet states, "I was a prophet while Adam was between spirit and body;" or according to a variant to which Ibn 'Arabī gives preference, "between water and clay."²² The fact that such a "Muhammadan light" (*nūr Muḥammadī*) pre-existed the historical life of the Prophet has been treated in several Quran commentaries, and then gradually became a widespread

19 See *Fut.* ii, 293–296; iii, 154 and 296. See also Chittick, William C., *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's metaphysics of imagination*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989, 275–276.

20 Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, "Kitāb 'Uqlat al-mustawfīz," in Henrik S. Nyberg (ed.), *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn 'Arabī (Nach Handschriften in Upsala und Berlin zum ersten Mal herausgegeben und mit Einleitung und Kommentar versehen)*, Leiden: Brill, 1919, 39–99, 45–46.

21 Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *'Anqā' mughrib fī ma'rifa khatm al-awliyā' wa-shams al-maghrib*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Ṣultān al-Manṣūb, Cairo: Shirkat al-Quds, 2016, 56.

22 See, e.g., *Fuṣ.* 39 (64), 202 (214), and *Fut.* iii, 23; iv, 58.

motif in Sufism, as well as in classical theology and popular Islamic culture.²³ Then, on the basis of that tradition, Ibn ‘Arabī elaborated the complex notion of “Muhammadian reality” (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*), which presents a meta-historical vision of the Prophetic mission and assigns to Muhammad a primordial status in the economy of Creation that appears in several points intertwined with what we have seen about the Adamic Perfect Man. The Muhammadian reality is presented at length in the *Kitāb ‘Anqā’ mughrīb* as “the origin of the beginning (*aṣl al-bud’*) and the first emergence (*nash’*),”²⁴ from which the whole cosmos subsequently emerged.²⁵ In the *Futūḥāt*, this primordial function is openly associated with the notion of “First Intellect” (*‘aql*) which, as we will see, is also associated with Adam:

The beginning of Creation was the dust (*al-habā’*), in which the first existent (*mawjūd*) was the Muhammadian reality [proceeding] from the All-Merciful (*al-rahīmān*). There was no “where?” enclosing it, because there was no spatial location (*ḥayyiz*) ... Then, He disclosed Himself—Glory to Him—by His light to this dust—which people of rational inquiry call “materia prima” (*al-hayūlā al-kull*)—in which the entire universe was in its full potentiality (*bi-l-quwwa wa-l-ṣalāḥiyya*). Everything that was in this dust received [from the Divine Manifestation] according to its capacity and its predisposition. And nothing, in this dust, was closer to Him in order to receive [this Manifestation] than the reality of Muhammad—Peace and Blessings be upon him—which is also called “the Intellect” (*al-‘aql*). He is thus the master of all the universe, and the first to appear in existence.²⁶

A clear correlation between the Adamic and the Muhammadian realities seems to take shape in Ibn ‘Arabī’s depiction of the primordial function of the Perfect Man. In the chapter of Muhammad that closes his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn ‘Arabī relates the two figures by evoking the *ḥadīth* mentioned earlier:

23 See Gril, Denis, *Le serviteur de Dieu: La figure de Muhammad en spiritualité musulmane*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2022; Addas, Claude, *La maison muhammadienne: Aperçus de la dévotion au Prophète en mystique musulmane*, Paris: Gallimard, 2015; and Schimmel, Annemarie, *And Muhammad is His messenger: The veneration of the Prophet in Islamic piety*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

24 Ibn ‘Arabī, *‘Anqā’ mughrīb* 103.

25 Ibn ‘Arabī, *‘Anqā’ mughrīb* 109.

26 *Fut.* i, 118–119.

[Muhammad] is the most perfect creature of the human species. That is why things began by him and are sealed by him. He was indeed a prophet while Adam was between water and clay and then [when he appeared] in his elementary form, he was the Seal of the Prophets.²⁷

This passage illustrates all the ambiguity of the question, as Ibn 'Arabī alludes both to the meta-historical Muhammadan reality and to the historical Prophet by the single name “Muhammad.”

