

# The Key Concepts of al-Farghānī's Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi Poem, *al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

My first approach to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great poem *al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā* has been carried out on the basis of a semantic analysis of its language.<sup>1</sup> One of the results of such an analysis was to point out the difference that exists between Ibn al-Fāriḍ's experiential and poetic language and Ibn al-'Arabī's more theoretical and philosophical one. Later on, I carried out a detailed analysis of the first great commentary of the poem, worked out by Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d.699/1300), comparing it to my first work in order to find out to what extent al-Farghānī has been faithful to the linguistic character of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry.<sup>2</sup> Recently, I have also carried out the critical edition of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*, to establish a more reliable text for future researches.<sup>3</sup>

In the present research, I intend to review some of the most relevant results of my work on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems in the light

1. Giuseppe Scattolin, *L'esperienza mistica di Ibn al-Fāriḍ attraverso il suo poema al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā – Un'analisi semantica del poema* (Rome: PISAI, 1987, 3 vols.; unpublished); summarized in "L'expérience mystique de Ibn al-Fāriḍ à travers son Poème al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā", in *MIDEO* 19 (1989), pp. 203–23; and in "The mystical experience of 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ or the Realization of Self (*Anā, I*)" in *The Muslim World* 82/3–4 (July–October, 1992), pp. 275–86.

2. Idem, "Al-Farghānī's Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Mystical Poem *al-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*" in *MIDEO* 21 (1993), pp. 331–83, from which most of the ideas of the present contribution have been taken.

3. *The Dīwān of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, a critical edition by Giuseppe Scattolin (Cairo: IFAO, 2004), p. 264 (English introduction 28 pp. + Arabic text 236 pp.).

of the discussion of his relationship with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Sufi vision and language. As a basis for this research, I take al-Farghānī’s commentary because it stands at the beginning of a large chain of commentaries on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poems carried out by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school. Through them Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Sufi vision and concepts have been largely introduced as tools to explain Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Sufi poetry. In this way, Akbarian concepts and terms have shaped the common understanding of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Sufism up to our time, in Sufi and non-Sufi milieux.<sup>4</sup>

Among these commentaries, a special importance has always been given to that of al-Farghānī. This is an important testimony of the way Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poems have been adopted and explained since the earliest times by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s disciples. In fact, al-Farghānī says that he took his explanation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *Great Tā’iyya (al-Tā’iyyat al-Kubrā)* directly from his master Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d.673/1274), Ibn al-‘Arabī’s foremost disciple and successor. Around the same time, ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d.690/1291), a companion of al-Farghānī in al-Qūnawī’s school, also wrote a commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poem, but his commentary has not yet been edited and studied. After these two, one finds a large number of commentaries on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Sufi poetry produced by the Akbarian school. Among them, one has to particularly mention those of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d.730/1330), Sharaf al-Dīn Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d.751/1350) and ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d.1143/1730). All these authors have been outstanding masters of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school, and in their commentaries they usually resort to Akbarian concepts and terms in order to explain Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Sufi poetry.

Among them all, al-Farghānī’s commentary has always enjoyed special appreciation as a classical reference to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Sufism, in Arabic and non-Arabic Sufi circles, in ancient and modern times. Sayyid Jalāl Ashtiyānī, a contemporary Persian scholar, says that: “... [al-Farghānī’s commentary] has no equal

4. For a general overview of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school of Sufism see William C. Chittick, “Ibn al-‘Arabī and his School”, *Islamic Spirituality*, vol. II (*Manifestations*), World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, n. 20 (New York: Crossroad, 1991), pp. 49–79.

in the exposition of the Sufi sciences and that many Sufis, in ancient and recent times, have benefited especially from its Introduction (*muqaddima*)".<sup>5</sup> In the same vein, William C. Chittick, a contemporary American scholar, praises al-Farghānī as one who: "... wrote some of the clearest and most detailed early expositions of his and Ibn al-'Arabī's ideas".<sup>6</sup>

In spite of such consensus, one cannot avoid questioning the validity of al-Farghānī's way of interpreting Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry. Does al-Farghānī really convey the original meaning of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry, or does he force his own thoughts, basically taken from Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufism, into Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses? Moreover, is such an assimilation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry into Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufism, though supported by many other commentators, historically correct and justified? We know that Ibn al-Fāriḍ has, over time, often been included in the condemnation of Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi school carried out by some Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyya (d.728/1328) and his school. One might ask, however, whether such a condemnation could be based on a misinterpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi vision and language, because of his Akbarian commentators. Such questioning has become an ever more central issue in the discussion of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry and its meaning, and no convincing answer has been given either by Ibn al-'Arabī's supporters or opponents. Trying to find answers to such questioning and keys for a more faithful and consistent interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry has been the purpose of my previous studies on this great Egyptian poet.

In this present paper, I intend to summarize some basic traits and ideas of al-Farghānī's methodology in his commentary of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem, comparing them with the results of my semantic analysis. I will discuss whether al-Farghānī's and, more generally, Ibn al-'Arabī's school, has interpreted Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry in line with the true character of his Sufi poetry, or whether, on the

5. *Mashāriq al-darāi Sharḥ Tā'iyya Ibn al-Fāriḍ; ta'lif Sa'id al-Dīn Ṣa'id Farghānī*, translated and commented on by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī (Mashhad, Iran: Anjuman-i Falsafah-i wa-'Irfān-i Islam, 1398/1978): Introduction, pp. 127–30.

6. William C. Chittick, "The Five Presences: from al-Qūnawī to al-Qayṣarī", *The Muslim World* 72/2 (1982), p. 108.

other hand, their way of interpretation does betray the letter and the intent of the Egyptian Sufi poet, forcing into his language foreign concepts and terms, taken from a different Sufi vision, the Akbarian philosophical sufism.

## 2. AL-FARGHĀNĪ'S LIFE AND WORK

Al-Farghānī's complete name is Sa'īd al-Dīn Abū 'Uthmān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Kāsānī al-Farghānī, but he is usually referred to simply as Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī. He was born around 629/1231 in the town of Kāsān, in the valley of Farghāna (in Central Asia, in a region known at that time as Khurāsān) from which he derived his *nisbas* "al-Kāsānī al-Farghānī". He died in Damascus in the month of Dhū'l-Ḥijja 699/August 1300.<sup>7</sup>

Al-Farghānī's life can be divided into two periods.

To begin with, while still a young student in his homeland, al-Farghānī entered one of the earliest and most famous Sufi orders in the Islamic world, the *Suhrawardiyya*. This order was founded by two prominent Sufi masters of the same family: Abū Najīb 'Abd al-Qādir al-Suhrawardī (d.563/1168), a disciple of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d.520/1126), the younger brother of the great Ash'arite theologian and Sufi, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d.505/1111). Abū Najīb is the author of one of the first manuals on the Sufi life, "*The Manners of the Adepts*" (*Ādāb al-murīdīn*). The order was continued and better organized by Abū Najīb's nephew, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d.632/1234), a most famous Sufi, contemporary to Ibn al-Fāriḍ and author of an

7. Louis Pouzet fixes the place of al-Farghānī's death in Damascus, in his *Damas au VIIIe/XIIIe siècle. Vie et structure religieuse d'une métropole islamique* (Recherches Nouvelle Série: A – Langue Arabe et Pensée Islamique, tome XV, Beyrouth: Dar al-Machreq, 1988), p.219. Pouzet also remarks that many of Ibn 'Arabī's disciples were buried in Damascus, near the tomb of their master, in order to come under the influence of his blessing (*baraka*). Among them he mentions Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Hūd (d.699/1300), Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d.673/1274), who wished to be buried near his master Ibn 'Arabī, 'Affī al-Dīn Sulaymān al-Tilimsānī (d.690/1291), and Muḥammad al-Āyķī al-Fārisī (d.697/1298), *ibid.*, pp.217–20, 234–35.

important Sufi manual, “*The Gifts of the Divine Sciences*” (‘*Awārif al-ma‘ārif*). In the *Suhrawardiyya* order al-Farghānī had his first Sufi initiation, and took both the cloak of discipleship (*khirqat al-irāda*) and the practice of invocation of the Divine Names (*talqīn al-dhikr*). Later on, al-Farghānī himself became a master of a Sufi convent called “The Mill” (*al-ṭāḥūn*), the location of which is unclear.

The second period of his life started when al-Farghānī entered into the companionship and service (*ṣuḥba wa-khidma*) of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d.673/1274), the foremost disciple and successor of the Great Sufi Master (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (d.638/1240). Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī had founded in Konya (in Anatolia, present-day Central Turkey), a flourishing centre of Sufism that attracted many students and scholars from all over the Islamic world.<sup>8</sup>

This second period was quite momentous in al-Farghānī’s life. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī introduced him into the “sciences of Reality” (‘*ulūm al-ḥaqīqa*), that is, as he says, into Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Sufi vision. In Konya, al-Farghānī also listened to al-Qūnawī’s explanations of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *al-Tā’īyyat al-Kubrā*. This was the starting point for what became his most important work, his Commentary (*sharḥ*) on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poem.<sup>9</sup> Echoing at first al-Qūnawī’s explanations, al-Farghānī wrote his Commentary

8. Al-Farghānī’s trip to Konya is probably connected with the general movement of peoples from the East to the West that happened in the middle of the seventh/thirteenth century under the onslaught of the Mongols advancing toward Baghdad. In 656/1258 Baghdad was conquered and destroyed by the Mongols led by their chief, Hūlāgū.

9. In a passage reported by al-Farghānī in *Mashāriq al-darārī*, op. cit., pp. 5–6 and 77–8, al-Qūnawī himself explains the story of his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poem. He says that he went to Egypt for the first time in 630/1233, when Ibn al-Fāriḍ was still alive, without meeting him. Ten years later, in 640/1243, he returned to Egypt. This time he met a number of Sufi masters (*shuyūkh*) who urged him to explain Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Sufi poems, which were held in high esteem by everybody. Thus al-Qūnawī agreed to write a commentary of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s great poem *al-Tā’īyya kubrā*. On al-Qūnawī’s advice, al-Farghānī wrote his commentary in Persian and presented it to his master who approved and blessed the work. Later on, al-Farghānī reworked his commentary in Arabic. This seems to be the complete story

in Persian under the title: “*Mashāriq al-darārī al-zuhar fī kashf ḥaqā’iq nazm al-durar*” (*The Rising Places of the Brilliant Stars in Unveiling the Realities of the Knitted Pearls*).<sup>10</sup> Later on, al-Farghānī reworked his Commentary in Arabic under the title: “*Muntahā al-madārik wa-muntahā lubb-i kull-i kāmīl-in wa-‘ārif-in wa-sālik-in*” (*The Utmost Realities Accessible to the Intellects and the Understandings of Any Perfect, Knowing and Disciple Sufī*).<sup>11</sup> The Arabic version is really a new composition, about one-third larger than the Persian one. Al-Farghānī’s Arabic Introduction (*muqaddima*) to his Commentary, in which he gives a systematic exposition of his Sufi vision, has always enjoyed special consideration as one of the best syntheses of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Sufi thought. This Introduction is also important in order to understand his commentary on the poem, because in it al-Farghānī explains his Sufi vision and the basic concepts he uses in his explanation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s Sufi poetry. For this reason I will offer a substantial summary of it.

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of al-Farghānī’s Persian and Arabic commentaries on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s great poem *al-Tā’iyya kubrā*.

10. The full title is given in *Mashāriq*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī, op. cit., p. 13.

11. *Muntahā al-madārik* ([Istanbul]: Maktab al-Ṣanā’i’, 1293/1876). This is the only existing printed edition. It consists of two volumes of 596 pages: vol. 1, pp. 1–358, of which pp. 1–107 are the “Introduction” (*muqaddima*); and vol. 2, pp. 1–238. The printed edition was done by a certain Muḥammad Shukrī al-Ūfī in 1293/1876 in Maktab al-Ṣanā’i’. The place is not evident from the text. A.J. Arberry puts it “in the East”, *The Poem of the Way* (London: Emerson Walker, 1952), p. 7, while F. Rosenthal and W. Chittick identify it in Istanbul. The full title of the Commentary is given in *Madārik*, op. cit., p. 5.

