

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FRIENDS OF GOD

*Walāya* or *wilāya*, “friendship with God”, is one of the most important concepts in Islamic mysticism.<sup>1</sup> The religious phenomenon associated with this concept has its origins in the pre-Islamic heritage: in many respects, the figure of the Muslim *walī*, “friend of God”, parallels that of the holy man or saint known from various Late-Antique traditions.<sup>2</sup> However, sainthood in Islam has several distinctive features that set it apart from similar phenomena in other religions. Two of these features in particular are worth mentioning: the one concerns the relationship between *walāya* and prophecy; the other pertains to the issue of Muḥammad’s heirs or successors. According to the prevalent view in Islam, which can be found already in the Quran,<sup>3</sup> Muḥammad is “the seal of the prophets” (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*), that is to say, he is the last prophet sent by God to mankind. Naturally, such a strict view, which excludes the possibility of prophetic missions in the generations following Muḥammad’s death, does not tally with the basic human need for charismatic religious figures who can function as mediators between man and God. The notion of *walāya* provided Islamic mysticism with an ideal solution to this problem: on the one hand, the *awliyā’*, “the friends of God”, are perceived as mediators between man and the Divine, much like the prophets themselves; on the other hand, the *awliyā’* are not considered to be prophets in the true sense of the word. As the famous *ḥadīth* states, “the learned ones are the heirs of the prophets”

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<sup>1</sup> On *walāya/wilāya* in general, see Radtke, *Walī*; Radtke, *Saint*; Izzi Dien and Walker, *Wilāya*; Landolt, *Walāyah*; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, index, s.v. “*walāyat*”; Amir-Moezzi, *Notes*; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 159 n. 151; Al-Geyoushi, *Al-Tirmidhi’s theory* 17–8; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 17–46; Elmore, *Islamic sainthood* 109–62; Gramlich, *Wunder* 58–60; Karamustafa, *Walāya* 64–70; Cornell, *Realm*, especially pp. xvii–xliv (in the Introduction); Fenton, *Hierarchy* and the references given there in notes 5–9. On the veneration of saints in Islam, see also Goldziher, *Muslim studies* ii, 253–341; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 7–15. On the question of the correct pronunciation of this term—*walāya* or *wilāya*—see the studies by Chodkiewicz, Landolt and Cornell referred to in this note.

<sup>2</sup> On the holy man or saint of Late Antiquity, see the references to the studies of Peter Brown given in the bibliography; see also Elm, *Introduction*; and the discussions and references in Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the sacred* 14–7 n. 58–62, 66–70; Harvey, *Asceticism* 4–21 (the Introduction).

<sup>3</sup> See Q 33:40.

(*al-‘ulamā’ warathat al-anbiyā’*). Whereas according to a widespread opinion, “the learned ones” mentioned in this tradition are none other than the religious scholars who are responsible for interpreting the canonical texts and ruling on religious-legal matters, both the Shi‘i tradition and Sunni mysticism maintain that the friends of God, who possess Divine knowledge, are the true heirs of the prophets.<sup>4</sup> Yet who are these friends of God? The answer to this question embodies the diverging opinions of the Shi‘is and the Sunni mystics.

Indeed, the concept of friendship with God and the figure of the friends of God are the main axis around which both the Shi‘i tradition and Sunni mysticism revolve.<sup>5</sup> In the Shi‘i tradition, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (Muḥammad’s cousin and son-in-law) and his descendants are defined as *awliyā’*, and are also called *a’imma* (singular *imām*), “leaders”.<sup>6</sup> In contradistinction, Sunni mysticism holds that any believer—regardless of his physical lineage—may become a friend of God. This depends upon his personal virtues, his ethical, religious and mystical accomplishments, and, above all, upon his election by God. In both the Shi‘i tradition and Sunni mysticism, the discussions of *walāya* and the *awliyā’* are based on the Quran and on early *ḥadīths* which treat of those chosen individuals who, due to their high spiritual degree and proximity to God, are superior to the majority of mankind. Shi‘i speculations on *walāya* and the *awliyā’* presumably began in the 2nd/8th century, mainly in the circles of the *imāms* Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. On the Sunni side, speculations on these issues began, as far as we know, only in the 3rd/9th century, and are found in the teachings of Sunni mystics such as Sahl al-Tustarī (died in 283/896), al-Junayd (died in 298/910), and especially al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.<sup>7</sup> It follows, therefore, that one cannot discuss the concept of *walāya* in Islamic mysticism without referring to its development in the Shi‘i tradition.

<sup>4</sup> See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide*, index, s.v. “mīrāth” and “wārith, waratha”; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 251–71; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 74–88.

<sup>5</sup> See, concerning Sufism, the pertinent words of Chodkiewicz (*Seal of the saints* 13): “Sufism and sainthood are inseparable. In the absence of saints there is no Sufism: it is born of their sainthood, nourished by it, and led to reproduce it”.

<sup>6</sup> Note that in the Shi‘i parlance, the Shi‘i believers, i.e., the followers of the *imāms*, are also called *awliyā’*. In this sense, *walāya* should be translated as “loyalty” and “devotion [to the *imāms*]”; see the references to Amir-Moezzi’s studies above in n. 1; and see also Kohlberg, *Evolution*.

<sup>7</sup> For the relevant traditions attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, see the references to Amir-Moezzi’s studies throughout this chapter. On al-Junayd in the context dealt with here, see Karamustafa, *Walāya*; and on al-Tustarī and al-Tirmidhī, see below pp. 129–32, 144–5.

In this chapter I will analyze several aspects of *walāya*, in an attempt to underscore certain affinities between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī. As I hope to show, awareness of the Ismāʿīlī discussions of *walāya* is important for a true comprehension and appreciation of Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings on this subject.

### *The Hierarchy of the Friends of God*

One of the most characteristic features of the discussions concerning *walāya* in Islamic mysticism is the hierarchal perception of the *awliyāʾ*'s world. According to this perception, the friends of God, who form a religious elite superior to all other human groups, are themselves positioned in varying degrees and ranks in accordance with their religious-spiritual virtues and their proximity to God. The notion of a hierarchy of righteous men is already found in several pre-Islamic religious traditions, and is likewise reflected in various early *ḥadīths*.<sup>8</sup> These *ḥadīths*, in turn, served as a source of inspiration for the Shiʿi as well as the Sunni-mystical treatment of *walāya*.

#### *From the Ḥadīth to Ibn al-ʿArabī*

In various *ḥadīths*, whose origins most likely go back to the first two centuries of Islam, the righteous believers are portrayed as forming a hierarchal 'society' of their own. A fine example of this notion can be found in the introduction to the well-known work by Abū Nuʿaym Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Iṣfahānī (lived in the 10th–11th centuries), entitled *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* ("The Ornament of the Friends of God"). This work is relatively late, but its introduction contains different traditions in which early motifs are found.<sup>9</sup> In one such tradition, attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, it is stated that

<sup>8</sup> For example, the idea expressed in several *ḥadīths*, and, later on, in various mystical teachings (see the discussion below), according to which the continuing existence of the world depends upon a fixed number of righteous men who live in every generation, is already found in Rabbinical literature of the Talmudic era. See *The Babylonian Talmud*, *Yomā* 38:b and *Ḥagigah* 12:b; Ginzberg, *Legends* i, 250–3, v, 239 n. 164; Schwarzbaum, *Lamed vav tsadiqim* (in Hebrew); Scholem, *Lamed vav tsadiqim* (in Hebrew); Scholem, *Elements* 219–20, 227 (in Hebrew); Liebes, *Ha-mashiāḥ shel ha-zohar*, especially pp. 118–28 (in Hebrew); Sviri, *Emergence*. For a general comparison in this matter between Jewish and Islamic mysticism, see Fenton, *Hierarchy*.

<sup>9</sup> On the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* as an early theme in Islam, see also Massignon, *Essay* 92; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 89–92; Chabbi, *Abdāl*; cf. Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of sainthood* 7; Radtke, *Concept of Wilāya* 483, 494–5.

Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, has among mankind three hundred [men] whose hearts are like the heart of Adam, peace be upon him; forty whose hearts are like the heart of Moses, peace be upon him; seven whose hearts are like the heart of Abraham, peace be upon him; five whose hearts are like the heart of Gabriel, peace be upon him; three whose hearts are like the heart of Michael, peace be upon him; and one whose heart is like the heart of Isrāfīl, peace be upon him.

According to this tradition, the number of those who belong to each category remains fixed at all times: when Isrāfīl's equivalent (the "one") dies, he is substituted by one of the three who are positioned below him (*abdala llāh 'azza wa-jalla makānahu min al-thalātha*); when one of the three dies, he is replaced by one of the five, and so on. The tradition further defines the role of those who belong to this hierarchal system:

Through them [i.e., as a result of their prayers and supplications], Allāh grants life and brings about death, He makes the rain come down, He causes the plants to grow and averts disasters.<sup>10</sup>

In other, similar traditions, the classification of the friends of God is less sophisticated, and only a small number of hierarchal degrees are enumerated. For instance, in another *ḥadīth* quoted in the introduction to *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, it is said that

the best among my nation (*khiyār ummatī*), in every generation, are five hundred, while the substitutes (*abdāl*) are forty. Neither number is [ever] reduced: whenever someone [from among the forty] dies, Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, replaces him with one of the five hundred (*abdala llāh 'azza wa-jalla min al-khamsimī'a makānahu [...]*)<sup>11</sup>

In other sources, the number of categories or ranks, the number of those who belong to them, and the terminology used to designate them all vary from one tradition to the other. Thus, in various traditions, one may find

<sup>10</sup> See al-İşfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* i, 9 ("Inna li-llāh 'azza wa-jalla fi l-khalq thalāthami'a qulūbuhum 'alā qalb ādam 'alayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh ta'ālā fi l-khalq arba'ūna qulūbuhum 'alā qalb mūsā 'alayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh ta'ālā fi l-khalq sab'a qulūbuhum 'alā qalb ibrahīm 'alayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh ta'ālā fi l-khalq khamsa qulūbuhum 'alā qalb jibrīl 'alayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh ta'ālā fi l-khalq thalātha qulūbuhum 'alā qalb mikā'il 'alayhi l-salām wa-li-llāh ta'ālā fi l-khalq wāhid qalbuhu 'alā qalb isrāfīl 'alayhi l-salām fa-idhā māta l-wāhid abdala llāh 'azza wa-jalla makānahu min al-thalātha wa-idhā māta min al-thalātha abdala llāh ta'ālā makānahu min al-khamsa [...]) fihim [read: fa-bihim] yuhyī wa-yumītu wa-yumtīru wa-yunbitu wa-yadfa'u l-balā' [...]). See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 58–60.

<sup>11</sup> Al-İşfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* i, 8 ("Khiyār ummatī fi kull qarn khamsimī'a wa-l-abdāl arba'ūna fa-lā l-khamsimī'a yanquṣūna wa-lā l-arba'ūna kullamā māta rajul abdala llāh 'azza wa-jalla min al-khamsimī'a makānahu wa-adkhalā min al-arba'ūna makānahu [...]).

different terms such as *awliyā'*, *abdāl* or *budalā'*, *'ibād* ("God's servants"), *khiyār*, *khawāṣṣ* ("the unique ones"), *aḥibbā'* ("the beloved ones"), *atqiyā'* ("the God-fearing ones"), *akhfiyā'* ("the hidden ones"), *abriyā'* ("the innocent ones") and more. Often, no name is given at all, and only the number of the righteous ones, their traits and their spiritual-religious functions are mentioned.<sup>12</sup>

The term *abdāl* or *budalā'*, "substitutes", which is quite common in the *ḥadīths* referred to here, merits special attention. In several traditions, in *ḥadīth* exegesis and in Sufi literature, various explanations for this term are provided. According to one widespread opinion, the *abdāl* or *budalā'* are called thus because their number remains fixed at all times: when one of them dies, he is substituted by someone else who belongs to a lower rank in the hierarchy of the friends of God.<sup>13</sup> However, the original meaning of this term may have been related to the role of the *awliyā'* in the post-prophetic age: the friends of God are conceived of as substitutes for the prophets, as their successors in their function as mediators between man and God.<sup>14</sup> One *ḥadīth* explains that

when prophecy disappeared—and the [prophets], after all, were the pegs of the earth [*awtād al-arḍ*, i.e., the pegs on which the earth rests]—Allāh replaced them [*akhlaḥa llāh makānahum*, or, according to another version: *abdala llāh ta'ālā makānahum*] with forty men from among the nation of Muḥammad, may Allāh's blessing and prayers be upon him, who are called 'the substitutes'. Not one among them dies before Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, establishes in his place someone who succeeds him. They are the pegs of the earth: the hearts of thirty of them share the certitude of Abraham [...]

