Al-Shaʿrānī's Theological Defence of Ibn ʿArabī in Context

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Abstract

This research undertakes the investigation of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī's (d. 973/ 1565) defence of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī's (d. 638/ 1240) mysticism. It aims to clarify the theological project on which al-Shaʿrānī embarked in an attempt to promulgate Ibn ʿArabī's thought to a wider audience. The thesis challenges the reductive view agreed upon in recent scholarship that al-Shaʿrānī was an uncritical apologist of Ibn ʿArabī and a mediocre thinker who was not interested in the latter's mystical worldview.

Contrary to the current reading of al-Shaʿrānī, the study argues how he systematically presents Ibn ʿArabī's ontology of 'the oneness of existence' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) as a perceptual and visionary experience. It is shown that this interpretive method emerged against a backdrop of polemics over Ibn ʿArabī. I will further demonstrate that, by situating Ibn ʿArabī's doctrines in the context of theological issues, al-Shaʿrānī integrates them into his own worldview, thereby merging the mystical and theological disciplines. I will also discuss that al-Shaʿrānī was supportive of Ibn ʿArabī's monistic teachings on condition that the audience are advanced enough to fully understand them.

The thesis therefore provides an account of al-Shaʿrānī's biography, intellectual milieu, and oeuvre (Chapter 1), investigates his interpretation of the oneness of existence as experiential oneness (Chapter 2), considers his support of the monistic worldview (the first part of Chapter 3), then studies his treatment of some of Ibn ʿArabī's controversial doctrines, focusing in particular on al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes of God (the second part of Chapter 3, and Chapters 4 and 5). It will become clear that al-Shaʿrānī's theological project was formulated through innovative

interpretive efforts and in the context of his own intellectual milieu. The research concludes that al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī's thought ought to be received in a more positive manner.

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Introduction

1. Research Aims

Hailing from Ottoman Egypt, the sixteenth-century Shāfiʿī jurist and Sufi, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 973/1565), is known for his ardent support of the Andalusian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), who proposed the controversial notion of 'the oneness of existence' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). The overarching objective of this thesis is to investigate the details of al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī's thought in a theological context. Al-Shaʿrānī's prominence in the legal sphere has been widely recognised and his jurisprudential works have received due scholarly attention. On the other hand, although scholarship on the significance of al-Shaʿrānī's works in the history of medieval Sufism does exist,[1] his contributions to the defence of Ibn ʿArabī have not been thoroughly studied. This is puzzling, given al-Shaʿrānī's major role in popularising Ibn ʿArabī.[2] One of al-Shaʿrānī's most famous writings with this purpose, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, which aims to reconcile Ibn ʿArabī's teachings with those of the Ashʿarīs, was favoured by Damascene intellectuals of the late nineteenth-century.[3] To this day, however, the text is barely studied. Many other theological works by

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[1] MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology*, 179-180; Arberry, *Sufism*, 123; Trimingham,
[2] Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore*, 10-11; Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 4.
[3] Hudson, 'Reading al-Shaʿrānī,' 39-68. Hudson's study attests to al-Shaʿrānī's popularity in late nineteenth-century Damascus. According to her, his works appear in forty-five percent of the inventories of private collections in Damascus, a proportion greater than the thirty-six percent of inventories in which works of the Syrian Sufi ʿAbd al-Ghanī Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731) are present, and the thirty percent in which works by al-Suyūṭī are found. The most circulated work of al-Shaʿrānī was *al-Mīzān al-kubrā*, the jurisprudential work that calls for a return to the source of the Law, i.e. the Qurʾān and Sunna while acknowledging the equal status of all the schools of Law. The second most well-read book was his biography *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* and *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*. It is notable that the works of al-Shaʿrānī were by far more popular than those of Damascus saint Ibn ʿArabī, and that his *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* was relatively well-read by Damascene intellectuals during this period, despite al-Shaʿrānī's Egyptian origin.

al-Shaʿrānī are also little known in modern scholarship. This is partly because they were either recently published (*al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* in 2006 and *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* in 2007) or remain in manuscript form (*al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya* and *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*).

The lack of attention to this subject can also be attributed to the reductive view that is currently taken of al-Shaʿrānī. Previous studies have tended to regard al-Shaʿrānī as a Law-abiding, moderate Sufi who hesitated to accept the extreme, antinomian mysticism of Ibn ʿArabī. This has resulted in al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī being considered merely apologetic; that is to say that he is viewed as having respected Ibn ʿArabī purely because the latter was already regarded as a great saint by the sixteenth-century, but that he nevertheless kept a distance from his monistic worldview.[4] Such observations have been drawn from al-Shaʿrānī's abundant quoting of Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, whereby he arbitrarily recontextualised excerpts, distorted their originally intended meanings, or avoided the more controversial passages altogether.[5] This simplistic analysis seems to have led recent scholarship to overlook the intricate structure and context of al-Shaʿrānī's writings, to the dismissal of his meticulous efforts to reinterpret Ibn ʿArabī as uncritical and contradictory.

The impetus for the present study is therefore to consider al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought in a new light, using hitherto uninvestigated materials. The recent publication of some of al-Shaʿrānī's works, as well as the present author's research trip to the manuscript library in Istanbul made the pursuit of this subject possible. I will especially argue against the current scholarly consensus of Winter, Trimingham, and El-Rouayheb that paints al-Shaʿrānī as a mediocre apologist who was indifferent to Ibn

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[4] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 127-129.
[5] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 129-130; El-Rouayheb, *Intellectual History*, 238-240.

ʿArabī's mystical worldview. Contrary to their view, we shall see in this study how his approach to Ibn ʿArabī was based on critical methodology and systematicity. The contribution of this thesis is thus to fill a gap in modern scholarship in order to better understand al-Shaʿrānī's endorsement of Ibn ʿArabī's thought through extensive and thorough analysis.

To this end, the study primarily examines the strategies that al-Shaʿrānī carefully adopted in his defence of Ibn ʿArabī. I will demonstrate that, in keeping with the opinions of other allegedly 'apologetic' supporters of Ibn ʿArabī in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Egypt, al-Shaʿrānī reinterprets the ontological doctrine of the oneness of existence from a different perspective by regarding it as a visionary, perceptual experience. It is also argued that by adopting the structure of the tripartite hierarchy of the articles of faith, al-Shaʿrānī presents Ibn ʿArabī's theories differently depending on the readership. Furthermore, I will also investigate how al-Shaʿrānī discusses the individual teachings of Ibn ʿArabī in relation to various theological issues, such as divine creation, divine knowledge, and the anthropomorphic attributes. Through these observations, the thesis will highlight al-Shaʿrānī's unique attempts to integrate Ibn ʿArabī's views into his own theological worldview, thereby establishing Ibn ʿArabī-inspired mysticism as an independent discipline for treating theological issues and making the latter's thought more acceptable for a wider audience.

2. Structure of the Study

This study is composed of five main chapters. Following the literature review, in Chapter 1, I provide a biographical sketch of al-Shaʿrānī's life along with his

intellectual milieu. This will be followed by an account of the polemics over Ibn ʿArabī's thought before al-Shaʿrānī. I examine the arguments of four of Ibn ʿArabī's famous adversaries: the Syrian Ḥanbalī Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the Timurid Ḥanafī-Ashʿarī Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390), the Yemeni Ashʿarī Ḥusayn ibn al-Ahdal (d. 855/1451), and the Egyptian Shāfiʿī jurist Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480). I then consider the views of three of Ibn ʿArabī's supporters who were also teachers and colleagues of al-Shaʿrānī: the Egyptian Shāfiʿī Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī (d. 926/1520), and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 973-4/1566-7). The investigation focuses on the methodologies that these pro-Ibn ʿArabī scholars in the Arabic-speaking world uniquely employed in their defence of him. In opposition to the currently agreed upon view that, like al-Shaʿrānī, they were mere apologists of Ibn ʿArabī, I argue that they strategically adapted the arguments of anti-Ibn ʿArabī scholars, presenting 'the oneness of existence' as something similar to 'the oneness of witnessing' (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*). Lastly, the chapter introduces al-Shaʿrānī's oeuvre of theology. Here, I pay attention to the underlying structure of his works, namely, the tripartite hierarchy of the articles of faith (*ʿaqāʾid*), clarifying who the readers were – whether such texts were addressed to advanced mystics, non-advanced mystics, or commoners. The analysis will allow us to explore and demystify al-Shaʿrānī's various theological opinions.

