

Seal of the Saints

PROPHETHOOD AND SAINTHOOD IN
THE DOCTRINE OF IBN ʿARABĪ

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It is reported in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* that the Messenger of God said: 'God is beautiful and He loves beauty'. It is God who made the world and endowed it with existence. The entire universe is therefore supremely beautiful. There is nothing ugly in it. On the contrary, in it God has brought together all perfection and all beauty . . . The gnostics see it as being nothing other than the form of the divine Reality . . . : for God is He who is epiphanized in every face, He to whom every sign refers back, He upon whom all eyes rest, He who is worshipped in every object of worship . . . The whole universe offers up its prayers to Him, falls down before Him, and sings His praises. All tongues speak of Him alone, and Him alone all hearts desire . . . If it were not so, no Messenger and no Prophet would ever have loved woman or child.

Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* III, pp. 449-50.

The Four Pillars

THE types of sainthood defined by Ibn 'Arabī correspond in a way to a horizontal manifestation of the possibilities contained within the total *walāya*, of which Muḥammad is the source and fulfilment. On the other hand, the community of the saints is built upon a vertical axis, along which the various degrees and functions are distributed.

Fāṭḥ—a word that we have translated as 'illumination' but which strictly speaking means 'opening'—'tears open' time and space. It is the immediate and instantaneous relationship of man with God, and as such it annuls both the 'where' and the 'when': as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī said, for the saint there is, in a sense, 'neither morning nor evening'. From another point of view, however, sainthood, being an assumption of human nature in its fullest sense, must paradoxically manifest itself under the forms and conditions intrinsic to the latter. In a sense the saint is 'nobody's son': between him and God there exists a relationship with no intermediary, expressed in Ibn 'Arabī's terminology by the technical term *wajh khāṣṣ*, meaning both the 'particular face' which in each being is eternally turned towards God, and the particular face of God or particular divine aspect which corresponds to that being.*¹ Even so, the saint included within a framework of time, a fact which is demonstrated explicitly by his belonging to an initiatory lineage (*silsila*), and more discretely by his being the heir to a prophet. He is emancipated from the six directions which determine the perception of ordinary men.² His 'place' is the 'non-place' ('the "where" no longer has a place', writes Ḥallāj in a famous quatrain); but he none the less occupies a strictly defined place on a cosmic stage whose determining principle is the hierarchy of the saints. Here typology becomes topology.

The origin of this hierarchical configuration and the terminology in which it is expressed are a matter of dispute, but are certainly prior to Ibn 'Arabī. In Ibn Ṭaymiyya's opinion, all the *ḥadīth* invoked to bear

* Due to the extensive nature of the footnotes belonging to this section they are placed at the end of the chapter, beginning on page 98.

out this doctrine are apocryphal.³ Ibn Khaldūn views these beliefs as borrowings from the Shī'ites.⁴ Conversely, to call to witness a Sūfī who was also a *faqīh* and a specialist in *ḥadīth*, Suyūṭī devoted an entire treatise⁵ to this problem, based on the prophetic traditions that he considered authentic. It contains an account which, being prototypal, is of especial interest, and which is as follows: Abū Hurayra recounts: 'I went in one day to the Prophet. He said to me:

'In a moment a man will come towards me through that door; he is one of the seven men by means of whom God protects the inhabitants of the earth.' And behold, an Ethiopian (*ḥabashī*) came through that door. He was bald and his nose had been cut off. On his head he carried a pitcher of water. Allāh's messenger said, 'This is he.' Now this man, explains Abū Hurayra, was the servant of al-Mughīra ibn Shu'ba, and it was he who washed down and swept out the mosque.⁶

An extensive literature very soon developed around the theme of the 'Council of the Saints' (*ḍiwān al-awliyā'*), and has continued to do so down to our day.⁷ One of its main features is the recurring theme of the 'hidden saint', already known to us from the *ḥadīth* quoted in Chapter One ('He is obscure among men and no one points at him'), and who also comes into the story told by Abū Hurayra. A more detailed illustration of this aspect of *walāya* comes in the hagiographic texts relating to one of the great saints of the twelfth century, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī. The episode has an interest which is more than merely anecdotal, and which is conferred on it by the importance of this saint, who is frequently mentioned by Ibn 'Arabī⁸ and of whom we will speak further, by the evident connection between these types of story, which are often held to be no more than folk tales, and by an essential element in Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of *walāya*. What follows is one version of the story:

Shaykh Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Baghdādī, commonly known by the name of Ibn Satan-tana al-Baghdādī, recounts: I devoted myself to the pursuit of knowledge under the direction of our teacher, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, and I was in the habit of spending most of the night awake in order to ensure that he wanted for nothing. One night in the month of Ṣafar 553,⁹ he went out of his house. I held out a pitcher to him [thinking that he wanted to perform the ritual ablution] but he did not take it, and went towards the gate of the *madrasa*. The door opened before him of its own accord. He went out and I went out behind him, saying to myself, "He does not know that I am here." Then the gate closed again and the shaykh walked to the gate of Baghdad which opened before him. He went out and I went out after him, and the gate shut. He only went a short distance but suddenly we were in a country that was unknown to me.

