

MICHEL VÂLSAN

ISLAM
& THE FUNCTION OF
RENÉ GUÉNON



BERSERKER

BOOKS



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This volume is a collection of articles written by Michel Vâlsan and published in the journal Eludes Traditionnelles, which he edited from 1961 until his death on 25 November 1974.

We are thus launching a new edition, in the form of volumes, of all the texts he published in the aforementioned journal from 1948 onwards. The aim is to highlight the importance of these writings at a time when they are being forgotten or neglected, encouraged by the current difficulty in accessing and reading them.

This edition was made possible thanks to the intervention of the author's own son, M' Muhammad Vâlsan. We would like to express our gratitude to him.

Cyrille Gayal

Regarding the form in which the articles appear here, as well as the somewhat artificial nature of such a collection, we refer the reader to the remarks made by Michel Vâlsan himself in his introduction to *Symboles fondamentaux de la science sacrée* (see 1st and 3rd editions, pp. 21, 22 and 23 – Gallimard).

I

Islam and the function of René Guenon¹

"Say: O People of the Book! Come to a word that is equally valid for us and for you: that we worship none but God, that we associate nothing with Him, that we take none of us as lords besides God..." (Quran, 3:57).

René Guénon's death drew public attention to his spiritual life, and many were surprised to learn that he was a Muslim. Nothing in his books indicated such a traditional connection, and even the place he gave to Islam in his studies was, in comparison with that given to Hinduism or Taoism, quite limited, despite his frequent references to Islamic metaphysics and esotericism. This led some to wonder whether there could be any agreement between his doctrinal perspective and his personal traditional position. Others went so far as to think that his metaphysical and intellectual teaching could not be considered compatible with Islamic doctrine. There is little need to point out how superficial or even malicious such opinions or assumptions are, but we feel it is useful to provide some clarification and clarification here, considering that certain questions may be asked in this regard in a more relevant way and, as such, deserve to be taken into consideration.

There is thus one question concerning the Islamic orthodoxy of René Guénon's work, and another concerning the relationship between his personal traditional position and his general doctrinal function. As far as the first of these questions is concerned, since to our knowledge there has been no specific criticism, we do not have to respond to a particular thesis, but will simply attempt to show the context in which such a question arises. As for the second question, we will bring to the attention of our readers some documentary evidence that is almost unknown in the West.

First of all, we must recall or clarify a few questions of principle.

The notion of orthodoxy can be considered mainly on two levels: one is that of pure ideas, the other that of their formal adaptation in the traditional economy². While universal truths are immutable in themselves, through their cyclical adaptations to human conditions, they take on forms that are then linked to certain criteria of contingent orthodoxy. At the same time, the wisdom that arranges truths and doctrinal forms in the different domains and conditions of the traditional world also determines the degrees of jurisdiction and the limits of competence of the institutions and authorities that must be familiar with them.

The relative adaptation of Universal Truth or immutable truths in different traditional forms varies first of all according to whether they are intellectual or religious forms, the former, such as Hinduism, having a more directly metaphysical character, the latter, which are called "monotheistic traditions," generally involving dogmatic conceptual modalities and greater emotional involvement. The criteria for orthodoxy generally vary in each of these forms according to their specific and particular definitions. Furthermore, within certain traditional forms, and more specifically in religious forms, a distinction must be made between esoteric orthodoxy and exoteric orthodoxy: despite an organic relationship existing to a certain extent between the two external and internal domains of the same traditional form, the criteria applicable to one are naturally different from those applicable to the other.

On the other hand, just as the criteria of orthodoxy specific to the exotericism of one tradition cannot be applied to what belongs to another traditional form, so those concerning the initiatory and esoteric world of one of these forms cannot be considered directly applicable to the corresponding domains of another: there are, in fact, specific modalities for the esoteric path of each of these, albeit of a more internal nature, both in terms of doctrine and corresponding methods, and it would be wholly insufficient to speak of the esoteric unity of traditional forms without specifying that this unity concerns only universal principles, outside of which traditional adaptations result in particularities in the initiatory and esoteric order itself; if this were not the case, there would be only one esotericism and one initiatory domain for all existing or possible forms of exotericism.

Such identity and universality are only real in the highest aspect of metaphysics: it is in this sense that Islamic masters say: "The doctrine of Unity is unique" (*at-Tawhîdu wâhidun*). However, this doctrine is itself identical only in terms of its meaning, not in terms of the form it takes in one tradition or another; moreover, within the cycle of the same traditional form, the expression of the same doctrine may take on various forms—either successively or concurrently³. In any case, given the necessary relationship to a certain extent between initiatory teaching and the exoteric form of the same tradition, a relationship that applies equally to doctrine and to symbolic and technical forms, the particularities in question are even more noticeable when one compares initiatory teaching in an intellectual tradition with that of a religious tradition.

Nevertheless, despite the diversity of conditions that we have just recalled or specified, there is no irreducible multiplicity here. On the contrary, there must necessarily be a principle of intelligibility of the whole corresponding to the wisdom that disposes this multiplicity and diversity. But this principle can only be metaphysical. Similarly, the supreme criterion of orthodoxy between the different domains with their particularities can only be the domain of pure metaphysics.

In general, René Guénon's doctrinal work relates to the most universal truths as well as to the symbolic rules and cyclical laws that govern their traditional adaptation. In this respect, the criterion of his orthodoxy lies, by the nature of things, in the understanding of metaphysical principles and the consequences that follow from them. It is only secondarily that this orthodoxy could be subjected to literal verification in the various existing traditional doctrines; at first glance, for an ordinary reader, this verification is only immediate where René Guénon has made a special effort in his works to establish documentary evidence in support of the points of doctrine he was expounding, and in relation to the tradition to which he was thus referring; for everything else, personal understanding and research are required; it is assumed, at the same time, that this research is based on right intention, a condition that ensures its orientation and result.

Writing at a time when psychological and speculative conditions were no longer characterised by tradition, and exposing truths unsuspected by his contemporaries, his modes of metaphysical formulation necessarily took on an independent character in relation to the modes of doctrinal expression known or practised in the West. On the other hand, as he did not

exclusively attached to the teaching of a single Eastern tradition, but opportunely drew on everything that could be used to expound the universal ideas he synthesised, this character of formal independence remains to a certain extent even in relation to the modes of doctrinal expression of the East; This was inevitable, given that René Guénon wrote in a language belonging to a civilisation entirely different from those in which these doctrines are conveyed. As is well known, René Guénon had to carry out a work of synthesis in his studies, both conceptual and terminological – the two necessarily going hand in hand – which appears moreover as a series of successes the most achievements of traditional teaching. But this very fact ties his work to special conditions of intelligibility. Thus, if one were to attempt to translate his works of general doctrine into any language of Eastern civilisation, the translation would have to be accompanied by a special ideological and terminological commentary, varying with each of these languages. The orthodoxy of the deep meaning of the ideas would not suffice on its own, with a literal translation – if that were even possible – to make an Oriental reader, who is unprejudiced and knows only his own traditional form, recognise in these works of general doctrine the same doctrinal content as in his own tradition. The difficulty would be even greater when it comes to translation into the language of a religious civilisation, for the reason that René Guénon thought and expressed himself in modes belonging to what could be called a "sapiential spirituality", modes that are specifically different from those regularly practised in treatises of doctrine based on "revealed religion". Spiritual modes of "wisdom," such as those of Hinduism, for example, place at the forefront of traditional consciousness the ideas of the identity of the Self and the Universal Principle (*Brahma*), the coincidence of knowing and being, and the active role of the transcendent Intellect in metaphysical realisation. These truths, in religious traditions, not only circulate esoterically, but also – and this is a point to which particular attention must be paid – take a form that is analogical rather than identical. the identity of final meaning always exists, but that of the form itself is rare⁴. Now, these are the very ideas that René Guénon vigorously promoted, while at the same time making use of certain speculative notions of Aristotelianism, itself one of the sapiential forms of the West⁵.

On the other hand, a religious notion such as that of the 'personal God', which is specific to the theological conception of the Principle, could not intervene in his purely metaphysical speculation. He does not deny its legitimacy in a

theological doctrine, for that is where it belongs, alongside other specifically religious concepts such as "creation" and "salvation"; moreover, as in a traditional religious form, the exoteric basis is necessary for the initiatory and esoteric path – and René Guénon himself insisted on this point – the doctrinal and ritual elements of exotericism must necessarily be integrated and practised on their own level. For an initiate, moreover, these elements can and must be transposed into a metaphysical sense, but this in no way detracts from their positive virtues, for they find a truly universal scope there.

These characteristics of René Guénon's teaching are the rigorous consequence of his desire to deal exclusively with metaphysics and pure intellectuality, and also of the fact that a purely intellectual perspective on spiritual matters is more readily accessible to understanding than any other: moreover, they are addressed exclusively to intellectuals.

But since these advantages of intelligibility are only valid for an elite, his doctrinal synthesis cannot be immediately translated into a language of religious-based civilisation, where the presence of official dogmatic teaching and faith in particular forms of revelation are constituent elements of tradition. To take the case of Islam, even if the concepts of Arab Peripateticism, combined with those of Neoplatonism, were to some extent used in the teaching of initiatory doctrines, this was only a contingent and partial adaptation made possible and even necessary by the fact that Islamic theology (*Kalâm*) itself had adopted the speculative modes of philosophy for its expositions⁶.

However, the spirituality of Islam in general, as well as that of the *Ahlu-l-Haqîqa* (the people of the Essential Truth) and *Tasawwuf*, has remained, in its most intimate concepts and terminology as well as in its methods, based on its prophetic foundations. There are reasons for this homogeneity between spiritual influences on the one hand, and conceptual modes and technical means on the other, reasons that are closely related to what constitutes the excellence of the Muhammadan tradition, both in the exoteric and initiatic orders⁷.

Any presentation of René Guénon's work in a traditional Islamic setting should therefore be accompanied by a competent reference to the esoteric and metaphysical doctrines of Islam, while taking into account the inevitable delicacy of presenting the esoteric doctrines of Islam, even to an audience that cannot be considered as a whole capable of understanding matters of this order.

In this regard, it should also be noted that nowadays the doctrines of *Tasawwuf* themselves need a renewed and adapted intellectual justification in Islamic countries in order to respond to the conditions of the modern mentality that has spread from the West to all cultural circles in the Eastern world. Apart from the exoteric spirit, we must now reckon with the anti-traditional spirit of progressives of all kinds, and especially with the presence of a generation of "Orientalist" scholars, of Eastern origin but Western and secular in their training and inspiration⁸. In a curious reversal of circumstances, René Guénon's teaching can itself greatly facilitate this justification, for it contains the speculative and dialectical means that make it possible to achieve this in all mentalities similar to that of the contemporary West. This work of intellectual justification is already essentially present in the doctrinal references that René Guénon's work makes to Islamic esotericism and metaphysics.

The presentation of René Guénon's work in an Islamic, or more generally Eastern, civilisation thus appears to be a favourable opportunity to restore the prestige of traditional Eastern intellectualism as a whole. As in this work the doctrines of Hinduism and Taoism are often related to those of *Sufism* as well as Jewish or Christian esotericism, it is in his teaching that we also find the principle and methods of concordance between the two types of spirituality we have mentioned, the intellectual and the religious.

This leads us to provide some details on the relationship between these two types of spirituality. The two coincide in their supreme source and in their ultimate aspect; the differences appear in the dominant modalities on the lower planes. But every revealer in the religious sense is necessarily, before being chosen as the bearer of a revelation or divine message, and remains so afterwards, a Knower of the Principle according to the identifying mode of metaphysical realisation. The initiatory path opened by the revealer, while being directly related to the modalities of wisdom that characterise his personal type⁹, also presents certain characteristics linked to the message received for the religious community as a whole.

The form and scope of the prophetic message, especially when it comes to major prophetic cases, are such that the chosen medium itself receives through faith the revealed message or "book", which thus relates to everything that has not been fully realised by itself, and which is entrusted to it both for itself and for its community. That is why *Allah* says to His universal Prophet: "

Thus have We revealed to you the revelation through a Spirit from Our command, while you did not know what the Book was, nor what Faith was..." (Cor. 42:52).

But whatever the particular or specific characteristics of a religious spirituality, because its focus remains that of knowledge and its principle is purely metaphysical, it is always possible to reduce all of its symbolic and technical doctrinal attributes to a metaphysical conception and thereby find agreement with purely intellectual doctrines.

Thus, in the doctrinal order, despite the seemingly irreconcilable dualism of the ideas of 'God' and 'creation' in religious forms, it is inconceivable that the doctrine of supreme identity, valid both for the relationship of the Self to the Principle and for that of universal manifestation to the Principle, is lacking in the founder of an integral tradition, and that it is not, in principle, destined to remain the very essence of the tradition founded by him, despite the forms it may take from the outset or even during the traditional cycle, in esoteric teaching itself. Awareness of this primordial foundation may diminish or even be eclipsed, but this is because the elite themselves are participating in their tradition only imperfectly or incompletely, or because there is no longer any true elite at all. which is why we can then say that the community and its institutions no longer understand or accept the idea of Supreme Identity, but not that the traditions themselves exclude it.

Islamic tradition is clear on the point that all divine messengers brought essentially the same message and that all traditions are essentially One, which implies first and foremost an identity of reality and metaphysical doctrine. As for the Muhammadan form of tradition, it is in any case originally and essentially centred on the doctrine of Supreme Identity, which is that of *Waḥdat al Wujūd*. This expression belongs to Sheikh al-Akbar, who lived in the 6th-7th centuries of Islam, but the thing designated is purely Muhammadan: it is nothing other than *Tawhid* itself, in its initiatory sense, a sense that is frequently attested to in earlier traditional history, and which this master merely made more explicit and more accessible to contemporary intellectuality¹⁰.

This doctrine (*Waḥdat al Wujūd*), which was by nature an esoteric teaching, and of which only a few signs could be revealed to the outside world, affirms the identity of the Self and Allah or the Supreme and Universal Truth, and at the same time the essential identity of manifestation with Its Principle:

The identity of the "Self" and the Principle is attested to, among other things, by the famous *hadith* "He who knows himself knows his Lord"; on the other hand, the notions of "act of creation" and "creature" - both included in the term *khalq* - are reduced to those of "act of manifestation" (*zuhûr*) and "manifestation" (*mazhar*), which express more than a simple externalisation of principled possibilities, since they are linked to the divine name the Appearing One (*az-Zâhir*) and announce the manifestation of the One Being itself.

Finally, to consider another important point of difference between the two types of spirituality we are discussing, namely the concept of Intellect, we will look at a similar but more complex situation. In Islam, according to the prophetic definition, Intellect (*al-'Aql*) is a created thing: "the first thing Allah created was Intellect," says a hadîth. We will disregard here the metaphysical transposition, which we discussed in relation to the concept of *Khalq* and which would already resolve any difficulty. We will take the concepts in their direct sense: according to this sense, the sapiential function of the Intellect as a point of coincidence between the Principle and being is no longer possible. The standard doctrine in Islam does not consider the Intellect to be a divine "quality" or "faculty," and for this reason, in *Tasawwuf*, one avoids speaking of *ta'qqul*, "intellection

" with regard to the Divine Essence, whereas on the one hand among the Hindus *Chit*, the Universal Consciousness, which is a qualification of *Ishwarra*, is also that of the being absorbed in Him and which in its ordinary state possesses its reflection in *citta*, individual thought, and on the other hand among the Peripatetics, pure Intellect

coincides with God¹¹ and intellectual intuition knows the Principle. For the latter, intellection (in Greek *noesis*) is a notion that applies both to the immutable Knowledge that God "possesses" and to that which the caused or generated being itself "realises", and through which it participates in the subject and object of divine Intellection¹².

As for the Muhammadian doctrine, it restores things in this regard to a specifically different perspective: it is the Heart that is the faculty or organ of intuitive knowledge, this Heart which has only a symbolic relationship with the bodily organ of the same name, and which the *qudsi* hadith states as follows: "My Heaven and My Earth cannot contain Me, but the Heart of My believing servant contains Me." It should be noted that this is not simply a question of terminology. First of all, the Heart, which is the central reality of being, is, for example, according to the terms of the school of Sheikh al-Akbar

"the essential reality (*al-haqîqa*) which brings together, on the one hand, all the attributes and

lordly functions, and on the other hand all the generated characteristics and states, both spiritual and individual."

The Intellect is only one implication. The heart can be called Intellect insofar as it contains it, and the Intellect is Heart insofar as it is part of it. Here is a clarification from Sheikh al-Akbar: "We call the First Intellect Intellect (*'Aql*) in a different sense from that in which we call it Pen (*Qalam*), from that in which we call it Spirit (*Rûh*) and from that in which we call it Heart (*Qalb*)." Sometimes, to better highlight the difference, the Heart is considered to be a faculty superior to the Intellect, transcending its plane: *Al-Qalb huwwa-l-quwwatu-llatî warâ'a ṭawr al-'Aql*, says Sheikh al-Akbar, adding: "Thus, there is no Knowledge of the Supreme Truth (*al-Haqq*) coming from Truth itself except through the Heart; then this knowledge is received by the Intellect, from the part of the Heart ¹³.

But what is even more characteristic of the spiritual implications of the concept of the Heart is that it can be more adequately linked to the individual and emotional aspects of religious being, and above all to the mystery and total function of Faith, as we see in the hadith quoted above¹⁴; this relationship with Faith is not specifically possible for the Intellect, neither when it is in some way replaced by the Heart in its essential and most universal function, as results from Islamic dogma, nor when it is taken in the sense of the faculty of immediate knowledge of universal principles conferring certainty, which then corresponds to its purely sapiential meaning¹⁵.

The reality of the Heart is not ignored by purely intellectual doctrines, of course, but in these doctrines the perspective from which it is viewed is different. Speaking of the Heart, the centre of life and integral individuality according to Hindu teachings, which assigns it an intermediate position between Universal Intelligence and the individual, René Guénon recalls that "the Greeks themselves, and Aristotle among others, attributed the same role to the heart, which they also made the seat of intelligence " (*Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, chap. III). With regard to the changes in position resulting from the changes in perspective we are discussing, it can be noted that in doctrines of this kind, the relationship between the Heart and Intelligence or Intellect is reversed: the former is considered only at the individual level, which means that it is Intelligence or Intellect that remains in the supra-individual or universal realm.

It is undeniable that in Greek wisdom doctrines, the concept of the Heart plays a rather secondary role, and almost accidentally, since the intellectualist perspective of these doctrines does not specifically require it; but it would be a mistake to see this only as a contingent difference in situation and not to notice the deeper concordance, for if the heart is considered in wisdom doctrines only as the centre of individuality, it is precisely because of this centrality that it corresponds symbolically to the divine Intellect in its relations with the individual and is essentially identified with it.

We must also point out that, in general, this notion of the Heart appears much less prominently in Christian doctrines themselves. We say this especially in relation to its importance, both in the texts of Muhammad's revelation and in the teachings of *Tasawwuf*, and the difference can be explained by the fact that Christianity necessarily borrowed the intellectual forms of Greek wisdom for its spread among the Gentiles ¹⁶.

These different points of view on the fundamental elements that constitute the spiritual being, and on their relationship with the Supreme Truth, are naturally related to the characteristic modalities that we then observe in the respective paths, both in terms of spiritual life in general and in terms of methods of realisation, but a true understanding of things always makes it possible to find the basic agreement and to situate the differences observed in the contingent order where they all have their reason for being.

To conclude this brief examination of the points taken as examples, we can see that there is no profound and irreconcilable divergence between the two types of spirituality we have discussed, the intellectual and the religious, and that, moreover, it is René Guénon's own method that allows us to find the real agreement between them. It is therefore not here that there would be any difficulty in establishing the orthodoxy of this teaching, either in relation to Islamic tradition or to any other tradition.

But apart from the purely intellectual concepts that characterise René Guénon's doctrinal synthesis and which would require a more specific presentation and justification in an Islamic civilisation, there is at least one other concept that is of paramount importance in this work and which is not openly or fully professed in either traditional religious or intellectual forms. This is the idea of the simultaneous validity and legitimacy of all existing traditional forms, or rather the idea that, in principle, there can be several traditional forms existing at the same time, or rather the idea that, in principle,

there can be several traditional forms at the same time, more or less equivalent to each other, because in fact, it can happen that a tradition, whatever its original excellence, deteriorates over the course of history to the point where one can no longer really speak of its current validity or its actual integrity.

However, due to a kind of organic need for self-affirmation, and as a result of the perception and awareness of its own spiritual excellence, each traditional mindset relegates other traditions to inferior positions, or simply excludes them from any access to a profound and truly beneficial truth. However, the idea of the legitimacy of all existing traditional forms is only the consequence in "spatial" mode.

", or the simultaneous application of the idea of the universality of doctrine and the fundamental unity of traditional forms; only this universality and unity, the doctrines that are generally valid in each traditional community, are more readily recognised in their application in temporal succession, and moreover to varying degrees, as this allows the respective communities to more easily exclude or diminish other contemporary traditional forms.

This natural propensity is generally accentuated in communities based on a religious form, but it is not in Islam that it reaches its most characteristic form. On the contrary, in a certain respect, there are more possibilities for universal vision in Islamic law than in any other tradition, and in any case more than in other religious laws. Indeed, regardless of the degree to which the common mentality or the exoteric doctrine professed actually realise this universal vision, its foundations are found in religious law, in the Qur'anic text itself. There is no other revealed text as explicitly universalist as the Qur'an. We can only address this question in general terms here, but we will quote a few texts that are sufficiently clear in themselves:

"Truly, those who believe, the Jews (text: *alladhîna hâdû* = those who practise Judaism), the Christians (*an-Nasârâ*), the Sabians (who are thought to correspond to the Mandaeans), those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds, these shall have their reward with their Lord. Therefore, they will have nothing to fear, and they will not be afflicted." (Cor.2.62. : "*inna-lladhîna âmanû wa-lladhîna hâdû wa-n-naçâra wa-ç-çâbi-îna man âmana bi-Llâhi wa-l-yawmi-l-âkhiri wa-âmila çâlihan falahum ajruhum 'inda rabbihim wa-lâ hum yaâhanûna*").

"For each of you, We have instituted a law and a way" (Cor.5.48 : "*likullin ja'alnâ minkum shir'atan wa minhâjan*").

"If Allah had willed, He would certainly have made you one community (*umma*), but He subjects you to 'trials' according to what He has given you. Strive to outdo one another in good deeds. You will all return to Allah, and then He will inform you of what you now differ about." (Cor.5.48: "*wa law shâ-a-Llâhu laja'alakum ummatan wâhidatan wa lâkin liyabluwakum fî mâ atâkum fa-stabiqû-l-khayrâti ilâ-Llâhi marjî'ukum jamî'an fayunabbi-kum bimâ kuntum fîhi takhtalifûna.*")

It must also be said that despite the precision and clarity of such texts, the dominant exoteric interpretation reduces them, as a matter of principle, to a perspective of successive validity, not simultaneous validity, because Muhammadan law is considered to abrogate previous laws. However, the Qur'anic text itself affirms that the Muhammadan revelation brings "confirmation" of what is still effectively present in previous revelations:

"And We have revealed to you the Book with the Truth, confirming and preserving what was before it in the scriptures." (Cor.5.48: "*Wa anzalnâ ilayka-l-kitâba bi-l-ḥaqqi muḥaddiqan llimâ bayna yadayhi mina-l-kitâbi.*")

We cannot examine here all the points that raise questions of abrogation and confirmation, but sticking to only the most obvious and general aspects, we will also quote the following verses that attest to the validity of Jewish and Gospel laws; this one concerning the Torah: "But how can they take you (O Muhammad) as their judge when they have the Torah in which is the judgement (legal criterion) of Allah?" (Cor. 5:43: "*wa kayfa yuḥakkimûnaka wa 'indahum at-Tawrâtu fîhâ ḥukmu-Llâhi*"). And this one concerning the Gospel: "Thus the People of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed in the Gospel, and those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed, those are the transgressors." (Cor.5.47: "*wa-l-yahkum ahlu-l-injîli bimâ anzala-Llâhu fîhi wa mâ lam yaḥkum bimâ anzala-Llâhu fa-ulâ-ika humu-l-fâssiqûn*").

These references suffice here to illustrate our assertion that the basis Islamic law is providentially disposed towards a broad vision of traditional unity and universality, both in succession and simultaneously. In this same regard, there is really only Christianity, which, stuck in its dogmatic conceptions of the "historical" meaning of the uniqueness of Christ, is exoterically deprived of both the successive and simultaneous visions of this universal reality, to the point that it does not even recognise the Jewish tradition prior to the coming of Christ, and in whose lineage it stands

, an autonomous soteriological economy: the effectiveness of the biblical forms as a whole is thus linked, in the exoteric acceptance of Christian religious dogma, to the criterion of the expectation of the "historical" Christ, and the actuality of salvation is suspended, both for the common people and for the Patriarchs and Prophets, until the redemption brought about by the Saviour. Judaism itself, whose exclusivism is in other respects more radical than any other, recognises at least for the biblical past this traditional reality in the line of the Patriarchs and Prophets, where it sees the continuous actualisation of the same primordial truth still conferring the fullness of salvation¹⁷.

