The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam

Volume 1. The Prophet Between Doctrine, Literature and Arts: Historical Legacies and Their Unfolding

Edited by

Denis Gril
Stefan Reichmuth
Dilek Sarmis

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The Reality and Image of the Prophet according to the Theologian and Poet ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī

Samuela Pagani

Bright moons have spoken from darkest nights –
ʻTell those who burn with desire:
For all who love Muḥammad,
sleep is forbidden!ʼ

Qālat aqmāru al-dayājī – qul li-arbābi al-gharām
kullu man yaʿshaq Muḥammad – yanbaghī an lā-yanām[1]

On the night of 25 Shaʿbān 1324 (14 October 1906), the pious scholar, Ottoman poet, and judge Yūsuf ibn Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī, who was born in Palestine in 1265/1849 and died in Beirut in 1350/1932, saw ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, who had died two centuries before, in a dream; they had a pleasant conversation. The following morning Nabhānī had forgotten what they had discussed, but rejoiced nevertheless, because, he said, Nābulusī

> is one of the greatest gnostic saints and the imam of practising scholars. His way of bringing together (*jamʿ*) the sciences of the apparent and the hidden (*ʿulūm al-ẓāhir w-al-bāṭin*) is unmatched among all the authors I know of who, from his day to our own, have surpassed themselves in knowledge and gnosis. From him one can gain a great deal in all the sciences, especially those that concern religion (*dīn*), the unicity of God (*tawḥīd*), divine gnosis (*al-maʿrifa bi-llāh*), and the exaltation of the rank

1 *Muwashshaḥ* by Nābulusī, reproduced in Nabhānī, *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*, 4: 400. Heard on 4 November 2018 in Marrakech, at the concert to which the organisers of the conference invited its speakers. Many thanks to them.

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> (ʿuluww qadr) of the Lord of Messengers, may God bless him and bring him peace.[2]

In this passage, the "exaltation of the rank" of Muḥammad is presented as a domain of the religious sciences in its own right. At the beginning of the twentieth century Nabhānī published two monumental anthologies of prose texts and poems honouring the Prophet (*madāʾiḥ*), mostly by Mamluk and Ottoman authors who wrote in Arabic, but weren't necessarily Arabs.[3] Their variety gives the reader some idea of the importance of the veneration of the Prophet in the study of Islamic cultural and religious history during these periods. Nabhānī's anthologies invite us to rethink the historiographical categories and definitions of identity that have become standard in the contemporary period. The glorification of the Prophet defies all such divisions because it links theology and ritual, metaphysics and poetry, jurisprudence and Sufism, occurring in a wide variety of genres and registers, from erudite commentary to accounts of the miraculous birth of the Prophet (*mawlid*), from *qaṣāʾid* full of the figures of style prized by scholars to strophic poems (*muwashshaḥāt* and *mawāliyā*) sung at festivals and *dhikr* sessions.

Nābulusī, who lived in Damascus between 1050/1641 and 1143/1731, excelled in all of these genres, and features prominently in Nabhani's two anthologies.[4] A "gnostic" and poet, he was skilled both in speculation on the "reality" (*ḥaqīqa*) of Muḥammad, and in the poetic description of his "attributes" (*awṣāf*). His work is representative of the polemical issues raised by the veneration of Muḥammad, the vision of the world this veneration brought with it, and the practices centred on it. Nābulusī's engagement in these controversies provided Nabhānī with another reason to see him as an author who was still relevant. For Nabhānī, who was a civil servant of Ottoman justice during the Hamidian regime, promoting the cult of the Prophet also meant underlining one's support for the brand of Sunnī orthodoxy that was favoured by the state, against its reformist and Wahhabi opponents. Writing in 1909, he invites "Muslims" to read Nābulusī in order to be forearmed against the "infatuated ones" (*baʿḍ al-maftūnīn*) who spread the "innovations" of Ibn Taymiyya.[5] About fifteen years later, and still during Nabhānī's lifetime, the cemetery of al-Baqīʿ in Medina was destroyed by the Wahhabites after the Saudi conquest of the

2 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1231.

3 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil, al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*.

4 See the extracts from Nābulusī in Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 2: 685–702; 3: 1060–97 and 1214–32; 4: 1355–66; and Id. *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*, 1: 12–15, 26, 25–31, 484–85; 3: 162; 4: 151, 248, 361–78, 393–96, 400, 406–409.

5 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 3: 1221.

Ḥijāz in 1924–25. Nābulusī lived and died before Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb had begun his predication, but even in his day voices were raised to remind the faithful that the cult of Muḥammad's person was competing with the legalist conception of what the properly "Islamic" practice of Islam should be: that of a religion that has cut all ties with its "idolatrous" environment. The *mawlid* does not, in fact, celebrate the birth of Islam, but that of Muḥammad, who was God's well-beloved even before his encounter with the angel Gabriel and, indeed, from before his birth. Some people rejected the doctrine according to which the "Muḥammadan light" (*nūr muḥammadī*) was transmitted from Adam to Muḥammad by an uninterrupted line of pure beings, objecting that the Prophet's parents were mere idolaters. This debate, which has been well described and studied by Joseph Dreher, also called into question Ibn ʿArabī's *Fantastische Philosophie*[6] and the ritual of the *mawlid*, which celebrates the Prophet as well as his Arab ancestors and his mother, Āmina. In one of his *mawālīd*, Nābulusī calls Muḥammad's mother "luminous beauty" (*bahja nūrāniyya*), "preserved from all harm in this world and the next" (*min kull sūʾ fī al-dārayn āmina*).[7]

In Nābulusī's time we can find a direct attack on the veneration of the Prophet in the Arabic-language sermons of the Anatolian preacher Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Aqḥiṣārī (d. 1041/1631 or 1043/1634).[8] Drawing on Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, Aqḥiṣārī reminds his hearers that the ban on visiting tombs applies equally to the tomb of the Prophet.[9] He compares the veneration of tombs to the "idolatry" of "the people of the Book",[10] affirming that the rule (*ḥukm*) of Islam on the subject of mosques built over tombs is that they must be destroyed down to the ground (*an yanhadim kulluhā ḥattā yusāwā bi-l-arḍ*),[11] and mentions that the Caliph ʿUmar had the tree under which the Prophet received the pact of allegiance (*bayʿa*) cut down when he noticed that people were venerating it.[12]

Aqḥiṣārī was a Qadizadeli, and thus belonged to a current of opinion that Nābulusī would be confronting throughout his life. Iconoclastic attitudes such

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6 Dreher, "Polémique", 296. Dreher takes up Balic's definition in *Das unbekannte Bosnien,* 223.

7 Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 107. Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 3: 1063, reproduces the text of another *mawlid* in which Nābulusī recounts the legends of Āmina's pregnancy and Muḥammad's birth. For more on this theme, see Holmes Katz, *Birth*, 35–39, 54, 61, 169, 172.

8 Michot, *Against Smoking*.

9 Aqḥiṣārī, *Majālis*, 127 (*majlis* 17), 359 (*majlis* 57).

10 Aqḥiṣārī, *Majālis*, 127 (*majlis* 17).

11 Aqḥiṣārī, *Majālis*, 129.

12 Aqḥiṣārī, *Majālis*, 128.

as these, though rare at the time[13] – despite occasionally being exploited by those in power – spring from problems that go beyond questions of what is permitted or forbidden. I will leave juridical polemics in the background and concentrate on the aesthetic and literary dimensions of the presence of the Prophet in Nābulusī's work. This approach allows one to look deep into the impacts and effects of the veneration of the Prophet, especially as regards the place of the imagination in human experience. For Nābulusī the texts, objects, and rituals relating to the cult of the Prophet constitute a "patrimony" that is artistic as well as religious, and the defence of this patrimony must reflect deeply on the nature of the "Muḥammadan heritage" and the modes of its transmission and its appropriation, along with all the consequences these may imply for the conception of authority, and the relationship of Islam with the other "prophetic" religions, particularly Christianity.

1 Seeing the Prophet in a Dream

The best introduction to the study of the presence of the Prophet in Nābulusī's work may be through the theme of the dream-vision in which one encounters the Prophet. He writes of every aspect of such dream-visions, whether as experienced by ordinary believers or by accomplished mystics. He offers a general overview of the subject in his extensive dictionary on the interpretation of dreams (written in 1096/1685), which remained one of his most popular works and still enjoys a wide circulation today.[14] Nābulusī is not laying claim to originality in this book. He analyses the *ḥadīth*, "whoever sees me in a dream has really seen me" (*man raʾānī fī manāmihi fa-qad raʾānī ḥaqqan*), "whoever sees me in a dream will see me when awake" (*man raʾānī fī l-manām fa-sa-yarānī yaqẓatan*), using a slightly abridged transcription of Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī's commentary.[15] Nābulusī had already used an exact copy of this passage in a short treatise, still extant in manuscript form only, dated before 1089/1678.[16] This treatise is a *ḥilya*, a description of the physical and moral characteristics of the Prophet, made with the devotional aim of helping the

13 Heyberger, "Entre Byzance et Rome", 534: According to Catholic missionaries, Muslims were more respectful of holy images than were Huguenots.

