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Realization of 'Self' (*anā*) in Islamic Mysticism 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (576/1181–632/1235)

A. Islamic Mysticism: a Mysticism of Self-realization?

"Pass by the cemetery at the foot of al-ʿĀriḍ,
Say: Peace upon you, Ibn al-Fāriḍ!
You have shown in your 'Order of the Way' marvels
and revealed a deep, well-guarded mystery.
You have drunk from the cup of love and friendship,
and quaffed from a bounteous, unlimited Ocean"¹.

These beautiful verses are read on the shrine (*darīʿ*) of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the well-known Egyptian Sufi poet (576–632/1181–1235). His tomb is located at the foot of al-Muqaṭṭam, a mountain east of Cairo, and it is still to the present day an attractive place for his devotees, particularly on his feast (*mawlid*). These verses point to a mystery that surrounded Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi experience during his lifetime, a mystery that still lingers on in the verses of his poems². What is that 'well-guarded mystery'? That 'cup of love and friendship'? That 'bounteous and unlimited Ocean' in which the Sufi poet has found the answer to his deepest need and thirst?

Finding an answer to such questioning was the starting point of my research

¹ *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, ed. by 'Abd al-Ḥālīq Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Ḥālīq, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1984, 25.

² There are many editions of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *dīwān*. We shall refer to the last critical edition edited by 'Abd al-Ḥālīq Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Ḥālīq, *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1984. It is worthwhile to note that all editions of the *dīwān* are based on manuscripts depending on the recension of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's grandson, 'Alī *sibt* Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d.735/1335), except for a manuscript found by A.J. Arberry in the Chester Beatty Collection. This manuscript is older than 'Alī *sibt* Ibn al-Fāriḍ's recension; it was copied by 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Maḥfūz al-'Alawī in 691/1292, and it has been studied and edited by A.J. Arberry himself in *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, edited in transcription, London, E. Walker, 1952. The Chester Beatty manuscript differs from the other manuscripts in many instances, e.g. the number of the poems listed in it is fourteen instead of the traditional twenty-four given by 'Alī *sibt* Ibn al-Fāriḍ's recension. For the description of his shrine and feast (*mawlid*) see Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Un mawlid particulier", in *Egypte/Monde Arabe*, CEDEJ, Le Caire, 14 (2e trimestre, 1993), 79–102.

on Ibn al-Fāriḍ who represents one of the deepest and most puzzling experiences in Islamic Mysticism or Sufism.

As any other historical phenomenon, Sufism too can be studied according either to its chronological development or to its inner thematical quest. The first approach gives us a rather exterior image of the phenomenon, while the second approach gives us an understanding of its inner structure. The two approaches, however, must not be seen as contradictory, but complementary. In fact, one could say that the inner structure of Sufism has been basically displayed in its historical development, though not completely, perhaps.

Three themes in particular seem to have become very central in Sufi speculation: the realization of the unity of God (*tawḥīd*), the particular knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*), the love of God (*ḥubb*).

Among them, it is the theme of 'realization of the unity of God' (*tawḥīd*) that appears to be the most central one in Sufi speculation and experience. It seems to us that Sufis strive above all at the full realization of the fundamental dogma of Islam: "There is no god but Allāh (*Lā ilāha illā allāh*)". Such a quest leads Sufis to the realization that everything outside God is ephemeral and must pass away (*fanā'*), that only God is permanent, only in him there is the true, permanent existence (*baqā'*).

But, connected with the theme of 'realization of the unity of God' (*tawḥīd*), another theme becomes all the more prominent in Sufi speculation: the realization of self (I, *anā*) or the realization of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Only in such a degree of perfection the true *tawḥīd*, that is the profession of the unity of God in full awareness, can be realized. On the basis of such new awareness, the quest of every Sufi becomes all the more the quest of the state of the 'Perfect Man'.

It is in the framework of the idea of the 'Perfect Man' that the mystical experience of 'Umar b. al-Fāriḍ must be understood. Therefore, such an idea has to be highlighted in its historical development and mystical dimensions.

B. The Realization of the "Perfect Man" in Sufism.

1. Non-Islamic Sources of the Idea of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*).

While discussions over the Islamic origin and sources of many topics of Sufism still continue, one finds a quite large consensus on the foreign influences in the formation and development of the idea of the 'Perfect Man' in Islam³.

³ For a basic bibliography on the topic of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) see: T.J. Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, (1st ed. Groningen-Holland 1903), Engl. transl., London, Luzac, 1961, 1-73; I. Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente in Ḥādīṭ" in *Gesammelte Schriften* Olms, Hildsheim, 1970, V 107-134 (excerptum from *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* XXII (1908), 317-344; R.A. Nicholson, "The Perfect Man" in *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, 77-148; id., "*al-Insān al-Kāmil*" in *EP* (fr.) 542-543

It is difficult to give a clear definition of such a complex concept as that of "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Nicholson gives two general descriptions of it:

"This expression [*al-insān al-kāmil*], which means literally 'The Perfect Man', is used by Muḥammadan mystics to denote the highest type of humanity, i.e. the theosophist who has realized his essential oneness with God"⁴.

and again:

"...perhaps we may describe the Perfect Man as a man who has fully realized his essential oneness with the Divine Being in whose likeness is made"⁵.

The idea of the 'Perfect Man' is not new in the history of human thought; on the contrary it is found, under different names and images, in almost all religions and cultures⁶. Such speculations have been quite developed in many religions of the Middle East since the remotest antiquity: one finds it in the religions of Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran and Greece. This idea stands in clear relation with the idea of the *Logos* (the original Divine word which is the source and the foundation of the cosmic order) and the idea of the man as *microcosm* (that is 'human being' thought of as the image of the Divinity and the compendium of all cosmic qualities).

Moreover, one could say that such types of speculations may be regarded as the expression of a "universal religious archetype", present in almost all human cultures since their first age. Such an archetypal idea may be understood as the mythological expression (which does not mean 'illusory') of a fundamental experience of the human being in his relationship and clash with the world around him. From such a primal experience it seems that the human being has derived and impressed in his deep memory a basic representation of himself in his relations to the other beings around him. Nicholson comments on this idea saying:

and *SEI* 170-171; L. Massignon, "Die Ursprung und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam", in *Opera Minora*, Beirut, Dar al-Maaref, 1963, I 498-523 (excerptum from *Eranos-Jahrbuch* (1937), 55-77); id., "L'homme parfait et son originalité eschatologique" in *Opera Minora* I 107-125 (excerptum from *Eranos-Jahrbuch* (1948), 287-314-77); id., "Inventaire de la littérature hermétique arabe" in *Opera Minora* I 650-666, in "Appendice III" in A.T. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès-Trismégiste*, Paris, 1944, 384-400; H.H. Schaefer, "Die Lehre vom vollkommenen Menschen", in *ZDMG* 79, n.f. 4, 197-288 (Ar. transl. by 'A-R. Badawī, *Al-insān al-kāmil*, Cairo, 1950); H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, 30-40; Arthur John Arberry, *Sufism. An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London, Allen & Unwin, (1st ed.1950), reprint ed. 1990, pp. 84-118; M. Molé, *Les mystiques musulmans*, Paris, PUF, 1964, 3-21; J. Chevalier, *Le soufisme*, Paris, CELT, 1974, 55-76; G. Quadri, "Il pensiero arabo ed ebraico nel Medioevo", in *Grande Antologia Filosofica*, Milano, Marzorati, 1973, IV 1047-1143; S. Pines, "Philosophy" in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. by P.M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, Bernard Lewis, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, II 780-823; G.E. von Grunebaum, "The Sources of Islamic Civilisation", in *The Cambridge History of Islam* II 469-510; R. Arnaldez, "Al-insān - Al-insān al-kāmil" in *EF* III 1237-1241.