On the basis of the names provided in its list of transmitters (the *isnād*), one may conclude that this *ḥadīth* was produced during the first half of the 8th century, or perhaps even earlier than that.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For the relevant traditions, see Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *al-Awliyā'* 9–49; al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl* i, 383–6 (*aṣl* 51), 567–70 (*aṣl* 103), 618–23 (*aṣl* 123), ii, 41–52 (*aṣl* 162); al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* i, 4–17; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat dimashq* i, 289–304; al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn* 11–36 ("al-faṣl al-awwal min al-muqaddima"); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāl* 41–78; see also Ibn al-'Arabī, *Ḥilyat al-abdāl*, the editor's Introduction 6–7.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-luḡha* 300; and see also the references given in the previous note. On the *abdāl* or *budalā'*, see also Goldziher, *Abdāl*; Chabbi, *Abdāl*; Flügel, *Scha'rānī* 38–40; Blochet, *Études* 49–111; Moosa, *Extremist Shītes* 110–9; Cook, *Studies* 154–5, 161–2 (see especially n. 121), 164, 205; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 103–4; Svirī, *Emergence*; Svirī, *Self* 196.

<sup>14</sup> See also Flügel, *Scha'rānī* 40.

<sup>15</sup> See Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *al-Awliyā'* 27 ("Lammā dhahabat al-nubuwwa wa-kānū awtād al-arḍ akhlaḥa llāh makānahum arba'īna rajulan min ummat muḥammad ṣallā llāh 'alayhi

The early theme of an *awliyā'* hierarchy was further developed, albeit in different ways, in both the Shi'i tradition and Sunni mysticism. The identity of the *awliyā'*, who are responsible for safeguarding the prophetic heritage, is perhaps the main bone of contention between the Shi'is and the Sunni mystics. As mentioned above, whereas according to Sunni mysticism, all Muslims can potentially belong to the *awliyā'* hierarchy, the Shi'is maintain that only 'Alī and his biological descendants enjoy this privilege. This is why in various Shi'i sources, the *abdāl* are identified with the *imāms* and/or with their close followers.<sup>16</sup>

Shi'i and Sunni-mystical speculations on the hierarchy of the *awliyā'* began gaining momentum during the 9th century. In the Shi'i world, such speculations are particularly characteristic of the so-called *ghulāt* and the various Ismā'īlī factions.<sup>17</sup> Hierarchical schemes of the *awliyā'*'s world figure in the Jābirian corpus as well as in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. In the former, the hierarchy of the friends of God includes fifty-five "figures" (*ashkhāṣ*), headed by the prophet and the *imām*. Various appellations given to these figures—*naḥīb* ("noble"), *naqīb* ("chief"), etc.—originate in the *Ḥadīth* literature discussed above, and, consequently, are also found in Sunni mystical sources. Other appellations—such as *sābiq* and *tālī* ("the preceding one" and "the following one"), *asās* ("foundation"), *bāb* ("gate"), *yatīm* ("orphan"), *nāṭiq* and *ṣāmī* ("the speaker" and "the silent one")—are

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*wa-sallama yuqālu lahum al-abdāl lā yamūtu l-rajul minhum ḥattā yunshī'a llāh 'azza wa-jalla makānahu ākhar yakhlufuhu wa-hum awtād al-arḍ qulūb thalāthina minhum 'alā mithli yaqīn ibrahīm [...]*"; Sufyān b. 'Uyayna on the authority of Abū l-Zinād); cf. al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl* i, 383 (on the authority of Abū l-Dardā'). In the version quoted by al-Tirmidhī, the phrase *akhlafa llāh makānahu* is replaced by *abdala llāh ta'ālā makānahu*, and it is also stated that the *abdāl* are "the deputies/successors of the prophets" (*khulafā' min al-anbiyā'*). See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 17 (the editors' Introduction), 63–4, 67–8, 70; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* xxvii, 48. On Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (107/725–196/811), see Sectorsky, Sufyān b. 'Uyayna; on Abū l-Zinād (died circa 130/748, at the age of approximately 66), see Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* v, 182–3; and on Abū l-Dardā' (died around 32/652), who, according to the prevalent opinion, was a *ṣaḥābī*, see Jeffery, Abū al-Dardā'.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Ibn Ḥawshab, *al-Rushd wa-l-hidāya* 200; Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 133; *al-Haft wa-l-aẓilla* 116–7; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 208; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* xxvii, 48, xxxiv 212–3. According to several early traditions, the *abdāl* reside in Umayyad Syria, and appear during the eschatological events as a pro-Shi'i group in support of the *mahdī* ("the rightly guided one", i.e., the messianic figure). See the reference to Cook's study above in n. 13; see also Moosa, *Extremist Shītes* 112–3; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 45–51, 64; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* liii, 83–4.

<sup>17</sup> See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 235 n. 715; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, liii; Halm, *Kosmologie* 153–6, 158, 160. On the hierarchy of the *awliyā'* in Nuṣayrī texts and in *Umm al-kitāb*, see Kraus, *Les Dignitaires* 85 n. 1–2, 5–6, 86 n. 1, 5–6; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-'Alawī religion*, index, s.v. "*bāb*" and "*yatīm*". On the term *ghulāt*, see above p. 11 n. 38.

distinctly Shi‘i-Ismā‘īlī.<sup>18</sup> In the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, different hierarchies of righteous men are found alongside the hierarchy of the seven *nuṭaqā’* and their followers, familiar from Ismā‘īlī literature.<sup>19</sup> One such hierarchy comprises of four thousand *mu’minūn*, *tā’ibūn* and *mukhlisūn* (“[true] believers”, “those who have repented”, “sincere believers”), who, in turn, include four hundred *zāhidūn*, *‘arifūn* and *muḥaqqiqūn* (“ascetics”, “those who possess Divine knowledge”, “those who have arrived at the truth”). These four hundred have among them forty *ṣāliḥūn* (“righteous ones”) who adhere to “the religion of Abraham” (*millat ibrahīm*) and who further include four *abdāl*. The Ikhwān explain that when a certain person belonging to one of these categories passes away, he is replaced by someone from an inferior category. The main elements in this scheme are obviously derived from the *Ḥadīth* literature, which, as mentioned above, is common to Sunni mysticism as well. However, the emphasis which the Ikhwān place on the number four (4-40-400-4000) is unique to the Ikhwānian worldview, influenced as it is by the Pythagorean tradition.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the Jābirian corpus and the Ikhwān’s Epistles, the hierarchal notion described here plays a central role in most (if not in all) the Ismā‘īlī writings dating from the 10th century onwards. The hierarchy of God’s friends—the prophets, their legatees (*awṣiyā’*), the *imāms*, and the various ranks of the *da’wa* organization which is responsible for propagating the Ismā‘īlī teachings and calling or summoning people to the Ismā‘īlī cause—is the main focus of many medieval Ismā‘īlī works.<sup>21</sup>

In the Sunni world, speculations on the hierarchy of the friends of God appear in the teachings of various Sufi masters who lived during the 9th–10th centuries, such as Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (died circa 246/861), Sahl al-Tustarī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Alī l-Kattānī (died in 322/933), and above all, in the writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.<sup>22</sup> In these speculations, various motifs from the aforementioned *Ḥadīth* literature are combined

<sup>18</sup> See Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* i, lii–liv; Kraus, *Les dignitaires*; Lory, *Alchimie* 70–89. On the Jābirian corpus see above pp. 30–2.

<sup>19</sup> On the seven *nuṭaqā’* and their followers, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *al-Jāmi‘a* i, 629–30, 669–73, ii, 138–54, 212. On the term *nāṭiq*, see above p. 49 n. 60.

<sup>20</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il* i, 376–7, ii, 375. Regarding the Pythagorean influence on the Ikhwān, see below p. 194 n. 26.

<sup>21</sup> See Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs*, index, s.v. “da’wa” and “hierarchy”; Madelung, *Imamat*; Halm, *Kosmologie* 18–37; Halm, *Fatimids* 56–70; Hamdani, *Evolution*; Madelung, *Ismā‘īliyya* 203b. On the importance of the *da’wa* organization for the Ismā‘īlī worldview, see also Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 29, 129.

<sup>22</sup> Dhū l-Nūn: see al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* i, 12–5. Sahl al-Tustarī: Böwering, *Mystical vision* 231–41. Al-Kattānī: al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 69. Al-Tirmidhī: Al-Geyoushi,

with Sufi or Sunni-mystical conceptions.<sup>23</sup> At times, the Sunni discussions of the *awliyā'* hierarchy exhibit Shi'i themes, or themes that are typical of the Shi'i discourse on the *imāms* and their superior status.<sup>24</sup> From the 9th–10th centuries onwards, and up to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time, the hierarchy of the friends of God in Sunni-mystical sources remained more or less the same. Thus, the hierarchy described in the famous work by Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān al-Hujwīrī (the 11th century), *Kashf al-maḥjūb* ("The Unveiling of the Veiled"), is not much different from the hierarchies that figure in the teachings of al-Kattānī and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Notwithstanding the differences in details between the various hierarchal schemes of these mystics—namely, in the names of the categories and in the number of persons belonging to them—their general outlines are essentially the same.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the resemblances in these matters between Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings and those of his predecessors, many themes concerning the

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Al-Tirmidhī's theory; Radtke, Concept of Wilāya; Radtke, A forerunner; Sviri, Emergence; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 131–5.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, according to Sahl al-Tustarī, the *abdāl* are thus named because they substitute or replace their mystical states (*aḥwāl*), that is, they constantly pass from one state to another (a mystical level known in Sufi parlance as *tabwīn*, "variegation"). In contradistinction, the *awtād* ("Pegs") enjoy mystical stability and are therefore positioned in a higher rank (*tamkīn*, "steadiness"). See Böwering, *Mystical vision* 237.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā'* i, 12–3; according to Dhū l-Nūn, the *abdāl* are "Allāh's proofs/arguments against His created beings" (*hujaj allāh ta'āla ʿalā khalqihī*); on the Shi'i term *hujja* see above p. 66 n. 118. Similarly, Sahl al-Tustarī is said to have claimed for himself the title of *hujjat allāh*, thus positioning himself above all other men; see Böwering, *Mystical vision* 63–7, 237; Elmore, *Islamic sainthood* 137. Al-Tirmidhī too defines the *walī*, *ṣiddīq* ("the truly veracious") and *khatm al-awliyā'* ("the seal of the friends of God") as *hujjat allāh*. Finally, the term *muḥaddathūn* ("those with whom the angels converse"), which, in al-Tirmidhī's writings, designates one of the highest ranks in the hierarchy of the friends of God, is likewise an important Shi'i term. See Al-Geyoushi, Al-Tirmidhī's theory 24–5; Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 134–5, 148. On the term *muḥaddathūn*, especially in Shi'i sources, see Kohlberg, Term 'Muḥaddath'; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 70–1; and in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works, see *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 23–4, 78–9, 85 (chapter 73, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 374–8, xii, 320–9, 335–50); see also Friedmann, *Prophecy continuous*, index, s.v. "muḥaddathūn".

<sup>25</sup> Al-Kattānī: three hundred *nuqabā'* ("chiefs"), seventy *nujabā'* ("noble ones"), forty *budalā'*, seven *akhyār* ("excellent ones"), four *ʿumud/ʿamad* ("the poles [of the tent]", "columns") and one *ghawth* ("succor"; see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 69). Al-Hujwīrī: three hundred *akhyār*, forty *abdāl*, seven *abrār* ("pious ones"), four *awtād*, three *nuqabā'* and one *quṭb* ("pole", "axis") or *ghawth* (see al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, Nicholson's translation 214; Blochet, *Études* 529–31). Ibn al-ʿArabī: forty *Rajabīyyūn* ("the men of the month of Rajab"), one *ḥawārī* (the *ḥawārīyyūn* are Jesus's apostles in the Quran), eight *nujabā'* and twelve *nuqabā'* (sic, in this order), seven *abdāl*, four *awtād*, two *imāms* and one *quṭb* or *ghawth* (see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 89–115; Corbin, *Creative imagination* 45 n. 15). See also Böwering, *Mystical vision* 237: according to Sahl al-Tustarī, there are one thousand and five hundred *ṣiddīqūn*, who include forty *budalā'* and seven *awtād*.

hierarchy of the *awliyā'* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings have no parallels in earlier Sufi sources, or, for that matter, in the works of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, the 9th century Sunni mystic from whom Ibn al-ʿArabī derived many of his notions regarding *walāya* and the *awliyā'*. For example, in chapter seventy three of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Futūḥāt*—the main chapter in this *magnum opus* dedicated to the hierarchy of the *awliyā'*—there are many additional categories and classifications of righteous men that are not found in earlier Sunni-mystical works.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, several of the conceptual contexts in which Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses the hierarchy of the *awliyā'* point to different sources of inspiration, other than the Sufi tradition. These contexts include the notion of parallel worlds; the perception of the whole universe as a hierarchal system; the Neoplatonic context; and the connection between the letters of the alphabet and the hierarchy of the friends of God. These contexts are all found in Ismāʿīlī literature.<sup>27</sup> One should also bear in mind that the concept of *walāya* and the hierarchy of the *awliyā'* occupy a central place in the writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, much more so than in classical Sufi works written between the 9th century and the rise of Ibn al-ʿArabī. In contradistinction to these works, al-Tirmidhī's teachings on *walāya* form part of a general theosophical system, in which the Divine world as well as cosmogonic and cosmological issues are all treated together—much like Ismāʿīlī literature and the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, who, contrary to most classical Sufi authors in the east, was indeed inspired by al-Tirmidhī.<sup>28</sup> From this perspective, both al-Tirmidhī and Ibn al-ʿArabī are typologically closer to the Ismāʿīlī tradition than to the Sufi one. The fact that from the 9th to the 12th century, the Sufi world in the East generally chose to ignore the teachings of al-Tirmidhī, and the fact that it was Ibn al-ʿArabī in the West who renewed the Sunni-mystical interest in al-Tirmidhī, testify to the essential difference between classical Sufism and the mystical thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī. This difference is perhaps due to the Ismāʿīlī impact on the Andalusī intellectual world, the world from which Ibn al-ʿArabī emerged.