It is important to note, however, that in recent times there has been an effort in Catholic studies to acknowledge certain spiritual values that are too obvious to be denied in other traditional forms, such as Hinduism and Islam; thus broadening the concept of "Church" in a sense that is freer from spatial, temporal, and formal contingencies, recognising that saving grace is more independent of historical conditions and formal adherence to dogmatic articles and their canonical consequences, but nevertheless linked to the informal and universal inner truths of dogmas, and that the universality of Christ is conceived as implying the possibility of his intervention outside the eminent modalities of the historical Christian form. This is currently only a timid and cautious trend, but it is particularly valuable in its significance, especially when it is manifested by those very people who had hitherto taken it upon themselves to obstruct any truly universal understanding of traditional data and agreement on principles with the traditional East.

But whatever the privileges of principle or fact of the Islamic tradition in this regard, it is only too true that the idea of the truth and legitimacy of other traditional forms, religious or otherwise, needs to be supported intellectually and legally when presenting René Guénon's work in Islamic circles. We would like to point out a point that will always be a valuable element in such work. Islamic spirituality as a whole is particularly sensitive to the recognition of divine Oneness, which for it is the foundation and primary criterion of validity for any religious form. However, René Guénon affirms and teaches the fundamental unity of existing traditions only because he observes that the essence of all respective doctrines is that of the Unity or Non-Duality of the Principle of Truth. Moreover, it is to the extent that this supreme doctrine is truly understood and practised in a

traditional community that he first recognises the current validity of the respective tradition.

René Guénon's teaching on the legitimacy of other traditions is thus verified and validated by the very truths that concern Islamic consciousness. On the other hand, having stated the need for a traditional agreement between East and West, in the interest of humanity as a whole, he explained that this agreement must concern the principles on which everything else depends, and his entire work has no other purpose than to awaken and develop in the West an awareness of the universal truths of which *Tawhid* is the most apparent expression in Islam. It is only natural that this constant and manifold homage to what is most dear to Islam in general should at the same time benefit the doctrinal authority of the person who has been its most qualified exponent in our time.

On the other hand, René Guénon's thesis on the fundamental unity of traditional forms will not appear entirely new in Islam, as there are some valuable precedents, first and foremost with Sheikh al-Akbar, whose teaching could not, however, be as explicit as that of René Guénon due to the reservations imposed by any particular traditional milieu; it will nevertheless be worthwhile to refer to them.

What we have just pointed out as critical points and solutions to be considered when judging the Islamic orthodoxy of René Guénon's teaching, as well as his orthodoxy in general, should not obscure the fact that what is required in this regard of any Oriental or Westerner who wishes to judge it is not only intellectual qualities of judgement, but also extensive and profound knowledge of the doctrines that must be evoked in this case. The easy and expeditious method of truncated quotations removed from their overall conceptual context, perhaps aggravated by terminological misunderstandings, can have no excuse here, for René Guénon does not speak in the name or in the terms of a particular theology or doctrine whose references would be immediately apparent. In any case, one of the most absurd things would be to ask exoteric "authorities", whether from the East or the West, to assess the degree of this orthodoxy, either in general or in relation to some particular tradition. These "authorities", as exoteric, and whatever their claims to competence, sincere or not, already have no qualification to judge the esoteric and metaphysical doctrines of their own traditions.

History is there to prove to any intelligent and honest person that whenever such interference has occurred, whether caused by simple carelessness or serious misconduct on either side, it has resulted in a decline in spirituality and the tradition as a whole has suffered.

caused by simple carelessness or serious mistakes on either side, the result has been a decline in spirituality, and the tradition as a whole has suffered as a consequence—⁽¹⁸⁾. This situation is more noticeable in the West because the exoteric order is centralised there in an institution that enjoys direct authority throughout its traditional world, but it has, to a certain extent, parallels in Eastern civilisations, where ill-advised religious or political authorities have sometimes felt compelled to interfere in matters that did not concern them. Thus, in Islam, the work of Sheikh al-Akbar has sometimes been the subject of violent attacks by theologians or jurists, while other authorities have defended him. In his case at least, this ultimately resulted only in some difficulty in the circulation of his works, which nevertheless continued to express the teaching par excellence of *Tasawwuf*. Nowadays, his writings are increasingly being published and, despite hostilities that will never disappear, his work enjoys a certain authority in general, which is also a source of pride for Islamic intellectualism and spirituality.

We have just mentioned again the case of Sheikh al-Akbar, who was the "reviver" par excellence of the initiatory path and, indirectly, of the Islamic tradition as a whole, in the 7th century of the Hegira. There is more than a simple natural concordance between René Guénon's teaching and his own, as between true metaphysicians. There is also a more subtle and direct relationship, given that René Guénon received his Islamic initiation from a master who himself was nourished by the intellectuality and universal spirit of Sheikh al-Akbar: the Egyptian Sheikh Elish el-Kebîr. It was to this figure that René Guénon dedicated his 1931 work *Symbolism of the Cross* in these terms: "To the venerated memory of Esh-Sheikh Abder-Rahmân Elish El-Kebir, El-Alim, El-Malki, El-Maghribi, to whom the initial idea for this book is owed. Meçr El-Qâhirah 1329-1349 H" ¹⁹.

The case of this Egyptian master is also interesting to us in another respect, because apart from his initiatory status, which was of the highest order, he had another quality that could be taken into account in relation to the question of Islamic orthodoxy in René Guénon's work. Here is what the author of "The Symbolism of the Cross" wrote to us at one point: "Sheikh Elish was the Sheikh of a Shadhili branch, and at the same time, in the exoteric order, he was head of the Maliki madhab at Al-Azhar." For those who are not familiar with the meaning of these terms, we should point out that the terms "Shadhili branch" refers to a branch of the initiatory organisation (tarîqa) founded in the 7th century.

century of the Hegira by Sheikh Abû-l-Hasan ash-Shâdhilî, one of the greatest spiritual figures of Islam, who was also an esoteric centre of the tradition; this is therefore an initiatory function proper; as for the terms "madhab mâleki", they refer to one of the four schools of law on which the exoteric order of Islam is based, each of which is represented in the teaching of the greatest university in the Islamic world, Al-Azhar in Cairo. In this way, René Guénon's master combined in himself the two competences and even the two authorities required respectively for the esoteric and exoteric domains of the tradition. In terms of his disciple's Islamic orthodoxy, this fact has significant value. It should be noted that it was the master who first had the idea for a book such as *The Symbolism of the Cross*, which, through its metaphysical doctrine and symbolic method, is the work most representative of the idea of intellectual universality of tradition in René Guénon's entire oeuvre.

He is also mentioned in a note in Chapter III of this book, where, referring to the realisation in the Prophet, identical to the Universal Man, of the synthesis of all states of being according to the two meanings of 'exaltation' and 'amplitude' which correspond to the two vertical and horizontal axes of the cross, René Guénon writes: "This allows us to understand the words spoken some twenty years ago by a figure who occupied a very high rank in Islam, even from a purely exoteric point of view: 'If Christians have the sign of the cross, Muslims have the doctrine.'" "We would add," continues René Guénon, "that in the esoteric order, the relationship of the 'Universal Man' with the Word on the one hand, and with the Prophet on the other, leaves no real divergence between Christianity and Islam, understood in their true meaning, at the very heart of the doctrine." In the perspective thus opened up by his master, we know that René Guénon first attempted a doctrinal revival of Christian symbolism through a series of articles in *Regnabit* (between 1925 and 1927), and that he then wrote further articles on Christian esotericism in *Le Voile d'Isis-Etudes Traditionnelles*.

In terms of what interests the West, Sheikh Elish also seems to have had some knowledge of Freemasonry and its initiatory symbolism. René Guénon once wrote that Sheikh Elish "explained the letters of the name of Allah in this regard by their respective forms, using the ruler, compass, square and triangle". What Sheikh Elish said could be related to one of the possible ways of reviving Masonry's initiatory practices. In any case, a large part of his great disciple's articles were subsequently devoted to

symbolism and Masonic initiatory doctrine, and this important work will in any case appear as a contribution to the intellectuality and universality of Islam, for René Guénon had long since been known as Abdl-Wahîd Yahya and was himself an Islamic authority.

But one may wonder what explanation there could be for his manifestations of Islamic initiation, manifestations that are by no means natural in view of the usual rules. For although in the esoteric hierarchy there has never been a lack of awareness of universality and traditional solidarity, its open expression, and even more so its public message, are rather unknown before our time. In the works of Sheikh al-Akbar himself, who is the most "bold" esoteric author, the testimony of the unity of traditional forms and their simultaneous validity is nevertheless surrounded by many precautions and most often veiled.

To understand Sheikh Elîsh's attitude, the simplest thing would be to consider the conclusions drawn by Sheikh Abdel-Wahîd Yahya, his disciple of Western origin who was responsible for developing his intellectual message, a message that was not only that of Islam, but also that of the universal traditional spirit. Those who have understood René Guénon's work know that through it, the spiritual forces of the East have given providential help to the West with a view to a traditional recovery that is of interest to humanity as a whole.

This help is unique in that it is expressed, first of all, on the relatively external level of doctrinal, metaphysical and initiatory teaching, while addressing a limited category of intellectuals. In the past, under more normal traditional conditions, purely intellectual relations between the East and the West were, on both sides, the exclusive secret business of initiatory organisations, which did not then exist in the West, and as a result, the influences that could be exerted remained imperceptible from the outside, and the effects in doctrinal terms, insofar as they resulted, did not appear in their Eastern form, nor did they betray their origin. Such was more precisely the situation in the Middle Ages the situation regarding the relations between the *Fedeli d'Amore* and the initiates of *Tasawwuf*, evidence of which has only appeared in literary form in our own time, when various studies of Dante's work have discovered important Islamic influences coming from the work of Sheikh al-Akbar or the writings of Abû-l-'Alâ al-Ma'arrî.

However, based on the few facts we have just presented, or simply recalled, the relationship between René Guénon's work and its 'functional' Islamic source may, despite everything, appear to be only virtual, if not accidental. And even if, apart from that, René's books and articles

Guénon's works contain frequent references to Islamic doctrines, but these references do not necessarily prove an Islamic influence on the general and final development of his entire body of work. Moreover, he himself never presented himself specifically in the name of Islam, but rather in the name of traditional and initiatory consciousness in a universal sense. Nor is it for us to consider restricting this broad privilege of his message²⁰, and if we say that there is a sure relationship between this universal work and Islam, it is, first of all, because of a natural coherence between all the forces of tradition, that everything that can be found on the Islamic side that intervened in the genesis and development of René Guénon's work could only be in agreement with what was predicted and supported at the same time by traditional Eastern forces other than Islamic ones.

But there is another reason that would allow us to consider the role of Islam here in a more characteristic way: namely, the natural proximity of the Islamic world to the West, and its more direct interest in everything concerning the fate of the latter. As a result, the spiritual forces of Islam could very well consider the idea of the intellectual and spiritual recovery of the Western world in a more determined manner. This seems to have been precisely the meaning of Sheikh Elish's function in relation to that of René Guénon. That is why it is appropriate to mention here some other facts concerning the spiritual case of Sheikh Elish, facts which will show that René Guénon's function and work are part of a cyclical perspective that his master had explicitly stated. This will provide an even better understanding of certain traditional situations existing in both the West and the East.

We have drawn the data in question from several issues, found recently, of the Arab-Italian journal *An-Nâdî = Il Convito*, which was published in Cairo in the first decade of this century and which, in 1907, took a traditionalist turn. The propitiatory spirit was already that of Sheikh al-Akbar. This journal thus played a pioneering role in relation to "La Gnose" of recent years and "Le Voile d'Isis-Etudes Traditionnelles". Among its traditional contributors, the most notable is Abdul-Hâdi Aguilî, both for the Arabic and Italian sections. He published articles, editions of treatises by masters of Islamic esotericism, including Sheikh al-Akbar, and translations of some of these texts. In that same year, 1907, there was much talk in the journal about Sheikh Elish, who for a time appeared as a contributor with a short article on the Master par excellence, Muhy-d-Dîn Ibn Arabî. Abdul-Hâdi, who was naturally in personal contact with Sheikh Elish, gives us valuable information about him.

He presents him as "one of the most famous men in Islam, son of the restorer of the Maliki rite, and himself a profound sage, respected by all, from the humblest to princes and sultans, leader of many religious brotherhoods throughout the Muslim world, and finally an undisputed authority on esoteric and exoteric Islam, law and politics ." Speaking further about him and his father, "the great renovator of the Maliki rite," Abdul-Hâdi gives us some details about the life of Sheikh Elish: "They kept their distance from political intrigues of all kinds. Their integrity, austerity and profound knowledge, combined with their illustrious ancestry, promised them an exceptionally prominent position in Islam; they wanted nothing to do with it.

"What established the legend of their fanaticism was a famous *fatwa*, which, it was said, led to the revolt of Arabî Pasha in 1882."

(Here Abdul-Hâdi examines what a *fatwa* is from a legal point of view, and why such a decision by a legal expert acting in the regular exercise of his function as *mufti* could never result in sanctions being imposed on him by the political authorities).

"Following the events of 1882, the two Sheikhs Elish, father and son, were thrown into prison and sentenced to death. The father died in prison; the son was pardoned and exiled... ²¹

"Bad fortune pursued the Sheikh even into exile. His notoriety, his birth, his very integrity made him suspect; and under the foolish accusation of aspiring to the universal Caliphate of the Muslim world, for his own account or for that of the Sultan of Morocco, he was again put in prison, this time on the orders of a Muslim prince.

"For two years, he remained in a filthy cell where everything was rotten and water threatened to burst in. To frighten him, condemned prisoners were killed in front of him. Finally, he was pardoned and granted honourable exile in Rhodes²² .

"He had stayed again in Damascus, where the famous adversary of the French in Algeria, Emir Abd El-Kader, became his aml and fellow student in the same spiritual teaching²³ . When the Emir died²⁴ , the Sheikh performed the last rites and buried him in Sâlihiyyé, next to the tomb of the Grand Master, Sheikh Muhy-d-Dîn Ibn Arabî.

"Amnestied by Queen Victoria²⁵ , the Sheikh returned to settle in Cairo. From there, he radiated his beneficial influence throughout the Muslim world, not only as a scientific authority, but also as the supreme leader of many

religious congregations. As always, he kept himself – and his followers with him – far above the petty intrigues of the day, the corruption and greed that tempt the soul.

Whenever you meet a man in the East who is superior in character and knowledge, you can be sure that you are in the presence of a "Shadhili". Now, it is mainly through the virtue of Sheikh Elish's rectitude and high spirituality that this admirable congregation maintains the sublime traditions of its founder, the Most Blessed Abû-l-Hasan ash-Shâdhilî, in the face of general contamination.

In issue no. 2, which we do not have, the magazine published Sheikh Elish's article on the subject. An Italian translation was given in issue no. 5-8 (Sept.-Dec. 1907). The title is: "The Prince of Religion, the Great Spiritual Pole, the Bright Star in All Centuries".

On this occasion, the editorial team said:

The venerable Sheikh Elish, who is, so to speak, the spiritual descendant of Ibn Arabî, having taken a keen interest in our translations and studies of the great master of Sufism, has promised us his valuable collaboration. The following is the translation of his first article, which is based on the authority of the famous Imam ash-Sharanî, whose judgements are considered authoritative in matters of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, he himself having been one of the greatest Sufis of Islam and a profound scholar of tradition and sacred law. his excellent book *El-Mîzân* (The Balance), which we have already mentioned, is the finest book in the field of comparative jurisprudence.

Sheikh Elish's article is a brief introduction to Sheikh al-Akbar. A few notes, probably written by Abdul-Hâdi, accompany this translation. In the passage where Sheikh Elish's article states that Sheikh al-Akbar was guided in all his activities by the Holy Spirit, a note by the translator reads: " Sufis who have reached certain levels receive direct orders from the higher spiritual world, which they obey and which determine their actions, gestures and words. Sheikh Elish is one such case." Further on, the article recalls the eminent orthodoxy of Sheikh al-Akbar: "He was strongly attached to divine revelation and prophetic tradition and said: 'He who deviates for a single moment from the balance of the sacred Law will perish.' Sheikh Majd ad-Dîn al-Firûzabâdî, author of the great treasure trove of the Arabic language entitled *Qâmûs* (The Ocean), wrote: "Many have said that no Sufi has been as advanced in esotericism and exotericism as Sheikh (al-Akbar) Muhy-d-Dîn. That is why his orthodoxy is as pure and great as that of any theologian of any religion." At this point, a note from the translator says

Here, we would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that one

of the most famous men of science spoke spontaneously, without being refuted, about the orthodoxy of several religions at once."

The translation ends after two pages with the following explanation given by the journal: "The end of this article by Sheikh Elish refers to the work of our collaborator Abdul-Hâdi, who asked us not to reproduce the translation because, he said, this part contains terms that are too laudatory for him. Sheikh Elish thanks him for the service he renders to civilisation by making known and understood to the people of today a mind as superb as that of Muhy-d-Dîn; he urges him to continue his studies, without worrying about the hatred that his Islamophile work may arouse among certain groups of so-called Muslims."

Sheikh Elish's spiritual advice was closely followed by the study group that formed around the journal. In issue no. 3-4, which followed the publication of the Sheikh's article in Arabic, a note announced that "a society for the study of Ibn Arabi" (the Sheikh al-Akbar) had just been formed in Italy and the East. The new society took the name "Akbariyyah"²⁶ and set out to:

1. "To deepen and disseminate the Master's exoteric and esoteric teachings through publications, translations and commentaries on his works and those of his disciples, as well as through conferences and meetings.

2. "To bring together, as far as possible and appropriate, all the friends and disciples of the Great Master, in order to form, if not a bond of brotherhood, at least a rapprochement based on intellectual solidarity between the two elites of the East and the West.

3. "To provide material and moral support to all those who represent the 'Mohiyyiddian' tradition²⁷, especially those who, through their words and actions, work for its dissemination and development.

The society's work will extend to the study of other masters of Eastern mysticism, such as Jalâl ad-Dîn ar-Rûmî, but the main subject will of course remain Ibn Arabî.

"The society will not concern itself with political issues of any kind and will not stray from the philosophical, religious or theosophical research on which it is based."

At the same time, the journal developed its studies on *Tasawwuf*, both in its Arabic and Italian sections. Abdul-Hâdi also began publishing some of the Sheikh al-Akbar's unpublished works, some of which were unknown to Orientalists and have remained so until now. In a note, he said:

"Having had the good fortune to find some twenty unpublished works by Ibn Arabî, rare and precious manuscripts, we have spent all this time analysing them."

Unfortunately, reactions from modernist circles ultimately led to the journal being banned and the studies begun in Egypt being interrupted. It is possible that issue no. 5-8, dated September-December 1907, is one of the last, if not the very last.

In these few documentary elements, which are certainly not all that could be found, we see that Sheikh Elish and his companions discuss doctrinal concordance between Islam on the one hand and Christianity and Freemasonry on the other, the need to revive traditional realities – first and foremost in the intellectual and initiatory order – an attempt to establish a spiritual link between East and West, and the notion of an elite to whom this function belongs, and finally the role of Islamic intellectuality and especially the teachings of Sheikh al-Akbar in this work. Readers of René Guénon will easily recognise certain fundamental theses of his work, which will thus appear once again, not as the creation of an original individuality and a syncretistic thought, but as the development of a providential idea whose means of expression and application were manifold and will certainly continue to be so until the intended goal is achieved to the extent that it must be.

After this start in Islamic lands, Abdul-Hâdi finally arrived in France, where he met René Guénon, who at the same time was editing *La Gnose*. It was there that Abdul-Hâdi resumed his activities in 1910, continuing his studies and, above all, his translations until the magazine ceased publication with the February 1912 issue, at which time René Guénon converted to Islam and was initiated into *Tasawwuf*. On the Italian side, it seems that there were no consequences at the time in terms of traditional studies. The war of 1914 even suspended all activity in France. With Abdul-Hâdi's death in Barcelona in 1917, René Guénon remained alone in Europe to continue developing, from a totally universal perspective, the work initially sketched out by the "Akbariyyah", until his writings attracted other intellectuals, the most important of whom gradually gathered around the "Voile d'Isis-Etudes Traditionnelles" (Veil of Isis-Traditional Studies). Shortly before, in a significant move in terms of his external positions, Guénon settled in Egypt, where Sheikh Elish had just died, and it was from there that he carried out his most important work for more than twenty years: books, articles and correspondence.

The traditional idea as we know it today in the West, following the work of René Guénon, thus has a definite Islamic and Akbarian origin. This immediate and specific origin does not exclude the possibility of another, more general Eastern origin, for the unity of direction of the entire traditional order involves the participation of multiple and diverse factors, all acting in perfect coherence and harmony. Islam itself appears in René Guénon's work through what is most essential and transcendent in it, and therefore most universally traditional. Thus, the primary and most important intention of this work is to remind the West of its own tradition through a renewed awareness of the most universal and permanent truths. Other possible consequences, whatever their degree of cyclical probability, logically come only as a secondary consideration.

It was only natural that, with regard to the modern West, the intellectual function of traditional doctrine should find its immediate support in Islam, for Islam is the natural intermediary between East and West, and as such it is united, even on the external level, with the entire traditional order of the world. This is precisely what answers the question concerning the relationship between René Guénon's personal Islamic position and his general doctrinal function.

On the other hand, we found that the meaning of his work and the general lines of his work were set out by his master Sheikh Elish, who was in our time an authority par excellence of Islamic orthodoxy in all respects. This Sheikh also represented the intellectual heritage of Sheikh al-Akbar Muhy-d-Dîn Ibn Arabî, the authority par excellence of *Tasawwuf* and Islamic doctrine. This answers the other question concerning the Islamic orthodoxy of René Guénon's teaching. The profound criteria of orthodoxy, as we have said, are found in the metaphysical intelligibility of the doctrine, but given misunderstandings such as those we mentioned at the beginning, it is nevertheless important to note that the apparent progression of René Guénon's teaching and its function is also part of a lineage of authorities whose manifest character is the purest orthodoxy and the most universal intellectuality.

II

Guénon's work in the East²⁸

For several years now, we have been aware of the progress made in the intellectual circles, especially academic circles, of the Indo-Pakistani world in terms of knowledge of René Guénon's work²⁹. We believe it is time to take note of a few characteristic facts on this subject in a chronicle.

Mr Mohammad Hassan Askari, Professor of English Literature at Islamic College (University of Karachi), who in previous years published an article in English on Guénon and his life, has just written two pamphlets in Urdu (the official language of Pakistan):

1. A list of about 200 errors committed by modern-minded people with regard to traditional doctrines and realities;
2. A short history of the development of the modern mentality.

Last year, the author presented these works to Muftî Mohammad Chafi', Rector of the *Dâru-l-'Ulûm* in Karachi, who found them most welcome and included them in the curriculum for the 1968-1969 academic year. During the three months of last autumn, Prof. Mohammad Taqî (the Rector's own son), who had been given responsibility for this development, used the respective texts as the basis for a course, which was very well attended and is continuing in 1969. The following sentence has been reported from the teaching given in this way: "Guenon's analysis shows that he is firm in the way of the Prophet and his companions"; this also means, for us, that the spiritual climate of these Asian regions is much more open to universalist conceptions of tradition than one might have thought. Furthermore, the alteration produced by the modern mind is much less profound than Westerners, even those with a traditional mentality, believe, as they are too easily impressed by the external deterioration of the social setting and style³⁰. Mr Askari also informs us that, in India itself, young Muslims are becoming increasingly interested in traditional ideas as developed by Guénon.

To better understand the favourable characteristics of the respective traditional region (which corresponds to the geographical concept of "Asian subcontinent") we will quote a few passages (adjusted only in terms of wording) from previous correspondence with Mr. Askarî who, considering translating several of our own articles into Urdu, said the following about the article entitled "Islam and the Function of René Guénon":

"In this last article, you examine the question of introducing Guénon's works into an Islamic milieu. I have a few things to say on this point.

"I am not familiar with the intellectual atmosphere in other Islamic countries. But as far as Muslims in Pakistan and India are concerned, the situation is somewhat different. First of all, it is important to realise that we have never emphasised the division between *Sharia* and *Tariqa*³¹, but rather their harmony. In our country, the greatest esoteric masters have always been masters of exotericism at the same time; such is the case, for example, with Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindî, Shâh Waliyullâh ad-Dihlawî, as well as his three sons Shâh Abdu-l-Aziz, Shâh Abdu-l-Qâdir, Shah Rafî'û d-dîn, and finally Shâh Ashraf Alî, who is the greatest esoteric and exoteric master of the 20th century. Thus, it is not at all shocking to us when Guénon considers things from an esoteric point of view.

"As for the question of presenting Guénon's work in an Islamic context, you say on page 16: 'But since these advantages of intelligibility are only available to an elite, his doctrinal synthesis cannot be immediately translated into a language of religious civilisation, where the presence of official dogmatic teaching and faith in particular forms of revelation are constituent elements of tradition.' And on page 17: "Any presentation of René Guénon's work in a traditional Islamic environment should therefore be made with competent reference to the esoteric and metaphysical doctrines of Islam, while taking into account the inevitable delicacy of presenting the esoteric doctrines of Islam, even to an audience that cannot be considered as a whole to be capable of understanding matters of this kind. And more explicitly on page 24, you mention the "purely intellectual conceptions that characterise René Guénon's doctrinal synthesis and which would require a more specific presentation and justification in an Islamic civilisation environment". I do not believe that Guénon's intellectual and metaphysical attitude will be problematic for our readers.