14 Lory, *Le rêve*, 127–129.

15 Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *Ashraf al-wasāʾil*, 596–599; compare Nābulusī, *Taʿṭīr*, 2: 213–214. On the *aḥādīth* and their variants, see Lory, *Le rêve*, 46; on their interpretation, *ibid.*, 149–162. For the English translation of the canonical version see Muslim, *Sahīh*, 6, 123–124 (*k. al-ruʾyā* 10–11).

16 Nābulusī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ*, 6a–8b. On the date, see Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1, 119.

reader to visualise him. Nābulusī says in his introduction: "I translate in the clearest terms the descriptions of the Prophet transmitted by tradition in order that the believer may familiarise himself with his qualities (*awṣāf*) and depict his appearance in imagination (*yarsum shaklahu fī khayālihi*), in the hope of seeing him in a dream (*ʿasā yarāhu fī manāmihi*)." This descriptive section is followed by a discussion on the "truthfulness" of dreams in which the Prophet appears. The framing of this is significant: since the *ḥilya* is a verbal portrait based on the *ḥadīth*, that is to say on a description validated by eye-witnesses, it can serve as the basis for a vision identical with Muḥammad's historical appearance, thus inscribing such dreams within a practice of preserving memory. But the passage that interests us here provides a corrective to this idea: in fact, it contains a critique of the opinions of a group of scholars that includes Ibn Sīrīn, the "father" of Arab dream-interpretation, according to whom the appearance of the Prophet in a dream is only authentic if he manifests the traditionally-attested qualities. The contrary opinion, adopted by a current that became the majority, was formulated as follows by the Andalusian scholar Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148):

> The vision of the Prophet that conforms to his description as we know it is an apprehension (*idrāk*) of reality (*ḥaqīqa*), whereas, if he is seen in another form, this is the apprehension of an image (*mithāl*). Since the earth [in which they are buried] does not corrupt prophets, the apprehension of the noble person (*dhāt*) of the Prophet is a reality, whereas the apprehension of his attributes is an image. […] When the Prophet says: "whoever sees me in a dream has really seen me", this means that if that person saw him when awake he would find a perfect correspondence with what he had seen while dreaming. The waking vision is authentic and real (*ḥaqqan wa-ḥaqīqatan*), whereas the dreaming vision is authentic and representative (*ḥaqqan wa-tamthīlan*).[17]

While the first outlook sets the truthful dream against the untruthful dream, according to the criterion of the dream's conformity with the description transmitted by tradition, the second distinguishes between the "reality" (in its proper sense) of the vision of the Prophet's person (his *dhāt*), and the figurative representation of his qualities.

> It is exaggeration and foolishness – continues Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī – to say that we see our dreams with the eyes of our heads; according to

17 Nābulusī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ*, 6b; Nābulusī, *Taʿṭīr*, 2: 213.

> certain theologians, however, dreams are perceived by the eyes of the heart, and they are a kind of metaphor (*innahu ḍarb min al-majāz*).[18]

This position implies that the *mithāl* is accorded the status of figurative representation of reality. Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, who, during his travels in the Near East, had studied with al-Ghazālī, takes the same position on this point as the latter had; it is synthesised thus by Pierre Lory: "the vision of the Prophet cannot be that of his physical person, nor of his spirit or essence, but that of a representation in a symbolic mode of this spirit, and this representation is fully true."[19]

This distinction between the symbolic representation of Muḥammad and his actual being lies behind Nābulusī's approach to the much-debated question of the waking vision of the Prophet. Nābulusī several times declares that he believes those of his contemporaries who say they have had such visions,[20] but he never, as far as I know, laid claim to having had one himself. The intimate relationship with the Prophet of which he writes, in works destined for an audience of Sufis, is not described as a vision of his person, but as an existential experience. In his commentary on a prayer on the Prophet attributed to Ibn ʿArabī, he described "joining" (*iltiḥāq*) with Muḥammad as reaching his "incorruptible reality", which he identifies with the *barzakh*, "the isthmus". Initiates may enter into this latter, which is "the threshold between the servant and his lord", while they are still alive:

> This *barzakh*, he says, is the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*: anyone who voluntarily dies to this world and to his carnal soul, and realises the station of Islam (*maqām al-islām*), enters into this *barzakh* which is his reality (*ḥaqīqa*), that is, the reality from which he has been created, the light of Muḥammad that comes from the light of God (*alladhī min nūr Allāh*), since earthly life has not changed it in any way (*lam tughayyirhā al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*).[21]

In a similar way, at the beginning of a treatise addressed to his Sufi "brothers", he says: "May God pray on Muḥammad, thanks to whom, by the blessing of his

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18 Nābulusī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ*, 8a.

19 Lory, *Le rêve*, 150.

20 Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 378; Nābulusī, *Wird*, 106a–b; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3: 1162 (Nābulusī specifies here that sometimes the Muhammadan reality "is embodied in human shape": "*tujassadu fī haykal basharī*"). See also Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 3: 1066.

21 Nābulusī, *Wird*, 60 a-b. For more on this text, written in 1141/1729, see Gril "*Jawāhir*", 49; Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1: 233.

imitation (*barakat mutābaʿatihi*), God opens a little window (*kuwwa*) in the heart to the presence of the invisible (*ḥaḍrat al-ghayb*)."[22]

Here we can observe that the debate on the nature of the Prophet's image, which concerns both prayer and dreams, corresponds to the distinction between the two styles in which he is figuratively represented in miniatures, as studied by Christiane Gruber: the dream that conforms to the "transmitted description" corresponds to *memory images*, illustrations of episodes in the Prophet's life that are notable by their "verism", while the image of the Prophet as a reflection of his metaphysical reality corresponds to his symbolic representation as a figure of light.[23]

The symbolic dream has the same function as the icon: like the icon, it is not the "illustration" of a memory, but a reflection of an actual presence. The analogy between dream and icon is the opening theme of a famous essay by Pavel Florensky, a Russian orthodox theologian and coeval of Nabhānī, and a passionate defender of the aesthetic of the icon and its conceptual universe at a time and place when these were being swept away by the Soviet regime. For Florensky, every icon, even one that is "poorly executed", can be "a window on eternity", because "it *necessarily authenticates* perception of the world beyond the senses through an always *authentic* spiritual experience". Thus the copy of the prototypical icon has the same "spiritual content" as the original, "though it may be in a veiled, dimmed, or dulled medium".[24] In the same way, the Prophet, like the sun, can be seen at the same moment by many people, and his image varies according to the clarity or cloudiness of the heart that reflects it.[25] The Prophet, in other words, is the prototypical image of God that

22 Nābulusī, *Risāla*, 12a. This text is also transmitted under the title *al-Rusūkh fī maqām al-shuyūkh*; see Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1: 189.

23 Gruber, "Between logos", 229. For more on the opposition between "memory" and "presence", see Bettetini, *Contro le Immagini*, 101–102, 116–30. The question was already being asked in debates within Egyptian Monachism; see Camplani, "Il dibatitto sulla visione", 154.

24 Florensky, *Iconostasis*, 74. Later in the same passage, Florensky explains the relationship between the prototypical icon and its hand-made reproduction, as distinct from "mere servile mechanical reproduction", saying: "In a manuscript you write describing a country someone else has previously described in an earlier manuscript, you will see your own words and phrases in your very own handwriting; but the living basis of your manuscript is assuredly identical with that of the earlier one: the description of the country. Thus, the variations arising between successive copies of a prototypical icon indicate neither the illusory subjectivity of what is being depicted nor the arbitrariness of the icon-painting process but exactly the opposite: the living reality, which, remaining itself, nevertheless will appear with those variations that correspond to the spiritual life of the icon painter who seeks to comprehend that living reality".

25 Nābulusī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ*, 7b.

the dreamer copies within himself, and the "authenticity" of the copy does not depend on the exactitude of the reproduction.

In Nābulusī's work, the validation of symbolic dreams is connected to the defence of innovations in worship and a claim to spiritual authority conceived as a "Muḥammadan inheritance" (*wirātha muḥammadiyya*), accessible through a journey of individual transformation, without any need for the mediation of a formal hierarchy. These two levels are interdependent: it is as a "Muḥammadan inheritor" that Nābulusī allows himself to take a stand in the great and divisive debates of his time. In his dream-journal, he makes a detailed note of a dream-vision he had one night in the month of Rajab 1088/1677, in which the Prophet told him to speak publicly. He relates how, in this dream of investiture, he was at once himself and the Prophet.[26] The manuals of dream interpretation studied by Pierre Lory say that "for he who sees himself as the Prophet in a dream, this means that he will also pass through the trials that Muḥammad faced during his life."[27] In Nābulusī's case, these trials were the disapproval of his opponents, who resisted his "Muḥammadan" explications of the *sunna* and the *sharīʿa*: he completed his courageous treatise in defence of the *samāʿ* barely a month after having received this dream.[28]

As Pierre Lory indicates, the typological approach to the analysis of dreams contains traces of Christian Old Testament exegesis.[29] The typological method, which is also used in hagiography, offers a key to interpreting the individual's role in society. The "resemblance" between a saint and Muḥammad, and between the former and other prophets, takes on political implications once it is recognised by the saint's contemporaries. A considerable number of the dreams recorded in Nābulusī's journal are not his own but those of people around him who claim to have dreamed of him as the Prophet.[30]

2 Creative Imagination and Muḥammadan Inheritance

The tool Nābulusī uses to obtain public recognition is the written and spoken word. In the hagiography written about him at the beginning of the nineteenth century, his charisma relates to his power of persuasion, his ability to transform other people's "gaze" (*naẓar*), to bring out emotions, especially in his

26 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 441–442.
27 Lory, *Le rêve*, 152.
28 Compare Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1, 108.
29 Lory, *Le rêve*, 159.
30 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 470–71, 472, 477–78.

polemical writings that "fulfil the hearts of those who have the knowledge, and tighten the chests of the incredulous or oppressive ones."[31]

In spite of the effectiveness of Nābulusī's pamphlets defending controversial practices, or of the theoretical treatises in which he seeks to help readers understand Sufi metaphysics, it is in his poetry, through which he experiences spiritual "realities" and makes others experience them, that his way with words is most powerful. His hagiography shows us the role of the creative or poetic imagination in the "Muḥammadan inheritance" to which Nābulusī lays claim, saying that he had entered the "land of the sesame seed" (*arḍ al-simsima*); the author draws his description of this immense and marvellous "land" from Ibn ʿArabī, transcribing a long passage from the *Illuminations of Mecca* that was made famous by Henry Corbin.[32] This "land", that is identical with the "imaginal world" (*ʿālam al-khayāl*), is located in the *barzakh*. As we have seen, to reach this world is, for Nābulusī, to achieve union with the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*. Let us pause a moment to try to cast light on the relationship between language and imagination, before we examine the literary aspect of the veneration of the Prophet in Nābulusī's work.