The affinities between Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī tradition, in the context dealt with here, did not go unnoticed by various scholars in

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<sup>26</sup> See the references to Chodkiewicz in the previous note; see also Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's theory* 128–31.

<sup>27</sup> See the discussions below in this chapter; see also above pp. 108–16.

<sup>28</sup> On these matters, see al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, Nicholson's translation 210; Al-Geyoushi, Al-Tirmidhī's theory 18, 59–61; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints*, index, s.v. "Tirmidhī, (al-Ḥakīm)"; Radtke, A forerunner; Radtke, Concept of Wilāya 487, 496; Radtke, Walī; Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of sainthood* 5–9.

medieval as well as in modern times. Henry Corbin, for instance—much like Ibn Khaldūn, hundreds of years before him—viewed the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* as essentially a Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī notion. Other scholars, such as Michel Chodkiewicz, have rejected this view as being too ‘pro-Shiʿi’.<sup>29</sup> However, it is perhaps possible to find a middle way between these opposing opinions, one that would acknowledge, on the one hand, the importance of the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī world in the formation of the hierarchal notion in Islam, and, on the other, would not view Sunni mysticism as an unoriginal tradition, utterly influenced by Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī thought. As is clear from the discussion in this chapter, various sources all played their part in the development of the hierarchal idea in Islam—the pre-Islamic heritage, early Islamic *ḥadīths*, eastern, classical Sufi writings, the works of al-Tirmidhī and, last but not least, the Shiʿi-Ismāʿīlī tradition. Ibn al-ʿArabī may be regarded as the climactic point in this process, as the confluence of all these diverse trends and traditions. To be sure, Ibn al-ʿArabī was not only influenced by these different sources, but was also extremely innovative in the way in which he blended them together into a new theory of *walāya* and *awliyāʾ*. This theory was to influence both Sunni and Shiʿi mystics in subsequent generations.<sup>30</sup>

#### *The Hierarchy of the Awliyāʾ and the Notion of Parallel Worlds*

The notion of parallel worlds is one of the most prominent themes in Ismāʿīlī literature. According to the Ismāʿīlī worldview, the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ*—comprising of the *nuṭaqāʾ*, *awṣiyāʾ*, *imāms*, and the various ranks of the *daʿwa* organization—corresponds to the universe at large. Whether this universe is described according to Neoplatonic philosophy or in accordance with a more mythic cosmology, the parallels drawn between the hierarchy of the *awliyāʾ* and that of the cosmos serve to enhance the supreme status of God’s friends and to emphasize their central role as mediators between man and God. The *awliyāʾ* are perceived as embodying the figure of the perfect man, who encompasses

<sup>29</sup> See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima* iii, 1108–9 (translated into English by Rosenthal, *Ibn Khaldūn* iii, 92–4); Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 92, 118–27; Corbin, *Creative imagination* 16, 45; Corbin, *History* 29; al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* i, 225–6, 229, 379–80, 407, 485–95; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 98 n. 4, 137, 145 n. 47; and see also the discussions and references in de Jong, Al-Ḳuṭb; Chabbi, Abdāl; Schaefer, *Islamische Lehre* 240–1; Affī, *Mystical philosophy* 89; Massignon, *Essay* 92; Elmore, *Islamic sainthood* 179–82. On Chodkiewicz and Corbin, see also above p. 20 n. 59.

<sup>30</sup> On this later influence, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 10, 15, 49 n. 4; Corbin, *Science*; Blochet, *Études* 49–111; and above p. 1 n. 2.

within himself all the different worlds, spiritual and corporeal alike. These notions are also shared by Ibn al-‘Arabī.

Ismā‘īlī writings contain many speculations on the correspondences between the hierarchy of the friends of God, the celestial bodies and the geographical structure of the sub-lunar world. The link between the friends of God and the geographical structure of the world is already drawn in early *ḥadīths*, in which different groups of *awliyā’* are said to reside in specific regions of the Islamic world.<sup>31</sup> Like other motifs in early Islamic traditions which treat of the *awliyā’*, this motif too has its origins in pre-Islamic sources.<sup>32</sup> However, in Islam, detailed analogies between the *awliyā’* hierarchy, the celestial bodies and the geographical regions of the world are typically found in Ismā‘īlī writings. For instance, in the 10th century Ismā‘īlī work *al-‘Ālim wa-l-ghulām*,<sup>33</sup> it is stated that the *imām* corresponds to the sun; the *ḥujja* (“proof”) of the *imām* or his *bāb* (“gate”) corresponds to the moon; and the *du‘āt* (the members of the *da‘wa* organization) correspond to the stars. In addition, the seven *nuṭaqa’* correspond to the seven heavens; the seven *imāms* correspond to the seven layers of the earth; the twelve supporters or *nuqabā’* (“chiefs”) of each *nātiq* (“the speaker prophet”) correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac; and the twelve *ḥujaj* (plural of *ḥujja*) of every *imām* are in charge of the *da‘wa* in the twelve geographical regions of the world (the *jazā‘ir*, plural of *jazīra*, literally: “island”).<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein, al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020) explains that the seven *nuṭaqa’* parallel the seven celestial spheres of the seven planets, whereas the six *imāms* in each historical cycle parallel the six small spheres which belong to each one of the seven big spheres. To the aforementioned correspondences found in *al-‘Ālim wa-l-ghulām*, al-Kirmānī adds the correspondences between the seven *awṣiyā’/usus* (“legatees”/“foundations”) and the seven geographical districts of the world (*aqālīm*, plural of *iqlīm*).<sup>35</sup> Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ likewise

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *al-Awliyā’* 30; Ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-lughā* 300; al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl* i, 383, 385 (*aṣl* 51); Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat dimashq* i, 289–304; al-Yāfi‘ī, *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn* 18–9; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll* 45–54, 60–2, 67–9, 71; see also Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 222–3 (concerning Nuṣayrī literature).

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, *The Jerusalem Talmud*, ‘*Avōdah zarah* 9:a (chapter 21); Schwarzbach, Lamed vav tsadiqīm 84–6, 93 (in Hebrew); Scholem, Lamed vav tsadiqīm 200 (in Hebrew); Fenton, Hierarchy 15.

<sup>33</sup> On this work see above p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> See Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *al-‘Ālim wa-l-ghulām* 16–7. On the term *ḥujja*, see above p. 66 n. 118; on the term *jazīra*, see above p. 102 n. 93.

<sup>35</sup> See al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql* 187, 242–3, 423 (on al-Kirmānī see above pp. 40–1). On the seven *aqālīm* in medieval Arabic geography, see Miquel, *Iqlīm*; Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Hilyat*

emphasize the correspondence between the seven planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac, the seven days of the week and the twelve months of the year, the seven *aqālīm* and the twelve *jazā'ir*, the seven spiritual faculties of man (= the five senses, the speaking faculty and the faculty of the intellect) and the twelve orifices in the human body, and, finally, the seven *nuṭaqā'* (termed *sab'a ashkhāṣ fādila*, "seven virtuous figures") and the twelve supporters of each *nāṭiq*.<sup>36</sup> Ismā'īlī literature abounds with such speculations. One should note the great importance attributed by the Ismā'īlī authors to the numbers seven and twelve.<sup>37</sup>

Very similar speculations are found in the works of Ibn al-'Arabī. According to the latter, the *quṭb* ("pole") corresponds to the sun; the four *awṭād* ("pegs") correspond to the four corners of the *ka'ba*;<sup>38</sup> the seven *abdāl* correspond to the seven *aqālīm* or to the seven planets; the twelve *nuqabā'* correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac; and the eight *nujabā'* ("noble ones") correspond to the eight planets and the eight celestial spheres which are situated below the ninth, encompassing sphere. Ibn al-'Arabī further explains that the seven *abdāl* are appointed by God to safeguard the seven *aqālīm*, and that they benefit from the spiritual powers (*rūḥāniyyāt*) emanating from the seven planets and seven heavens. The seven *abdāl* also derive their spiritual powers from the seven pre-Islamic prophets Adam, Jesus, Joseph, Idrīs, Aaron, Moses and Abraham, who are stationed in the seven heavens. In each day of the week, a different celestial sphere, planet and prophet exercise their particular spiritual influence on one of the seven *abdāl*.<sup>39</sup> Obviously, the connection between

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*al-abdāl*, the editor's Introduction 8–9.

<sup>36</sup> Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iv, 232–3; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 624–34, ii, 260–4, 585–8; cf. al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 276; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 153.

<sup>37</sup> On the importance of these numbers in cosmological-astrological speculations in Ismā'īlī literature as well as in the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Hellenistic, and Gnostic traditions, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 91–100; see also Dornseiff, *Alphabet* 32–5, 57–60, 81–91; Blochet, *Études* 51 n. 1, 85 n. 4; Schaeder, *Islamische Lehre* 204–5, 218. The cosmological importance of the numbers seven and twelve is also evident in the Jewish mystical work *Sefer yetzirah*; see Liebes, *Ars poetica* 16–22, 76–7, 209–11 (in Hebrew); Weiss, *A conceptual examination* 196, 199–201 (in Hebrew); and see also Fenton, *Hierarchy* 15–6, 32 n. 36.

<sup>38</sup> This motif also figures in Ismā'īlī literature; see, for instance, Ibn Ḥawshab, *al-Rushd wa-l-hidāya* 203 (where the four senior *nuqabā'* are said to correspond to the four corners of the *ka'ba*); al-Qāḍī l-Nu'mān, *al-Mudhhiba* 70 (Abraham, Ishmael, Muḥammad and the *qā'im* correspond to the four corners of the *ka'ba*).

<sup>39</sup> See Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 37 ("Khuṭbat al-kitāb", = 'Uthmān Yahyā's edition i, 52–3), 208–10 (chapter 15, = 'Uthmān Yahyā's edition ii, 376–84), 237–8 (chapter 22, = iii, 147–8), ii, 9–11 (chapter 73, = xi, 274–83); Ibn al-'Arabī, *Hilyat al-abdāl*, the editor's Intro-

the seven prophets and the seven heavens is based on the famous tradition concerning Muḥammad's ascension to the heavens (the *mi'rāj*). According to various *ḥadīths*, contained in the canonical compilations and in other sources as well, Muḥammad encountered a different prophet in each one of the seven heavens which he visited. However, the link between the friends of God, the seven *aqālīm*, the heavens, the planets and the days of the week is typically Ismā'īlī.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Ibn al-'Arabī defines the fourth celestial sphere, i.e., the sphere of the sun, as the "millstone" (*raḥā*) and "pole" (*quṭb*) of all the other celestial spheres, and as "the heart of the world and the heart of the heavens". "The station of Idrīs's spiritual power" (*maqām rūḥāniyyat idrīs*) is located within this fourth sphere. In addition to being a prophet, Idrīs himself is a pole, that is, the one who stands at the summit of the *awliyā'* hierarchy.<sup>41</sup> Now, the concept of *rūḥāniyyāt* (plural of *rūḥāniyya*) and the connection between this concept and the seven planets; the significance of the sun; the correspondence between the sun, the human heart and the highest-ranking friend of God; and the link between *rūḥāniyyāt* and Idrīs, who is identified with Hermes—these themes are also found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.<sup>42</sup>

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duction 8–13; Blochet, *Études* 51–2, 58 n. 2; Corbin, *Creative imagination* 45 n. 15; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 93, 97, 100 n. 22, 106.

<sup>40</sup> For the correspondence between the *nuṭaqā'*, the seven days of the week and the seven planets, see, for example, al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 143–5; al-Qaḍī l-Nu'mān, *al-Mudhhiba* 44; see also Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 315–20; and Marquet, *Imamat* 75–9.

<sup>41</sup> See Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 75 ("Wa-a'lā l-amkina l-makān al-ladhī tadūru 'alayhi raḥā' ālam al-aflāk wa-huwa falak al-shams wa-fihi maqām rūḥāniyyat idrīs 'alayhi l-salām [...] fa-min ḥaythu huwa quṭb al-aflāk huwa raḥā' al-makān"); idem, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 437 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 24: "[...] Al-samā' al-rābi'a wa-hiya qalb al-'alam wa-qalb al-samawāt [...] wa-askana fihā quṭb al-arwāḥ al-insāniyya wa-huwa idrīs 'alayhi l-salām"); and see also Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 94. On the *quṭb* see above n. 25. Note that in various Arabic sources influenced by the Hermetic tradition, including Shi'i-Ismā'īlī works such as the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Idrīs-Enoch is identified with Hermes; see the references above in p. 32 n. 94 and in the following note.