In Chapter 2, in order to contextualise al-Shaʿrānī's views in his scholarly milieu, I will examine his general approach to Ibn ʿArabī's thought, focusing on his explicit endorsement of reading the oneness of existence as the oneness of witnessing or experiential oneness. As I shall demonstrate, al-Shaʿrānī's discussions of this subject are intended for the mystics who were not advanced enough to accept the full scale of

Ibn ʿArabī's mystical worldview, as well as for theologians who were suspicious of his teachings. For our purpose, this second chapter will provide a brief sketch of the history of the doctrine of the oneness of witnessing. I then consider how al-Shaʿrānī reinterprets passages in Ibn ʿArabī's writings based on this tenet. It will become clear that al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī was built on the dichotomous framework proposed by Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries, and that al-Shaʿrānī's position needs to be understood against the backdrop of the polemics over Ibn ʿArabī in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Chapter 3 contains two main arguments. It first sets out to demonstrate al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological monism. Here, I disagree with present scholarship claiming that al-Shaʿrānī was not interested in Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview. In contrast to the findings of Chapter 2, it is argued that al-Shaʿrānī actually promotes the tenet of the oneness of existence and the ontology of God's self-manifestation in the world's beings (*tajallī*). This stance is not contradictory to his thought elsewhere, since, in his discussion of this topic, he is addressing advanced mystics who are ready to embrace such cosmological teachings – not the average mystics and theologians who cannot fully grasp them. The investigation will highlight al-Shaʿrānī's multi-layered approaches to Ibn ʿArabī's thought. In relation to this, and as the second main argument of the chapter, I turn towards al-Shaʿrānī's treatment, in works written for conventional non-advanced mystics and theologians, of the immutable entities (*aʿyān thābita*), a theory which is essential to Ibn ʿArabī's mystical cosmology. The investigation will specifically examine the extent to which al-Shaʿrānī endorses the theory of the immutable entities in terms of his adherence to some of its key features, with the objective of clarifying its functions within his theological thought.

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It will emerge that some of al-Shaʿrānī's discussions of this teaching are presented as responses to its opponents, placing his views, once again, in the polemical context of Ibn ʿArabī's legacy.

The findings of Chapter 3 inform Chapter 4, where I look at al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the anthropomorphic attributes of God. Here, I will explore the central question of this thesis concerning al-Shaʿrānī's integration of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings into his own theological worldview. For the purpose of this survey, I will delineate al-Shaʿrānī's refutation of figurative interpretation, investigate his understanding of the notion of divine self-assimilation through perceptual similarity (*tashbīh*), and analyse his treatment of God's visionary self-manifestation. As I will explain, these ideas are provided as alternatives for Ibn ʿArabī's endorsement of divine immanence and God's ontological self-manifestation in the world's beings. These observations will establish the originality of al-Shaʿrānī in his attempts to reinterpret Ibn ʿArabī's teachings in a systematic manner, incorporating them into his own theology. In order to further detail al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the question of the anthropomorphic attributes, I will also consider his view on the interpretive method of the Ḥanbalī scholars. I will argue that al-Shaʿrānī's theological project, in keeping with a traditionalist approach and based on Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism, focuses on offering answers to the issue of the anthropomorphic attributes of God.

Lastly, furthering the analysis on the anthropomorphic attributes, Chapter 5 is concerned with al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of 'God's with-ness' (*maʿiyya*), as suggested in verses including 'He [God] is with you wherever you are' [Q. 57:4]. After reviewing the theologians' and Ibn ʿArabī's stances on this notion, I will focus my attention, once again, on the extent of al-Shaʿrānī's reception of the latter's thought. The

chapter considers the views of the little known Shādhilī Sufis in Mamluk Egypt, Muḥammad al-Maghribī (d. 910-911/1504-1506) and his disciple Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī (d. 914/1508-9), both of whom were influenced by Ibn ʿArabī in their interpretation of God's with-ness. As will become clear, al-Shaʿrānī incorporates Ibn ʿArabī's thesis of the relationship between God's essence and His essential attributes, as well as the theological opinions of these mystics, into his own approach to the subject of God's with-ness. The analysis here confirms al-Shaʿrānī's adherence to Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, demonstrating that his thought needs to be understood against the intellectual backdrop of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The thesis is thus founded on three broad themes: (1) the investigation of al-Shaʿrānī's general approach in his defence of Ibn ʿArabī's thought and the contextualisaion of this stance within his own theological milieu (Chapters 1 and 2); (2) a survey of al-Shaʿrānī's endorsement of the ontology of Ibn ʿArabī for advanced mystics (Chapter 3); and (3) the interrogation of al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the individual teachings of Ibn ʿArabī, the discussions of which are intended for the broader audience of average, non-advanced mystics and theologians (Chapters 3, 4, and 5).

This thesis will demonstrate the complexity of al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, against the reductive assessment of previous studies. As I shall argue, al-Shaʿrānī's main aim is to discuss Ibn ʿArabī's mystical teachings within the context of certain theological issues, with the objective of defending Ibn ʿArabī from the theologians' attacks. We will see in Chapter 1 that this attempt to fuse theological and mystical doctrines was first embarked upon by al-Shaʿrānī's teacher Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī. Taking over this theological project, al-Shaʿrānī advanced it by further integrating Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism into the subject of theology. The present study will

thus establish al-Shaʿrānī's position as an ingenious, strategic supporter of Ibn ʿArabī.

3. Literature Review

Al-Shaʿrānī's texts first received attention because they provided western researchers with historical insights into late Mamluk and early Ottoman Egypt, the details of which are only scarcely recorded by other historians of his age.[6] Scholars such as MacDonald, Arberry, and Trimingham introduced al-Shaʿrānī as one of the finest Sufi thinkers who, in their view, appeared at a time when Sufism was stagnating.[7] However, they did not give his actual teachings much in-depth attention. Later, Winter, Johnson, and most recently Sabra wrote significant monographs on al-Shaʿrānī that greatly contributed to the understanding of his thought. In what follows, I first review three studies by these recent scholars (Winter, Johnson, and Sabra). I will then take a brief look at three more articles that feature al-Shaʿrānī's jurisprudential views. Although the objective of this study does not concern his jurisprudence per se, some of the suggestions these articles make, especially concerning al-Shaʿrānī's efforts to integrate Ibn ʿArabī's teaching into society at large and to make it accessible to a wider audience, are pertinent to the current thesis. Lastly, I consider four Arabic studies dedicated to clarifying al-Shaʿrānī's thought.

Apart from these texts, a few more recent studies will be referenced in due course.[8]

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[6] Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*; Garcin, 'Index des Tabaqāt,' 31-94; Schimmel, 'Sufismus,' 274-289.
[7] MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology*, 179-180; Arberry, *Sufism*, 123; Trimingham, *The Sufi Order*, 220-225. The idea of intellectual decline or stagnation in the medieval Islamic world and Arab worlds has been refuted in recent research. See, for example, El-Rouayheb, 'Opening the Gate of Verification,' 263-281; *Islamic Intellectual History*.
[8] McGregor, 'Notes on the Transmission,' 380-392; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*.

While they are not as substantial as other studies, they nonetheless give us useful insight into al-Shaʿrānī's mystical thought.

Winter, *Society and Religion*, 1982.

Winter's work investigates the details of al-Shaʿrānī's background as well as the cultural, religious, and social milieu of sixteenth-century Egypt. It covers a wide range of topics – from popular Sufi orders and scholarly life to the daily toil of rural living – as described in the writings of al-Shaʿrānī. This study is still frequently referred to when discussing al-Shaʿrānī and the history of early Ottoman Egypt. It must be noted, however, that the author's position is based on the misleading assumption that Ibn ʿArabī was an extreme, antinomian Sufi whereas his follower al-Shaʿrānī was a representative of the moderate, Law-abiding Sufis.[9] This reductive assumption, which might hold true in the views of Ibn ʿArabī's antagonists, is not accurate, not least because current scholarship agrees that Ibn ʿArabī never disregarded the Law.