⁴ R.A. Nicholson, "*al-Insān al-Kāmil*" in *EP* (fr.) 542 and *SEI* 170.

⁵ R.A. Nicholson, "The Perfect Man" in *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 78.

⁶ See the inspiring research of Cyrill Korvin Kransinski, *Microcosmo e macrocosmo nella storia delle religioni*, (Düsseldorf,1960) tr. it., Milano, Rusconi, 1970.

"In the theory thus outlined we can recognize a monistic form of the myth which represents the Primal Man, the first-born of God, as sinking into matter, working there as a creative principle, longing for deliverance, and, at last, finding the way back to his source"⁷.

At the time of the Islamic conquest of the Middle East such speculations on the Perfect Man, especially those expressed through many Gnostic myths, were already very much wide-spread and have been incorporated into the principal religious trends of that area. Von Grunebaum says in this respect:

"The Hellenistic and Gnostic inspiration is audible in the hubristic description of the Perfect Man, who, tenuously integrated in the Islamic experience of God and creation, becomes a world unto himself comparable to the macrocosm, and merits to be called a 'microcosm'"⁸.

Moreover, many of those religious currents had already elaborated such a conception in some basic models, which must be regarded as the prototypes and the direct inspirers of the correspondent Islamic idea of the Perfect Man. The most known of those models are:⁹

- i. **The myth of "Primal Man", Gayōmart of the Mazdeism, and Purusha of Hinduism**, which has become the idea of the "**Protos Anthropos**" of Gnosticism and Hermetism. The same idea passed to Manicheism in which it was called the 'Ancient Man' (*al-insān al-qadīm*).
- ii. **The idea of the "Ancient Adam" (*Ādām qadmōn*)** of the mystical and esoteric current of Judaism, the Kabbala.
- iii. **The conceptions of the Logos and the microcosmos** of the Hellenistic philosophical speculations, developed especially in Platonic, Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophies. It is known that Neoplatonic philosophies in particular had the greatest influence in the formation of the Islamic philosophical thought.
- iv. **The theology of the Logos** in Judaic theology (Philo of Alexandria) and in Christian theology (the Christological dispute on the Logos and his incarnation, the divinization of man through the Divine grace), in which similar ideas have been accepted and expressed in different ways.

These few data seem enough to the purpose of giving a concise idea of the cultural and religious background upon which the Islamic idea of the Perfect Man has been formed and developed.

One has to remark, however, that such similarities of conceptions and expressions do not necessarily mean identity of views or a straight and material

⁷ R.A. Nicholson, "The Perfect Man" in *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 86.

⁸ G.E. von Grunebaum, "The Sources of Islamic Civilisation", in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, II 486. Also I. Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente in Ḥadīq" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, V 107-134; L. Massignon, "Die Ursprung" in *Opera Minora*, I 500-512; H. Corbin, *Histoire de philosophie*, 31-34; Chevalier, *Soufisme* 55-76.

⁹ Massignon, "L'homme parfait" 110-111; Nicholson, "Al-insān al-kāmil" in *SEI*, 171; Arnaldez, "Insān" in *EF* III, 1239-1241.

transfer of ideas from one culture to another, or from one religion to another. Such a simplistic method of thinking, unfortunately still present in many researches, seems to be the fruit of some apologetical or polemical stance and proves to be far from a scientific and objective inquiry. In a scientific study one has to point out both the similarities and the dissimilarities of an idea or a conception when it is considered in different cultural contexts or religious experiences. For instance, the Platonic Logos is not exactly the same as the Stoic or the Neoplatonic one; neither is Philo's Logos the same as the Christian Logos: similarities here are as numerous as dissimilarities.

In conclusion, we can say that the idea of the 'Perfect Man' can be considered as an Islamic re-expression and re-explicitation of a very ancient religious archetype which, present in many religions and cultures, has been expressed in different ways and models. Moreover, one can say that the religious background of the Middle East can surely be considered as the direct inspirer of many hadiths and Islamic speculations in which the pre-existence of Muḥammad, his cosmic and historical roles are extolled against the pure Sunni orthodox understanding of the Koranic dogmas.

2. *The Beginning of the Idea of the "Perfect Man" in Islam.*

a. *The Hadith Material.*

Ignaz Goldziher has long since pointed to the presence of Neoplatonic and Gnostic ideas in many hadiths through which many pre-Islamic conceptions passed into the Sufi circles¹⁰. There is a quite common consensus among scholars in considering these hadiths not as the actual word of Muḥammad, but as the speculations of some particular Islamic circles, in this instance the Sufi ones¹¹. Some of the most known hadiths on this topic are:

- **"I was a prophet when Adam was still between the water and the clod"**
This hadith points to the pre-existence of Muḥammad before creation.
- **"I am the first of the prophets with regard to creation, and I am the last one with regard to resurrection"** This hadith extolls Muḥammad as the first and the last – Alpha and Omega – in the history of salvation.

¹⁰ I. Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente in Ḥādīṭ" in *Gesammelte Schriften* V 107–134, from which are quote the hadiths below.

¹¹ We mention here some basic studies on this topic: I. Goldziher, *Études sur la tradition islamique*, Paris, 1952; id., *Le dogme et la loi de l'Islam*, Paris, 1924, 27–60, 11–124; J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford, 1950; J. Robson, "Tradition, the Second Foundation of Islam" in the *Muslim World* 41 (1951), 22–33, 98–112, 166–180, 257–270; id., "Ḥādīṭ" in *EF* III 23a–29b; F. Pareja, *Islamologie*, Beirut, 1963, 622–636; W.A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, The Hague–Paris, 1977; Th. W. Juynboll, "Hadith" in *The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* 116–121; G. H. A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Traditon Literature*, Leiden, 1969; id., *Muslim Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983; Şāliḥ Şubḥī, *'Ulūm al-ḥadīṭ*, Damascus, 1973; Caspar Robert, *Cours de mystique islamique*, PISAI, 1968, 14–15.