We see that the motif of the seal, already encountered in the opening chapter of Adam to describe the cosmological function of the Perfect Man, reappears in the closing chapter of Muhammad to describe his perfection. Another shared motif is their respective mediating function as vectors of the Divine Mercy (*rahma*), ascribed to Adam in the opening chapter²⁸ even though it is usually the privilege of the figure of Muhammad, because of the verse: “We only sent you as a Mercy for the worlds” (Q 21:107). At this point, we can already realize how these two figures seem intimately intertwined in Ibn 'Arabī's view. Above all, there seems to be no clear precedence between their respective pre-existence. In a certain way, Adam and Muhammad appear to merge obscurely in the notion of the Perfect Man, so that we can barely distinguish them in their meta-historical aspect. Some precious indications that allow us to sensibly distinguish between them can however be found, as we will now see.

3 The Two Fathers

A first key distinction that proves helpful to clarify the correlation between the two meta-historical figures of Adam and Muhammad can be found in the *Kitāb al-Isfār*. Muhammad is described there by Ibn 'Arabī as “the first father among the spiritual entities, father of Adam and the world,” while Adam is described as “the corporeal father, father of Muhammad and of all the sons of Adam.”²⁹ Ibn 'Arabī seems thus to draw a clear line between the meta-historical and spiritual Muhammadan reality—which is designated here as “the father of Adam”—and his human embodiment in the Prophet Muhammad—which is one of “the sons of Adam.” Nonetheless, in this passage again he seems to willingly preserve the ambiguity between the meta-historical and the historical realities by naming them both “Muhammad,” even though he finally adds that the first designates

²⁷ *Fuṣṣ.* 202 (214).

²⁸ *Fuṣṣ.* 28 (50).

²⁹ Ibn 'Arabī, *Kitāb al-Isfār* 71.

“the essential reality and spirit of Muhammad—Peace and Blessings be upon him.”³⁰ But more importantly, this passage seems to bring into light the specific aspects of each reality: Muhammad is the spiritual father of mankind whereas Adam is its corporeal father.

Another passage illustrating the correlation between the spiritual Muhammadan reality and the corporeal Adamic nature can be found in the *Kitāb ‘Anqā’ mughrīb*. Here, Ibn ‘Arabī alludes to the corporeal embodiment of Muhammad by referring to the clay in which Adam was created, according to the Quranic narrative and the aforementioned *ḥadīth* that speaks of the precedence of Muhammad over the Adamic clay: “[The Prophet] is the supreme genus (*al-jins al-‘ālī*) for all the genera, and the greatest father (*al-ab al-akbar*) for all existents and human beings (*nās*), even though his clay (*ṭīna*) appeared later.”³¹ In another revealing passage of the same book, Ibn ‘Arabī comments on the Quranic verse describing the creation of Adam—“He fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him something of His spirit” (Q 32:9)—by declaring: “The spirit attributed to the Real, which was breathed out from Him into the world of Creation, is the Muhammadan reality.”³²

What is remarkable here is that Ibn ‘Arabī adds a comment which presents these two qualities as constitutive of the reality of the Perfect Man: “According to this definition, he is the [Perfect] Man (*insān*) in the two abodes (*dār*), and His manifestation in the two worlds.”³³ This dual quality should be related to the motif of the double-sided mirror that we have already encountered with respect to the Perfect Adamic Man. It is a constitutive element of the Adamic reality for Ibn ‘Arabī, just as a mirror is only such because of the image it reflects: “[God] knew that His own existence was a ‘thing,’ thus He created Adam in His form. Hence Adam was a duality.”³⁴ That dual quality is that of the “interface” (*barzakh*),³⁵ a famous notion used by Ibn ‘Arabī to characterize that which allows one to connect two separate realities through a third emerging entity—the interface—which participates of the nature of the two, without being reduced to either of them. Because of its dual—Adamic and Muhammadan—nature, the Perfect Man is thus the mirroring interface which

30 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Isfār* 71.