<sup>42</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* ii, 145, 477, iv, 214–5, 443, 445; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Jāmi'a* i, 519–20, ii, 111–20, 254–9 (where the *qā'im* is said to parallel the sun and the heart); see also Marquet, *Imamat* 66, 94 n. 61, 109, 111; Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā': l'Imām et la société* 137. On the significance of the sun in the Epistles of the Ikhwān, and on the Platonic, Neoplatonic and Hermetic roots of this motif, see De Smet, *Le Soleil*. On the sun as the center, the heart and the pole, see also al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql* 156. On the connection between the heart and the friends of God, see *ibid.* 160–1, 295–6, 343–4, 415; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 254, 257; cf. Ibn al-'Arabī, *Anqā' mughrīb* 62; and Krinis, *Idea* 119–20 (in Hebrew). For a discussion of the term *rūḥāniyyāt* and its origins in Hellenistic theurgy and magic—including pagan Neoplatonism—see Pines, *On the term Ruḥaniyyot* (in Hebrew).

*The Universal and Divine Aspects of the Hierarchal Worldview*

In the Ismāʿīlī tradition and in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the universe at large—rather than the world of the *awliyāʾ* alone—is conceived of as a hierarchal system. This universal aspect of the hierarchal worldview is reflected in the important Ismāʿīlī term *ḥudūd* (“boundaries”, singular: *ḥadd*), which signifies both the spiritual entities in the upper worlds—namely, *Kūnī-Qadar* and the other celestial beings in Ismāʿīlī mythical writings, or the universal intellect and soul in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism—as well as their equivalents in the lower, corporeal world, i.e., the *nuṭaqāʾ*, *awṣiyāʾ*, *imāms* and the various ranks of the *daʿwa* organization. *Ḥadd* literally means “definition”, “border”; according to the Ismāʿīlī perception, created beings, by their very nature and in contradistinction to God, are defined and delimited. Hence, every created being has its own *ḥadd*—its ontological boundaries and its vertical rank in the universal hierarchy.<sup>43</sup> Neoplatonic philosophy, which gained much popularity in the Ismāʿīlī world from the 10th century onwards, served to reinforce this universal aspect of the hierarchal worldview, since according to Neoplatonic cosmology, the different echelons of the universe all emanate from “the One” in a hierarchal-vertical manner. Another term which signifies both the human-social and the universal aspects of the hierarchal perception is *martaba* (“level”, plural: *marātib*), a fundamental concept in Ismāʿīlī literature as well as in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings. In Ismāʿīlī works, the terms *ḥudūd* and *marātib* belong to the same semantic field and are often synonymous.<sup>44</sup>

Numerous examples of the Ismāʿīlī usage of the term *martaba* and its derivatives can be found in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. According to the Ikhwān, the universal intellect is hierarchically situated (*murattab*) below God’s command (*amr allāh*), or, more precisely, it is encircled or encompassed by the Divine command. Similarly, the universal soul is hierarchically situated below the universal intellect or is encircled by

<sup>43</sup> See Halm, *Kosmologie*, index, s.v. “ḥadd, ḥudūd” and “-ḥudūd al-ḡusmāniya, ar-rūhāniya”; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s.v. “ḥudūd”; De Smet, Mizān 251 n. 10; Corbin, *Divine epiphany*; Hamdani, *Evolution* 87. See also Stern, *Earliest cosmological doctrines* 8–9; and Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 24 (“[...] *Wa-kull yantahī ilā ḥadd lahu maḥdūd* [...]”).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Ibn Ḥawshab, *al-Ruḥd wa-l-hidāya* 189, 198; Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kaṣf* 117, 125, 131–4, 143–4, 149, 155–6; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 624–5; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 152–3; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 94, 127, 130, 148, 170; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 205–15, 223–6; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 163–204; Lewis, *An Ismaili interpretation* 700, 701. The Ismāʿīlī authors and Ibn al-ʿArabī also employ the term *rutba* (plural: *rutab*), which seems to be identical in meaning to the term *martaba*.

it. Each of the remaining cosmic beings, spiritual and corporeal alike, is equally positioned in its proper hierarchal level—below the preceding being or encircled by it. This universal hierarchy corresponds to the numbers from one to ten: God corresponds to the number one; the universal intellect corresponds to the number two; the universal soul corresponds to the number three; prime matter (*al-hayūlā*) corresponds to the number four; and so on. The sub-lunar world too is structured in a hierarchal fashion: the *martaba* of the minerals is situated below the *martaba* of the plants; the *martaba* of the plants is situated below the *martaba* of the animals; the *martaba* of the animals is situated below the *martaba* of man; and the latter is situated below the *martaba* of the angels. Each one of these *marātib* is further subdivided into additional levels. For example, according to one classification of the Ikhwān, the human level is divided into the following categories: the simple men; the craftsmen and artisans; the rulers; the kings; and, finally, at the uppermost level, the prophets, their heirs and their followers. The differences between these diverse human classes correspond to the differences between inanimate beings, plants, animals, human beings and angels. The levels of the various souls in the sub-lunar world—from the vegetative soul, to the simple human soul, to the prophet's soul—correspond to the hierarchy of the numbers mentioned above.<sup>45</sup>

Similar speculations appear in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Both share the Ismāʿīlī-Ikhwānian worldview which perceives human society and the universe at large as hierarchal systems.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and Ibn al-ʿArabī maintain that the hierarchal structure of creation originates in the Divine world itself—more precisely, in its manifest and creative aspect, i.e., in the Divine word and command

<sup>45</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* i, 311–3, 318–31, ii, 150–1, 166–72, iii, 127, 129, 178–82, 224–9, 246, 348–9, 353, 359, 368–9, 371, 377, iv, 76, 169–77, 199–201, 212–31, 237–8, 276–82, 374–81; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 16–8. On the hierarchal worldview of the Ikhwān, see also Marquet, *Imamat*, esp. pp. 103–39; Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ: de Dieu à l'homme* 393–8; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists* 33, 35–7; Nasr, *An introduction* 44–74. On the hierarchal worldview in other Ismāʿīlī sources, see Corbin, *Divine epiphany*; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism*, index, s.v. “hierarchy”; Walker, *Cosmic hierarchies*; Hamdani, *Evolution*.

<sup>46</sup> For Ibn Masarra, see, for example, Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 146–50; Ibn Masarra, *al-ʿItibār* 183, 185 (where the term *ḥudūd* is used in a cosmological context similar to that which is found in Ismāʿīlī literature). For Ibn al-ʿArabī, see the discussion below and Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 289. The writings of yet another Andalusī author—the Jewish Judah Ha-Levi (d. 1141; see above p. 74)—likewise exhibit a hierarchal worldview which is quite similar to that of the Ismāʿīlī tradition; see Pines, *Shīʿite terms* 178–92, 203, 217; Krinis, *Idea* 66–7, 101–21; and see also Berman, *Judaeano-Arabic thought* 41–2.

(*kalima, amr*). As explained above,<sup>47</sup> the Ikhwān identify this hypostasis, located between God and the universal intellect, with the Divine knowledge, which functions as the source for the universal hierarchy or the various levels (*marātib*) of the cosmos. Divine knowledge is also the ontological root of mankind's religious leadership and is defined as the goal of creation. It seems that according to the Ikhwān, during the first stages of creation, the hierarchal structure of human society and of the universe at large exists in a state of mere potentiality, as a Divine 'plan' waiting to be executed. This 'plan' emanates from the hypostasis of Divine knowledge down to the universal intellect, and from the intellect it reaches the universal soul which is responsible for implementing it in the lower, corporeal worlds.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Ibn al-ʿArabī views *nafas al-raḥmān*—"the breath of the All-Merciful", located above the universal intellect—as the source of the different levels of the universe (*marātib*) and as the Divine root of the perfect man, the goal of creation. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, all created beings exist eternally as the objects of God's knowledge, as "immutable entities" (*aʿyān thābita*) which are organized in a hierarchal order even before they are brought into existence.<sup>49</sup> The letters that emanate from "the breath of the All-Merciful", and which function as the building blocks of creation, are likewise divided into hierarchal levels (*marātib*).<sup>50</sup> Finally, the Divine names—which, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, bring about the creation of the world—are hierarchically organized according to their varying ranks (*marātib, rutab*): some are "lords" (*arbāb*), some are "gatekeepers" (*sadana*), others are "leaders" (*aʿimma*) and so on. This hierarchy in the Divine world is the source of the hierarchy in creation.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> See above pp. 45–51.

<sup>48</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 88–9 ("[...] *Fa-awwal dhālika l-tartīb al-awwal al-murattab kāna fī l-naḥs awwalan bi-l-quwwa wa-l-umūr al-ʿaqliyya l-maʿqūla wa-hiya sūrat aʿyān basāʾit al-murakkabāt wa-l-mawjūdāt bi-l-tartīb*"); see also *ibid.* i, 404 ("[...] *Al-ashyāʾ kulluhā aʿyān ghayriyyāt murattaba fī l-wujūd ka-tartīb al-ʿadad* [...]"), iii, 236 ("*Fa-qad bāna bi-hādhā l-mithāl anna l-mawjūdāt kulluhā ṣuwar ghayriyyāt wa-hiya aʿyān al-ashyāʾ wa-annahā mutatāliyyāt fī l-ḥudūth wa-l-baqāʾ ka-tatāli l-ʿadad min al-wāḥid* [...]"), 348–349, iv, 200–1, 203, 409; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Jāmiʿa* i, 24, 270–1, ii, 16–8, 312–3, 319; see also Marquet, *Imamat 107*; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 32–3.

<sup>49</sup> See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 279 (chapter 167), 394 (chapter 198, *faṣl 1*), iv, 212 (chapter 558, "ḥaḍrat al-khalq wa-l-amr": "[...] *Wa-innamā l-aʿyān al-mumkināt al-thābita fī ḥāl al-ʿadam murattaba kamā waqaʿat wa-taqaʿu fī l-wujūd tartīban zamāniyyan*"). In the last sentence quoted here from chapter 558, the use of the terms *aʿyān* and *tartīb* brings to mind the Ikhwānian phraseology; see the quotations in the previous note.

<sup>50</sup> See above p. 97.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 35 ("Khuṭbat al-kitāb", = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition i, 42), 145–8 (chapter 4, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 119–31); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ*

The Divine origin of the human and cosmic hierarchies may explain why both Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Ismā‘īlī authors attach such great importance to the observance of the hierarchal order: any deviation from this order is conceived of as a transgression against the Divine will itself. Accordingly, Ismā‘īlī tradition views Iblīs’s disobedience of the Divine command to bow down before Adam (see Q 2:34) as a rejection of the Divinely-ordained hierarchy in the world. In a similar vein, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ interpret Adam’s sin as a premature and illicit attempt to obtain for himself a higher rank in the religious hierarchy.<sup>52</sup> In fact, acknowledging the hierarchal structure of the universe and of human society forms the crux of the Ismā‘īlī faith itself. In the Ismā‘īlī worldview, every created being—in the spiritual and corporeal worlds alike—is, on the one hand, superior to those beings that are situated below it (*fāḍil*), and, on the other hand, inferior to those located above it (*maḥḍūl*). As a result, the primary religious obligation of man is to acquire knowledge of the various hierarchal levels found above and beneath him and to accept his own proper rank in this hierarchy.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, acknowledging the human and universal hierarchies is the basis for the belief in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*), and, in effect, is equal to it; the propagation of this notion among men is the main

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*al-dawā’ir* 32–8; Ibn al-‘Arabī, *‘Anqā’ mughrīb* 33–6; Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 153. The hierarchal perception described here is especially evident in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s myth of the Divine creative names; see Elmore, *Four texts*; see also Chittick, *Sufi path* 47–58. On the term *martaba* in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings, see also *ibid.* index, s.v. “martaba”; and Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 89.

<sup>52</sup> See Stern, *Earliest cosmological doctrines* 10, 11–4; Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarā’ir wa-asrār al-nuṭṭaqā’* 21; Ebstein, *Secrecy* 322–6. Note that in Twelver sources, Adam’s sin is often interpreted as a denial of *walāya* and of the *imāms*’ high status; see De Smet, *Adam* 189; Amir-Moezzi, *Notes* 734; Amir-Moezzi, *La Préexistence* 118 n. 34; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 163 n. 184; Kohlberg, *Some Shī‘ī views* 55–7; Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 134–5, 185. The Ismā‘īlī-Ṭayyibī author Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmīdī (on whom see above p. 70) describes the emergence of the world of the ten intellects along similar lines: the third intellect, having refused to acknowledge the superior rank of the preceding intellect, falls down to the bottom of the Divine world and is henceforth situated below the other nine intellects. The restoration of the Divine world to its initial state becomes the responsibility of the Ismā‘īlī believers themselves: through their faith and religious deeds, and especially through their acknowledgement of the various *ḥudūd*, the fallen intellect (= the tenth intellect) is able to eventually return to its original rank in the Divine hierarchy. See al-Ḥāmīdī, *Kanz al-walad* 66–133, 157 ff., 295–297; Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs* 269–276. On the Gnostic roots of this myth, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 75–90, 117–8.

<sup>53</sup> On the principal of *tafḍīl/tafāḍul*, see, for example, Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *al-‘Ālim wa-l-ghulam* 8–9, 16, 79–81; Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 142–4; al-Qāḍī l-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām* 9–11; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 140–1; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql* 299, 434.

objective of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa*.<sup>54</sup> To be sure, acknowledging the high status of the *imāms* and maintaining loyalty to them (*walāya*) are also perceived by the Twelver Shī'īs as the most important religious duty incumbent on man and as a prerequisite for spiritual salvation. The principal of *tafḍīl/tafāḍul*, rooted in the Quran,<sup>55</sup> is likewise shared by the Twelver authors, who hold that the prophets and *imāms* stand above all other human beings.<sup>56</sup> However, in the Ismā'īlī tradition, this hierarchal notion receives an unprecedented emphasis and is also extended to the universe at large, very often in the framework of Neoplatonic cosmology.