For five or six centuries, we have had countless works that have taken the same attitude and point of view. We cannot forget the role played by the *Dâru-l-'Ulûm* in Deobend over the last hundred years. Shâh Ashraf Alî, who had a close connection with this "House of Sciences (in the traditional sense of the word)", expressly stated that nowadays *sulûk 'ishqî* [initiatory path based mainly on the virtue of spiritual desire] had lost much of its validity and had even become dangerous: he himself advised his disciples to adopt *sulûk 'ilmî* [initiatory journey based mainly on doctrinal understanding].³²

On page 28, you consider the question of exoteric authorities in relation to Guénon's writings. If a justification were to be found in this regard, I think it could easily come from our masters. For my own benefit, I have often noted in their works observations confirming what Guénon said; it is a pity that I did not take notes on this subject.

On page 29, you mention the hostility encountered by Sheikh al-Akbar in exoteric circles. This is not the case with us. Admittedly, there have been objections – the most notable ones coming not from the exoteric side, but from the great esoteric master Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindî. And the defence of Sheikh al-Akbar came not only from the esoteric side, but also from the "Exoteric": one of the best defences of this kind came from Shah Ashraf All, who undoubtedly held the position of exoteric authority [while also being, of course, an esoteric master]. He devoted two short works to this subject. Thus, we have never failed to show respect and reverence for Sheikh al-Akbar. His *Futûhât Makkiyya* is often cited as an authority in the exoteric works published today. This is especially true of the people belonging to the *Dâru-l-'Ulûm* of Deobend, who are known for their exoteric orthodoxy and severity in this regard.

Our milieu is not hostile to the concept of *Wahdatu-l-wujûd*³³. Most people remain silent on this issue. But it is the central theme of our traditional poetry in Urdu or dialects such as Punjabi, Sindhi and Pashto. The inhabitants of our villages sing *Wahdatu-l-wujûd* every night.

As for what you say on the question of traditional universality on page 31, and on Guénon's use of Hindu terms and concepts, allow me to clarify a few points:

a) In the 17th century, Prince Dârâ Shikûh, son of Emperor Shâh Djahân, had already prepared a correspondence between esoteric Hindu terms and Islamic terms. It is a small book called *Majma'u-l-Bahrayn* (= The

Meeting of the Two Seas)³⁴ (6); the Urdu translation is still available today for half a franc.

b) Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindî himself recognised the validity of Vedic doctrines. What he doubts are the possibilities for realisation offered by Hinduism today.

c) Shah Waliyullâh ad-Dihlawî wrote about the Vedic doctrines in his work *Lamahât*, which I have already sent you.

d) The most explicit document on this question is a letter by Hazrat Maz'har Djânî Djânân, a contemporary and friend of Shah ad-Dihlawî (18th century), who belonged to the *Mujaddidiyya Naqshabandiyya* order and was recognised by Shah ad-Dihlawî as a saint greater than himself, and who was also the Sheikh of Qâdi Thanâu-Llâh (all these masters being of unquestionable orthodoxy). This authority accepts the truth of the Vedic doctrines but has reservations about the current validity of the Hindu tradition.

e) Another 18th-century saint, Shah Kâzim Qalandar, wrote poems on the theme of *Wahdatu-l-wujûd* using Hindu terms and symbols. He is not the only one to have done so. But I mention his name because his poems have been published with detailed commentary. The same can be said of the poems of his son Shah Turâb Alî Qalandar from the 19th century.

We will stop there for now with the quotations from the rich and colourful intellectual fresco that our correspondence with Prof. Askarî has provided us with in recent years. But we will return to it soon in connection with René Guénon.

EDITOR'S ADDENDUM

In the May-August 1970 issue of *Etudes Traditionnelles*, Michel Vâlsan presented and published a letter from Prof. Askarî entitled "Tradition and Modernism in the Indo-Pakistani World". We refer the reader to this article.

It should be noted that Prof. Askarî wrote in the last paragraph of his letter:

"I recall what the great Sufi master of the 20th century, Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, said to his disciples one day in around 1930: 'As I see it, the defenders of Islam will now come from Europe'³⁵. This was precisely the period when Guenon's work was taking on a more complete form and he was embarking on his studies of *Tasawwuf*³⁶ (2). And I firmly believe that Guenon is the intellectual guide that Muslims in particular need today to face the temptations and provocations of modern civilisation, as do people of all traditions."

III

ON SHEIKH AL-'ALÂWÎ (1869-1934)³⁷

Mr Martin Lings' book, recently published in French translation, *A Muslim Saint of the Twentieth Century: Sheikh al-'Alâwî*³⁸, has already been reviewed in *Etudes Traditionnelles* when its original English edition was published³⁹. We would like to take this opportunity to highlight a particular point in the biographical information reported in this book, which, corroborated by other documentary evidence and illuminated by doctrinal notions of *Tasawwuf*, may reveal a hitherto unnoticed aspect of this spiritual master of our time and his spiritual function.

Firstly, in the text of Dr Marcel Carret's memoirs, which Mr Lings included in Chapter I of his book, using it as an introduction⁴⁰, among the initial notes is one concerning the impression that Sheikh Al-'Alâwî made on the French doctor when he visited him for the first time at the *zawiya* in Mostaganem: "What struck me immediately was his resemblance to the face commonly used to represent Christ. His clothes, so similar, if not identical, to those worn by Jesus, the veil of very fine white fabric that framed his features, and finally his attitude, all contributed to reinforcing this resemblance. The idea came to my mind that this must have been how Christ looked when he received his disciples while he was staying with Martha and Mary" (p. 17)⁴¹. Further on in his reproduced text (p. 21), Dr. Carret, still speaking of Sheikh Al-'Alâwî, uses the terms "this figure of Christ". Many readers will think that this is, especially in the case of a modern European who would not be overly concerned with or have the means to nuance his sensibility, a summary reference to a common notion of holiness in the Western world, based on an aesthetic analogy. We have some reasons not to think so, and several other considerations may come into play to explain, at least to some extent, the "resemblance" noted in the doctor's account, which, in our opinion, is more a reflection of something more subtle than physical appearance.

During the events that followed the death of Sheikh Al-Bûzîdî, who had not wanted to appoint his successor himself, expressly leaving the matter to

divine decision, and when the group of affiliates of the *zâwiya* of Mostaganem with their *muqaddams* wondered who they should recognise as their new local leader above all else, many members of the brotherhood had spiritual dreams which resulted in Sheikh Al-'Alâwî being named as the successor to Sheikh Al-Bûzîdî's *maqâm*. Sheikh Sidi Adda Ben Tunes, in his book *Ar-Rawdat as-saniyya* (Mostaganem, 1354 H. = 1936), says that these "visions" were very numerous: he already records about sixty of them; Mr Lings has translated six of them (pp. 76-80), including one from Sheikh 'Alâwî himself. However, apart from these, there are a few other visions reported in the Arabic work that are so special and significant in a respect that interests us here that it would be truly regrettable not to mention them in this circumstance. We translate the respective passages:

One of these visions was reported by Sheikh Sidi Abdu-r-Rahman Bû'azîz, the leader of the *zâwiya* of the al-Jaâfirah region, who said: 'One of *the fuqarâ'* told us that he saw the moon split in two and a board (*lawha*) suspended from chains descended from it, which continued to approach the earth until there was only a short distance between them. Then Master Al-'Alâwî – may Allah be pleased with him! – appeared at the top of this plank, and with him Sayyidunâ Aïssâ (our lord Jesus) – peace be upon him! A herald stood up and shouted: "Who wants to see Aïssa (Jesus) – peace be upon him! – with the Supreme Master?" ? Here they are, descending from the sky! Hurry up, then!" The earth was then shaken violently, along with its inhabitants, and all creatures gathered together and asked to ascend with the Master onto this plank. He replied: "Wait! We will return to you!" (p. 138). Another vision reported by Sheikh Al-Hassan ben Abdel-Aziz at-Tilimsânî is as follows:

"I saw myself in the middle of the valley of the city of Tlemcen, which was filled with a huge crowd of men; they were waiting for the Descent (*Nuzûl*) of Aïssâ (Jesus) – peace be upon him! – from heaven⁴². Then a man actually descended, and people said, 'It is Aïssâ!' But when I looked at him, I found that it was Sidi Ahmed ben Alioua (= Al-'Alâwî) – may Allah be pleased with him!" (p. 135).

"The vision conveyed by the revered Sharif, the saint of Allah Sidi Mohammed ben at-Tayyib ben Mûlay al-'Arabî ad-Darqâwî – may Allah grant us the benefit of his blessings! – is this: 'I saw a group of men who were informing of the Descent of Aïssa – peace be upon him! – and who claimed that he had descended and that he had in his hand a wooden sword with which he struck the stone and it turned into a real man (*rajul*), and struck the beast and it became a human being (*insân*). Now I knew this man who had descended from heaven and I was in correspondence with him; he wrote to me and I wrote to him. I

prepared to meet him, and when I found him, I realised that he was Sheikh Sidi Ahmed Al-'Alâwî – may Allah be pleased with him! – except that he looked like a doctor who treated the sick and was assisted by more than sixty men." (p. 137).

Apart from these visions in dreams, we will mention another that seems to have originated in the waking state, but which must have transferred between wakefulness and sleep (in the latter case, it would be more accurately described as a *wâqî'a*, or "event"):

"What the faithful in love, the pure being, Sîdî Ahmed Hâjî at-Tilimsânî, reported, saying: 'While I was engaged in the supreme invocation (*adh-dhikr al-a'zam*)⁴⁽³⁾ (6), I saw the letters of the Name of the Divine Majesty (*Ism al-Jalâla*) fill the entire universe. Then, from these letters, I saw the person of the Prophet take shape – may Allah grant him unifying and peaceful blessings

! – in a luminous form. Then the same letters appeared in another form, in which I perceived the figure of Sheikh Sidi Ahmed ben Alioua, on whose body was inscribed: Mustafâ Ahmed ben Alioua, after which I heard a voice cry out:

"Witnesses! Observers! " (*Shuhadâ'! Ruqabâ'!*). Then these letters (of the divine name "Allah") appeared a third time, in the form of the Sheikh wearing a crown on his head. While we remained there, a bird descended upon his head and spoke to me: "Look, this is the maqâm (spiritual station) of Aïssâ (Jesus)" – peace be upon him! A dozen other "visions" reported in Sheikh Adda's book show an explicit and direct relationship between Sheikh Al-'Alâwî and the Prophet Muhammad, which,

in such matters, is, one might say, perfectly normal; one of these, reported by Sheikh Al-'Alâwî himself, is quoted in Mr. Lings' book. However, those we have just translated, each of which mentions a special relationship between Sheikh Al-'Alâwî and "Sayidunâ Aïssâ" and more specifically with his "spiritual station" (*maqâm*) in Islam, constitute a very unusual phenomenon that has not yet been explained, at least to our knowledge. In any case, Sheikh Adda, in the volume we cite, makes no comment on them, and Mr. Lings, for his part, makes no mention of them. For us, this particular group of "visions" is significant not only for Sheikh

Al-'Alâwî's personal spiritual case, but also for his initiatory function. More precisely, we have here, first of all, an illustrative example of those initiatory types that exist in the Muhammadan formula and which Ibn Arabi discusses in his *Futûhât*, as we have already pointed out on other occasions⁴⁴. We will specify here once again that the Muhammadan prophetic form, as the final synthesis of the prophetic cycle since Adam, includes and summarises under the

types of spirituality represented by earlier prophets, the most important and characteristic of which are mentioned in the Qur'anic revelation and the hadiths of the Prophet⁴⁵. Ibn Arabi's doctrine explains things as follows: the Prophet Muhammad, or his light, was the first divine creation; from his light were drawn the lights of the other prophets who came successively into the human world as his lieutenants; he himself came in bodily form at the end of the cycle of prophetic manifestation, and it is thus that the laws of his lieutenants are then "abrogated" and replaced by his own, which contains them all in potential from the beginning and which, when it finds them in action on the historical plane, confirms them or not, according to the providential regime assigned to the last part of traditional times. In any case, regardless of the current presence in the world of laws formulated by previous revelators, their spiritual entities appear as inherent realities, constitutive of the Muhammadan form itself and as functions present in the initiatory economy of Islam. It is for this reason that the spiritual men of *Tasawwuf* live and develop initiatically, without any deliberate choice on their part, according to the spiritual type that corresponds to them naturally, either in general or in one of the phases of their career; of course, they only realise these possibilities insofar as they are found within themselves. Some may thus have to pass successively under the initiatory regime of several of these particular prophetic entities inscribed in the totalising Muhammadian sphere⁴⁶.

As for the case of Sheikh Al-'Alâwî, we certainly only have indirect, occasional documents relating to the "visions" in question, limited to a single moment in his life, but that moment was particularly important for the master's personal career and for the historical destiny of the *tariqa* to which he belonged. Apart from its normal role within its Islamic framework, the *tariqa* also had to constitute the effective presence of *Tasawwuf*, as an initiatory path, on the fringes of the Western world and even within the zone of European influence on the Muslim world, which was also one of reverse penetration. It had to express itself through modalities appropriate to effective and efficient contact with the intellectual sensibility of the West. This sensibility, despite the alterations and omissions inflicted by anti-traditional modernism, had to be, insofar as it remained, primarily Christ-like in character. Under these circumstances, the presence today of a Muslim spiritual leader of the "*Aïssawi*" type ⁴⁷ at the head of a North African branch of the *Tariqa Shâdhiliyya* can only be seen as understandable, and other

concomitant or subsequent events only confirm this view.

On the subject of the Chadhilites, we will recall what we ourselves wrote when discussing the Islamic sources of Guénon's work⁽⁸⁾. In mentioning Islam's more direct interest, among all traditional Eastern forms, in everything concerning the fate of the West and the possibilities for its traditional recovery, we pointed out the role of the Egyptian Chadhilite Sheikh Elish El-Kebir. He is the author of the famous statement quoted by René Guénon in chapter III of his *Symbolism of the Cross* (1931): "If Christians have the sign of the Cross, Muslims have its doctrine." It was mainly on the basis of doctrinal data from this master that Guénon wrote this book, which occupies a central place in his entire work and which is highly relevant to Western modes of participation in traditional intellectuality. We do not intend to dwell on this point further in the present circumstances, but will merely point out that this book by Guénon, and all his other works dealing with symbolism, are based on principles characteristic of spiritual men known as 'aissawîs', principles which are those of the Science of Letters ('Ilmu-l-Hurûf). all of his works dealing with symbolism are based on principles characteristic of spiritual men known as "aissawîs", principles that are those of the Science of Letters ('Ilmu-l-Hurûf), understood above all in the sense of knowledge and art of the divine Breath or life (the "letters" being above all the articulated elements of the Word). We should also add that this spiritual science was that of Al-Hallâj, the famous "aissawî" of the 3rd and 4th centuries of Islam (= 858-922), whose case, by a coincidence that is anything but fortuitous, also constitutes in our time the theme par excellence of the Orientalist interpretation of *Tasawwuf*. However, as Hallâj's case involved peculiarities and incidents that were difficult to place, especially when one did not have a traditional point of view, it was all the easier, though not without distortions, to turn it into a subtle weapon against Islam as a whole, to which even modern Orientals, dependent on European academic circles, succumbed. This was, one might say, the counterpart of the intellectual relations between Islam and the West that we mentioned earlier.

Returning to the work that prompted these lines, we would also like to point out that we have not included all of our thoughts on the matter in the above. On one point in particular, on which Mr Lings has been very discreet, we have been equally so, without any collusion, and for reasons which we believe to be slightly different, though not fundamentally opposed, to his, while hoping that one day we ourselves will feel comfortable enough to be more thorough.

IV

ISLAMIC REFERENCES TO THE THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CROSS

The esoteric meaning of the sign of the cross was first stated by René Guénon in an article entitled "Prayer and Incantation", published under the pseudonym T Palingénius in *La Gnose* in early 1911⁵⁰. Speaking of incantation as a mode of initiatory work, entirely internal in principle, but which can be expressed and supported externally by words or gestures, the author said that the ultimate goal was "the realisation within oneself of the Universal Man, through the perfect communion of all states of being, harmoniously and hierarchically ordered, in complete fulfilment in both senses of breadth and exaltation". In a note, he added the following clarification: "This sentence contains the expression of the esoteric meaning of the sign of the cross, symbol of this double blossoming of being, horizontally, in the breadth or extension of integral individuality (indefinite development of a particular possibility, which is not limited to the bodily part of individuality), and vertically, in the indefinite hierarchy of multiple states (corresponding to the indefiniteness of the particular possibilities included in the Universal Man)." ⁵¹

In subsequent issues of the aforementioned journal, Guénon returned to this theme with an article entitled "The Symbolism of the Cross", which, as we know, was the first draft of the book that would be published under the same title twenty years later⁵²). However, he made no explicit reference to Islamic sources, even though the concepts of the "Universal Man" and those of "amplitude" and "exaltation" undoubtedly related to them. Nevertheless, considering only the *La Gnose* collection, it is clear that the opportunity to address such a subject, which was to prove exceptionally successful under his pen, was offered to him by the publication, in a previous issue, of Abdul-Hâdi's (John Gustaf Aguéli) translation of a short treatise on *Tasawwuf* presented under the following title: "Epistle entitled The Gift, on the manifestation of the Prophet, by the initiated and inspired Sheikh Mohammad ibn Fazlallâh El-Hindî"⁵³. This writing provided information

doctrinal of the first order that can be immediately linked to the symbolism of the cross, although its text did not contain any explicit reference to the cross itself; this information is found in a passage that we will quote, which came after a list of the Seven Degrees of Universal Existence. Retaining the translator's vocabulary but summarising the text, these degrees are as follows (unlike the simple parentheses, the words in square brackets are added by us):

1° *The Unassignable* or the Absolute, referred to as "Pure Unity". 2° *The first assignment*, which is God's awareness of His quiddity, His attributes and all created beings in a general or synthetic way; this degree is called the "Truth of Muhammad" [we would rather say "Muhammadian Reality"].

3° *The second assignment*, which is God's awareness of His quiddity, His attributes, and all created beings in a distinctive and analytical manner.

4° *Spirits* [or rather "the world of pure spirits"], that is, abstract and simple creatures that manifest themselves in their primary essences.

5° *The world of primary forms*, that is, subtle but composite creatures that cannot be divided (without ceasing to be what they are).

6° *The world of bodies*, that is, gross things that can be broken down or divided (without fundamentally changing their nature).

7° *The universal degree*, which encompasses the five immediately preceding degrees and is man.

Immediately after this list comes the passage that interests us: "The first of these seven 'planes' is that of the 'Unmanifest', while the other six comprise the entire manifestation or 'expansion'. When man in the seventh (and last) 'degree' exalts himself to the sublime, when the other (five) 'planes' arise in him in perfect fulfilment, he is 'the universal man'. Exaltation and magnitude reached their peak in our Prophet — may Allah pray upon him and greet him! — ⁵⁴. This passage, modified in style — for, one might say, retranslated — was taken up by Guénon as an express quotation from "The Epistle of Fazlallâh El-Hindî" only in 1931, in the context of *The Symbolism of the Cross* (Ch. III), when, having used the terms "amplitude" and "exaltation", he had to clarify that these were borrowed from language of Islamic esotericism⁵⁵. But on this occasion, he added another piece of Islamic information from an esoteric source: "This helps us to understand the words spoken some twenty years ago by a figure who, even from an exoteric point of view, occupied a very high position in Islam

: "If Christians have the sign of the cross, Muslims have the doctrine."
»⁵⁶.

Since neither Abdul-Hâdi, René Guénon, nor any other author has indicated what Arabic terms are rendered by the words "amplitude" and "exaltation" — whereas a whole generation of traditionalist writers now use the corresponding English terms or their equivalents in other Western languages — we will transcribe them here, but we must also point out that these are in fact two complementary "notions", expressible by different pairs of terms rather than a single pair of specific terms. Thus, first of all, in the Arabic text of the Epistle of Fazlallâh El-Hindî⁵⁷ these terms are: *inbisât* for "magnitude" and *'urûj* for "exaltation". Taken in their ordinary sense, the first properly means "extension" and the second "ascent"; they therefore do not refer to the express dimensions of a cross, but to tendencies and movements that can be symbolically centred on these dimensions. In any case, it can be noted that, as designations for phases of initiatory realisation, they correspond respectively to the two parts of the Prophet's Night Journey, the symbol par excellence of the initiatory journey: the first, called *Isrâ'* (Night Transfer), going from Mecca to Jerusalem and corresponding to the horizontal dimension of the cross⁵⁸, the second, heavenly, designated by the term *Mi'râj* (Means of Ascension, Ladder)⁵⁹ corresponding to the vertical dimension and leading to the Lord of Almighty Glory, the end of which is located at the "interval of the two arcs (*qâba qawsayn*), or closer (*adnâ*)", which is an expression of the passage beyond Duality⁶⁰.

* * *

Another, better-known pair of symbolic terms refers directly to dimensions that, geometrically speaking, are those of a cross: these "dimensions", usually cited in reverse order to the previous pair, are the words *tûl* = "length" and *'ard* "width"⁶¹, in their primary sense, obviously measuring a horizontal plane, but already, in common usage, they are also used for a vertical plane, the word *tûl*, like its equivalents in other languages, easily referring to "vertical length" or height⁶². In the symbolic sense, the two "dimensions" apply, the first to the higher, informal world, or to purely spiritual nature, and the second to the lower, formal world or, correlatively, to gross, corporeal nature. Admittedly, these are more like "domains" of cosmic existence than qualitative "tendencies", but in truth a certain tendency characterises each of the

domains thus correlated between which the being is situated and in relation to which it acts. Finally, in the works of Sheikh al-Akbar Ibn Arabî, we find the following correspondences: *tûl* corresponds to "the hidden world" (*'âlam al-Ghayb*) and *'ard* to "the manifested world" (*'âlam ash-Shahâda*)⁶³, which is richer in conceptual possibilities. Furthermore, it is important to note, in the order of our considerations, that this conception of the axial dimensions of universal existence is a characteristic of the science specific to Muslim initiates, whose particular prophetic type is Sayyidunâ Aïssâ (Jesus) as one of the forms of the Universal Word included in the possibilities of *the* Muhammadian *Maqâm*. This initiatory science is also called the "Aïssawie science", but it is more accurately the "science of Letters", by which we mean above all the knowledge of the generative breath of the "letters" both on the divine side (*Nafas ar-Rahmân* = the "Breath of the All-Merciful") and on the human side⁶⁴. The transcendent letters give birth to the divine Words (*Kalimât*) and the Names of things (*Asmâ'*), and man receives them both as knowledge in itself, as a means of realisation and as a power to govern the macrocosm and the microcosm. This science is also that of the "breath of life" by which Jesus raised the dead or animated the clay birds he had fashioned himself. One of the most notable Sufis who possessed this science, and whose case will be of particular interest to us here, was the famous Al-Hallâj. This is clearly stated by the master par excellence of *Tasawwuf*, Sheikh al-Akbar Ibn Arabî, in the following lines of his *Futûhât*:

"This science (the 'Aïssaoui science') is that which relates to the concepts of 'height' (*tûl*) and 'width' (*'ard*) of the world, meaning, on the one hand, the spiritual world (*al-'âlam ar-rûhânî*), which is that of pure Ideas (*al-Ma'âni*) and divine Command (*al-Amr*), and, on the other hand, the created world (*'âlam al-khalq*) of cosmic nature (*at-tabî'a*) and bodies (*al-ajsâm*), all of which belong to Allah: "Are not creation and command His?" (Q. 7:54).

"Say: The Spirit is part of the Command of my Lord!" (Quran 17:85).

"Blessed be Allah, Lord of the Worlds! " (Cor. 7:54). This was the knowledge of Al-Hussayn ibn Mansour Al-Hallâj — may Allah have mercy on him! — When you hear someone from our Path discussing the Letters (*Hurûf*) and saying that such and such a "letter" is so many fathoms or spans in "height" and so many in "width", as Al-Hallâj and others have done, know that by "height" he means its operative virtue (*fi'l*) in the world of spirits, and by "width" its operative force in the world of bodies: the measure mentioned then is its

distinctive characteristic. This technical terminology was instituted by Al-Hallâj" ⁶⁵

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In relation to the symbolism of Arabic letters, we will make a general remark here, without being able to dwell on it further at this time. There is an aspect of the structure of the Arabic language — and we are thinking above all of sacred Arabic — that can illustrate the Hindu theory of *the* three *gunas* (tendencies) to which Guénon gave prominence in his writings, notably in *The Symbolism of the Cross* (chap. V). As is well known, these *gunas* constitute a cruciform system of tendencies, whose application in Hinduism concerns above all the cosmological order: in the case we are discussing here, these are the three vowel movements (*harakât*), *u*, *a* and *i*, which in Arabic can affect a consonant, which in itself is silent (*sukûn*, *jazm*), through declension and conjugation⁶⁶.

* * *

Before presenting another aspect of the Aissaoui doctrine, we must first briefly mention the application of this cruciform scheme to the values of the works of Islamic sacred law. The virtue of obligatory works (*farâ'id*) is related to the *tûl* dimension of Science or Knowledge (*al-'ilm*), while the virtue of supererogatory works (*nawâfil*, *sunan*) is related to the *'ard* dimension of the same⁶⁷. These concepts can be found in the works of authors from different periods, such as Al-Hallâj (d. 309/922), 'Umar Ibn al-Fârid (d. 632/1235) and Muhammad Ibn Fazlallâh al-Hindi (d. 1029/1620). As for Sheikh al-Akbar (d. 638/1240), we will quote another passage from his *Futûhât*, ch. 559, which is, in fact, only a final annotation made for the chapter from which we have just quoted:

"The secret of the institution of obligatory works (*farâd*) and supererogatory works (*nâfila*) lies in the relationship that Science (*'Ilm*) has with the dimensions of 'height' (*tûl*) and 'width' (*'ard*) — a point that relates to chapter 20 (of *the Futûhât*).