31 Ibn ‘Arabī, *‘Anqā’ mughrīb* 111.

32 Ibn ‘Arabī, *‘Anqā’ mughrīb* 108.

33 Ibn ‘Arabī, *‘Anqā’ mughrīb* 108.

34 *Fut.* iv, 307. See also Chittick, William C., *The self-disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s cosmology*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998, 180.

35 See Chittick, *The self-disclosure*, xxv–xxvii, 331–339, and Bashier, Salman H., *Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ‘barzakh’: The concept of the limit and the relationship between God and the world*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004.

connects the spiritual and corporeal levels of being, as it appears clearly in this passage from the *Kitāb Inshā' al-dawā'ir* (*The emergence of the circles*):

It is as if he is an interface (*barzakh*) between the cosmos and the Real, and a synthesis between the creature and the Real. He is the line that separates the Presence of God from that of the becoming [existence], like the line that separates the shadow from the sun. That is his reality, and that is why absolute perfection is due to him in temporal existence (*ḥudūth*) and in eternity (*qidam*), whereas absolute perfection is due to the Real only in eternity, for He has no entry in temporal existence: He is too Sublime for this!³⁶

According to Ibn 'Arabī, the dual constitution of the Perfect Man notably appears in the Quranic narrative of Adam's creation, through the motif of the "two Hands" of God (Q 38:75):³⁷ "It is nothing but the synthesis of the two forms: the form of the cosmos and the form of the Real, which are the two Hands of the Real."³⁸ Ibn 'Arabī also uses the symbol the "two Feet" to describe how everything appears in existence as dual couples (*zawjān ithnayn*) emerging from the Divine Pedestal (*kursī*), as another verse affirms: "And of all things We created couples" (Q 51:49).³⁹ But it is yet another Quranic symbol that is most often used by Ibn 'Arabī to denote the synthetic dual quality of the Perfect Man: "the Pen" (*al-qalam*) mentioned in Q 68:1,⁴⁰ which designates for him the First Intellect (*'aql*). A major overlap between the two figures of Adam and Muhammad appears in their respective link to that motif of the Pen, for if we have already seen that Ibn 'Arabī clearly identifies the Intellect with the Muhammadan reality in the *Futūḥāt*, we also find it associated in the same work with Adam, while its necessary counterpart, "the Preserved Tablet" (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*),⁴¹ is identified with Eve:

36 Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *Kitāb Inshā' al-dawā'ir al-iḥāṭa* (*La production des cercles*), trans. Maurice Gloton and Paul Fenton, Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 1996, 25.

37 There are also numerous *ḥadīths* mentioning one or two Hands of God involved in the creation of Adam. See Gimaret, Daniel, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme: Les anthropomorphismes de la sunna et leur interprétation par les théologiens*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997, 190–205.

38 *Fuṣ*. 32 (55). See also *Fut*. ii, 67 and iii, 150.

39 *Fut*. iv, 100. On the implications of this principal polarity on the human genders, see Murata, Sachiko, *The Tao of Islam: A sourcebook on gender relationships in Islamic thought*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992.

40 On the motif of the Pen and its association with the notion of the Universal Intellect (*al-'aql al-kullī*) as first emanation of God, see Wisnovsky, Robert, "Heavenly book," in *EQ*.

41 See Madigan, Daniel A., "Preserved tablet," in *EQ*.

For rational thinkers, the name of the Preserved Tablet is “the Universal Soul.” It is the first existence demanded by the Intellect, like Eve regarding Adam: She was created from him and was coupled with him. It became therefore two, just as being (*wujūd*) became two by the thing that came into being, and knowledge became two through the Pen that came into being.⁴²

Ibn ‘Arabī alludes here to the Quranic verses presenting the creation of mankind coming from a “unique soul,” from which a double (*zawj*) is created, before “spreading from the two a multitude of men and women” (Q 4:1, 6:98 and 39:6). But more importantly, he emphasizes the fact that it is the dual nature of the Adamic Perfect Man that manifested itself, so that it “became two.”