The purported orthodox-unorthodox dichotomy, in which al-Shaʿrānī is pitted against Ibn ʿArabī, seems to have made Winter and others such as Trimingham struggle to explain al-Shaʿrānī's fervent support for Ibn ʿArabī. For these scholars, Ibn ʿArabī's extreme monism seemed irreconcilable with al-Shaʿrānī's modest Sufism. Winter therefore describes al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī as 'unexpected' and 'apologetic', maintaining that the reason behind his espousal of Ibn ʿArabī does not lie in the theological sphere, but is, rather, an expected attitude in the socio-political context of a time during which Ibn ʿArabī was widely revered and upheld as a symbol of Sufism.[10]

Based on this observation, Winter proceeds to list al-Shaʿrānī's ways of

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[9] See also a comment by Knysh in his *Ibn ʿArabī*, 313, 173n.
[10] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 128.

approaching Ibn ʿArabī and his beliefs concerning Ibn ʿArabī. They are as follows: (1) al-Shaʿrānī tries not to associate himself entirely with Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, as he admits in the beginning of *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* his incapacity to comprehend some of the latter's passages in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*; (2) al-Shaʿrānī believes that Ibn ʿArabī's works have been interpolated by others, and consequently contain some anti-Law statements; (3) according to al-Shaʿrānī, Ibn ʿArabī and other Sufis use their terminologies in a specific way, and hence their writings should not be accessible to those who are not adept in Sufism; (4) in al-Shaʿrānī's view, since no one knows Ibn ʿArabī's real intentions, it is better for a Muslim not to declare other Muslims unbelievers; (5) in al-Shaʿrānī's mind, Sufis may profess utterances that go against the Law upon being enraptured by their love towards God, but their remarks in this particular state of mind should be sanctioned; (6) al-Shaʿrānī interprets Ibn ʿArabī's phrases out of context, twisting the originally intended meaning, without necessarily presenting the latter's theological system in a more favourable manner.[11]

In reference to this, Winter notes that al-Shaʿrānī's overall apologism and subsequent distortion of Ibn ʿArabī's arguments were effective, as Ibn ʿArabī's opponents, while aware of his most popular statements, were probably unfamiliar with the details of his actual teachings. Therefore, it could not have been that difficult to clear Ibn ʿArabī of the heretical charges against him.[12] Winter then adduces several cases, in which he believes al-Shaʿrānī to have unsystematically interpreted Ibn ʿArabī's statements. One of them – the interpretation of a line from a poem, taken from Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Chapter 5 – reads: 'He praises me and I praise Him, He

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[11] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 129-131.
[12] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 131.

worships me and I worship Him.'[13] Based on Ibn ʿArabī's mystical and cosmological view that God brings the world's beings into existence by manifesting Himself in them while they manifest His inner realities upon themselves,[14] this particular poem highlights the mutual dependency between God and His creation. As we shall see in Chapter 1, this ostensibly pantheistic theory earned Ibn ʿArabī criticism, for it implies that God is in want of the world and that He is identified with His creation. As Winter observes, al-Shaʿrānī takes a different approach to the poem by interpreting 'He praises me' as 'He thanks me when I praise Him,' and 'He worships me and I worship Him' as 'He obeys me by answering my prayer.'[15] Winter also treats al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of another one of Ibn ʿArabī's controversial remarks, which goes: 'there is no existence but God [*lā mawjūda illā Allāh*].' The statement was later condemned for promoting ontological monism. In reply to this, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that 'if indeed he [Ibn ʿArabī] did say so, it must mean that nothing exists independently except God and everything else exists through others,' thus excluding the monistic implication.[16]

For Winter, these examples of superficial and justificatory reinterpretation demonstrate al-Shaʿrānī's uncritical and apologist attitude towards Ibn ʿArabī. In

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[13] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 69/83; Winter, *Society and Religion*, 132. For the sake of precision, in this study, I referred to two editions of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*: (1) that published by Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī in 1980 and (2) the edition published by Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya in 2003.

[14] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 68-69/83. In *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, the passage prior to this poem goes as follows:

> If it is affirmed that existence belongs to God, and not to you, then the determinations (*ḥukm*) [of your states] belong to you without doubt but in existence of God […] He only gives you existence, while you determine your states. Hence, do not praise anyone except yourself, and do not accuse anyone except you. God deserves praise for granting existence to you, for it belongs to Him, not you. You nourish God with your determinations, whereas God nourishes you with [His] existence [Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 68/83].

[15] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 131-132; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 17.

[16] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 131; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 17. This interpretation is also referred to by El-Rouayheb as attesting to al-Shaʿrānī's attempt to make ontological monism innocuous. See El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 344-345.

opposition to this current reading, and based on the thorough investigation of hitherto unstudied materials, I will argue that al-Shaʿrānī meticulously reinterprets Ibn ʿArabī's worldview in a positive manner by taking a different approach to it.

Johnson, 'The Unerring Balance: A Study of the Theory of Sanctity (Wilāyah) of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī,' 1985.

Johnson's elaborate thesis on al-Shaʿrānī's concept of sainthood (*wilāya*) explores his attempt to contextualise Ibn ʿArabī's teachings in society. After explaining metaphysical theories such as the hierarchy of the saints and the seal of the saints which al-Shaʿrānī learnt from Ibn 'Arabī, Johnson sets out to describe the unique role that the former attributed to the saints; namely, the role of saints as the guardians of Egyptian society. Johnson argues that in the eyes of al-Shaʿrānī, who was well aware of the dire situation of the commoners suffering from poverty and social upheavals, the conventional theory of saints and sainthood sounded too abstract and detached from society. What was urgently needed was an image of a saint who could help reduce people's afflictions. Based on this premise, Johnson gathers numerous descriptions of saints who can shoulder the suffering of the people from al-Shaʿrānī's *al-Baḥr al-mawrūd*, *Laṭāʾif al-minan wa-l-akhlāq*, and *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*. She describes in detail how these saints, using their spiritual power, can take upon themselves individual diseases or injuries as well as impending disasters that are expected to occur in Egypt. She further refers to al-Shaʿrānī's theory that the saints receive different degrees of affliction in accordance with the rank that they occupy in the hierarchy of saints.

Although Johnson's account of the sayings and actions attributed to various Egyptian saints is highly valuable, her study seems to be embedded within the static

two-tier framework of Sufism: the modest and Law-abiding al-Shaʿrānī on one pole and the extreme and antinomian Ibn ʿArabī on the other. As Johnson explicitly states, her study starts with the assumption that Ibn ʿArabī severed the link and complementary relationship that had up until then existed between the Law and sainthood. This is based on her understanding that for Ibn ʿArabī the saints could attain the truth without adherence to the Law. It was al-Shaʿrānī, argues Johnson, who tried to restore the place of sainthood within the bounds of orthodox Islam, granting popular Sufism authority. In order to underpin this point, she reiterates how the saints who are depicted as the guardians of Egypt in al-Shaʿrānī's texts remain subjected to the injunctions of the Law.[17] This conclusion is no longer sustainable, since the premise that Ibn ʿArabī was antinomian has been repeatedly disproven in recent scholarship. Ibn ʿArabī did not take Islamic Law lightly; rather, he regarded its abidance as necessary in order to attain the state of perfection, whilst criticising those who dismissed the Law.[18] This misconception leads Johnson, just like Winter and Trimingham, to dismiss al-Shaʿrānī, in his espousal of Ibn ʿArabī, as an unsystematic apologist. She therefore reductively concludes that al-Shaʿrānī only apologetically defended Ibn ʿArabī by insisting that the latter's works had been misinterpreted or falsified by his antagonists.

Johnson's assessment of al-Shaʿrānī as a restorer of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching of sainthood within the sphere of the Law was later refuted by McGregor. Surveying al-Shaʿrānī's *al-Kibrīt al-aḥmar*, McGregor demonstrates that he faithfully upheld Ibn

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[17] Later, Johnson published articles based on her dissertation in which she presents al-Shaʿrānī as a Sufi who attempts to retrieve the link between the Law and the Reality shattered by Ibn ʿArabī. See Johnson, 'The Unerring Balance (Part 1),' 284-300 and 'The Unerring Balance (Part 2),' 24-41. She also published another article as a summary of her dissertation, focusing more on al-Shaʿrānī's biography (Johnson, 'ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī,' 15-39).

[18] Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, 121; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 256-262; *Imaginal Worlds*, 43-45.

ʿArabī's key beliefs on the theory of sainthood. Al-Shaʿrānī does replace some of its terms with less problematic ones, notes McGregor, but the terms he employs make sense in the wider context of Ibn ʿArabī's worldview. Based on this observation, McGregor concludes that al-Shaʿrānī is not only an apologist of Ibn ʿArabī but also an exponent and transmitter of his thought.[19] McGregor's evaluation of al-Shaʿrānī's role in a more positive light accords with what this study aims to achieve.