### 3. AL-FARGHĀNĪ'S MUQADDIMA<sup>12</sup>

#### 3.1. The Transcendent Mystery (*al-ghayb*) and its Self-Manifestations (*tajalliyāt*)<sup>13</sup>

Al-Farghānī's Introduction is centred on the general Akbarian idea that the transcendent Mystery (*al-ghayb*) of the Divine Essence (*al-dhāt*) manifests or unfolds itself in a series of self-manifestations (*tajalliyāt*), known as its names (*asmā'*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*). Such an idea is at the core of Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi thought. In fact, al-Farghānī starts his reflection quoting a well-known hadith, classified among the Divine hadiths (*ḥadīth qudsī*), starting with the words "*kuntu kanz-an ...*". The same hadith is also at the centre of Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi reflection; it says:

I was a hidden treasure, I loved to be known, so I created the world in order to become known.<sup>14</sup>

Through it some important Sufi concepts are introduced:

(a) The "*hidden treasure*": this term is meant to designate the unseen, Divine Mystery (*ghayb*) in its absolute, transcendent hiddenness (*khafā'*) and self-sufficiency (*ghinā*), as al-Farghānī explains:

Know – may God help you with the true understanding – that in this Divine hadith by the hidden treasure (*al-kanz al-khāfi*) is meant the unfathomable Mystery (*kunh al-ghayb*) and the absolute transcendence of the Essence (*iṭlāq al-dhāt al-aqdas*) and the inward eternal Ipseity (*bāṭin al-huwiyyat al-azaliyya*).<sup>15</sup>

12. In the historical sources al-Farghānī's famous "Introduction" is sometimes called *Dībāja*, a term that means "ornament" and was often used to indicate the introduction to literary works.

13. *Madārik* I, pp. 5–45.

14. This hadith is reported in various wordings, but it is not mentioned in the official collections of hadith; we refer here to Arendt J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1936–69), 7 vols.; in al-Farghānī's text it reads: "*Kuntu kanz-an makhfiyy-an, fa-aḥbabtu 'an u'rafa, fa-khalaqtu l-khalqa li-u'rafa*", *Madārik* I, p. 5.

15. *Madārik* I, p. 5.

- (b) **“I loved”**: love (*ḥubb*) is shown to be the original movement and the first eternal impulse that drove the Divine Mystery out of hiddenness towards its self-disclosure or self-manifestation (*tajallī, zuhūr*). It is out of love that the non-manifest and the unseen Mystery became manifest and visible. Love, therefore, is indicated as the ultimate cause of creation.
- (c) **“To be known”**: the true knowledge (*maʿrifā*) of the Mystery can only be reached through its own self-manifestation, and in no other way. Consequently, only the Sufi knowledge must be considered to be true knowledge, because it is the knowledge of God through God himself.
- (d) **“I created the world”**: the created world or the universe (*khalq*) is seen as the manifestation of the *Hidden Treasure*, i.e. of the Divine Mystery. As such, the created world has no independent being in itself and no possible meaning outside its relation to God: it is absolutely dependent on God’s continuous creative act.

Starting from such a premise, al-Farghānī expounds the process of self-manifestation of the Mystery. The unfathomable Mystery is seen as manifesting itself through a number of aspects or levels, called self-manifestations (*tajalliyāt*) or self-determinations (*taʿayyunāt*). The Mystery, coming out of its eternal hiddenness and darkness (*zulma*), reveals itself first of all in its transcendent and absolute Oneness (*waḥda*).<sup>16</sup> This Oneness, however, is not to be thought of as a static identity, but rather as a dynamic and dialectical process. In fact, Oneness is the principle of self-identity of the Mystery and, at the same time, the source of its countless, possible self-manifestations or self-determinations. Therefore, such an original Oneness (*waḥda*) must be considered under two basic aspects: the first called the Absolute Unity (*al-aḥadiyya*), and the second called the Related Unity (*al-wāḥidiyya*).

16. Al-Farghānī uses in his text a number of theological concepts such as Essence (*dhāt*), Oneness (*waḥda*), qualities and attributes (*ṣifāt*), and others. These terms are not mere rational concepts, but they carry clear Sufi overtones, basically inspired by Ibn al-ʿArabī’s vision.



3.1.1. THE ABSOLUTE UNITY (AL-AḤADIYYA)

This term is a derivative of *aḥad*, a Quranic qualification of God as One. In al-Farghānī's vocabulary it designates the transcendent and absolute Oneness of God in himself, with no relation to any kind of multiplicity or determination. The Absolute Unity is related only to the Absolute Mystery (*ghayb*) and, therefore, it takes the Mystery's colour which is, as al-Farghānī says, the colour of darkness (*zulma*) that no eye can penetrate or violate.

3.1.2. THE RELATED UNITY (AL-WĀḤIDIYYA)

This term is a derivative of *wāḥid*, another Quranic qualification of God as One. The Related Unity denotes, in al-Farghānī's thought, the Oneness not in its absoluteness, as Absolute Unity, but as related to multiplicity, i.e. to the infinite, possible aspects that can derive from it.<sup>17</sup>

Both aspects of Oneness (*waḥda*), the Absolute Unity and the Related Unity, are qualified as being all-comprehensive (*jāmi'*) or having the characteristic of all-comprehensiveness (*jam'iyya*), because they are inclusive of all the subsequent manifestations of the Essence. For this reason, al-Farghānī compares the level of the Oneness to the seed which, though one and simple, contains and includes in itself its subsequent development, such as the tree and the fruits.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, the two aspects of Oneness, the Absolute Unity and the Related Unity, are strictly correlated and their qualifications are in perfect correspondence: what is hidden and general in the first becomes manifest and specific in the second, as shown in the following pattern, in which some of the main qualifications of each aspect of Oneness are shown.

It should be pointed out that these same qualifications of the two aspects of Oneness are also used throughout the Introduction

17. For this reason I prefer to translate them, following Chittick's translation, as Absolute Unity and Related Unity, instead of Exclusive Unity and Inclusive Unity, as found in other translations.

18. This particular usage of the terms (*jāmi'*, *jam'iyya*) in al-Farghānī's vocabulary is of great value for a comparison with Ibn-Fāriḍ's vocabulary. In fact, in my semantic study, I have pointed to the centrality of the term *jam'* (universal, all-comprehensive union) in Ibn-Fāriḍ's poem.

<i>aḥadiyya</i>		<i>wāḥidiyya</i>	
(the main qualifications of each aspect of Oneness)			
a. <i>jāmi'</i>	all-comprehensive	a. <i>muta'ayyin</i>	determined
<i>jam'</i>	all-comprehensiveness	<i>ta'ayyun</i>	determination
b. <i>bāṭin</i>	inward non-manifest	b. <i>zāhir</i>	outward manifest
<i>buṭin</i>	inwardness non-manifestation	<i>zuhūr</i>	outwardness manifestation
c. <i>mujmal</i>	total undifferentiated	c. <i>mufaṣṣal</i>	particularized differentiated
<i>ijmāl</i>	totality undifferentiation	<i>tafṣīl</i>	particularization differentiation
d. <i>mundaraj</i>	included implicit	d. <i>mumayyaz</i>	distinct explicit
<i>indirāj</i>	inclusiveness implicitness	<i>tamyīz</i>	distinction explicitness

in a broader meaning to indicate the constant relationship existing between the different levels of the unfolding process of self-manifestation of the Essence. What appears implicit, comprehensive and general at a higher level, will appear explicit, determined, specific at the successive, lower one; and this, in turn, will be implicit, comprehensive and general in relation to the next one, and so on.<sup>19</sup>

19. Such an unfolding pattern of thought surely bears the imprint of the Neoplatonic conception of Being, in which the One manifests itself through an unfolding process of emanations from the One to the Many. As is known, Neoplatonic philosophy had long been adopted by Muslim philosophers and had a great influence on Islamic thought in general, and on that of Ibn al-'Arabī in particular. This latter was the main inspiration for al-Farghānī's Sufi vision.

### 3.2. Love (*maḥabba*): the Cause of Self-manifestation (*tajalliyyāt*) of the Absolute Mystery or Essence<sup>20</sup>

Al-Farghānī underlines that the Absolute Mystery or Essence is in itself by definition absolutely Self-sufficient (*ghanī*), and, as such, it has no need of manifesting itself. One cannot say that there is an inner “necessity” of manifestation on the part of the Divine Essence or the Absolute Mystery. In fact, God in the Quranic revelation is said to be the “*Ghanī* (i.e. absolutely Independent or Self-sufficient) from all the worlds” (Q. 3:97). Thus, says al-Farghānī, the Divine Essence, before any manifestation, was, as it were, in balance between two possibilities: either remaining constantly in its state of hiddenness (*khaḥā'*) and non-manifestation (*lā-zuhūr*), which is in itself more innate to its character, or going forth in a movement of self-disclosure (*tajallī*) and manifestation (*zuhūr*). What then was the cause that broke such a balance and pushed, or drove, as it were, the Divine Essence out from its state of hiddenness and non-manifestation to that of self-disclosure and manifestation?

In al-Farghānī's vision two main factors moved the Essence out, as it were, of itself in a movement of self-manifestation.

#### 3.2.1. THE “INNER SPEECH” (*AL-ḤADĪTH MA'A NAḤSI-HA*)

The Essence is described by al-Farghānī as being from eternity “in an inner dialogue within itself” (*mutaḥadditha ma'a naḥsi-hā fī naḥsi-hā*). Al-Farghānī does not explain at length such a concept. He does, however, recognize that in the Essence there is the presence of an “Inner Speech or Word” (*ḥadīth*), as an interior movement of “speaking from itself to itself”. From such an Inner Speech the process of manifestation originates.

#### 3.2.2. THE “ORIGINAL LOVE” (*AL-MAḤABBA AL-AṢLIYYA*)

However, more powerful than speech was love, the “Original Love” (*al-maḥabba al-aṣliyya*), as al-Farghānī calls it. Flowing from unfathomable depths, it was love that drove the Essence out, as it were, of Itself, toward its self-manifestation or, as al-Farghānī

20. *Madārik* I, pp.10–11; 16–17; 45–46.

says, it was love that broke the balance and made the Essence's inclination toward manifestation (*zuhūr*) prevail over its intrinsic inclination toward non-manifestation (*lā-zuhūr*). This concept occurs many a time throughout al-Farghānī's Introduction and is always referred to the above quoted hadith *kuntu kanz-an ...*, in which it is said that: "I loved to be known" (*aḥbab-tu an u'raf*), "therefore I created the world ...". Thus, love is, in al-Farghānī's vision, the inner power lying at the origin of the movement of self-manifestation of the Essence, driving it toward its full manifestation, in all its possible aspects. He says:

The influence (*athar*) of Speech (*ḥadīth*) and Love (*maḥabba*) and the essential inclination (*al-mayl al-dhātī*) made the order of manifestation (*ḥukm al-zuhūr*) prevail over the order of non-manifestation (*ḥukm lā-zuhūr*), thus [that influence] decided the antecedence of that [*ḥukm al-zuhūr*] over this [*ḥukm lā-zuhūr*]. Consequently, the transcendent Essence (*al-dhāt al-aqdas*) manifested itself to itself (*tajallat 'alā nafsi-ha*), because of that influence and that prevalence and that antecedence. Thus, it [the Essence] became manifest to itself in itself (*zaharat li-nafsi-ha fī nafsi-ha*), I mean, in that very First Determination (*al-ta'ayyun al-awwal*) and that very First Receptivity (*al-qābiliyyat al-ūlā*); so the Essence perceived (*wajadat*, lit. found, became present to) itself in this First Self-disclosure (*tajallī*) and Manifestation (*zuhūr*) and according to its order.<sup>21</sup>

Thus the Original Love, coming from the depths of the Absolute Mystery, was the original impulse that drove it towards the completion of the process of manifestation (*kamāl al-zuhūr*). Consequently, all the following stages of manifestation must be seen as effects of that Original Love. Such a process is compared by al-Farghānī to the flowing of the breath (*nafas*) in the act of breathing. The different sounds and words are but articulations of the same breath. In a similar way, all the aspects (*i'tibārāt*) and the qualities (*ṣifāt*) that will appear at the Second Level as distinct (*mutamayyaza*) and differentiated (*mutaghāyara*), are already present, though not distinct and not differentiated in this First Level, which is the origin of them all.

21. *Madārik* I, p.10.

This creative breath, by which everything comes into existence, is called the "breath of the All-merciful" (*nafas al-Rahmān*), and it is breathed from the Original Love (*al-maḥabbā al-aṣliyya*) and the Essential Mercy (*al-rahma al-dhātiyya*) of the Essence, i.e. from the depths of the transcendent Mystery.