Just as Adam was created by God to contemplate Himself, the creation of Eve proceeds from the reality of Adam, for him to contemplate his own dual nature.⁴³ Eve is a mirror for Adam, just as Adam is a mirror for God:

Adam was a duality ... So when God created Eve from him, He did not increase the dual nature that Adam possessed ... Rather, his dual form made Eve manifest, and so she was the first thing born from that dual nature, just as He created Adam with His two Hands.⁴⁴

In other words, because the Adamic mirror of Creation is a double-faced mirror receiving the Divine image and reflecting it both towards God Himself and towards His Creation, it in turn demands another mirror to reflect his own image, both towards himself and towards what is beyond this new mirror, and so on in the processing chain of Creation.

4 The Muhammadan Tree and the Adamic Birds

The articulation between the Muhammadan reality and the multiple manifestations of the dual nature of the Adamic Perfect Man is the object of an early

⁴² *Fut.* iii, 399.

⁴³ “He married none other than himself. From him came the companion and the child, and the affair (*amr*) is one in the multiple.” *Fuṣ.* 57 (70). This explains in a sense why Ibn ‘Arabī affirms that the form of the Perfect Man is a sphere. See Ibn ‘Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, “al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya fi iṣlāḥ al-mamlaka al-insāniyya,” in Henrik S. Nyberg (ed.), *Kleinere Schriften* 101–240, 225.

⁴⁴ *Fut.* iv, 307. See also Chittick, *The self-disclosure* 179–181.

poetic and allusive treatise by Ibn 'Arabī the *Risālat al-Ittiḥād al-kawnī*.⁴⁵ In this short epistle, Ibn 'Arabī depicts the relations between a tree and four birds (in the order of their appearance in the text: a dove, a royal eagle, a phoenix, and a crow), each one of them describing its own nature that is a particular aspect of the Perfect Man. A quick overview of some elements characterizing the tree, the eagle, and the dove will illustrate what we already encountered about Muhammad, Adam, and Eve.

The declaration of the tree seems to designate the Muhammadan reality, for it reminds us of the way we already saw Ibn 'Arabī describe it as emerging from the Primordial dust: "I became like the *materia prima*, the receptacle of every form in this world and the other. There is nothing I do not bear in myself."⁴⁶ The tree has been "planted by the Hand of the One (*aḥad*) in the garden of eternity (*abad*),"⁴⁷ so that his radical unity contrasts with the duality of Adam: It is "at the same time shadow and light," its time is "the now," its function is "that of the equator," and of "the equilibrium of the humors."⁴⁸ The account of the royal eagle seems on the other hand to insist on the dual nature of Adam, and to emphasize both his receptive and emanative functions:

The eagle asked: "How could something be manifested from me, when my station is that of deficiency (*ʿajz*) and I am not endowed with authority nor power?"—He was answered: "Continue to tell your moan, and this will appear to you face to face. That is the second harmony and the conjunction of the doubles (*mathānī*)."⁴⁹

45 Its full title is *The epistle of the unification of creation in the presence of the essential testimony through the presence of the human tree and the four spiritual birds* (*Risālat al-Ittiḥād al-kawnī fī ḥaḍrat al-ishḥād al-ʿaynī bi-maḥdar al-shajara al-insānīyya wa-l-tuḡūr al-arbaʿa al-rūḥānīyya*). The epistle is quoted in *Fut.* ii, 351 and was thus composed before Ibn 'Arabī's departure for the East in 598/1201. See Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, "Risālat al-Ittiḥād al-kawnī: Le livre de l'Arbre et des quatre Oiseaux d'Ibn 'Arabī," ed. Denis Gril, in *AI* 17 (1981), 53–111, 67–68.