"He whose illness (or 'spiritual cause')⁶⁸ is Aissa (Jesus) will not have to treat himself⁶⁹, for Aissa is both the Creator who gives life and the creature who lives it⁷⁰ ! "The breadth (*'ard*) of the world lies in its gross nature (*tabî'a*), and its height (*tûl*) in its spiritual nature (*Rûh*) as well as in its Law (*Sharî'a*)⁷¹.

This (doctrinal) light comes from As-Sayhûr wa ad-Dayhûr⁷², a text attributed to Al-Hussayn Ibn Mansour (Al-Hallâj). I have yet to see another

realisation of the unitive (*muttahi*)⁷³ type that has been able to "weld and separate" like this one.

"⁷⁴and "speak through his Lord", "swear by the twilight, by the night and what it envelops, as well as by the moon and what it fills, and ascend layer after layer" ⁷⁵, for he was a light in the darkness! In his case, God (*al-Haqq*) occupied the position of Moses in the basket (*tâbût*), and that is why he spoke of *lâhût* (= divine nature) and *nâsût* (= human nature)⁷⁶. However, where does this case stand in relation to those who profess that the Essence is unique (*al-'Ayn wâhida*), and even reject, as absurd, (the idea of) the attribute as something added (to the Essence)⁷⁷ ? Where is Mount Sinai (Mosaic) in relation to Fârân (Muhammadian)⁷⁸ ? Where is the Fire (of the Burning Bush) in relation to the Light (blinding and indescribable)⁷⁹ ? "Width" is limited, and "length" is only a "prolonged shadow"⁸⁰. Obligatory and supererogatory works are "contemplating" and "contemplated"⁸¹.

This text is useful here again because it presents a case of use, in Islamic esotericism, of the technical notions of *lâhût* and *nâsût*⁸² which, as we shall see later, are certainly related to our subject, and which in the exoteric commentaries on the Qur'an are mentioned only in connection with the Messiah, and are criticised for that matter. These concepts correspond to what is known in Christian theology as the "two natures of Christ", a concept that is only acceptable in Islam in forms specific to Muhammad's vision of universal realities. Here is an eminent expression of this by the great master Ibn Arabî, taken from a text specifically devoted to the Word of Jesus⁸³. After stating the general truth that pure Spirits have the power to make everything they touch "alive", with life penetrating it by that very fact⁸⁴, this master declares: "The measure of life (*dhâlika al-qadr min al-Hayât*) thus infused into things is called *lâhût*; the correlative *nâsût* is the receptacle in which this Spirit resides. Finally, this *nâsût* is itself called 'Spirit' because of what then resides in it."⁸⁵

The consequence expressed in the last sentence may be difficult to understand, but apart from the fact that the *nâsût* in question is a form divinely and directly manifested as a receptacle of the divine Spirit, the explanation lies in the fact that Aïssâ himself is traditionally called in Islam "Spirit of God", which must be understood not as a single part of his being, but as his whole being, and it is as a whole that he was described as Spirit in the following Qur'anic text: "The Messiah, Aïssâ, son of Mary, is only the Messenger of God, and His Word which He projected to Mary, and a Spirit from Him (*Rûh min-Hu*)" (Cor. 4:171). Thus, in the constitution of a metaphysical personality such as that of *Aïssa*, the *lâhût* and the

nâsût are the two complementary parts—container and content—of a single entity that transcends them and is called "the Spirit of God"⁸⁶.

Admittedly, according to the doctrinal evidence cited thus far, the concept of the "two natures" in Islamic esotericism has characteristics that are specifically different from those found in mainstream Christian theology⁸⁷. In any case, there is no question of an ordinary *nâsût* and, above all, no question of a *lâhût* that would coincide with the divine essence itself and in which only Christ would participate; on the contrary, it is a type of spirituality constantly represented and even illustrated, one might say, by the Men (*Rijâl*) of *Tasawwuf* or, if you will, of Islamic sainthood, a type which, in the whole of Muhammadian spirituality, is explicitly linked to the prophetic word of Jesus and even bears his name, as we have seen.

At the same time, we realise that the correspondence, which results from the texts borrowed from Ibn Arabî, between the two initiatory dimensions of *tûl* and *'ard* on the one hand, and the two ontological substances of *lâhût* and *nâsût* on the other, and then the application of these latter notions to the case of Jesus, allow us to see that the sign of the cross can be viewed as a diagram of the union of the two natures in the person of Christ. But if this is so, it is, of course, because the cross is above all a geometric summary of the multiple states of being and, as such, a symbol of the Universal Man, as Guénon has demonstrated, supported by numerous examples from universal tradition. It is at a second level, so to speak, that it will apply to interpreting the special ontology of the Christic Word, and then, at a third level, to the story of Jesus Christ, where it will be the cross of the Passion. It is at these last two levels that we must now pause for a moment. The theological meaning of the Christian cross is usually derived solely from the events at Golgotha⁸⁸; as a result, the symbolic meaning we have just highlighted, of the sign of the cross as a symbol of the two natures united in the person of Christ (and this independently of any particular sacrificial purpose attributed to their union), seems to be the least attested to in the teachings of Christianity, whereas such a meaning should, it seems, be in no way incompatible with the salvific function of the Christic Word in its historical manifestation, for it could only give it an even broader and higher significance. It is not impossible that the cause of this silence is attributable to the necessities of exoteric dogma.

Be that as it may, we can point out here a few facts coming from the Christian side itself, which are perfectly consistent with what

we have found on the Islamic side, and which we borrow from one of the "apocrypha" of the New Testament: the *Acts of Peter*⁸⁹, a text that seems to have been widely circulated in Greek and Latin in ecclesiastical and monastic circles in both the Eastern and Western Christian worlds, before suffering the fate of all books not admitted into the canon, which were condemned in particular during the 4th century⁹⁰. In this text, the Apostle Peter, who was to be crucified in Rome, standing first at his cross, reveals its mystery to the faithful; after saying that the very name of the cross (in the Greek text *onoma staurōi*) is a "hidden mystery" (*musterion apocryphon*)⁹¹, he declares:

"... I will not conceal this mystery of the cross, which was once closed and hidden from my

soul. Let the cross not be what it seems to you who hope in Christ! For it is quite different from its appearance, this passion according to that of Christ... Turn your souls away from all that is sensible, from all that appears and is not true! Tear away from yourselves these visions, tear away these hearings, these apparent actions, and you will know what it was like for Christ and the whole mystery of your salvation⁹²; and may these words, for you who hear them, be as if they were not⁹³...". Then the Apostle asks the executioners to crucify him "upside down, and not otherwise", and, once this has been done, suspended, he continues: "You whose role it is to listen, listen to what I am announcing to you at this moment when I am crucified. Know the mystery of all nature, and what was the beginning of everything. So the first man, of whose race I bear the image, thrown head down, shows a nature different from what it was before; for it became dead, having no movement. Therefore, overturned, he who had even thrown down his first state, organised the whole order of this world in the image of his new vocation, suspended as he was, and showed what is left as right and what is right as left; and he changed all the signs of his nature, to the point of regarding as beautiful what is not, and as good what is in reality evil. On this subject, the Lord says in secret (*en musterion legei*): "If you do not make left what is right, and right what is left, and lower what is higher, and anterior what is posterior, you will not know the Kingdom"⁹⁴. This is the thought I put before your eyes; and the way you see me hanging is the image of the man who was born first⁹⁵. So you, my beloved, who hear (this) now, and also you who are about to hear it⁹⁶, must leave this primitive error and rise up."

It is the passage that immediately follows that we wish to highlight in particular in the context of our discussion:

"For it is fitting to attach oneself to the cross of Christ, which is the extended Word (*tetamenos Logos*), one and only, of whom the Spirit says: 'What then is Christ, if not the Word (*Logos*) [and] the Echo (*Ekhô*) of God?'"⁹⁷. In this way, the Word will be the upright part of the cross, to which I am crucified; the Echo will be the crossbar, the nature of man; and the nail that attaches the crossbar to the upright part will be the reversal (*epistrophê*) and spiritual transformation (*metanoia*) of man."⁹⁸

From this text of great symbolic interest, what should be remembered above all is the identification of Christ with the cross, in terms of his two natures; this is particularly important as it is expressed in a purely principled way, without any reference to the historical Cross of Golgotha and the Passion⁹⁹. Christ thus presents himself with an axial aspect in terms of his "divine nature" and a horizontal aspect in terms of his "human nature", just as the divine Word appears first in itself and secondarily in its cosmic repercussion or echo¹⁰⁰. It can also be noted that, according to this dual aspect of the universalised Word (*tetamenos Logos*), primordial human nature, considered at its own cosmic level, distinct therefore from divine nature, is nonetheless a reflection of the latter in the world of man¹⁰¹. Finally, the central point that connects the two natures, and which marks the crucial place where they coincide "without merging", constitutes the point of passage from one dimension to another, and corresponds in the ascending sense to a function of "transformation" in the sense of "passing beyond form".

On the other hand, the relationship between the "two natures" in the constitution of human beings has changed as a result of the cyclical descent: originally, in Primordial Adam, pure human nature (*Fitra* in Arabic) faithfully reflected divine nature; due to the "fall" and the resulting reversal, especially at the end of the descending cycle, the "divine" and "celestial" part of humanity is increasingly dominated by its "human" and "earthly" part, and subordinated to it. In order to restore the primordial state, the current human orientation must be reversed, which will initially require a reversal in the order of "forms", which, through their symbolic role, must ultimately promote the restoration of the "informal" realities themselves. This is what the crucifixion of Saint Peter was meant to represent: Christ could be crucified with his head above because he was innocent and because in him the two natures had remained in their primordial relationship; but the Apostle Saint Peter, representing guilty humanity, in which this relationship is reversed, had to be crucified upside down.

The relationship between the respective positions of Christ and Saint Peter in the crucifixion is therefore that between the two triangles in the "Seal of Solomon", and with regard to this figure, it is interesting to note that Guénon wrote the following:

: "...in the symbolism of a hermetic school to which Albert the Great and Saint Thomas Aquinas belonged, the right triangle represents the Divinity and the inverted triangle represents human nature ("made in the image of God" and as its reflection in reverse in the "mirror of the Waters"), so that the union of the two triangles represents that of the two natures (*Lâhût* and *Nâsût* in Islamic esotericism)"¹⁰² . To simplify matters, we could also say that the respective positions of the two crucified figures themselves represent—in a general way—the two natures, and so the resulting symbolism could concern, for example, the Church as constituted by the alliance between the Christic presence and its apostolic foundation. The significance of this aspect can be further emphasised by another sentence that Guénon added in the context mentioned above: "The role of the Word, in relation to universal Existence, can be further clarified by the addition of the cross drawn inside the figure of the 'Seal of Solomon': the vertical branch connects the vertices of the two opposing triangles, or the two poles of manifestation, and the horizontal branch represents the 'surface of the Waters'¹⁰⁽³⁾ ". Here again we find the sign of the cross connected in some way to the concept of the two natures.

Ultimately, the result of the succinct presentation of doctrinal data by which we have confirmed the existence of an Islamic basis for the doctrine expounded in *The Symbolism of the Cross*, will have significantly verified the words of Sheikh Elish el-Kébîr quoted by René Guénon and recalled by us, at least as far as "Muslims" are concerned, meaning by this term not the common faithful, but the true doctrinal authorities of *Tasawwuf*. They therefore possess both the doctrine of the cruciform dimensions of universal existence and that of the two natures considered to be coextensive, notably in the two senses of the unfolding in "exaltation " and "expansion" of the Universal Man, and, particularly importantly, they even know it as the characteristic science of Sayyidunâ Aïssâ (*al-'ilm al-'îsawî*). As for the doctrinal awareness of "Christians" concerning the same symbolism, the words of Sheikh Elish are no less true, at least if we consider the reaction of Catholic theologians and writers to the publication of *The Symbolism of the Cross*, for things have changed considerably since then, but this point would in fact constitute a different subject from the one we have set out to discuss in these pages.

V

THE SCIENCE PROPER TO JESUS¹⁰⁴

(al-‘Ilm al-‘îsawî)
(Futûhât, chap. 20) ¹⁰⁵

Where does it come from and how far does it go? What is its modality ? Does it concern the "height" of the world or its "width", or both at the same time?

To:

The knowledge of Aïssa (Jesus) is something whose value is unknown to creatures. Through this knowledge, he brought back to life a being whose grave was the earth.

The Breath (Nafkh) (by which he gave life) was equivalent to the permission (Idhn) of the One who dwells hidden therein, and to His creative command (Amr)¹⁰⁶.

In truth, his Lâhût (divine nature), which in the unseen was his "father" father" (sihr),

He is a Spirit who took on a tangible form (Rûh mumaththal) and whose "secret" was revealed by Allah ¹⁰⁷.

As for him (Jesus), he came forth from a mystery of divine Dignity, a mystery whose full light Allah had concealed,

And became a creature after having been a pure Spirit (Rûh) and Allah illuminated him (with Holiness).

His Command (Amr) came to him, and He graced him and gave him joy. To those like him (Aïssâ), Allah will give an immense reward.

Know – and may Allah confirm you with His help – that the Aïssaoui science (specific to Jesus) is the science of Letters (‘ilm al-Hurûf). It is for this reason that Aïssa was given the power of breathing life (*an-nafkh*), which consists of the "air" (*hawâ*) that comes from the depths of the heart and is the spirit of life (*rûh al-hayât*). When the breath, on its way out of the body towards the mouth, pauses, the places where it pauses are called "letters" (*hurûf*, sing. *harf*) and there

the entities specific to the letters are manifested. When these are put together, sentient life appears in ideas (*al-ma'ânî*), and this constitutes the first thing that was manifested to the world from the divine Dignity (*al-Hadrah al-ilâhiyyah*).

Essential entities (things) (*a'yân*) in their non-existent state (*'adam*) are endowed – in terms of existential relationships (*nisab*) – with nothing other than hearing (*as-sam'*); these entities were thus predisposed in themselves, in their non-existent state, to receive the divine command to exist, when it was to bring them into existence. So when God said to them, "Be (*Kun*)!" they came into existence as entities. Thus, the divine Word (*al-Kalâm al-ilâhî*) was the first thing they perceived from God – exalted be He! – meaning by this a mode of language attributable to the divine Dignity: glorified be it! The first word that was composed was *kun* = "be!", which is made up of a root of three letters: *kâf*, *wâw* and *nûn*¹⁰⁸; each of the names of these letters being itself trilateral, thus appeared the number 9, whose root (square) is 3, the first odd number – *fard*¹⁰⁹. Now, because of the number 9, all numerical entities themselves proceeded from the verb *kun*, and thus there was a double manifestation: that of numbered things and that of numbers. Hence, the premises of a syllogism are also constituted with three terms – even if there are apparently four, because one of the terms is repeated in both premises, so in reality there are only three. It is from the odd number – *fard* – that the universe came into existence, and not from the one (*al-wâhid*).

Allah has taught us that the cause of life in the forms (*suwar*, sing. *sûra*) of created beings is nothing other than divine inspiration (*an-nafkh al-ilâhî*), saying (about Adam): "And when I have formed him perfectly and breathed into him of My Spirit, (the Angels) fell down before him in prostration."

¹¹⁰. The Spirit referred to in this text is the Breath (*an-Nafas*) through which Allah enlivens Faith and which He manifested. The Messenger of Allah – may Allah grant him grace and peace! – used this term when he said: "The Breath of the Most Merciful (*Nafas ar-Rahmân*) comes to me from the side of Yemen."¹¹¹. And through this breath of mercy, the "form" (*sûra*) of faith and the "form" of the rules established by the Law were revived in the hearts of believers.

Aïssâ received the knowledge of the divine Breath that enters into this infusion and the respective relationship of origin (*nisba*)¹¹². He therefore breathed into the form that was in a tomb or into the "form" of the bird that he himself had made from mud, and the being corresponding to the "form" in question rose up alive by divine Authorisation (*al-Idhn al-ilâhî*) which entered into this insufflation and

into that air. Were it not for the propagation (*sarayân*) of divine Authorisation in the breath, life would never have resulted in any "form" whatsoever.

It is from the Breath of the All-Merciful that the Aissaoui science comes to Aïssa, and he revived the dead by his act of insufflation – peace be upon him! – and the breath stopped in the forms into which it was introduced: this is what constitutes the lot that every existing being holds from Allah. It is through this same portion that the being reaches Allah when "all things come to Him

."

When man, for example, frees himself during his spiritual ascent (*mi'raj*) towards his Lord, and every world he encounters on his journey (through the superimposed planes of being) takes from him what is related to that world, he is ultimately left with only this one "secret" (*sirr*) that he holds from Allah, the only thing through which he can see Him and hear His word, for Allah is too sublime and holy to be grasped except by Him¹³. And when the being returns from this contemplative degree (*mashhad*), his form, which had been decomposed during his exaltation (*'urûj*) is reconstituted, the universe (at all degree), restoring to it what it had retained as a related part (at the corresponding level of existence), each world in no way exceeding the limits of its kind. Everything therefore comes together around this "divine secret" and is completely reformed within it. It is through this "secret" that the "form" of being sings the praises of its Lord, for no one other than itself can ever truly praise Him; if the "form" were to praise him on its own behalf and not on behalf of this secret, neither divine favour (*al-fadl al-ilâhî*) nor grace (*al-imtinân*) would appear with regard to this very form; yet it is firmly established that grace exists towards all creatures, and this means that what Allah receives as magnification and praise from the creature comes from this "divine secret"; it is God who praises and glorifies Himself, and the divine Good that returns to the "form" during its acts of praise and glorification, this "form" receives it as grace and not as a creature's right over Allah: when Allah admits that a created being has a right over Him, He does so by imposing it upon Himself.

The "words" (*kalimât*) come from the "letters" (*hurûf*), and the letters come from the air (*al-hawâ'*), and the air comes from the Rahmanian Breath. Through the Names (*al-Asmâ'*), effects appear in created beings, and this is where Aïssawey science culminates.

On the other hand, man, by virtue of words (which come from the All-Merciful), causes the Rahmanian Dignity to grant him from His Breath that which will raise up the "life" of things requested by means of these

words: thus the order of things is continually circular (since the words that come from the breath of grace return to their source to bring back more grace).

Know that the life of spirits belongs to them by their very nature, which is why every living being is alive through its spirit. The Samaritan (of the people of Moses) knew this; when he saw the Angel Gabriel, he knew that the angel's spirit constituted his entire being and that the life he had belonged to him by virtue of his very being. He also knew that every place he trod, by virtue of his condition as a "sensible representation" (*tamthîl*)¹¹⁴ (11), became "alive" by virtue of contact with this tangible form (*as-sûrah al-mumaththalah*), he took a "handful" of dust from the angel's footprints, according to what Allah reported in the words of the Samaritan: "And I took a handful of the traces of the (heavenly) Messenger"¹¹⁵. When the calf was formed and shaped, the Samaritan sprinkled this handful on it and the (animated) Calf bellowed.

Aïsha – peace be upon him! – being "Spirit" (*Rûh*) as He named him¹¹⁶ – and Allah constituted him as Spirit in the stable form of a human being, just as He constituted Gabriel in the transient form of a Bedouin – resurrected the dead by simple breath. Then, Allah confirmed him with the Spirit of Holiness (*Rûh al-Quds*), and he was thus Spirit confirmed by a Spirit that was pure from the defilement inherent in cosmic beings. The principle of all this is the Living Being of all Eternity (*al-Hayy al-Azalî*), which is identical to endless life; the distinction between eternity without beginning (*azal*) and eternity without end (*abad*) is introduced only by the existence of the world and its adventitious nature.

This science relates to the "height" (*tûl*) and "width" (*'ard*) of the world, meaning, on the one hand, the spiritual world (*al-'âlam ar-rûhânî*), which is that of pure Ideas (*al-Ma'ânî*) and divine Command (*al-Amr*), and, on the other hand, the created world (*'âlam al-khalq*) of gross nature (*at-tabî'â*) and bodies (*ajsâm*), all of which belong to Allah: "Are not Creation and Command His?"¹¹⁷. "Say: The Spirit is part of the

Command of my Lord!"¹¹⁸. "Blessed be Allah, Lord of the Worlds!"¹¹⁹.

This was the knowledge of al-Hussayn Ibn Mansur Al-Hallaj – may Allah Have mercy! – When you hear someone from our Way discussing letters (*Hurûf*) and saying that such-and-such a "letter" is so many fathoms or spans in "height" and so many in "width", as Al-Hallâj and others have done, know that by "height" he means its operative virtue (*fi'l*) in the world of spirits, and by "width" he means its operative virtue (*fi'l*) in the world of bodies: the

measure mentioned then is its distinctive characteristic. This technical terminology was instituted by Al-Hallâj.

Those among the Realised Certifiers (*al-Muhaqqiqûn*) who know the reality of *Kun* possess the Science of Jesus (*al-'ilm al-'issawî*)¹²⁰ and those who exist by virtue of their spiritual energy (*himmah*) as beings (*kâ'inât*) do so only by virtue of this Science¹²¹.

*

**

The number 9 appeared with the reality of these three letters (from *Kun*), and among the things numbered were the 9 Heavens, and through the movements of all 9 Heavens and the course of the planets, the Lower World (*ad-Dunyâ*) was created with all that it contains, just as, through their movements, this world with all that it contains will be destroyed.

Through the movement of the highest sphere among the nine, Paradise came into existence with all that it contains. Just as the movement of this highest sphere produces what is in Paradise, so the movement of the second sphere, which follows the highest, produces Fire with all that is in it, as well as the Resurrection, the Emergence from the grave, the Gathering and the Unfolding. Because of what we have mentioned, the Lower World is mixed: delight mixed with punishment. Because of what we have mentioned respectively, Paradise is all delight, and Fire is all punishment. The current mixture of composition will cease for beings (going from this world to the Hereafter), for the condition of the Hereafter does not admit the complexion that beings have here below: this is the great difference between life in this Lower World and the Hereafter, except that, concerning the natural constitution (*nash'ah*) of the people of the Fire, – when the divine Wrath is over, its limit having been reached as far as they are concerned, and this wrath is followed by Mercy, which had already preceded it in duration¹²² – the authority of Mercy will once again prevail over them, its form (*sûra*) remaining unchanged. – Moreover, if the form of Mercy had changed, they would be subject to punishment. – Thus, these beings are initially governed, by Allah's permission and investiture, by the movement of the second celestial sphere, the one that follows the highest, and which produces for them a punishment intended for any receptacle disposed to punishment, – and if we say "any receptacle disposed to punishment", it is because there are some among the inhabitants of the Fire who are not there to receive punishment themselves ¹²³ (20).

When the duration (of the Fire) of 45,000 years has been completed, it will have been a punishment (effective) for such a duration for its people (but here is how): they are punished (first) in it with a continuous punishment, without interruption for 23,000 years. Then the Most Merciful (*ar-Rahmân*) sends them a sleep (*nawmah*) during which they lose all sensitivity, which corresponds to the words of Allah: "He neither lives nor dies therein."

"¹²⁴ , as well as the words of the Messenger of Allah – peace be upon him – concerning the people of Hell, destined for Hell: "They neither die nor live there," which refers to the state of these beings during the periods when they lose their sensitivity. This state is analogous to that of people punished in this world who faint because of the violence of terror and the exceptional force of pain. The people of the Fire remain in this state (of sleep) for 19,000 years, then they awaken from their fainting (*ghayshyah*) – but Allah has "replaced their skins with other skins" ¹²⁵ , and they are then punished in these new skins for 15,000 years; then they fall back into unconsciousness and remain so for 11,000 years; then they wake up again, while Allah has again replaced "their skins with other skins so that they may taste the punishment again"¹²⁶ , and because of this they taste the painful punishment again for 7,000 years; then they fall back into unconsciousness for 3,000 years; then they wake up and Allah grants them delight (*ladhdhah*) and rest (*râhah*) similar to those experienced by a man who falls asleep tired and wakes up rested ¹²⁷ .

This comes from "divine mercy, which prevails over His wrath" and which "extends (*wasi'at*) to all things". Mercy then exercises its power of perpetuation derived from *the* divine *name* Al-Wâsi': "He who extends and contains vastness", by which Allah "extends to all things, enveloping them in (His) mercy and (His) knowledge"¹²⁸ .

Then beings no longer feel pain, and as this state continues for them and they find it pleasant¹²⁹ , they say: "We have been forgotten and we ask for nothing, for fear of recalling the memory of our case, when Allah has said to us: 'Remain there and do not speak to Me!'"¹³⁰ ". Thus they remain silent, enveloped in a veil; all that remains of their punishment is the fear of its return; it is this portion of punishment that is perpetuated upon them, fear, which is a psychological feeling, not a sensory one, but it may happen that they forget the fear itself at certain moments. Their happiness consists in tranquillity on the side of sensory punishment, and this comes from what Allah puts in their hearts, as He possesses vast mercy. Indeed, Allah says: "Today We

Let us forget as you have forgotten..."¹³¹ . It is for this reason¹³² that they say "we have been forgotten" (*nusînâ*) when they no longer feel pain. This is also referred to in the divine words: "They forgot Allah, and He forgot them."