- **“‘Alī and I, we were light in the hands of God, before Adam was created”**
This hadith also points to the Primordial Light, from which every thing has been created. The Light is here identified with ‘Alī and Muḥammad. This hadith has clear Shiite overtones.
- **“God created Adam in his own image”**: This hadith has become a basic reference of all Sufi speculations on the human being as the image of God and, consequently, endowed with all Divine qualities.
- **“Who knows himself, knows his Lord”**. This hadith indicates that the quest of the true self leads to the true knowledge of God and, on the contrary, the quest of God leads to the knowledge of one’s own ‘self’.

b. *The Shiite Milieu.*

It seems historically quite certain that much of the pre-Islamic religious heritage entered into Islam through the Shiite movement in particular. I. Goldziher says in this respect:

“It was the Neo-platonic and Gnostic elements in particular, with which the Ismā‘īlī sect dressed the religious ideas of Islam, that enabled this sect to become a veil for the preservation of the religious débris of the old paganism [in Islam]”¹².

One of the key concepts introduced into Islam by way of the Shiite thought has been the idea of the ‘Eternal Light of Muḥammad’ (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*). The essence of Muḥammad was thought of as having been originally created before time in the form of a luminous point in which all human souls were included: these were thought of as particles of that Eternal Light¹³. On this idea another important Shiite idea was built, that of the Imamate (*imāmiyya*): the ‘Shiite leader’ (*imām*) was thought of as having a special share in that Eternal Light which enabled him to lead the community of the believers. The Shiite ideology believes that that Eternal Light has manifested itself through the whole history of the Prophets in different degrees reaching its highest point of manifestation in the very person of Muḥammad. After him, the same Eternal Light has been inherited by the ‘people of his house’ (*ahl al-bayt*), that is ‘Alī and his descendants, becoming their exclusive privilege. Because of such a high privilege the Shiite imams are believed to be endowed with the highest qualities of sainthood (*walāya*) and infallibility (*‘iṣma*).

It is also quite certain that such ideas have influenced the Sufi circles in some degree. Though, it seems difficult to agree with the definition of Sufism given by H. Corbin, a well-known pro-Shiite scholar: he defines Sufism as just “an extrapolation of Shiism” and as “an Imamology without the imam”. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed upon that the Sufi idea of the ‘Eternal Reality of Muḥammad’ (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*) bears a clear resemblance and

¹² I. Goldziher, “Les sectes” in *Le dogme et la loi dans l’Islam*, tr. fr. par Félix Arin, Paris, Geuthner, 1920, 209

¹³ L. Massignon, “Nūr Muḥammadī” in *EP*, III 1027–1028, in *SEI* 452.

parallelism with the Shiite idea of the 'Eternal Light of Muḥammad' (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*)¹⁴. Besides, it is well known that one of the key authors who had a large influence on Sufis in general and has been always held by them as one of their greatest authorities was the sixth *imām* Ġa'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765). In his commentary (*tafsīr*) of the Koran, arrived to us through later quotations, he had already outlined some of the most important Sufi themes, such as love (*ḥubb*), the passing away (*fanā'*) in God and the Muḥammadan light (*nūr*)¹⁵.

3. The Development of the Idea of "Perfect Man" in Sufism up to the 7th/13th c.

In the Sufi circles, speculations on the idea of the 'Eternal Light of Muḥammad' (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*) are evident since the 3rd/7th c. in authors such as Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidī (d. 285/898) and Ḥusayn al-Ḥallāğ (d.309/922). Among them al-Tirmidī has developed the idea of the hierarchy of sainthood (*walāya*) and that of the 'Seal of the Saints' (*ḥātam al-awliyā'*), who represents the highest degree of sainthood and, consequently, the highest realization of humanity. These ideas will have a large influence in the following centuries, especially on the 'Greatest Spiritual Master' (*al-šayḫ al-akbar*) Ibn al-'Arabī¹⁶.

It seems, however, that it was Ṭayfūr al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 261/874) the first one who explicitly used the expression 'the perfect, accomplished man' (*al-insān al-kāmil al-tāmm*)¹⁷. This expression designates in al-Biṣṭāmī's experience the man who has reached the summit of his 'spiritual ascension' (*mi'rāğ*). In such a state he has completely passed away from himself (*fanā'*) finding his permanence (*baqā'*) in the Divine qualities, in the end in God himself. At this point, he cannot help expressing himself in 'theopathic locutions' (*šataḥāt*) in which God is the real, true speaker, the human 'I' (*anā*) being completely obliterated and non-existent.

With al-Ḥallāğ the same idea recurs, but in a more positive way. The human being is in his essence, that is in his humanhood (*nāsūt*), the image (*šūra*) and the irradiation (*tağallī*) of the Divine Essence among creatures¹⁸. By realizing the full image of God in himself man reaches the fulness of his humanhood (*nāsūt*). In the way towards his unity with God, the Sufi must go through various

¹⁴ The link between the two movements of Islam, Shiism and Sufism, is still object of controversies; see in favour Corbin, *Histoire de philosophie* 48–50.139–150; Kāmil Muṣṭafā Šībī, *Šīlat al-tašawwuf wa-l-tašayyū'*, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1969; against this idea is Massignon *Passion* 2 III 43–47.

¹⁵ P. Nwya, *Exegèse coranique* 171–175; textes in *Etudes Arabes*, ed. PISAI, Rome, 67–68 (1984/2–1985/1) 21–22.

¹⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Caroline Press, 57; Anawati-Gardet, *Mistica islamica*, Torino, SEI, 1960, 28–29; Caspar *Cours*, 46.

¹⁷ Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* 77; "Al-insān al-kāmil" in *SEI* 170.

¹⁸ Louis Massignon, *La passion de Hallāğ, martyr de l'Islam*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975 4 vols. (1st ed. Paris, 1922); Roger Arnaldez, *Hallāğ ou la religion de la croix*, Paris, Plon, 1964.; Arberry, *Sufism* 59–60; Schimmel, *Dimensions* 62–77; Caspar, *Cours*, 62–95.

kinds of purifications and trials till, in the end, through love he strip from his own qualities and to wear only the Divine qualities. In such a way, through love the Sufi becomes united with his Beloved, that is God, as al-Ḥallāğ says:

"I am the One I love, and the One I love is I
we are two spirits dwelling one body:
if you see me, you see Him.
if you see Him, you see us".

The Sufi's own 'self' has completely passed away, now God has taken full possession of his humanity and only God can proclaim the 'true tawḥīd' (*tawḥīd al-ṣidq*) through the Sufi. Moreover, he can proclaim with full awareness: "I am the Truth" (*anā l-ḥaqq*). Surely, in al-Ḥallāğ Sufism has reached one of its highest expressions and, in spite of the official condemnation of theologians and jurists ('*ulamā' – fuqahā'*), many of his ideas have been repeated and meditated by Sufis in their inner, esoteric circles.

4. The Full Elaboration of the Idea of the 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*) in the 7th/13th c.

It is in the 7th/13th c., however, that the Sufi idea of the 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*) reached its fullest development and expression. Many authors in this period have made of this idea the central theme of their mystical experience. Among them we must mention Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) with his disciple Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) and his school, Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273)¹⁹. The Persian Sufi 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. around 700/1300) is the first one to have written a book specifically dedicated to this topic and entitled precisely 'The Book of the Perfect Man' (*Kitāb al-insān al-kāmil*)²⁰.