46 Ibn 'Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād* 79.

47 Ibn 'Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād* 78.

48 Ibn 'Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād* 79. It should be noted that the tree also declares: "My emerging constitution (*nashʾa*) is spherical, like the [celestial] sphere (*ḥalāk*);" Ibn 'Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād* 79, which reminds us of what we just mentioned about the sphericity of the Perfect Man.

49 Ibn 'Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād* 80. The Adamic eagle of the *Risālat al-Ittiḥād* also describes himself in a way that alludes to the Quranic polemical arguments regarding Christology (Q 5:116): "By confusing eternity with anteriority, they declared me eternal and affirmed that my existence was not outside non-being ... I deny their worshiping of me;" Ibn 'Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād* 83. This is to be linked with the parallel between Adam and Jesus men-

As for the dove, she expresses the fact that her creation is manifesting the inner duality of the Adamic eagle rather than the apparition of a distinctive nature, just as Eve proceeds directly from the nature of Adam:

Essential being in the visible world, my existence is only through dualities. I am called “second” yet I am not additional ... My existence is the limit of all creatures. I come after the one whose essence transcends the eyesight. That nature which is peculiar to me is found in every being, close or distant.⁵⁰

We find however some clear overlaps between the Muhammadan and the Adamic realities in the epistle. For example, the eagle declares that his existence was “the very beginning,” as he is the “Manifestation of Himself to Himself,” “the sublime emanation and the light of His existence,”⁵¹ all of which reminds us clearly of the motifs of the Muhammadan reality mentioned earlier. Eventually, Ibn ‘Arabī warns us about the limits of the rational categorization of the Adamic reality of the eagle:

Some philosophers invented lies about me. Some others, men of merit, joined their forces to capture me ... by using means that I was myself providing them ... Satan sowed confusion in their minds. They imagined themselves at the top while they were still in the bottom of the valley ... They only captured an eagle in my image, coming from the country of conjecture. “Here is the evident truth!,” they claimed. Do they not understand that truth did not appear to them, and actually cannot appear?⁵²

5 From the Adamic Duality to the Muhammadan Triplicity

The self-mirroring of the Adamic Perfect Man and his relation to his double is described in detail in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, although interestingly not in the chapter dedicated to Adam, but rather in the closing chapter dedicated to Muhammad. The tense articulation between the unity and the multiplicity of the Adamic Perfect Man actually seems to underlie the structure of the book.

tioned in the Quran: “Truly the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam” (Q 3:59).

⁵⁰ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād*.

⁵¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād*.

⁵² Ibn ‘Arabī, *Risālat al-Ittiḥād* 83.

The opening chapter, dedicated to the “divine wisdom in an Adamic word,” ends with a table of contents of the whole work, as if his “synthetic existence” (*kawn jāmi'*) was containing every other prophet mentioned after him. It is probably no accident that this chapter addresses precisely the interdependent correlation between universals and existent things. As for the closing chapter, dedicated to the “singular wisdom in a Muhammadan word,” it is marked by triplicity rather than duality. Muhammad is qualified there as the “primordial singularity” from which all the following numbers proceed, for “the first of the singulars (*afrād*, i.e., “the odds”) is three” and “his emerging constitution is triple.”⁵³ Because there are 27 chapters in the *Fuṣūṣ*, each dedicated to a prophetic figure—or “word” (*kalima*)—the triplicity underlying this closing chapter also seems to contain the whole book, just as Muhammad is said to be endowed with “the all-comprehensive words” (*jawāmi' al-kalim*).⁵⁴ Mathematically speaking, as 27 is 3 to the power of 3, we can consider that all the chapters of the book only result from the self-multiplication of the Muhammadan Perfect Man.