The mediating function of this "isthmus" or "in-between world", which is the place where opposites meet, is shared by all the forces or faculties that enable the relationship between the earth and the heavens (such as angels) or between the intellect and the senses (such as the faculty for imagination); this also applies to relationships between two subjects, which are mediated by language. The definition of the imaginal world as "the world through which spirits are embodied, and bodies spiritualised",[33] does indeed also apply to the act of communication. Ibn ʿArabī defines *ʿibāra* ("expression") as the transfer of the imaginal representation (*khayāl*) of the soul from the speaker to the listener, by means of words.[34] He underlines that the term *taʿbīr* indicates both the expression through which the speaker gives a formal and materially supported consistency to an invisible meaning, and the interpretation through which the listener accomplishes the inverse process, translating the words into an inner image. This demonstrates that all language is metaphorical, requiring interpretation, and thus that the imagination has a "mighty rank" (*ʿiẓam rutbat al-khayāl*), because it controls (*ḥākim*) all knowledge.[35]

31 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 95.
32 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 515; see the translation of chapter 8 of the *Futūḥāt* (1, 126–131) in Corbin, *Corps spirituel*, 164–72 (English translation, 135–43).
33 Corbin, *Corps spirituel*, 109 (English translation, 84).
34 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3, 453–54.
35 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3, 454.

This passage from Ibn ʿArabī appears to be in dialogue with the Greco-Arab traditions of logic and philosophy. His definition of the term *taʿbīr* corresponds perfectly to the Greek *hermeneia*, which forms the title of Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*; this can be translated as "On Interpretation", or "On Expression", as in the ninth century Arabic translation (*fī l-ʿibāra*).[36] This definition of *taʿbīr* also corresponds to that of poetic discourse in Arabic commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, where this discourse is called *takhyīl*, and defined as: "the creation of mental images (*khayālāt*) by the poet for the 'imagination' (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) of the listener".[37] In the canon of Aristotle's works in late antiquity and then in the Islamic world, the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* were placed at the end of the *Organon*, the treatises on logic. For the *falāsifa*, poetic discourse is distinguished from logical propositions that are true, precisely because it engages the imaginative faculty, and thus contains an element of illusion. By extending the definition of poetic discourse to include all acts of communication, Ibn ʿArabī sets himself apart from the philosophical hierarchisation of discourse, but his attitude is not incompatible with a philosophical approach to rhetoric.[38] What he has to say about the power of the imagination recalls Averroes' words at the beginning of his commentary on the *Rhetoric*: like the other parts of logic, the science of rhetoric does not have a specific aim; it is a method, or instrument, that can be used in all the other sciences and is thus in some way associated with them.[39] According to Averroes, rhetoric and dialectics are to be distinguished from other aspects of logic, "since man does not use these two arts to converse with himself (*baynahu wa-bayna nafsihi*), as is the case for the art of demonstration, but uses them only with other people (*maʿa l-ghayr*)".[40] This definition also applies to poetry, not as *shiʿr*,

36 Compare the explanation of this double meaning of the Greek *hermeneia* by Grondin, *Introduction*, 20–21: "In 'expression' spirit, as it were, makes what is contained within knowable from without, whereas 'interpretation' tries to penetrate an uttered expression to see the spirit contained within it."

37 Heinrichs, "Introduction", 5.

38 See Lizzini, "Le langage de Dieu", 23: "Le modèle dualiste qui opposerait un langage non rhétorique et porteur de vérité à la langue des images et de la poésie semble incompatible avec la philosophie élaborée dans l'islam, qui doit pouvoir reconnaître la vérité (aussi) dans le langage rhétorique et poétique" ("The dualist model that opposes a non-rhetorical, truthful language and the language of images and poetry seems to be incompatible with the philosophy elaborated in Islam, which must be able (also) to recognise the truth in rhetorical and poetic language").

39 Averroès, *Commentaire*, 2, 1–2, par. 1.1.1. Thanks are due to Francesca Gorgoni for having brought this passage to my attention.

40 Averroes, *Commentaire*, 2, 1–2, par. 1.1.1.

which refers to an "intimate" discourse,[41] but as *naẓm*, a versified discourse. Among the "strange and marvellous" things that Ibn ʿArabī saw in the "land of the sesame seed" was a "vessel of stone" navigating a sea of sand. Claude Addas has pointed out that this apparently surrealist description is in fact a riddle, alluding to the classical ode (*qaṣīda*). Ibn ʿArabī brings about a double meaning by using technical terms from Arabic prosody in their concrete sense (for example, *baḥr*, which means both "sea" and "metre").[42] This fantastical metaphor is an example of *takhyīl*, in the specific sense that this term has had in Arabic criticism since the time of ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078 or 474/1081). Beatrice Gruendler defines it thus: "tropes with arresting fantastic features that purported to be true. They all shared the blurring of the borderline between reality and image and the interpenetration of these two planes with an illogical or fantastic effect, construed with logical tricks and figures of speech".[43] This manner characterises the "new style" (*badīʿ*) invented by poets from the beginning of the ʿAbbāsid period; through the same distinctive evolution, *badīʿ* moves to signify "rhetorical artifices". The imaginal world, in which, Ibn ʿArabī says, "a multitude of things exist which are rationally impossible",[44] is certainly a fitting locus for this "fantastic aesthetics". Ibn ʿArabī's approach is nevertheless quite distinct from that of a literary critic, such as Jurjānī, for whom this style perfectly demonstrates the maxim *khayr al-shiʿr akdhabuhu*, "the best poetry is that which 'lies' the most."[45] In fact, for mystical poetry the *takhyīl* tends rather to prove that it is possible to bring the real and the fictional together, and that this happens before our very eyes if we can perceive the invisible meanings of things by looking at them "subtly".

In the chapter in which Ibn ʿArabī defines the *taʿbīr*, he also explains that God reveals Himself to us through His Names and through similes (*ḍarb al-amthāl*), and through "the world of imagination", in order to establish a relationship with us: some people adore Him and never go beyond the form; other, less fortunate, people aspire to make the form into an abstraction, and the ones who are perfect unite the faith of the first with the intellect (*ʿaql*) of the latter.[46] Ibn ʿArabī's "literalism" sets him apart not only from philosophers but also from rationalist theologians.[47] In spite of this, he does not reject the analogy between rhetorical discourse and prophetic discourse,

41 Compare Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 1, 71: *al-shiʿr ḥadīth al-nafs fīmā tashʿur bihi min al-maʿānī.*
42 Addas, "Le vaisseau de pierre".
43 Gruendler, "Fantastic Aesthetics", 215; see also Heinrichs, "Introduction", 11.
44 Corbin, *Corps spirituel*, 166 (137 in English translation).
45 Heinrichs, "Introduction", 12.
46 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3, 450–451.
47 Chodkiewicz, *Océan*.

which is part of the philosophical reading of prophecy – but he does emphasise the loving intention behind the exteriorisation of divine discourse, which means that its ends can be achieved even through the "imaginative" faith of non-intellectual believers. Ibn ʿArabī's attitude is incompatible with al-Fārābī's political interpretation of prophecy, according to which the Prophet's rhetoric, like Plato's myth, serves to govern the masses who are incapable of knowing the truth … but it does have things in common with the more nuanced positions of Avicenna and Averroes.[48]

3 Poetry and *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*

As we shall shortly see, these knotty questions are at the heart of Nābulusī's reflections on poetry and *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*. Nābulusī puts his fantastical poetry in the service of veneration of the Prophet in his account of a journey to Palestine, *al-Ḥaḍra al-unsiyya fī l-riḥla al-qudsiyya*, "the presence of intimacy in the journey to the Holy Land". As Gracia López Anguita has observed, this title refers to the holiness of Jerusalem, and of Palestine in its entirety, as an "intimate" pendant to the holy places of the Ḥijāz; these holy spaces are both analogues – because the stages of the Palestinian itinerary are "comparable" to those of the Ḥijāz – and complements: Nābulusī says, speaking of the al-Aqṣā mosque, "God has looked at this mosque with the eye of Beauty, and at Mecca with the eye of Majesty."[49] Right from the beginning of his book, Nābulusī affirms and upholds the legitimacy of this pilgrimage, in response to the attacks of Ibn Taymiyya and other scholars on the religious merits of Jerusalem and its prophetic relics. When describing its culmination, the visit to the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-ṣakhra*), he examines the legends and polemics relating to the Prophet's footprint on the rock. Nābulusī first refutes sceptics in prose, presenting several arguments in support of the credibility of the account, which holds that when the Prophet was ascending from the earth the rock from which he rose melted with tenderness for him and sorrow at the parting. But the most important parts of Nābulusī's argument are expressed through poetry:

48 Ibn ʿArabī explicitly rejects al-Fārābī's position, without naming him, though he does mention the title of one of his books, in *Futūḥāt*, 3, 178. For more on this passage, see Rosenthal, "Ibn ʿArabī", 19; Brague, *La loi*, 299–300. On Avicenna's theory of the imagination, and his affinities with Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī: Michot, *Destinée*, 212–217. On the objections of Averroes to Plato's political philosophy: Leaman, *An Introduction*, 184–85. On Ibn ʿArabī's encounter with Averroes: Bashier, *Ibn al-ʿArabī's* Barzakh, 59–74.