Sabra, *The Guidebook for Gullible Jurists and Mendicants to the Conditions for Befriending Emirs and the Abbreviated Guidebook for Gullible Jurists and Mendicants to the Conditions for Befriending Emirs*, **2013.**

In the introduction to two of al-Shaʿrānī's translated works, Sabra explains al-Shaʿrānī's political views and his connections with the Mamluk and Ottoman elites. According to the study, al-Shaʿrānī's widespread influence lies in his combination of the culture of literate religious scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) with that of popular religion, represented by his Sufi teacher ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ al-Burullusī (d. 939/1532-1533). As Sabra explores in another article, 'Illiterate Sufis and Learned Artisans: The Circle of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī', whilst al-Shaʿrānī himself was a well-educated scholar of rural origin, many members of his Sufi circle were learned artisans who would never been counted amongst the *ʿulamāʾ*, and illiterate Sufis belonging to the lower classes.[20] For this reason, and unlike other scholars of his age, al-Shaʿrānī showed a remarkable knowledge of the lives of ordinary people. His experience of different classes of Egyptian society, argues Sabra, greatly affected his political and social attitudes.

Sabra then proceeds to investigate al-Shaʿrānī's political theory, that is to say, his

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[19] McGregor, 'Notes on the Transmission,' 390.
[20] Sabra, 'Illiterate Sufis and Learned Artisans,' 153-168.

separation between the manifest government exercised by sultans and the hidden government exercised by saints. He does so by focusing on the proper relationship between the ruling class and the Sufi teachers. According to Sabra, al-Shaʿrānī believes that one must obey the government even when it is tyrannical, as the source of political power is divinely determined, just like the authority of sainthood is of divine origin. In other words, a religious scholar has no right to challenge the political authorities. What the Sufi teacher can do in this situation is to be a spiritual advisor and intercede on behalf of ordinary Muslims both with God and the political authorities. Moreover, the Sufi teacher should intervene for the sultans and officials through interceding for their salvation and giving them protection. Sabra's study illustrates how al-Shaʿrānī achieved popularity in the community by standing not only on the side of political authorities but also with the popular classes. It is thus evident that al-Shaʿrānī was indeed a meticulous thinker who knew how to appeal to different groups of society, acting 'in accordance with the best interest (*maṣlaḥa*) of each Muslim individual'.[21]

Later, Sabra published a completed translation of al-Shaʿrānī's second work, which he examined in the study, entitled 'Advice for Callow Jurists and Gullible Mendicants on Gullible Mendicants on Befriending Emirs.' Although the current thesis does not intend to contribute to the subject of al-Shaʿrānī's political views and his relationship with the authorities, Sabra's observation about his interest in the welfare of each Muslim individual, regardless of class, is a subject that is relevant to this study.

Studies on al-Shaʿrānī's Jurisprudence

Al-Shaʿrānī's jurisprudential works, especially *Kashf al-ghumma* and *Mīzān*

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[21] Sabra, *The Guidebook to Gullible Jurists*, 17.

al-kubrā, were extensively studied by Pagani, Ibrahim, and Dajani. Highlighting the concept of 'the differences of opinion amongst the schools of law' (*ikhtilāf al-madhāhib*), Pagani argues that al-Shaʿrānī's jurisprudential objective was to remove the controversies from the schools of law whilst letting their differences continue to coexist. [22] In his view, al-Shaʿrānī combined Sufi and legal discourses by accommodating Ibn ʿArabī's hermeneutics into the cultural history of the early Ottoman period. His claim that al-Shaʿrānī's texts, such as *al-Mīzān al-kubrā*, helped control access to Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* merits attention. As we shall see, this is how al-Shaʿrānī most likely popularised the latter's mystical teachings to the wider audience.[23]

Ibrahim's study stresses the importance of reading al-Shaʿrānī's works within the contexts of the Ottoman Ḥanafīzation and the debates over the validity of pragmatic eclecticism. According to Ibrahim, the Ottoman government started conformity reformism during the sixteenth century in order to unify the legal system under the Ḥanafī school of law. This was to abolish Mamluk legal pluralism whereby the four schools were given equal orthodoxy. Al-Shaʿrānī opposed this reform and supported the practice of pragmatic eclecticism. According to the notion of pragmatic eclecticism, vulnerable laypeople are automatically allowed to change their school of law for pragmatic reasons. In al-Shaʿrānī's view, argues Ibrahim, they can follow a more lenient juristic opinion without having to consult a scholar. This is in sharp contrast to the purist position that there is only one correct juristic opinion. Ibrahim maintains that al-Shaʿrānī aimed to develop Ibn ʿArabī's view on pragmatic eclecticism into a theory of legal pluralism. To conclude, Ibrahim writes that al-Shaʿrānī's jurisprudential

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[22] Pagani, 'The Meaning of the *Ikhtilāf al-Madhāhib*,' 177-212.
[23] Pagani, 'The Meaning of the *Ikhtilāf al-Madhāhib*,' 211.

approach should be read as a response to the social needs of that period, rather than as legal or mystical speculation.[24]

In his recent study, Dajani considers the extent of the influence of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings on al-Shaʿrānī's jurisprudential writings. Through thorough analysis and comparison of the texts, Dajani demonstrates how faithfully the ideas of Ibn ʿArabī were represented in al-Shaʿrānī's. He observes that just as Ibn ʿArabī approved of the different opinions of jurists and gave them spiritual justification, so did al-Shaʿrānī. The difference between the two thinkers is that al-Shaʿrānī's arguments were much simpler, making them more accessible to laypeople. This view is underpinned by the premise that al-Shaʿrānī showed great concern and respect towards laypeople. Dajani concludes that 'by making these [jurisprudential] ideas more accessible to the layperson, one could argue that *al-Mīzān al-kubrā* was able to achieve Ibn ʿArabī's own goals of making the law easier for the laypeople more than the *Futūḥāt* itself.'[25]

Studies on al-Shaʿrānī in Arabic

There are several Arabic monographs that undertook the examination of al-Shaʿrānī's thought and that deserve special attention here: (1) *al-Shaʿrānī: Imām al-taṣawwuf fī ʿaṣri-hi* by Tawfīq (1945); (2) *al-Taṣawwuf al-islāmī wa-l-imām al-Shaʿrānī* by Surūr (ca. 1952)[26]; (3) *ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī: Imām al-qarn al-ʿāshir* by al-Qarnī (1985); (4) *Khiṭāb al-siyāsī al-ṣūfī fī Miṣr: Qirāʾa fī khiṭāb ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī lil-sulṭa wa-l-mujtamaʿ* by al-Dālī (2011).

Described by Winter as one of the most important studies on al-Shaʿrānī written in

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[24] Ibrahim, 'Al-Shaʿrānī's Response to Legal Purism,' 110-140.

[25] Dajani, 'Ibn ʿArabī's Conception of Ijtihād,' 192-193.

[26] At the end of the book, the editor's concluding remark is dated as 1952. However, there is no reference to the exact publication date.

Arabic,[27] Tawfīq details al-Shaʿrānī's life and scholarly atmosphere by focusing on his role as a teacher in his Sufi lodge. In particular, he surveys al-Shaʿrānī's relations with other Sufi teachers and disciples, jurists, and the Ottoman officials; Tawfīq also delineates al-Shaʿrānī's ideas on religious duties and ethics that a mystic ought to follow. The study stresses al-Shaʿrānī's uniqueness as a Sufi of his period. This is observed, for example, in al-Shaʿrānī's refusal to receive a gift from the officials on their first visit to him and in his insistence upon obtaining different types of knowledge of the Law and Sufism. With regard to al-Shaʿrānī's support of Ibn ʿArabī, Tawfīq ascribes it to the clichéd reasons that Ibn ʿArabī's works are falsified and that his remarks should appropriately be interpreted in the way that complies with the Law (and henceforth, Ibn ʿArabī is excused from the charge of heresy). On the whole, the study is well structured and its arguments are plain and straightforward. However, it does not examine the details of al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, let alone discussing the methodologies behind al-Shaʿrānī's espousal of it.