"¹³³ and: "likewise today you will be forgotten" ¹³⁴ , meaning "you are abandoned in Gehenna", because *nisyân*, "forgetting", is "abandonment": if (the root used in all the words translated here by the idea of "forgetfulness" is considered to have as its third radical) the *hamzah* (and not the *yâ'*), its meaning is "delay".

The share of happiness that the people of Fire have is the absence of punishment, and their share of punishment is the arrival of punishment itself, for they have no security by way of notification¹³⁵ from Allah. However, they are protected at certain times from the fear of the arrival of punishment. Thus, they are protected from it for 10,000 years at one time, 2,000 years at another, or 6,000 years at yet another, but they do not go beyond these limits, for they must spend a predetermined amount of time there.

Finally, when Allah wishes to grant them a favour in His name *Ar-Rahmân*, they consider the state they are in and their release from the punishment they had been subjected to, and they are favoured for as long as this gaze lasts; but this can last for 1,000 years in one case, 9,000 years in another, and 5,000 years, or even more or less.

Such is the situation of these beings in Gehenna, remaining there continuously, for they are its permanent inhabitants.

What we have just mentioned in this chapter comes from the Aissaweed science inherited from *the Maqâm* Muhammadien.

And Allah speaks the truth, and He guides to the Way.

VI

HERACLIUS' CHEST AND THE TRADITION OF THE "TABUT" „ TRADITION136

The *Folia Orientalia*, vol. 11, 1960 (Krakow), published by the Polish Academy of Sciences, contains an interesting work by Prof. M. Hamidullah entitled *An Embassy from Caliph Abu Bakr to Emperor Heraclius, and the Byzantine Live of Destiny Prediction*. From a documentary point of view, on the Islamic side, these are very precise and highly curious official accounts of public or private – one might even say secret – discussions between ' Ubâda ibn

As-Sâmit, Hishâm ibn al-'Âs and Nu'aym ibn 'Abd-Allâh, the ambassadors of the^{1st}Caliph, met with the Emperor. The events took place in Byzantium shortly after Abu Bakr's accession to the Caliphate (632-634) and before the war against the Byzantines became widespread. During a night-time meeting in the imperial apartment, Heraclius had a large chest brought in, from which he began to take out pieces of black silk, each of which had a human figure painted on it. Each time, he asked his visitors if they recognised the figures depicted. As they initially answered in the negative each time, the Emperor then explained that they were portraits of Adam, Noah and Abraham. In the image that followed, they recognised the face of the Prophet Muhammad, "smiling as if alive". Here are the exact words of Hishâm ibn al-'Âs's version given by Al-Bayhaqî (*Dalâ'il an-Nubuwwa*) and translated by Mr Hamidullah (but slightly adapted by us):

"The Emperor asked us, 'Do you know him?' We said, 'Yes, he is Muhammad, the Messenger of God,' and we began to weep.

"At that moment, God is my witness, the Emperor stood up, then sat down again, and said to us: 'I adjure you by God, is it really him?' We replied, 'Yes, it is him, as if you were seeing him yourself (or, 'as if we were seeing him alive', in the version of Abû Nu'aym)

!"

"Then he paused for a moment, then declared: "Truly, this was the last box in order, but I opened it early to test you."

The account then reports that the Emperor showed the Muslim ambassadors the images contained in each of the other boxes in the same way, specifying each time which prophet was involved; thus Moses, Aaron, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael, Joseph, David, Solomon and Jesus were mentioned. (It should be noted that other versions vary somewhat on this point.) After that, Heraclius closed the chest and sent it back. The story continues as follows:

We asked, "Where did you get these portraits, for we now know that they are the figures of the Prophets – peace be upon them! – since we have found among them the figure of our black Prophet – prayers and peace be upon him!" The Emperor explained to us, "Adam had asked his Lord to show him the prophets among his descendants. God produced their forms on pieces of silk from Paradise. These portraits remained in Adam's Treasury at Sunset. Dhû-l-Qarnayn (The Man with Two Horns, cf. Qur'an 18:83-98) brought them back. Comparing the different versions of the end of this story, it appears that when the time of the Prophet Daniel came, he made copies of these portraits, and it was these very copies that the Byzantine Emperor possessed."

Mr Hamidullah pointed out at the beginning, on the Byzantine side, historical documents that could be recalled here in some way; such as, for example, the presence in the library of Leo the Wise of a book copied from a scroll found in the tomb of the same Prophet Daniel, predicting the destiny of Byzantium and containing the names of those who would reign there as long as the city existed. The author sees in all this two albums that were part of the imperial treasury: "Heraclius showed one to the Muslim ambassadors, and Leo the Wise used another. " Several other accounts confirming the existence of more or less comparable documents, again relating to Islam, in China, Palestine and Visigothic Spain, lead Mr Hamidullah to conclude that there was a certain "pictorial tradition" similar to the apocalyptic genre. The author does not specify what is meant by this "pictorial tradition," which could, in fact, have a different meaning from that of simple imagery by artists or imperial scribes. He also adds: "The esoteric aspect is not of interest to us here. " This statement seems to admit, at least in principle, that when viewed from the perspective of traditional science, the data in question may have a more serious and instructive meaning. In this regard, we draw attention first of all to the cases of the Emperor

Heraclius himself. Traditional accounts show him to be knowledgeable in astrology (*Kâna Hiraqlu hazzâ'an yanzuru fî-n-nujûm*, reports Bukhârî, *Sahîh*, I.1). According to Islamic accounts, on three occasions he is seen to be preoccupied with the question of Muhammad's prophetic manifestation. The first time, through pure astrological scrutiny, before learning of the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad in any other way, he stated that he had just discovered that a new King (*Malik*) or Reign (*Mulk*) had appeared "among the circumcised" and wondered whether these were other than Jews (Bukhârî, *ibid.*). Shortly afterwards, learning that a prophet had arisen among the Arabs, he inquired whether they were circumcised. He also consulted in writing one of his Byzantine friends "as knowledgeable as himself in science" (*nazîru-hu fî-l-'ilm*), whose response confirmed his conviction. A second time was when he received a message from the Prophet Muhammad himself, summoning him to Islam, and when he inquired about this from Arab merchants who had come from Mecca to Syria, things mentioned, for example, by Bukhârî at least twice, in the chapter on Revelation and in the chapter on Holy War. His attitude appears positive in this circumstance (a hadith of the Prophet will also declare, confirmed by this fact, the Byzantine Empire, and on the other hand condemning the Persian Empire to destruction, due to the hostile response of Khosrow Parviz to a similar prophetic message), but that of the leaders of the Church was such that he could not act on his good intentions. It is clear, however, that he did not have a firm conviction, as his behaviour in the third circumstance, that of the ambassadors of Abu Bakr, shows that he was still seeking certainty.

The concern and emotion shown by the Emperor at that time can be explained quite well by his sense of personal and functional responsibility in the face of events and at historical moments that were decisive for the traditional destinies of the world. His response to Abu Bakr, while dilatory, remained polite, although Byzantine and Christian history seems to have retained no memory of contacts of this kind. His personal attitude, which differed in all these circumstances from official and ecclesiastical reactions, could even be explained, at least to a certain extent, by the fact that the "imperial" tradition in the West appears to have had an origin and position independent of the "Christian priestly" tradition, while being able, and ultimately even having to, join closely with it in the traditional organisation of the West. (The Byzantine Emperor even became the 'Bishop of the Outside'.) Heraclius' references to a "treasure" passed down "by continuous imperial succession" (reported by Ad-Dînawarî), from Dhû-l-Qarnayn (to whom the case of Alexander the

Grand only corresponds to a certain extent to a certain historical moment), clearly attests to this continuity of imperial function despite changes in traditional "religious" forms in the sphere where the authority of the temporal sovereigns of the West was exercised (the West taken as a whole and in relation to the traditional world order as a whole). It is also significant, in this same regard, that during the first investigation, based on astrological data, Heraclius was concerned about the advent of a new King or Kingdom rather than that of a new Prophet.

As for the question of what exactly these images of the Prophets were, it is certainly not easy to say anything for certain, but the fact that they were kept secret and stored in a very special way in separate lockers suggests that they were an astrological "treasure" rather than a kind of album. (The existence of a book on the destinies of Byzantium in the imperial library could be of a somewhat different order, more "external" in any case, whatever its original sources may have been.) It is not impossible that the prophetic images in question also had some talismanic virtue, even though they were only "copies" of originals kept in a more mysterious repository. It is interesting to note, in any case, that the origin of all this would have been a strictly Western repository, in the Far West that Dhû-l-Qarnayn had actually reached (whereas Alexander the Great had not had to undertake such an expedition). From this perspective, Al-Bayhaqî's version, translated by Mr Hamidullah, includes the detail that Adam's figure was red in colour, which also suggests a connection with the Adamic prototype of the red race, whose cardinal position is in the West. One of the details of the Islamic tradition regarding the creation of Adam applies more specifically to the red race.

These are the reflections that we can add to those made by Mr Hamidullah himself on the information reported in the most important document in his article.

VII

AN IDEOGRAPHIC SYMBOL OF UNIVERSAL MAN

(Information from correspondence with René GUÉNON)¹³⁷

At the end of his article entitled "La Montagne et la Cavern e" (*Etudes Traditionnelles*, January 1938), René Guenon, who had just based his considerations on the triangular patterns corresponding to these two symbols, wrote: "If we want to represent the cave as located inside (or at the heart, one might say) the mountain, we need only move the inverted triangle inside the upright triangle, so that their centres coincide [fig. I]; it must then necessarily be smaller in order to be contained entirely within it, but apart from this difference, the whole figure thus obtained is clearly identical to the symbol of the 'Seal of Solomon', where the two opposing triangles also represent two complementary principles in their various possible applications.

On the other hand, if we make the sides of the inverted triangle equal to half those of the right triangle (we have made them slightly smaller so that the two triangles appear completely detached from each other, but in fact, it is obvious that the entrance to the cave must be on the surface of the mountain itself, so that the triangle representing it should actually touch the outline of the other)¹³⁸, the small triangle will divide the surface of the large one into four equal parts, one of which will be the inverted triangle itself, while the others will be right triangles; this last consideration, as well as that of certain numerical relationships related to it, does not, strictly speaking, have any direct connection with our present subject, but we will no doubt have occasion to return to it later in the course of other studies.

Our late master did not, in fact, have such an opportunity in his books or articles. It was only in his correspondence with us that he was led, on several occasions, to provide some unpublished details relating to certain topics discussed in our exchanges. His other readers now have no other way of knowing what he meant in this regard than to

reading certain passages from his letters in a posthumous note such as this one. We will accompany them with contextual explanations and a few personal comments.

These questions were first raised **i n** relation to the numerical symbolism of certain Arabic names and terms. To better understand this, it is worth recalling that in *Symbolism of the Cross*, Chapter III (1931), René Guénon had already written that, in Islamic esotericism, "it is taught that the 'Universal Man', as represented by the pair 'Adam and Eve', has the number of Allah, which is indeed an expression of the 'Supreme Identity'. In a footnote, the author specified: 'This number, which is 66, is given by the sum of the numerical values of the letters forming the names *Adam wa Hawâ*. According to the Hebrew *Genesis*, man 'created male and female', that is to say in an androgynous state, is 'in the image of God'. As we subsequently pointed out to him a few other correspondences (which cannot be mentioned in the present context), there was in his reply a first allusion, albeit insufficiently explicit, to the point that interests us:

"For the number 45 of the name *Adam*, it should be noted that it is not only a multiple of 9, but that it is actually the "triangle" of 9, that is, in other words, the sum of the first 9 numbers. On the other hand, the number for *Hawâ* is 15, which is the 'triangle' of 5; the relationship between these two triangles also gives rise to some curious considerations; I have long intended to discuss this in an article, but have not yet found the opportunity to do so" (Letter of 30 March 1940).

In our reply, we remarked, among other things, that the relationship between 45 and 15 was particularly interesting in the arrangement of the first 9 numbers in the so-called "magic square" of 9, where each row, vertical, horizontal or diagonal, totals 15, the whole being centred on the number 5, the numerical symbol of the human microcosm (cf. the arrangement of the regenerated man on the Flaming Star). This earned us a new clarification on the point in question:

Your remarks about the 'magic square' of 9 are correct ¹³⁹ ; but
more, 

the ratio of the numbers of *Adam* and *Hawâ* is also that of the two triangles I mentioned in connection with the symbolism of the mountain and the cave. If we consider the sum of the two names without using the conjunction, i.e. 60, *Adam* represents three quarters and *Hawâ* one quarter; this could be compared to certain Hindu formulas (one quarter in Sanskrit is called a "

foot", *pâda*), at least insofar as these formulas are applicable to the Universal Man" (Letter of 21 April 1940).

On this last point, here is what we believe can be mentioned, first of all Hindu data cited elsewhere by René Guénon himself. The *Mândûkya Upanishad* (*shruti* 1 and 2) uses the unit of measurement called *pâda* in relation to the conditions of *Atmâ*: "*Atmâ* (of which all things are but manifestations) is *Brahma*, and this *Atmâ* (in relation to the various states of being) has four conditions (*pâdas*); in truth, all this is *Brahma*." After quoting this text in chapter X of *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, René Guénon shows in chapters XI, XIV and XVI that according to the correspondences established by the same *Upanishad* between the constituent elements (*mâtrâs*) of the sacred monosyllable *Aum* (pronounced *Om*) and the conditions (*pâdas*) of *Atmâ*, of which it is the ideographic symbol, these four conditions are:

1° the waking state (*jâgarita-sthâna*), which is that of the most external manifestation, the corporeal world, represented by the letter A of the monosyllable;

2° the state of dreaming (*swapna-sthâna*), which is the subtle manifestation represented by the letter U;

3° the state of deep sleep (*sushupta-sthâna*), the principal degree of being, represented by the letter M;

4° the supreme, total and absolutely unconditional state represented by the monosyllable itself, considered in its principal aspect and "unexpressed" by an ideographic character (*amâtra*).

But on the other hand, the *Maitri Upanishad* (7°*Prapathaka*, *shruti* 11) says: "Waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and that which is beyond, these are the four states of *Atmâ*: the greatest (*mahattara*) is the Fourth (*Turîya*). In the first three, *Brahma* resides with one of his feet; he has three feet in the last." And René Guénon comments: "Thus the proportions established previously from a certain point of view are reversed from another point of view: of the four 'feet' (*pâdas*) of *Atmâ*, the first three, in terms of the distinction of states, are only one in terms of metaphysical importance, and the last is three in itself in the same respect. If *Brahma* were not 'without parts' (*akhandâ*), one could say that only a quarter of Him is in Being (including everything that depends on it, that is, the universal manifestation of which He is the principle), while His other three quarters are beyond Being. These three quarters can be envisaged as follows:

1° all possibilities of manifestation insofar as they do not manifest themselves, therefore in an absolutely permanent and unconditional state, like everything that belongs to the "Fourth" (insofar as they do manifest themselves, they

belong to the first two states; as "manifestable", to the third, which is principal in relation to them);

2° the totality of possibilities of non-manifestation (which we refer to in the plural only by analogy, since they are obviously beyond multiplicity and even beyond unity);

3° finally, the Supreme Principle of both, which is Universal, total, infinite and absolute Possibility.

It is naturally possible to find correspondences between the four *pādas* of *Brahma* and the four small triangles into which the large one is divided (just as, on the other hand, it should be possible to make a new transposition of the monosyllable *Aum*): in this case, the inverted triangle, applied to the principal order, symbolises Being as it manifests itself¹⁴⁰ ; the three right triangles then correspond to the three aspects of *Brahma* beyond Being: the upper triangle, the origin of the figurative whole, naturally serves as a symbol of the Supreme Principle of all possibilities, and the two triangles on the right and left, respectively, to the possibilities of non-manifestation and the possibilities of manifestation insofar as they do not manifest themselves¹⁴¹ (4).

On the other hand, when we consider the correspondences with the four *pādas* of *Atmā*, they are as follows: the upper triangle corresponds to the principal and unmanifested *pāda*, and the other three triangles correspond to *the* three *pādas* of the realm of manifestation, in addition to the *mātras* of Om. However, for a precise application, we must again consider an interpretation based on the symbolism of the centre, the right and the left, that is, by reordering the vertical hierarchy of the degrees of existence (principal, intermediate and corporeal) on a horizontal plane corresponding to the point of view of the "directions of the path" or "distributive justice".

Finally, from a more cosmological perspective (close to that of *Sankhya*) but in the terms of the *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad*, the upper triangle would be the 'Single, Colourless Being' (interpreted as *Shiva*), and the other three triangles would be the three "unborn": one, of a feminine nature, "the unborn red, white and black" which begets particular beings, and which corresponds to Primordial Nature, the principle of the three *Gunās*, or to *Shiva's Shakti*, is logically represented by the inverted triangle¹⁴² ; the other two "unborn" are masculine in character, but one "stands beside her satisfied, the other leaves her after enjoying her"; these are respectively the uncreated soul, but passive and bound in the first case, active and detached in the second (*Sv. Up. IV, 1 and 5*)¹⁴⁽³⁾. However, this text actually refers to four distinct entities, not four parts of a single being. In truth, it refers to

modes of the same essential reality, which is none other than *Atmâ*, but these modes are here, for didactic reasons, personified in typically characterised hypostases that can affect it not only in the multitude of existing beings, but also in the multiplicity of states of the same being¹⁴⁴.

But let us return to our correspondence with Guénon. At another point, much later, in our letters repeatedly touching on the question of *the mantra Om* in relation to Islamic *dhikr* names and formulas, R. Guénon finally tells us:

"In connection with what I had told you, I would ask you again to examine carefully what the arrangement of the letters on the sides of the figure opposite gives, in which the large triangle must be regarded as having a value of 45 = *Adam*, and the small inverted triangle as having a value of 15 = *Hawâ*. This figure is the one I had given, but without the letters and without even alluding to it, because I intended to return to it later, in my article on the mountain and the cave" (*Letter* of 4 August 1945).



Circumstances at the time prevented us from doing anything other than thanking him for this important communication, so we are unable to quote any comments he may have had on our findings in this regard, nor any other considerations that he would undoubtedly have added himself at the time. We also hoped that he would finally decide to write the article he had been planning for so long.

Here is what can be said at first glance about Figure III:

The letters surrounding it are Arabic, namely: at the top an *alif*, at the right corner a *dâl*, at the left corner a *mîm*, which for the large triangle make up the three letters constituting the name *Adam*; in the middle of the right side, where the tip of one of the angles of the inverted triangle is located, there is a *hâ*; in the middle of the left side, where the tip of the side adjacent to the same side is located, there is a *wâw*; and finally, in the middle of the base of the large triangle, where the inverted apex of the small triangle rests, there is another *alif*, which forms the three letters of the name *Hawâ*¹⁴⁵(8). The effect produced by this interference of the letters of the two names on each side of the large triangle is as follows: on the right side, *alif – hâ – dâl = Ahad*, which means "One"; on the left side, *alif – wâw – mîm = Awwm*, which is the Arabic transcription of the sacred monosyllable of the East; finally, on the base, following the normal order of Arabic writing, we have *dâl – alif – mîm = dâm*, a verb meaning "he is permanent", but which should rather be read in the present participle *Dâl'im* = "Permanent, Eternal", which gives one of the divine names, *the i* in the transcription of this last word corresponding in Arabic writing only to

a simple *hamza* (a vowel sign that is not a letter and therefore has no numerical value). This gives us three terms of paramount importance in the doctrinal order: the divine name of Pure Unity (cf. Cor. 112, 1), the primordial word which, according to Hindu doctrine, includes the essence of *the* triple *Veda* and is therefore a symbol of the universal Word, and, finally, a term that expresses both the permanence of the One Principle and that of the First Revelation of the Word. However, these three divine aspects, insofar as they appear here in the structure of the Form of the human Androgyne, are in fact theophanic aspects of the Universal Man.

In this regard, it is striking to note that *the alif* at the top, which already expresses the ideas of "principle" and "unity" (the numerical value of this letter being 1), or even "polarity" (the value of the letters that make up the name *alif* being 111, the number of the "pole", *Qutb*), appears as the initial letter in both *Ahad* = "One" and *Awm* = *Om*, and this is also in accordance with the principal position that this letter occupies in both the "numerical" and "literal" orders: this suggests the idea that we are in the presence of a kind of "seal" of the two sacred sciences of Numbers and Letters. These sciences are in fact the two main branches of the more general Science of Names (applicable both in the divine order and in the creaturely order) that *Allah* taught by privilege to *Adam* (Cor. 2:31; cf. Genesis II, 19-20), and the fact that this *alif* is in our diagram first and foremost the initial letter of *Adam's* own name perfectly illustrates the truth that these two sciences are two complementary and interdependent attributes of Universal Man. However, their primary origin being divine, as we have just said, *the alif* that symbolises their principle must be considered as originally and essentially the initial letter of the very name of *Allah*, "conferred" on *Adam* by the Primordial Theophany which constitutes, in fact, his creation "in the image of *Allah*". This *Alif* is therefore a symbol of the Principle of this total Form, just as the straight line of this first letter of the sacred alphabet is considered to be the constituent principle of all the others, and just as the sound *a* that corresponds to it (as we see in writing when the letter marked with a *fatha* – sound *a* – is necessarily extended with an *alif*) is the primordial voice, of which all possible sounds are only modifications, and finally, that unity, which is the numerical value of this letter, is the principle of all numbers¹⁴⁶.

Finally, this upper *alif*, which is the initial letter in the name *Adam*, has a kind of "projection" in *the* lower *alif*, which is the final letter in the name *Hawâ*. The relationship between these two *alifs* is, strictly speaking, that of two simultaneous and polar opposites of the same being, just as *Hawâ* is

an intimate part of *the* primordial and androgynous *Adam*, and, distinctly, his complement produced by a simple inner reflection of the masculine aspect¹⁴⁽⁷⁾. From a more analytical microcosmic point of view, the place occupied by *the alif* at the top is that of the ray sent by the spiritual Sun, which is the transcendent Self, and touching first the centre of the "Thousand-petalled Lotus" (*Sahasrara*)¹⁴⁸, symbolically located at the crown of the head. In turn, *the* lower *alif* represents, one might say, the lower end of the same ray (through the subtle artery *Sushumna*), and its position, which is the point of contact between the inverted apex of the small triangle and the base of the large one, expresses

a relative and apparent 'immanence' of the Self at the bottom of the 'cave of the heart'¹⁴⁹, whereas, according to its pure essence, the Self remains unconditioned, just as *the* original *alif*, that of *Allah*, cannot be assigned according to its true nature to any specific position on this symbolic diagram, whose elements nevertheless all proceed from it. From the macrocosmic point of view, the relationship of "descent" The connection that exists between these two *alifs* is essentially an expression of the manifestation of the Lordly Command (*al-Amr ar-Rabbânî*), which descends from Heaven to Earth, reorders the world and ascends back to *Allah*¹⁵⁰.

On the other hand, if we refer to the symbolism of the Mountain and the Cave as "abodes" of the spiritual Pole, *the* upper *alif* represents its dominant and manifest position at the beginning of the cycle, and *the lower alif* represents its central and inner residence in the phase of occultation.

Finally, to conclude our supplementary considerations, we would say that by digging a little deeper, we could make other significant observations, both in numerical terms and in literal and verbal terms, but as our aim is primarily to report on René Guénon's remarks, we will stop there for the moment with our personal comments on this point.

However, the most striking feature of this figure is the appearance of *the Aum*, and one may wonder what the presence of this Vedic term means in an Arabic context. This question leads us to another area of study, which we propose to consider in another chapter in which we will refer to some further comments from the correspondence with René Guénon¹⁵¹.

VIII

THE TRIANGLE OF THE ANDROGYNE AND THE MONOSYLLABLE

"OM".¹⁵²

At the end of our article entitled *An Ideographic Symbol of Universal Man* (Data from a Correspondence with René Guénon), we planned a sequel specifically intended to account for the presence of the Vedic term *Awm* (= Om) within the Arabic context given by the figure representing the symbolic proportions between Adam and Eve in the constitution of the primordial Androgyne. We reproduce here once again the drawing given at that time and duplicate it with a transcription in Latin letters for ease of reference. At the same time, we specify the literal transcriptions, noting that, on both drawings, the reading must be done in the direction of Arabic writing, i.e. from right to left.

1. Complementarity of ideographic symbols.

In fact, it will now be a question of clarifying the meaning of the three Arabic letters that correspond to the three *mâtrâs* or constituent elements of the monosyllable *Om*¹⁵⁽³⁾, because Arabic, like all Semitic languages among others, does not include, at least explicitly, this same invocatory term, and instead has, with a more or less comparable sacred use, the term *Amin* (= *amen*), an equivalence to which we will return later.



The three Arabic letters *alif*, *wâw* and *mîm*, as elements of a specific ternary group situated within the symbolic framework of our schema of the Universal Man, can be interpreted as follows: *the alif*, which is a symbol of unity and the first principle, naturally represents *Allah*, whose name, incidentally, begins with the letter *alif*; in contrast, the last of the three letters, the

Mîm refers to the Messenger of Allah, *Muhammad*, whose name begins with this letter¹⁵⁴. The initial and final letters of this *Awm* thus correspond to the two Attestations (*ash-Sha-hâdatân*) of Islam: that concerning *Allah* as the one and only god and that concerning the divine mission of the Prophet *Muhammad*. Between these two extreme terms, the *wâw* acts as a junction (*waçl*), this letter also being the copula

"and" (*wa*)¹⁵⁵; at the same time, metonymically, the *waw* is the *Wahdah*, the essential Unity between the pure Principle and the Muhammadian Reality¹⁵⁶.