49 López Anguita, "La *riḥla*", notes 38 and 53.

> Oh God's venerated boulder, the heart of love's slave does not stray from its passion for thee.
> Thou art a spirit emerging within my thoughts, a light embodied outwith mine eyes […]
> How tender, this rock, for one who knows its virtue, but for he who does not it is so hard!
> Oh subtle secret that appeared from the sky's zenith, like the sun shining from the horizon!
> Although eyes see it coarsely because in human language it has assumed the name of "rock".[50]

The footprint in the rock says it will function only if the pilgrim detaches himself from appearances, and from the obvious meanings of words, and understands that it is a veil, or a threshold, between the visible and the invisible. However, we must specify that Nābulusī does not see the "gnostic's" perception as qualitatively different from that of the ordinary believer: for example, in a *qaṣīda* composed in Medina on the subject of the Prophet's tomb, he lists the many inspirations that the mystic draws from it and also the healing that it brings to the ordinary devout people who are clinging to the fence.[51]

The transformative power of Nābulusī's gaze surpassed that of alchemists, according to his biographer, who recounts that a Maghribi who was passing through Damascus offered to teach him Art (*al-ṣanʿa*), but in reply Nābulusī asked him to look out the window: there the visitor saw Mount Qasiyun turn to gold before his very eyes.[52] In the journal he kept during his travels to Egypt, Nābulusī transcribes a fantastical comparison whose subtlety had struck him (*takhayyul laṭīf*), and then imitates it, with the addition of an alchemical theme:

> According to this model we have imagined the following unparalleled concept:
> When the sun sets and the waves are moving
> brighter than the stars does the sea glow,
> just as silver melted by the flame's heat

50 Nābulusī, *Ḥaḍra*, 121: *yā ṣakhrata llāhi l-muʿaẓẓamata llatī – qalbu al-mutayyami ʿan hawāhā mā fatī/ rūḥun taṣawwara fī bawāṭini khāṭirī – nūrun tajassada fī ẓawāhiri muqlatī* / […] *hiya ṣakhratun lānat li-ʿārifi faḍlihā – wa-qasat ʿalā l-juhhāli ablagha qaswatī* / *sirrun laṭīfun lāḥa min awji l-ʿulā – ka-l-shamsi fī l-āfāqi dhāti ashiʿʿatī* / *fa-hiya l-kathīfatu fī l-ʿuyūni li-annahā – aḍḥat tusammā fī l-warā bi-l-ṣakhratī.*

51 Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 334.

52 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 509.

the elixir flows over it
and the alchemic ingots turn into pure gold.[53]

The institutionalisation of the *mawlid* propelled the *madīḥ nabawī* to greater heights, and perhaps stimulated new reflections on the relationship between "technique" and "inspiration" in poetry. The growth of the genre is demonstrated by the fact that Būṣīrī's *Burda* (mantel ode) became a set text for those learning the art of rhetoric, and the fourteenth century saw the invention of the *badīʿiyya* sub-genre, consisting of imitations of the *Burda* in which each verse exemplifies at least one rhetorical artifice (*badīʿ*).[54] When he was twenty-five, Nābulusī composed a *badīʿiyya*, which marked his entry into literary society in Damascus.[55] Nābulusī followed this poem with an extensive commentary, which is consultable today thanks to Pierre Cachia's work: he has extracted 180 detailed definitions of figures of style from it. This text gives us some idea of the level of elaboration that the art and science of *badīʿ* had reached by Nābulusī's time. Cachia calls this book "a full exposition of the science [of the *badīʿ*] and of the aesthetic perceptions attending it at a significant juncture in cultural history",[56] that is to say, some time before the dawn of a new literary period which would (among other things) rid itself of the *badīʿ*.

Yet Nābulusī's most important *madāʾiḥ* are closer to love poetry (*ghazal*) than to the neo-classical *qaṣīda* in the style of Būṣīrī. These poems are collected in his *dīwān* entitled *Nafḥat al-qabūl fī midḥat al-rasūl* ("Breath of the Southern Wind in praise of the Messenger"); there are 29 of them – one for each letter of the alphabet – and each poem comprises fifty verses. Here Nābulusī's style has similarities to that of Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), whom he considered more eloquent than Būṣīrī; despite the latter's excellence in the art (*fann*) of describing the virtues of Muḥammad, Nābulusī believed that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was better at expressing how very indescribable these virtues are.[57] In the preface of this *dīwān*, Nābulusī underlines the fact that here he does not repeat any of the praises of the Prophet that he had previously composed, instead relying on

53 Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 218: *wa-takhayyalnā naḥnu min hādhā al-qabīl hādhā l-maʿnā lladhī laysa lahu mathīl*: *li-l-baḥri waqta ghurūbi l-shamsi wa-ḍṭarabat – amwājuhu rawnaqun yazhū ʿalā l-shuhubi | ka-fiḍḍatin taḥtahā l-nīrānu mūqadatun – ḥattā ghalat baʿda mā dhābat ʿalā l-lahabi | fa-darra min fawqihā l-iksīru fa-nqalabat – sabāʾiku l-kīmiyā min khāliṣi l-dhahabi.*

54 See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 70; Kilpatrick, "From *Literatur* to *Adab*", 214.

55 Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1, 156 (n. 150); see also *ibid.*, 141, (n. 127), 152 (n. 145).

56 Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 2.

57 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1071; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 1, 116.

his talent for improvisation (*aʿmaltu qarīḥatī fi naẓmihā irtijālan*).[58] The main themes of these poems are the declaration of passionate love (*ʿishq*) for the Prophet, ardent desire (*shawq*) for the *ziyāra* in Medina, and the invocation of help against his enemies. The lyrical "I" of love's slave (*mutayyam*), hated and misunderstood by his peers, is identified with the Prophet at the time when his people rejected him. The identification of the poet/lover's censor with the Sufi's adversary is one typical motif of the mystical *ghazal*.[59] In the framework of the *madīḥ*, this theme takes on a particular polemical power, putting the censor in the same category as Muḥammad's Qurayshī adversaries. In the *dīwān's* preface, Nābulusī says that the motive (*bāʿith*) of its composition is his gratitude for the "healing" of a sickness.[60] The fact that this is a conventional theme does not mean he was not sincere in advancing it. The affirmation in this preface of the unmeasurable distance between poets' praises of the Prophet and the inimitable praises for him found in the Qurʾān corresponds to the feeling of yearning brought forth in the poems by the absence of the Prophet. What's more, the Prophet's reality surpasses all beauty and the art of language cannot express it; in fact, the eloquence and clarity (*balāgha* and *faṣāḥa*) of language itself were created by his light.[61] These statements represent a sort of profession of *tanzīh*, of the un-bridgeable distance that separates the suffering poet from Muḥammad's original light, and his poems from the words of the Qurʾān. Like the "opaque" dream, the poetic description of Muḥammad tells us more about the value (*qadr*) of the person praising than it does about the one being praised.[62]

In his preface to his *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, a retrospective essay looking back over his entire poetic production, Nābulusī also informs us about the place of the *madīḥ* in his poetry. Here he enumerates the four poetic genres that he cultivated, comparing them to the four "gates" of Paradise, and to the four "corners" (*arkān*) of the Kaʿba.[63] These genres are, in order, mystical poetry, the *madīḥ nabawī* (represented by the *Nafḥat al-qabūl*), the praises of contemporaries, and erotic poetry (*ghazal*). Although the last three of these genres are distinct in function and object, especially the *madīḥ nabawī*, because it is addressed to those who follow the spiritual path, for Nābulusī the essential distinction is not

58 Nābulusī, *Nafḥat*, 7.

59 See, for example, Nicholson, *Studies*, 139 (on the subject of Ibn al-Fāriḍ). For an example of the identification with the rejected Prophet, drawn from Ottoman mystics of Nābulusī's day, see Dreher, "Polémique", 298.

60 Nābulusī, *Nafḥat*, 7.

61 Nābulusī, *Nafḥat*, 5–6.

62 Nābulusī, *Nafḥat*, 6.

63 Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 15–17.

between sacred and profane poetry, but between mystical poetry, expressed in the "language of union" (*lisān al-jamʿ*), and the three other genres, all expressed in the "language of separation" (*lisān al-farq*).