Man's obligation to observe the Divinely-ordained hierarchy in the world is also evident in Ibn al-'Arabī's writings. Like the Ismā'īlī authors, Ibn al-'Arabī too views the universe in general and human society in particular as hierarchically structured: "the whole world", he states, "[comprises of] those who are superior (*fāḍil*) and those who are inferior (*mafḍūl*)".<sup>57</sup> In referring to the spiritual influence of certain geographical spaces and holy sites on the mystic, Ibn al-'Arabī explains that

in the same way that spiritual stations differ in their superiority over one another (*tatafāḍalu*), so too physical stations differ in their superiority over one another; otherwise, would not a clod of clay be similar to a stone? This is indeed the case with one who is subject to a mystical state. However, the perfect one who has reached stability distinguishes between the two just as God has distinguished between them [...] For the wise one who has arrived [at the Truth] is he who grants everything what it deserves (*fa-l-ḥakīm al-wāṣil man a'tā kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu*).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 11; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 154; al-Qāḍī l-Nu'mān, *al-Mudhhiba* 60; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql* 15, 18, 25, 103-4, 121, 134-5, 143, 186; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ* 49, 83, 159-60; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 23-4, 26, 29, 75, 163, 279; Marquet, *Imamat* 60, 92-4.

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Q 2:47, 253; 4:34, 95; 16:71; 17:55.

<sup>56</sup> See Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 196-9; Krinis, *Idea* 102-3, 115-6 (in Hebrew).

<sup>57</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* iii, 443 (chapter 373: "[...] *Fa-l-'ālam kulluhu fāḍil mafḍūl*"); see also *ibid.* ii, 23 (chapter 73, on the *aḥbāb*, = 'Uthmān Yaḥyā's edition xi, 369; and see also 'Uthmān Yaḥyā's edition, chapter 54, iv, 263-6), 254 (chapter 158); Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 132; Chittick, *Sufī path* 12-4, 47-52, 336, 363.

<sup>58</sup> See Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 146 (chapter 4: "*Fa-kamā tatafāḍalu l-manāzil al-rūḥāniyya kadhālika tatafāḍalu l-manāzil al-jismāniyya wa-illā fa-hal al-durr [read: al-madar] mithlu l-hajar illā 'inda ṣāhib al-hāl wa-ammā l-mukammal/l-mukmal ṣāhib al-maqām fa-innahu yumayyizu baynahumā kamā mayyaza baynahumā l-ḥaqq [...] fa-l-ḥakīm al-wāṣil man a'tā kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu [...]*"), = 'Uthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 120, where *المدر* ("a clod of clay") appears instead of *الدر* ("pearls"). See also Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 219 ("*Fa-tamayyazat al-a'yān bi-l-marātib fa-a'tā kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu kull 'arīf*"; on *a'yān* and *marātib* see above nn. 48-9). On *ḥakīm* ("wise one"), *ḥukamā'* ("wise ones") and *ḥikma* ("wisdom") in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī, see Rosenthal, Ibn 'Arabī 13-6 and the discussion below.

Whereas the ordinary mystic, who is subjected to varying mystical states, views the hierarchal structure of reality as a mere illusion, the perfect mystic, who has attained mystical stability, acknowledges both the hierarchal nature of creation and the Divine unity which permeates it. He is thus able to grant every created being “what it deserves”; that is, he is able to acknowledge its proper rank in the universal and human hierarchies. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, this correct mystical vision of reality is characteristic of the attitude of the *malāmiyya*, “those who adhere to the path of blame”.<sup>59</sup> The latter, who are superior even to the Sufis, are

the wise ones who skillfully place every matter in its proper place (*waḍa‘ū l-umūr mawāḍi‘ahā*). They confirm the [cosmic] means in their spaces, and remove them from the places whence they should be removed. They do not neglect anything in the hierarchal order which Allāh has established among His created beings [...]

Acknowledging the hierarchy in the universe is thus essential for understanding the true nature of Divine creation. Conversely, focusing exclusively on the hierarchal structure of the world while disregarding the Divine presence, which bestows unity on all created phenomena, likewise leads to a distorted perception of reality.<sup>60</sup>

The expressions “to grant everything what it deserves” and “to place every matter in its proper place” and the principal reflected in them are recurring themes in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī.<sup>61</sup> Although these

<sup>59</sup> On the *malāmiyya* or *malāmātiyya* see Sviri, Ḥakīm Tirmidhī.

<sup>60</sup> See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 19 (chapter 73: “*Fa-minhum raḍīya llāh ‘anhum al-malāmiyya* [...] *wa-hum al-ḥukamā’ al-ladhīna waḍa‘ū l-umūr mawāḍi‘ahā wa-aḥkamūhā wa-aqarrū l-asbāb fi amākinihā wa-naḥawhā fi l-mawāḍi‘ al-lati yanbaghī an tunfā ‘anhā wa-lā akhallū bi-shay’ mimmā rattabahu llāh fi khalqihī ‘alā ḥasab mā rattabūhu* [...] *fa-innahu man raḍā’a l-sabab fi l-mawāḍi‘ al-ladhī waḍa‘ahu fihī wāḍi‘uhu wa-huwa l-ḥaqq fa-qad safiḥa wāḍi‘ahu wa-jahila qadrahu wa-man i’tamada ‘alayhi fa-qad ashrafa wa-alḥada wa-ilā arḍ al-ṭabā’a akhlada fa-l-malāmātiyya qarrarat al-asbāb wa-lam ta’tamid ‘alayhā”, = ‘Uthmān Yahyā’s edition xi, 340–1). See also ibid. i, 308–9 (chapter 42, = ‘Uthmān Yahyā’s edition iv, 57–61), iii, 36 (chapter 309, “*Qad a’lamahum allāh bi-l-mawāṭin wa-mā tastaḥiqquhu min al-a’māl wa-l-aḥwāl wa-hum yu’āmilūna kull mawṭin bi-mā yastaḥiqquhu* [...]”; “[...] *Yaḍa’ūna l-asbāb mawāḍi‘ahā wa-ya’rifūna ḥikmatahā* [...]”), 37 (“*Wa-‘lam anna l-ḥakīm min al-‘ibād huwa l-ladhī yunazzilu kull shay’ manzilatahu wa-lā yata’addā bihi martabatahu wa-yu’ī kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu* [...]”); see also Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 110. The expression in the last sentence quoted here from chapter 309 of the *Futūḥāt*, *wa-lā yata’addā bihi martabatahu*, or similar expressions, are quite typical of Ismā‘īlī phraseology; see, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il* iv, 200, 203; al-Sijistānī, *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* 146. See also Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 13 (chapter 73, = ‘Uthmān Yahyā’s edition xi, 305); and Ibn Masarra, *al-I’tibār* 183.*

<sup>61</sup> See also Chittick, *Sufi path* 174–9.

expressions are based on certain *ḥadīths*,<sup>62</sup> the distinct context in which Ibn al-‘Arabī employs them—that is, man’s obligation to acknowledge the proper hierarchal rank of every created being in the universe—is absent from these *ḥadīths*. This context is rather found in Ismā‘īlī literature, above all in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’. The latter explain that Adam was given complete dominion over all existents in nature so that he may benefit from them and “place every one of them in its proper place, giving it the share it deserves (*wa-yaḍa‘a kull shay’ minhā fi mawḍi‘ihi wa-yuwaffiyahu qisṭahu*). In this way, the harmonious order is observed and perfection is attained”. Like Ibn al-‘Arabī, the Ikhwān perceive the “placing of every matter in its proper place” as characteristic of the wise man (*al-ḥakīm*), who in so doing emulates Divine creation and Divine wisdom. For instance, the Ikhwān claim that in contradistinction to various schools in the history of human thought who preferred a certain number to all other numbers in their religious-philosophical system, the Pythagoreans attached importance to all the numbers from one to ten. These numbers correspond to the hierarchal structure of the universe:

The wise Pythagoreans granted everything what it deserves (*fa-a‘ṭaw kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu*), for they said: existents are [organized] according to the nature of the numbers [...] This is the approach of our brothers, may Allāh support them, who maintain that things should be placed in their proper places and organized in their proper hierarchal ranks, in accordance with the natural course and the Divine harmonious order.<sup>63</sup>

The Shi‘i-Isma‘īlī perspective is clearly evident in *Kitāb al-kashf*, where the Sunnis are criticized for “placing the [Divine] names and miraculous

<sup>62</sup> See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* i, 457–8 (Kitāb al-ṣawm / bāb man aqsama ‘alā akhīhi li-yuṭfira fi l-taṭawwu‘, *ḥadīth* 1968), iv, 102 (Kitāb al-adab / bāb ṣun‘ al-ṭa‘ām wa-l-takalluf lil-ḍayf, *ḥadīth* 6139); Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* ii, 203–4 (Musnad al-zubayr b. al-‘Awwām, *ḥadīth* 1434), xiii, 456–7 (Ḥadīth ‘amr b. khārija, *ḥadīths* 17594, 17596–17597); al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān* vi, 241 (on Q 9:75–77); al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* i, 51 (a tradition attributed to Jesus).

<sup>63</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il* iii, 141 (“[...] *Wa-yaḍa‘a kull shay’ minhā fi mawḍi‘ihi wa-yuwaffiyahu qisṭahu min ḥifẓ al-niẓām wa-bulūgh al-tamām*”), 199–200 (“*Fa-ammā l-ḥukamā’ al-fithāghūriyyūna fa-a‘ṭaw kull dhī ḥaqq ḥaqqahu idh qālū inna l-mawjūdāt bi-ḥasab ṭabī‘at al-‘adad [...] wa-hādihā madhhab ikhwāninā ayyadahum allāh wa-bi-ḥasab ra’yihim fi waḍ‘ al-ashyā’ mawāḍi‘ahā wa-tartibihim ḥaqq marātibihā ‘alā l-majrā l-ṭabī‘ī wa-l-niẓām al-ilāhī*”). See also *ibid.* iv, 204, 237, 462; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *al-Jāmi‘a* i, 115–7, 136, 138, 140–1, 143–4, 471–2, 529, ii, 333. Note that according to the Ikhwān, “placing everything in its proper place” also means to keep Divine truths secret, since by disclosing Divine secrets to the uninitiated, one “places them in their improper places” (see Ebstein, *Secrecy* 322–6). This esoteric aspect is based on a tradition which is attributed to Jesus; see the reference to al-Ghazālī above in n. 62.

signs (*āyāt*) in their improper places”—in other words, they do not acknowledge the proper rank of the *imāms* in the human-social hierarchy. Finally, al-Sijistānī states that the *nātiq* and the *asās* (“foundation”, the prophet’s legate) have the intellectual-spiritual ability to “place everything in its proper place”.<sup>64</sup>

### *The Divine Origin of the Friends of God and their Supreme Source*

In the Shi‘i tradition and in Sunni mysticism, the ability of the *awliyā’* to function as mediators between God and man is due to their unique relationship with the Divine world. This relationship is not restricted to the framework of human history, but is rather conceived of as having existed even before creation. Consequently, the friends of God are distinct from the ordinary human beings in their very essence, deriving as they do from the Divine world itself.

This notion is found in various early *ḥadīths* where it is expressed in a rather mythical language. These *ḥadīths* form the basis for both the Shi‘i and Sunni-mystical discussions concerning the Divine roots of the *awliyā’*, though the mythical treatment of this theme is particularly evident in Shi‘i sources. In the Ismā‘īlī tradition, the relationship between the *awliyā’* and the upper, Divine realm was interpreted in a unique way, in accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy. A very similar interpretation, likewise inspired by Neoplatonism, is found in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī.