He entered a place that resembled a *ribāṭ* ['convent']. There were six people there who greeted him with eagerness. I took refuge behind a pillar. Then I heard a groan nearby. After a second, the groaning ceased. A man came in and went towards the place where the groans had come from. He came out again carrying someone on his shoulders. Then another man came into the room. He was bare-headed and had a long moustache.¹⁰ He sat down in front of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, who made him say the two *shahādas*, cut his hair and moustache, made him cover his head with a skullcap and gave him the name Muḥammad. Then the shaykh said to the people who were present, 'I have been commanded that this man should replace him who is dead' (*umirtu an yakūna ḥādḥā badalan 'an al-mayyit*).

They answered, 'So be it!' Then the shaykh went out and left them. I went out and walked behind him. We only went a short distance, and there we were in front of the gate of Baghdad which opened before us as before. Then the shaykh went to the *madrasa*, where the gate also opened, and entered his dwelling.

The next day, when I sat down before the shaykh to study with him, I begged him to explain to me what I had seen. He replied, 'As regards the place, it is Nihāwand.¹¹ As for the six people whom you saw there, they were the noble *abdāl*. The man who was groaning was the seventh of them, and when he was on the point of death I came there to be present for it. As for the man whom I made to say the two *shahādas*, he was a Christian, an inhabitant of Constantinople. God had ordered me to put him in the place of the *badal* who had died. He came to me, made a profession of Islam before me, and now is one of them. Finally, as regards the man who entered and who bore the dead man on his shoulders, it was Abū 'l-'Abbās al-Khādir; he took him away to see to his funeral.'

The shaykh then made me promise not to speak of all this to anyone during his lifetime.¹²

Although other hagiographic accounts tell of the sudden appointment to a position of importance in the invisible college of the saints of individuals who are of no particular note, and even of avowed sinners,¹³ the paradox of divine election in this case is even more surprising. The man who is suddenly assigned a place among the *abdāl*—one of the highest ranks in the hierarchy of the saints, as we shall see¹⁴—is not simply an obscure Muslim: he is an infidel, a *rūmī*, and his investiture takes place immediately after his profession of faith.¹⁵

Islamic information in the first centuries about the Pole (*quṭb*), the *awṭād* and the *abdāl* is, for the most part, difficult to interpret: the terminology is fluid, and the different sources vary and contradict each other as to the number of holders of each 'grade' and the nature of their functions in a way which the commentators do their utmost to resolve, without eliminating the confusion. Here again, Ibn 'Arabī was the first to organize and explain these traditional facts, allusive and variable as they were, and to lend them coherence with an overall doctrine of

walāya. But we would be gravely mistaken as to the nature of his undertaking if we were to see it merely as the systematic classification of already existing material and the establishment of a more rigorous vocabulary. It is with a description that we are concerned, and the person who records it claims over and over again to have been a witness: at Cordoba, he saw twenty-five Poles who preceded the Prophet Muḥammad;¹⁶ at Fez, in 593AH, he met the Pole of his own time.¹⁷ In the texts to be analyzed we will come across a great deal of this sort of thing. Thus, we are not dealing here with some sort of theoretical construct but—as we have said from the beginning—with the expression of a conviction based on direct vision and personal experience. Furthermore, we shall see that Ibn ‘Arabī does not speak in the sole capacity of a witness, but that he prides himself on the authority he possesses on a different account.¹⁸