Similarly to Tawfīq's work, Surūr sets out to investigate al-Shaʿrānī's general approach to Sufism, in addition to providing a vivid account of his biography and intellectual life. Surūr's arguments centre around the apologetic defence of Sufism; that is to say, he insists that true Sufism follows the Law and is hence unrelated to the heretical idea of the oneness of existence, and that al-Shaʿrānī, as well as Ibn ʿArabī, was amongst the Law-abiding, modest Sufis who do not belong to the advocates of the oneness of existence. In order to reiterate these points, Surūr selectively quotes al-Shaʿrānī's remarks that display an agreement between Sufis and jurists/theologians regarding their understanding of the Law and religious belief. The study also refers to

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[27] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 3.

several important ideas expressed by al-Shaʿrānī, including descriptions of his miraculous deeds, his view on the ruling class, and his intention to harmonise the teaching of Sufism and that of theology – which this thesis aims to illuminate. Although Surūr's work is a good introduction to al-Shaʿrānī's thought and his intellectual context in general, unfortunately it does not analyse any of these subjects in detail. Furthermore, the explanations proceed by accepting al-Shaʿrānī's statements uncritically. Consequently, like other studies on al-Shaʿrānī, Surūr's work overlooks the intricate structure that al-Shaʿrānī adopts to defend Ibn ʿArabī.

Recognising al-Shaʿrānī as an important Sufi in the medieval history of Islam, al-Qarnī elucidates al-Shaʿrānī's scholarly life by covering a wide range of subjects. They include al-Shaʿrānī's opinions on certain Sufi practices and ethics, along with his relations to and views of some of his Sufi teachers and other mystics, his attempt to unify different schools of the Law, his emphasis on attaining religious knowledge and basing his actions upon it, and his aim of reconciling the theological and mystical group. By quoting al-Shaʿrānī's famous works as well as his biography which was written a few centuries after his death,[28] al-Qarnī discusses each theme in a more detailed manner than the two studies reviewed above, presenting al-Shaʿrānī as a modest and sensible scholar. In spite of his careful analysis of al-Shaʿrānī, however, al-Qarnī's arguments remain descriptive, without giving enough attention to the methodologies and the worldview based on which al-Shaʿrānī developed his ideas. This results, once again, in a failure to properly examine al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought.

In his recent survey of al-Shaʿrānī's political discourse, al-Dālī clarifies al-Shaʿrānī's discussions of the authority of the Mamluk and Ottoman governments, of

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[28] The text is entitled as *al-Manākib al-kubrā* written by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Mālijī in the year 1109/1697.

the influence that government policies can exert on shaping society, and of the desirable relationship between the ruling class and people in society. To this end, al-Dālī interrogates several famous works of al-Shaʿrānī by reading the related passages closely. The study concludes that al-Shaʿrānī was not only a mystic who kept teaching in his Sufi lodge, but also a man of flexible opinions who aimed, in this case, to reconcile the position of the government with that of the Egyptian society and to represent the interests of both as much as possible. Although al-Dālī does not discuss al-Shaʿrānī's theological discourse, the work is insightful in that it casts light on the versatility of al-Shaʿrānī's teachings and their relevance to the present time. The work is timely, especially because it was published in the the year when the political demonstrations against the Egyptian government began.[29]

To summarise, previous studies on al-Shaʿrānī were concerned with the following points: (1) his religious/cultural milieu (discussed by Winter, Surūr, Tawfīq, and al-Qarnī; (2) his theory of saints and sainthood (Johnson); (3) his political theory and the theory of the ideal relationships between Sufi teachers and the ruling class (Sabra and al-Dālī); and (4) his jurisprudential teachings (Pagani, Ibrahim, and Dajani). However, these important studies, as I have repeatedly mentioned, do not consider the details of al-Shaʿrānī's theological defence of Ibn ʿArabī.

The central aim of this thesis is therefore to investigate al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings in a theological context through a close reading of his works of theology. It will expose the systematicity in al-Shaʿrānī's approach to Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism, situate his defence in the intellectual, theological milieu of his period, and demonstrate al-Shaʿrānī's unique attempt to integrate Ibn ʿArabī's thought into his own

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[29] Although the year of publication is 2011, the date noted in the editor's preface shows that the book was already complete in 2004.

theological and mystical worldview.

Chapter 1

Al-Shaʿrānī's Life, Intellectual Milieu, and Oeuvre

This chapter explores al-Shaʿrānī's biography, scholarly context, and writings. There has so far been little analysis of how al-Shaʿrānī's teachers and colleagues influenced his views on Ibn ʿArabī's thought, nor of what factors contributed to shaping the structure of his works of theology. It is therefore important to situate al-Shaʿrānī's ideas within the scholarly trends of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Egypt in order to get a better understanding of his theological project of defending Ibn ʿArabī. To this end, I will read the texts of al-Shaʿrānī's teachers and colleagues closely, detail their attitudes to Ibn ʿArabī, and identify some correspondences in ideas between al-Shaʿrānī's approach and that of his contemporaries to Ibn ʿArabī.

The current chapter consequently explores three themes in three different sections. In the first section, I outline al-Shaʿrānī's biography, emphasising in particular his role as a Sufi, and then introduce some of his most important teachers and colleagues, paying special attention to their stance on Ibn ʿArabī. They include Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī (d. 926/1520), Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ramlī (d. 957/1550), Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 973-4/1566-7), Abū Ḥasan al-Bakrī (d. ca. 951-954/1544-1547), his son Muḥammad al-Bakrī (d. 994/1586), and ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ al-Burullusī (d. 939/1532-1533).

In the second section, I investigate the controversies concerning Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, which raged well into the late Mamluk period. First, I provide an overview of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, looking in particular at his ideas on 'the oneness of existence' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and 'God's self-manifestation' (*tajallī*). Next, I analyse the thought

of four of his adversaries – Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390), Ḥusayn Ibn al-Ahdal (d. 855/1451), and Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480). Here, I will clarify the criticisms of Ibn ʿArabī that were of most concern to his supporters in late Mamluk and early Ottoman Egypt. Finally, I examine the arguments and strategies that al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar adopted from Ibn ʿArabī's antagonists in order to defend him. Against the currently agreed view that the Arabic-speaking advocates of Ibn ʿArabī in this period were uncritical apologists, I will argue that they methodically defended him by drawing on the theological framework already defined by his opponents. This finding will inform Chapter 2, where I shall contextualise al-Shaʿrānī's approach to Ibn ʿArabī's thought by focusing on how al-Shaʿrānī adopts this framework and further advances it.

The third section introduces al-Shaʿrānī's theological oeuvre. I first consider the structure of his writings, examining his treatment of Ibn ʿArabī's tripartite hierarchy of creeds (*ʿaqāʾid*). I then describe the contents of al-Shaʿrānī's eight theological works. This will give us a clearer picture of what he was trying to achieve through his theological project.

1.1. Al-Shaʿrānī's Life and Scholarship

Most of the biographical details concerning al-Shaʿrānī are recorded in the following texts: al-Shaʿrānī's biography *al-Manākib al-kubrā*, which was written by his admirer Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Mālijī[30] in the year 1109/1697; al-Shaʿrānī's autobiography *al-Laṭāʾif al-minan wa-l-akhlāq*; his biographical dictionaries of Sufis

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[30] I have not yet found any information on al-Mālijī's death date.

al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā and of jurists *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*; and a Sufi biography, *al-Kawāqib al-dhurriyya*, which was authored by his prominent disciple ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621).[31] By examining these primary materials along with the studies conducted by Winter and others, in this section, I will highlight some important factors that may have affected al-Shaʿrānī's thought.

1.1.1. Al-Shaʿrānī's Life

ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmad al-Shaʿrānī is primarily known as a prominent Shāfiʿī jurist, and for his jurisprudential works (*Kashf al-ghumma* and *al-Mīzān al-kubrā*, amongst others). He is also famous as a mystic, who stressed the importance of various Sufi etiquettes, as well as being an ardent supporter of Ibn ʿArabī. Al-Shaʿrānī was born in 897-8/1492-3 in the village of Qalqashanda in the province of Qalyūbiyya, which is north of Cairo. He was then brought to a village called Sāqiyat Abū Shaʿra by the river Nile in the province of Minūfiyya, west of the Qalyūbiyya province, and is hence called Shaʿrānī or Shaʿrāwī.[32]

His paternal grandfather, Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī (d. 891/1486), was a student of al-Azhar and a colleague of the then young Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, the future chief judge of the Shāfiʿī school of law and later an important teacher of al-Shaʿrānī.[33] Al-Shaʿrānī revered ʿAlī al-Anṣārī as a devoted mystic who belonged to the Sufi group led by the illiterate Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī (d. ca. 877/1472).[34] One of al-Matbūlī's disciples, ʿAlī

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[31] For more information on the sources on al-Shaʿrānī's life, see Winter, *Society and Religion*, 31-33.
[32] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 37; al-Malījī, *al-Manāqib*, 38.
[33] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 35.
[34] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 35; al-Malījī, *al-Manāqib*, 14; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 423-440.

al-Khawwāṣ, became the most influential Sufi teacher of al-Shaʿrānī.