### 3.3. The Designations of the Two First Self-manifestations of the Essence: *al-aḥadiyya* and *al-wāḥidiyya*<sup>22</sup>

#### 3.3.1. THE DESIGNATIONS OF THE FIRST SELF-MANIFESTATION (*AL-TAJALLĪ AL-AWWAL*)

The First Manifestation of the Divine Essence is designated in al-Farghānī's text by many names that have become part of his technical vocabulary and constantly recur throughout his commentary. Here we mention the most important ones.

##### **The first group**

This comprises general designations which are correlated and opposite to the corresponding ones of the Second Manifestation; they are:

- (a) The First Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-awwal*)
- (b) The First Determination (*al-ta'ayyun al-awwal*)
- (c) The First Level (*al-martabat al-ūlā*)
- (d) The First Consideration or Aspect (*al-i'tibār al-awwal*)
- (e) The Level of Absolute Unity (*martabat al-aḥadiyya*)

##### **The second group**

This comprises some designations that have a particular relevance as Sufi or philosophical concepts; they are:

- (a) **The Reality of Realities** (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*). The First Manifestation is called the Reality of Realities, because it is the most universal and inward aspect of all realities, Divine and created. These latter are only partial aspects or manifestations of that Reality which includes everything with its pervasive presence (*sirāya*).

22. *Madārik* I, pp.10–11; 16–17; 45–46.

- (b) **The First and Supreme Isthmus (*al-barzakh al-awwal wa-al-akbar*)**. An isthmus is by definition a link that joins and separates, at the same time, two realities. In the process of manifestation every level is mediated by a link that unites it to and separates it from the next one. Consequently, there are as many isthmuses as there are levels of manifestation. However, only the First Manifestation is called the “The supreme all-comprehensive Isthmus of all the other isthmuses and their origin” (*al-barzakh al-akbar al-jāmi‘ li-jamī‘ al-barāzikh wa-aṣlu-hā*), because it implicitly contains all that will be explicitly manifested in the following stages.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the First Manifestation is the universal mediator between the Mystery and all its manifestations.
- (c) **The Station of the “Nearest” (*maqām adnā*)**. This designation is taken from the Quranic verse (Q. 53:9), in which the carrier of the revelation is described as coming near to Muḥammad at “the distance of the two extremes of the bow (*qāb qawsayni*) or nearer (*aw adnā*)”. In the Sufi terminology these two expressions came to indicate the two highest degrees of nearness to God. The station of the “nearest” (*aw adnā*) indicates in al-Farghānī’s vision the highest possible proximity to the Divine Essence. Such a lofty stage can only be attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, because he alone reached the highest level of nearness, i.e. the Absolute Unity (*aḥadiyya*) of the First Manifestation. All other prophets and saints can reach only the station of “the distance of the two extremes of the bow” (*qāb qawsayni*), corresponding to the level of the Related Unity (*wāḥidiyya*) or the Second Manifestation, in which multiplicity becomes explicit.
- (d) **The Eternal Reality of Muḥammad (*al-ḥaqīqat al-aḥmadiyyat al-thābita*)**. Al-Farghānī explains this designation saying that the Prophet Muḥammad was characterized by the utmost degree of justice (*‘adāla*) and balance (*i’tidāl*) because he was not dominated by a particular Divine Name, but he was the mediating point (*nuqṭa waṣṭiyya*) among all the Divine Names. For such reason Muḥammad’s Reality is the supreme

23. *Madārik* I, p.13.

Isthmus (*al-barzakh al-akbar*) and his Light (*nūr*) is the very First Manifestation, as he is reported saying in a hadith: "The first thing God created was my Light."<sup>24</sup> This Light existed from all eternity in the Divine Essence, but became visibly manifested only in the most pious (*taqī*) and pure (*naqī*) heart (*qalb*) of Muḥammad, which is, therefore, the visible image (*ṣūra*) of the First Manifestation and its Eternal Light. Because of such a pre-eminence, only the Prophet Muḥammad enjoys the station of the "nearest" (*aw adnā*), i.e. of the absolute vicinity to the Divine Essence at the level of the Absolute Unity (*aḥadiyya*).

### **The term *wujūd* as perception–existence**

Having established the distinction of the two first fundamental aspects of manifestation, al-Farghānī applies to them some general qualities of the Essence, namely, its perfection (*kamāl*), its science (*'ilm*) and its perception–existence (*wujūd*). These qualities take different connotations as to whether they are considered at the level of Absolute Unity (*aḥadiyya*) or at that of Related Unity (*wāḥidiyya*). Among them the term perception–existence (*wujūd*) deserves a special mention for the importance it acquires both in al-Farghānī's and Ibn al-Fāriḍ's vocabularies.<sup>25</sup>

(a) **At the First Level of Manifestation or Absolute Unity (*aḥadiyya*)** *wujūd* means the Essence finding or perceiving only itself in its absolute Oneness without multiplicity, it is:

24. This hadith is quoted in *Madārik* I, p. 13, but not found in the official collections of hadith; cf. Wensinck, *Concordance*, op. cit.

25. The term *wujūd* comes from the root *w-j-d* that has many connotations in Arabic, ranging from an original one "to find, to come across something", to a second one "to feel and perceive the presence of something", and to a third one "to be found, to exist", from which the general philosophical idea of "being", "existence" is derived. This last designation has become common in Islamic philosophy to translate as the idea of "being" in general. However, in the Sufi language (and precisely in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's) the two first meanings often continue to be prevalent. In al-Farghānī's text all three meanings are present, thus I have translated the term *wujūd* and its derivatives mostly as the "finding perception of something", though the meaning of "existence" is present too. Limiting its translation to only one of its meanings can lead to a misunderstanding of the text.

... the finding perception (*wijdān*) of the Essence of itself in itself, in which all aspects (*i'tibārāt*) of the Related Unity (*wāḥidiyya*) are included. This perception (*wijdān*) is a total, undifferentiated (*mujmal*) act in which all its specifications and differentiations (*tafṣīl*) are included (*mundaraj*), and which by its nature refuses any multiplicity (*kathra*) and differentiation (*mughāyara*), any otherness (*ghayriyya*) and distinction (*tamayyuz*).<sup>26</sup>

(b) **At the Second Level of Manifestation or Related Unity (*wāḥidiyya*)** *wujūd* becomes the finding perception of all the determinations of the Essence, implicit in the First Level. At this level *wujūd* must be considered under two different aspects:

(i) **At the level of the Real (*ḥaqq*)**. Here the perception (*wujūd*) is referred to the Real (*ḥaqq*) and means the Essence's perception of its determinations before any exterior manifestation of them in the created world. In this perception the Divine Names become manifest and present, and since they are all manifestations of the same Essence, the Divine Names are essentially one and have all the same content, that is the same Essence. Nonetheless, they differ from one another inasmuch as each one of them designates the same Essence according to a specific determination or aspect, which is expressed in a particular designation or name.

(ii) **At the level of the created world (*khalq*)**. Here *wujūd* means the perception of the manifestations of the Divine Names in the created world (*khalq*), qualified as the "visible, manifested existence" (*al-wujūd al-'iyānī*). This world (*khalq*) is further differentiated into several degrees or levels of existents, which are called the levels of the universe (*marātib al-kawn*). In the created world the act of perception is linked to the specific level of each created being, which is determined and limited so that it can directly perceive (*yajidu*) only the beings belonging to its own level: e.g. the spirits (*arwāḥ*) can directly

26. *Madārik* I, p.15.



perceive only the spirits, the images–archetypes (*mithāl*) the images–archetypes, and the corporal bodies (*ajsād*) the corporal bodies. Since all these created beings only exist through the act of creation or the creative act (*ijād – khalq*), therefore:

... the Creator (*khāliq*) and the Giver of existence (*mūjid*) – be He exalted and praised – gives to the worldly realities (*ḥaqā'iq kawniyya*) their faculty of perception (*wijḍān*) with its own correspondent determination (*ta'ayyun*).<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, each created being perceives the things that are present at the level of its determination (*ta'ayyun*).

### 3.3.2. THE DESIGNATIONS OF THE SECOND SELF-MANIFESTATION (*AL-TAJALLĪ AL-THĀNĪ*)

The two levels of manifestation, namely that of Absolute Unity (*al-aḥadiyya*) and that of Related Unity (*al-waḥidiyya*), come from the same transcendent Oneness (*waḥda*) of the Essence and are, therefore, necessarily closely correlated so that it is impossible to describe one without making reference to the other. What is hidden and implicit at the First Level becomes manifest and explicit at the Second Level. This is the general rule (*ḥukm*) linking them both together. Here a more specific description of the Second Manifestation is provided.

Also the designations of the Second Manifestation, mentioned in al-Farghānī's Introduction, can be divided into two general groups.

#### **First group**

This comprises some general designations that are correlated and opposite to the corresponding ones of the First Manifestation; they are:

- (a) The Second Manifestation: (*al-tajallī al-thānī*)
- (b) The Second Determination: (*al-ta'ayyun al-thānī*)
- (c) The Second Level: (*al-martabat, al-rutbat al-thāniya*)
- (d) The Level of the Related Unity: (*martabat al-wāḥidiyya*)

27. *Madārik* I, pp.15–16.

## Second group

This comprises a number of designations related to some particular Sufi or philosophical conceptions, such as:

- (a) **The level of Divinity (*martabat al-ulūha*)**, because at this level the name God (*Allāh*) is manifested.
- (b) **The world of meanings or ideas (*'ālam al-ma'ānī*)**, because at this level the ideas and meanings of all realities, general and particular, are present in the Divine knowledge.
- (c) **The presence of the Cloud (*al-ḥaḍrat al-'amā'iyya*, from *'amā'*, i.e. Cloud)**, because the Second Manifestation is the linking isthmus (*barzakh*) between Oneness and multiplicity.
- (d) **The Perfect Human Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-insāniyyat al-kamāliyya*)**, because the Second Manifestation is the perfect realization of the human essence, conceived as the most universal and comprehensive reality, including and encompassing all the other realities.
- (e) **The station of “the distance of the two extremes of the bow” (*qāb qawsaynī*)**, because the Second Manifestation is the station of the prophets and the saints next to the station of Muḥammad, designated as the station of the “nearest” (*aw adnā*).

## The Divine Names (*al-asmā' al-ilāhiyya*)<sup>28</sup>

At the level of the Second Manifestation multiplicity in all its aspects becomes manifest in two basic orders: the uncreated order of the Divine Names (*al-kathra al-asmā'iyya*), and the created order of the created entities of the universe (*al-a'yān al-kawniyya*). Al-Farghānī dedicates many pages to the description and classification of the multiplicity of the Divine Names. The Divine Names are ordered in a hierarchy that goes from the most general to the most specific ones. Only a brief mention of them will be given here. The Divine Names are grouped as follows:

- (a) **God (*Allāh*) and the All-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*)**. These two names are the most comprehensive of all the Divine Names and stand in reciprocal relation as the inward aspect (*bāṭin*,

28. *Madārik* I, pp.18–19; 25–45.

*Allāh*) to the outward aspect (*ẓāhir*, *al-Raḥmān*). God (*Allāh*) cannot be directly known, but by its own manifestation in the act of creation, brought about by “the breath of the All-Merciful (*nafas al-Raḥmān*)”.

(b) **The Negative Names (*asmā' salbiyya*)**. These names emphasize God's transcendence or incomparability (*tanzīh*) with respect to the creation, denying that in Him can be any kind of similarity with the created qualities (*tashbīh*). These names are called “the keys of the Divine Mystery” (*mafātīḥ al-ghayb*), because they are, as it were, the keys protecting the Treasure of the transcendent and inaccessible Divine Essence in its absolute Mystery. These negative Names are seven:

- *al-azalī* the Beginningless, Eternal
- *al-ghanī* the Self-sufficient, Independent
- *al-fard* the Singular, Unparalleled
- *al-witr* the Solitary, Unaccompanied
- *al-quddūs* the All-Holy, Transcendent
- *al-salām* the Peace, Peaceful
- *al-subbūḥ* the most Exalted and Glorified

(c) **The affirmative Names (*al-asmā' al-thubūtiyya*)**. These are positive statements on the Divine Essence. Drawing from the previous Sufi tradition, al-Farghānī classifies a large number of Divine Names, though they are in reality without end because the Divine Essence has no limit. However, among them “the seven fundamental names” (*al-asmā' al-aṣliyya al-sab'ā*) have always been given special consideration in the Islamic theology. These Names are derived from “the seven, most general and fundamental realities present in God” (*al-ḥaqā'iq al-sab'at al-kulliyyat al-aṣliyya*), and from them all the other Divine Names derive. To each of these realities corresponds a Divine Name, as shown in the following:

- **life (*ḥayā*)** from which comes the name the Living (*al-ḥayy*)
- **will (*irāda*)** from which comes the name the Willing (*al-murīd*)
- **knowledge (*'ilm*)** from which comes the name the Knower (*al-'alīm*)
- **speech (*qawl*, *kalām*)** from which comes the name the Speaker (*al-qā'il*, *al-mutakallim*)

- **power (*qudra*)** from which comes the name the All-powerful (*al-qādir*)
- **generosity (*jūd*)** from which comes the name the Generous (*al-jawād*)
- **justice (*iqsāt*, 'adl)** from which comes the name the Just (*al-muqsit*, *al-'ādil*)

These names are called the “the seven Leaders or Chiefs” (*al-a'immat al-sab'a*) because all the other Divine Names are derived from and ordered under them, especially the ninety-nine well-known Names (*al-asmā' al-tis'a wa-l-tis'ūn*), common to the Islamic piety.