First of all Nasafī says that the 'Perfect Man' must be perfect and accomplished in the three stages of the spiritual life: the law (*ṣarī'a*), the path or way (*ṭarīqa*) and the reality (*ḥaqīqa*)²¹. It is very interesting to read the number of names by which Nasafī defines the 'Perfect Man', names that must have been well-known among the Sufi circles of the 7th/13th c.:

"The Perfect Man is called the 'Spiritual-Master', the 'One-who stands-in-front (of all)', the 'Guide', the 'Rightly-Guided (by God)'. He is called the 'Wise', the 'Adult', the 'Perfect', the 'One-who-makes-perfect'. He is called

¹⁹ For more information Ibn 'Arabī's school see William Chittick, "Ibn al-'Arabī and his School" in *Islamic Spirituality II: Manifestations*, World Spirituality: An Encyclopaedic History of the Religious Quest n. 20, New York, Crossroad, 1991, 49–79.

²⁰ Azīzoddīn Nasafī, *Kitāb al-insān al-kāmil*, ed. par M. Molè, Bibliothèque Iranienne, Teheran-Paris, 1962; *Le livre de l'homme parfait*, trad. franç. par Isabelle de Gastines, Paris, Fayard, 1984; Hamid Dabashi, "The Sufi Doctrine of the 'Perfect Man' and a View of the Hierarchical Structure of Islamic Culture" in *Islamic Quarterly* 30/2 (1986), 118–131 (a study on Azīzoddīn Nasafī's concept of *al-Insān al-Kāmil*).

²¹ Nasafī, *Le livre de l'homme parfait*, 14.

'Imām', 'Khalif', 'Pole'. He is called the 'Master-of-time', the 'Globet-that-reveals-the-universe', the 'Mirror-of-the-world', the 'Great-antidote', the 'Supreme-elixir'. He is called also 'Jesus-who-raises-the-dead', 'Khidr-who-has-drunk-from-the-water-of-life', 'Solomon-who-knows-the-language-of-the-birds'. There is always a Perfect Man in the world and there is only one Perfect Man each time, because all beings are as the body of which the Perfect Man is the heart: the body without heart cannot last. As there is only one heart in the body, in the same way there is only one Perfect Man in the world. In the world there are many wise and educated men, but the one who is the heart of the world is unique"²².

In the following century, another Sufi, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ġīlī (d. 832/1428), gave a full description of the idea of the Perfect Man in a book dedicated to this topic and entitled 'The Man Perfect in the Knowledge of the First and the Last Things' (*Al-insān al-kāmil fī ma'rifat al-awāhir wa-l-awā'il*)²³.

The one, however, who first fully developed the idea of the Perfect Man and to whom all other Sufis after him refer, is the 'Greatest Spiritual Master' (*al-šayḥ al-akbar*), the Andalusian Sufi, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240).

5. The Idea of the 'Perfect Man' in Ibn 'Arabī's Sufism.

It is not the purpose of the present research to present here the unlimited ocean of Ibn 'Arabī's sufism but it intends to only touch upon the idea of the 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*), leaving aside all other aspects for which we refer to some basic bibliography²⁴.

The idea of the Perfect Man, however, can be fully understood only in the light and in the framework of Ibn 'Arabī's whole Sufi vision, which can be very briefly outlined as follows:

- i. The Divine Essence or the Absolute Being is in itself utterly unknowable. However, it makes itself known in a number of self-manifestations (*tağalliyāt*), displayed at the different levels (*marātib*) of being. The first of these levels is called the 'Reality of Realities' (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) in which the Essence is manifested according to the infinite numbers of the possible

²² Nasafī, *Le livre de l'homme parfait*, 16–17.

²³ 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ġīlī, *De l'homme universel. Extraits du livre Al-insān al-Kāmil*, trad. franç. par Titus Burckhardt, Lyon, Dervy-Livres, 1953; id., *L'uomo universale*, tr. it. di Giorgio Jannaccone, Roma, 1981, 112 p. See Helmut Ritter, "'Abd al-Karīm al-Ġīlī", in *EF*, I 71; Nicholson, "The Perfect Man", in *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* 81–148 (a study of al-Ġīlī's vision).

²⁴ Out of the vast bibliography on Ibn 'Arabī see Nicholson, "Some notes on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*" in *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* 149–161; Abū 'Alā 'Afīfī, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyīd Dīn-Ibnul-'Arabī*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1939; Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. by Abū 'Alā 'Afīfī, Beirut, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1980 (1st ed. 1946); Aḥmad Ateş, "Ibn 'Arabī" in *EF*, III 707–711; Ibn 'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, transl. by R.W. Austin, London, SPCK, 1980: "Introduction" 1–46; William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge. Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989.

- intelligible forms or ideas. There is without doubt a quite clear resemblance between this idea of the 'Reality of Realities' and that of the Neoplatonic Logos.
- ii. The 'Reality of Realities' (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) is called in Ibn 'Arabī's Sufi philosophy with many different names. One of them, that of the 'Eternal Reality of Muḥammad' (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*), has a particular relevance in his thought. The 'Eternal Reality of Muḥammad' or 'His Eternal Essence' is believed to be the first manifestation of the Essence in which the infinite number of the possible perfections of all beings were gathered before any visible manifestation. Then, the 'Eternal Reality of Muḥammad' became visible in the cosmos and through the history of the prophets, till it came to its fullest manifestation in the Prophet Muḥammad. In the Prophet Muḥammad two basic aspects were united: an exterior aspect, that of the prophet as law-giver (*nabī-nubuwwa*), and an interior aspect, that of the saint (*walī-walāyā*), that is his nearness to the Divine Essence. Anyone who, taking from him, manages to fully realize the interior aspect of Muḥammadan prophethood, will reach the stage of the Perfect Man.
- iii. Many are the descriptions of the Perfect Man given by Ibn 'Arabī. Abū 'Alā 'Afīfī summarizes Ibn 'Arabī's thought of the Perfect Man as follows: "The Perfect Man is the human being in which the being (*wuḡūd*) has been realized (*taḥaqqāqa*) in all its meanings (*ma'ānī*). Because of this, he [Ibn 'Arabī] describes it as the 'comprehensive being' (*al-kawn al-ḡāmi'*) and the microcosm (*al-'ālam al-ṣaḡīr*) in which the Divine all-comprehensiveness (*al-ḡam'iyyat al-ilāhiyya*) is manifested. Because of this also, he deserves to be called God's vicegerent (*ḥalīfat allāh*) and his image (*ṣūra*), the spirit (*rūḥ*) of the world and its cause ('*illa*). This Perfect Man relates to the 'Reality of Realities' (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) as the exterior (*zāhir*) to the interior (*bāṭin*). In nobody has God manifested all his attributes but in him (=Perfect Man), and nobody knows him (=God) but he (=Perfect Man)"²⁵. In such a definition many elements of the idea of the 'Perfect Man' are highlighted: he is the manifestation of the 'Reality of Realities' (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) in which the all-comprehensiveness of the Divine Names (*al-ḡam'iyyat al-ilāhiyya*) is contained. These Names are, in their turn, the manifestations of the Divine Essence.
- In another passage, Abū 'Alā 'Afīfī summarizes Ibn 'Arabī's qualification of the 'Perfect Man' saying that he is the 'pupil of the eye' (which in Arabic is called 'the man of the eye' – '*insān al-'ayn*') of God through whom God regards the world and bestows on it his mercy. He continues: "... he is the place in which the Real (*ḥaqq*) reflects (*maḡlā*) himself, because he is his mirror (*mir'āt*). He is the intelligence ('*aql*) through which the Real comprehends the perfection of his own qualities. He is the being (*wuḡūd*)