Al-Shaʿrānī's father, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Aḥmad (d. 907/1501), was an educated scholar who learnt from some prominent Shāfiʿī scholars like Ṣāliḥ al-Bulqīnī (d. 868/1464) and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), both of whom also taught al-Suyūṭī. It is highly probable that al-Aḥmad was acquainted with al-Suyūṭī through them. With al-Aḥmad, the young al-Shaʿrānī studied the Qurʾān and hadith. After his father died in 907/1501, al-Shaʿrānī was looked after by his brother ʿAbd al-Qādir (d. 956/1549) for a period of time.[35] Then in 911/1505, at the age of twelve, he moved to Cairo.[36] Al-Shaʿrānī regards this journey from the countryside to Cairo as something symbolic in his life, describing it as a journey from a land of roughness and ignorance to a land of benevolence and knowledge.[37]

In Cairo, al-Shaʿrānī studied at the Ghamrī mosque in Bāb al-Shaʿriyya in the north of the city for seventeen years.[38] The mosque was founded by Sufi Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar al-Ghamrī (d. 850/1446-47), a disciple of Aḥmad al-Zāhid (d. 820/1417) of the Aḥmadī order.[39] Al-Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣarī was initiated into Sufism by Muḥammad al-Ghamrī.[40] His son, Abū Abbās al-Ghamrī once visited al-Shaʿrānī's village when the latter was eight years old.[41] This encounter could explain why al-Shaʿrānī chose the Ghamrī mosque upon his arrival in Cairo. Muḥammad al-Ghamrī's grandson, Abū

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[35] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Laṭāʾif*, 68.
[36] Sabra, 'Introduction' in *The Guidebook*, 9; al-Malījī, *al-Manāqib*, 39-40; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Laṭāʾif*, 67.
[37] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Laṭāʾif*, 69.
[38] Johnson, 'Unerring Balance,' xv; al-Dālī, *al-Khiṭāb al-siyāsī*, 41.
[39] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 38, 73-74.
[40] al-Shaʿrānī, *Anwār al-qudsiyya*, 50-51; *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*, 27; *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 454. According to al-Ghazzī, al-Shaʿrānī recounts the episode when al-Anṣari visited al-Ghamrī while the latter was in *khalwa*. Al-Anṣari saw seven eyes on al-Ghamrī with which he could watch what was going on in the world. When he visited him again, al-Anṣari found al-Ghamrī floating in the air (al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 1, 200; see also Ingalls, 'Recasting al-Qushayrī's Risāla,' 98-99).
[41] al-Shaʿrānī, *Tabaqāt al-kubrā*, 451. I have not found the death date of Abū Abbās al-Ghamrī.

al-Ḥasan al-Ghamrī (d. 939/1532-1533), was a friend of al-Shaʿrānī.[42] During his stay at al-Ghamrī, in 914/1508, al-Shaʿrānī became a student of Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī. In 923/1517, he witnessed the invasion of Cairo by the Ottoman Sultan Selīm I (r. 918/1512-926/1520) and the subsequent defeat of the Mamluks. While he was at the Ghamrī mosque, al-Shaʿrānī also frequently visited al-Azhar in order to pursue further knowledge.[43]

As al-Shaʿrānī's popularity as a Sufi rose, the members of the Ghamrī mosque started to harass him out of jealousy. This eventually led him to leaving the mosque in around 928/1522. A few years later, his own Sufi lodge (*zāwiya*) was built by an official called Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Uzbakī on land that he had endowed as a religious foundation (*waqf*).[44] Al-Shaʿrānī's Sufi lodge gradually attracted a lot of people, and through its management he gained wealth and fame.[45] Its attendants were mainly educated, non-scholarly artisans and illiterate laypeople.[46] Sabra maintains that being a renowned scholar, al-Shaʿrānī was favoured by different classes of society, because he combined the culture of the literate religious intellectuals with the popular religion of illiterate people.[47]

Al-Shaʿrānī kept teaching at his Sufi lodge until he died in 923/1565 at the age of seventy-four. The Egyptian vizier ʿAlī Pasha, officials, judges, scholars, Sufis, and

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[42] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 38.
[43] al-Dālī, *al-Khiṭāb al-siyāsī*, 32.
[44] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 38-40. It is believed that this endowment is related to the defeat of the Egyptian governor Aḥmad Pāshā (d. 931/1524) in 1524; after the revolt was suppressed, the authorities started land registration, including for land owned by the former Mamluk officials. Many landholders donated their lands in order not to have them confiscated by the new government. See also Sabra, 'Introduction' in *The Guidebook*, 4-5. On the revolt by Aḥmad Pasha, see Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt's Adjustment*, 48-49.
[45] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 39-41; Sabra, 'Introduction' in *The Guidebook*, 4.
[46] This made al-Shaʿrānī acutely aware of the suffering of the laypeople from poverty and heavy taxation, which, according to Sabra, was unusual for the scholars of his age (Sabra, 'Introduction' in *the Guidebook*, 8-13; Winter, *Society and Religion*, 50-52).
[47] Sabra, 'Introduction' in *the Guidebook*, 3.

commoners are said to have attended his funeral.[48] He was buried next to his lodge. Al-Shaʿrānī was succeeded by his son ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 1011/1603), and the lodge ultimately survived at least until the early nineteenth century.[49]

Al-Shaʿrānī's most famous student is without doubt Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621).[50] Al-Munāwī left a biographical dictionary of Sufis called *al-Kawākib al-dhurriyya fī tarājim al-sāda al-ṣūfiyya* and *Fayḍ al-qadīr sharḥ al-jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, which is a mystical commentary on al-Suyūṭī's collection of rare hadiths, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*. In both works, he occasionally refers to al-Shaʿrānī. However, little is known about how al-Munāwī was affected by al-Shaʿrānī, nor how the latter's teaching was embraced in later generations.

With regard to al-Shaʿrānī's affiliation to the established Sufi institutions, he did not declare himself a member of one particular Sufi order, but maintained connections with various orders, including the Aḥmadī, the Shādhilī, and its sub-order the Wafāʾī which was founded by Muḥammad Wafāʾ (d.765/1363) and his son ʿAlī Wafāʾ (d. 807/1405) in Mamluk Cairo.[51] Belonging to more than one order was not unusual in this period. His teacher Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī also joined several Sufi orders without showing loyalty to a specific institution. Despite this, al-Shaʿrānī's relationships to the Shādhilī and Wafāʾī orders seem to have been the strongest. This is observed in *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, in which he devotes a substantial number of pages to certain Shādhilī and Wafāʾī Sufis: eleven pages on the founder of the Shādhilī order Abū

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[48] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 55; al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 4. 72.
[49] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 56-57.
[50] El-Rouayheb briefly introduces al-Munāwī's position as the Ashʿarī theologian. El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 283-284.
[51] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 69-92. The Wafāʾī order traces its esoteric lineage to the early Shādhilī shaykhs: Dāʾūd ibn Bākhilā, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh Iskandarī (d. 709/1309), al-Mursī and al-Shādhilī. For more information on this order, see the arguments in McGregor, *Sanctity*.

l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), ten pages on his successor Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), eighteen pages on Muḥammad Wafāʾ's teacher al-Shadhilī Dāʾūd ibn Bākhilā (d. 733/1332), fifty-nine pages on ʿAlī Wafāʾ which is by far the lengthiest entry, and nineteen pages on Shādhilī Muḥammad Abū al-Mawāhib (d. ca. 911-4/1505-9), who was an ardent follower of ʿAlī Wafāʾ and a teacher of the Shādhilī Ibrāhim al-Mawāhibī (d. 914/1508-9).[52] I will discuss the teaching of Ibrāhim al-Mawāhibī concerning his view on the notion of God's with-ness (*maʿiyya*) in Chapter 5.