By interpreting the ideographic relationship between the three letters from a theophanic perspective, we can say that the Word, which exists in its principal state in *the alif*, develops as the Holy Spirit in the spiral movement of *the waw*, finally coiling into the totalising and occulting form of *the Mohammedan mim*; thus the Mohammedan Reality constitutes the mystery of the supreme and universal Word, for it is at once the integral Theophany (of the Essence, Attributes and Acts) and its occultation under the veil of absolute and total Servitude¹⁵⁷. This is why the Prophet said: "He who sees me sees the Truth itself" (*man raânî faqad râ-l-Haqq*). The sequence presented by these three letters can be regarded as constituting the complete cycle of the universal Breath: in Hindu terms, *Brahma* as *Prâna*¹⁵⁸.

It should be noted that this symbolism of totality specific to the group of three Arabic letters *alif-wâw-mîm* coincide exactly with those of the Hindu monosyllable according to the *Mândûkya Upanishad* (*shruti* 1): "Om, this syllable (*akshara*) is all that is!"¹⁵⁹. Furthermore, *alif* and *mîm* can be considered from the perspective of the cycle of prophetic manifestations. These letters, which are also the initial and final letters of Adam's name, represent, respectively, *Adam* himself as the primordial holder of the divine Science of Names (*Ilmu-l-asmâ'*) and *Mohammad* as the Seal of the Prophets who receives the Synthetic Words (*Jawâmi'u-l-Kalim*) and is charged with "perfecting noble morals" (*tatmîmu Makârimi-l-Akhîlâq*)¹⁶⁰.

Thus, it is understood that the role of this Arabic *Aum* is simply ideographic, and it is under this report that we will still a few remarks.

In our figure, the Arabic letters corresponding to the characters A, U, M follow each other in descending order, which corresponds to the hierarchy of the truths they symbolise, whereas in Hindu symbolism the order of *the mât-râs of Om* is ascending¹⁶¹.

This reverse order of *the mât-râs* can be explained by their arrangement according to the order of sound absorption, which begins from the state of complete manifestation

in the sensible realm, rises through a movement of inner involution in the subtle realm, and returns, through total extinction, to the unmanifested¹⁶².

However, the *matras* of the sacred monosyllable also have a written representation. In this regard, both in Arabic and Sanskrit, the geometric elements corresponding to the characters of the transcription appear to be the same: a straight line for the character A, a curved or spiral element for the character U, and a dot for the character M. In this case, it would be necessary to account for the resulting inversion, at least apparently, in the order of the respective characters from an ideographic point of view. In this regard, as far as the Sanskrit side is concerned, we will refer to the details provided by René Guénon in *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, when he dealt for the first time in a special way with the sacred Hindu monosyllable, especially since nowhere else, apart from his writings, any indication of a geometric symbolism of *the matras of Om*: "...the geometric forms that correspond respectively to the three *matras* are a straight line, a semicircle (or rather an element of a spiral) and a point: the first symbolises the complete unfolding of manifestation; the second, a state of relative envelopment in relation to this unfolding, but nevertheless still developed or manifested; the third, the informal and 'dimensionless' state or state without special limiting conditions, that is to say, unmanifested. It should also be noted that the point is the primordial principle of all geometric figures, just as the unmanifested is the principle of all states of manifestation, and that it is, in its order, the true and indivisible unity, which makes it a natural symbol of pure Being.

»¹⁶³.

We have quoted Guénon's text in full because, in addition to the correspondences we are discussing, it contains an indication of the particular meaning in which these correspondences should be understood when referring to Sanskrit. We thus know that the line in question symbolises "the complete unfolding of manifestation"; however, while this meaning can be found in the character A of the Hindu transcription to which Guénon refers without further clarification, it cannot be found in the vertical line of *the Arabic alif*; the latter, to use the terms that Guénon himself employed in another circumstance, corresponds in its form to "*amr*, affirmation of pure Being and primary formulation of the supreme Will"¹⁶⁴, which recognises its principal and axial symbolism. On the contrary, the idea of "complete unfolding of manifestation" refers to a figuration opposite to that of the vertical line, which, since it must always be straight here, can only be horizontal.

However, as the ordinary or even more special forms of transcription

of *the akshara* in Devanagari do not reveal, at least at first glance, all these basic geometric elements ¹⁶⁵, we believe that René Guénon had in mind a particular hieroglyphic form of the monosyllable *Om*, of a simpler and more primordial nature, designed to correspond graphically to the phonetic properties of the word.

In any case, we find even more precise indications in this regard in his work when he discusses the symbolism of the conch shell.

In this regard, we recall first of all that "during the cataclysm that separates this *Manvantara* from the previous one, the *Veda* was enclosed in the conch shell (*shankha*), which is one of the main attributes of *Vishnu*. This is because the conch shell is regarded as containing the primordial and imperishable sound (*akshara*), that is, the monosyllable *Om*, which is par excellence the name of the Word manifested in the three worlds, while at the same time, through another correspondence between these three elements or *mâtrâs*, it is the essence of *the triple Veda*. Moreover, these three elements, reduced to their essential geometric forms and arranged graphically in a certain way, form the very pattern of the conch shell; and, by a rather singular coincidence, this pattern is also that of the human ear, the organ of hearing, which must indeed, in order to be capable of perceiving sound, have a disposition in accordance with the nature of sound. All this clearly relates to some of the

deepest mysteries of cosmology ... ¹⁶⁶. Now we can better understand what the author means in the following passage: "The diagram of the conch can also be completed as that of *the akshara* itself, the straight line (*a*) covering and closing the conch (*u*) which contains within it the point (*m*), or the essential principle of beings; the straight line then represents at the same time, by its horizontal direction, the 'surface of the Waters', that is to say, the substantial medium in which the development of the seeds will take place (represented in Eastern symbolism by the blossoming of the lotus flower) after the intermediate period of darkness (*sandhyâ*) between two cycles. Continuing with the same schematic representation, we then have a figure that can be described as the reversal of the conch, opening to release the seeds, following the straight line now oriented in a vertical downward direction, which is that of the development of manifestation from its unmanifested principle. Here is a precise note: "This new figure is the one given in the Archeometer for the zodiacal letter ♋ of Cancer" ¹⁶⁷.

However, the figure shown is more accurately that of the corresponding letter in the *Vattan* alphabet, namely



by restoring it to the position of the conch before its 'turning over' and 'opening', when it contained the seed, this figure must be



In this position, which can be considered normal, the straight line is horizontal. However, the order of succession of the elements is new; but the author had warned us that in order to obtain the conch shell pattern, the three elements (or *mâtrâs*) were not only "reduced to their essential geometric forms", but also "arranged graphically in a certain way", and it is certainly this special, unusual arrangement that explains the changes that can be seen here in the order of succession of the basic elements¹⁶⁸.

Finally, in *Le Roi du Monde*, ch. IV, while explaining that "the word *Om* immediately provides the key to the hierarchical distribution of functions between *Brahâtâmâ* and his two assessors," a triad that governs the "three worlds," Guénon adds: "To use yet another symbolism, no less rigorously accurate, we will say that the *Mahânga* represents the base of the initiatory triangle, and the *Brahâtâmâ* its summit; between the two, the *Mahâtâmâ* embodies, in a way, a mediating principle (cosmic vitality, *the Anima Mundi* of the Hermeticists), whose action unfolds in the 'intermediate space'; and all this is very clearly represented by the corresponding characters of the sacred alphabet that Saint-Yves calls *vattan* and Mr Ossendowski *vatannan*, or, which amounts to the same thing, by the geometric forms (straight line, spiral and point) to which the three *mâtrâs* or constituent elements of the monosyllable *Om* essentially boil down." Admittedly, this is only a correspondence, but it is of the utmost importance. The explicit reference made this time to the *Vattan* script allows us to understand that the respective characters in this 22-letter solar alphabet are at least related, if not completely identical, to those involved more specifically in the symbolism of *the matras of Om* according to the *Mândûkya Upanishad* and in René Guénon's commentary. Now, in the said alphabet, as we know it from Saint-Yves' Archéomètre, the letter A corresponds to a horizontal line, U to an upward-facing spiral, and M to a small dot (placed on a line horizontal like a pearl on a string)¹⁶⁹.

In any case, now the straight line corresponding to the *mâtrâ* A must be considered horizontal and then it appears, one might say, in a complementary relationship with the vertical line of *the alif*, rather than a similarity. Moreover, if we look closely, a similar relationship can be observed

in the other two geometric shapes in question, the spiral element and the "point": indeed, the spiral representing the *mâtrâ* U is involutive and ascending, as it is defined in the *Mândûkya Upanishad* as *utkarsha* "elevation"¹⁷⁰, while that of the Arabic *wâw* is evolutionary and descending¹⁷¹. Finally, on the Sanskrit side, the point corresponding to the *mâtrâ* M is a point proper, "dimensionless"¹⁷² (20), whereas in Arabic, the *mîm* is in fact a closed loop or a knot made by a coil, a shape which, at least in theory, has a small empty space in the middle. One could even specify that the shapes of the characters in the two series, when combined, give the following three fundamental symbols: the Cross, the two snakes of the Caduceus, and the Egg of the World.

Furthermore, we can see that, in a certain sense, true symbolic equivalences are found not in the characters themselves, whose order is reversed, but, at each level, in the symbolic functions of their basic geometric elements.

Thus, the constituent point of the *matra* M, located at the top, where it represents the principal state, corresponds in fact to the upper point of the alif, which is the "original point" (*an-nuqtat al-asliyya*) that flowed under the Gaze of Allah and gave rise to the vertical line of the first letter¹⁷³. The two spirals, involutive and evolutionary, of the intermediate level naturally correspond in their functions, which are also "mediating", mercurial, between a principal state and a state of complete manifestation. Finally, at the lower level, the horizontal line of the *mâtrâ* expresses in a rectilinear form the same idea as the compact form of the *mî*: a state of completeness which, on the one hand, is the starting point of a resorptive process and, on the other, the culmination of a cyclical consumption.

Thus, in conclusion to this examination, the reverse order in which the geometric shapes appear in the two series of characters seems to be a logical consequence of their actual hieroglyphic design. However, this tracing, with the complementarity that we discern in it, cannot be an isolated and accidental fact, nor can it be without a more general traditional meaning, for we are in a domain that is sacred par excellence, where forms are the direct symbolic expression of the realities they are meant to express. We recall here that René Guénon has already made an observation of this kind in the case of the Sanskrit *na* reduced to its fundamental geometric elements and the Arabic *nûn* — two half-conferences, upper and lower, each with its own point—whose union constitutes "the circle with its point at the centre, a figure of the complete cycle which is at the same time the symbol of the Sun in the astrological order and that of gold in the alchemical order"¹⁷⁴. However, he also said at the time that this should be seen as an effect of the "

relationships that exist between the alphabets of different traditional languages
" ¹⁷⁵.

Its cosmological symbolism also led to a certain idea of traditional final integration: "Just as the lower semicircle is the figure of the arch, the upper semicircle is that of the rainbow, which is its analogue in the strictest sense of the word, that is, with the application of the 'opposite meaning'; they are also the two halves of the 'Egg of the World', one 'earthly', in the 'lower waters', and the other 'heavenly', in the 'upper waters'; and the circular figure that was complete at the beginning of the cycle, before the separation of these two halves, must be reconstituted at the end of the same cycle. We could therefore say that the reunion of the two figures represents the completion of the cycle, through the joining of its beginning and its end, especially since, if we relate them more specifically to "solar" symbolism, the Sanskrit figure *na* corresponds to the rising Sun and the Arabic figure *nûn* to the setting Sun... What we have just said suggests that the completion of the cycle, as we have envisaged it, must have a certain correlation, in historical terms, with the meeting of the two traditional forms that correspond to its beginning and its end and whose sacred languages are Sanskrit and Arabic respectively: the Hindu tradition as the most direct heir to the primordial Tradition, and the Islamic tradition as the "seal of Prophecy" and therefore the ultimate form of traditional orthodoxy for the current cycle ¹⁷⁶. Finally, returning to our initial symbolic considerations, we can say that what we ourselves observed above regarding the three characters of the monosyllable *Om* confirms Guénon's initial insight, and this is all the more significant given that, in this case, we are dealing with letters that express the symbol par excellence of the primordial Word. In this respect, we can also see the existence on both sides of elements of a certain complementarity and final integration. But such integration is, of course, only possible as a reconstruction of an original prefiguration of the harmony existing between the different elements and factors of the total traditional order; the sacred languages themselves and the essential alphabets that correspond to them participate, in their own way and on their own level, in a primordial synthesis which is both their *raison d'être* and their supreme purpose. By reducing the sacred sacred to their fundamental patterns, the symbolic characters traced on either side in the traditional defined between them according to relationships relationships of

Complementarism must reveal its affiliation with such a synthesis.

In this regard, however, one observation must be made, especially in light of the particularities noted in our research. On the Sanskrit side, it is not among the fifty or so characters of the *Devanagari* syllabary, a script designed to provide the most perfect phonetic recording of the oral tradition, that one should look for the complementary schematic forms of the 28 Arabic consonantal letters, but in an alphabet of a hieroglyphic character, such as the *Vattan* alphabet, which itself must be the close or distant origin of the *Devanagari* script, as well as most of the syllabic scripts of Asia¹⁷⁷. Admittedly, the latter is a "solar" alphabet, consisting of 22 letters like the Hebrew alphabet¹⁷⁸, whereas the Arabic alphabet is a "lunar" alphabet of 28 letters, but the latter can easily be reduced to the 22 letters of its solar base by simply removing the diacritical dots from 6 of its letters¹⁷⁹ (27), and it is in this form that Arabic letters should be considered when attempting a "synthesis" with *Vattan*, which we cannot undertake within the scope of this study. We would also add that, of all the Semitic alphabets, it is Arabic, with its remarkably geometric schematism, that appears to be best suited to a reconstructive rapprochement of the kind we are discussing.

2. Complementarity of traditional forms.

Underlying all of the above is what could be called a traditional polarity between Hinduism and Islam¹⁸⁰. Islamic tradition refers to this relationship, first and foremost, as a symbol of "kinship" and, more specifically, "filiation" linking the founders of two corresponding ethnic-traditional movements. Curious as it may seem, these are Abraham (*Ibrâhîm* in Arabic), to whom "Brahmanism" is linked, as evidenced by the phonetic similarity of the names, and his son Ishmael (*Ismâ'îl* in Arabic), "the father of the Arabs", or rather the spiritual entities and intellectual aggregates represented by these two patriarchs¹⁸¹.

In this regard, here is first of all how a great master of Islamic esotericism, Abdu-l-Karîm al-Jîlî (d. 832 / 1428), identifies the Hindu tradition, in its metaphysical and non-idolatrous essence, with the Abrahamic heritage:

"The Brahmins (*al-Barâhîma*) worship Allah in an absolute manner, not according to any prophet or divine messenger. Or rather, they profess that there is nothing that is not a creature of Allah: thus they recognise the oneness of Allah in

existence, but they absolutely refuse to acknowledge prophets and messengers (as bringing something that is not already found in man). Their worship of Truth is a kind of adoration comparable to that of the "divine messengers" (*rusul*) before they were entrusted with their mission (*qabl al-irsâl*) (that is, according to a conception of total universality and autonomy of being).

The Brahmins claim to be the children of Abraham; they also say that they have a book written for them by Abraham himself; they do not say that Abraham brought it from his Lord. This book contains the fundamental truths (*al-Haqâ'iq*) and consists of five parts: four of which can be read by anyone and a fifth^e, which is accessible only to a few among them, because of its depth. Now it is a well-known fact among them that whoever reads this 5^e part of their scripture will necessarily arrive at Islam and enter the religion of Muhammad. This category of men is found mainly in the countries of Hind¹⁸⁽²⁾. But there are others who take on the appearance of the latter and claim to be Brahmins themselves, when in reality they are not; these are the ones known as idol worshippers" (*al-Insân al-Kâmil*, ch. 63).

We need not insist particularly for this to be understood. certain peculiarities in the presentation of ideas in this text by a Muslim author. Furthermore, it is clear that Abraham's identification with *Brahma* explains why, in Abdu-l-Karim Al-Jilî's account, it is specified that Abraham left the Brahmins a book "written for them by himself" and "not by his Lord"; in Hindu terms, *Brahma* also formulated the Veda in his own name: "The Veda is *Brahma*; it came forth from him like his breath," says one formula (*Prânatoshîni*, 19); and it is because it has no human author and is only "heard" that it is called *Shruti* ("That which is heard") ¹⁸⁽³⁾. This intimate connection, in the case of Abraham, between the divine and human aspects, is signified in Arabic by the patriarch's title *Khalîlu-Llâh* = usually translated as "the intimate Friend of Allah": the root *khalla* used here expresses the idea of "interpenetration" and *Khulla* represents the final degree of Love¹⁸⁴.

The identification or correspondence between the monotheistic patriarch and the formulator of Vedic doctrine is a fairly widespread belief in the Islamic East. The curious *Amratkund*, now known only through its Arabic (*Hawd al-Hayât* = the basin of Life) and Persian (*Bahr al-Hayât* = the Ocean of Life), also attests to this, in another form, when it reports

the story of *the Brahmin yogi* Bhûjar, who ultimately converted to Islam ¹⁸⁵. After receiving enlightening answers, particularly concerning Allah, who is worshipped in Islam as "invisible" (*bi-l-ghayb*, cf. Qur'an 2:3) and concerning the Spirit (*ar-Rûh = Atmâ*) as being "of the divine order" (*min amri Rabbî*, cf. Qur'an 17:85), he declared: This is what we ourselves have found in the Collection (*mushaf*) of Brâhman (transcribed *Brâhimân*) which (the word before thus in Arabic the dual form) are Abraham and Moses (an association that must be based on Quran 87:19: "The first Pages, the Pages of Abraham and Moses").

»)¹⁸⁶.

As for the book attributed, according to Al-Jîlî, to Abraham, its four parts, accessible to all, seem to correspond to the four Vedas themselves, while the ^{fifth}, due to its strictly confidential nature, refers not to what is known as "the fifth Veda" (which is usually associated with tantric texts or even the theatrical arts), but rather the *Vedanta*, "the end of the Veda", in other words its purely metaphysical part, which is effectively only the preserve of an elite, even if it does not have the esoteric "position" suggested by the quoted text.

In any case, what we will retain from Al-Jîlî's text is, first and foremost, the idea of an "Abrahamic" source for Hinduism, which should be taken in an analogical sense, as we are dealing with a document of strictly Semitic form. By this we mean that what constitutes the essence of this "source" is not defined in itself as Semitic, but that Semitic thought, especially of the Muhammadian form, must, for symbolic reasons, place it under the type of Abraham.

That is why, moreover, one could say that, if we looked at the same things from the Hindu perspective, the relationship between the two traditional forms in question could quite naturally be interpreted in the opposite sense ¹⁸⁷. But it is a common source that should rather be considered here. In any case, Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek, from whom the patriarch receives a blessing and to whom he pays tithes, which was explained by René Guenon (*Le Roi du Monde*, ch. VI) as "the point of junction between the Hebrew tradition and the great primordial Tradition", clearly indicates the subordination of Semitic Abrahamism (which must be considered as a whole and not restricted to the Hebrew tradition) to a spiritual authority of a primordial nature, from which the eponymous patriarch truly receives his investiture¹⁸⁸)

However, we do not exclude the idea of a direct relationship between what Semitic Abraham represents and Brahmanism. Admittedly, this thesis may seem as complex as it is difficult to prove; nevertheless, it is not

impossible, as it is commonly accepted that the oldest known civilisation in north-western India has Sumerian origins; Sumer is lower Mesopotamia, the country of Abraham's origin¹⁸⁹. But, sticking to a strictly traditional and initiatory point of view, it will suffice here to say this: in the Qur'an, which contains "the synthesis of all traditional doctrines

(This is one of the more precise meanings of *Jawâmi' al-Kalim*, a privilege of the Seal of Prophecy that we mentioned earlier.) The doctrine that corresponds to Vedantic Hinduism is, in any case, that recorded under the name of the patriarch Abraham: indeed, if Hinduism, through its antiquity and relative formal continuity, as well as through the free nature of its metaphysics and its openness to universality, represents, as René Guenon said, "the most direct heritage of the primordial Tradition"¹⁹⁰, it is indeed the Abrahamic conception of tradition that corresponds to it among all the rules of wisdom set forth in the Qur'an and attested as applicable in the historical-Muhammadian cycle. We thus refer, without being able to dwell on it in particular, to the notion of *Hanîfiyya*, the pure, non-associationist religion that admits all forms of non-idolatrous worship, which is traditionally linked to Abraham¹⁹⁽¹⁾. Suffice it to say here that, according to the words of the Prophet, the most excellent of religions is *Hanîfiyya samha*, the pure and liberal religion, "with which," he further says, "he himself was sent, and that, on the other hand, Allah says in the Book: "Who could be of a better religion than he who submits his face to Allah, acting with excellence, and follows the Rule of Abraham (*millat Ibrâhîm*) in a pure manner (*hanîfan*)? For Allah took Abraham as a close friend (*khalîl*)" (Cor. 4:124). Let us specify, however, that according to the metaphysical and initiatory interpretation,

"Submitting one's face to Allah" means "making one's being conform or adequate to the Absolute Being". The Qur'an further emphasises this point: "Who would seek anything other than the Way of Abraham, except one who has lost his mind? For We chose Abraham in this world, and in the Hereafter he is among the righteous." (Quran 2:130)¹⁹² [*wa man yarghabu 'an millati Ibrâhîm illâ man safiha nafsahu wa laqad stafaynâhu fi-d-dunyâ wa innahu fi-l-âkhirah la-mina-s-sâlihîna*].

Next, from the text by Abdu-l-Karim al-Jîlî, it is worth noting the assertion that the most profound teaching of Brahmanism is in direct agreement with the truth of "Muhammadian" Islam¹⁹⁽³⁾. According to the explicit terms of the Qur'an, the latter is based in a special way on the characteristic tradition of Abraham; Allah says to the Prophet: "We have inspired you (*awhaynâ ilay-ka*) to follow the way of life (*milla*) of Abraham, who was *hanîf* and was not one of the

polytheists" (Quran 16:123). The Prophet is committed to explicitly attesting to this fact himself: "Say: Verily, my Lord has guided me to a straight path, according to a firm religion, in the rule of Abraham, who was *hanif* and was not of the polytheists" (Quran 6:162).

Finally, Allah declares: "Indeed, Abraham was neither a Jew (*Yahûdî*) nor a Christian (*nasrânî*), but he was a *Hanif Muslim*, and he was not one of the polytheists. Truly, those who, above all others, can claim the patronage of Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet (Muhammad), as well as those who have faith. And Allah is the patron of the believers" (Cor. 3:67-68). Unlike other spiritual figures from the traditional past, Abraham is the only sage expressly proposed as a model par excellence in Islam: "You have an excellent model in Abraham and those who were with him, etc... You have in them an excellent model, as they hoped in Allah and the Last Day, etc.

" (Cor. 60:4-6)¹²⁴ .

It should be added that the relationship between Abraham and Muhammad is constantly evoked and updated in formulas, such as the one recited in the last position of daily prayers: "*Allâhumma* grant Your unifying grace (*sallî*) to our lord Muhammad and to the Family of our lord Muhammad, as You granted it to our lord Abraham and to the Family of our lord Abraham, etc... Furthermore, in the fixed rites of the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*) and in those of the ordinary visit (*'umra*), which is permitted throughout the year, the memory of Abraham is particularly alive and active, as he is involved in certain places and related rites.

As for the second term of the traditional "kinship" we are discussing, Ishmael, who was himself a "divine messenger" (*rasûl*) and therefore, according to initiatory truth, a theophanic form, we would like to highlight here a characteristic role that has a certain connection with the initial subject of our study. This patriarch is at the origin of the Arabic language, the language in which the Qur'an was to be revealed and Muhammad's teachings formulated. According to the hadiths, "Ishmael received this Arabic language through inspiration (*ilhâm*)"; thus, "the first person whose tongue articulated clear Arabic (*al-'arabiyya al-mubîna*) was Ishmael when he was a child of 14 years old". These facts show that Arabic was from the outset a revealed language, of truly heavenly origin, not a natural language that was more or less adapted for traditional use, regardless of the relationship on the human level between the Arabic of the Qur'anic revelation and the Arabic spoken by the tribes contemporary with the Prophet.

Moreover, another hadith says that the Prophet Muhammad himself received knowledge of this language from the Angel Gabriel, who descended especially to teach it to him: "Truly, the language of Ishmael had lost its clarity; so

Gabriel came with this language and taught it to me." It is important to note that this teaching concerns only the means of prophetic expression and must be understood as different and distinct from the revelation of the Qur'an, which was to come only after the verbal foundations had been established¹⁹⁵. Finally, insofar as between the respective eras of Ishmael and Muhammad, separated by several millennia¹⁹⁶, there would be a need to consider a readjustment of this language to changed cyclical conditions, it should also be noted that this readjustment would itself be a heavenly work and not a human one¹⁹⁷.