²⁵ Abū 'Alā 'Afīfī, "Ibn 'Arabī", in *Dā'irat al-'ulūm al-islāmiyya*, I 348; id., *Fuṣūṣ* 36.

in which the mystery of the Real is revealed. He is the cause (*'illa*) of creation and the ultimate purpose (*ġāya*) of being, because in his being the Divine will has been fulfilled, that is to existencize a creature that will perfectly know the Real (*ḥaqq*) and manifest his perfections"²⁶.

iv. The main traits attributed to the 'Perfect Man' in Ibn 'Arabī's vision can be summarized as follows:

- **He is the microcosm**, the synthesis of all Divine qualities both the interior (*bāṭin*) as the exterior ones (*ẓāhir*).
- **He is the true temple (the *Ka'ba*)**, the goal and purpose of all religions and their rites.
- **He is the isthmus (*barzaḥ*)** that joins the Divine with the visible world.
- **He is the 'pupil of the eye' (*insān al-ʿayn*)** through whom God looks at the creatures and bestows on them his mercy.
- **He is the prime cause (*'illa*) and the ultimate purpose (*ġāya*)** of the universe: without him nothing would have come into existence and nothing could continue in it.
- **He is the universal and absolute agent (*al-fā'il al-muṭlaq*)** in the universe: all actions and operations come from him.
- **He is the universal Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-kullī*)** who is the source of the sainthood of the saints and of the revelation given to the prophets.

v. The main manifestations of the 'Perfect Man' throughout history are:

- **Adam**, as the first man is the symbol of the essence of all human beings.
- **Muḥammad** represents the historical manifestation of the 'Perfect Man' as a the 'Seal of the prophethood' (*nubuwwa*) and the giver of the Divine law (*ṣar'ā*).
- **The 'Seal of the Saints' (*ḥātām al-awliyā'*)**: will be the Sufī in whom the reality of the 'Perfect Man' is fully realized because in him the complete meaning of the Divine law and its inner sainthood are fulfilled²⁷. Who is this 'Seal of the Saints'? This is one of the most puzzling questions of Ibn 'Arabī's Sufism. But, it seems quite clear that Ibn 'Arabī was well aware to have reached the highest 'perfection of sainthood' and that he thought of himself as being in reality the 'Seal of the Saints', that is the end and perfection of all sainthood. On such a premise he dared proclaim in clear words:

"I am the Seal of saintship, no doubt, (the Seal of) the heritage of the Hāshemite (that is Muḥammad) and the Messiah"²⁸.

²⁶ Abū 'Alā 'Afīfī, *Fuṣūṣ* 38.

²⁷ Abū 'Alā 'Afīfī, *Fuṣūṣ* 92–101; Austin, *Bezels* 98; see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, especially pp. 159–179.

²⁸ 'Alā 'Afīfī, *Ibn 'Arabī* 100; Austin, *Bezels* 38.

C. The Reality of 'Self' in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufism: His Own Realization of the 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*).

1. *The Poet and His Mystery.*

'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (576–632/1181–1235), the well-known Egyptian Sufi poet, was a younger contemporary of Ibn 'Arabī. As pointed out above, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi experience was always been surrounded by a sort of mystery during his lifetime and after, a mystery still lingering on in the beautiful verses of his poems²⁹.

The fascination of that mystery was, perhaps, the reason which prompted many ancient commentators as well as several modern scholars to study his poems, trying to find a clue to unravel the mystery of his Sufi experience. Among the commentators are: Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Fargānī (d. 699/1300), 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730/1330), Badr al-Dīn al-Būrīnī (d. 1024/1615) and 'Abd al-Ġanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731). Among the most outstanding modern scholars who have dealt with Ibn al-Fāriḍ' mystical poetry are: Ignazio Di Matteo and Carlo Alfonso Nallino, in Italy; Reynold Alleyne Nicholson and Arthur John Arberry, in England; Louis Gardet, in France; Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ḥilmī, Ġadwat Naṣr and 'Abd al-Ḥālīq Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Ḥālīq, in Egypt; Issa Boullata and Th. Emil Homerin, in the United States³⁰.

An important question has been risen time and again in these commentaries

²⁹ For the editions of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *diwān* see note No. 2.

³⁰ Among the most important modern studies on Ibn al-Fāriḍ are to be mentioned: Ignazio Di Matteo, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ. Il gran poema mistico noto col nome di At-Tā'iyyah al-Kubrā* (polycopied manuscript, Rome, 1917); id., "Sulla mia interpretazione del poema di Ibn al-Fāriḍ", in *La rivista degli studi orientali*, VIII, (1919–1920) 479–499; Carlo Alfonso Nallino, "Il poema mistico di Ibn al-Fāriḍ in una recente traduzione italiana", in *Rivista degli studi orientali*, VIII, (1919–1920) 1–106, also in *Raccolta di scritti editi ed inediti*, Roma, Istituto per l'Oriente, 1940, vol. II, 191–287; id., "Ancora su Ibn al-Fāriḍ e la mistica musulmana" in *Rivista degli studi orientali*, VIII, (1919–1920) 501–562, also in *Raccolta di scritti editi ed inediti*, vol. II 289–343; id., "Frammento di traduzione dell'"*at-Tā'iyyah al-Kubrā*" di Ibn al-Fāriḍ (vv.1–404)" in *Raccolta di scritti editi ed inediti*, vol. II 346–385; Reynold A. Nicholson, "The Odes of Ibnu'l-Fāriḍ", in *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 162–266. We have adopted Nicholson's translation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses, except for minor changes; Emile Dermenghem, *L'éloge du vin (al-khamriyya), poème mystique*, Paris, Les Éditions Véga, 1931; Arthur J. Arberry, *The Poem of the Way*, translated into English verse from the Arabic of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, in *Chester Beatty Monographs No 5*, London, Emery Walker, 1952; id., *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, in *Chester Beatty Monographs No 6*, Dublin, Emery Walker, 1956; Muṣṭafā M. Ḥilmī, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ wa-l-ḥubb al-ilāhī*, (1st ed. Cairo, 1374/1945) Cairo, Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971; Louis Gardet, "Ibn al-Fāriḍ et l'unicité de l'être", in *Expériences mystiques en terres non-chrétiennes*, Paris, Alsatia, 1953, 141–148; "Ibn al-Fāriḍ", in L. Gardet – O. Lacombe, *L'expérience du Soi. Étude de mystique comparée*, Paris, DDB, 1981, 249–317; Ġadwat 'Ārif Naṣr, *Ši'r Ibn al-Fāriḍ, dirāsa fī fann al-šī'r al-ṣūfī*, Beirut, Dār al-Andalus, 1982; 'Abd al-Ḥālīq M. 'Abd al-Ḥālīq, *Ši'r Ibn al-Fāriḍ fī ḍaw al-naqd al-ḥadīṭ*, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1984; Th. Emil Homerin, *From Arab poet to Muslim saint: Ibn al-Fāriḍ, his verse and his shrine*, Columbia (South Carolina), University of South Carolina Press, 1994; Giuseppe Scattolin, "More on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Biography", in MIDEO 22 (1995), 202–245.