The Shaykh al-Akbar wrote a good deal about the subject in hand.¹⁹ However, the most comprehensive survey of it comes at the start of Volume Two of the *Futūḥāt*, in the very lengthy Chapter Seventy-Three which also contains the answers to Tirmidhī’s questions. We will use this text as our guide. First of all, there are some general considerations about *risāla*—the status proper to the *rasūl* or Messenger—and *nubuwwa* or Prophethood. What is sealed by Muḥammad, Ibn ‘Arabī says, is legislative prophethood (*nubuwwat al-tashrī‘*), which is acquired only through divine election. On the other hand, there is ‘general prophethood’, which does not involve the establishment of a new sacred law and which can be acquired (*muktasaba*). There are four corner-stones of religion (*arkān al-dīn*): *risāla*, *nubuwwa*, *walāya* and *īmān* or faith. But *risāla* is the *rukn jāmi‘*: it contains the other three. This appears to contradict what was said earlier in Chapter Three, namely, that the most universal sphere is *walāya*. In fact, the problem is only one of vocabulary: to avoid all confusion, instead of *risāla* we should say *rasūl*; for each Messenger is by definition *rasūl*, *nabī*, *walī* and *mu‘min*—messenger, prophet, saint and believer—whereas the reverse is not true because not every believer is a saint, not every saint a prophet, and not every prophet has the supreme status of a Messenger. The status of *rasūl*, then, is the most inclusive of all. Its disappearance would bring in its wake the disappearance of the human race. As a result, the world is never without a living *rasūl* who is its Pole (*quṭb*). By ‘living’, says Ibn ‘Arabī, we should understand: corporeally alive (*ḥayy bi-jismihī*). He explains that after Muḥammad’s death, ‘Allāh

preserved three of the Messengers, corporeally alive in this world.’ The first of these in the list that follows is Idrīs, who is generally identified in Muslim tradition with Enoch of the Bible, but of whom the Qur’ān (19:56-57—verses 21:85-86 merely mention his name) says only that he was ‘lifted up [by God] to a sublime place’.²⁰ ‘God preserved him alive in body’, writes Ibn ‘Arabī,

and assigned him the fourth heaven to be his dwelling place. Now the seven heavens are part of this world; they exist for as long as it exists and their form vanishes when it vanishes . . . God also preserved, living in this world, Elijah and Jesus . . . These are the three whom everyone acknowledges to be *rusul*. Regarding Khaḍir, the fourth, there is some divergence of opinion, though not as far as we are concerned, about his being *rasūl*. These four beings exist in the flesh in this world below, and are its Pillars (*awṭād*, singular *watād*). Two of them are the two Imāms and one of them is the Pole, who is the place of God’s beholding on this earth. Messengers have not ceased and will not cease to be in this world until the Day of Resurrection, and this does not contradict the fact that [in spite of the status of *rasūl*, which usually involves legislative authority] they do not bring a religion which revokes the religion brought by Muḥammad and profess no religion but his. But most people are ignorant of this matter.

Thus, one of these four Messengers, Jesus, Elijah, Idrīs and Khaḍir, is the Pole. The latter is one of the corner-stones of the House of Religion, and corresponds [in the Ka’ba] to the corner of the Black Stone. Two of the others are the Imāms, and the four of them make up the whole assembly of Pillars. Through one of them God protects faith, through another sainthood, through another prophecy, through the fourth the mission (*risāla*), and through all of them He protects the purity of religion. He among them who is the Pole will never die, that is to say, he will be preserved from the loss of consciousness [which will come upon all beings when the angel’s trumpet sounds on the Day of Judgement, Qur’ān 39:68] . . . Within this community, there corresponds at all times to each of these Messengers a being who is ‘on the heart’ of that Messenger and is his deputy (*nā‘ib*). Among our companions on the way, most of the saints know the Pole, the two Imāms and the Pillar (*watād*, the fourth person of the group) only through these deputies; and that is why all seek to attain that station (*maqām*). But when they attain it, they discover that they are merely the vicars of the Pole, the Imām and so on, and that the true Imām is someone else; the same is true of the office of the Pillar . . . Do not under-estimate the importance of what I have been saying, for you will find it said nowhere else among those whose words concerning the secrets of this way have come down to us.

Even though it is generally held in Islam that the four people mentioned by Ibn ‘Arabī belong forever to the world of the living (two of them, Idrīs and Jesus, dwell in the celestial spheres, and the other two, Elijah and Khaḍir, dwell on this earth unseen by most mortals),

this is the first time that they have been assigned the supreme offices in the esoteric hierarchy. All previous traditional teaching, in fact, seems to identify the rightful holders of these offices as being individuals who, according to Ibn 'Arabī, are really only the successive deputies of the true *awṭād*. Thus the connection between prophethood and sainthood is confirmed and strengthened: the sphere of *walāya* is not autonomous, but is subject until the end of time to the perennial authority of the only prophets who are still living since the death of Muḥammad.