At the end of this description, al-Farghānī stresses once more the essential unity that links together the multiplicity of Divine Names. All these Names are summarized and encompassed in the Muḥammadan Reality, called the presence of the Cloud (*al-ḥaḍrat al-'amā'iyya*) because it joins the Divine and the created realities, and the Reality of Realities (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) because it encompasses all other realities.

### 3.4. The Levels of the Universe (*marātib al-kawn*)

After the description of the First and Second Manifestations, al-Farghānī dedicates the second and third part of his Introduction to the description of the created beings. Thus the first part of his Introduction can be considered al-Farghānī's ontology, while the following parts can be regarded as his angelology, cosmology and anthropology. They are, on the whole, quite similar to the corresponding vision of Ibn al-'Arabī. I will give here a very brief summary of this part of al-Farghānī's Introduction, pointing out only the main terms concerning our research.<sup>29</sup>

The sum of the created beings constitutes the created world (*al-khalq*) or the universe (*al-kawn*), which is the created level of the Second Manifestation, and therefore a mirror of its uncreated level, that of the Divine Names. All created beings come into existence through the creative word “be!” (*kun*), mentioned in the Quran (Q. 16: 40, parallel texts). Thus, all created beings,

29. *Madārik* I, pp.45–66.

each at his particular level, are effects (*āthār*) and manifestations (*mazāhir*) of the Divine Names. Consequently, these created levels are arranged in a hierarchy that corresponds to that of the Divine Names, following the general rule (*ḥukm*) of manifestation that the lower levels are the unfolding manifestations and specifications of the higher ones.

The created world (*khalq*) or universe (*kawn*) is composed, in al-Farghānī's view, by three general levels in which all the created beings are ordered, as follows:

#### 3.4.1. THE LEVEL OF SPIRITS (*MARTABAT AL-ARWĀḤ*)

The level of Spirits (*martabat al-arwāḥ*) is the invisible universe, also called the world of the Dominion (*'ālam al-malakūt*) and of the presence of Power (*ḥaḍrat al-jabarūt*). At this level, many realities are found, such as the Angels (*malā'ika*) or the Spirits (*arwāḥ*), from which this level takes its name. The Spirits are charged with special functions in the government of the universe. The level of Spirits too has an internal hierarchy, reflecting the process of unfolding from Unity (*waḥda*) and comprehensiveness (*ijmāl*) to multiplicity (*kathra*) and specification (*tafṣīl*).

#### 3.4.2. THE LEVEL OF THE IMAGES (*MARTABAT AL-MITHĀL*) AND THE LEVEL OF THE CORPOREAL BODIES (*MARTABAT AL-AJSĀM*)

Under the world of Spirits two other worlds come: that of the Corporeal Bodies (*martabat al-ajsām*), perceived by the sense perception (*ḥiss*), and that of the Images or the Archetypes (*martabat al-mithāl*) extending in between the Spirits and the Corporeal Bodies. The description of the worlds of Images and the Corporeal Bodies constitutes al-Farghānī's cosmology, crowned by the appearance of the human being. The two worlds, that of the Spirits and that of the Corporeal Bodies, being the manifestations of the Divine Names are also arranged in a correspondingly hierarchical order.

We cannot enter here into al-Farghānī's complicated angelology and cosmology. One has only to remark that, on the whole, al-Farghānī's angelology and cosmology are basically built on Ibn al-'Arabī's concepts and vision. In such a vision, there is a strict correspondence between the order of the Divine Names and the

elements of the universe, visible or invisible. These latter are, in fact, effects or manifestations of the first. In such a way, Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi vision achieves an impressive unitarian and coherent vision of Being at all its levels.

### 3.5. Adam and the Human Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-insāniyya*); Muḥammad and the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*)<sup>30</sup>

#### 3.5.1. THE HUMAN REALITY (*AL-ḤAQĪQAT AL-INSĀNIYYA*)

Al-Farghānī concludes the description of the created world mentioning the formation of the human being with Adam, the prototype of humankind (*al-insān*), also called the human reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-insāniyya*) or human constitution (*al-mizāj al-insānī*). The human being has a special place in the created universe because, though the last in the order of manifestation, it is actually the first in order of intention, being the goal and purpose of all creation. In fact, because of its composite constitution (*mizāj murakkab*), the human being is comprehensive (*jāmi'*) of all the orders of Being, and is a summary of all previous levels of the manifestation of the Divine Essence. Thus, humans possess some particular characteristics that are unique with respect to all other beings. These characteristics can be summarized in the following way:

#### Image of God (*ṣūrat Allāh*)

“God created Adam in his own image”, says a hadith often quoted by Sufis, echoing a well-known Biblical topic.<sup>31</sup> In al-Farghānī's thought, this hadith means that Adam is the image of the Second Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-thānī*), also called the visible manifestation of the Breath of the All-Merciful (*al-tajallī al-naḥāsī al-rahmānī al-zāhirī*). For this reason he is comprehensive of all Divine Names (*asmā'*) and Qualities (*ṣiḥāṭ*), in their interior and exterior manifestations. Adam is the visible image (*ṣūra maḥsūsa*) into which the Divine Spirit (*rūḥ ilāhī*) has been

30. *Madārik* I, pp.66–86.

31. This hadith is important in the Sufi vision; it is reported in the official collections, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, III, p. 438b.

breathed (*manfūkh*) without intermediary (*bilā wisāta*). For this reason, in him the created and uncreated aspects or levels of Being are united as in a sublime balance.

### **Vicegerent of God (*khalīfat Allāh*)**

In accordance with the Quranic revelation and the Sufi tradition, al-Farghānī extols the position of the human being above all the other orders of being. The Quranic revelation calls Adam the vicegerent of God (*khalīfa*, Q. 2: 30) attributing to him the knowledge of all the Names (Q. 2: 31). In al-Farghānī's view these two qualifications mean that the human being is comprehensive (*jāmi'*) of all the Divine Names and Perfections (*jamī' al-asmā' wa-l-kamālāt al-ilāhiyya*). In him two images merge: the image of God (*ṣūrat al-ḥaqq*) and the image of the cosmos (*ṣūrat al-khalq*). Because of his composition (*tarkīb*), the human being is characterized by the qualities of all-comprehensiveness (*jam'iyya*), universality (*kulliyya*) and perfection (*kamāl*). Thus, the human being is raised not only to a rank higher than any other being of the visible universe, but also far above the Angels, the pure Spirits. These are, in fact, limited to a definite order of Being, the spiritual one, while the human being is the comprehensive synthesis (*jāmi'*) of all the Divine qualities found in all orders of Being. It was for this reason that God ordered the Angels to prostrate themselves before Adam (Q. 2: 30–34ss.). All of them obeyed, recognizing the superior status of Adam, except Iblīs who rebelled against God's order. For this reason, only to Adam, the prototype of the human being, did God attribute the highest degree of relationship with Himself, as al-Farghānī says when commenting on this Quranic verse:

... by such a perfect receptivity (*qābiliyya*) I made him my vicegerent (*khalīfa*), in My perfect knowledge of Myself, and in My perfect vision of Myself (*istijlā'-ī dhāt-ī*) by himself in himself and in all things, in My love for Myself (*maḥabbat-ī dhāt-ī*), both absolute and conditioned, in the manifestation of Myself to Myself (*zuhūr-ī li-nafs-ī*) in the Perfection (*kamāl*) of My Essence and Names, both in general and in particular...<sup>32</sup>

32. *Madārik* I, p. 71.

The human being is the mirror that reflects the perfection of the Divine Reality and its Names to the point that another hadith can say: "Whoever knows himself, knows his Lord (*man 'arafa nafsahu 'arafa rabba-hu*)".<sup>33</sup> This hadith points to the hidden sublimity of the human reality, present in every human being. However, above all orders of beings, human and not, the reality of the prophet Muḥammad ranks in a special and unique place, known as the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*). This is a central concept of al-Farghānī's Sufi vision, repeated time and again throughout his Introduction and Commentary.

### 3.5.2. THE MUḤAMMADAN REALITY (*AL-ḤAQĪQAT AL-MUḤAMMADIYYA*)<sup>34</sup>

The human reality finds, in al-Farghānī's vision, its fullest expression and its highest realization in the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*). The human reality in Adam is said to be the image of the Second Manifestation, while the human reality in Muḥammad is said to be the image of the Divine Essence in its First Self-manifestation, as the First Isthmus (*barzakh*) and the all-encompassing (*jāmi'*) Absolute Unity of the Essence (*aḥadiyya dhātiyya*). Consequently, the relationship between Adam, and thus all other human beings, and Muḥammad corresponds to the relationship between the Second and the First Manifestation. As al-Farghānī explains:

Adam was in his reality comprehensive (*jāmi'*) of all the [Divine] Names and qualities, the Divine and created realities that are included in the Second Manifestation or Isthmus. Muḥammad, on the contrary, was, in his reality and image, comprehensive (*jāmi'*) of all that is comprehended in the First Isthmus, that is the Keys [of the Mystery] (*mafātīḥ [al-ghayb]*) and the absolute One (*al-wāḥid al-aḥad*), in the real, all-comprehensive unity (*al-jam'iyya al-ḥaqīqiyya al-aḥadiyya*), where there is no prevalence of one order [of qualities] over another.<sup>35</sup>

To sum up, Adam, and in him every perfect prophet and saint, is the image of the Second Level of manifestation, i.e. that of the

33. This hadith also is important in the Sufi vision, but it is not mentioned in the official collections of hadith.

34. *Madārik* I, pp. 72–78.

35. *Madārik* I, p. 67.



Related Unity (*al-wāḥidiyya*), while Muḥammad is the image of the First Level of manifestation, i.e. that of the Absolute Unity (*al-aḥadiyya*). For this reason Muḥammad's rank is far above all beings: after the supreme Mystery itself, he has the highest rank in the whole of Being.

In fact, it is in him, Muḥammad, that the Perfection of Self-vision (*kamāl al-istijlā'*) is realized, which is the return (*rujū'*, *marja'*) of the process of manifestation to its origin, i.e. a return from multiplicity to unity, from a descendent movement (*nuzūl*) to an ascendant movement (*'urūj*). In fact, the transcendent Mystery, not only manifests itself in the process of self-manifestation or self-disclosure (*zuhūr, tajallī, jalā'*), but it returns to itself in an act of self-vision or self-realization (*istijlā'*), in which all its manifestations are reunified.

In this way, in the Human being, the circle of Being is concluded: multiplicity and unity are no longer seen as opposite states, but as inclusive of one another. In al-Farghānī's view, such an act of self-vision is indicated in the Quranic verse: "Unto Him every thing will return" (Q. 11: 123). Thus the process of return must go through the same stages as the process of manifestation, so that to each level or degree of manifestation, called *jalā'*, corresponds a level or degree of self-vision or self-realization, called *istijlā'*. In particular, the process of return reflects the two main levels of manifestation: that of the Absolute Unity of the First Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-awwal*) and that of the Related Unity of the Second Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-thānī*).