### *The Mythical Foundation in the Ḥadīth*

In various traditions contained in *Ḥadīth* literature, the Prophet Muḥammad is presented as the terrestrial-historical manifestation of a primordial being, or a being that had already existed before the creation of the world. This being is typically described as a light (*nūr muḥammad*, “the light of Muḥammad”) which was formed by God—according to several traditions, from the Divine light itself—and was then passed on from Adam, via his chosen descendants and the prophets known from

<sup>64</sup> See Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-kashf* 45 (“[...] *Yakhūḍūna fī asmā’ihī wa-āyātihī bi-ghayr ‘ilm fa-yaḍā’ūnahā fī ghayr mawḍi’ihā wa-yanḥarifūna ‘anhā wa-dhālika anna llāh amarahum an yattakhidhū aqwāman awliyā’ wa-a’imma l-ladhīna a’tāhum allāh min al-faḍl [...]*”); al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābī’* 71, 95; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 119. For the hierarchal-cosmological aspect of the two expressions discussed here, see also al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql* 110–1.

sacred human history, to Muḥammad. The passage of the Divine-prophetic light from father to son, and from one generation to the next, is portrayed as a physical process which involves the transmission of the male semen into the female womb.<sup>65</sup> In a number of traditions, Muḥammad, in his existence prior to creation, is depicted as a cosmogonic and cosmological being—a “pearl”, in the mythic wording of several *ḥadīths*—from which all other prophets, or all other existents, were created.<sup>66</sup> In Shi‘i literature, these themes are also ascribed to ‘Alī, his wife Fāṭima and their descendants, the *imāms*. Thus, various Shi‘i *ḥadīths* maintain that these figures were produced from the Divine light itself, directly or through the light of Muḥammad. Prior to creation, Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima and the *imāms* were “spirits” (*arwāḥ*), “shadows” (*aẓilla*) or “silhouettes” of light (*ashbāḥ*). These beings are further linked to the Divine throne (*‘arsh*): they are said to have circumambulated the throne before Adam was created, or to have had their names inscribed on it. Certain traditions state that from the light of Muḥammad and his family, the whole world was created. The Divine light was then transmitted from one prophet to the next and from one *imām* to the following one, either by physical means (semen) or in a spiritual manner (*waṣīyya*, “legacy”).<sup>67</sup> It is noteworthy that in certain Sunni *ḥadīths*, the three “rightly guided” Caliphs who ruled after Muḥammad—Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān—are likewise perceived as having Divine primordial roots. For example, one tradition states that their names are written on the Divine throne. These traditions were most likely formed in response to the Shi‘i speculations on the Divine primordial origins of the *imāms*.<sup>68</sup>

The concept of *nūr muḥammad* seems to have been adopted and developed by the 9th century Sufi master Sahl al-Tustarī. According to the teachings attributed to the latter, the light of Muḥammad was created by God from the Divine light itself, prior to the creation of the world. Muḥammad’s light is not only the cosmogonic root of all existents, but

<sup>65</sup> See Rubin, Pre-Existence 67–104.

<sup>66</sup> See *ibid.* 95, 97–8, 111–7. The motif of *nūr muḥammad* has its roots in diverse pre-Islamic sources—most significantly, in the Zoroastrian, Manichean, and Gnostic traditions; see the discussions and references in Goldziher, *Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente* 324–44; Schaefer, *Islamische Lehre* 204–5, 212–5, 217–8, 239; Rubin, Pre-Existence 98 n. 84, 100 n. 98, 105 n. 5; Rubin, *Nūr Muḥammadī*; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 64–5; Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His messenger* 130 and n. 34; Zoran, *Magic* 54 and n. 164 (in Hebrew).

<sup>67</sup> See Rubin, Pre-Existence 65–7, 98–114; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 29–59; Amir-Moezzi, *La Préexistence*.

<sup>68</sup> See Rubin, Pre-Existence 107, 113.

is also the spiritual source of the prophets and friends of God. Accordingly, the relationship between God and Muḥammad prior to creation is described by al-Tustarī in Sufi terminology: *mukāshafa* (“mystical unveiling”), *mushāhada* (“mystical vision”), *maḥabba* (“love”) and so forth. Another concept in the teachings attributed to al-Tustarī which is closely linked to that of *nūr muḥammad* is *qalb muḥammad* (“the heart of Muḥammad”). “The heart of Muḥammad”, containing all the Divine truths which were revealed to Muḥammad before creation, is the archetype and source of prophecy and friendship with God.<sup>69</sup> The Divine roots of the prophets and the friends of God, and the events that took place before creation, occupy an important place in the teachings attributed to al-Tustarī. Their mythic formulation seems to set al-Tustarī apart from other 9th century Sufi masters.<sup>70</sup> Although al-Tustarī was apparently inspired by the early *ḥadīths* treating of *nūr muḥammad*, his preoccupation with this theme can be understood as a Sunni-mystical response to the Shi‘i speculations on the Divine roots of the *imāms*.

References to the primordial being of Muḥammad are also found in the teachings of both al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and the well-known al-Ḥallāj (executed in 309/922).<sup>71</sup> However, there is no doubt that in the history of Sunni mysticism, the motif of *nūr muḥammad* was developed in the most elaborate and profound way by Ibn al-‘Arabī. In the writings of the latter, the mythic theme of *nūr muḥammad* is reflected in the concept of *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*, “the true essence of Muḥammad”. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* was, in effect, the first being to emerge out of the Divine light; from *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* and by means of it, all other beings were created. *Al-Ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* likewise functions as the spiritual source of all the prophets and the friends of God throughout history, and is thus the root of “the perfect man” (*al-insān al-kāmil*).<sup>72</sup> These notions are clearly derived from the aforementioned

<sup>69</sup> See Böwering, *Mystical vision* 145–65, 231–2, 238–9; Rubin, Pre-Existence 113–4.

<sup>70</sup> See the statements of ‘Umar b. Wāṣil, al-Tustarī’s disciple, quoted in Böwering, *Mystical vision* 148–9. In addition, compare the speculations on *nūr muḥammad* which are attributed to al-Tustarī to al-Ghazālī’s conservative interpretation of the *ḥadīth* “I [Muḥammad] was already a prophet when Adam was still between water and clay [i.e., when the creation of Adam had not yet been completed]” (“*Kuntu nabīyyan wa-ādam bayna l-mā’ wa-l-ṭīn*”), in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 61 n. 3; see also Rubin, *Nūr Muḥammadī*.

<sup>71</sup> See Radtke, *Concept of Wilāya* 491; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 66; Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His messenger* 125–6; Takeshita, *Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory* 145–6.

<sup>72</sup> See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 60–73. Regarding the influence of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s concept of *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* on subsequent generations of Muslim mystics, see Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His messenger* 127, 129, 132–4, 137–8.

*ḥadīths* dealing with *nūr muḥammad*,<sup>73</sup> and perhaps also from the teachings attributed to al-Tustarī. However, other elements in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s treatment of the *awliyā’*’s Divine roots—namely, the connection he draws between the *awliyā’* and God’s names, and the Neoplatonic context of his speculations—point to additional sources of inspiration, that is, the Shi‘i-Isma‘īli tradition.<sup>74</sup>

### *The Awliyā’ and the Names of God*

In early Shi‘i traditions which are found in both Twelver and Isma‘īli sources, the *imāms* are perceived as the names of God. This notion, which was analyzed by Amir-Moezzi,<sup>75</sup> is based on two main principles. According to the first principle, which is shared by Islamic theology in general, God’s hidden essence cannot be attained by man; it is only through His names and attributes, as revealed in the Quran and in the *Ḥadīth*, that man may gain knowledge of God. According to the second principle, which is unique to the Shi‘i worldview, worshipping God can only be accomplished by worshipping the *imāms* (*‘ibāda*)—in other words, by knowing or acknowledging them (*ma‘rifā*), by maintaining devotion to and loyalty towards them (*walāya*), and by loving them (*maḥabba*).<sup>76</sup> Hence the radical correspondence drawn in Shi‘i literature between the *imāms* and God’s names: God can only be known by His names—that is, by means of the *imāms*, through whom the Divine, hidden essence becomes manifested in creation.

Several traditions reflecting this perception are found in *Kitāb al-kashf*. In one tradition, which is attributed to the *imām* Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq and which likewise appears in Twelver sources, it is stated that

Allāh created veils from the light of His face, and gave each one of these a name from among His names. He is ‘the Praised One’ (*al-ḥamd*)—and it is with this name that His Prophet [Muḥammad], peace be upon him, is named; He is ‘the Supreme One’ (*al-‘alī*)—and the leader of the believers is ‘Alī; ‘He has the most beautiful names’ [*wa-lahu l-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*; see, for example, Q 20:8; 59:24]—from here He derived the name of al-Ḥasan and

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, the mythic motif of the cosmogonic pearl in Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 37 (“*Khuṭbat al-kitāb*”, = ‘Uthmān Yaḥyā’s edition i, 48–9).

<sup>74</sup> On the affinity between the Shi‘i-Isma‘īli tradition and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought as regards *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*, see al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila* i, 405–6, 478–85; Nasr, Shi‘ism iii and n. 17.

<sup>75</sup> See the references below in n. 78.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Ibn Bābawayhī, *al-Tawḥīd* 152 (“*Bi-‘ibādatinā ‘ubida llāh wa-lawlā nahnu mā ‘ubida llāh*”); see also Amir-Moezzi, *Remarques* 97 and n. 35.

al-Ḥusayn; and ‘He is the creator (*fāṭir*) of the heavens and the earth’ [see, for example, Q 6:14]—from here he derived the name of Fāṭima. Having created them, He placed them on the right side of the throne.

According to this tradition, the members of the Prophet’s family (*ahl al-bayt*) originate in the Divine world itself: they are created from the very light of God’s face; they are directly linked to God’s names, thus forming a veil between the Divine essence and creation; and they are situated on the right side of God’s throne. The tradition quoted here goes on to explain that the names which God had revealed to Adam, and which granted him superiority over the angels (see Q 2:30–34), are none other than God’s names, in other words, the names of the *imāms*. This is the reason why Iblīs, who refused to bow down before Adam, is perceived as the prototype for the Shi’a’s enemies throughout history: these enemies deny the Divine origin of the *imāms* and their supreme status.<sup>77</sup> Another tradition in *Kitāb al-kashf* states that every messenger and *imām*, in every generation, is

the name of Allāh, by means of which Allāh is invoked in that particular generation. Allāh, powerful and mighty is He, said: ‘Allāh has the most beautiful names, so invoke Him by means of them [Q 7:180]’, that is to say, Allāh has the *imāms*, who guide [men] towards the right path, and the messengers whom He has chosen. Therefore, seek His proximity by obeying them [...] For they are His gates and the means by which His created beings [reach] Him.

The *nuṭaqā’* and the *imāms* are thus a veil which, on the one hand, stands between the Divine essence and creation, and, on the other, functions as a gate and a means of access to God. The friends of God are the mediators *par excellence* between God and man—not only in terms of their religious mission in the framework of human history, but also in terms of their ontological nature, a human-Divine nature which bridges the gap between the Creator and the created.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Ja’far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 35 (“*Wa-‘an abī ‘bdillāh ‘alayhi l-salām annahu qāla inna llāh khalaqa ḥujuban min nūr wajhihi wa-sammā kull wāhid minhum isman min asmā’ihi fa-huwa l-ḥamd musammā bihi nabīyyuhu ‘alayhi l-salām wa-huwa l-‘alī wa-amīr al-mu‘minīna ‘alī wa-lahu l-asmā’ al-ḥusnā shtaqqā minhā sma al-ḥasan wa-l-ḥusayn wa-huwa fāṭir al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ ishtaqqā minhā sma fāṭima fa-lammā khalaqahum qāmāhum ‘an yamīn al-‘arsh*”), 36–37.

<sup>78</sup> Ja’far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 108 (“[...] *Wa-taqaddasat asmā’uhu [...] bayān qawlihi fi l-asmā’ annahum al-hudāt ilayhi wa-l-dalāla ‘alayhi min al-nuṭaqā’ wa-l-‘imma ‘alayhim al-salām*”), 109 (“*Fa-kull qā’im fi ‘asrihi huwa smu llāh al-ladhī yud‘ā bihi fi dhālika l-‘aṣr kamā qāla llāh ‘azza wa-jalla wa-li-llāh al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā fa-d’ūhu bihā ya’nī li-llāh*”).

In a certain sense, God needs His friends in order to reveal Himself to the created beings. “Were it not for Allāh”, Ja‘far al-Šādiq is reported to have said, “we would not have been known; and were it not for us [the *imāms*], Allāh would not have been known”.<sup>79</sup> This idea brings to mind Ibn al-‘Arabī’s notion of the reciprocal relationship between God and creation and especially between God and the perfect man: on the one hand, the universe and the perfect man are created by God, and therefore, their existence is dependent upon Him; on the other hand, God needs creation and the perfect man in order to be known, in order to reveal Himself. This mutual dependence is best expressed in the tradition of “the hidden treasure” (*kanz*), of which Ibn al-‘Arabī is particularly fond. In this *ḥadīth*, God states that

I was a hidden and unknown treasure, yet I wished to be known. So I created the created beings: I made myself known to them, and they came to know me.<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, as in the Shi‘i-Isma‘īlī tradition, in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought too the friends of God correspond to His names; more precisely, it is by means of God’s friends and in their very beings that the Divine names and attributes are manifested. This is particularly true of the perfect man, who, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, manifests all of God’s names and attributes in a perfect and well-balanced manner. Like the Shi‘i *imām*, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s perfect man functions as a veil which separates the Divine essence from creation, and, at the same time, mediates between the two. The entity of the perfect man, in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own words,

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*al-a‘imma l-hudāt wa-l-rusul al-ladhīna khtārahum wa-taqarrabū ilayhi bi-ṭā‘atihim wa-ṭlubū marḍātaḥu wa-mā ‘indahu bihim fa-hum abwābuhu wa-asbāb khalqihī ilayhi”*), 118, 149–50; see also Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarā’ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqa’* 22–3; al-Qāḍī l-Nu‘mān, *al-Mudhhiba* 28–38; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 5, 25, 173, 205–10, 220–1; al-Rāzī, *al-Iṣlāḥ* 282; al-Daylamī, *Qawā’id ‘aqa’id āl Muḥammad* 11, 55; Madelung, Fatimids 52. For similar traditions and themes in Twelver sources, see Rubin, Pre-Existence 99, 107, 113 and n. 9; Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 89–90, 94–8, 105–8; Amir-Moezzi, La Préexistence 111–2, 126–7; Amir-Moezzi, Notes 730–2; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide* 30–1, 44–6; Kohlberg, Some Shi‘i views 55. On Fāṭima in the context dealt with here, see also Halm, *Kosmologie* 151. On God’s names as a veil which hides His essence and, at the same time, serves as the only means of attaining knowledge of the Divine, see also Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 7, 10–11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibn Bābawayhi, *al-Tawḥīd* 290 (“*Lawlā llāh mā ‘urifnā wa-lawlā naḥnu mā ‘urifa llāh*”); see also Amir-Moezzi, Remarques 97 n. 33.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 229 (chapter 146: “*Kuntu kanzan lam u‘raf fa-aḥbabbtu an u‘rafa fa-khalaqtu l-khalq wa-ta‘arraftu ilayhim fa-‘arafūni*”); see also Chittick, *Sufi path* 391 n. 14.

was the aim of Allāh [in creating] the world. He is the true vicegerent, he is the locus in which the Divine names are manifested and he comprises within himself the true essences of the whole world [...]