How are the roles divided between these four prophets? Chapter Seventy-Three of the *Futūḥāt* has nothing very specific to say on the subject, but other texts fill the gap.²¹ Idrīs, dwelling in the fourth heaven of the Sun and occupying a middle position in the centre of the seven planetary spheres, has the office of *quṭb* or Pole of the universe. The two Imāms are Jesus and Elijah. Lastly, Khaḍir is the fourth *watād*.²² The visible hierarchy described later on is in fact simply a reflection of this permanent structure, which in turn is itself no more than the refraction of the higher reality whence it derives its authority. Indeed, another passage from the *Futūḥāt*,²³ apparently contradicting what went before, states: 'As for the one and only Pole, it is the spirit of Muḥammad (*rūḥ Muḥammad*), by which all the Messengers and all the Prophets are sustained.' Idrīs, Elijah, Jesus and Khaḍir are, likewise, simply differentiated projections of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*: in a certain sense, they too are only 'deputies'.

Next, Ibn 'Arabī embarks on a detailed description of the 'men of God' (*rijāl Allāh*). These are divided into many classes or categories (*ṭabaqāt*). Among these categories, whose definition sometimes involves a highly complex blend of criteria, a distinction is to be made between a first series of thirty-five *ṭabaqāt*, which maintain a constant number of individuals in every epoch and correspond to cosmic functions, and a second one which corresponds either to types or to degrees of sainthood. The first category of all is the category of the Poles (*aqṭāb*),

who are the sum of all the states and all the stations, in either an immediate or a derivative fashion by means of deputies, as we saw. However, the meaning of the word 'Pole' may be stretched to cover all those who are the pivots of a certain spiritual station and who alone are in full possession of it at any given moment. One may also say of a man dwelling in a certain place that he is its Pole. In the same way, the shaykh who presides over an assembly is the Pole of that assembly. But in the technical sense, and in the absence of any other definition, the Pole is a term which

properly speaking can be applied only to one person in every epoch. He is also named *ghawth*, 'help'. He is one of the 'proximate' (*al-muqarrabūn*; cf. Qur'ān 56:11), and is the head of the community for his time.

Some of the Poles possess an authority which is manifested and hold the office of caliph in the external sense, just as they are caliphs in the inner sense in virtue of their spiritual rank. This was so in the case of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, Ḥasan and Mu'āwīya ibn Yazīd, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz²⁴ and al Mutawakkil.²⁵ Others are caliphs only in the inner sense and possess no apparent external authority, such as Aḥmad ibn Harūn al-Rashīd al-Sabī²⁶ or Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and most of the Poles.

Next are the Imāms, of whom there are never more than two at any given time. One of them is called 'Abd al-Rabb' ('servant of the Lord') and the other 'Abd al-Malik' ('servant of the King'), while the Pole is called 'Abd Allāh: for every man has a divine Name that corresponds to him, and the Pole is named 'Abd Allāh, whatever his [profane] name may be. It is always so, just as the Imāms are always 'Abd al-Rabb' and 'Abd al-Malik'.²⁷

The *Kitāb manzil al-quṭb*, or *Book of the Spiritual Dwelling of the Pole*, throws additional light on these three offices.²⁸ The Pole is both the centre of the circle of the universe, and its circumference. He is the Mirror of God, and the pivot of the world. He is bound by subtle links to the hearts of all created beings and brings them either good or evil, neither one predominating. But from the point of view of the Pole, these things in themselves are neither good nor evil: they are (*wa-huwa 'indahu lā khayr wa-lā sharr wa-lākin wujūd*), and become good or bad as a result of the vessel that receives them²⁹ The Pole's dwelling place is the dwelling place of pure existention (*ijād*) He is the universal Veil within Existence.³⁰ He keeps the treasures of divine Generosity. God is perpetually epiphanized to him He is located in Mecca, whatever place he happens to be in bodily. When a Pole is enthroned at the level of the *quṭbiyya*, all beings, animal or vegetable, make a covenant with him other than men and *jinn*s (with a few exceptions) This explains the story about the man who saw the huge snake that God has placed around Mount Qāf,³¹ which encircles the world. The head and the tail of this snake meet. The man greeted the snake, who returned his greeting and then asked him about Shaykh Abū Madyan, who lived at Bijāya in the Maghrib. The man said to it, 'How do you come to know Abū Madyan?' The snake answered, 'Is there anyone on earth who does not know him?'³² Chapter Three Hundred and Thirty-Six of the *Futūḥāt*³³ is entirely about this pact of allegiance with the Pole, and says that all the spirits (*arwāḥ*) participate in it; each of them asks the *quṭb* a question inspired by God and receives an answer it did not know.³⁴

On the other hand, the distinctions which apply to the *awliyā'* in general apply to the *aqṭāb* as well:

The most perfect of the Poles is the Muḥammadan Pole. The ones below him are divided hierarchically according to the rank of the Prophets whose heirs they are; for there are the heirs of Jesus, of Abraham, of Joseph, of Noah, and so on; and the position of each pole is determined by the position of the prophet whose heir he is, but all of them proceed from the 'tabernacle' [*mishkāṭ*, which is of course the 'tabernacle of light', *mishkāṭ al-anwār*, so designated in verse 24:35] of Muḥammad. Thus, some are superior to others, but this superiority relates only to their spiritual knowledge, and there is no distinction to be made between them as regards their office (*quṭbiyya*) and the government of the universe (*tadbīr al-wujūd*).³⁵

This Pole, who is a 'face without a nape' (*wajh bilā qafā*) because nothing escapes his eyes,³⁶ himself escapes the eyes of others. The earth does not fall back before him, he does not walk through the air or on water, he does not feed himself by emancipating himself from secondary causes. He makes use of supernatural powers only at rare moments, when divinely commanded to do so. If he hungers, it is of necessity and not through choice: he does not call attention to himself by excessive asceticism. He is patient in wedlock, for there is no state in which he can more perfectly realize absolute servitude (*al-ʿubūdiyya*) than the state of marriage.³⁷

The *Kitāb manzil al-quṭb*, in common with other texts, describes the nature and the respective roles of the two Imāms.³⁸ The Imām on the left, whose secret 'name' is 'Abd al-Rabb, watches over the equilibrium of the world (*ṣalāḥ al-ʿālam*). He is the 'sword of the Pole' (*sayf al-quṭb*) and usually succeeds him. If he dies first, the Imām on the right becomes the Imām on the left and is himself replaced by the fourth 'pillar'. As regards Shaykh Abū Madyan, who as we saw above succeeded the previous Pole one or two hours before his death, Ibn 'Arabī explains in this passage that from now on his esoteric name was 'Abd al-Ilāh (the equivalent of 'Abdallāh), and that his previous name, 'Abd al-Rabb, passed immediately to a man from Baghdad, previously the Imām on the right, whose esoteric name was 'Abd al-Wahhāb.³⁹ The Imām on the right, 'Abd al-Malik, has the task of watching over the world of the spirits (*ʿālam al-arwāḥ*): 'His knowledge is knowledge of the things of heaven and he knows nothing about the earth.'⁴⁰

Having been viewed in terms of their functions as such, the Pole and the two Imāms are considered insofar as they are elements of the next

category, the category of the four Pillars or *awṭād* which they constitute with the addition of a fourth person, the *watād*, who is Khadir's 'substitute'. 'Through one of them God protects the east, through another the west, through another the south and through another the north—all of this must be understood from the Ka'ba. They are also called 'mountains' (*jibāl*) on account of Allāh's words (Qur'ān 78:6): 'Have we not made the earth into a cradle and the mountains into pillars (*awṭādan*)? For He stabilized the movement of the earth by means of the mountains, and the authority (*ḥukm*) of those of whom we are speaking (over the world) is analogous to the authority of the mountains over the earth.

Allāh is also referring to their station when He repeats the words of Iblis: 'We will approach them [i. e. men] from in front and from behind, from their right and from their left' (Qur'ān 7:17). It is by means of the *awṭād* that God protects these four directions, and they themselves are guarded against all that might come from there. Thus the demon has no power over them because he can only come at the son of Adam from one of these sides. As for above and below [if these are added to the four directions already mentioned], perhaps they are the concern of the six [spiritual men] of whom, if God wills, we will speak later.⁴¹

At the start of this section, Ibn 'Arabī claims to have known one of the *awṭād* of his time, in Fez. His name was Ibn Ja'dūn, and he earned his living sifting henna. One of the notes in the *Rūḥ al-quḍs* is about him, and provides more information. There is one remark which merits particular attention, for it describes a characteristic which we have already come across both in the prophetic traditions and in the literature of Sufism: when Ibn Ja'dūn was absent, says Ibn 'Arabī, no one noticed, and when he was present, no one asked him his opinion. When he arrived somewhere, no one thought to welcome him. When a subject was being debated in front of him, the speakers discussed it as though he were not present.⁴² Here, the saint's transparency is complete.

Before going on to the next category, the Shaykh al-Akbar makes two further points. The first concerns the 'name' of the *awṭād*, which in the case of three of them is added on to the name conferred on them in their capacity as Pole or Imām: they are 'Abd al-Ḥayy (servant of the Living One), 'Abd al-ʿAlīm (servant of the Knower), 'Abd al-Qādir (servant of the Powerful), and 'Abd al-Murīd (servant of Him Who Wills). The second point is much more general and precludes the possibility of a serious misunderstanding: 'All that we say here', writes Ibn 'Arabī, 'is said in connection with spiritual men (*rijāl*), but it may

apply equally to women.' This statement is further emphasized and clarified in other texts: 'Each category that we speak of contains both men and women.' 'There is no spiritual quality belonging to men to which women do not have equal access.' 'Men and women have a part to play at all levels, including the level of the Pole (*ḥattā fi 'l-quṭbiyya*).'⁴³

Notes to Chapter Six

1. On the *wajh khāṣṣ*, cf. *Futūḥāt*, I, pp. 319, 347; II, p. 294; III, pp. 23, 235, 248, 260; IV, p. 315; *Fuṣūṣ*, I, p. 174.