and studies of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems, a question that has become a classical one in Islamic Sufism: which kind of mystical union is the one described in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poems? Is it a sort of ontological monism, designated by the classical formula of 'union of being or existence' (*waḥdat al-wuḡūd*), of which Ibn 'Arabī is acknowledged to be the most outstanding representative? Or is it only a psychological union, at the level of mystical state (*ḥāl*), denoted by the other classical formula 'union of vision' (*waḥdat al-ṣuhūd*)?

Different answers have been given to this question. The first interpretation, namely that of monism (*waḥdat al-wuḡūd*), is commonly found among ancient commentators, because they wrote under the influence of Ibn 'Arabī's mystical philosophy and most of them belonged to Ibn 'Arabī's school. To those commentators Ibn al-Fāriḍ appeared as just a disciple of Ibn 'Arabī, translating the same mystical monistic thought into poetry. Presumably, it was on that assumption that meetings between the two Sufis were invented. A well-known of these meeting is the one mentioned by al-Maqqarī, in which Ibn al-Fāriḍ declares to Ibn 'Arabī that his 'The Meccan Revelations' (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*) are the best commentary on his own great poem, *al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*, that is, its very explanation and meaning³¹.

Such an assumption, however, although commonly adopted by Arab commentators to the present day, is now commonly dismissed by modern scholars on the ground of lack of historical evidence. "The two seem never to have met", concludes Nicholson³². Moreover, some modern scholars, such as Nallino, Nicholson, Arberry and Ḥilmī, have tried to acquit Ibn al-Fāriḍ altogether of the suspicion of monism (*waḥdat al-wuḡūd*) which drew upon him the condemnation of Islamic orthodox authorities. But, strangely enough, in spite of all their statements, these scholars, too, have to resort to Ibn 'Arabī's monistic language – such as One Being, One Soul, One Spirit, One Essence – in their explanation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poems. It is as if, as Nicholson explains: "in the permanent unitive state, which he [Ibn al-Fāriḍ] describes himself as having attained, he cannot speak otherwise than pantheistically"³³. In spite of these authoritative statements, we see that one has to question whether such monistic expressions and interpretations do convey the true meaning of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses or whether they are in fact a distortion and, in the end, a misinterpretation of the original meaning of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poems.

A fact that further complicates the 'problem of Ibn al-Fāriḍ' is the paucity

³¹ Šihab al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Maqqarī al-Tilmisānī (986/1578–1041/1632), *Nafḥ al-ṣib fī ḡuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb wa-ḍikr waḏīrī-hā Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥaḡīb*, ed. R. Dozy, G. Dugat, L. Krehl, Leiden, 1855–61; reprint. ed. Amsterdam, Oriental Press, 1967: "Ibn al-Fāriḍ" vol. 1 570; ed. Muḥammad Muḡyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Būlāq, Cairo, 1279/1862 and Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beyrouth, 1967: "Ibn al-Fāriḍ" vol. 2 p. 365. Al-Maqqarī, an Andalusian scholar born in Tlemcen (Maghreb), moved to the East settling in the end in Cairo. In his history of al-Andalus he preserved much historical material from ancient sources which are now lost.

³² R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 165

³³ R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 194.

of trustworthy data handed down in his biographical sources³⁴. Born in Cairo on the 4th of Dū al-Qa'da, 576/1181, Ibn al-Fāriḍ lived there most of his life, except for a period during which he went to Mecca, following an accepted custom of Sufis. His stay in Mecca is to be fixed somewhere between 613/1216 and 628/1231. It is reported by his grandson, 'Alī, *sibṭ* Ibn al-Fāriḍ (735/1335), that the Sufi poet, after his return from Mecca, used to live near al-Azhar mosque, in seclusion, away from public attention. During his last four years in Cairo, Ibn al-Fāriḍ dictated his collection of poems (*dīwān*) of about twenty four odes and some epigrams, that is in all about 1651 verses. Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *dīwān* was edited a century after his death by his grandson who also wrote a biographical introduction to it called *Dībāḡa*³⁵. No other written document of the poet has come down to us, and we know very little concerning his teachers and Sufi acquaintances. In the end, we find ourselves with only the text of his *dīwān* and nothing else that might help us to understand Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical vision.

In addition to this lack of biographical evidence, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetical language, too, presents a serious problem for any reader. It is a very elaborate and highly enigmatic language which for Nallino is "a continuous puzzle", for Nicholson "it is intended to put to test the cleverness of any reader," and for Arberry "it is a particularly stubborn problem"³⁶. Eventually, one has to face the puzzling challenge of trying to grasp the meaning intended by the poet, through his complicated terms and expressions, with only the aid of the text itself. Looking for an outside interpreter is certainly tempting, but this would ultimately jeopardize both a more objective approach to the text as well as a more accurate comprehension of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience.

It seems, therefore, that one has no other resource than to try to interpret the text of Fāriḍ's poems, as much as possible, through the text itself. Among his odes, a special place must be given to the ode called *Naẓm al-Sulūk* (i.e., *The Order of the Way*), commonly known as *al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*, because of its rhyme in *tā'*, which, with its 761 verses, occupies a substantial part of the *dīwān*. It is in this poem that Ibn al-Fāriḍ has expressed his mystical vision in the most complete and systematic way and, therefore, it can be considered the very core of the whole *dīwān* providing the key concepts for its true interpretation. For this reason we have chosen it as the subject of a semantic analysis.

³⁴ This is the conclusion reached by Issa J. Boullata, "Toward a Biography of Ibn al-Fāriḍ" pp. 38-56. See also the biographical and historical study of Th. Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*; and Giuseppe Scattolin, "More on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Biography", in MIDEO 22 (1995), 202-245.