Within this noble compendium [of the macrocosm], that is, within the perfect man, [God] has brought into existence all the Divine names as well as the true essences of that which is found outside of him in the big world [...]<sup>81</sup>

These notions of Ibn al-ʿArabī are quite unique and radical in comparison with other mystical-Sufi teachings that were developed prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's time. Although in Sufi thought the mystic is indeed required to emulate the attributes of God (*al-takhalluq bi-akhlāq allāh*), nevertheless, this is mostly an ethical-spiritual obligation, not an ontological statement concerning the essential nature of God's friends; the latter are not perceived as an indispensable means for the Divine self-manifestation in creation.<sup>82</sup>

In contradistinction to the Shi'i-Isma'īlī perception, Ibn al-ʿArabī views the perfect man in general—regardless of his physical genealogy—as an ontological embodiment of God's names. Ibn al-ʿArabī also sees in the created universe as a whole a locus of manifestation for the Divine names.<sup>83</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī's outlook is thus both universal (all of creation) and humanistic (the perfect man in general).<sup>84</sup> The Shi'i-Isma'īlī worldview, on the other hand, is less universal and more sectarian: the *imāms* alone correspond to God's names, and, consequently, only their followers, the Shi'i believers, enjoy a special relationship with the Divine world.

However, a universal-humanistic approach, similar to that of Ibn al-ʿArabī, can be detected in the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. To be sure, the Ikhwān seem to have espoused the Shi'i-Isma'īlī idea of a correspondence between the Divine names and the friends of God. This idea is interpreted

<sup>81</sup> See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 176 (chapter 7, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 252: "[...] 'Alimnā qat'an anna l-insān huwa l-ʿayn al-maqṣūda li-llāh min al-ʿalam wa-annahu l-khalīfa ḥaqqan wa-annahu maḥall zuhūr al-asmā' al-ilāhiyya wa-huwa l-jāmī' li-ḥaqā'iq al-ʿalam kullīhi [...]"). Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 199 ("Fa-awjada fī ḥādḥā l-mukhtaṣar al-sharīf al-ladhī huwa l-insān al-kāmil jamī' al-asmā' al-ilāhiyya wa-ḥaqā'iq mā kharaja 'anhu fī l-ʿalam al-kabīr al-munfaṣil [...]"). See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, 'Anqā' mughrib 41 ("[...] Fa-anta ṣifātī fihim wa-asmā'ī [...]"). Chittick, *Sufi path* 27–30, 366–72, 375–6; Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 20–3, 28–9, 36–7, 146–9. On the perfect man as a veil, see *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 348 (chapter 178); Chittick, *Sufi path* 329.

<sup>82</sup> Compare, for instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī's view in this context with that of al-Ghazālī in Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabī's theory* 31–9, 170–1.

<sup>83</sup> See Chittick, *Sufi path* 8–11, 16, 33–58, 94–6; Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 32–3; Elmore, Four texts.

<sup>84</sup> On the terms 'universal' and 'humanistic' see below chapter 4, especially pp. 179–88.

by the Ikhwān in the framework of Neoplatonic philosophy. According to the Ikhwān, “the complete words and the great names” (*kalimāt al-tamām wa-l-asmā’ al-‘izām*) were inscribed by the cosmic pen (*qalam*), i.e., the universal intellect, on the cosmic tablet (*lawḥ*), i.e., the universal soul. These “great names” are the names which Allāh taught to Adam, and “the complete words” are those by means of which Adam sought God’s forgiveness after he had sinned (see Q 2:37).<sup>85</sup> In a similar vein, the Ikhwān state that the names of “the rational/speaking figures” (*al-ashkhāṣ al-nāṭiqā*), who are responsible for enunciating the Divine law (*nāmūs*), are written on “the preserved tablet” (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) in seven lines—a clear allusion to the seven *nuṭaqā’*, “the speaker prophets” known from the Ismā’īlī tradition. The Ikhwān explain that these are “the great names” that God had taught to Adam and the angels, the names through which Adam’s repentance was accepted. Furthermore, in terms of their ontological roots, these figures function as the source of creation—in the words of the Ikhwān, “these seven inscribed [names] contain the whole of creation”—and, consequently, they guarantee the continuing existence of all created beings.<sup>86</sup> Hence, the mythic Shi’i-Ismā’īlī idea, according to which the friends of God are but a terrestrial-historical manifestation of a Divine cosmogonic-cosmological being, is interpreted by the Ikhwān in a Neoplatonic-philosophical manner: the Divine roots of God’s friends are located within the upper worlds of the universal intellect and soul.

As mentioned above, in the Epistles of the Ikhwān one may also identify a more universal approach, one which focuses on the universe at large

<sup>85</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *al-Jāmi’ā* i, 25 (“[*Fa-‘arshuhu huwa*] *l-qalam al-jārī bi-amrihi fa-khaṭṭa fī l-lawḥ al-karīm suṭūr al-mashī’a wa-aḥruf al-irāda wa-qawl al-ḥaqq wa-wa’d al-ṣidq wa-kalimāt al-tamām wa-l-asmā’ al-‘izām fa-talaqqā ādam min rabbihi kalimāt fa-tāba ‘alayhi wa-‘allamahu l-asmā’ kullahā*”); the addition in the square brackets is based on Tāmīr’s edition v, 12); see also *ibid.* 537–8 (“[. . .] *Al-kalimāt al-latī talaqqahā ādam yaqūlūna innahā kānat maktūba bi-nūr al-qudra fī lawḥ al-‘arsh al-karīm wa-innahu ulhima qirā’atahā wa-l-tawassul ilā rabbihi bihā wa-innahu sa’ala l-iqāla ba’dā l-tawba [. . .]*”). For the correspondence between God’s names and the friends of God, see also *ibid.* 651 (“*Waminhum ṭā’ifa qad alḥadat fī asmā’ allāh wa-‘adalat ‘an awliyā’ihī*”); for the identification of “the complete words” with God’s friends, see *ibid.* 118. On Adam see above n. 52. Regarding the writing of the names on the tablet, cf. Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 37 (“*Khuṭbat al-kitāb*”, = ‘Uthmān Yaḥyā’s edition i, 48: “[. . .] *Fa-kāna awwal ism katabahu dhālika l-qalam al-asmā dūna ghayrihi min al-asmā’ innī urīdu an akhluqa min ajlika yā muḥammad al-‘alam al-ladhī huwa mulkuka [. . .]*”); and see also above pp. 51 n. 66, 57 n. 90.

<sup>86</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *al-Jāmi’ā* ii, 312–3, 319–21 (see *ibid.* 321: “[. . .] *Al-asmā’ al-‘izām al-latī talaqqahā ādam wa-tawassala bihā wa-kānat al-wasīla baynahu wa-bayna llāh subḥānahu fī l-tawba ‘alayhi wa-hādhihi l-sab’a l-maṣūra ḥawīya li-jamī’ al-khilqa wa-bi-ḥasab amākinihā fī suṭūrihā yakūnu bad’uhā wa-zuhūruhā [. . .]*”), 324–5.

rather than on the figures of the prophets and their heirs. In a discussion of theirs concerning the Divine attributes (*ṣifāt*), the Ikhwān emphasize the close links between all created beings and the attributes of God: “these attributes”, the Ikhwān explain,

are found among His existents. They are inscribed on His earth and in His heavens; they are His miraculous signs that are written ‘in the horizons and in the souls’ [see Q 41:53].<sup>87</sup>

Since the universal intellect was created by God Himself, through His command and word (*amr Allāh, kalima*), it follows that the intellect and all the existents emanating from it have their share in the Divine attributes: they all have life (*ḥayāt*), power or ability (*qudra*), knowledge (*‘ilm*) and so forth. Naturally, the correspondence between the attributes of the created beings and those of God is relative and limited. Accordingly, the Ikhwān stress that God has attributes that are unique to Him, such as His eternal existence without beginning (*qadīm azalī*) or His act of creation *ex nihilo* (*mubdi*). In addition, the attributes of the created beings are partial (*juz’iyya*) and include opposing qualities—for instance, life and death, knowledge and ignorance, power and inability. God, in contradistinction, is beyond these opposites. Finally, the created beings differ from one another in respect of their attributes—the Prophet’s knowledge, to give one example, is obviously not the same as that of the common man—whereas God’s attributes are unqualified and absolute. Nevertheless, the Ikhwān clearly maintain that all created beings share, to some extent, the Divine attributes.<sup>88</sup>

### *The Neoplatonic Context*

In the Ismā‘īlī tradition, the issue dealt with here, that is, the Divine origin of the friends of God, was also given a more philosophical interpretation, in the framework of Neoplatonic cosmology. According to Ismā‘īlī Neoplatonism, the worlds of the universal intellect and soul are the

<sup>87</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il* iv, 210 (“[...] *Wa-lahu l-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* [...] *fa-hādhihi l-ṣifāt al-muḥayyira li-dhawī l-albāb wa-l-uqūl fī ma’rifat al-bārī minhā subḥānahu bi-annahu lā yashrakuhu fihā aḥad siwāhu wa-fi’lihi l-ladhī fa’alahu bi-dhātihī wa-awjadahu bi-kalimātihī mawjūda fī mawjūdātihī mastūra fī arḍihī wa-samawātihī wa-hiya āyātuhu l-maktūba fī l-āfāq wa-l-anfus* [...]”). On the concept of “the miraculous signs”, see below pp. 212–29.

<sup>88</sup> See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il* iv, 206–10.

supreme source of the prophets and their heirs, functioning as a channel through which Divine powers and knowledge reach the religious leaders of mankind. Similarly, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, the universal intellect is the spiritual source of the friends of God: the aforementioned *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* (see above) is explicitly identified by Ibn al-‘Arabī with the universal intellect.<sup>89</sup> It is noteworthy that in addition to the various traditions which view Muḥammad’s light as the first being created by God, there are other *ḥadīths* which state that the first created entity was the [human] intellect (‘*aql*) or the cosmic pen (*qalam*).<sup>90</sup> These traditions presumably inspired Ibn al-‘Arabī to identify his *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya* with the Neoplatonic universal intellect as well as with the Quranic pen. However, one should bear in mind that the identification of the universal intellect with the cosmic pen appears already in Ismā‘īlī literature.<sup>91</sup>

The affinity between the Ismā‘īlī Neoplatonists and Ibn al-‘Arabī in the context referred to here is particularly evident in their discussions of the relationship between the universal intellect and the highest-ranking friend of God—the *nāṭiq* (“speaker prophet”) in the Ismā‘īlī tradition, and the *qutb* (“pole”) in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. According to the Ismā‘īlī Neoplatonic authors, the *nāṭiq* corresponds to the universal intellect, which

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 140 (chapter 3, = ‘Uthmān Yahyā’s edition ii, 97: “*Wa-kadhālika l-maḥfūl al-ibdā’ī l-ladhī huwa l-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya ‘indanā wa-l-‘aql al-awwal ‘inda ghayrinā wa-huwa l-qalam al-‘alā l-ladhī abda’ahu llāh ta’ālā min ghayr shay’* [...]”), 169 (chapter 6, = ‘Uthmān Yahyā’s edition ii, 227: “[...] *Ḥaqīqat muḥammad ṣallā llāh ‘alayhi wa-sallama l-musammāt bi-l-‘aql* [...]”), iii, 430 (chapter 371, *faṣl* 9: “[...] *Al-qalam al-ilāhī* [...] *wa-huwa l-‘aql al-awwal* [...] *wa-huwa l-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya wa-l-ḥaq al-makhlūq bihi wa-l-‘adl ‘inda ahl al-laṭā’if wa-l-ishārāt wa-huwa l-rūḥ al-qudusī l-kull ‘inda ahl al-kushūf wa-l-talwīḥāt*”); see also Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 71, 74, 90, 186; Lory, *La Science* 117, 133. On the universal intellect (or *al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*) as *al-rūḥ al-qudusī l-kull* or *al-rūḥ al-kullī* (“the universal holy spirit” or “the universal spirit”), see also Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 389 (chapter 198: “*Kadhālika naqūlu fi l-‘aql al-awwal ‘aqlan li-ma’nan yukhālifu l-ma’nā l-ladhī li-ajlihi nusammūhi qalaman yukhālifu l-ma’nā l-ladhī li-ajlihi nusammūhi rūḥan yukhālifu l-ma’nā l-ladhī li-ajlihi nusammūhi qalban*”); Ibn al-‘Arabī, ‘*Anqā’ muḥḥrib* 40; Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 75 and n. 3; Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 271–3. For the identification of the universal intellect with *rūḥ* or *rūḥ al-qudus* in Ismā‘īlī literature, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il* iii, 238; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *al-Jāmi‘a* ii, 9, 139; Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 117; Makārim, ‘*Al-amr al-ilāhī*’, 9. Note that the term *al-‘aql al-awwal* (“the first intellect”), which Ibn al-‘Arabī often employs in order to signify the universal intellect, likewise appears in the writings of the Ikhwān with reference to the universal intellect; see *al-Jāmi‘a* i, 273, ii, 5, 139.