The prophetic figure of Ishmael, the "father of the Arabs", has a special relationship with Truth as a characteristic "spoken Word" which, at the end of the prophetic cycle, will also be that of the Muhammadian revelation. The name Ishmael, which expresses the idea of "divine hearing", itself prepares and inaugurates a whole thematic ensemble of "invocation" and "word".

To begin with, the angel of Jehovah said to Hagar, who was fleeing from Sarai's severity

"Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son; and thou shalt call his *name Ishmael, because Jehovah hath heard thy affliction*" (*Gen. XVI, 11*). Later, when Ishmael was thirteen years old, Jehovah, while announcing to Abraham the coming birth of Isaac, also said: "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly! He will father twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation" (*id. XVII, 20*). Finally, when, after Isaac's birth, Hagar was expelled with her son into the desert, "*Elohim heard the voice of the child*, and the angel of Elohim called to Hagar from heaven, saying, 'What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for Elohim has heard the voice of the child where he is!'" (*id. XXI, 17*). It is at this latter moment that the heavenly revelation of "the clear Arab" must be placed, made to Ishmael, who was then indeed 14 years old as indicated by the aforementioned hadith, and the event will correspond with a second meaning of the name Ishmael in Arabic: "the act by which God makes himself heard", a meaning that is correlative to the first and which can help us understand the causal relationship.

between the invocation and the "response"¹⁹⁸. It should also be noted that the meaning of "hear" that we have emphasised so far does not refer solely to the divine attribute of "hearing", but also and above all to that of "granting", i.e.

"responding", which can be understood either in the general sense of "satisfying"¹⁹⁹, or in the more specifically oracular sense of "responding eloquently". As for the latter meaning, which is the most appropriate in this context, we will make one further observation.

The reference to "the place where the child was" suggests that the divine "response" had a tangible and external support, a place that would subsequently bear witness to the event. Such a place, which is a point of celestial influence, could also become a sacred centre, the centre of the new traditional form that was to proceed from Ishmael²⁰⁰. This perspective is opened up by the divine words already quoted, addressed to Abraham: "Ishmael... shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation" (cf. *id.* XXV, 12-16), which therefore announced a spiritual centre with its traditional community²⁰¹.

However, the institution itself at the centre of this new tradition would only really come into being later, under the leadership of Abraham. Father and son are united in a very characteristic way in the construction of the Kaaba, the Islamic symbol of the Centre of the World. This institution was, moreover, more of an adapted restoration of the original temple that Adam had founded after leaving the Garden of Eden. A long passage from the Sura of the Heifer (Cor. 2:124 ff.) speaks of their work; we quote the part relating to the final invocation: "When Abraham raised the foundations of the House, and Ishmael, (he said or they said): 'Our Lord, accept this from us! Truly, You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing! Our Lord, make us submissive to You (*muslimayni la-Ka*), and make our descendants a community submissive to You (*ummatan muslimatan la-Ka*)! Also show us our sacrificial rites, and return to us! Truly, You are the One who always returns, the Most Merciful! Our Lord, raise up among them a messenger from among themselves who recites Your Signs to them, teaches them the Book and Wisdom, and purifies them! Verily, You are the Strong and the Wise." The historical fulfilment of this wish is attested to a little further on in the same surah: "Thus We have sent among you a messenger from among yourselves who recites Our Signs to you, purifies you, teaches you the Book and Wisdom, and teaches you what you did not know" (v. 151).

We can therefore see how Muhammad, for it is he who is being discussed here, himself constitutes a point of convergence between two complementary ethnic-traditional currents which, in Muhammadan terms, correspond to the two great traditions of Hinduism and Islam. The Seal of Prophecy, who as an Arab descends from Ishmael and as a universal sage descends from Abraham, thus brings together in his personal formula the two respective legacies : that of the sacred language that becomes the organ of the eternal Qur'an, and that of the immutable doctrine, the universal and absolute *Tawhid*²⁰².

However, he does not receive these two legacies through simple earthly and human transmission, but through direct heavenly intervention, which simultaneously updates and reforms the pre-existing traditional supports and data: Muhammad's message is truly divine, and the references to Abraham and Ishmael are strictly typological and technical in nature. In other words, we could even say that the two prophetic figures reflect the correlative functions of the Intellect and the Word, which are the two aspects of a single Logos with which Muhammad himself ultimately identifies.

Thus, the complementarity of the two traditional forms and the subsequent conjunction that we have envisaged from the perspective of the end of a cycle, according to the indication given by René Guénon, are already included in a certain way in the constitutive realities of Islam and traced in its structural lines. This also means that the corresponding outcome on the historical plane must appear from the Islamic point of view as a circumstantial but regular development of possibilities specific to Muhammad. Things should certainly appear differently, but correlatively, from the Hindu point of view. We will return to this subject a little further on ²⁰³. The final conjunction in question cannot, of course, constitute, either from an Islamic or a Hindu point of view, something like an external and syncretic combination; because of the ultimate unity of the traditional domain as a whole, and the profound constitutive analogy that exists between particular traditional forms, and this despite the seemingly irreconcilable differences that they may present in external degrees, everything found in one of these forms necessarily has its counterpart, in some way and to some degree, in the others, and more particularly in the one with which it is cyclically coordinated in a specific relationship.

However, one wonders what role this spatial conjunction between two traditional forms might play in the traditional world as a whole, and what the situation is for other existing forms. The answer to this complex question can be found in another text by Guénon, which first defines the characteristic position occupied by the Hindu tradition in relation to the Law constituting the total cycle of present humanity, that is, in relation to *Sanâtana Dharma*, and then indicates the reason why it is associated with the Islamic tradition. Let us note right away that it is particularly valuable in this kind of notation to be able to find in the data coming from Guénon himself the additions to certain cyclical insights to which he held the key and which he had proposed

in a more limited form and in the most diverse contexts. We will borrow the following passage from an article that appeared in a journal, which many of our readers are not yet familiar with:

"... the concept of *Sanātana Dharma* appears to be particularly linked to the Hindu tradition: this is because, of all the traditional forms currently in existence, it is the one that derives most directly from the primordial Tradition, so much so that it is, in a way, its external continuation, always taking into account, of course, the conditions under which the human cycle unfolds, and of which it itself gives a more complete description than any that can be found elsewhere, and thus it contributes to a greater degree than any other to its perpetuity. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the Hindu and Islamic traditions are the only ones that explicitly affirm the validity of all other orthodox traditions; and if this is so, it is because, being the first and last in date during the *Manvantara*, they must also integrate, albeit in different ways, all these diverse forms that have arisen in the interval, in order to make possible the 'return to the origins' by which the end of the cycle must rejoin its beginning, and which, at the starting point of another *Manvantara*, will once again manifest the true *Sanātana Dharma*" ²⁰⁴ .

It follows from the above passage that the integration of all traditional forms must be the goal of the final union of Hinduism and Islam, with these two traditions playing a central role in relation to the others; and it is their manifest spirit of ecumenism that qualifies them for this role. However, the integration they must achieve will take place, it is also said, in different ways, and, certainly, as a result of the correlation between these two traditions, these ways will be complementary to each other. In this regard, a characteristic difference can be noted: while on the Hindu side there is – and it is above all the sages who manifest this according to historical opportunities – rather a general and permanent state of mind, but without any formal character, which allows for an understanding of the legitimate existence of a plurality of traditional forms, as exemplified by the richness of spiritual modes that the Hindu world carries within itself, on the Islamic side there is, above all, a precise sacred legislation that recognises the legitimacy of other religions or traditional paths while assigning them a particular status in relation to Islam²⁰⁵)

The traditional functions implied by these two cyclical positions with their characteristic perspectives can be understood even better through the symbolism of the corresponding letters *na* and *nûn*: we have seen more

Furthermore, according to one of its applications noted by Guénon, the Arabic *nûn* represents the Ark of the Flood, which contains "all the elements that will serve to restore the world and which are also the seeds of its future state"²⁰⁶ .

Islam, the traditional form that came at the conclusion of the prophetic-legislative cycle and destined to remain the only form practised on earth before the closure of the cosmic cycle of the present humanity, will fulfil such a function because it was constituted with the characteristics of human generality and spiritual universality required for this purpose. The Seal of Prophecy received the synthetic words (*Jawâmi' al-Kalim*) corresponding to the previous legislative prophets, and these then constitute spiritual types that can be realised in the Muhammadan formula²⁰⁽⁷⁾ ; and it is by virtue of this totalising character that it falls to him to gather and integrate elements belonging to the whole of traditional humanity. The Ark of the end of our cycle is the *Sharî'a* (Quran and Sunnah) of Islam²⁰⁸ (29).

The Sanskrit *na*, on the other hand, and according to a meaning correlative to that of *nûn* as an ark, corresponding to the rainbow, a celestial and luminous phenomenon, naturally refers to transcendent knowledge. The role assigned to the Hindu tradition must indeed be informal and purely contemplative; it will coincide, in short, with the reserved teaching referred to by Abdu-l-Karim al-Jîlî, which we have determined to be that of the Vedanta, corresponding on the Islamic side to that of *Tasawwuf* and, more precisely, to that of Supreme Identity or metaphysical and initiatory *Tawhid*²⁰⁹ . In any case, in the final integration in question, Hinduism cannot play any role on the formal level of tradition: on this level, its definition, conditioned by the caste system, is not only inextensible outside the current Hindu world, but also destined to disappear in India itself: its specific social and cultural modalities will unfortunately not be able to survive the dissolution that is continuing in our time. In the current phase of Kali Yuga, as things must progress to the state announced in the sacred books of India, "where castes will be mixed and the family will no longer exist", the very foundation of Hindu tradition, the caste system, will disappear²¹⁽⁰⁾ and when a traditional recovery becomes possible, it can only be in the fraternal formula of sacred legislation such as that of Islam²¹¹ .

Without wishing to make presumptuous speculations as to how this dual integration should actually take place, we will simply point out that traditional data suggest a certain understanding of symbolic mode. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind

note that within the traditional cycle itself, there is always a septenary of main traditional forms²¹² which represent on earth the septenary of planetary influences²¹³. The relationship between these two orders is obviously comparable to that between the Ark and the rainbow. Now, there is precisely, in these last two symbols, a septenary implication that is likely to complete the previous symbolic insights: just as there are seven colours in the rainbow²¹⁴, so the Ark of the Flood carries seven human beings of positive value: Noah, his three sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth) and their wives²¹⁵. We can therefore say that every formal and earthly aspect found in the Ark corresponds to an informal and heavenly aspect in the rainbow. It is therefore logical to deduce that each of the seven traditional worlds will be inscribed, by analogy, in some way, on the one hand with its formal and sensible modalities, and on the other with its informal and intelligible modalities²¹⁶.

Furthermore, two cases attested to by the history of initiatory tradition, and of particular interest to the Western world, can be cited here as examples of the historical process of reintegration of traditional forms: one is the final transfer of the Grail by Perceval, as well as the reconstruction of the Temple in India, where the guardianship of the Holy Grail is entrusted to the mysterious Prester John²¹⁽⁷⁾, the other is the retreat of the Rosicrucians to Asia shortly after the Thirty Years' War²¹⁽⁸⁾. Guénon also says that, according to the most accurate assertion on this subject, the latter themselves withdrew to the kingdom of the same Priest John, and at the same time he specifies that this kingdom is nothing other than "a representation of the supreme spiritual centre, where all traditional forms, which for one reason or another have ceased to manifest themselves externally, are in fact preserved in a latent state until the end of the current cycle" (21) all the traditional forms which, for one reason or another, have ceased to manifest themselves externally"²¹⁹. However, the mention of India in both cases means that it was its tradition that was the basis for this resorption. Furthermore, Albrecht's *New Titurel* (late 13th century) specifies, with regard to the transfer of the Grail itself, that India is "not far from the Earthly Paradise", which is, of course, only the biblical symbol of the supreme centre. Furthermore, the fact that, with regard to the two traditional lineages in question, namely Celticism and Christianity, certain positive interventions by Islamic esotericism²²⁰ could be observed beforehand can only confirm the notion of an axial and ultimately integrating role played by Islam in general and more specifically with regard to the traditional West.

On the other hand, if one hesitates to conceive of the appropriate changes that the Hindu tradition should then make itself, it is also useful to remember these

reflections by René Guénon, written some time ago, but relevant to the very trials that India is undergoing in our time and which its spirit will ultimately have to overcome (emphasis added): "... India appears to be particularly destined to maintain to the end the supremacy of contemplation over action, to oppose through its elite an insurmountable barrier to the invasion of the modern Western spirit, to preserve intact, in the midst of a world agitated by incessant change, the consciousness of the permanent, the immutable and the eternal.

It must be understood, moreover, that *what is immutable is the principle alone, and that its applications in all areas can and must vary according to circumstances and times*, for while the principle is absolute, its applications are relative and contingent, like the world to which they relate. Tradition allows for infinitely multiple and diverse adaptations in their modalities; but *all these adaptations, as long as they are made strictly in accordance with the traditional spirit, are nothing more than the normal development of certain consequences that are eternally contained in the principle*; in all cases, therefore, it is only a matter of making explicit what was previously implicit, and thus the essence, the very substance of the doctrine, always remains the same beneath all the differences in external forms²²¹.

After the aspects we have highlighted above, it is clear that these statements apply par excellence to the rehabilitation required of the Hindu tradition itself, through final traditional integration.

3 Primordial tradition and axial cult²²²

Further on in the same article, after specifying that the India we must have in mind in this order of things cannot be the modernised and Westernised India, but the one that remains faithful to the teachings of its elite and fully preserves the repository of a tradition whose source goes back higher and further than humanity, Guénon adds:

We know that it was not always the region we refer to today by that name; indeed, since the primitive Arctic settlement mentioned in the *Vedas*, it has undoubtedly occupied many different geographical locations over time. perhaps it will occupy others still, but that matters little, for it is always where the seat of this great tradition is, whose preservation among men is its mission and its *raison d'être*. Through the unbroken chain of its Sages, *Gurus* and *Yogis*, it survives through

all the vicissitudes of the outside world, unshakeable like *Meru*; it will last as long as *Sanâtana Dharma* (which could be translated as *Lex perennis*, as accurately as a Western language allows), and it will never cease to contemplate all things, through the frontal eye of *Shiva*, in the serene immutability of the eternal present²²³.

This text also highlights the special relationship between the Hindu tradition and this *Sanâtana Dharma*, whose consciousness is all the more natural to Hindus as they consider it to be the very designation of their tradition.

Now, we observe something quite analogous and, all things considered, equivalent, when it comes to the definitions that the Islamic tradition gives itself. But before proceeding with some comparisons in this regard, we will ask you to keep in mind the final definition that Guenon gave of *Sanâtana Dharma*²²⁴ in the text from which we have already borrowed a passage:

"It is nothing other than the primordial Tradition, which alone subsists continuously and without change throughout the entire *Manvantara* and thus possesses cyclical perpetuity, because its very primordially removes it from the vicissitudes of successive epochs, and which alone can, strictly speaking, be regarded as truly and fully integral. Moreover, as a result of the downward march of the cycle and the spiritual obscuration that results from it, the primordial Tradition has become hidden and inaccessible to ordinary humanity; it is the primary source and common fund of all particular traditional forms, which proceed from it by adaptation to the special conditions of a particular people or epoch, but none of these can be identified with *Sanâtana Dharma* itself or considered an adequate expression of it, although they are always more or less veiled images of it. Every orthodox tradition is a reflection and, one might say, a "substitute" for the primordial Tradition, to the extent that contingent circumstances allow, so that, while it is not *Sanâtana Dharma*, it nevertheless truly represents it for those who adhere to it and participate in it effectively, since they can only attain it through it, and since it expresses, if not its entirety, at least everything that concerns them directly, and this in the form best suited to their individual nature. In a certain sense, all these diverse traditional forms are contained in principle within *Sanâtana Dharma*, since they are all regular and legitimate adaptations of it, and since none of the developments to which they are susceptible over time could ever

be something else at heart, and, in another sense that is opposite and complementary to this, they all contain *Sanâtana Dharma* as their most inner and most "central" element, being, in their various degrees of exteriority, like veils that cover it and allow it to shine through only in an attenuated and more or less partial way.

This being true for all traditional forms, it would be a mistake to want to assimilate *Sanâtana Dharma* purely and simply to one of them, whatever it may be, for example to the Hindu tradition as it currently presents itself to us." ²²⁵

However, later in the text, Guénon spoke of the more specific link between the concept of *Sanâtana Dharma* and the Hindu tradition, and we have already quoted the relevant passage above. In the same context, he said nothing about the Islamic tradition itself. Yet the awareness of a link with the primordial Tradition, although established under very different conditions, is also remarkable in Islam. As this point is essential to the subject that concerns us here, we must pause for a moment and highlight it, emphasising the particular characteristics that play a certain technical role in the integral work of the end of the cycle.

Islam, for its part, explicitly and radically asserts itself as the reactivation of the "original religion". A *hadîth* states this dogmatic article in the form of a simple equation: *Al-Islâm Dîn al-Fitra*, "Islam is the Religion of pure primordial Nature". This "pure primordial nature", *al-Fitra*, is what the Qur'an, in a formula rich in initiatory implications that we will return to later, calls "the nature of Allah according to which He has created men" (*Fitrata-Llâhi-llâti fatara-n-nâs 'alayha*) (Qur'an 30:30).

However, we must point out that the concept of *Fitra*, whose verbal root is very synthetic, has many other meanings, notably that of "separative light", which is also found in the meaning of the divine name of the same root (*Fâtiru-s-Samâwâti wa-l-Ard*), "the Separator of the Heavens and the Earth", and which qualifies the characteristic state of primordial manifestation. As for the "substantial" meaning that we retained above in relation to original humanity, we can quote Ibn Arabî, who once said that *Fitra* is the nature of the macrocosmic being concentrated entirely in Adam, enabling him to receive all theophanies: "This Man," he says, "being the synthesis of the universe (*Majmû' al-'âlam*), his nature unites all the natures of the world. Adam's *Fitra* is the *fitâr* of the entire universe. He knows his Lord according to the knowledge proper to each species of beings in the world, as one who knows by virtue of his

Lord for each species, because he includes it in his *Fitra*. And this *Fitra* is that through which Adam appears when he receives his existence from the theophanic act (*al-ilâhî*) that concerns him. In him, therefore, is the predisposition (*isti'dâd*) corresponding to every being in the world, and he is thus the worshipper according to every religious law, the glorifier in every language and the receptacle of every theophany, when he fulfils all that the reality of his humanity requires and knows himself, for no one knows his Lord (and therefore has epiphany) only he who knows himself" ²²⁶ .

On another occasion, the same author states that "the human spirit (*ar-rûh al-insânî*) created by Allah as perfect, mature, intelligent, knowledgeable, possessing the faith of *Tawhid* and recognising divine Lordship, is the very *Fitra* according to which human beings were created"²²⁽⁷⁾ . The recognition of divine Lordship mentioned here is that which was attested to by the seeds of the sons of Adam²²⁸ , a fact which constituted, in short, a profession of Islam: this is why many commentators interpret *Fitra* in the aforementioned Qur'anic passage as "the Covenant made with Adam and his descendants". This refers to a congenital and primordial fact, but at the same time evokes a legal notion, and it is probably this idea that explains another, even more specific meaning of the term *Fitra* in the same place, among commentators who, se claiming Ibn 'Abbâs in particular, interpret *Fitra* as "religion" (*dîn*) and consider *Fitrat Allâh* to be synonymous with *Dînu-llâh* = the "Religion of Allah", which is immediately specified as being "Islam". We thus have a natural state converted into a legal status.

However, this particular interpretation of the word *Fitra* cannot be taken literally, because in that case an expression such as *Dîn al-Fitra* used in the hadith quoted above would be a pure pleonasm. But it is certain that the equivalence indicated by Ibn 'Abbas, apart from the reasons of convenience he may have had as an interpreter of the Qur'an, is not without a profound basis: the fact that in the primordial state, the "norm" (Islamic *dîn* as well as Hindu *dharma*) is not really an institution imposed on beings from outside, but more accurately an intelligible form inherent in their own nature²²⁹ . One could even say that each of them is, in Hindu terms, *swadharmâ*, 'one's own law', or, in Islamic terms, '*alâ Dîn al-Fitra*, "according to the innate law of fundamental nature"²³⁰ .

However, even if we consider only the "legislative" aspect of this primordial and synthetic state, "Islam" as thus defined does not in fact refer to the law of a particular traditional form, but to the fundamental and imprescriptible Law of

the **e n t i r e** traditional cycle; in fact, as we know, the Arabic term *Islâm* refers, particularly in the Qur'an, to any traditional orthodox form centred on a fundamental orientation: the worship of Unity. This is the same meaning we find in the absolute formula: *Inna-d-Dîna 'inda-Llâhi-l-Islâm*, "Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam" (Quran 3:19). However, the tradition in its Muhammadian form will bear the name par excellence, because it asserts itself as the perfect re-actualisation, in final cyclical conditions, of the original Truth, as well as the synthetic recapitulation of all the traditional forms previously instituted. This tradition asserts itself not only as adequate to all human possibilities, but even as inherent in the natural condition of every being coming into the world, now as in the past:

"Every newborn is born according to the *Fitra*, and it is his two parents who subsequently make him 'Jewish' or 'Christian' or 'Majûsî' (fire worshipper)" (hadith)²³¹ .

Through this typological schematisation, the prophetic word means that human beings, who are primarily determined solely by the specific principles designated as Adam and Eve, and who receive from them the condition of human *Fitra* proper, are modified after birth according to the mental and traditional form of their immediate parents (and those who represent them in terms of education). The labels "Jew", "Christian" and "Mazdean" (*majûsî*) refer to the subsequent typifications of this process²³² , which are alterations and distortions of the *Fitra* considered as a primordial form, both existential and traditional. From this perspective, currently, only entry into Islam, understood in its absolute sense and with its complete virtues, can restore the lost primordial condition. But this can only be achieved naturally by rejecting all the limiting conditions represented by imperfect traditional conceptions. This is one of the meanings of the hadith saying: *Al-Islâm yajubbu mâ qabla-hu*, "the act of entering Islam removes what was before"²³³ . This is also why, when someone enters Islam, they are considered to be virtually reintegrating the primordial Tradition itself; this is, moreover, only a consequence of the definition already cited: *Al-Islâm Dîn al-Fitra*.

However certain the fundamental identity of the concepts of *Dîn al-Fitra* and *Sanātana Dharma*, the Hindu expression primarily conveys an idea that is not explicitly found in the Islamic expression, nor in the technically Guénonian expression of "Primordial Tradition" (which, in fact, appears to be more of a transcription of the latter)²³⁴ but which is found in the translation given primarily by Guénon using the terms *Lex perennis*:

the idea of stability and perpetuity. Now, in the Qur'an itself, there is another expression that relates to this characteristic of the fundamental traditional order: it is *Ad-Dîn al-Qayyim*, which can be translated, depending on the context, as "Immutable Religion" or "Axial Cult", and which is naturally understood as one of the epithets of Islam in its absolute sense. The passages in the Qur'an where this expression appears leave no doubt as to its equivalence with that of *Sanâtana Dharma* and, moreover, provide some insight into the realities and spiritual activities specifically related to this concept.

First, here is a verse in which *Dîn Qayyim* appears in a situation that is not only primordial, but also cosmic and pre-human in nature; the human order (although man is, from another point of view, the 'goal' of all creation) is inscribed in certain conditions that amount to the observance of a divine right in the universal, macrocosmic and microcosmic, collective and individual order.

"Verily, the number of months with Allah is twelve (found) in the Book of Allah, since the Day He created the heavens and the earth: four of them are sacred (*hurum*): this is the immutable Religion (*ad-Dîn al-Qayyim*). Do not wrong yourselves during these months; however, fight the polytheists totally as they fight you totally, and know that Allah is with the pious and fearful."

"The intercalary month (*an-nasi'*) is only an increase in disbelief; thereby are led astray those who disbelieve: they declare it unholy one year and holy another year, in order to correspond to the number of holy months instituted by Allah, so that they declare unholy what Allah has declared holy. The evil of their deeds has been made fair-seeming to them. But Allah does not guide the disbelieving people" (Quran 9:36-37).

We will not go into lengthy explanations here about the calendar issues raised in these verses, which are regularly discussed, for example, in Koranic commentaries. Suffice it to say that, despite the principle of lunar time calculation, among pre-Islamic Arabs (as among Jews, for that matter), a relative fixation of the year had long been established through the periodic introduction of an extra month intended to bring the beginning of the lunar year back to the same time of the solar year (in autumn); the pilgrimage of the Abrahamic tradition thus took place in months that were out of sync with their actual time but which nevertheless received the names required for the performance of the annual rites and sacrifices.

The restoration of things to their normal order took place only during the last pilgrimage made by the Messenger of Allah, the "Farewell Pilgrimage", which, as we understand from the hadiths, had to take place at a time when,

providentially, the pilgrimage had returned to its normal position in the secular cycle of months. Indeed, these are the words spoken by the Messenger of Allah at that time: "Verily, Time (*Az-Zamân*) has cyclically returned to a configuration similar to that which it had on the Day when Allah created the Heavens and the Earth. The year has twelve months, four of which are sacred: three of these follow one another, namely, *Dhû-l-qa'da*, *Dhû-l-Hijja* and *al-Muharram*, and one is isolated, *Rajab*, which lies between *Jumâdâ* (ath-thâni) and *Sha'bân*, etc." The rest of the hadîth shows the Prophet solemnly identifying the sacred month (*Dhu al-Hijjah*) in which the pilgrimage took place, the sacred territory on which the rites were performed, and the day itself as the Day of Sacrifice on which victims were to be offered, concluding with a proclamation of sacredness to be observed:

"Your blood, your wealth, and your honour are sacred to you, as sacred as this day is to you, in this territory that belongs to you and in this month that belongs to you! You will meet your Lord and He will ask you to account for your deeds. Do not become infidels after me, cutting off each other's heads, etc."