³⁵ The text of 'Alī *sibṭ* Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dībāḡa* is found at the beginning of many editions of the *dīwān*. The most reliable are those reported at the beginning of the following editions of the *dīwān*: ed. *ṣayḥ* 'Uqayl al-Zuwaytinī al-mudarras bi-Umawī in Alep, written for the *ḥawāḡa* Bilfanī al-Sardīnī, lithography, 1257/ 1841 (pp.1-29); ed. Ruṣayd fīalīb al-Daḥdāḥ (d. 1889), Marseille, 1853 (pp. 1-24); ed. 'Abd al-Ḥālīq M. 'Abd al-Ḥālīq, Cairo, 1984 (pp. 19-44). We will refer in our research to this last one which is substantially the same as that of *ṣayḥ* 'Uqayl al-Zuwaytinī.

³⁶ C.A. Nallino, *Il poema mistico*, 193; R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 166; A. J. Arberry, *The Poem of the Way*, 7.

The semantic analysis seems to us the most appropriate approach of a text in order to understand it in its own terms. In fact, a semantic analysis involves first of all a careful study of all the important terms occurring in the text. It must highlight the basic meaning of each term and clarify its relational meaning inside its semantic field, pointing out the focus-word which is its center. In the end of such an analysis, one has to look, as far as possible, for the focus-word of the whole poem, that is the term to which all the semantic fields of the text refer as their center and, therefore, as the center of the poet's vision. Such a term will be the key-word for the true understanding of the whole poem. By a such a semantic approach one can hope to better understand the poet's thought through his own vocabulary and, consequently, to evaluate to what extent previous interpretations of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience are consistent with the terms he used in his poems. The results reached by such a semantic analysis, summarized in the following, will shed new light on the understanding of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience³⁷.

2. From Division (*farq*) to Universal Union (*ḡam*).

A first result reached by the semantic analysis of the text was to define the structure of the poem in which the structure of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience is reflected. Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience is clearly articulated in three stages, explicitly named by the poet himself. They are:

- i. **the stage of division (*al-farq*):** in which the poet experiences the separation from his Beloved.
- ii. **the stage of absolute unity or identity (*al-ittihād*):** in which the poet experiences the absolute unity or identity with his Beloved expressed in formulas such as: "I am She" and "She is My-self", that ends in the self-identity: "I am My-self".
- iii. **the stage of universal union (*al-ḡam*):** in which the poet experiences the synthesis of the One and the Many, of the Self (*anā*) and the Whole.

It has also been remarked that the three stages follow each other and are interwoven within each other in ten great units, in a movement which expresses the progressive journey of the poet in the discovery of the dimensions or of the true identity of his own self (*anā*).

Besides this, it has been highlighted that, contrary to what ancient and modern scholars have been said, love is not the highest stage of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's

³⁷ For more information see my research and articles: Giuseppe Scattolin, *L'esperienza mistica di Ibn al-Fāriḍ attraverso il suo poema al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā – Un'analisi semantica del poema*, PISA, Roma, 1987, 3 vols., 730 pp. (not published yet); id., *L'esperienza mistica di Ibn al-Fāriḍ attraverso il suo poema al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*, PISA, Roma, 1988, 88 pp. (a summary of the research); id., "L'expérience mystique de Ibn al-Fāriḍ à travers son poème *al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*", in MIDEO 19 (1989) 203–223; id., "The Mystical Experience of 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ or the Realization of Self (*Anā*, I), in *The Muslim World*, LXXXII/3–4 (July–October, 1992), 274–286.

mystical experience. Ibn al-Fāriḍ has been celebrated throughout Sufi literature as the 'Prince of Lovers' (*sultān al-‘āshiqīn*), as if love were the main topic of his mystical experience. Contrary to such a long tradition, it appears, on the basis of an accurate semantic linguistic analysis of the poem, that such an interpretation is mistaken. The poet clearly states that:

"I have crossed the boundary of passion (*hawā*), love (*ḥubb*) is to me even as hate:
from unity (*ittiḥād*), the peak of my ascension (*mi‘rāḡ*), begins my journey (*riḥlat-ī*)".
(v. 295)

In his mystical journey, the poet has passed far beyond both the stage of love (*ḥubb*) in all its manifestations and forms, and the stage of absolute self-unity or identity (*ittiḥād*), because his aim is the highest stage of universal union (*ḡam‘*): this is his supreme goal and his loftiest aspiration. In this stage of universal union the poet finds marvels, unknown in the previous stages: the opposites come together, the One and the Many merge in a synthesizing and dynamic unity, the poet's own self and the whole universe become one and the same in a movement of reciprocal merging and inclusion.

At this stage, the poet finds that his *anā* (I, My-self) is not only the source of everything, but it is in everything, beyond all limits of space and time. Awake to this new vision of reality, the poet can sing new melodies, strange and provocative for us, shocking for the shortsighted faithful, but highly fascinating and enchanting, for example:

"But for me, no existence (of the visible world) (*wuḡūd*) would have come into being,
nor would there have been vision (of unity) (*ṣuhūd*),
nor would religious covenants (*‘uhūd*) have been taken in fidelity.
There is no living being, but his life is from mine,
and every willing soul is obedient to my will.
There is no speaker, but tells his tale with my words,
nor any seer but sees with the sight of my eye.
There is no listener, but hears with my hearing,
nor anyone that grasps but with my strength and might.
And in the whole creation there is none save me,
that speaks or sees or hears". (vv. 638-642)

The ultimate source of such an extraordinary and transcendent union is to be found in the reality of universal union (*ḡam‘*) of which the poet is now fully conscious, as he declares:

"And I dived into the seas of universal union (*ḡam‘*), nay, I plunged into them in aloneness
and brought out many peerless pearls (i.e. its extraordinary effects):
That I might hear my acts with a seeing ear,
and behold my words with a hearing eye". (vv. 725-26).

3. The Realization of His True 'Self' as the 'Perfect Man'.

It is only in the stage of universal union (*ḡam‘*) that the poet's 'I-Self' (*anā*) reaches the fullest awareness of its reality and discovers its historical and cosmic dimensions. Most of the poem is a description of such a stage of universal union (*ḡam‘*) and of the extraordinary effects the poet experiences in it. For this reason

it seems from a closer analysis of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience that the true title to be given to him is not the traditional 'Prince of Lovers' (*sulṭān al-‘āšiqīn*), but he should be called the 'Cantor of Self' (*anā*) in the universal union (*ġam'*) (*munšid al-anā al-ġam'ī*). Throughout the semantical analysis it has appeared quite clear that the very word 'I-Self' (*anā*) is without doubt the focus-word of the whole poem on which all the semantic fields are centred and from which they have their position and meaning.