The articulation between the Muhammadan reality and the historical instances of the Prophets must be considered in the perspective of the precedence of the prophetic reality over its human embodiment, as claimed by the aforementioned *ḥadīth* in which Muhammad affirmed that he “was a prophet when Adam was still between water and clay.” A strong example for that is given by Ibn 'Arabī regarding the Quranic narrative of the primordial “Covenant” (*mīthāq*) of all the human souls, extracted from the loins of Adam to testify of their faithfulness before their Lord.⁵⁵ The second Covenant mentioned in the Quran, in which—following the same pattern—the Prophets affirm their mission,⁵⁶ is considered as coming before that of the children of Adam, which Ibn 'Arabī calls “the second Covenant.”⁵⁷

Therefore, in Ibn 'Arabī's view, the qualities and functions of the Adamic Perfect Man are nothing but a manifestation of the Muhammadan reality:

53 *Fuṣ*. 202 (214).

54 *Fuṣ*. Ibn 'Arabī adds that those words are actually “the names of Adam,” alluding to the motif of the Divine names taught by God to Adam and then by Adam to the angels, which is at the center of the opening chapter. See *Fuṣ*. 28–29 (50–51).

55 Q 7:172.

56 Q 3:81.

57 *Fut*. iv, 58. See Addas, *La maison muhammadienne* 52. A third Covenant, between God and the “Children of Israel,” is mentioned in Q 5:12. The pledge between Muhammad and the believers can also be related to those covenants: “Those who pledge allegiance to you pledge allegiance only to God. The Hand of God is over their hands” (Q 48:10).

When God taught the names to Adam, he was in a secondary station compared to Muhammad, for Muhammad already knew the all-comprehensive words (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*), and all the names are but words. When Muhammad was not apparent in the concrete, he already appeared in the names, for he is endowed with them. Then, this appeared in the first human existent, which is Adam.⁵⁸

Before being the children of Adam and Eve, the human beings are thus the children of two fathers, and the history of mankind is the history of that double heritage:

Adam, and all those who came after him, were but inheritors of Muhammad, for he was a prophet when Adam—who was still “between water and clay”—was not yet existent. The Prophethood belonged to Muhammad when there was no Adam, just as the human natural Adamic form belonged to Adam when the Prophet did not yet have a form. Thus, for Adam and for all the Prophets, Adam is the father of the human bodies, while Muhammad is the father of the heritage. This is from Adam until the inheritor who will seal the affair. Any revealed law that appeared, any knowledge, was thus an inheritance from Muhammad.⁵⁹

According to Ibn ʿArabī, when the corporeal manifestation of Muhammad finally occurred, it brought a temporal revolution that allowed for all humanity to access the primordial state of Creation. This is the meaning of a canonical *ḥadīth* quoted in the first chapter of the *Futūḥāt*: “Time returned to its original state (*al-zamān qad istadāra*), that of the creation by God of the heavens and the earth.”⁶⁰ In other words, for Ibn ʿArabī, the historical Muhammad is nothing but the manifestation of the Muhammadan reality in the cosmic dimension of the Adamic Perfect Man. Therefore, his historical manifestation is the most perfect Adamic mirror available to humanity to contemplate its original perfection:

⁵⁸ *Fut.* ii, 88.

⁵⁹ *Fut.* iii, 456–457.

⁶⁰ *Fut.* i, 80. See also Ibn ʿArabī, *Anqāʾ mughrīb* 124. The *ḥadīth* is quoted by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-imām al-Bukhārī al-musammā bi-l-jāmiʿ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-mukhtaṣar min umūr rasūl Allāh wa-sunnatihi wa-ʿayyāmihi*, ed. Muḥammad Z. Ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir, 9 vols., Jeddā: Dār al-Minhāj, 2015, *Badʾ al-khalq* 59, 8.