<sup>90</sup> See the discussions and references in Goldziher, *Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente* 318–24; Rubin, *Pre-Existence* 115–6 and n. 23; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints* 63 n. 13, 68 n. 28; Wensinck, *Muslim creed*, index, s.v. “Pen”.

<sup>91</sup> See above p. 50 n. 64.

functions as the *nāṭiq*'s supreme spiritual source. Al-Sijistānī, for instance, declares that the *nāṭiq* is the “deputy” or “vicegerent” (*khalīfā*) of the universal intellect in the physical-corporeal world.<sup>92</sup> At times, the *asās* or *waṣī* (the “foundation” or “legatee” of the *nāṭiq*) and the *imāms* are said to correspond to the universal soul (or to the second intellect, according to al-Kirmānī's philosophical system). The connection between the universal intellect and the *nāṭiq* is signified in Ismā'īlī literature by the term *ta'yīd* (“support”)<sup>93</sup> and by the derivatives of the Arabic root m.d.d. *Mādda* (plural: *mawādd*) denotes “continuous increase” and “[spiritual] substance”; *imdād* (“increasing”, “succoring”, “reinforcing”) is the active bestowal of this *mādda*, while *istimdād* (“requesting succor”; “drawing”, “deriving”) is the passive reception of it.<sup>94</sup> A typical example of the Ismā'īlī use of these terms is found in Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman's *Sarā'ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqā'* (“The Mysteries and Secrets of the Speaker-Prophets”). In this work, it is explained that in contradistinction to the common believers and the ordinary *da'wa* members who are in constant need of human guides (= the prophets and their heirs),

none of the *nuṭaqā'*, may Allāh's prayers and blessings be upon them, have ever received the *ta'yīd* from any human form, nor did the *mawādd* become attached to them by means of any physical being; they did not have any spiritual father or mother. The *ta'yīd* from the universal intellect and soul only became attached to them through the three [cosmic-angelic] means mentioned in the book [the Quran], the three spiritual boundaries [...] that is, through *al-Jadd*, *al-Faṭḥ* and *al-Khayāl*, who are named Gabriel, Michael and Isrāfil.<sup>95</sup>

According to this and other, similar passages, Divine powers and knowledge continuously flow throughout the universe. These spiritual powers

<sup>92</sup> See the reference to Walker below in n. 96.

<sup>93</sup> See above pp. 64–72.

<sup>94</sup> On *imdād* see also above p. 49 n. 59.

<sup>95</sup> See Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarā'ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqā'* 22–6 (ibid. 24: “*Wa-inna jami' al-nuṭaqā' ṣallā llāh 'alayhim wa-sallama lam ya'khdhū l-ta'yīd min šūra bashariyya wa-lā ttaṣalat bihim al-mawādd min al-khilqa l-jasadāniyya wa-lā kāna lahum ab wa-lā umm fi l-hadd al-rūḥānī wa-innamā sabab ittiṣal al-ta'yīd bihim min al-'aql wa-l-naṣṣ bi-l-wasā'it al-thalātha l-madhkūra fi l-kitāb wa-hum al-ḥudūd al-thalātha l-madhkūra fi l-kitāb wa-hum al-ḥudūd al-rūḥāniyya [...] wa-hum al-jadd wa-l-faṭḥ wa-l-khayāl al-musammawna bi-isrāfil wa-mikā'il wa-jibrā'il*”). On *al-Jadd*, *al-Faṭḥ* and *al-Khayāl*, which are situated beneath the universal soul, see Halm, *Kosmologie* 67–74, 133–5; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 116–22. On *Sarā'ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqā'* (comprising, in fact, of two separate works: *Sarā'ir al-nuṭaqā'* and *asrār al-nuṭaqā'*), see Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 122.

and knowledge emanate from the Divine world itself—more precisely, from God’s command (*amr*) and creative word (*kalima*)—and, via the universal intellect and soul, as well as the three cosmic-angelic beings situated below them (*al-Jadd*, *al-Faṭḥ* and *al-Khayāl*), they reach the *nāṭiq* in the sub-lunar world. The *nāṭiq* transfers these powers and knowledge to his legatee and to the *imāms* that follow; from the *imāms*, they pass down to the members of the Ismā’īlī *da’wa*, and from the latter they are transmitted to the common believers. Each link in this universal chain, or rather each level in this cosmic hierarchy, receives the Divine flow from the rank situated above it (*istimdād*) and transmits it to the rank located below it (*imdād*). Both the universal intellect and the *nāṭiq* play a key role in this cosmic process: the Divine flow depends on them both—that is, on the universal intellect in the spiritual world, and on the *nāṭiq* in the physical-corporeal one.<sup>96</sup>

In the Epistles of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, the same relationship is also envisaged between the universal intellect and man in general, that is, the perfect man who fully realizes his “human form” (*ṣūrat al-insān*) and his “rational/speaking soul” (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqā*). The human rational/speaking soul forms a part of the universal soul and of the universal intellect too (*naḥs juz’iyya*, *‘aql juz’ī*). According to the Ikhwān, man’s supreme status and his central role in creation as God’s vicegerent on earth (*khalīfa*) derive from his special relationship with the universal intellect.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>96</sup> On the relationship between the universal intellect and *nāṭiq*, and for various examples of the use of the root m.d.d. and its derivatives in Ismā’īlī literature, see al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābī’* 8–15, 57, 72, 75, 91, 94; al-Sijistānī, *al-Iftikhār* 77, 79, 152, 207, 209, 214; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyād* 60, 70–1, 82–3, 89–90, 95, 162; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql* 64–8, 79, 94, 100, 102, 112, 123–4, 186, 188–9, 362, 378; al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-walad* 5, 55, 57–8, 69, 157–8, 176, 181, 228, 230, 269, 279, 290; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il* i, 146–7, 312, iii, 185–6, 189–90, 296–7, iv, 136, 200–1, 209, 223–5, 330, 396; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *al-Jāmi’a* i, 528–37, 540–2, 625, 635–6, 658, ii, 5, 140, 148; Ja’far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Kashf* 4, 55, 61, 165; al-Qāḍī l-Nu’mān, *al-Mudhhiba* 28, 34, 49–50, 52–6, 60, 84; Stern, Earliest cosmological doctrines 10, 14–6; Halm, *Kosmologie* 215; al-Daylamī, *Qawā’id ‘aqā’id āl Muḥammad* 68; Lewis, An Ismaili interpretation 699, 702; see also Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 117 and n. 31; Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā’: l’Imām et la société* 134–7; Pines, Shī’ite terms 176 n. 84; Pines, *La Longue récession* 12 n. 5; De Smet, *Le Verbe-impératif* 404 n. 51, 405 n. 53; De Smet, *Les Épîtres* 59–60.

<sup>97</sup> For the correspondence between “the human form” and the universal intellect, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il* iii, 144–5. For the correspondence between “the rational/speaking soul” and the universal intellect, and for the expressions *naḥs juz’iyya* and *‘aql juz’ī*, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *al-Jāmi’a* ii, 12–3. Elsewhere, man’s individual intellect is said to correspond to the universal intellect, whereas his soul is said to correspond to the universal soul; see *ibid.* 33–4. On the *nāṭiq* and his relationship with the universal intellect, see *ibid.* 248–9.

A similar humanistic approach is reflected in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, who maintains that the *quṭb* corresponds to the universal intellect; the latter serves as the spiritual source from which the pole draws his *mādda*.<sup>98</sup> The *quṭb*, who does not necessarily belong to the Prophet's family (at least not in the physical-biological sense), represents the perfect man in general:

He [man] corresponds to the first intellect and is connected to it [...] creation reached the human genus, at which point the circle was completed. Man became attached to the [first] intellect, in the same manner as the end of the circle is attached to its beginning; and so, a circle ensued.

The existence of the world depends upon this "human form", upon God's vicegerent on earth:

[Allāh], glory be to Him, has established this human form with a straight movement [= in an upright position], like the form of a tent's pole [*ʿamad*], for the sake of this sky's dome. [Allāh], glory be to Him, 'holds the sky lest it fall' [see Q 35:41] because of him [man]. Hence we have defined man as a [tent's] pole [...].<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 139 (the beginning of chapter 3, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 91), 204–5 (chapter 14), ii, 661–2 (chapter 295: "[...] *Al-quṭb al-ladhī huwa l-imām [...] yakūnu māddatuhu min al-ʿaql al-awwal*"); Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Mabādīʾ* 52 ("[...] *Ka-ḥaqīqat muḥammad ṣallā llāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama l-qāʾima bi-l-amr min warāʾ al-ghayb al-ladhī minhā māddat al-khulafāʾ wa-l-aʾimma wa-l-aqṭāb wa-l-qāʾimīna bi-amr allāh taʾālā*"). On the universal intellect as the source of *imdād*, see also *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 415 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 11); cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 122. See also *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 279 (towards the end of chapter 167), where it is said that the universal intellect is the source of "the knowledge pertaining to the friendship with God" (*ʿilm al-walāya*). On the similarities between Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought and the Ismāʿīlī tradition in the context dealt with here, see also Affifi, *Mystical philosophy* 74–5, 88–90, 188; de Jong, *Al-Ḳuṭb* 544; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 253.

<sup>99</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 176 (chapter 7, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 251-2: "[...] *Fa-huwa naẓīr al-ʿaql al-awwal wa-bihi rtabaṭa [...] wa-ntahā l-khalq ilā l-jīns al-insānī fa-kamulat al-dāʾira wa-tṭaʿala l-insān bi-l-ʿaql kamā yattaṣilu ākhir al-dāʾira bi-awwalihā fa-kānat dāʾira [...]*"; "*Wa-aqāma subḥānahu ḥādhihi l-ṣūra l-insānīyya bi-l-ḥaraka l-mustaqīma šurat al-ʿamad al-ladhī lil-khayma fa-jaʿalahu li-qubbat ḥādhihi l-samawāt fa-huwa subḥānahu yumsikuhā an tazūla bi-sababihi fa-ʿabbarnā ʿanhu bi-l-ʿamad [...]*"; see also *ibid.* 170 (chapter 6, = ʿUthmān Yaḥyā's edition ii, 231: "*Fa-l-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya [...] naẓīrūhā min al-insān al-laṭīfa wa-l-rūḥ al-quḍusī*"); and Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 211. For a very similar Ikhwānīan use of the term *naẓīr* ("corresponds" in the translation above), see *al-Jāmiʿa* ii, 33–4. Note that in several Neoplatonic Ismāʿīlī sources, the various worlds are likewise described as circles; see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iv, 198–249; Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* ii, 135–85; al-Sijistānī, *al-Yanābīʾ* 59 ("[...] *Wa-katabnā fī ḥādhihi l-dāʾira ʿinda nuqṭat al-markaz al-ʿaql fī muqābalat al-insān [...]*").

According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, the Divine flow, which he signifies by the use of the terms *imdād-istimdād*, also exists among other ranks of the *awliyā’* hierarchy, and influences the spiritual and physical wellbeing of human beings in general.<sup>100</sup> The link between *imdād* and *ta’yīd* likewise appears in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings.<sup>101</sup>

Finally, it is significant that similar conceptions are also reflected in the works of Ibn Masarra. The latter maintains that the rational/speaking soul draws (*tastamiddu*, from *istimdād*) its spiritual-intellectual power from the light of the intellect, i.e., from the individual human intellect and, by implication, from the universal intellect.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Tadbīrāt* 112; Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* i, 105 (chapter 2, *faṣl* 1, = ‘Uthmān Yahyā’s edition i, 277–81), 151–2 (chapter 5, the “waṣl” at the beginning of the chapter, = ‘Uthmān Yahyā’s edition ii, 144–5), 204–5 (chapter 14), 208 (chapter 15, = ii, 377), ii, 15 (chapter 73, “rijāl al-hayba wa-l-jalāl”, = xi, 316), 16 (“rijāl al-imdād al-ilāhī wa-l-kawnī”, = xi, 322), 24, 415 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 11), 465 (chapter 198, *faṣl* 50); Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 47, 65–6, 163; Ibn al-‘Arabī, ‘*Anqā’ mughrib* 42–3, 48, 51, 57–9; Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-mīm* 14–5.

<sup>101</sup> See above p. 71 n. 138.

<sup>102</sup> See Ibn Masarra, *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* 142–3 (“[...] *Fa-hādhihi l-naḥs al-nāṭiqa l-latī fi l-insān tastamiddu min nūr al-‘aql* [...]”).