Thus the *madīḥ nabawī* belongs in the same group as the "profane" *madīḥ* and *ghazal*: all three are indirect expressions of reality because of their separation and distance from God. A single internal criterion is therefore more important than distinctions based on genre: the mystical poem is not necessarily distinguished from other poems by its formal qualities, but by the state of the poet while writing it. Nābulusī clarifies this point in two further texts: synthesising it in an autobiographical letter written in 1099/1687 to the Egyptian Sufi master Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn al-Bakrī al-Ṣiddīqī, in which he speaks of his "realisation of the station of inheritance" (*taḥqīq maqām al-wirātha*) at the end of his retreat,[64] and discussing it at length in his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*, a commentary that covers more than 2000 pages in its unabridged version, which was only published in 2017.[65] A mature work completed in 1123/1711, this commentary is also somewhat autobiographical: between the verses by Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Nābulusī paints the portrait of a theologian-poet exactly resembling himself.[66]

In these texts, unlike in the *Nafḥat al-qabūl*, the emphasis is not on distance, but on the resemblance between the Prophet and his heir. For his "heir", Muḥammad is not just an object of devotion. He is also the model of the transformative experience through which a compiler-epigon becomes an "author" himself. The many passages on "Muḥammadan inheritance" in Nābulusī's work illustrate his conception of the continuity of prophecy. He emphasises the ever-renewed descent of the divine word onto the heart of the saint who becomes capable of translating it into human language.[67] The "heir", as an author who speaks in the first person, and whose words flow directly from his heart, bears witness to the relevance of prophecy. He is not imitating a model from the past, but has become a new "locus of manifestation" of "Muḥammadan light".[68]

The "internal" similarity with the Prophet is the ultimate source of "authority". In his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Nābulusī often insists that the "psychic 'I'" (*nafsānī*) of the poet has become a *rabbānī* "I"; the adjective is derived from the word *rabb*, meaning lord or master. In the Qurʾān, this term relates to teaching and to study (Q 3:79), and it is also related to the verb *rabbā* (to make [people] grow, to raise), from which we get the verbal noun *tarbiya* (education).

64 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 399–408.

65 Nābulusī, *Kashf*.

66 See the fine analysis by Homerin, "On the Battleground". Most of the extracts from Nābulusī in Nabhānī's *Faḍāʾil* come from this text.

67 Nābulusī, *Ḥāmil*, §§ 55–58; Gril, "*Jawāhir*".

68 Nābulusī, *Natīja*, question 1. See also *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 2, 34.

These meanings are semantically close to the Latin terms *auctor* and *auctoritas* (derived from *augeo*). As Hannah Arendt has shown, the function of *auctoritas* in Latin culture is precisely that of constantly "augmenting" the tradition established by the founders; it is incompatible with the violence that is the prerogative of power (*potestas*).[69] For Nābulusī, religion springs from this domain of authority (*auctoritas*), rather than from power, and it must be imposed by the word, without recourse to force or constraints.[70]

The "heir" also resembles the Prophet outwardly, in his way of speaking. The Prophet and the "heir" both address their "people" (*qawm*) in the people's own language, translating divine speech (*kalām*) into a figurative language communicating through that which is "other" than God. Nābulusī calls this language *lisān al-ghayr* and *lisān al-siwā*, and also the "language of separation" (*lisān al-farq*), distinguishing it from the "language of union" (*lisān al-jamʿ*). Thus the first three terms refer to the consciousness of the separation between subject and object, between God and the world.[71] Using an expression that recalls the philosophical interpretation of prophecy, Nābulusī says that prophets guide people by "wrapping the things [of this world] in symbols from the imagination" (*labisū tamāthīla l-khayāl ʿalā al-siwā*).[72] This figurative language is not "poetry", but, because of its formal aspects, it is associated (*ishtaraka*) with poetry, and therefore its true nature risks being misunderstood.[73] In the same way that the Prophet was not a poet, the poetry of his "heirs" is not poetry, but a form of inspired discourse.[74]

69 Arendt, "What is authority", 120–22.

70 Pagani, "Défendre", 322.

71 Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 10–11; compare Ghazzī, *Wird*, 408. This distinction corresponds to that between the Qurʾān and the *Furqān*. Elsewhere (*Kashf*, 2, 744), Nābulusī says that the former is God's "interior discourse" (*al-kalām al-nafsī*), which does not belong to the genre of letters and sounds. The *Furqān*, on the other hand, is the descent of this discourse "through our letters, our words, our meanings". Among human beings there is also an interior language (*nuṭq*) ("the discourse and the meanings that we conceive in our souls through imaginative power") and a proffered language (*al-nuṭq al-lafẓī al-lisānī bi-al-mādda al-hawāʾiyya*). Compare the Stoic's distinction between *logos endiathetos* and *logos prophorikos*: Grondin, *Introduction*, 21. For more on this distinction in the *uṣūl al-fiqh*, see Weiss, *Search*, 68: "The Qurʾān is the internal speech (*al-kalām al-nafsī*) of God embodied in a phonic speech (*al-kalām al-lisānī*) which is of God's own making. [...] In the case of the *sunna*, the internal speech of God comes to be embodied in a phonic speech or in acts and endorsements that are of the Prophet's making".

72 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 399.

73 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 407–408; Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 13.

74 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 407–408; Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 13; 2, 134 (*wa mā anā shāʿir wa-jamīʿ naẓmī baʿīd ʿan madā shiʿr al-mughannī*); Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 1, 71, 132, 136–137. See also Homerin, "On the Battleground", 408; Addas, "Le vaisseau'".

Nābulusī applies this idea throughout his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ: it is because Ibn al-Fāriḍ is a *rabbānī* poet that the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* speaks in the first person in his mystical poetry, or speaks "with his tongue" in his seemingly profane *ghazal*.[75] In one remarkable passage, he describes the spiritual and poetic itinerary of Ibn al-Fāriḍ as a circular path: in the first phase, when the poet, through his perspicacity (*baṣīra*), discovers that the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* is the source of light, his tongue is untied (*yanṭaliqu lisānuhu*) "and he composes figurative poetry (*al-shiʿr al-badīʿ*) according to his mastery of the poetic arts and literary sciences (*ʿalā ḥasab mā ʿindahu min maʿrifat al-ṣināʿa al-shiʿriyya wa-l-ʿulūm al-adabiyya*) [...], even if his discourse should be called a divine science rather than poetry". Then, when he passes into the state of annihilation (*fanāʾ*), his discourse separates itself from him (*yanqaṭiʿu minhu al-kalām*) and he openly proclaims the union (*ittiḥād*) with God, believing himself to have passed the stage of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*. But once he becomes settled in this station, he discovers that it does, in fact, belong to the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*, to the facet of it that is turned towards absolute unity, called *ḥaqīqa aḥmadiyya* by Nābulusī. At this point, and henceforth conscious that love for Muḥammad and love for the true being (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*) are one and the same, speech returns to him (*yarjiʿu kalāmuhu*), and he begins once again to compose erotic poetry and celebrate the beauty of the apprehensible world, as he had at the beginning, except that now the person speaking is the only true speaker.[76] This means that when the poet expresses his passion for the beautiful faces of boys or girls, even if this passion resembles that of a lover put to the test by "the love of images" (*ʿishq al-ṣuwar*), the source and goal of his words is always the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*.[77]

Essentially, understanding the nature of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* means grasping the continuity or co-existence of "subtlety" and "density", of the spirit and the body. This means that "reality" can be perceived by the five senses, as it can be perceived by spiritual intuition.[78] In fact, Muḥammad is the principle within which the spirit and the light, the two ways of exteriorising the invisible, join together.[79] Nābulusī sometimes describes "Muḥammadan light" as the "primal matter" (*mādda hayūlāniyya*)[80] from which God, as demiurge

75 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1075–1076; 1080–82.
76 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1092–1094; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 833–834 (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 334).
77 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1094–97; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 835–36 (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 335).
78 Homerin, "On the Battleground", 385–86. Nābulusī also comments on the verses translated by Homerin, in *Wird*, 13a–b.
79 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2: 831–832; Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1091–92 (Ibn al-Fārid, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 333).
80 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3, 1162.

(*ṣāniʿ*), fashioned the world;[81] the clay from which Adam's body was made also comes from the flow (*fayḍ*) of this luminous material.[82] Importantly, the body's "luminous" origin means that the original legal assessment of all things is "indifference" (*al-aṣl fī l-ashyāʾ al-ibāḥa*), while any interdiction is secondary or accidental.[83] This principle is the basis for the defence of listening to music, and of the "gaze", and also fits in with the *malāma*, "avoiding distinguishing oneself from the common believers", and refraining from avoiding (for fear of scandal, for example) the company of "people who are lost and corrupt" (*ahl al-ḍalāl wa-al-fasād*).[84]

The positive nature of the body also means that the entire human being, spirit, soul and body, is made in God's image, and therefore sacred, even if the individual is not a saint. Of course, this applies to Muḥammad, the archetype,[85] but in fact it applies to every human being, which implies that one must adopt every recourse available in law in order to avoid bloodshed. Ibn ʿArabī affirms this in the chapter on Jonas in the book "The Bezels of Wisdom". Nābulusī's commentary on this passage underlines the fact that the lieutenancy of God generally belongs to all human beings (*khilāfa ʿāmma*), and not only to those who exert inner spiritual authority or external worldly power.[86]

It could be said that in some ways artists exercise this "lieutenancy" in the external domain, because they partake of God's "creativity". Ibn al-Fāriḍ himself suggests this in the two groups of verses that follow – the first of these concerns Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, the summit of the prose *badīʿ*:

> My coining parables for thee time after time concerning my state is a favour from me to thee.