2. This spatial indeterminacy—for 'whichever way you turn, the Face of God is there', *Qur'ān* 2:115—is conveyed chiefly by the fact that, as regards his physical being, the saint becomes a face without a nape: like the Prophet who could see the faithful praying behind him, he sees in all directions at one glance. Ibn 'Arabī describes his experiences of this charisma in *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 491, and II, p. 486. Part of the same order of phenomena is the fact that the body is freed from the specialization of its organs. Any sense can substitute for any of the others: the *walī* is able to 'see' scents or 'hear' visible things, and so on (*Futūḥāt*, I, p. 221). On this characteristic aspect of the experience of the *fath*, see the autobiographical account by 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh (*Kitāb al-Ibrīz*), Cairo 1961, pp. 14-16; cf. also p. 354), which is one of the most extraordinary documents known on this subject. All this should be compared to Ibn 'Arabī's statement that the divine writings which, in certain exceptional circumstances, fall into the hands of man, are to be read in all senses (*Futūḥāt*, III, p. 605). On this subject, see also *ibid.*, I, p. 320; *Taj*, ed. O. Yahia, III, p. 462.

3. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-rasā'il*, I, pp. 21-26; see also M. U. Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle Against Popular Religion*, The Hague 1976, p. 65.

4. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle (Muqaddima)*, trans. V. Monteil, Beirut 1967-1968, III, pp. 1022-23. On this vast and complicated theme, see the excellent article by F. de Jong in *EP*, s.v. *quṭb* (IV, p. 548 ff.), which, however, says nothing about an essential point of Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine on this subject. Without embarking on a detailed analysis of the positions adopted by Orientalists, let us recall that for L. Massignon (*Essai sur les origines du lexique technique*, Paris 1954, pp. 132-34), we are dealing with 'a doctrine which is far more ancient in Islam than is generally believed', '... which is not necessarily Imāmīte in origin, whatever Ibn Khaldūn may have said about it. In the tenth century it was already classic. . . . Indeed, it was specifically spoken about from the ninth century onwards'. Henry Corbin (*En islam iranien*, I, p. 229; II, p. 76; III, p. 279. . .) sees it as a crypto-Shū'ite doctrine (in his opinion, the *quṭb* is a metamorphosis of the *imām*) and he suggests that the hierarchy of the *awliyā'* in Sufism was inspired by the hierarchy of the Ismā'īli secret societies.

5. This treatise occurs again in *al-Ḥāwī li' l-fatāwā*, Cairo 1959, II, pp. 417-37. In the next century, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (*Fatāwā ḥadīthiyya*, Cairo 1970, p. 322) was to adopt a position similar to Suyūṭī.

6. Suyūṭī, *ibid.*, p. 428.

7. One of the most interesting descriptions—for the topographical details it gives—of the *diwān al-awliyā'* occurs in 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh-'s, *Kitāb al-Ibrīz*, p. 326 ff.

8. Cf. for example *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 233; II, pp. 14, 19, 223, 308; III, pp. 34, 560. Ibn 'Arabī further says, in his attestation of investiture which concludes his *Kitāb Nasab al-khirqa*, that he received the *khirqa* (the gown or mantle of initiation) in Mecca from the hands of Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn Yūnus al-'Abbāsī, who had it directly from 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī. Despite being invested with the *khirqa* in other ways, this investiture establishes a special relationship between him and 'Abd al-Qādir. On 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (or al-Jilī, or al-Kilānī, or al-Gilānī), see the article by Margoliouth in *EP* and by W. Braune in *EP*; see also the thesis by Jacqueline Chabbi, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, idées sociales et politiques', Sorbonne 1971, and her article 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, personnage historique', in *Studia islamica*, no. 38 (1973), pp. 75-106. The most interesting hagiographical source is the *Bahjat al-asrār wa ma'dan al-amwār* by Shaṭṭanūfī (died 713/1314), Cairo 1330 AH (with Jilānī's *Futūḥ al-ghayb* in the margin), of which the *Qalā'id al-jawāhir* by Muḥammad ibn Yahyā al-Tādhafī, Cairo 1956, is a plagiarist. There are many editions of works attributed to 'Abd al-Qādir, in particular *al-Ghunya li ṭālibī tariq al-ḥaqq* and *al-Fath al-rabbānī*.