When God discloses Himself in the mirror of your heart, your mirror only reflects Him according to its capacity and its configuration ... Persevere therefore in faith and in observance of the prophetic model, and place the Prophet in front of you, like a mirror ... because the manifestation of God in the mirror of the Prophet is the most perfect, the most right, and the most beautiful. Whenever you see Him in the mirror of the Prophet, you perceive a perfection that you cannot perceive when you contemplate Him in your own mirror ... Do not seek to contemplate Him anywhere but in the mirror of the Prophet. Do not try to contemplate Him in your own mirror, nor to contemplate the Prophet and what is manifested in his mirror in your own mirror.⁶¹

It is thus through the perfect combination of the Muhammadan and the Adamic aspects of the Perfect Man, which are both manifested in the historical Prophet, that human beings can finally contemplate the image of God: "When you arrive at Muhammad, it is not Muhammad that you find, but God in a Muhammadan form."⁶²

6 The Two *mīms* of the *basmala*

To end this introductory overview of the correlation between the figures of Adam and Muhammad, we should mention the illuminating passages of the *Kitāb al-Mīm*, an epistle dedicated to the science of letters in which Ibn 'Arabī exposes the symbolism of the letters *mīm*, *wāw* and *nūn*. Those three letters share the common characteristic of having a palindromic name, constituted by the doubling of their own consonant and the mediation of one of the three vowels of the Arabic language.⁶³ Ibn 'Arabī uses this symbolic context to formulate the articulation between the two complementary realities of Adam and Muhammad by using the motif of the letter *mīm* that is present in their names.

The correlation between the corporeal Adamic aspect and the spiritual Muhammadan aspect of the Perfect Man is symbolized here by the letter *ī* that connects the two presences of the letter *mīm* in the names of Adam and Muhammad:

61 *Fut.* iii, 251–252. See Addas, *La maison muhammadienne* 54.

62 *Fut.* ii, 127.

63 Interestingly, we find Ibn 'Arabī explaining in the long chapter 2 of the *Futūḥāt*, dedicated also to the science of letters, that the nature of the *mīm* is radically triple, for its name is composed of three letters (*mīm-yā'-mīm*), whose names are themselves in turn composed of three letters (*mīm-yā'-mīm* and *yā'-alif-hamza*); *Fut.* i, 74.

The *mīm* belongs to both Adam and Muhammad while the *ī* is the cause of the connection between the two ... Muhammad operates spiritually in Adam by the *ī*, and it is through this operation that his spiritual [influence] (*ruḥānīyya*) and that of all those who manage Creation happens, from the Universal Soul to the last existent, which is the human spirit: “I was a prophet while Adam was still between water and clay.” As for Adam, he operates corporeally in Muhammad by the mediation of the *ī*, and it is through this operation that the corporeality of every human in the world—including Muhammad—happens. Adam is thus the father of Muhammad, our father, and the father of Jesus, corporeally. As for Muhammad, he is the father of Adam, our father, and the father of Jesus, spiritually.⁶⁴

That is why the spiritual history of mankind, that is usually called by Ibn ‘Arabī “the cycle of Dominion” (*dawrat al-mulk*), is also qualified by him as “the cycle of the sphere of our master Muhammad” (*dawrat falak sayyidinā Muḥammad*).⁶⁵

Ibn ‘Arabī adds that we can find an indication of this cycle in “the prolongation existing in the *mīm*” of the *basmala* (“In the name of God, the All-Merciful the Merciful”: *Bi-smi Llāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*).⁶⁶ The term “prolongation” (*madd*) alludes to a rule of Quranic recitation, according to which one should emphasize certain letters (usually vowels rather than consonants) and sustain it longer in the recitation.⁶⁷ But here, Ibn ‘Arabī seems rather to suggest a subtle prolongation from the *mīm* of the first word—*ism* (“name”)—to that of the last word—*raḥīm* (“Merciful”):

64 Ibn ‘Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *Kitāb al-Mīm* (*Le Livre du Mīm, du Wāw et du Nūn*), ed. Charles-André Gilis, Beirut: Albouraq, 2002, 80.

65 Chapter 10 of the *Futūḥāt* is dedicated to “the knowledge of the cycle of Dominion,” and chapter 12 to “the cycle of the sphere of our master Muhammad,” *Fut.* i, 134–138 and i, 143–147. See also *Fut.* ii, 9 and iii, 514.