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81 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 832; Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1091–92.

82 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1088–89; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 812 (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 313). This idea had been formulated as early as the ninth century by Sahl Tustarī: see Holmes Katz, *Birth*, 14.

83 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1088–89; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 812.

84 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 563 (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 80).

85 Nābulusī, *Jawāhir*, 309: Ibn ʿArabī says that Muḥammad is "triple" (*muthallath al-nashʾ*) because his constitution is based on three principles, *wa-huwa al-haykal al-sharīf alladhī ẓāhiruhu jismānī wa-bāṭinuhu rūḥānī wa-barzakhuhu nafsānī, wa-kull wāḥid min al-thalātha allatī fīhi ʿayn al-ākhar min wajh wa-ghayruhu min wajh*.

86 Nābulusī, *Jawāhir*, 2: 190. "Anthropomorphite" monks of the fourth and fifth centuries also believed that all men carry the imprint of God's image within their physical forms: see Camplani, "Il dibattito sulla visione", 161. Like Ibn ʿArabī and Nābulusī, they drew important legal and ethical conclusions from this belief: Del Cogliano, "Situating Serapion's Sorrow", 404.

> Consider the *Maqāmāt* of the Sarūjite and draw a lesson from his variety (of disguise) […].
> And thou wilt perceive that the soul in whatever form and shape she appears, inwardly masks herself in sensation;
> And if his (Ḥarīrī's) work is fiction, yet the Truth makes of it a parable.[87]

The second group of verses concerns shadow-theatre:

> And beware of turning thy back on every tinselled form or unreal and fantastic case;
> For in the sleep of illusion the apparition of the shadow-phantom brings thee to that which is shown through the thin (semi-transparent) curtains.[88]

On the subject of these latter verses Nābulusī says that all these things are "examples and parables forged for you, by the creative action that God realises through human hands" (*ʿibar wa-amthāl maḍrūba laka bi-khalq Allāh taʿālā ʿala aydī al-nās*).[89] Ibn ʿArabī remarks that human creations spring from the divine Names: the Name *al-Badīʿ* (the Originator) corresponds to the man who "has invented [something] within himself, then made it appear";[90] from the Name *al-Bārī* (the Creator) "derives the inspiration for painters in bringing beauty and proper harmony to their pictures".[91]

In his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Nābulusī wants to create an original work: in fact, he proposes to fuse the two distinct readings that men of letters

87 Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, vv. 655–58 (trans. Nicholson, *Studies*, 200), in Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3, 1172. *Wa-ḍarbī laka l-amthāla minnīya minnatun – ʿalayka bi-shaʾnī marratan baʿda marratī / taʾammal maqāmāti l-Sarūjiyyi wa-ʿtabir – bi-talwīnihi* […] / *wa-tadrī ltibāsa l-nafsi bi-l-ḥissi bāṭinan – bi-maẓharihā fī kulli shaklin wa-ṣūratī / Wa-fī qawlihī in māna fa-l-ḥaqqu ḍāribun – bihī mathalan* […]. Nābulusī mentions elsewhere that the Egyptian scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī was asked for his legal opinion on whether a person who says that Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* are lies should be declared an infidel because in so doing he would ridicule knowledge (*li-istihzāʾihi bi-l-ʿilm*): Nābulusī, *al-ʿUqūd*, 24.

88 Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, vv. 679–80 (trans. Nicholson, *Studies*, 202), in Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3, 1187f.: *wa-iyyāka wa-l-iʿrāḍu ʿan kulli ṣūratin – mumawwahatin aw ḥālatin mustaḥīlati / fa-ṭayfu khayāli l-ẓilli yuhdī ilayka fī – karā al-lahwi mā ʿanhu al-satāʾiru shaffati*. The symbolic interpretation of the shadow theatre has been further taken up by one of Nābulusī's disciples: see Aladdin, "ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī", 43f., referring to Baytamānī, *Kashf al-asrār* fol. 281a. On this manuscript, see Māliḥ, *Fihris*, 2, 503f.

89 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3, 1188.

90 Abdel-Hadi, "Unexplored Concepts", 73, translation of Chapter 558 of the *Futūḥāt*.

91 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2, 424, translated in Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier*, 7. On this passage from the *Futūḥāt* see further Puerta Vílchez, *Aesthetics*, 814.

and "Akbarians" have of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry, while avoiding the excessively technical elements of either group's approach.[92] Nābulusī's accessible and discursive style is closer to the *adab* than to the *ʿirfān*.[93] As Denis Gril has said, Nābulusī has a place of his own in the tradition of interpreters of Ibn ʿArabī, who are mostly of Persian culture and have a more philosophical style. Not only are Nābulusī's explanations addressed to a non-specialised audience, but his commentaries include many personal touches that allow the reader to glimpse his originality and the things he holds dearest.[94]

Two of Denis Gril's comments are particularly interesting for our purposes. The first has to do with terminology: alongside *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*, a technical term from Ibn ʿArabī, Nābulusī also often uses the older term *nūr muḥammadī*, an indicator of his preference for a language that is closer to the *ḥadīth*. The second of Gril's insights is stylistic: in order to explain the expression "word of God", Nābulusī compares the utterance of the divine verb with the human act of language, thus emphasising the physical dimension of this process.

It could be said that interest in the "form" of revelation, the letter, body of the word, is one aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching to which Nābulusī pays more attention than do Persian commentators. In doing so, he aligns himself not only with the "Arabic" poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, but with the "realism" of traditional exegesis, which is linked to a belief in the representability of God in human form, and to the identification of the Qurʾān with the word of God. This proximity goes beyond the literary: in Damascus, Nābulusī frequented the Hanbali circles of the Ṣāliḥiyya quarter, among which a pietist tradition that was open to Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism had been cultivated since the beginning of the Ottoman period.[95] This is not surprising: the Hanbali refusal of the rationalist allegorisation of the figurative expressions in the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* is not incompatible with a symbolic and mystical interpretation, and in fact this outlook encouraged the early rapprochement between religion and love poetry in devout traditionalist circles.[96] This form of devotion, common

92 Homerin, "On the Battleground", 359–60.

93 See, as a contrast, Scattolin, "The Key Concepts", 78–79.

94 Gril, "*Jawāhir*".

95 El-Rouayheb, *Intellectual History*, 262–264, 285–294; Voll, "ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī", 195–209.

96 Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, 379–430. More recently, Williams, in "A Body Unlike Bodies", 44, underlined that classical Sunnī traditionalism is not iconoclastic, but exists in continuity with the "transcendent anthropomorphism" of the Bible, the Near East, and the Qurʾān. In addition, Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law*, 503–508, compares the controversies between Sunnīs and their Jahmite and Muʿtazilite adversaries with those between Byzantine iconophiles and iconoclasts during the same period.

to Sufis and medieval Hanbalis, has been accused of anthropomorphism and resemblances with Christianity.[97] Since I have alluded several times to the conceptual affinities between the cult of icons and the veneration of the Prophet, I will now expand on this point. The defenders of icons were obliged to prove to their adversaries that the image of Christ could be venerated in a material support – the wood of the icons or the bodies of living saints – without this support being made divine in itself. The first formulation in Arabic of these arguments can be found in the treatise on the subject by the bishop of Ḥarrān, Theodor Abū Qurra (c. 755–830), who was active in the movement to translate Greek philosophy into Arabic. His demonstration has a typological argument at its heart: Christian exegesis considers the anthropomorphic descriptions of God by the prophets of the Old Testament to be prefigurations of the incarnation of the Word. Therefore, before the incarnation these descriptions are authentic "images" of the eternal model. In the same way, icons and saints are "images" of the model after the incarnation.[98] This equivalence is based on a metaphorical conception of language, perhaps inspired by the *Peri hermeneias*: Abu Qurra says that names and "images" (*ṣuwar*), have the same signifying function[99] – in fact:

> written names are symbols (*ashbāh*) and images (*aṣnām*) of sounds (*alfāẓ*), and these latter are symbols of imagined figures (*ashbāh al-awhām*), and these imaginations (*awhām*) are symbols of things (*ashbāh al-ashyāʾ*), as the *falsafa* [var.: *al-falāsifa*] affirm.[100]

By the term *ṣūra* Abū Qurra indicates at once the "types" of Christ in the Old Testament and icons. Indeed, in Greek, *eikon* is often used as a synonym for *typos*, and Latin retains this synonymy, translating *typos* as *figura*.[101] According to Frances Young, the exegesis of the school of Antioch should be called "iconic" rather than "typological", in order to highlight the fact that it does

97 Compare the quotation from Jāḥiẓ in Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice*, 205 and 275, note 323; see also Holtzman, "Anthropomorphism", 53b.