#### **The Self-vision (*al-istijlā'*) at the level of Absolute Unity (*aḥadiyya*)**

The self-vision or self-realization (*istijlā'*) at the level of the First Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-awwal*) is called the Perfection of the Essence (*al-kamāl al-dhātī*), because it is the realization of its Absolute Unity, as al-Farghānī explains:

The perfection of the Essence (*al-kamāl al-dhātī*) implies also the perfect self-vision (*istijlā'*) of the transcendent, absolute One Essence (*al-dhāt al-aqdas al-wāḥid al-aḥad*), that is its manifestation of itself to itself through the Absolute Unity, comprehensive (*aḥadiyya jam'iyyat*) of all forms and aspects of its Related Unity (*wāḥidiyya*),

and through the return of them all unto Himself, because of His own word: "Unto Him every thing will be returned" (Q. 11: 123).<sup>36</sup>

The vision of the all-comprehensive Unity (*al-aḥadiyya al-jam'iyya*) of the Essence (*dhāt*) can only be realized through the form of a human being (*mazhar insānī*) that enjoys the highest degree of balance (*'adāla*) and proportion (*sawā'iyya*). Such a perfection has been actualized exclusively in the most perfect human constitution, the constitution of Muḥammad (*al-mizāj al-aḥmadī*) whose pure and pious heart encompassed the Real. Thus, because of his eminent perfection, Muḥammad enjoyed the highest qualifications: he is the Perfect Vicegerent (*al-khalīfat al-kāmil*), the Reality of Realities (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*), the First Isthmus (*al-barzakh al-awwal*), the First Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-awwal*), the Inwardness of Being (*bāṭin al-wujūd*) and the Eternal Light of Muḥammad (*al-nūr al-aḥmadī*).<sup>37</sup> No wonder that Muḥammad's birth in such a vision is extolled by al-Farḡhānī as the most important cosmic and historical event in the whole universe.

Because of his perfect balance, Muḥammad also received the supreme scale (*al-mīzān*) of every reality, which is the Quran (*al-Qur'ān*): the most perfect, all-comprehensive and universal word (*al-qawl al-akmalī al-jam'ī al-kullī*). In fact, the Divine Eternal Word is manifested, according to a Sufi tradition, in three general forms: the first is the universe, called the Book of [God's] Acts (*al-kitāb al-fi'lī*); the second is the written text of the Quran, the book of knowledge and wisdom, called the Book of Words (*al-kitāb al-qawlī*); the third is the visible form of Muḥammad (*al-mazhar al-aḥmadī*), which is the most unified and all-comprehensive form (*al-mazhar al-aḥadī al-jām'ī*) to the point that his wife 'Ā'isha could say of him: "His behaviour was the Quran".<sup>38</sup>

36. *Madārik* I, p. 72.

37. *Madārik* I, pp. 75–80.

38. *Madārik* I, p. 80.

**The Self-vision (*al-istijlā'*) at the level of Related Unity (*wāḥidiyya*)<sup>39</sup>**

The self-vision (*al-istijlā'*) at the level of the Second Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-thānī*) is called the Perfection of Names (*al-kamāl al-asmā'ī*) and encompasses the multiplicity of the Divine Names and qualities. This means the reunification of all the different aspects in a unified vision, realized after the display of their differentiation. Such a self-vision can only take place in a human constitution:

[The self-vision] ... is the disclosure of the Second Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-thānī*) to itself but through that human form (*al-mazhar al-insānī*), its heart, hearing and sight, in a vision (*shuhūd*) that is differentiated (*mufaṣṣal*) in its comprehensiveness (*mujmal*) in it (human heart) and in his sight and in his hearing, and from it a vision (*shuhūd*) that is comprehensive (*mujmal*) in its differentiation (*mufaṣṣal*).<sup>40</sup>

Through such a self-vision, all the created effects (*āthār*) are brought back to their source and cause, the Divine Names. These, in turn, are unified in the seven fundamental Names. This process of return happens in the human form because of its unique characteristics of comprehensiveness (*jam'iyya*) and inclusiveness (*ishtimāliyya*) of all the Divine Qualities.

Historically, such a process has taken place in the missions of the prophets (*anbiyā'*), the messengers (*rusul*) and the saints-friends (of God) (*awliyā'*), who are the highest degrees of human perfection, after the Muḥammadan Reality. Here, al-Farghānī introduces a classical topic of Sufism, that of the hierarchy of saints, or friends (of God), and the difference between prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and friendship-sainthood (*walāya*). Saints are the manifestations of Divine Names and consequently they are arranged in a similar hierarchical order. Before Muḥammad, a saint could either be a messenger (*rasūl*), if he had a Divine law (*shar'*) to enforce, or simply a prophet (*nabī*), if he had no Divine law to enforce. However, after Muḥammad, there will be no new

39. *Madārik* I, pp.81–2; 84–90.

40. *Madārik* I, p.75.

prophet or messenger, because there will be no new religious law. This is a basic doctrine of Islam. Consequently, now the saint-friends take their sainthood from the heritage of Muḥammad (*al-irth al-muḥammadī*) and are also arranged in a hierarchical order as vicegerents (*khulafā'*) and poles (*aqṭāb*) of the community of Muḥammad (*al-umma al-muḥammadiyya*). They are the guides (*shuyūkh*) that lead the faithful to the way of perfection.

In the end, al-Farghānī touches upon the important topic of the “Seal of Friendship-Sainthood” (*khātām al-walāya*), a concept that had a very crucial place in Sufism, especially in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writing.<sup>41</sup> The “Seal of the Friendship” is a saint who encompasses all forms of friendship or sainthood. Moreover, through the “Seal” all beings will reach their final return to God, because in him the Muḥammadan heritage will be fully realized. However, al-Farghānī does not go into details and he does not open the question about the identity of the “Seal of Friendship”, as Ibn al-‘Arabī, as well as other Sufis before and after him, have done.

### 3.6. The Six Universal Levels (*al-marātib al-kulliyya*): an Outline of al-Farghānī’s Vision of Reality

Having expounded in detail the complicated text of al-Farghānī’s Introduction, a synthesis is now needed to have a clearer picture of his Sufi vision. Luckily, al-Farghānī himself provides quite a good summary of his general vision of Reality at the beginning of his Introduction.<sup>42</sup> He says that Reality is divided into six orders or levels, called the universal levels (*al-marātib al-kulliyya*), or presences (*ḥaḍarāt*), or worlds (‘*awālim*). These levels represent the different aspects of the self-manifestation of the one transcendent Essence and are, therefore, also called places (*maḥāll*) or loci of its manifestation (*majāli-mazāhir*). These six levels are arranged in three basic orders: two levels are considered as pertaining to the uncreated Real (*ḥaqq*), while three levels are considered as pertaining to the created world (*khalq*). The sixth level

41. *Madārik* I, p. 86.

42. *Madārik* I, pp. 24–5.

is the one that encompasses all the other levels: this is the Perfect Man (*insān kāmil*). Thus, al-Farghānī's vision can be outlined in the following pattern:

**The Transcendent Mystery (*al-ghayb*) or the Divine Essence (*dhāt*) manifests itself:**

- (a) At the Real, eternal, uncreated level (*al-ḥaqq*) as Absolute Oneness (*waḥda*) which includes:
  1. The Absolute Unity (*al-aḥadiyya*): with no relation to multiplicity
  2. The Related Unity (*al-wāḥidiyya*): with the display of the Divine Names.
- (b) At the created level (*al-khalq*), as part of the Related Unity (*al-wāḥidiyya*) there are:
  3. The Level of Spirits (*martabat al-arwāḥ*)
  4. The Level of Images–Archetypes (*martabat al-mithāl*)
  5. The Level of Corporeal Bodies (*martabat al-ajsām*).
- (c) At an all-comprehensive level (*al-jāmi'*), which is the summary of the whole process of manifestation, there is:
  6. The Level of the Perfect Man (*martabat al-insān al-kāmil*).

These six levels are the manifestation of the same Divine Essence and can be summarized as follows:

**I. At the beginning** There was the unveiled and unseen transcendent Mystery (*ghayb*) or the Divine Essence (*dhāt*), with no manifestation (*zuhūr*) or created existence (*kawnī*), as the hadith says: "God was, and nothing was with him."<sup>43</sup>

**II. The transcendent Divine Mystery** This manifests itself first in its transcendent Oneness (*waḥda*), which includes the two levels of the Absolute Unity (*al-aḥadiyya*) of the First Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-awwal*), excluding any kind of multiplicity, and the level of the Related Unity (*al-wāḥidiyya*) of the Second Manifestation

43. This hadith, important for Sufis, is reported by al-Bukhārī and Ibn Ḥanbal, see Wensinck, *Concordance I*, p. 806b. Some Sufi reports add "... and He is now as He was", cf. *al-Ḥikma*, n. 34 of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sakandārī (d.709/1309).

(*al-tajallī al-thānī*), in which the multiplicity of Divine Names are present and manifest in the Divine, eternal knowledge (*‘ilm*).

**III. From the Second Manifestation** From this, or from the Divine Names comes the created universe (*kawn – khalq*), which is divided in three levels:

- (a) **The level of the non-composite**, simple beings (*martabat al-mawjūdāt al-basīṭa*), which is **the Level of the Spirits** (*martabat al-arwāḥ*).
- (b) **The level of the composite beings** (*martabat al-mawjūdāt al-murakkaba*), divided into two other levels:
  - The level of the subtle beings (*al-mawjūdāt al-laṭīfa*), so called because they cannot be divided; this is the level of the Images–Archetypes (*martabat al-mithāl*).
  - The level of the dense beings (*al-mawjūdāt al-kathīfa*), so called because they can be divided into parts. This level is the level of the Sense Perception (*martabat al-ḥiss*) or the world of the Visible (*‘ālam al-shahāda*) or the level of the Corporeal Bodies (*martabat al-ajsām*).

**IV. At the end of the process of manifestation** At this point there comes a sixth level, which is the all-comprehensive (*jāmi‘ li-l-jamī‘*) level, and the synthesis of all five previous levels of the uncreated and created beings. This is the level of **the Perfect Human Being** (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which is the perfect mirror of the transcendent Mystery. The Perfect Human Being is realized in two basic forms: the first is Adam, that is, the human being in general, and the second is the Muḥammadan Reality, realized in the person of the prophet Muḥammad, in whom alone the highest degree of Unity is realized, because he alone is the Perfect Human Being.

### 3.7. Al-Farghānī and Ibn ‘Arabī’s School

For a better understanding of al-Farghānī’s Sufi vision it is useful to compare it with that of his two great masters, Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, pointing to the aspects of similarity and dissimilarity existing among them.

3.7.1. AL-FARGHĀNĪ AND IBN AL-'ARABĪ<sup>44</sup>

Al-Farghānī is surely to a large extent indebted to *al-shaykh al-akbar* (the Great Spiritual Master), Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī. There are quite a number of points of similarity between them, such as the centrality of the above-mentioned hadith *kuntu kanz-an makhfiyy-an*, on which the whole process of self-manifestation is based. Such a process goes forth from the Divine Essence to the hierarchical order of the Divine Names, to the created world, divided into the three levels (*marātib al-kawn*), the Spirits (*arwāḥ*), the Images–Archetypes (*mithāl*) and the Corporeal Bodies (*ajsād*); and in the end, to the idea of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) and that of the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*) in which the idea of the “Seal of Friendship–Sainthood” (*khātam al-walāya*) is included.

Nevertheless, some dissimilarities can be noticed between al-Farghānī and his great master, Ibn al-'Arabī.

**The distinction between the Absolute Unity (*al-aḥadiyya*) and the Related Unity (*al-waḥdāniyya*)**

Al-Farghānī is credited with having provided a clearer description of the Second Manifestation of the Essence, the Related Unity, fixing its name as *wāḥidiyya*, instead of *waḥdāniyya* as Ibn al-'Arabī names it. In this instance, al-Farghānī's terminology seems to be on the whole more consistent than that of Ibn al-'Arabī, who is not always a systematic expositor of his own thought.

**The idea of effusion (*al-fayḍ*)**

The term *al-fayḍ* plays a central role in Ibn al-'Arabī's vision of the process of manifestation of the Essence. He speaks of two levels of effusion. The first, called the Most Holy Effusion (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*) or the Unseen Theophany (*al-tajallī al-ghaybī*), occurs

44. For a synthesis of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought we refer to William Chittick's studies on Ibn al-'Arabī, in particular, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge. Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989); idem, “Ibn al-'Arabī and his School”, op. cit., in particular pp. 72–9; idem, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994); idem, *The Self-Disclosure of God. Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1998).

inwardly, at the level of the Divine science, in which the Divine Names are manifested and the Eternal Ideas of all possible entities are present. The second, the Holy Effusion (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*) or the Visible Effusion (*al-fayḍ al-shahādī*), occurs outwardly, at the different levels of existence of the created beings (*mawjūdāt*) ranked in three levels of created existence. Although the same concepts are found in al-Farghānī's vision, the very term effusion (*fayḍ*) does not play any important role in his vocabulary and thought, being almost absent from his vocabulary. Al-Farghānī prefers to use other terms such as self-disclosure or self-manifestation (*tajallī*, *zuhūr*), which are also present in Ibn al-'Arabī's vocabulary.