9. This event took place, therefore, eight years before the death of 'Abd al-Qādir, who is said to have died in 561 AH.

10. These two details enable us to identify the newcomer as a non-Muslim.

11. This town in the province of Hamadhān is several hundred kilometres away from Baghdad.

12. Tādhafī, *Qalā'id al-jawāhir*, p. 31.

13. The characteristic features of this type of account are found in the apologue of the sincere *murīd* and the false *shaykh*, related by 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh, *Ibrīz*, pp. 371-72.

14. Unlike other terms which we will come across later in this chapter, the term *abdāl* (singular *badal*) comes into at least one *ḥadīth* (*Lā tasabbū ahl al-Shām fa-inna fihim al-abdāl* . . .), mentioned by Suyūṭī in the treatise cited in note 5.

15. Some further points of interest in this account are: the presence of Khaḍir; the part played by 'Abd al-Qādir, who is obviously the Pole (*quṭb*)—although this means there is one too many, for, as we shall see, the Pole is one of the *Abdāl*; the presence of the 'indiscreet witness'—whose part is taken here by the narrator—which cannot be fortuitous, and which suggests that he himself will be called on one day to fill the office of *badal*; the departure from the rule according to which, at each level of the hierarchy, the replacement of the deceased titular is effected by a member of the category below 'going up a step'.

16. *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 151.

17. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 76. This person, who is not named in the *Futūḥāt*, is identified in the *Durra Fākhira* (trans. Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, London 1971, p. 152, number 62) as going by the name of al-Ashall al-Qabā'īli.

18. The definitions provided by Ibn 'Arabī and the structure of the hierarchy of the saints as he describes it (see below) are found later, in outline at least and often in detail, in most of the works of Ṣūfī literature in which these problems are raised

or discussed. We cannot here undertake an analysis of this vast body of documents, where, besides the classics, consideration would also have to be given to the innumerable smaller works arising out of the literature of the *ṭuruq*, even to the literature produced by a movement as unorthodox as the *anṣār* of the Sudanese Mahdī. Later on, we will give several examples relating to the Seal of Sainthood. However, strict precision is not always uppermost in the use of traditional elements or of Ibn 'Arabī's formulation of them: there is no local saint who has not been proclaimed *ṣāhib al-zamān*, no shaykh who has not been credited with the power to make his followers into *awṭād* or *abdāl*, no *ṭarīqa* which does not claim the exclusive privilege of supplying at every epoch the Pole of the time. When one is not just dealing with pious hyperbole, Ibn 'Arabī's explanations and his criteria usually make it possible to become aware of the underlying confusion of doctrine.

19. Apart from chapter 73 of the *Futūḥāt*, part of which we summarise below and in which this subject is discussed from page 3 to page 39 of volume II, the chapters of particular interest are: chapter 270 (II, pp. 571-74); chapter 336 (II, pp. 135-40); chapters 462 to 556 (IV, pp. 74-196). See also several short treatises: *Ḥilyat al-abdāl*, Hyderabad 1948, translated into French by M. Vālsan with the title 'La parure des abdāl', in *Études traditionnelles*, nos. 286-87, September-October and November 1950; *Kitāb Manzil al-quṭb*, *Risālat al-Anwār* (analysed below), *Kitāb al-Tarājīm*, all three published in Hyderabad in 1948; *Mawāqī' al-nujūm*, Cairo 1956. The treatise on the *Mubāya'at al-quṭb*, of which Osman Yahia has not registered a single manuscript, is undoubtedly identical to chapter 336 of the *Futūḥāt*.

20. Cf. the article by G. Vajda, s.v. in *El²*; the references it contains should, of course, be expanded to include—in addition to the passage from the *Futūḥāt* (I, p. 5) summarized here—chapter 4 of the *Fuṣūṣ* (ed. 'Aḥī, I, pp. 75-80), and chapter 22 (I, pp. 181-87), in which Idrīs is assimilated to Ilyās (i.e. Elijah).

21. Cf. *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 455; *Kitāb al-Isfār*, Hyderabad 1948, p. 32; *Tarjūmān al-ashwāq*, Beirut 1961, p. 24.

22. The fourfold nature of this structure, which corresponds explicitly with the four corners (*rūkn*, plural *arkān*) of the Ka'ba, also bears a relation to the levels of universal Manifestation, as we shall see when we discuss Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology (see chapter 10, n. 70).

23. *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 151.