98 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 5, 11, 21. Abū Qurra refers in particular to the vision of the throne of Ezekiel (5: 12; 11: 30–37), which has fed both Christian and Jewish mysticism. This vision is recalled in the *Kitāb al-Zuhd* by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, in a tradition by Wahb ibn Munabbih, according to which God says to Ezekiel: "The fearful and tender heart of the believer contains me" (*wasiʿanī qalb al-muʾmin al-wāriʿ al-layyin*). See https://library.tebyan.net/fa/Viewer/Text/136381/80 (text online from Qom edition: Mu'assasat tibyān, 1387).

99 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 12, 2.

100 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 12, 18. Compare Aristote, *De l'interprétation* 1 (16a), trans. Tricot, 78–79.

101 Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 192.

not limit itself to establishing correspondences between the Old and the New Testaments, but constitutes a hermeneutic key to revelation and nature: the "contemplation" (*theoria*) that it encourages is distinguished from Alexandrine allegorism because it focuses on singular examples rather than on philosophical concepts.[102] What's more, Abū Qurra's treatise demonstrates how this iconic or figural approach relates to hagiography. The way he conceives the "presence" of the archetype in the prophets and saints is very close to the Prophetic model of sainthood in Islam, in which the "reality" of Muḥammad is the source of sainthood, and is reflected in the prophets who preceded his full earthly manifestation and in the saints that came after it.[103] On the one hand, this concept implies that earlier prophets retain an exemplary function for saints, and on the other that the advent of the "supreme form" (*ṣūra ʿaẓīma*)[104] of God does not bring the believer's personal relationship with God to an end, but rather reinforces it by mediating it.

It is true that Nābulusī, in a *mawlid*, says of Muḥammad: "he destroys churches, synagogues, hermitages, and abrogates all other laws".[105] But elsewhere he specifies that even if Muḥammad has abrogated all other religions, "he only abrogated them with respect to legal acts. As for professions of faith, he did not use abrogation on them".[106] This passage occurs within a commentary on a poem by the Andalusian Sufi Shushtarī (d. 668/1269), in which Nābulusī justifies the use of Christian symbols and terms in Sufi poetry; icons are notable among the symbols he mentions. In the introduction to this treatise, he synthesises the ideas laid out by Ibn ʿArabī in Chapter 36 of the *Futūḥāt*, about the Muslim saints who follow Jesus's model (*ʿīsāwiyyūn*). This chapter contains a passage on the "doctrine of images" (*al-qawl bi-l-ṣūra*), the importance of which has been revealed in detail by Michel Chodkiewicz.[107] In a commentary on Shushtarī's verse "They shall give thee the key of the church in which their monks have painted Jesus figuratively" (*wa-aʿṭawka miftāḥa al-kanīsati wa-llatī – bihā ṣawwarat ʿĪsā rahābīnuhum shaklan*) Nābulusī tackles the subject:

> They shall make thee understand the images in which divine reality is made manifest to them in their spirits (*afhamūka al-ṣuwar allatī fī nufūsihim taẓhar lahum fīhā al-ḥaqīqa al-ilāhiyya*): they declared its

102 Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 192–201.
103 Chodkiewicz, "Le modèle prophétique".
104 Compare Nābulusī, *Jawāhir*, 308.
105 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1063.
106 Urvoy, "Les thèmes chrétiens", 108; Nābulusī, *Radd*, 632–633.
107 Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, 97–98. See further: Abdel-Hadi, "Unexplored Concepts".

> transcendence (*yunazzihūnahā*) by virtue (*bi-ḥukm*) of "There is nothing that resembles Him" (Q 42:11), and they declare its resemblance (*yushabbihūnahā*) by virtue of "And He is the hearer, the clairvoyant" (Q 42:11). This is similitude according to the Law (*al-tashbīh al-sharʿī*), that which brings the meaning that God [alone] knows (*alladhī warada bi-l-maʿnā alladhī yaʿlamuhu Allāh*). For on this subject He has said that He has one face, by his own Word: "Wherever thou turnest, the face of God is still there" (Q 2:115), and that He has one hand, by his own word: "The hand of God is above their hands" (Q 48:10), and other, similar, expressions, whereas, in all this, declaring His transcendence (*tanzīh*) is necessary. Comparable ambiguous (*mutashābih*) expressions can be found in the Gospels.[108]

In other words, the "key" to understanding icons is the symbolic exegesis of the Qurʾān's verses on "resemblance". Through this equivalence between the veneration of icons and the contemplation of the figurative expressions in the Qurʾān, Nābulusī offers an Islamic "translation" of Christian spiritual practice. At the same time, this passage presents striking similarities to Abū Qurra's treatise. First comes the fairly exact correspondence of Nābulusī's commentary with Chapter Five of this treatise. In the modern edition this is entitled "The bodily attributes of God that are found among Muslims must bring them to understand what we aver on the subject of Christ."[109] Here Abū Qurra alludes specifically to the Qurʾānic verses on "resemblance" that Nābulusī mentions: "The non-Jew who claims to be a believer [that is to say the Muslim] will say: I don't accept any of these things! Nevertheless, he asserts that God is seated on the throne, and that He has a face and a hand, and other things that we don't have space to mention here."[110]

The second similarity is in the polemical aim of both texts: Abū Qurra refutes the objections of outsiders (*barrāniyyūn*), meaning Jews and Muslims, but is also proposing to help Christians who are turning away from icons under the influence of the criticism of outsiders to return to the right path. Thus he reminds his Christian readers that what really differentiates Christians from followers of other religions is the spiritual intelligence of the Scriptures, which he contrasts with "carnal intellect" (*al-ʿaql al-jasadānī*).[111]

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108 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 636.

109 Abuqurra, *Traité*, 106: *mā jāʾa ladā al-muslimīn min awṣāf mujassima li-Allāh yajib an tuqarrib lahum fahm mā naqūluhu fī al-masīḥ*.

110 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 5, 16; see also Ch. 9, 35–37, where the prosternation of angels before Adam, Q 2:30, is discussed.

111 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 5, 4; see also Ch. 18, 18–19.

As for Nābulusī, he refutes the objections of exoteric Muslims to the poetry of poet-saint *ʿīsawī-muḥammadī* Shushtarī, by explaining that the Christian practices of which he speaks (the cult of images is the one that interests us here) do not make their followers infidels (*kuffār*) if one understands their authentic meaning. Those gifted to understand these authentic meanings are spiritual masters (*rabbāniyyūn*), and as such are distinct from those who are dominated by their carnal soul (*nafsāniyyūn*). This distinction also applies to Christians, so that the *rabbāniyyūn* among them are not, in fact, infidels (*kuffār*), unlike their *nafsāniyyūn*.[112] From this we can deduce that the Christian *rabbāniyyūn* may also themselves be a source of "correct" intelligence on the cult of images. It is therefore possible that Nābulusī was familiar not only with Ibn ʿArabī's approach to "the doctrine of images", but also with the Christian sources themselves.

Here Nābulusī also introduces interesting thoughts on the expression of Christian concepts in the Arabic language: given that each prophet speaks the language of his own people, and that the language of Jesus was Syriac, the Arabisation of Syriac words is not enough to make them understandable in the language of Muḥammad. Thus, a poet such as Shushtarī, who draws his inspiration from the *ḥaqīqa ʿīsāwiyya-muḥammadiyya*, speaks in Arabic, but in the "Syriac tongue" (*lisān suryānī*), in other words, unclearly (*ghayr mutabayyin al-maʿnā*). What's more, in the Sufi lexicon, *Suryāniyya* means a language understood by saints and unintelligible to others; Nābulusī plays on both senses. In the same way, the translation of the Gospels into Arabic, and the creation of an Arab-Christian lexicon (*iṣṭilāḥ*) remain in "Syriac" unless one also translates them conceptually, by explaining how they correspond to "secrets" and spiritual stages for insightful Muslims.[113] For example, in "Muḥammadan" Arabic the Messiah corresponds to the Spirit and Mary to the Well-Preserved Tablet.[114] The inverse operation is also possible: for example, when a *ʿīsāwī-muḥammadī* saint reads the Qurʾānic verse 19:34, its "Syriac" meaning becomes apparent, which probably means that this verse will be understood to say "This is Jesus, the son of Mary, the Word of Truth about whom they doubt", rather than "Such was Jesus, son of Mary: (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt".[115]

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112 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 63: *al-naṣārā alladhīna kafarū kānū nafsāniyyīn lā rabbāniyyīn*.

113 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 632.

114 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 637.

115 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 633–34: *wa-qāla taʿālā: "dhālika ʿĪsā ibnu Maryama qawl al-ḥaqq alladhī fīhi yamtarūn"* [Q 19:34]: *fa-akhbara subḥānahu anna al-imtirāʾ ḥāṣil fī hādhihi al-kalima al-suryāniyya al-ʿīsāwiyya fa-idhā takallama bihā al-muḥammadī min al-mashrab al-ʿīsāwī ẓaharat suryāniyya kamā kānat li-annahu taʿālā lā mubaddila li-kalimātihi*.

It is likely that these considerations were prompted by events in Christian culture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Arabic was confirmed as the liturgical language of most Arabic-speaking Christians in Syria.[116] The Arabisation of the liturgy was accompanied by an increased tendency to translate the classical languages of Levantine Christians – Greek, Syriac, and Armenian, as well as Latin, under Rome's influence – into Arabic; Arabic linguistic and literary traditions were also re-appropriated and adapted for a Christian public.

