

A Bosnian Commentator on the *Fusus al-hikam*

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INTRODUCTION

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* is the work of a Muslim Sufi philosopher, theosopher and highly sophisticated hieratic, and a native of that irreplaceable Muslim kingdom in southern Europe known as Andalusia, the loss of which is still mourned. Not only is this work an inexhaustible *locus* of inspiration for the central concerns of Sufi literary works and the entire esoteric tradition of Islam, but it also symbolizes the most elaborate, and still unsurpassed, metaphysics of the imagination ever developed. It is based on the gnosis and direct spiritual experience of *mubashshira* or the imaginal vision, accompanied by a voice from the world of *malakut*, the world of the living creative imagination or *mundus imaginalis* ('*alam al-amthal*). Ibn 'Arabi himself, al-Shaykh al-Akbar (*Doctor Maximus*), is explicit in saying that he received the substance of the book from the Prophet of Islam, whom he saw in a vision of direct spiritual witnessing (*al-shuhud*) among other messengers of the Word of God in Damascus in the latter part of the month of Muharram AH 627, where they had come together as a true *communio spiritualis*. As Ibn 'Arabi himself says, he wrote down only what the Prophet of Islam desired him to; he did not describe in minute detail all the spiritual sapience (*adhwaq*) and testimony (*shuhud*) he experienced during this extraordinary 'spiritual audience'.

The fact that the *Fusus al-hikam* has been the subject of commentary for more than eight centuries is sufficient evidence of its significance and almost inexhaustible content. It would be hard to name all those who have sought to interpret it, and no less difficult to list all the languages into which the book has been translated and in which lengthy and painstaking commentaries on and analyses of the work have been written.

This is testimony not only to the profundity and extreme spiritual complexity of the text, but also suggests that the *Fusus al-hikam* surely came into being under the influence of extraordinary spiritual inspiration and illumination, ranging from *ilham* (inspiration), *kashf* (revelation), *dhawq* (intuitive cognition, taste), *fiyad* (effusion, emanation of divine light), *tajalliyat* (self-disclosure, divine theophanies), and *al-waridat* (spiritual inspiration) to *ilqa'* (projection of divine light to illuminate the sufi heart)¹ and *mushahada* (contemplative witnessing through the eye of the heart). There is a perceptible effort on the part of Western oriental and Islamic studies, focusing in particular on the commentaries and analysis of Sufi literary works and their authors, to understand in detail, in a manner more applicable to the Western mindset, the forms of inspiration that led to the composition of the *Fusus al-hikam*. It is not unusual to find in such studies examples clearly revealing that the kinds of inspiration referred to above by their Arabic terms are expressed in the West by metaphorical titles such as *Gabriel's Wing*, *sophia aeterna*, *L'Ange empourpré*, *Madonna intelligenza*, and so on.²

EARLY COMMENTATORS

Writing in different eras and from various parts of the world, the scholars who have written commentaries on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus* have not solely confined themselves to the text in isolation from the historical and spiritual context within which it came into being, but have been of one mind in placing it into the relevant historical, interpretative and spiritual context within the history of Islamic philosophy. Putting the *Fusus* into context, the first paradigm for this kind of approach was proposed by Sadruddin al-Qunawi (d.673/1274), who was also the first true

1. *Ilqa' rabbani* – projection or cause of the Lord's revelation into the heart of the sufi; see, for example, Ibn 'Arabi's *Futuhat*, Vol. III, p.457 of Osman Yahya's edition (Cairo, 1970).

2. Henry Corbin, *L'Imagination creatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi* (Paris, 1958); *Islam u Iranu*, III (Sarajevo, 2000); Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing* (Lahore, 2000).

interpreter of this work by Ibn 'Arabi, in his famous work, *K. al-Fukuk*.³ With an extraordinary understanding of peripatetic philosophy on the one hand and traditional Islamic scholarship on the other, Sadruddin's approach to the work is all the more significant and authoritative in the light of his intimacy with Ibn 'Arabi, for the Persian al-Qunawi was not only Ibn 'Arabi's stepson, but also his spiritual heir in the real, literal meaning of the word. Because of this intimate connection, al-Qunawi was to become the spiritual guide and director of many students, and others who joined the path of Sufism, who came to Konya to hear him lecture.

The first comprehensive commentary of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* was compiled by Mu'ayyidduddin al-Jandi (d.700/1300),⁴ a pupil of Sadruddin Qunawi and one of the second generation of interpreters of this work by Ibn 'Arabi. This was followed by the commentary written by his pupil 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani (d.730/1330),⁵ and the two-volume commentary by al-Kashani's pupil Dawud al-Qaysari (d.751/1350).⁶ Sadruddin al-Qunawi's style is clearly recognizable in each of these commentaries: indeed, in that of Dawud al-Qaysari not only the master's style but also the basic conception was borrowed from his works. Also in this list of well-known interpreters of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus*, one should not overlook the famous Iranian philosopher, Sufi and hieratic Haydar Amuli (b.720/1320 in Amul), who wrote an important commentary on the *Fusus* entitled *Nass al-nusus* (The Text of Texts).⁷ Haydar Amuli's work differs from others in that he deals with the *Fusus* in the light of his great *Tafsir*, bearing in mind at all times the relationships between both the Qur'an and the Prophet of Islam on the one hand, and between the

3. Sadruddin al-Qunawi, *Kitab al-fukuk*, ms no. 4858, Yusuf Agha Library, Konya.

4. Mu'ayyid al-Din Jandi, *Nafhat al-ruh wa tuhfah al-futuh*, ed. Mayil Harawi (Tehran, 1983).

5. 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani, *Sharh fusus al-hikam* (Cairo, 1966).