To better understand the significance of these last words, it is important to know that among pre-Islamic Arabs, during the four sacred months, all things attributable to man, whether good or bad, were considered much more important than at other times, and the rewards and punishments were the same. Wars were forbidden, and if "someone encountered the murderer of his father or brother, he pretended not to notice him". In Islam, the importance of these months was further increased, but there are differences of opinion regarding war: what seems more obvious is that special warfare against polytheists (*al-mushrikun*) is a divine right that can be waged at any time, and, moreover, that combat is inevitable when it comes to defence.

As for the expression *Ad-Dîn al-Qayyim*, which describes this status of the year and the four sacred months, here is one of the opinions cited by Al-Khâzin's commentary:

: "This is the unalterable and irreplaceable Decree (*al-Hukm*)."
The word *qayyim* here has the meaning of *dâ'im*, "permanent," *lâ yazûlu*, "that which will not cease." Now, as this decree dates from the Day of the Creation of the Heavens and the Earth, we have here a cosmic law, pre-human, but which man must observe himself in the ways that are particular to him, and which must last as long as the world. This is indeed the meaning of *Sanâtana Dharma* as a universal Order that we find here, at least in one of its applications²³⁵.

As for the content of *Dîn Qayyim*, it should be noted that, in the fundamental aspect under consideration here, it appears only in a negative light: it is a matter of refraining – especially during the four sacred months – from anything that could be considered "injustice" to souls, literally "do not darken

your souls" (*fa-lâ tazlimû fi-hinna anfusa-kum*), and it is only prescribed to act in a negative way: war to defend oneself and to defend the right of the Oneness of Allah against polytheists. This solely negative status of *Dîn Qayyim* here is normal in the early formulations of the cyclical order. The natural perfection inherent in the primordial era needs only to be defended in principle, and it is only when it is later "lost" that the need to reconquer it will bring about the prescriptions for positive actions. In the earthly Paradise, it is also through a negative and restrictive prescription that the legislative cycle begins: "Do not approach this Tree, lest you be among the unjust" (Cor. 7:19), and it is interesting to note that in this case too, failure to observe the rule was to be a cause of "injustice" or "darkness" (the Arabic term for "unjust").

" is *zâlimûn*, etymologically "darkening"). This idea of "darkening" naturally contrasts with that of "light" specific to *Fitra*, pure primordial Nature.

Another mention of *Dîn Qayyim* comes in Joseph's words to his two prison companions.

After declaring that he follows the Rule (*Milla*) of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which excludes all associationism with Allah, he says:

"O my two fellow prisoners, are divisive lords preferable, or Allah the One, the Reducer?"

"You worship nothing but names which you yourselves have invented, names to which Allah has sent down no authority, for authority belongs only to Allah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him: this is the Unchanging Religion (*ad-Dîn al-Qayyim*). But most men do not know. " (Cor. 12, 37-40). [*mâ ta'budûna min dûnihi illâ asmâ'an sammaytumûhâ antum wa abâ'ukum mâ anzala-Llâhu bi-hâ min sultânin ini-l-hukmu illâ li-Llâh amara allâ ta'budû illâ iyyâhu dhâlika-d-dînu al-qayyimu wa lâkinna akthara-n-nâsi lâ ya'lamûne*]

Here, then, the *Dîn Qayyim* is precisely defined in terms of its content: worship none but Him, Allah, an essential rule that we see occasionally inscribed in the privileged tradition of Abraham.

In two verses of the same surah, the^{30th}, *Dîn Qayyim* takes its place in the divine injunction made to the Messenger Muhammad himself:

"Set your face (*aqim*) towards the Cult (*ad-Dîn*) in a pure manner (*hanîfan*) in accordance with the Nature (*Fitra*) of Allah, according to which He has created men, (for) there is no change in the creation of Allah: this is the Unchanging Religion (*ad-Dîn al-Qayyim*), but most men do not know." (Cor. 30:30).

- Turn your face towards the Axial Cult (*ad-Dîn al-Qayyim*) before the Day arrives that nothing from Allah will prevent. On that day, they (the good and the wicked) will be separated. (Cor. 30:43).

Here, *Dîn Qayyim* is defined in terms of its method, which can be described as "direct": it is an essentialising attitude, because the "face" (*wajh*) of a thing is its imperishable "essence" (*dhât*), in accordance with the verse:

"All things are perishable except his face" (Cor. 28:88)²³⁶. In this case, the "face" being that of a contemplator, it is his deepest essence that must be oriented in an immediate, total and unwavering manner towards pure Truth: this is what the term *aqim* = "straighten" means, which is also from the same root as the word *qayyim*, a qualifier of *Dîn*, and this is what the concept of *Fitra* guarantees, which we thus find in its full context where it also appears as "Allah's unchanging creation". This constitutes the true foundation of the axial position and immutable consciousness that characterise *Dîn Qayyim* as a divine institution and spiritual cult.

However, it must be admitted that the concept of *Fitra* is complex and even ambiguous, as is evident from the syntax of the verse in which it appears. Since the concept of *Dîn Qayyim* is based on this notion, it is useful to quote a text by Ibn Arabî which highlights what might be called its "divine" aspect:

"Allah is the One who manifests things; He is their Light; the manifestation (*zuhûr*) of manifested things (*mazâhir*) is Allah. He, as *Fâtiru-s-Samâwâti wa-l-Ard* (the Separator of the Heavens and the Earth), created (*fatara*) them by Himself: He is their *Fitra* (germinal pact): 'Am I not your Lord? They replied: Yes!' (Quran 7:172). He created them only through Himself. It is also through Him that things are distinguished from one another, separated and determined. And things in their divine appearance (*fî zuhûri-hâ-l-ilâhî*) are nothing! Existence is His Existence, servants are His servants: they are servants in terms of their determined entities (*a'yân*) but they are God (*al-Haqq*) in terms of their existence (*wujûd*)."²³⁷

For his part, Abdu-r-Razzâq Al-Qâshânî, commenting on the verse that caught our attention in his *Tafsîr*, says:
verse that caught our attention, says:

"*Fitrat Allâh* means: Attach yourselves to the divine disposition (*al-Hâlat al-ilâhiyya*) according to which human reality was created as clarity and purity from all eternity! This 'disposition' is the *Dîn Qayyim*, from all eternity and for all eternity; unalterable and immutable, it never detaches itself from the original clarity and purity of Primordial Natural *Tawhîd*. This Primordial Nature (*al-Fitra al-Ûla*) comes only from the Most Holy Emanation (*al-Fayd al-Aqdas*)

which is the Source of the Essence itself ('*Ayn adh-Dhât*). Those who remain grounded in this foundation cannot be diverted from the essential Identity (*at-Tawhid*) nor veiled from the Truth."²³⁸ .

Finally, in the context of the same verse, we also see the emergence of the concept of *Hanifiyya*, which is generally linked to *Fitra*, a point which we cannot dwell on at this time either²³⁹.

At the same time, by finding *Fitra* and *Dîn Qayyim* together here, we verify the perfect coincidence of the notions of "Primordial Tradition" and *Lex perennis* through which Guenon had interpreted *Sanâtana Dharma*. However, we realise that the concept of *Dîn al-Fitra* is included in that of *Ad-Dînu-l-Qayyim* because the latter, as we have just seen, encompasses the idea of primordiality in the Qur'an. It is this latter Islamic concept that corresponds more closely to that of Hindu *Sanâtana Dharma*.

It is also significant to note that there is a certain complementarity between these two expressions, which correspond to each other in both traditional forms, which only corroborates the other observations we have made so far under the same heading. While both refer to the primordial Tradition in its perpetuity, each of these expressions emphasises a modality that is more specific to the respective tradition: Hinduism, which is the uninterrupted external continuation of the primordial Tradition through simple modifications of form, according to the times and geographical situations, expresses the idea of permanence; Islam, which is a new revelation after a period of "cessation of the messengers" (cf. Cor. 5:19), emphasises the idea of axiality. A complementarity of horizontality and verticality naturally comes to mind, but it is only really significant in the following way:

On the Hindu side, there is an awareness of a kind of substantial continuity of Truth itself, linked to the human substance that has conveyed it since time immemorial; on the other side, there is the concept of a supreme elective incidence at the end of time, which is illustrated quite well by the words of the Prophet speaking of himself: "I was the first in the order of Creation ²⁴⁰ and I am the last in the order of mission."

IX

THE INVESTITURE OF SHEIKH AL-AKBAR AT THE SUPREME CENTRE²⁴¹

In our ongoing study of The Last High Degrees of Scottish Rite Freemasonry and the Descending Realisation²⁴², in examining the symbolism of the 33rd degree, we were led to seek an explanation for the ceremonial form of initiation into the degrees beyond the 30th, as this external form appears to be at odds with the "inner" character that we have attested elsewhere for "initiation" into the descending phase of realisation. This initiatory phase, as we have shown, presupposes the prior effective attainment of Supreme Identity and, in the case of the walî, requires a specific act of theophany (*tajallî ilâhî*), which places the event of this initiation on a truly divine level.

In this regard, an external ritual such as that presented in Masonic initiation, which nevertheless speaks of "contemplating Truth face to face", can only be explained by reference to the symbolism of the Spiritual Centre, where the initiated initiate finds himself before the constant theophany that constitutes the Pole of Tradition. We have invoked Islamic data concerning esoteric hierarchies in this regard, and have specified that what is at stake in such cases lies in a realm of realities that can only be accessed through the intuition of the knowing Heart. This point is very important for our thesis, and, on the other hand, we fear that readers may have some difficulty in precisely locating the concepts we have used, especially those relating to the "spiritual centres" and the corresponding subtle "assemblies".

That is why, alongside the aforementioned study and in support of it, we will provide additional "documentary" evidence here, which, for reasons of

literary proportions, we cannot introduce it into the body of our presentation. This evidence is again drawn from Islamic esotericism, specifically from the work of Sheikh al-Akbar, which allows us to remain within a unified set of references and concepts.

This is the Preface to the "Meccan Revelations" (*Futûhât*), in which Sheikh al-Akbar explains, in the relatively incantatory style characteristic of the introductory texts of Islamic writings, his access to the Supreme Centre of the Primordial and Universal Tradition, which he refers to several times here as *Al-Malâ'u-l-A'lâ*, the "Supreme Pleroma" or the "Sublime Assembly". This assembly, located in a subtle region whose designations are reminiscent of what the traditions of Central Asia say about Agartha, the hidden Kingdom of the King of the World, is presided over by the primordial Muhammadian Being, whose nature and attributes, given the particularities of Islamic formulation, correspond quite clearly to those indicated by René Guénon for the personification of the Primordial Manu, and which Christian doctrine, to mention only this one, presents in the figure of the mysterious Melki-Tsedeq "who is without father, without mother, without genealogy, who has neither beginning nor end of life, but who is thus made like the Son of God", and who "remains a priest forever" (Epistle to the Hebrews, VII, 1-3)²⁴³.

What is of particular interest to us here is that this "visit" by Sheikh al-Akbar is expressly related to the investiture of this master as "Heir to the Maqâm Muhammadien". More precisely, it concerns the function of this master in his relationship with the Centre of Universal Tradition, not only with the particular centre of historical Islam. This event in the personal life of Sheikh al-Akbar took place, according to indications he himself gives in various other places, at the time of his journey to Mecca, where he stayed from the end of 598-1198 until 600/1201, or immediately after the latter date. At that time, Sheikh al-Akbar had not only attained the degree of Supreme Identity, but had also been invested, since Fez 594/1195, with the exceptional function of Seal of Muhammadian Holiness, and this allows us to see the subsequent nature of this "visit" and the "ceremony" of investiture that took place at that time, in relation to what we have considered as the "initiation" into descending realisation.

This investiture thus appears as a recognition, at a higher level of the esoteric hierarchy of the World, of the reality and function of the Muhammadian Seal, which must also constitute an "exaltation" of this function and of the very reality of the Sheikh al-Akbar. However, the description of the circumstances and transcendent events involved

allows us to observe symbolic elements to which we could attach a part of Masonic symbolism itself in the high degrees beyond the 30th.

The space available in this review does not allow us to reproduce this document in its entirety²⁴⁴. We will therefore only quote a few passages that are more directly relevant to our subject. We will therefore leave aside the beginning of the *Khutba* (the Foreword), which develops the customary divine praise, and take our quotations from the section on the Prayer on the Prophet. The Prophet of Islam is naturally the basis for everything that will be said about the Primordial Prophetic Principle, whose successive prophetic manifestations are only figures and substitutes.

EXCERPTS FROM THE FOREWORD TO THE FUTÛHÂTS;

May prayer – the work of grace – be upon the one who is the Secret of the World and its fundamental Point²⁴⁵, the goal of the Scholar and his need, the truthful Leader, the Night Traveller who was carried to his Lord²⁴⁽⁶⁾, and who was made to cross the Seven Heavenly Paths, so that He who made him travel might "show him what He has set forth as Signs and Truths in His most marvellous creatures (cf. Cor. 17:1-2), *this being whom I saw*, when I composed this Preface, in the World of subtle truths, and in the dignity of Majesty, *through an intuition of the heart, in a mysterious region*²⁴⁷. Now, when I saw him in such a world as Sovereign, inaccessible to approaches and protected from view²⁴⁸, he sat assisted and confirmed (by divine power)²⁴⁹, while all the divine Envoys stood in rows before him, and his community, the "best community"²⁵⁰ surrounded him, the Ruling Angels gravitated around the throne of His Station, and the Angels begotten of deeds (servants)²⁵¹ were arranged before him.

The Confirmer (*Aş-Şiddîq*) sat at his august right hand²⁵², and the Discerner (*al-Fârûq*) at his most holy left hand²⁵³, while the Seal (*al-Khatm*) crouched before him²⁵⁽⁴⁾, entertaining him with the story of the Woman²⁵⁵, while Alî – may Allah pray upon him and greet him! – interpreted the words of the Seal in his language²⁵⁽⁶⁾, and the Possessor of the Two Lights (*Dhû-n-Nûrayn*), clad in the cloak of his publicity, stood before him in his manner²⁵⁷.

Then the Supreme Sovereign, the sweetest and most delicious drink, the most manifest and resplendent Light, turned and, seeing me behind the Seal where I stood because of a community of status that exists between me

and this Seal ²⁵⁸ , said to him: "This one is your equal, your son and your friend! Set up the Chair of Newcomers for him, in front of me!" Then he signalled to me: "Arise, O Muhammad²⁵⁹ , and ascend the pulpit, and praise Him who sent me and me, for in you there is a part of me²⁶⁰ that can no longer bear to be far from me, and that part is the strength of your personal reality. Therefore, return to me only in your entirety, for this part must absolutely return for the Encounter. It is not part of the world of the unhappy, for after I was sent, nothing that belonged to me could be anything other than happy, praised and thanked in the Supreme Pleroma (*al-Malâ'u-l-A'lâ!*)"²⁶⁽¹⁾

Sheikh al-Akbar – may Allah be pleased with him – describes his investiture (again in the khutba of the Futûhâts) in the Supreme Centre...

Then the Seal installed the Chair in this solemn setting. On the pediment of the Chair was inscribed in blue light: "This is the Purest Muhammadan Station! He who ascends it is its Heir, and God sends him to ensure compliance with the Law!"²⁶²

At that moment, I received the gift of Wisdom, and it was as if I had received the Sum of Words²⁶³ . I thanked Allah – may He be glorified and magnified! – and I climbed to the top of the Pulpit, and thus arrived at the place where the Messenger of Allah – may Allah pray upon him and greet him! – had stopped and established himself. He spread the sleeve of a white tunic on the step where I was standing, and I sat on it so as not to touch the place where his feet had touched. This was out of respect for his holiness and nobility, and also so that I might be warned and instructed that the Station which he had contemplated on behalf of his Lord, the Heirs could only contemplate from behind his garment...

When I occupied this Glorious Degree before him who, on the Night of his heavenly Ascension, was from his Lord "at a distance of Two Arcs or Closer" (Cor. 53.9)²⁶⁴ , I stood up, raising my head in confusion, but then, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, I began my speech with these improvised verses

:

O He who sends down Signs and Annunciations
Send down upon me the Sciences of the divine
Names, So that I may praise Your Being,
By the praises that are due to you in good fortune and in misfortune! Then,
pointing to him – may Allah pray upon him and greet him! – I continued: This
sovereign is the Sign that You have chosen from among the Circle of Cosmic
Vicars,
And whom You placed as a noble root 'when Adam was between water and clay'

Whom You transferred (as a seed in the series of successive generations) until the moment when "Time, through a complete circular revolution, returned to its initial aspect"²⁶⁶ .

You then made him a humble and submissive servant, invoking You, for a long time, in the Cave of Hirâ',

Until a herald came from You, Gabriel, the one specially appointed to Prophecy,

And said to him, "Peace be upon you! You are Muhammad, the Secret of the Worshipers and the Seal of the Prophets!"

O Sovereign, am I speaking the truth? He replied, "You are truthful. You are the shadow of My Mantle!

Give praise, and put all your zeal into praising your Lord, For you have received the gift of the truths of Things.

Now speak to us in prose of the work of your Lord, and tell us what is revealed to your heart, preserved from darkness.

In fact, all immediate truth of an ultimate truth comes to you as a slave without having been purchased" ²⁶⁷ .

So I proceeded with my speech in the language of the Scholars, and designated him again – may Allah pray upon him and greet him! – I said:

I praise Him who sent down upon you the "Hidden Book that only the Purified touch" (Cor.56.78-79) and who, sending down revelation through the beauty of your character and the holiness of your unfading nature, said in the surah *Nûn*: "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful: *Nûn*: By the pen and what they write! You are not, by the grace of your Lord, possessed! You will have a reward that will not be tainted by reproach. Truly, you are of a Magnificent Nature! You will see, and they will see too!" (Cor.68.1-5).

Then He dipped the Pen of Will into the Ink of Science, and with the Hand of Power traced upon the Guarded and Preserved Tablet all that has been, all that is, all that will be, and all that will not be among the things that, had He willed – and He did not will – them to be, would have been as they must be, because of His predestined and weighed Decree, and according to His Generous and treasured Knowledge²⁶⁸ . Glory be to Your Lord, the Lord of Almighty Power above the qualities ascribed to Him! Such is Allah, the One, the Only, who transcends what the polytheists associate with Him!

The first name that this Sublime Pen wrote before any other name was: "Verily, I want to create, because of you, O Muhammad, the World that will be your Kingdom" ²⁶⁹ . I therefore created the substance of Water. I created it outside the Veil of inviolable Glory, while I remained "As I was, nothing being with Me" ²⁷⁰ , in a Cloud ²⁷¹ .

He created Water, cold, frozen, round, round and white like a Pearl. He put bodily and accidental realities into it. Then He created the Throne and settled there according to His Name *Ar-Rahmân* (the All-Merciful). He placed the Footstool there and rested His Feet on it²⁷² .

Then He looked at this Pearl with the Eye of Power, and the Pearl melted with modesty. It spread and flowed like Water. "And His Throne was upon this Water" (cf. Cor. 11:9) before the existence of Heaven and Earth. At that time, only the Truths of the Throne, the Occupant of the Throne, and the Seat upon the Throne existed.

Then He projected the Breath (*an-Nafas*)²⁷³ and the Water was stirred by its gusts and foamed. And as its waves struck and struck again the edges of the Throne, it sang the praise – the praise – of the truly Praised One! The Foot of the Throne vibrated and said to the Water: I am Ahmad! I am the one who is "most praised"! ²⁷⁴

Then the Water rolled in confusion, and as the ebb tide carried it back out to sea, it left behind on the edge of the Throne the foam that the waves had thrown there. This product of the churning of the Water contains most things. Allah – may He be glorified! – made this foam into the Earth in a circular shape, spreading out widely in all directions. Then He made Smoke from the Fire that sprang from the friction of the Earth when it split apart. From this Smoke, He brought forth the high Heavens, and made them the receptacles of the Lights and the dwellings of the Supreme Pleroma. He placed His Stars there, enhanced by the Luminaries in symmetrical correspondence with the corollas of the plants with which He decorated the Earth.

Then Allah devoted himself to Adam and his two parents (the bodily elements): water and earth). He applied Himself to it with His Essence, whose immensity leaves no room for resemblance, and with His Two Hands (one of which confers resemblance and the other takes it away)²⁷⁵ . He established a "nature" which He fashioned through two operations: one concerning its final consumption, the other its disposition to perpetuity²⁷⁽⁶⁾. He gave this entity its seat at the central point of the Sphere of Existence and hid it there. He warned His servants in this regard with His words proclaiming the existence of an invisible support for the Heavens (Cor.13.2: "Allah raised the Heavens without supports that you can see..." (Cor.31.9)

...²⁷⁷

Then Allah extracted from the first father (Adam) the lights of *the Aqtâb* (the Poles) like suns sailing in the Spheres of spiritual Stations (*al-maqqâmât*)²⁷⁽⁸⁾, and He also extracted from him the lights of *the Nujabâ'* (the Nobles) like stars that circulate in the Spheres of prodigious powers (*al-karamât*)²⁷⁽⁹⁾. He established the four *Awtâd* (Pillars) in the four Corners (or Cardinal Points of the Earth), to guard the two species endowed with gravity (the Jinn and Humans)²⁸⁰. These calmed the agitation of the Earth and its movement. It settled and became beautiful with the adornment of its flowers and the mantles of its meadows, and it showed its "blessing". The eyes of creatures were delighted by its resplendent appearance, their noses were perfumed by its fragrant exhalations, and their palates were flattered by its delicious foods.

Then, by mandate of Sage and Scholar, he sent the seven *Abdâl* (the Replacements) as Kings to the seven Climates: each *Badal* to one Climate²⁸⁽¹⁾. He also appointed for the *Qutb* (the Pole) the Two Imams (one on his right, the other on his left) and made them leaders of the two reins (of the World)²⁸².

When He had thus made the World according to the most perfect perfection, so that "there remained no possibility of there being another more marvellous," as Imam Abû Hâmid (al-Ghazâlî) said, He revealed your body to the gaze of all, may Allah pray upon you²⁸³!

The truest statement²⁸⁴ heard in the Annunciation (*an-Naba'*)²⁸⁽⁵⁾, and brought by the Hoopoe of Understanding from the Kingdom of Sheba²⁸⁶, is that of the existence of a Containing Sphere (*al-Falak al-Muhît*), present both in the world of simple elements and in the composite world, and called Matter (*al-Habâ'*)²⁸⁷, with which Air and Water bear the greatest resemblance, although these two elements are part of the forms that were hatched in Matter²⁸⁸.

This sphere being the root of cosmic Existence, and as the divine Name *an-Nûr* (the Light) revealed itself there, through an act of divine generosity, Manifestation took place. You then received your Form from this sphere – may Allah pray upon you.

! – from the first effusion of light, and you appeared as the Exemplary Form (*Şûra mithliyya*) whose outward appearance can be contemplated, its beverages, ineffable, its Paradise, Edenic, its knowledge, "calamic", its sciences, "dextrochères", its secrets, "inkwells", its spirits, "tabular", and its earth, Adamic²⁸⁹. You are our father in spirit, just as he – and I was pointing to Adam among those present – is our father in body...

Look – and may Allah have mercy on you! – look at the White Emerald that the Merciful One has placed in the "first father"! And I

pointed to Adam.

Look at the Obvious Light! And I pointed to the "second father", the one who called us Muslims (Abraham) (See Cor. 22:77).

Behold the Pure Silver! And I pointed to "the one who heals the blind and the lepers by Allah's command," as the revealed text says (Jesus).

Behold the beauty of the Red Hyacinth of the Soul! And I was referring to "the one who was bought cheaply" (Joseph) (cf. Cor. 12:20).

Behold the Red Gold! And I was referring to the Precious Vicar (Aaron).

Behold the light of the Yellow Hyacinth shining in the darkness! And I was referring to the one who was favoured by divine conversation (Moses)²⁹⁰.

He who travels towards these Lights until he finds the means that opens the way to their mysteries, knows the Degree for which he was brought into existence²⁹¹ and becomes worthy of *the* Divine *Maqâm*²⁹² so that one prostrates oneself before him²⁹³. He is then the Lord and His Servant, the Lover and the Beloved.

Look at the principle of existence and understand it well!

The "thing" is like the "Thing" except that Allah shows the Eternal Thing to the eyes of the world as adventitious.

If the spectator swears that the Being of the "Thing" has been such for all eternity, he is truthful and does not bear false witness.

If the spectator swears that the Being of the "Thing" comes from the disappearance of the "thing", it is even better, while being a "triple criminal denouncer"²⁹⁴.

Then I revealed mysteries, I reported sacred data that the time does not allow me to mention here, and whose existence is unknown to most creatures. I leave all this at the beginning of the path, for fear of placing wisdom where it should not be placed.

Finally, I was sent back from this sublime vision of a dream to the lower world, and I placed the holy praise I had just made as the Preface to this Book.

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