The lengths of these entries, especially on ʿAlī Wafāʾ, stand out in comparison to just one page on Ibn ʿArabī and three pages on Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī. Even al-Shaʿrānī's important Sufi teacher ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ (twenty-six pages) is not given as long an entry as ʿAlī Wafāʾ. In one of his theological works, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya fī tawḥīd ahl al-khuṣūṣiyya*, al-Shaʿrānī also dedicates a whole chapter to the sayings of ʿAlī Wafāʾ. Al-Shaʿrānī's strong interest in ʿAlī Wafāʾ can be attributed to the popularity that the latter's order rapidly gained in Egypt.[53] There is also a striking similarity between ʿAlī Wafāʾ's thought and that of Ibn ʿArabī. For example, similarly to Ibn ʿArabī, ʿAlī Wafāʾ upholds the theories of God's self-manifestation and the oneness of God and creation.[54]

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[52] See al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*. On the other hand, he spends merely a few sentences on al-Mursī's disciple Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh and two pages on another founder of the Wafāʾī order, Muḥammad Wafāʾ.

[53] According to al-Munāwī's report, ʿAlī Wafāʾ's order had a great number of followers. Reportedly, some of them were too extreme in their love for him, so much so that they started to offer him a lot of money. When Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī once joined ʿAlī Wafāʾ's gathering, he had to prohibit the followers from prostrating themselves in the direction of ʿAlī Wafāʾ. He also saw ʿAlī Wafāʾ rotating at the centre of the circle during the *samāʿ* session while chanting: 'wherever you may turn, there is a face of God' [Q: 2.115]. When a person who was present at that time declared him an unbeliever, ʿAlī Wafāʾ and his followers left the room (al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 3, 136-146; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, vol. 2, 308).

[54] McGregor, *Sanctity*, 123-127. Al-Munāwī also admits that ʿAlī Wafāʾ follows the path of Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ. See al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 3, 147. It has to be mentioned that ʿAlī Wafāʾ does not mention Ibn ʿArabī's name nor cite his works. The latter's actual influence on the former needs further scholarly investigation.

It is most probably due to ʿAlī Wafāʾs monistic leanings that a number of Egyptian scholars who were adversaries of Ibn ʿArabī – amongst others, the Shāfiʿī Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1403),[55] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqālānī,[56] and the Shāfiʿī historian and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqālānī's student ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 903/1497)[57] – condemned ʿAlī Wafāʾ as heretical, whereas Ibn ʿArabī's advocates al-Suyūṭī and al-Shaʿrānī defended him.[58]

With respect to al-Shaʿrānī's close relation to the Shādhilī order, there is an intriguing similarity between his approach to Ibn ʿArabī's thought and that of some Shādhilīs in this period. As we shall see later, they try to understand Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine as something visionary, not ontological nor cosmological. This raises a possibility that al-Shaʿrānī was part of the wider scholarly trend of reinterpreting Ibn ʿArabī's worldview in this specific manner.

In relation to his theological affiliation, al-Shaʿrānī held Ashʿarism in faith.[59] Ashʿarism was a major theological group in Mamluk Egypt and remained prominent in the early Ottoman era, that is, between the nineth/fifteenth and late tenth/sixteenth century, despite the fact that the Ottomans generally favoured Māturīdism. With regard to this, Haidar argues that Ashʿarism greatly influenced Māturīdism even in this period and its texts remained popular in the religious schools before the latter took a more

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[55] al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 3, 147.
[56] al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 3, 146; Ibn Ḥajar, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, vol. 2, 308-309. Ibn Ḥajar castigated ʿAlī Wafāʾs poetry for preaching the union of God with His creation (*ittiḥād*) as a form of heresy (*ilḥād*).
[57] al-Sakhāwī, *al-Dawʾ*, vol. 6, 21 (n. 46). On their attacks on Ibn ʿArabī, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*.
[58] Al-Suyūṭī, for example, defended ʿAlī Wafāʾ by quoting the latter's statement as follows: 'people think of me [ʿAlī Wafāʾ] as an upholder of the union with God and incarnation of God, but my heart is actually filled with the notion of God's unity (*tawḥīd*)' [al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2, 135].
[59] al-Mālijī, *al-Manāqib*, 38; Spevack, *The Archetypal*, 89.

definitive form towards the end of eleventh/seventeenth century.[60] Al-Shaʿrānī also notes in his *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* that what is meant by the people of Sunna are the followers of Abū Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-6) and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) from Samarkand, an eponym of Māturīdism. According to him, while Ashʿarism spread in many parts of the Islamic world, including Khorasan, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, Māturīdism was only upheld in Central Asia.[61]

The popularity that Ashʿarism retained in early Ottoman Egypt would explain al-Shaʿrānī's attempts to reconcile some of the school's teachings with those of Ibn ʿArabī. However, al-Shaʿrānī's theological views do differ from those of the majority of the Ashʿarīs in many aspects. Most markedly, following Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī opposes the application of figurative interpretation to scripture. As we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, al-Shaʿrānī also takes a different approach to the issue of the divine attributes.

1.1.2. Al-Shaʿrānī's Teachers and His Scholarly Community

The aim of this section is to clarify al-Shaʿrānī's intellectual milieu as a defender of Ibn ʿArabī. Al-Shaʿrānī studied with some fifty teachers from different schools of law and Sufi orders. Incorporating the findings and trajectory of insights provided by Geoffory, Ingalls, and El-Rouayheb, I introduce below some of al-Shaʿrānī's most important teachers and colleagues. I will first look at Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ramlī, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, and Abū Ḥasan al-Bakrī and his son Muḥammad al-Bakrī. These were renowned Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī

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[60] Haidar, 'The Debates,' 17, 116-121, 204-211.
[61] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 4. Quoting al-Taftāzānī, al-Shaʿrānī notes that differences between the two theological groups are merely trivial. See al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, vol. 5, 231-232. See also Haidar, 'The Debates,' 116-117.

scholars who held central positions in Egyptian society. The reasons for selecting these particular figures include, first of all, the fact that they were favoured by and close to al-Shaʿrānī, as indicated in his works. More importantly, they were strong advocates of Sufism and of Ibn ʿArabī, just like al-Shaʿrānī. In fact, as we shall see later, there is an intriguing resemblance between them and al-Shaʿrānī in their approach to the defence of Ibn ʿArabī. Considering the scope of this study, which aims to elucidate al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, an observation of these scholars will lead us to delineate the intellectual trend which al-Shaʿrānī was most likely to have been part of. For this reason, in this section, I will especially describe their relationships with al-Shaʿrānī, along with their view of Sufism and on Ibn ʿArabī in general.

This is followed by a reference to al-Shaʿrānī's most influential non-scholarly Sufi teacher, ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ al-Burullusī, and his acceptance of Ibn ʿArabī's thought. Aside from Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī quotes ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ more than anyone else in his works on Sufism. This indicates the significance of ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's role in moulding al-Shaʿrānī's thought.

1.1.2.1. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī

Al-Shaʿrānī considers the Shāfiʿī polymath and the renewer of Islam (*mujaddid*) for the ninth-century, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, as one of his major teachers in jurisprudence.[62] As a theologian, al-Suyūṭī belonged to the Ashʿarī school, yet he denounced the study of logic for theology.[63] Al-Suyūṭī was also familiar with mystical

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[62] For al-Suyūṭī's view on jurisprudence, see Hernandez, *The Legal Thought*. With regard to his view on angelology, see Burge, *Angles in Islam*.
[63] For al-Suyūṭī's position on the Ashʿarī school and logic, see El-Rouayheb, 'Sunni Scholars,'

teaching, and his main teacher in the Sufi path was Shādhilī Muḥammad al-Maghribī (d.