**The ideas of the imagination (*al-khayāl*) and the isthmus (*al-barzakh*)**

In Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi vision the faculty of imagination (*khayāl*) plays a very important role, being the isthmus linking different levels of Reality. William Chittick considers it a central concept in Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi vision, particularly in linking the spiritual with corporeal worlds. On the contrary, in al-Farghānī's vocabulary the very term imagination is hardly mentioned. Also the concept of isthmus plays a manifold role in Ibn al-'Arabī's vision, being applied to many realities. Yet again, on the contrary, al-Farghānī reserves the term isthmus for some specific realities: the First and Second Manifestation, called in his text the First and Second Isthmus (*al-barzakhīyya al-ūlā wa-l-thāniyya*), the all-comprehensive reality of the Perfect Human Being (*al-insān al-kāmil*) and the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*). This last is also called the all-comprehensive isthmus (*al-barzakh al-jāmi'*). The term isthmus is not applied to other realities.<sup>45</sup>

45. For more about the differences between the two Sufis, see Chittick, "The Five Presences", pp. 109–16; idem, "Introduction" to Fakhruddin 'Iraqi, *Divine Flashes*, translated and introduced by William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (Classics of Western Spirituality, New York: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 3–32; idem, "Ibn al-'Arabī and his School", pp. 60–8; *The Sufi Path*, pp. 12–30, 112–43.



3.7.2. AL-FARGHĀNĪ AND AL-QŪNAWĪ

Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī was Ibn al-'Arabī's most prominent disciple and an outstanding leader of a Sufi school. He is credited with having reshaped in his lectures Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology in a more systematic way.<sup>46</sup> As has been said above, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī was al-Farghānī's spiritual master and the direct inspirer of his commentary. All this can account for the many similarities found in their Sufi vision. However, here also there can be found some points of difference between them.

**The idea of the Related Unity (*al-wāḥidiyya*)**

Also, in comparison with al-Qūnawī al-Farghānī went further in defining the name and functions of the Related Unity, as the Second Manifestation of the Essence. This level is clearly distinct from the Absolute Unity (*aḥadiyya*), though both are included in the First Level of Manifestation, the Oneness (*waḥdat*).<sup>47</sup>

**Al-Qūnawī's idea of the Five Presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-khamsa*)**

Al-Qūnawī summarized the whole realm of the manifestations of the Essence in "Five Divine Presences" (*ḥaḍarāt*), called also levels (*marātib*) or worlds ('*awālim*). This number was adopted by many of his followers.<sup>48</sup> In al-Qūnawī's vision the five presences are:

- (a) The Divine knowledge (*al-'ilm*)
- (b) The world of the Spirits (*arwāḥ*)
- (c) The world of the Images–Archetypes (*mithāl*)
- (d) The world of the Corporeal Bodies (*ajsād*)
- (e) The Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*)

46. W.C. Chittick, "Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī on the Oneness of Being" in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1981), 171–84; idem, "Ibn al-'Arabī and his School", pp. 54–7.

47. William Chittick remarks that: "The whole discussion of the First and Second Entifications, the various names by which each may be called, and the distinction between the two in the views of different Sufis is exceedingly complex. Al-Qūnawī himself does not discuss these points systematically in his works, but he does allude to them", in *Divine Flashes*, "Introduction", p. 30, n. 15.

48. Idem, "Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī on the Oneness of Being" pp. 173–5; idem, *Divine Flashes*, "Introduction", pp. 12–17, and p. 31, n. 31; idem, "The Five Divine Presences", pp. 112–18.

As shown above, al-Farghānī provides a more articulated pattern of the Presences, also called levels or worlds, fixing their number at six, instead of five.

From all this, one can assume that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought has been conveyed to his disciples not in a closed system of fixed concepts and terms, but in a somehow open pattern that underwent an amount of reshaping by them. Al-Farghānī also contributed to the development of Akbarian thought in an important way which has been recognized by many Sufi scholars.

### 3.8. Al-Farghānī’s Sufi Path: the Levels of Self-disclosures (*tajalliyāt*) and the Return (*al-rujū’*) to the Essence<sup>49</sup>

#### 3.8.1. THE JOURNEY (*SULŪK*) OF RETURN

In the last part of his Introduction, al-Farghānī describes the path of return (*rujū’*) of the human being, and in it of the whole created universe, to its First Origin. He starts by remarking that the human constitution (*mizāj insānī*), being the result of a long process of manifestation and the outcome of so many and different factors, is always in a fragile balance. In humans, the forces of the animal and vegetative nature can obscure the spiritual spirit (*rūḥ rūḥānī*) and the unified heart (*qalb waḥdānī*), except for some elected characters such as Muḥammad, the prophets and the saints. Because of his constitutional weakness, the human being is always in need of a radical self-reform (*iṣlāḥ al-nafs*), to be achieved through strenuous struggles (*mujāhadāt*) and strict discipline (*riyāḍāt*). By entering this path of reform, the human person becomes a spiritual traveller (*sālik*) in need both of a law (*shar’*), which shows him the path to follow, and of the direction of an experienced guide (*shaykh murshid*). This guide will be like a doctor (*ṭabīb*) who will cure (*‘ilāj*) the spiritual traveller from all his spiritual diseases and weaknesses.<sup>50</sup> In his description of this process of reform, al-Farghānī expounds the traditional Sufi teaching on the spiritual journey (*sulūk*) to perfection, a journey

49. *Madārik* I, pp.86–107.

50. *Madārik* I, pp.87–90.

that goes through a number of spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*).<sup>51</sup>

The whole spiritual journey is seen by al-Farghānī as a progression through three fundamental stages, already fixed by the Sufi tradition. These are: the station of Islam (*maqām al-islām*), based on the observance of the law; the station of faith (*maqām al-īmān*), based on the practice of asceticism (*zuhd*); the station of perfect goodness (*maqām al-iḥsān*), based on a vision leading to the very essence of *tawḥīd* (*al-mushāhada al-jādhība ilā 'ayn al-tawḥīd*).<sup>52</sup>

### 3.8.2. A RETURN THROUGH FOUR STAGES OF SELF-DISCLOSURES (*TAJALLIYĀT*)<sup>53</sup>

The journey of return to the Real is the reverse of the process of manifestation. If the manifestation was a movement of descent (*nuzūl*) from Oneness to the multiplicity, the return, correspondingly, must be a movement of ascent (*ṣu'ūd*, *'urūj*) from the multiplicity to Oneness. In the description of this process of return, al-Farghānī introduces some concepts and terms, which correspond to those used in the first part of his exposition and which constantly recur throughout his commentary. He speaks of four stages of self-disclosures, which constitute the movement of return.<sup>54</sup>

#### **The Level of the Outward Self-disclosure (*martabat al-tajallī al-zāhiri*)**

This self-disclosure happens at the level of the created beings, which are effects (*āthār*) of the creative act. At this level each being is always a veil (*ḥijāb*) that hinders the vision of the other beings. The spiritual traveller (*sālik*) lives in a continuously changing state, called by the Sufis "the station of variegation

51. *Madārik* I, pp.92–3.

52. *Madārik* I, pp.93–100. The three stages of *islām*, *īmān* and *iḥsān* are taken from the *hadith Jibrīl*, a very important hadith for Sufi teaching, mentioned in many official collections; see Wensinck, *Concordance* I, p. 476b.

53. To highlight the particular usage of the term *tajalliyāt* in this part of the Introduction I translate it here as 'self-disclosure', not as 'self-manifestation', as done before.

54. *Madārik* I, pp.95–105.

or inconsistency" (*maqām talwīn*), until, in a flash of intuition, he realizes the unity of all the manifest beings and discovers the all-comprehensiveness of the Divine Name of the Outward (*al-zāhir*), in which all beings are included as loci of its manifestation (*mazāhir*). Now his vision becomes fixed in the One who acts in all things. This is what is al-Farghānī calls "the contemplation of the unified Divine action of God" (*mushāhada fi'l Allāh al-wahdānī*), which encompasses and permeates everything. This is called also the self-disclosure of God's action (*al-tajallī al-fi'lī*). Now the love of the traveller, which in the state of inconsistency was scattered after many images and loci of beauty (*mazāhir al-ḥusn*), finds its unity in the contemplation of everything in the unity of the Divine creative act. The spiritual lover also realizes that God is the only real Beloved (*al-maḥbūb al-ḥaqīqī*) in every image of beauty that captures his love. In al-Farghānī's view, this stage is the starting point of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem. In fact, at the beginning of his *Tā'iyya*, Ibn al-Fāriḍ describes the face of his Beloved as a cup (*ka's*) from which he drinks the wine of love. Al-Farghānī interprets the cup as the locus of manifestation of the Divine beauty (*mazhar al-ḥusn*) and the wine as the Divine love (*qawhā al-maḥabbā*) which is poured out into the heart of the traveller through the contemplation of the one Divine act displayed in the multitude of beings.

### **The Level of the Inward Self-Disclosure (*martabat al-tajallī al-bāṭinī*)**

This self-disclosure is also called the Presence of the Divine Knowledge, because in it all beings are present in their knowable images (*ṣuwar 'ilmiyya*) and in their universal names (*al-asmā' al-kullīyya*). The Divine Names are the source of the true knowledge of all things and they all are unified in the Name of Inward (*bāṭin*). In the Divine knowledge all the sciences of the Unseen (*al-'ulūm al-ghaybiyya*) and all the Divine secrets (*al-asrār al-il-āhiyya*) are included. In this way, the multiplicity of the exterior world is brought to unity and the traveller passes from the state of inconsistency to the state of stability (*tamkīn*) in the unity of the Divine Names. Nevertheless, the traveller continues to live in a state of conflict, because the two aspects of reality, the outward

and the inward, are seen as contradictory, each of them being a veil for the other, and in the same way each Divine Name is a veil for the other Names. True stability can be only reached in a superior synthesis.

**The Level of the All-comprehensive Self-disclosure (*martabat al-tajallī al-jam'*)**

This self-disclosure is called the Presence of the perfect All-comprehensiveness (*ḥaḍra jam' al-jam'*) and "the distance of the two extremes of the bow" (*qāb al-qawsaynī*). At this level the limit and the opposition of the two previous orders, outward and inward (*zāhirī, baṭinī*), are overcome, the one being no longer a veil for the other. The outward and inward aspects are now unified and brought back to their original unity, which is the Related Unity (*al-wāḥidiyya*) of the Second Determination and the Second Isthmus (*al-ta'ayyun al-thānī wa-l-barzakhiyya al-thāniya*). Only a perfect (*kāmil*), all-comprehensive (*shāmil al-jam'iyya*) heart (*qalb*), which has reached the utmost degree of annihilation or passing away from self (*fanā'*), can reach this stage of unity. At this point, the annihilation becomes "the annihilation from the awareness of annihilation" (*fanā' 'an shuhūd al-fanā'*), in which the traveller does not keep any trace of self-awareness. Now the traveller reaches the utmost degree of stability, which is called "stability in inconsistency" (*al-tamkīn fī-l-talwīn*), because there is no longer opposition between the unity of the inward and the multiplicity of the outward aspects of reality. In the presence of the perfect all-comprehensiveness (*ḥaḍra jam' al-jam'*) the synthesis (*jam'*) of the opposite aspects of being is realized, as al-Farghānī says:

... the end comes back to the beginning to accomplish the circle (*dā'ira*) of manifestation ... so that it must be evident to all as knowledge (*'ilm*), vision (*'ayn*) and absolute certainty (*ḥaqq wa-ḥaqīqa*) that everything (*al-amr*) belongs to God. From Him it has its beginning and unto Him it finds its end: "Everything in fact will go back to Him" (Q. 11:123). He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward, the Knower of everything.<sup>55</sup>

55. *Madārik* I, p.104.

This stage of return corresponds to the Second Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-thānī*) or of the Related Unity (*wāḥidiyya*) in the movement of descent. Prophets and saints can only reach this degree, but above it lies the highest perfection of unity, reserved only for Muḥammad.