66 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-Mīm* 84. Chapter 5 of the *Futūḥāt* is dedicated to the symbolism of the *basmala* and the *fātiḥa*. Ibn ‘Arabī presents there some other symbolic interpretations of the *mīm* of the *basmala*, among which we find an interesting affirmation concerning the Covenant, the cycle of Dominion, and the *mīm*: “[Man] entered the Dominion by the *mīm* of ‘Am I not your Lord?’ (*a-lastu bi-rabbikum*),” that is, the testimonial question asked by God to the children of Adam (Q 7:172); *Fut.* i, 74.

67 It should be noted that there is an actual prolongation (*madd*) in the recitation of the *mīm* (though precisely speaking, a prolongation of the *ī* that is in the *mīm*) in the three isolated letters opening the second Quranic Sūra: “*alif, lām, mīm*” (Q 2:1). Ibn ‘Arabī considers those three opening letters as “the synthesis of the interface (*barzakh*), the two abodes, the link, and the two realities,” *Fut.* i, 65.

The *mīm* of *bi-smi* ("in the name") belongs to Adam, for he is endowed with the names. It is by the prolongation existing in him that the world of bodies exists: "He created you from a unique soul" [Q 4:1]. Eve was created from Adam, and if she were created from other than him [the affirmation] "He created you from a unique soul" would not be true regarding corporeality. As for the *mīm* of *al-rahīm* ("the Merciful"), it belongs to Muhammad, for he is endowed with Mercy: "[The Messenger is] kind and merciful (*rahīm*) to the believers" [Q 9:128], that is the mercy of faith (*īmān*); and "We only sent you as a Mercy for the worlds" [Q 21:107], that is the mercy of origination (*ījād*). It is by the prolongation (*madd*) existing in him that the continuing support (*istimdād*) of the world of spirits exists.⁶⁸

As we just saw, the existence of the human world is sustained both by the continuous corporeal presence of the Adamic reality and the continuous spiritual presence of the Muhammadan reality:

The corporeal appearance of Muhammad in history is therefore the completion of the spiritual cycle of manifestation of the Muhammadan reality: His station appeared later in the world of bodies, whereas the station of Adam appeared first, and that is why we say *Bi-smi Llāh al-rahīmān al-rahīm*. [Muhammad] is last in corporeity (*jismiyya*) and first in spirituality, whereas Adam is first in corporeality (*jismāniyya*) and last in spirituality.⁶⁹

Just as the "name" in the beginning of the *basmala* is already alluding to the name "the Merciful" at the end of the sentence, the reality of Adam is the prefiguration of the manifestation of the reality of Muhammad. In other words, the Muhammadan reality of Adam only appears with the Adamic existence of Muhammad, just as the meaning of the *basmala* precedes its enunciation and is already virtually contained in its first word, but only appears effectively at the end of its formulation, with the name "the Merciful."

68 Ibn 'Arabī, *Kitāb al-Mīm* 84.

69 Ibn 'Arabī, *Kitāb al-Mīm* 84.

7 Conclusion

The foregoing has brought to light the extent of the correlation between the figures of Adam and Muhammad in Ibn 'Arabī's prophetology. We have seen that, in his view, the two figures should be considered both as aspects of the Perfect Man and as historical human beings. Their respective natures are revealed to be combined and intertwined, both in their meta-historical and historical instances. For Ibn 'Arabī, the historical Muhammad is the Adamic form of the spiritual Muhammadan reality, and the meta-historical Adam is the Muhammadan form of the corporeal Adamic reality. The Muhammadan spiritual fatherhood precedes the Adamic corporeal fatherhood, and the history of the children of Adam is therefore in a way the corporealization of the spiritual meta-history of the children of Muhammad.

What we have shown here regarding the figures of Adam and Muhammad should be extended to other Prophets. Such a correlative approach has proven to be particularly relevant to bring to light some of the intricacies of Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of the Perfect Man. Indeed, it is hoped that further research on other Prophets (following the same line of inquiry taken up in this study) will help bring about a more comprehensive understanding of Ibn 'Arabī's prophetology and spiritual anthropology.

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