6. Sharaf al-Din Dawud al-Qaysari, *Sharh fusus al-hikam* (Tehran, 1981–82).

7. Haydar Amuli, *Nass al-nusus* (Tehran/Paris, 1988).

Prophet of Islam and Ibn 'Arabi on the other. For him, it would have been almost inconceivable to compile a comprehensive commentary on the *Fusus* without constantly drawing analogies and associating this hermeneutic act with the hermeneutic approach to his great commentary on the Qur'an. Other commentaries on the *Fusus* that also deserve mention at this point are those of al-Nabulusi⁸ and al-Jami.⁹

MODERN COMMENTATORS

The true significance and complexity of the *Fusus al-hikam* will become apparent as Western scholars become more familiar with this *opus* as part of the Muslim written heritage. The works and ideas of Ibn 'Arabi and Jalaluddin Rumi will no doubt occupy a special place in their studies, for their names symbolize the spiritual pinnacle of Sufi literature as a whole and, after eight centuries, their works are now, paradoxically, the subject of considerably more interest in the West than they ever were in the Muslim world. Moreover, their spiritual impact there is so great that these two giants of Sufi literature are doing more in the West for the understanding of Islam than the entire Muslim world, even at its best, can offer nowadays.

The work by the outstanding French orientalist Michel Chodkiewicz, entitled *The Seal of the Saints*,¹⁰ addresses in detail the idea of *walaya*. This is not only an enduring topic within Sufism, and Muslim scholarship in general, but it is also a favourite of Ibn 'Arabi, and forms the core of his works, in particular the *Fusus*. Michel Chodkiewicz not only introduced this great name of Muslim spirituality to the cultural public in France but also, along with his profound insights into the idea of *walaya*, provided a systematic overview of the technical terms so crucial to

8. 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi, *Sharh jawahir al-nusus* (Cairo, AH 1303–23).

9. 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, *Naqd al-nusus fi sharh naqsh al-fusus*, ed. W.C. Chittick (Tehran, 1977).

10. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* (Paris, 1958); English trans. by L. Sherrard, *The Seal of the Saints* (Cambridge, 1993).

the study of the history of Sufi literature. It is equally important at this point to refer to the anthological work on Ibn 'Arabi by the great Henry Corbin. Corbin was a devotee of the purest form of spiritual Islam, which he had discovered through the various works of Ibn 'Arabi, Jalaluddin Rumi, Ibn Sina (especially his idea of 'Eastern philosophy'), and those of Suhrawardi, Mulla Sadra Shirazi and many others. Corbin's *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*¹¹ with its careful and systematic elaboration of the spiritual context in which the relationship between Ibn 'Arabi's thinking and spiritual thought of Iran developed, is essential reading for any serious student of the history of Sufi literature, with its careful and systematic elaboration of the spiritual context in which the relationship developed between Ibn 'Arabi's thinking and the spiritual thought of Iran. After being engulfed in the quicksands of the Muslim philosophy that followed the death of Ibn Rushd, it was in Iran that the purest spiritual gnosis of Islam first resurfaced, going on to be developed further by the many schools and philosophical strands of thought that would bring Muslim philosophizing to its peak in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

During his time at the Royal Philosophical Academy in Tehran in 1972/1973, together with Henry Corbin and the then President of the Academy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Professor Toshihiko Izutsu lectured on the *Fusus*. Among those whom he, Corbin and Nasr tutored on the *Fusus* was a young doctoral student of philosophy, William Chittick. In addition, Sayyid Jalaluddin al-Ashtiyani, a prominent professor from the University of Mashhad, also provided much selfless assistance at these lectures; Ashtiyani had just completed a critical edition of the two-volume commentary on the *Fusus* by Dawud al-Qaysari, running to more than a thousand pages.¹² This critical edition of the

11. H. Corbin, *L'Imagination creatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*; English trans. by R. Manheim, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton, 1969).

12. Muhammad Dawud al-Qaysari al-Rumi [also known as Sharaf al-Din al-Qaysari, see n.6], *Sharh fusus al-hikam*, critical edition, introduction and notes by Sayyid Jalaluddin al-Ashtiyani (Tehran, AH 1375).

commentary was preceded just a few years earlier, in 1967, by the publication of a complete critical edition of the *Fusus* itself, edited by the eminent Egyptian Professor Abu al-'Ala Affifi.