**The Level of the All-comprehensive Unity (*martabat al-aḥadiyya al-jam'iyya*)**

This level is also called the perfect, all-comprehensive self-disclosure of the Essence (*al-tajallī al-dhātī al-jam'ī al-kamālī*) or the awareness of all-comprehensiveness (*ṣaḥw al-jam'*); it corresponds to the level of Absolute Unity (*aḥadiyya*) of the First Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-awwal*). It is also designated as the Muḥammadan Station (*al-maqām al-muḥammadī*), because it is exclusive to the prophet Muḥammad, and is also designated as the station of the "nearest" (*aw adnā*), because it is the nearest level to the Divine Essence or the absolute Mystery. In it the two movements of Manifestation (*tajallī – jalā'*) and Self-vision (*istijlā'*) reach their utmost degree of realization. Beyond this level lies only the unfathomable abyss of the transcendent Essence and the ocean of the absolute Mystery. This supreme stage of unity is realized only in the most perfect human being, Muḥammad, because in him:

... was born a most pious, pure, unified (*aḥadī*) and all-comprehensive (*jam'ī*) heart, that of Muḥammad (*qalb aḥmadī*), which is the image of the very First Original Isthmus (*ṣūrat al-barzakhīyya al-ūlā al-aṣliyya*), in it the very First Manifestation (*al-tajallī al-awwal*) is manifested, which is the All-comprehensive Unity (*al-aḥadiyya al-jam'iyya*) of all the Names, the general and the particular, the original and the derived, those of the Essence and those of its Qualities.<sup>56</sup>

56. *Madārik* I, p.104.

### 3.9. The stages of the *Tā'iyyat* according to al-Farghānī's Introduction<sup>57</sup>

At the end of his Introduction al-Farghānī gives a synthesis of the main stages of the spiritual journey which, in his view, are described in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Tā'iyya*. Al-Farghānī is not always clear in his description, but one can follow his thinking when comparing what he says about Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi stages with what he had said above about the four self-disclosures of return. Al-Farghānī reads these four stages commenting on one of the most common hadiths in Sufi tradition, the *ḥadīth* "*kuntu sam'a-hu...*"<sup>58</sup>.

#### 3.9.1. THE STAGE OF LOVE (*AL-MAḤABBA*)

In al-Farghānī's view, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem is in the main a description of love in all its stages (*aṭwār*). Love is the first spiritual stage of the traveller (*sālik*) who realizes the first part of the hadith that says: "There is nothing dearer to me, which my servant can do to draw near to me, than his accomplishing the religious duties (*farā'id*) I have imposed on him. And if my servant continues to draw near to me by voluntary acts of devotion (*nawāfil*), I

57. *Madārik* I, pp.105–7.

58. The full text of the hadith is: "Whoever treats a friend-protégé (*walī*) of mine as an enemy, I will declare war on him. And there is nothing dearer to me, my servant can do to draw near to me, than his accomplishing the religious duties (*farā'id*) I have imposed on him. And if my servant continues to draw near to me by voluntary acts of devotion (*nawāfil*), I shall love him (*aḥbābtu-hu*); and when I love him, I shall be his ear (*kuntu sam'a-hu*) with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks me (anything), I will give it to him; and if he seeks protection from me, I will give it to him. And never do I hesitate in doing anything as (in taking) the soul of a faithful believer of mine (i.e., to make him die): since he hates death, and I hate to harm him, [however, he has no escape from it (= death)]", see Ibn 'Arabī, *Mishkāṭ al-anwār*, hadith 91 (translated as *Divine Sayings* [Oxford: Anqa, 2005], p.88 English and p.51 Arabic) and Wensinck, *Concordance* I, p. 408a (al-Bukhārī, *riqāq* 38); the text translated here is taken from W.A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1977), pp. 173–4. There are some variants in the reports of this hadith, see also the translation and comment in W.C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p.325.

shall love him (*aḥbabtu-hu*) ...” This stage corresponds to the outward self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-zāhirī*) described in the process of return.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.9.2. THE STAGE OF UNITY (*AL-TAWḤĪD*)

As a result of love comes the stage of unity, in which complete unity between the servant and his Lord is realized, following the same hadith that says: “... and when I love him, I shall be his ear (*kuntu sam‘a-hu*) with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks etc.”. This stage corresponds to the first stage of the inward self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-bāṭinī*) described in the process of return.

### 3.9.3. THE STAGE OF TRUE KNOWLEDGE (*AL-MA‘RIFA*)

From love and unity comes knowledge, which is achieved by the Lord Himself. It is through the knowledge of the Lord that the servant knows in complete self-annihilation, as the same hadith says: “... by Me he hears, by Me he sees and thinks ...” This stage corresponds to the second stage of the inward self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-bāṭinī*) described in the process of return.

### 3.9.4. THE STAGE OF PERFECT REALIZATION (*AL-KAMĀL WA-L-TAḤQĪQ*)

At this stage all contradictions are overcome in a universal comprehension, this stage has in fact the character of the all-comprehensiveness (*jam‘*) of all levels. This stage is proper to the perfect (*kummāl*) saints and the friends-vicegerents (*awliyā’ wa-khulafā’*) of God. This stage corresponds to the all-comprehensive self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-jam‘ī*) described in the process of return.

### 3.9.5. THE MUḤAMMADAN PRESENCE (*AL-ḤAḌRAT AL-MUḤAMMADIYYA*)

This is the highest and the most perfect stage (*martabat al-akmaliyya*) of return to unity, that is the Absolute Unity (*al-*

59. In the same context al-Farghānī distinguishes the three degrees of *maḥabba*: that at the level of acts (*fi‘liyya*), that at the level of qualities (*ṣifātiyya*) and that at the level of the Essence (*dhātiyya*). These three degrees are matched by al-Farghānī to the four self-disclosures of return.



*aḥadiyya*), beyond which there is nothing but the absolute Mystery of the transcendent Essence. This stage is exclusive to the Prophet Muḥammad, the Muḥammadan Presence (*al-ḥaḍrat al-muḥammadiyya*) that nobody else can reach. This stage is the highest level of unity, qualified as the level of the All-comprehensive Unity (*martabat al-aḥadiyyat al-jam'iyya*).

It was in this highest stage that, in al-Farghānī's view, Ibn al-Fāriḍ composed his poem. Al-Farghānī says:

... but he [Ibn al-Fāriḍ] has described those stages in general in a language (*lisān*) derived from the station of Muḥammad (*maqām muḥammadī*) which permeates (*sirāya*) by the All-comprehensiveness of his Unity (*aḥadiyya jam'iyyati-hi*) every order and every being.<sup>60</sup>

Al-Farghānī continues by saying that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's language is a "speaking on behalf" (*ḥikāya 'an*) and the "translation of" (*tarjumāniyya*) the station of Muḥammad (*maqām muḥammadī*). Such a statement implies that Ibn al-Fāriḍ translated into words the experience of the highest level of spiritual realization, which, as al-Farghānī repeats many times, is in itself the exclusive privilege of the Prophet Muḥammad.

In my research I reached a conclusion similar to that of al-Farghānī. I pointed out that at the end of his poem Ibn al-Fāriḍ claims to have reached the highest stage of proximity, indicated as the Eternal Light of Muḥammad (cf. vv. 751–2). However, I have emphasized that I reached such a conclusion through a systematic linguistic analysis of the poem, and not by projecting into it foreign ideas taken from other sources. One may notice in fact, that a lot of concepts, designations and terms used by al-Farghānī in his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems, are borrowed from Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi vision and vocabulary, and they remain, in my view, quite foreign to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's vocabulary.

In conclusion, one must again emphasize that al-Farghānī's Introduction remains a very important work, not only because it is a clear summary of his Sufi thought and that of his great master Ibn al-'Arabī. Moreover, al-Farghānī highlights in it a

60. *Madārik* I, p.107.

number of Sufi concepts and terms he uses in his interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem. One cannot possibly understand his Commentary without a good acquaintance with the vocabulary of his Introduction. For this reason I thought it useful to offer a detailed account of it.

#### 4. SOME REMARKS ON AL-FARGHĀNĪ'S COMMENTARY (*SHARḤ*)

##### 4.1. A General View

Al-Farghānī's Introduction (vol. I, pp. 1–107) is the starting point of his large Commentary which extends over 489 pages (vol. I, pp. 107–358; vol. II, pp. 1–238). Al-Farghānī does not mention the source of the poem text he uses. In my critical edition of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*, I have pointed to some affinities existing between his text and a group of texts that are linked in different ways with the tradition of Konya, related in the end to Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's Sufi school.<sup>61</sup> Besides, the actual printed text of the poem and its commentary are full of printing mistakes, and there is a need for a more accurate and critical edition of such an important work. On the whole, one has to acknowledge that al-Farghānī provides a remarkable explanation of every verse at the linguistic and at the Sufi level. He sometimes extends his explanations into a discussion of Sufi topics.

Al-Farghānī does not explicitly mention the sources of his thought, but these can be easily guessed from the names of some forty Sufis he mentions here and there in his text. Among them a special place is given to those whom al-Farghānī himself calls "our master and guide" (*shaykhu-nā wa-sayyidu-nā*), always mentioned with distinguished titles. They are:

- Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq al-Qūnawī (d.673/1274), called "Our master (*sayyidu-nā*), the perfect spiritual guide (*al-shaykh al-kāmil*), who has realized Reality (*muḥaqqiq*)" (vol. I: v. 69, p. 174; vol. II: v. 556, p. 104; v. 614, p.137).

61. *The Dīwān of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, op. cit. (English text), p. 18.

- Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (d.638/1240), called "The most perfect spiritual guide (*al-shaykh al-kāmil al-mukammal al-akmal*)" (vol. I: v. 69, p. 174; v. 191, p. 253; vol. II: v. 501, p. 219).
- Muḥammad Ibn al-Sakandānī al-Baghdādī, called "Our spiritual guide and master (*shaykhū-nā wa-sayyidu-nā*)" (vol. I: v. 189, p. 152).
- Najīb al-Dīn 'Alī Ibn Buzghush al-Shīrāzī, called "My spiritual guide and model (*shaykh-ī wa-quḍwat-ī*)" (vol. I: v. 240, p. 28; vol. II: v. 560, p. 109).
- Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d.632/1235), called "The head of all spiritual guides, the Junayd of his time (*shaykh al-shuyūkh, Junayd waqti-hi*)" (vol. II: v. 598, p. 130; v. 723, p. 202).

#### 4.2. Al-Farghānī's Partition of the *Tā'iyya*

Al-Farghānī does not provide a clear partition of the *Tā'iyya*, but from the titles of some sections one can have a general picture of it. This is based on the four journeys (*asfār*) the spiritual traveller goes through. These four journeys are matched to the four self-disclosures (*tajalliyāt*) of the process of return.

Such a division of the poem seems to me quite artificial and based on a vision prefixed without inquiring first about the internal structure of it. Nevertheless, al-Farghānī's commentary provides a lot of useful insights into his Sufi vision and into the cultural world of his time, which was still quite close to Ibn al-Fāriḍ. In our linguistic analysis of the poem we have divided the poem into ten major parts.<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.3. Al-Farghānī's Method of Interpreting *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*

Al-Farghānī interprets Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry according to his own vision expounded in his Introduction. In it one finds the key concepts of his interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great poem, *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*. The whole Reality or Being is seen by al-Farghānī as the manifestation of the unfathomable Mystery through two

62. G. Scattolin, *L'esperienza mistica*, vol. I, pp. 55–163.

basic movements, one coming from and the other going back to it:

- (a) **The first is the movement from the One to the Multiple, or from Oneness to multiplicity.** This movement is called the self-manifestation (*zuhūr, tajallī*) of the Divine Essence (*al-dhāt*) in its attributes (*ṣifāt*) and acts (*aʿāl*), and goes through six levels of self-manifestation.
- (b) **The second is the movement from the Multiple to the One, or from multiplicity to Oneness.** This movement is called return (*rujūʿ*) and self-vision (*istijlāʿ*), and goes through the four stages of self-disclosures (*tajalliyāt*).

On such a basic pattern of thought al-Farghānī builds his whole commentary and understanding of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's language and vision. Such an ontological pattern is based essentially on the Neoplatonic philosophy largely adopted by Muslim philosophers and Sufi thinkers like Ibn 'Arabī. It seems that al-Farghānī takes for granted that Ibn al-Fāriḍ has the same ontological vision and, on this presumption, he projects into the Faridian verses the Akbarian philosophy. Such a method is surely questionable.

#### 4.4. On al-Farghānī's Method

One can easily point out that in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's actual text there is very little of all that complicated ontological, cosmological and anthropological Sufi vision and elaborated terminology that is expounded in al-Farghānī's Introduction. Ibn al-Fāriḍ's pattern of thought seems to be on the whole rather simpler, based on lived experience rather than on theoretical speculation, though he does not ignore a number of Sufi technical terms. Thus one can point to a number of clear dissimilarities and similarities between Ibn al-Fāriḍ's text and al-Farghānī's commentary that should be taken into consideration.