As Hilary Kilpatrick notes, literary history has neglected to place the renaissance in Christian literature that occurred during this period in the context of contemporary Arabo-Muslim culture; thus we lose sight of the role played by the intellectual exchanges and aesthetic syntony between Christians and local Muslims.[117] A verse by Germanus Farḥāt (1670–1732) on the Virgin Mary, "Faultless pearl, thou wert created – as though according to thine own desire thou wert created" (*khuliqti durratan lā ʿayba fīhā – kaʾannaki mithlamā shiʾti khuliqti*),[118] that appears to take as its model the prototypical *madīḥ nabawī*, the poem by Ḥassān ibn Thābit (*khuliqta mubarraʾan min kull ʿaybin – kaʾannaka khuliqta kamā shiʾta*), demonstrates the relevance of Nābulusī's reflections on the relationship between "Muḥammadan" Arabic and "Christian" Arabic.

Nābulusī maintained a theological correspondence with a Christian dignitary whom we can probably identify as Athanasius Dabbās (d. 1136/1724). He was the Melikite patriarch of Antioch, and one of the protagonists of the cultural renewal among Syria's Christians. He translated patristic works by John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea from Greek to Arabic, and founded the first printing house in Aleppo to use Arabic characters.[119] At the beginning of his epistle, Nābulusī addresses his correspondent as "one of the brothers of spiritual detachment" (*ikhwān al-tajrīd*).[120] The *dhimmī*s who had the gift of inner faith (*al-īmān bāṭinan*) were also "brothers", in a treatise in which Nābulusī takes up and amplifies a short passage in the *Futūḥāt*, from the chapter on the *ʿĪsawīyūn*, the same one in which icons also feature.[121] In it Ibn

116 Kilpatrick, "From *Literatur* to *Adab*", 203.

117 Kilpatrick, "From *Literatur* to *Adab*", 203; for example, in the library of a Lebanese monastery there was a glossed copy of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*: Walbiner, "Monastic", 473.

118 Ayoub, "L'hyperbole", 17.

119 Aladdin, "Deux fatwā-s"; Rafeq, "Religious Tolerance", 7. On the translations, see Graf, *Geschichte*, 3: 127–133.

120 Aladdin, "Deux fatwā-s", 9 (French), 22 (Arabic).

121 Nābulusī, *Qawl*, 216a: the *dhimmī*s who believe inwardly pay the *jizya* "to help their Muslim brothers" (*iʿānatan li-al-muslimīn min ikhwānihim*). Lejla Demiri is preparing a critical edition of this text.

ʿArabī suggests that the people of the Book who submit to the *jizya* will go to paradise.[122] Nābulusī defends this idea, arguing that God has no obligation to put his threats into practice; he supplements this theological reasoning with a linguistic argument: he contests the authority of his anonymous adversary, whom he derisively calls "Turk", to interpret the Qurʾān, maintaining that he is incapable of understanding the spirit of the Arabic language, whereas Ibn ʿArabī and the Arab *ʿulamāʾ* whom he inspires do, on the contrary, understand it perfectly. The Arabic language has always been the inner language of revelation (*waḥy*),[123] exteriorised with the advent of Muḥammad, the prophet of compassion (*raḥma*). It is not sufficient to know the rules of its grammar in order to master it; one must have a natural disposition and spontaneity (*ṭabīʿa* and *salīqa*): this is why an illiterate Arab is considered more noble than an erudite non-Arab (*aʿjamī*).[124] In spite of their extensive study, most foreigners must make huge and painful efforts in order to speak Arabic. Even worse is to be "a non-Arab at heart" (*aʿjamī al-qalb*),[125] to lack the ear to speak in the accents of mercy in the language of revelation.

In other words, the approach of the "Turk" or "non-Arab at heart" to the Arabic language and the Qurʾān is one of strict normativity, both grammatical and Islamic. People whose mother tongue is Arabic, even if they are illiterate and/or not Muslims, are closer to the matrix from which the language sprang. In this respect the original version of Germanus Farḥāt's Arabic dictionary is suggestive in containing two long explanations of the expressions *al-raḥma al-jasadiyya* (physical compassion) and *al-raḥma al-rūḥiyya* (spiritual compassion); these were substantially abridged by the dictionary's modern editor, who judged them to be based on Christian doctrine rather than on the study of the language itself.[126] However, spirituality before the *nahḍa* was not formally divided from *adab*, and Nābulusī's œuvre demonstrates how it can function as a component of a shared conceptual syntax.

122 Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, 101.

123 Nābulusī, *Qawl*, 58a.

124 Nābulusī, *Qawl*, 63a.

125 Nābulusī, *Qawl*, 84a. Conversely, a saint who can't speak Arabic is "Arab in spirit" when he speaks in his own language under inspiration, as Nābulusī says explaining the saying: "I slept as a Kurd and woke up as an Arab", attributed to an illiterate shaykh admired by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī: See Sukkar, "al-Nābulusī", 155.

126 Kilpatrick, "From *Literatur* to *Adab*", 208.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, for Nābulusī, celebrating and glorifying the Prophet means celebrating Sufis, celebrating Arabs[127] and, especially, celebrating Arabic literary culture.[128] And being "like the Prophet" means being an "author". His exaltation of his own literary production in prose or verse, and in all genres, is not, despite his work's importance for the city, associated with leadership ambitions, or the foundation of a *ṭarīqa*, but with his aim to persuade and educate his readers – both profane and specialist – both aesthetically and spiritually.[129] In his image of himself, the eclecticism of the accomplished man of letters is part of the universalism of the perfect man.[130] At the same time, his reflections on the space in religious life for imaginative representation mean that Muḥammad becomes not only the object of poetical, visual and musical production, but also (in a way) the patron of these expressions that are as devotional as they are artistic. Nābulusī's reflections on God's manifestation in human language and human form are at the heart of his concept of Muḥammad's "reality"; they also carry unmistakeable marks of his familiarity with the Christian culture of the Syrian people, and of his concern to "translate" religious symbols in order to encourage intellectual and emotional exchange with Christian Arabs.

Nabhānī admires Nābulusī very much, but he differs from him on some of the latter's most characteristic attitudes. For example, he prefers, in the *madīḥ nabawī*, to set very narrow limits on the use of the *ghazal* (especially those addressed to young men).[131] He also takes care to distinguish the veneration of Muḥammad from that practised by Shīʿīs and Christians, since one must ultimately avoid confusing poetic hyperbole with dogma.[132] Finally, although he had 40,000 copies of an engraving of the Prophet's Sandal printed[133] (mechanical reproduction had by now brought an end to the time when each copy was a unique exemplar, an "original"), he also wrote a pamphlet against images.[134] This text, published in 1906, illustrates the profound cultural rupture that had

127 See his exaltation of the Arab *qabāʾil* in a *mawlid* improvised for the people of Nābulus: Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 106–107.

128 In another *mawlid*, he celebrates as blessings from God a lengthy series of books that "flows" from the prophetic source, starting with the *Futūḥāt*. Yet the series also includes a book in Persian, the *Mathnawī* by Rūmī. See Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1060–64. On Nābulusī's commentary on the Arabic preface to the *Mathnawī*, see Sukkar, "al-Nābulusī", 152–56.

129 Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 6, 16.

130 Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 11–12; 2, 24.

131 Nabhānī, *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*, 14, 24–31.

132 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1 and 3.

133 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 931, 972, 975–76.

134 Nabhānī, *Taḥdhīr*.

occurred since the time of Nābulusī. When speaking of images, Nābulusī drew on the classical heritage of the Near East, whereas this seems to have disappeared from Nabhānī's points of reference. In what may be a reaction to a 1903 text by Muḥammad ʿAbduh, in which the Egyptian Mufti celebrates European painting while implying a critique of the cult of saints as potentially being "idolatry" (*shirk*),[135] Nabhānī can find no better response than to attack the idolatry of Christians, expressing his disapproval of both religious and secular images. The supposedly "historic" critique, in which he describes Christian adoration of images as a survival of paganism, and his reference to Protestant criticism of this "innovation", lead one to speculate that he may have been influenced by a book written by the American pastor Benjamin Schneider (1834–77), who was then living in Aintab with the aim of encouraging the Armenians who populated the region at the time to return to the straight path.[136]

And yet Nabhānī makes an exception for the shadow theatre, praising the beauty of an anonymous couplet that alludes to the teachings contained in this form of spectacle.[137] Despite his scruples on the subject of the *ghazal*, Nabhānī finally decides not to exclude them from his collection of *madāʾiḥ*, because:

> Considering that this is present in a great many admirable poems, my soul did not permit me to deprive this collection of such well-aligned pearls, and to deprive these excellent poets of such a noble station and such immense merit, for, if they have erred, they have nevertheless also done right in praising the Prophet, and only God can know their intentions.[138]

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135 ʿAbduh, *Aʿmāl*, 2, 198–200.
136 Schneider, *Rayḥana*. This book is still honoured in a recent publication on the correct way of imitating the Prophet: Ḥāmid, *Muqaddimāt*, 116–40.
137 Nabhānī, *Taḥdhīr*, 1: *raʾaytu khayāla al-ẓilli akbara ʿibratin – li-man kāna fī ʿilmi l-ḥaqīqati rāqī / shukhūṣun wa-ashbāḥun tamurru wa-tanqaḍī – wa-tanfā jamīʿan wa-l-muḥarriku bāqī*. Nābulusī wrote an imitation of these verses: see *Dīwan al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 341.
138 Nabhānī, *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*, 14–15.

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