Prior to this came *Sufism and Taoism*¹³ by Professor Toshihiko Izutsu, who was probably the greatest name in Japanese oriental studies. Although he deals with Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus* in its entirety, his particular interest – and the subject he addresses in greatest detail – is the linguistic features and nuances in which Ibn 'Arabi expressed his fundamental ideas. His work is being carried forward, and expanded upon to cover other aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's thought, by Professor Yasushi Tonaga, a former student of Izutsu's, who teaches Islamic philosophy at Kyoto University. Professor Tonaga has spent the past two or three academic years preparing a critical edition of a manuscript by Abdullah al-Bosnawi, a mid-seventeenth-century scholar who wrote what is perhaps the finest and most comprehensive commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* – and to whom we shall return in due course. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean is another student of Professor Izutsu's, Sachiko Murata who, together with her husband William Chittick (both of whom teach at the State University of New York), has written an extensive exposé of the complexity and significance of Ibn 'Arabi's work, with particular reference to the *Fusus al-hikam*.¹⁴

The translation of the *Fusus al-hikam* into English by Professor Ralph Austin entitled *The Bezels of Wisdom*,¹⁵ is perhaps one of the finest translations into a European language, as is the translation into French by Charles-André Gilis entitled *Le Livre des Chatons des Sagesses*.¹⁶ Before this became available, the

13. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism – A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Taoism and Sufism* (Tokyo, 1966–67).

14. Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St Paul, MN, 1994); however, Murata's *The Tao of Islam* (Albany, NY, 1992) and Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, NY, 1989) are the two books which directly refer to Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam*.

15. Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, translated with an introduction and notes by R.W.J. Austin (New York, 1980).

16. Ibn 'Arabi, *Le Livre des chatons des sagesses*, I–II, translated, with notes and commentary, by Charles-André Gilis (Beirut, 1997).

French cultural public had had the opportunity to encounter part of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus* in the incomplete translation by Titus Burckhardt entitled *La Sagesse des Prophètes*.¹⁷

It would be a clear omission not to make reference here to William Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, given that it is such a systematic, clear and scholarly account of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas and provides many in the West with an opportunity of understanding his writings who would otherwise be unable to read his works for themselves. Seyyed Hossein Nasr has also written some significant material on Ibn 'Arabi, particularly in his short book entitled *Three Muslim Sages*,¹⁸ which still remains extremely useful for an understanding of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas. Reference should also be made to the major advances in the field of Sufi literature made by Professor James Winston Morris, whose articles on Ibn 'Arabi and his works¹⁹ invoke our admiration, as do his translations of selected texts from the true *opus magnum* (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*) of Ibn 'Arabi's works. The crowning achievement in his absorption with the ideas of Ibn 'Arabi is his recently published work *The Reflective Heart*.²⁰

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BOSNIAN COMMENTATOR

Among the many fine commentaries on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* is one written by a Bosnian Muslim, by the name of Abdullah effendi Bošnjak 'Abdi' bin Muhammad al-Bosnawi (d.1054/1644), who was a disciple and shaykh of the Bayrami-Malami *tariqa*. Originally composed in Ottoman Turkish, an enlarged edition, with explanations, was rendered into Arabic.

17. *La Sagesse des Prophètes* (Lyons, 1955); translated into English by Angela Culme-Seymour as *The Wisdom of the Prophets* (Aldsworth, Glos., 1975).

18. S.H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, MA, 1964).

19. J.W. Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi and his Interpreters", *Journals of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986): 539–51, 733–56; 107 (1987):101–19. Morris has also made numerous contributions to the *JMIAS*; details are available at <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org>.

20. *The Reflective Heart* (Louisville, KY, 2005).

The Turkish version has been translated, with some abridgements, into English by Bulent Rauf, in association with R. Brass and H. Tollemache,²¹ but with the original wrongly ascribed to Ismail Haqqi al-Bursevi, the famous author of the *tafsir Ruh al-Bayan* and devoted follower of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, instead of to its true author, Abdullah al-Bosnawi.

Shaykh Abdullah al-Bosnawi was born in 992/1584 in Bosnia, where he received his primary and secondary education before completing his studies in Istanbul. He then spent several years in Bursa, acquiring further knowledge of Sufi literature under the eminent authority of the day Shaykh Hasan Kabaduz, from whom he received an *ijazat-nama* (diploma) in *irshad* (spiritual guidance by a shaykh). In 1636 he set off on his travels around Egypt, Syria and Arabia, ending up in Mecca where he performed the pilgrimage. He took advantage of his travels to write the enlarged Arabic version of his commentary on the *Fusus*, probably for his pupils in Syria, Egypt and Medina, who travelled with him for a time. Later, on his return from the Hijaz, Abdullah al-Bosnawi spent some time in Damascus near the mausoleum of Ibn 'Arabi, where he single-mindedly dedicated himself to studying his works. On returning to Istanbul he decided to visit Konya with the intention of performing a *ziyara* (pilgrimage) to the tombs of Jalaluddin Rumi and Sadruddin Qunawi. He was to spend the rest of his life there, and in due course this was where he fell ill and died. In accordance with his last wishes, he was buried alongside the tomb of Shaykh Sadruddin Qunawi. His tombstone bears the epitaph:

This is the tomb of a recluse of Allah on His Earth.

His name is Abdullah, Servant of Allah.

Although he was known in Anatolia by the nickname 'Abdi', in Bosnia al-Bosnawi was called *al-Ghaibi*, his Sufi nickname, which probably led to his later confusion with another dervish who had the same Sufi nickname, and who was buried in Stara

21. *Isma'il Haqqi Bursevi's translation of and commentary on Fusus al-hikam by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi*, ed. Bulent Rauf et al., 4 vols., Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society (Oxford/Istanbul, 1986–91).