##### 4.4.1. DISSIMILARITIES

Ibn al-Fāriḍ explicitly mentions only three basic stages of his mystical journey. I could assess this on the basis of an accurate semantic analysis of the poem. The three stages are expressly named by the poet himself, as:

- (a) **The stage of division (called *al-farq*)**, in which the poet experiences the separation from his Beloved. At this stage the erotic language is prevalent.
- (b) **The stage of absolute unity and identity (called *al-ittihād*)**, in which the poet experiences the absolute unity with his Beloved ending in self-identity, expressed in the formulas: "I am She (*anā iyyā-hā*)", "She is I" (*hiya iyyā-ya*), "I am My-self" (*anā iyyā-ya*).<sup>63</sup>
- (c) **The stage of universal union (called *al-jam'*)** in which the poet experiences the universal union, i.e. the merging of his own "Self" (*anā*) into the whole universe, in which the One and the Many are united.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ ignores all the complicated divisions and sub-divisions found in al-Farghānī's commentary and its philosophical vocabulary. In particular, the important technical expression, namely "The Level of the All-comprehensive Unity" (*martabat al-aḥadiyya al-jam'iyya*), a term which is at the centre of al-Farghānī's Sufi vision and continuously repeated in his commentary, representing in his view the highest stage of unity, never occurs as such in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetical vocabulary. The nearest concept to it could be that of the Muḥammadan Light (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*), which is alluded to at the end of the poem (vv. 751–2) and with which the poet clearly identifies himself. This notion is parallel to other Sufi concepts such as that of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) and of the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*), mentioned at length by al-Farghānī, but never mentioned as such by Ibn al-Fāriḍ in his text. In my analysis, I have shown that Ibn al-Fāriḍ hints at such a lofty reality only in two instances and only with two designations: *al-qutb* (the Pole) in vv. 500–1, and the *mufīḍ al-jam'* (the bestower of union) in v. 751 (which corresponds to the *mufīḍ al-asrār*, i.e. the bestower of spiritual powers, explicitly said of Muḥammad in v. 625). I have also pointed out that Ibn al-Fāriḍ clearly identifies himself with such a supreme Reality, but without providing any definition or explanation of such designations.<sup>64</sup> It seems that

63. It is interesting to note that the term *ittihād*, which surely is a key term in the *Tā'īyya*, never appears as such in al-Farghānī's vocabulary.

64. G. Scattolin, *L'esperienza mistica*, vol. II, pp. 407–24.

the poet took for granted that such terms were quite familiar to the Sufi circles he was addressing. In fact, the term “pole” (*qutb*) had a long history before Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and has been used since al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d.285/898) to designate the highest degree of sainthood (*walāya*), having its source in the so-called Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*). This was thought of as the “Islamic *Logos*”, that is the first manifestation of the Divine Essence, the eternal principle and goal of the whole creation, and the sum of all the Divine Qualities.<sup>65</sup> But Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s language proves to be, on the whole, quite alien to such a complicated terminology.

In conclusion one can say that, compared with Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetical language, al-Farghānī’s philosophical vocabulary appears to be quite artificial, and in many instances misleading and foreign to it, lacking the inspiration of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetry. In my semantic analysis, I have pointed out that even some technical terms, such as *wujūd* (existence), *rūḥ* (spirit), *nafs* (soul), *dhāt* (essence), which I called “pivotal terms” in the Faridian vocabulary, do not have the philosophical overtones they have in Ibn ‘Arabī’s vocabulary.

#### 4.4.2. SIMILARITIES

However, in spite of all these differences between the two Sufis’ visions and vocabulary, one finds also some similarities. Both visions are rooted in a common Sufi background and heritage, coming down from a long Sufi tradition and centred, in the end, on the concept of the Perfect Man. At the conclusion of my research, it appeared to me that the very notion of Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) must have had the deepest influence in shaping Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s mystical vision. Such a notion had already found full development in the Sufi literature by the sixth–seventh/twelfth–thirteenth centuries, and reached in Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy its most systematic exposition. The Perfect Man was seen as the ultimate goal of the Sufi path. It was thought of as the perfect image of God, the mirror of his Divine qualities, the supreme synthesis between the Divine Essence and its

65. G. Scattolin, *L’esperienza mistica*, vol. II, pp. 539–63.

manifestations, the comprehensive union of the opposites, the source, the model and purpose of all creation. In my analysis of the qualities of *anā* in the stage of *jam'*, which is the highest state of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's spiritual travel, I have pointed out many traits that are similar to those found in the idea of the Perfect Man in the contemporary Sufi literature. But at the same time, I have underlined the difference existing between Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetical and Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical vocabulary. One cannot consider, as has often been done in the past, Ibn al-Fāriḍ simply as a disciple of Ibn al-'Arabī, putting into poetry the latter's philosophical speculations. It appeared to me that Ibn al-Fāriḍ had his own particular and original Sufi experience and language, and should first be understood in his own terms.

In my view, both Sufi shaykhs, Ibn al-'Arabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ, must have drawn independently from a common background of ideas and terms, already well developed by their time in the Sufi circles. Yet each of them has edited such ideas in accordance with his particular personal experience (*tajriba*) and taste (*dhawq*). While Ibn 'Arabī and his school elaborated them in a systematic and philosophical way, Ibn al-Fāriḍ expressed them in a more experiential and poetical language. A direct dependence of Ibn al-Fāriḍ on Ibn 'Arabī seems improbable not only on historical grounds, as already established by some modern scholars, but also on the basis of the linguistic evidence, as my study intends to prove. In this way, one can account in a more reasonable way for both the similarities and dissimilarities existing between the two Sufis, doing justice, at the same time, to the peculiarities of each of them. On this basis, one can also account for the particular interest Ibn 'Arabī's school, starting with al-Qūnawī and al-Farghānī, always showed toward Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems. The two Sufis' experiences must have appeared quite similar, and the popularity of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems could have been considered by Ibn 'Arabī's school a very suitable means to propagate Akbarian ideas in Sufi circles.

#### 4.5. The Experience of *anā* (I, Myself), the Core of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi Experience<sup>66</sup>

At the end of my semantic analysis of the poem, it appeared to me that the experience of *anā* (I, Myself) must be considered the core of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi experience. In fact, the term *anā* appears to be the focus word of the whole poem, both at statistical and semantic levels. In such a vision, the poet's mystical travel takes the form of a transforming process of his own *anā* from the state of separation (*farq*) and limitation, to a new perception of his identity in the stage of unity-identity (*ittihād*), up to the highest awareness of his transcendent dimensions in the stage of the universal, all-comprehensive union (*jam'*). This is, in my view, the basic pattern of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience. Ibn al-Fāriḍ has surely been influenced by the contemporary idea of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), though he himself does not explicitly use such an expression. Thus the sources of his mystical experience should be found in a personal and deep assimilation of the contents of the concept of the Perfect Man. Through such a realization the poet came to the full awareness of having attained his most profound aspiration, the source of all mystical experience, i.e. the union with the Absolute. Having gone through all the stages of love, which leads the Sufi to the complete annihilation of his personal qualities (*fanā'*) to reach the permanence in the qualities of the Beloved (*baqā'*), the poet arrived at a new awareness. He found that his empirical *anā*, at the beginning of the path still in a stage of multiplicity and duality, has passed away in a pure transparency of the true, unique *anā*: the absolute One. At this point, the poet experiences such an absolute *anā* as the unique Centre of all qualities and movements in the whole universe. In this absolute *anā* he has now completely merged so that no traces are left of his previous, empirical *anā*. Now, in a new transparent and transcendent awareness, the poet realizes that whatever he says or does is done by that One and absolute Subject, the only Centre of all, the only One who can say, in Reality, *anā* (I, Myself). Having attained the Source of everything,

66. G. Scattolin, *L'esperienza mistica*, vol. II, pp. 564–81.



he finds that he is in everything and everything is in him, from him and to him.

This is, in my view, the final stage of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical path, and from there he tries to convey to his readers something of his lofty experience. His language is full of paradoxes, but this is, in his view, the unique way of communicating an experience which is in itself beyond words.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the end of the present exposition of al-Farghānī's Commentary, some general remarks can be made.

1. First of all, I hope to have achieved my main purpose of offering a faithful exposition of al-Farghānī's thought as he expressed it in his Commentary, known to be quite a difficult text. In spite of such "obscurity", al-Farghānī's Introduction has been held in great esteem and has had a profound influence on the history of Sufism. It has been praised as one of the clearest expositions of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought. Besides, al-Farghānī's Commentary comes at the head of a long chain of commentaries on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems, mainly produced by Ibn al-'Arabī's school, which remain a precious legacy in Sufi literature. Although I have expressed a number of critiques on al-Farghānī's way of interpreting Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry, I would not suggest that his work is without value. Al-Farghānī's Commentary represents a possible and legitimate "reading" of the Faridian text in the light of the Akbarian Sufi vision, without, however, pretending to express the "original Faridian mind". It is quite well known in hermeneutical sciences that a text continues to have "its own life" after the death of its composer and beyond his own purposes. Such was the case of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry in the Akbarian reading of it.

2. Al-Farghānī's commentary is in itself a very important Sufi work. It is one of the best testimonies of Ibn al-'Arabī's school of thought, known as the school of Sufi monism (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). This expression (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) does actually explicitly recur

in al-Farghānī's text, linked, however, with other concepts such as self-manifestation or self-disclosure (*zuhūr, tajallī*), which give it some important nuances. For some scholars, however, such a type of Sufism does away with the basic distinction between creatures and the transcendence and uniqueness of God, which is the fundamental dogma of Islam. On such a basis, Ibn al-'Arabī's school was sharply and vigorously condemned by many representatives of Islamic orthodox Sunnism. Also Ibn al-Fāriḍ, as understood in the light of the Akbarian school, has often been assimilated to it and to its condemnation. It seems to me, however, that al-Farghānī does not speak of an absolute, pure monism, as it is usually understood in Western thought. Al-Farghānī, and with him also the Akbarian school, is very careful in introducing into such a concept some subtle, but important, distinctions and considerations. This question should be reconsidered anew.

Moreover, as one of the best expressions of Akbarian thought, al-Farghānī's work has a great value for world spiritualities. It is well known that Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufism represents a very important link among many mystical experiences in the East and the West. The Japanese scholar Toshihiko Izutsu sees that Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi thought represents: "... an archetype of philosophical thought which has been expressed in different ways by the great philosophers of Eastern tradition".<sup>67</sup> Similarly, we can hope that al-Farghānī's synthesis of Akbarian thought will help with a better understanding of it.

3. But now, after all, a new approach to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry is surely needed, going beyond what has been done in the past. We now possess better tools for research and criticism, and I have dedicated some of my efforts to this end, going from the linguistic analysis of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's language to a critical edition of his text. Others, such as Thomas Emil Homerin, have delved

67. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Unicité de l'existence et création perpétuelle en mystique islamique* (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1980), p. 51; see also his bulky, *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism* (Tokyo: Keio Institute, 1966–7), 2 vols.; and Helmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), IV, pp. 601–11.

more into the historical field.<sup>68</sup> All such work should now produce a new and, one hopes, truer picture of Ibn al-Fārid's Sufi spiritual world, adding something new to our knowledge of the history of Sufism.

In the end, however, one should always be aware that when dealing with a mystical experience one has to cross over into the world of silence, the mystical silence, since a true experience of the Absolute can never be really and totally expressed in human words. Human words and linguistic expressions are perceived by mystics as just traces of, and pointers to, a Reality always transcending all human understanding and expression. For this reason, I concluded my first research on Ibn al-Fārid's Sufi experience with the reminder that:

Ultimately, however, in spite of all effort, one has to acknowledge that the Sufi poet took with him the secret of his mystical experience as he returned through the silence of death towards the mysterious sources of his mystical journey: that "Sea of love and friendship" and that "bounteous and unlimited Ocean", in which he found his true, real 'Self' (*anā*). He left us his poems to be read simply as traces (*āthār*) of a path to follow (*The Order of the Way*, this is in fact the meaning of one of the first titles of the poem) towards that transcendent and ultimate Reality in which he found his utmost fulfillment.<sup>69</sup>

In the end, we are simply called to follow his path towards that Reality.

68. Thomas Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Fārid, His Verse and His Shrine* (Columbia, USA: University of South Carolina Press, 1994; 2nd edn, Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001).

69. *The Dīwān of Ibn al-Fārid*, p. 11.