24. The Poles named here are; firstly, the four initial caliphs (the *rāshidūn* caliphs, meaning orthodox or well-guided), who successively took over the leadership of the community after the Prophet's death. Next is Ḥasan, son of 'Alī, who, when elected caliph, abdicated in favour of Mu'āwiya, who founded the Umayyad dynasty. Mu'āwiya was the grandfather of the next-named Mu'āwiya ibn Yazīd, whose rule was brief in the extreme (forty days according to some, two or three months according to others; cf. Ibn 'Arabī's note on him in *Muḥāḍarat al-abrūr*, Damascus 1968, I, p. 67—a work whose authenticity is beyond doubt, despite certain suspicions, on which see GAL, SI, 799—and Suyūṭī, *Ta'rīkh al-khulafā'*, Cairo 1969, pp. 210-11), and who died aged twenty-one. 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, eighth Umayyad caliph, famous for his piety, reigned from the month of Ṣafar 99 until the month of Rajab 101 (717-18).

25. Al-Mutawakkil (206/822-247/861), the twelfth Abbassid caliph, put an end to the persecution (*mihna*)—started by the caliph al-Ma'mūn—of Muslims who, contrary to the Mu'tazilites, held that the Qur'ān was uncreated in nature.

26. Aḥmad ibn Ḥārūn al-Rashīd, son of the fifth Abbassid caliph, is mentioned several times by Ibn 'Arabī: *Tanazzulāt mawṣūliyya* (published in Cairo in 1961 under the title *Laṭā'if al-asrār*, p. 194); *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 15 (where Ibn 'Arabī relates how he met him one Friday in front of the Ka'ba in 599AH, i.e. several centuries after his death) and IV, p. 11.

27. *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 6.

28. *Kitāb manzil al-quṭb*, p. 2.

29. This means that his function is on a level which, ontologically speaking, precedes the level at which things endowed with existence become qualified as good or evil.

30. This perhaps surprising name derived from the fact that the Pole, his function being what it is, in a sense comes between God and created being.

31. On the theme of Mount Qāf in Islamic cosmology, see the article by M. Streck and A. Miquel in *El²*, s.v. *Qāf*.

32. *Kitāb manzil al-quṭb*, p. 4. Ibn 'Arabī explains (*Kitāb manzil al-quṭb*, p. 12; *Mawāqī' al-nujūm*, pp. 139-40) that Abū Madyan was the 'Imām of the left' and only acceded to the *quṭbiyya* 'one or two hours before his death' (in 595/1197). The same story, in expanded form, comes in the *Rūḥ al-quḍs*, where the man talking to the snake is identified as Mūsā Abū 'Imrān al-Ṣadrānī, of whom more later.

33. *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 135-40.

34. Those who are exempt from the obligation imposed by the pact are the 'sublime spirits' (*al-'ālīn*; see Qur'ān 38:75)—that is to say, according to *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 312, the *muhayyamūn*, the 'spirits overcome with love', who never cease their contemplation of the divine Beauty and Majesty and are unaware that the world even exists. The *muhayyamūn* are also called the *karūbiyyūn*, or Cherubim.

35. *Kitāb manzil al-quṭb*, p. 6.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 2. On the expression 'a face without a nape', see above, note 2.

37. *Futūḥāt*, II, pp. 573-74.

38. Information about the two Imāms is contained in all the texts which have reference to the Pole, as indicated in note 19.

39. *Kitāb manzil al-quṭb*, p. 12.

40. In *Futūḥāt*, chapter 270 and in *Mawāqī' al-nujūm*, p. 139, Ibn 'Arabī alludes to the correspondence between the three functions of the Pole and the Imāms, and the three divine functions ('Lord of men', 'King of men', 'God of men') mentioned at the start of the last *sūra* of the Qur'ān (114:1-3), which is, as we know, a *sūra* of protection. This correspondence is not without significance with regard to the modes of operation of the protection invoked by the believer who recites these verses. Let us note, on the other hand, that a contradiction exists between most of Ibn 'Arabī's texts about the esoteric names of the two Imāms and *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 571, where it is the Imam of the right who is named 'Abd al-Rabb. If this is not a mistake on the part of the author or a copyists's error, the most likely explanation is that there has been a reversal of perspective, with the Imām on the

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left of the Pole appearing to an observer to be on his right, and the Imām of the right on his left.

41. *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 7. On the *awṭād* and the next category, the *abdāl*, cf. *Futūḥāt*, I, pp. 152-61 (chapters 15 and 16).

42. *Rūḥ al-quds*, p. 72, number 17 (Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, pp. 114-16). Ibn Ja'dūn died at Fez in 597/1200.

43. These three quotations are taken respectively from *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 26; II, p. 35; and III, p. 89.