Gradiška. Following local tradition, having already entered into Bosnian *salnami* (annals) this grave was wrongly believed to be that of al-Bosnawi. According to a note by Professor Džemal Čehajić, the same mistake is to be found in a dissertation by Safvet-beg Bašagić, who equated him with a certain dervish from Bosnia dubbed 'Gaibi'.²²

The only member of his immediate family to whom reference is made is his son Hasan effendi (d.1069/1659), a very erudite man who was a qadi and teacher in Jerusalem. The meagre biographical details concerning Abdullah al-Bosnawi are compensated for by the considerable quantity of his writings left to posterity. Of particular note for our purposes is his extensive commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam*, the full title of which is *Sharh fusus al-hikam: tajalliyyat 'ara'is al-nusus fi manassat hikam al-fusus*,²³ or "Lifting the Veil from the Brides of the Divine Revelation on the Sublime Thrones of Wisdom". The Turkish version of this manuscript has been published twice: first in Bulak in Egypt in 1252/1836, and then in Istanbul in 1290/1873. The Arabic version has yet to be published. The first critical edition of the Arabic manuscript of this work of Bosnawi's is being prepared by Professor Yasushi Tonaga, currently the chair of Islamic philosophy at Kyoto University in Japan. Abdullah al-Bosnawi ended the second volume of his commentary with a 107-hemistich *qasida*, a symbol of praise for the *Fusus al-hikam* and its author, Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi.

Commenting on al-Bosnawi's commentary, the polymath Haji Halifa says that it is "mingled with the text and is a very good commentary, perhaps the best of all".²⁴ Though scholars such as Bursali Mehmed Tahir²⁵ claim that al-Bosnawi wrote

22. Džemal Čehajić, *Šejh Abdulah Bošnjak 'Abdi' bin Muhamed al-Bosnevi*, FIN (Proceedings of the Faculty of Islamic Studies), 1/1982 (Sarajevo, 1982), pp. 75–81.

23. 'Abdullah effendi al-Bosnawi, *Sharh fusus al-hikam: tajalliyyat 'ara'is al-nusus fi manassat hikam al-fusus*, ms no. 1032, V. Çarullah ef., Millet genel Kütüphanesi, Istanbul.

24. Haji Halifa, *Kashf al-zunnun*, II, p. 1263

25. B.M. Tahir, *Osmanli Muellifleri* (1299/1925), I (Istanbul, 1915),

some sixty works, it should be said that so far more than a hundred treatises have been attributed to him, some long and some short, in Turkish, Arabic and Persian.

Particular mention should be made here of al-Bosnawi's extensive introduction to his commentary on the *Fusus*, which he divided into sections on twelve principles, each one dedicated to one or more matters of importance in the theory of Sufi literature. The actual incident that brought about the writing of this separate introductory section was a debate conducted in the seventeenth century concerning the orthodoxy of Ibn 'Arabi's precepts. Al-Bosnawi defended the person and works of Ibn 'Arabi, and countered with exhaustive and systematic arguments those who criticized him, reproaching them with all manner of things. Foremost in this smear campaign were the *fuqaha*' or experts in jurisprudence, who reduced the entire spiritual reality of Revelation and the Traditions of the Prophet from a universal and all-encompassing level to mere rules and dry legal casuistry. As a result, the once towering corpus of Muslim thought, which for centuries set the standard of global culture and civilization, has been brought down to what are regarded today as anaemic, mundane political views based on legal decisions or fatwas, all of which are highly questionable from a scholarly point of view, often forgotten by the very people who issued them and increasingly disregarded by those for whom they were intended.

Against this background of fervent defence of Ibn 'Arabi, and systematic explanation and clarification of his teachings, al-Bosnawi, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Fusus*, began by addressing the suggestion that Ibn 'Arabi personified the seal of the specific Muhammadian *walayat*.²⁶ This is a point of Sufi theory that is discussed in the context of the spiritual authority of *walayat*, both general and particular, as one of the

p. 60; quoted in Dž. Čehajić, *O jednom filozofskom traktatu šejha Abdulaha*, POF (Contributions to Oriental Philology, Oriental Institute, Sarajevo), 32–33/1982–83 (Sarajevo, 1983), p. 66.

26. Abdullah al-Bosnawi, *Sharh fusus*, fol. 002b–009b.

leading issues that has been a constant preoccupation of Sufi exegesis and hermeneutics. The only scholars to disagree with Ibn 'Arabi on this point were the Shi'ite theoreticians of Sufism, or *'irfan*, given that they reproached Ibn 'Arabi with arrogating the position of the seal of the specific Muhammadian *walaya* for himself, rather than to the Twelfth Imam or Mahdi, to whom the attribute belongs by the nature of things. Neither Ibn 'Arabi nor al-Bosnawi deny the Twelfth Imam: indeed, they explicitly predict and explain the signs of his second coming, and the rulership that is his and is yet to be realized.

Aspects of al-Bosnawi's Metaphysical Commentary in his Introduction to the *Fusus*

Abdullah al-Bosnawi then embarks on a consideration of the extremely complex and challenging issue that might be described as the metaphysics of the Divine Essence and Being.²⁷ Like many of his predecessors, he begins, in line with Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics of Essence and Being, by setting out the contrast between

- (1) the *'alam al-ghayb al-mutlaq*, the universe of absolute Mystery, which eludes the descending, outflowing vertical of the self-disclosing Divine Being and is lost in the Ur-Being (proto-Being, primitive-Being), even though for many Sufi writers it symbolizes the very summit or point of departure of this vertical; and
- (2) the *'alam al-shahada*, the universe of visible forms and sensate things, or the world of that which can be witnessed in the here and now.