The main traits of the 'Self' (*anā*), as described by the poet at the stage of *ġam'*, can be summarized as follows:

- i. the poet describes his own 'I-Self' (*anā*) as present in the pre-eternal covenant of friendship (*mīṭāq al-walā'*), in which there was perfect identity between those who witnessed and the witnessed one, i.e. the one who asked the question: *a lastu* (Am I not your Lord?), and those who answered: *balā* (Yes, indeed)! (K 7,172).
- ii. the poet describes his own 'I-Self' (*anā*) as the permanent source of the effusion (*fayḍ, imdād*) of all qualities and operations on the whole universe: these are its own manifestations. In them the 'I-Self' (*anā*) veiled itself in order to discover itself in the act of the true vision (*ṣuhūd*) and unity (*ittiḥād*), in which the poet discovers his own identity (*dāt*).
- iii. the poet describes his own 'I-Self' (*anā*) as the origin and principle of the prophetic inspiration (*rūḥ*) in history of prophets and saints (*awliyā'-anbiya'*) and as the bestower of their power to do miracles and wonders. In them and through them, it was in reality the the poet's 'Self' (*anā*) who was sending and manifesting itself to itself
- iv. In the end of this journey, in such a stage of universal union (*ġam'*), the poet's 'I-Self' (*anā*) reaches the fullest awareness of itself and finds itself in everything and everything in itself. This transcendent experience leads the poet to utter expressions that have shocked many orthodox minds, but for him they are the only faithful and true disclosure of his own mystical state.

However, it is worthwhile noticing that such a reality of 'I-Self' (*anā*), central as it is in the poem, is never explicitly defined. The poet describes it in a profusion of images and allusions that are never to be taken as true, philosophical definitions, as some commentators and scholars have done. Only two names are explicitly given to that reality of 'I-Self' (*anā*) in the stage of universal union (*ġam'*), namely: *al-quṭb* (the pole) in vv. 500-1, and *mufīḍ al-ġam'* (the bestower of union) in v. 751 (which clearly corresponds to *mufīḍ al-asrār*, i.e. the bestower of spiritual powers, explicitly said of Muḥammad in v. 625). But no further definitions or explanations are provided for these names. It seems that Ibn al-Fāriḍ took for granted that such terms were quite familiar to the Sufi circles he was addressing to. In fact, the term 'pole' (*quṭb*) has a long history before Ibn al-Fāriḍ.

Since the time of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiḍī (3rd/9th c.) the term 'pole' (*quṭb*) had already come to designate the highest degree of sainthood (*walāya*), which was thought to have its source in what has been known as the Muḥammadan

Reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*), that is the 'Islamic Logos', the eternal principle and goal of the whole creation and the perfect manifestation of the Divine qualities. This Muḥammadan Reality, as previously said, was believed to be operating and manifesting itself in the whole universe, and, in particular, in the history of prophets and saints. By using the term 'pole' (*quṭb*) and by the qualifications he attributes to his own 'I-Self' (*anā*), Ibn al-Fāriḍ seems to make explicit reference to such a supreme 'Reality' with which he, in his mystical ascension, has come to identify himself.

4. *The Experience of the Absolute 'Self' (anā).*

From the results of the previous analysis, it appears that the core of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience lies first of all in his personal and deep assimilation of the concept of 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*). This concept was already developed and present in the Sufi circles of his time. It seems that it is not necessary to make Ibn al-Fāriḍ a disciple of Ibn 'Arabī, as some have done in the past. A careful analysis has proved that there are clear differences of vocabulary between the two Sufis which makes impossible to consider one disciple of the other. Nevertheless, the qualities Ibn al-Fāriḍ attributes to his own 'I-Self' (*anā*) in the state of universal union (*ḡam'*) are very similar and parallel to those attributed to the concept of 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*) by his contemporary Sufis, and especially Ibn 'Arabī.

It seems that it was through a personal realization of such a concept that Ibn al-Fāriḍ came to the full awareness of having attained his most profound aspiration, which is the source of all mystical experience: his desire of union with the Absolute. Having gone through all the stages of love that leads to the complete annihilation of all personal qualities (*fanā'*) in order to reach the permanence in the qualities of the Beloved (*baqā'*), the Sufi poet has grown to a new awareness. He finds that his empirical 'self' (*anā*), which at the beginning of his path was still living in the stage of multiplicity and duality, has passed away to become a pure transparency of the true, unique 'Self' (*anā*), the Absolute One.

At this stage, he experiences the Absolute 'Self' (*anā*) as the unique center of all qualities and movements in the whole universe. In this Absolute 'Self' (*anā*) the poet has completely merged to the point that no traces are left of his previous, empirical 'self' (*anā*). Now, in a new transparent and transcendent awareness, he realizes that whatever he says or does is done by that One and Absolute Subject, the only Centre of all, the only One who can say in Reality *anā* (I, My-self). Having attained the Source of everything, the Sufi poet finds that everything is in him, from him and for him.

Moreover, he finds himself in everything in a new, cosmic awareness, beyond all limits of space and time. Completely merged in that union, he tries to convey in his poems something of such an extraordinary experience, drawing from the literary and religious culture of his time. Though his expressions might sound absurd, even hubristic, to the understanding of common faithful not yet

grown into the poet's deep and interior transformation, those expressions are for the poet the only possible articulations in human language of that Reality in which he now exists. In fact, conscious that words can never totally express such a transcendent experience of the Absolute, the poet warns:

"From me by allusion (*talwīḥ*) understands the one who has the taste (*dawq*) (of that Reality): he can dispense with the clear explanations (required) by a fastidious inquirer". (v. 398)

The ultimate Reality experienced by Sufis lies far beyond any rational capacity (*'aql*). Only the interior intuition and taste (*dawq*) can give some understanding of it. Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems are to be read as just allusions to that mysterious, inexpressible Reality.

Consequently, what is offered in the present research cannot be taken as the explanation of 'a fastidious inquirer' of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience. We have only intended to clarify his language, so that in reading his poems according to their true meaning and following the inspiration of one's own intuition and taste (*dawq*), the reader might have access to the Reality intended by the poet. It has appeared quite clear that a personal appropriation of the reality of the 'Perfect Man' lies at the source and at the end of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience. But, the depth and width of that Reality cannot be grasped through clear definitions and descriptions. Ibn al-Fāriḍ as a poet shows that Reality through the veil of his highly sophisticated poetical language: only the mature Sufi and poetical taste can have a glimpse of his deep mystical experience.

Ultimately and in spite of all efforts of interpretation, one has to acknowledge that the poet took with him the very secret of his mystical discovery in the silence of death, in his return to the mysterious sources of his mystical journey, to that 'Sea of love and friendship', to that 'bounteous and unlimited Ocean', where he found his true and real 'I-Self' (*anā*). His poems have been left to us as traces (*āṭār*) of a path to follow ("Ordre of the Way" – *Naẓm al-sulūk* – is the original title of his poem) towards the same, transcendent Reality.

All these feelings have been nicely summarized by the poet's grandson, 'Alī *sibṭ* Ibn al-Fāriḍ, in the poem he wrote on his grandfather's shrine and with which this research on the Sufi poet will end as it began:

"Pass by the cemetery at the foot of al-'Āriḍ,
 Say: Peace upon you, Ibn al-Fāriḍ!
 You have shown in your 'Ordre of the Way' marvels
 and revealed a deep, well-guarded mystery.
 You have drunk from the cup of love and friendship,
 and quaffed from a bounteous, unlimited Ocean"³⁸.

³⁸ *Dīwān*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥāliq, 25.