Between these two universes is the scale of infinite degrees of the self-disclosing Divine Being and its presence (*al-hadra*), a Being that is one, that only God possesses in origin, absolutely and without beginning (*al-wujud al-mutlaq*), for it lends itself to, bestows and temporarily enters other existences and creatures, thereby bearing the attribute of relative, contingent being (*al-*

27. *Ibid.*, fol. 009b–011a.

wujud al-idafi). Al-Bosnawi reflects on the world of absolute Mystery (*'alam al-ghayb*) from two perspectives. One is expressed by the universe of *Deus Absconditus*, the intangible, ineffable meta-cosmic and pre-existent abyss about which human language can say nothing, for language is helpless to mediate or express that which is absolute, impersonal, suprapersonal, intangible, inexpressible and ineffable. It is this that al-Bosnawi calls the real invisible world (*'alam al-ghayb al-haqiqi*). The other perspective is the universe of the relatively invisible (*'alam al-ghayb al-idafi*) or the universe of the imaginal Being (*al-'alam al-dhihmi*) which is the abode of hidden realities (*al-a'yan al-thabita*),²⁸ of future visible worlds. These hidden or concealed realities dwell in the eternal Divine Knowledge or the Presence of the divine knowledge (*hadrat al-'ilm al-ilahi*),²⁹ or in the wasteland of Non-being that is not mere nothing, mere non-existence, but a synonym for the eternal Divine Knowledge that has not yet subjected these elements of the Divine Intellect to the divine creative command (“*Kun!*” – “*Be!*”). This is to say, the worlds and the universes at the lower levels of the self-outpouring Being do not come into being through the principle of *creatio ex nihilo*, but through that of illumination or emanation (*emanatio, al-fayd*) of the existence-bestowing force from the centre of the Divine Ipseity. Thus, the pure light of the Divine Being, as *nur*, not as *diya'*, passes through the *mundus imaginialis* (*'alam al-amthal* or *'alam al-rumuz*), the universe of prototypes or hidden realities, so that the shadows of their subtle “forms” (*suwar latifa*) or imaginal vessels (*qawabil al-khayaliyya*) pour into the world of visible forms and are condensed in the spatial and temporal world of dark, cold matter. This outpouring is known as *tajalliyyat* and *zuhurat*, which are none other than a cosmic effulgence under the auspices of the names of the Visible (*al-zahir*), of the spiritual meanings of the Divine Names and Attributes in the loci of their visible manifestation (*al-mazahir*), also known as visible space or the existential theatre (*al-majla*) in which the existence-bestowing rhythm of the descending, emanating

28. *Ibid.*, fol. 011.

29. *Ibid.*, fol. 011b–012a.

Being of the Divine scale or hierarchies of the universes manifests itself.

The concealed or hidden realities are the individually determined essences of potential existences not yet brought into the mercy of the real, true Being, but rather that “exist” *in potentia*, in the wasteland of Non-being or the eternal Divine Knowledge that has not yet placed *in actus* the creative command *Kun!* – *Be!*, *Fiat lux!* For this reason an alternative, specific name for the universe of relatively invisible worlds is proposed in al-Bosnawi’s Sufi theory – ‘*alam al-ghayb al-imkani*, or the potentially invisible universe from which all future visible existences and things emerge into view. Whereas one could say of the absolutely invisible world and the invisible world of realities that they are known only to God, the relatively or potentially invisible world could be said to exist, discernible in its inner structure and its existence-bestowing degree. Al-Bosnawi carries out a certain gradation concerning the infinite number of Divine Presences (*al-hadarat al-ilahiyya*); the first of these he refers to as *hadrat al-‘ama*’ or the Presence of the cumulus, the pre-existent nebulosity, the pre-cosmic “blindness” or ethereal white Cloud (*materia prima*, the refined creative dust – *al-haba*’). The ideational reality of existences and phenomena from the lower levels of Being are then individually differentiated under the light of the Divine Names and Attributes, and are “visible” and recognizable in their ideality or potentiality of the universe of imaginal being from the perspective of the Absolute Mystery, but are wholly concealed, invisible and indiscernible to the observer from the lower levels of being, especially for the level of the cosmic world. The term ‘*ama*’ is indeed a traditional one, to be found in a *hadith* of the Prophet (a.s.), and denotes the existential level of the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) or Transcendent Man (*al-insan al-mutlaq*), or the level of Unicity (*ahadiyya*) of the Divine Essence, where the Breath of the Merciful (*nafas al-rahman*) dwells, the absolute imagination, the quiddity of the *barzakh*, the boundary between the worlds, the Reality of realities (*haqiqat al-haqa’iq*), and so on.

Abdullah al-Bosnawi goes on to discuss the First Determination (*al-ta’ayyun al-awwal*), the visible aspect of the pre-existence

Non-determination (*la-ta'ayyun*) or pre-cosmic "blindness", the indistinguishable ethereal or white cloud (*'ama*). This is, in fact, the All-encompassing Existence (*al-kawn al-jami'*) or the Adamic form of the Muhammadian reality (*al-haqiqa al-muhammadiyah*), which is a synonym for the Perfect Man in whom all forms and levels of the manifesting Being or Being in revelation dwell by virtue of the manifestation of the Divine in all its meanings. The First Determination, as All-encompassing Existence, comprises all the universes, all the Divine Presences and all the realities of non-contingent (*al-haqqiyya*) and contingent (*al-khalqiyya*) Being. In this All-encompassing Existence, too, the perspectives of the macro- and the microcosmos permeate one another. This is to say that the First Determination or All-encompassing Existence, as the supreme Divine creation, the burnished mirror of the universe, the spirit of pancosmic forms, is the confluence of the Two Oceans (*majma' al-bahrayn*) – the eternal and the transient, the spiritual and the material, the visible and the invisible – with between them the isthmus or universe of the In-between World (*'alam barzakh*) that both unites and separates the Oceans, linking the Two "Hands of God" – the one that gives and the one that takes away, the Hand of Mercy and the Hand of Wrath – so testifying that the Hand that gives always precedes the Hand that takes, and the Hand of Mercy precedes the Hand of Wrath. This boundary not only has its own eschatological meaning but also, indeed primarily, a profound existential meaning, a meaning for all time. The universe of the *barzakh* is not only testimony of the "furling of the peacock's tail", the traditional Sufi symbol for the decline of cosmic time, but also the symbol of perpetual cosmic effulgences, of the inexhaustible river of the theophanies and epiphanies of the Divine Names and Attributes. What is more, it is also the supreme Divine witness to the fact that the destruction of the physical, material, degradable forms of the macro- and microcosmos does not entail the degradation of the refined forms of the world, which are preserved and return to the Lord of the worlds just as the glorious colours of the peacock's tail remain intact, perfectly preserved, even when the tail is tightly furled, as are the concealed realities of all beings within the opaque "darkness" and

impenetrable “silence” of the eternal Divine Knowledge beyond which nothing is omitted, nothing forgotten. Just as the First Determination or All-encompassing Existence is the quintessence of all the realities of Being, whether reposing in Suprabeing (*al-wujud al-mutlaq*) or in its dynamic existence-bestowing motion, so the universe of the *barzakh*, the separating and unifying boundary-bridge within that All-encompassing Existence, as a synonym of the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*),³⁰ is the sum of all forms of the innumerable Divine Presences that image the entire scale of Being and the descending, outpouring vertical of the pancosmic manifestations of the Divine Names and Attributes.

The Divine Presences (*al-hadarat al-ilahiyya*) occupy a central position in Sufi cosmology, and al-Bosnawi therefore accords immense importance to them in his commentary on the *Fusus*. In his view, they are none other than the cosmic or existential abode of the Divine at each level of the descending, outpouring Being that forms the “waves” of the endlessly immanent meanings of the Divine Names and Attributes, which roll out the Divine Ipseity from their intangible Essence or inexhaustible Hidden Treasure by virtue of the three Divine Names *Allah*, *Rabb* and *al-Rahman* spanning the degrees from the world of the All-encompassing Existence (*al-kawn al-jami'*) to the existential level of the mineral as the lowest existential level within the Perfect Man.³¹ Al-Bosnawi expounds the question of the creative command and its actualization rather more systematically in his treatise entitled “The Book of the Unveiling concerning the Creative Command in the Interpretation of the Last Verse of the Qur’anic Sura al-Hashr”.³²

All the Divine Presences, which are infinite in number – as too are the Divine Names as the abode of the Divine Ipseity in manifestation – are contained in the Adamic forms of the

30. Ibid., fol. 012a–013a.

31. Ibid., fol. 011b–012a; cf. Ibn ‘Arabi, *al-Futuhat al-makkiyya*, II.176, 173 (Cairo, 1911); *Fusus al-hikam*, I.199 (Cairo, 1946).

32. ‘Abdullah al-Bosnawi, *Kitab Al-Kashf ‘an al-Amr fi tafsir akhar sura al-hashr*.

All-encompassing Existence. This Existence is none other than the Muhamadian reality, the Muhammadian light, the sublime pen, or the Perfect Man – in short, the First Creation or First Determination in which is the plenitude and the inexhaustible pledge of Divine Love; of the love breath of the Hidden Treasure (*al-kanz al-makhfiyy*) that resolves to disclose itself by virtue of selfless, peerless Love for the Muhammadian reality of the universe, to be known, ever building palaces of being (*hayakil al-wujud*) that are mere tokens and mementoes of the existence-bestowing Love of the *Ahad* with which He embraces *Ahmad*.³³ According to al-Bosnawi, Ahmad is not only the most universal vessel in which dwells the plenitude of the Divine Being: he is also the absolute, jealously guarded book of the universe (*liber mundi*) inscribed by the pen of the Divine Spirit, and the book of the divine *logus* (*liber revelatus*) revealed in sacred languages, however many of them may have flowed through sacred history. He is the key to all the mysteries that lie on the pages of the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitab*), inscribed in characters (*kitab marqum*), the sacro-historical and mundane history of which is preserved and attested to by the Qur'an, the Book of all the Divine *huruf*, the *huruf* of the Divine Essence and of the Divine Being, the book of all existence-bestowing reverberations and peals of thunder produced by the beating and chant of Gabriel's wing as he hovers above the innermost disposition of God's chosen messengers. For the key to all the universes is the Perfect Man, who is none other than the Beloved of God (*habibullah*), who said long ago that he is the plenitude of all the words of God (*jawami' al-kalim*). The letters and words that al-Bosnawi classifies as *huruf wa kalimat al-ilahiyya* (Divine words and letters) and *huruf wa kalimat al-wujudiyya* (the letters and words of Being)³⁴ are inscribed in the book of the worlds and the book of revelation, books united in his being by the Prophet of Islam as the symbol of the Mother of the Book, the Principial Book, like two oceans – the ocean of Divine Essence and the ocean of Divine Being. The first group of letters and words symbolize

33. 'Abdullah al-Bosnawi, *Sharh fusus*, fol. 014b.

34. *Ibid.*, fol. 012b.

the spiritual reality of the Divine Names and Attributes, and of all that emanated from them by virtue of the incessant Divine creative command – not forgetting the hidden realities that, as infinite potentialities, still dwell in the “silence” of the Divine Knowledge and those that are already emerging into the existence-bestowing light of Being. The second group symbolizes all the recipients within all the Divine Presences, or all the existences that manifest themselves as diverse, many-coloured, multiform gems bowled along by the gold-bearing waves of the river of the Divine *Tajalliyyat*, whose cascades pour down from universe to universe, from the universe of the Divine Ipseity (*'alam al-dhat*) to that of visible forms (*'alam al-shahada*). Just as the *huruf* and *kalimas* on the pages of the sacred text are but the foam covering the depths of the eternal Divine Knowledge summed up on the pages of the sacred text, so the entirety of creatures and existences on the pages of nature are but the froth rising from the infinite depths of the Divine Being that is in the essence (*lubb*) and substance (*jawahir*) of even the minutest of created things. Where the foam and the sea simultaneously touch and part is the invisible, ultrafine boundary (*barzakhiiyya*) in which the opposing cutting edges of the Visible and the Invisible are blunted, like that which both separates and unites light and shade, or the Perfect Man and God. It is this very boundary that is the mirror of both realities, and only this self-mirroring prevents them from blurring and merging into one another.

The entire gamut of Being is established by the descending, outpouring Divine Being, while the Adamic form of All-encompassing Existence is revealed – and thence each fragment of the universe – establishing it by virtue of the Divine Presences (*al-hadarat al-ilahiyya*) or the Presence of the Names and Attributes, as a result of which the Divine Being at all times paves the way back for the All-encompassing Existence and, through it, for even the minutest existence in the universe, to return home. This scale of Being is reflected at its most complete in the Perfect Man as the sum of all spiritual realities, of the levels and presences of the Divine Being, for he is the most perfect model and image of the ascending sapiential ascent to the Lord. In him dwell all spiritual states and spiritual stations along which

every *homo viator* or *salik* must make his way in his perennial sapiential and existential *mi'raj*. They are infinite in number, just as are the Divine Names and Attributes in whose light every spiritual journey (*via purgativa, sayr al-suluk*) is realized. The paragon of spiritual realization on that journey is the one who is All-encompassing Existence and the Perfect Man – the Prophet of Islam, whom the Qur'an describes as of the finest natural disposition (*al-khuluq al-'azim*), and of whom the prophetic tradition relates that he is the pledge of Divine Love and the reason for the Divine creative command of all the universes. He offered us such a paragon or paradigm for our spiritual journey through his *Mi'raj*. The spiritual institution through which our own *mi'raj* is realized is the prescribed five daily prayers, the *salah*, performed at the most sensitive and significant points of the day and night, and the prayer of the heart (*dhikrullah*) that we perform voluntarily, with loving hearts, following the rhythm of our own inner needs and spiritual readiness. Al-Bosnawi describes our individual spiritual journey to the Divine Presence through the tradition of the Prophet of Islam concerning the seven spiritual meanings of the Revelation or the seven hermeneutic perspectives (*unzila al-qur'an 'ala sab'a ahruf*) with which one may approach the Qur'an in part or in whole. This is the symbol of the seven *ahruf*, as the Prophet of Islam expressed it, which are none other than the seven depths or the seven spiritual horizons within which one is able to develop and enquire into a *hermeneutica spiritualis*. This is itself the hierohistory of the individual soul opening up to the Light of the East (*mashriq al-nur*) and animating within itself the primordial dawn (*crepusculum matutinum*) of the most spiritual meanings of the Word of God in its Quranic or its *furqan*-ic aspect. In the Quranic metaphor on *khal' al-na'layn*, or "the removal of the sandals", al-Bosnawi recognized the very *initiatory* form by virtue of which the individual spiritual quest for the inner meaning of the Word of God is realized. This metaphor is associated with the events in the sacred valley of Tuva when Moses stood before the burning Bush. This sacrohistorical event later inspired Ibn Qasi and Ibn 'Arabi each to write their own Sufi initiatory treatises (*khal' al-na'layn*), taking this very Quranic metaphor as their title. The

inner drama of the individual human soul in its self-mastery and triumphal march along the path of spiritual ascent, its own *mi'raj*, is reflected through this initiatory narrative, which al-Bosnawi adopted as his hermeneutic model. This is not a question of ascending the scale of spiritual states (*ahwal*) and stations (*maqamat*), but of passing from each one of the seven sacred vales, seven spiritual chambers, or seven spiritual abodes. One pair of sandals, symbolizing the negative characteristics or habits to which we are slaves, and which conceal the Face of God from us, is shed in each of these seven vales. The ultimate outcome, after each act of "removing one's sandals", is the acquisition of a new spiritual physiognomy (*tashakkulat*) and the ascent to a new spiritual level or sacrohistorical tropic of the Word of God in its interiorization and a return to the nodal space of the innermost human depths of the individual, to put it in Simnani's terms.

The first spiritual vale is thus the image of the human soul (*nafs*) that ceases to be corruptible by desire and concupiscence – two negative energies that yoke the soul to vice and evil – and that is transformed (*metanoia*, *tashakkulat*) into pure yearning and conscious aspiration towards God.

The second spiritual vale is the image of the intellect (*'aql*) that successfully liberates itself from conceit, vanity, high-flown fantasies and pernicious spiritual strabismus, and now sees the burning bush in the sacred vale of Tuva as the flicker of the luminous heart in which a flame of pure light burns, and as the sparks of the Divine Spirit within us, ignited by the fluttering of Gabriel's wing, the wings of the *malak* of the human race, which does not permit them to be quenched in the obscurity of the western Sinai of our being.

The third spiritual vale within us is the image of the spirit (*ruh*) that is neither of the east (*sharqi*) nor of the west (*gharbi*), but is rather the oriental light (*ishraqi*), the light from the orient of our geography of illumination, the hierogeography of our being. As transcendent, transcending light, it is also free of any admixture of that which is below its spiritual level.

The fourth spiritual vale in our self-sapiential progress towards the Divine Presence is the image of our supraconsciousness or

transconsciousness (*sirr*), which is no longer concerned with any kind of relationship between the outward and the inward, the visible and the invisible. This is to stand at the centre of the spiritual being at which all the radii from every point on the perimeter of our physical and our spiritual being converge; the influence of these is then neutralized and their contradictions are brought into harmony and transcended.

The fifth spiritual vale consists of an image of the heart (*qalb*), the black rose at the centre of our multicoloured, many-flowered microcosmic rose garden, as Shabistari calls it, where the entire spectrum of our physical and spiritual being comes to rest. It is the image of the celestial *ka'ba* (*bayt ma'mur*) within us, into which flows the river of the divine *tajalliyyat*, losing itself in the luminous ocean of our heart, as the river of the heavenly hosts merges into the celestial *ka'ba* (*al-bayt al-ma'mur*), never to return. It is the *na-koja-abad* within us, the paradisaal soil concealed deep within us, beyond the reach of our physical senses. Here all our tears and our laughter, our joy and our sorrow, all the rivers and seas of our physical and spiritual geography lose themselves, for the vale of the heart within us is the sea of all our seas, in the silence of which our physical senses ferment and the disquiet of our spiritual organs finds comfort and ease.

The sixth spiritual vale within us is symbolized by the mental image of the Divine Presence (*al-sura al-ilahiyya*) personified in the First Determination, All-encompassing Existence or Perfect Man within us that is the trace in the sandy wasteland of our heart left by the torrent of the Muhammadian spiritual reality flowing in every existence, irradiating it from within and marking it with its seal. The trace it leaves points the way in our own spiritual quest for the far side of Mount *Qaf*, and is but a foreshadowing or harbinger of that alone which is the true Perfect Man, the title of the divine creative Command and the vault and seal on the treasuries of all the universes, the spiritual aroma that perfumes the microcosmic garden of each individual Muslim, submissive soul.

Lastly, the seventh spiritual vale within us is where Heaven and Earth meet and touch again, forming the arch of descending, outpouring being, and ascending, sapiential being, the

Divine Non-determination and the First Determination, the Utterly Incomparable (*Ahad*) and the most highly praised of the human race (*Ahmad*), with only the *barzakh* dividing them, the Ahmadian boundary within us. In the relation of *Ahmad* to *Ahad*, the boundary is our dying and death (*mamat*), while in that of *Ahad* to *Ahmad*, it is our eternal, intransient life (*mahya*). This very boundary prevents any hint of multiplicity from tainting the One (*Ahad*), however great the yearning and pangs of love the separation from the Most Beloved (*al-Wadud*) may cause in us, and yet it means life to us, and keeps us in life: as long as God looks upon us and showers us with the droplets of His Being, we exist, we live, we are; but whenever we seek to look upon God and strip the final veil from His Face, we die, fade away and cease to be.

When we reach the seventh spiritual vale, therefore, at the end of our spiritual journey, we have reached the spiritual abode of the Ahmad of our being, at the level of the Perfect Man, in the chambers of whose heart the knowledge of the Invisible and the Visible, are united. These are the two indispensable spiritual “sandals”, one of esoteric, initiatory knowledge that enables us, sometimes, to step onto the sacred soil of the *Ahad* and yet remain alive, and the other of the exoteric, outward knowledge that ensures our safe passage through the realm of multiplicity where only the footprints of the Musa of our being lead towards the inner “promised land” of the Ahmad of our being.

This, then, is a simplified summary of what Abdullah al-Bosnawi sought to convey to us in the introduction to his commentary on Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Fusus al-hikam*.