910/1504) who was influenced by Ibn ʿArabī's tenet of the oneness of existence.[64]

Although al-Suyūṭī did not become a member of a particular Sufi order, it has been

pointed out that he favoured the Shādhilī order.[65]

With regard to al-Shaʿrānī's encounter with al-Suyūṭī, it is reported that the latter

granted the then around the ten-year-old al-Shaʿrānī, whom he had never met before, a

permission to promulgate his teachings and to lecture about all his books (*ijāza*).[66]

According to al-Malījī, this was made possible through the request of al-Shaʿrānī's

father Shihāb al-Dīn al-Aḥmad to al-Suyūṭī who shared the same teachers with

al-Aḥmad.[67] When al-Shaʿrānī moved to Cairo in 911/1505, he finally had a chance to

meet al-Suyūṭī in person for the first and only time. The meeting took place a month

before the latter's death. On this occasion, al-Shaʿrānī recited several hadiths and

passages from jurisprudential books. Al-Suyūṭī then allegedly put a piece of cloth

(*khirqa*) on him, a symbolic act that a Sufi teacher performs when admitting a disciple

to his group.[68] Whether or not the account is historically true, it is unlikely that

al-Shaʿrānī learnt anything from al-Suyūṭī directly during this short period. Winter

nonetheless believes that, considering al-Shaʿrānī's constant reference to al-Suyūṭī's

opinions in religious and legal issues, the latter's influence over the former should not

be ignored.[69]

According to Geoffroy, al-Suyūṭī was an ardent supporter of Sufism; so much so

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215-216; Spevac, 'The Intolerant Ecumenist,' 36-44; Hernandez, 'Framing the Jurist.'
[64] Geoffroy, 'al-Suyūṭī as a Sufi,' 9-10. I will discuss the teachingx of Muḥammad al-Maghribī in Chapter 5.
[65] Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, vol. 1, 35-36.
[66] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*, 8.
[67] al-Malījī, *al-Manāqib*, 28.
[68] al-Malījī, *al-Manāqib*, 27.
[69] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 45.

that he included his approval of the discipline of Sufism in his collection of legal opinions, called *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, something that no Muslim scholar had ever done before.[70] In this regard, Geoffroy argues that al-Suyūṭī is deemed a pioneer in advocating Sufism formally within the legal field of *fatwā*, paving the way for later scholars to do the same. Indeed, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī and two of al-Anṣārī's students, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ramlī and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, followed al-Suyūṭī's path and included their official endorsement of Sufism in their collections of legal opinions.[71] Al-Suyūṭī also 'apologetically' excused Ibn ʿArabī. Based on the observation that Ibn ʿArabī's works had been falsified, al-Suyūṭī tried to dissociate Ibn ʿArabī from the heretical ideas of unificationism, incarnationism, and ontological monism, while calling for a ban on the reading of his texts. I will come back to the details of al-Suyūṭī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī later in this chapter.

1.1.2.2. Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī

In 914/1508, a couple of years after al-Shaʿrānī arrived in Cairo, he was initiated as a Sufi novice at the age of fifteen, by the then eighty-five-year old Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, by being vested with the Sufi mantle. Al-Anṣārī was a chief judge of the Shāfiʿī school from 886/1481-905/1500 during the reign of the Mamluk sultan al-Qāʾitbāy (r. 872/1468-901/1496).[72] Like al-Shaʿrānī, al-Anṣārī is believed to have belonged to all of the major Sufi orders in Egypt, including the Shādhilī order.[73] His widely circulated

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[70] Geoffroy, 'al-Suyūṭī as a Sufi,' 9-13.
[71] Geoffroy, 'al-Suyūṭī as a Sufi,' 9-10; Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 235-237.
[72] Witner, *Society and Religion*, 44; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya*, 49; *al-Ṭabaq al-ṣughrā*, 27. For his legal thought as a jurist, see Hernandez, *The Legal Thought of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*.
[73] Geoffroy, 'Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī,' in *EI2*; McGregor, 'al-Anṣārī', Zakariyyāʾ,' in *EI3*. For the details of emergence of the Shādhilī order in Egypt, see Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism*.

mystical work is *Iḥkām al-dalāla ʿalā taḥrīr al-risāla*. It is a commentary on the mystic al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1072) Sufi manual *al-Risāla*. Al-Shaʿrānī relied on *Iḥkām* when reading al-Qushayrī's epistles with the help of al-Anṣārī.[74] According to Ingalls, the range of theological subjects that al-Anṣārī refers to in *Iḥkām* suggests that its main readership is a group of non-intellectuals, who nevertheless possess at least a basic understanding of the scholarly sciences – not the pure commoners who have no knowledge in these fields at all – and who are also eager to pursue the Sufi path.[75] This indicates that, educated and spiritually advanced as he might have been, al-Anṣārī was concerned with addressing those who were outside of scholarly institutions.[76] As we shall see, al-Shaʿrānī also prefers to speak to a group of people who are not members of the intellectual elite, yet who are educated to a certain extent, with aspirations to learn mysticism.

Al-Anṣārī spoke favourably of Ibn ʿArabī and of the controversial Egyptian Sufi poet Ibn Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235).[77] The legal opinion that al-Anṣārī issued against the Shāfiʿī al-Biqāʿī in the year 874/1469, with the objective of defending the mystical utterances of Ibn Fāriḍ through a metaphorical interpretation, is well known.[78] According to one of his students, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, al-Anṣārī once stated that whoever declared Ibn ʿArabī an infidel was himself an infidel and that a mystic who expressed what sounds like unificationism and incarnationism in the state of experiencing God's unity did not actually mean them (and hence, he should be

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[74] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā*, 452; al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 4. 70; al-Malījī, *al-Manāqib*, 44.
[75] Ingalls, 'Recasting Qushayrī's *Risāla*,' 107.
[76] Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 133-134.
[77] al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 1, 205.
[78] Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 59-61. For Ibn Fāriḍ, see Homerin, *From Arab Poet*.

sanctioned).[79] In spite of his favourable view on Ibn ʿArabī, al-Anṣārī does not speak much of the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī. A lack of reference to the latter's actual sayings is a tendency that is often observed amongst his supporters, including al-Suyūṭī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ramlī, and Ibn Ḥajar.

In my view, al-Anṣārī was more of an advocate of Ashʿarī theology than of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings. In contrast with al-Shaʿrānī who, like Ibn ʿArabī, denounces the figurative interpretation of scripture (as will be discussed in Chapter 3), al-Anṣārī positively upholds it, together with the majority of the Ashʿarīs. In contrast with Ibn ʿArabī and al-Shaʿrānī, al-Anṣārī also maintains − following the Ashʿarīs − that the divine attributes are not identical to God yet they are not other than Him.[80] For example, when explicating the meaning of God's with-ness in 'He is with you wherever you are' [Q. 57:4], al-Anṣārī insists that God is with you, not in the sense of physical closeness but through His knowledge and help, an interpretation that is typical of the major Ashʿarīs.[81] This view differs from that of al-Shaʿrānī whose approach to this verse is firmly grounded in Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of God's attributes. I will discuss this in Chapter 5.

Aside from their aforementioned concern for non-scholarly but relatively educated people, another interesting similarity between al-Anṣārī and al-Shaʿrānī is their attempts to integrate Sufi discussions into the sphere of theology. With respect to al-Anṣārī's view on this, Ingalls writes as follows:

Elsewhere in his [al-Anṣārī] commentary, he explains that the Sufis should

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[79] Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Fatāwī al-ḥadīthiyya*, 52.
[80] al-Anṣārī, *Iḥkām*, vol. 1, 197;
[81] al-Anṣārī, *Iḥkām*, vol. 1, 59;

be considered 'to be a part of the larger body of religious scholars' (*min jumlat ṭawāʾif al-ʿulamāʾ*) and expressly analogizes their discipline and its terms of art with those of the theologians (*ahl ʿuṣūl al-dīn*). In this manner, al-Anṣārī links Sufism and theology as mutually inclusive spheres of scholarly insight.[82]

According to Ingalls, al-Anṣārī analyses theological subjects such as the vision of God or the issue of freewill by turning to the mystical discipline.[83] True as this may be, however, as far as his *Iḥkām* is concerned, al-Anṣārī does not extensively examine how he can actually explain theological problems through the realm of mysticism. He certainly tries to combine mystical and theological terms by employing mysticism-charged expressions, such as the hearts of Sufis (*ʿārifūn*) or mystical knowledge (*maʿrifa*), when discussing theological issues. However, he does not add any thorough analysis. This shows that al-Anṣārī's attempt to intermingle the mystical and theological disciplines remains rather preliminary.

As we shall see, it is precisely this theological project that al-Shaʿrānī took over. I will discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 how al-Shaʿrānī gives answers to certain theological conundrums by drawing on Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, thereby making an inextricable connection between theology and Ibn ʿArabī-inspired Sufism. Although al-Shaʿrānī states that he esteems al-Anṣārī not as a primary guide on the mystical path, but more as a prominent legal scholar,[84] their shared attempt to establish mysticism as an independent scholarly discipline should not be dismissed.

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[82] Ingalls, 'Reading the Sufis,' 463. See also Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 164-165.
[83] Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 164-165.
[84] Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 48.

1.1.2.3. Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ramlī, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, and Muḥammad and Abū Ḥasan al-Bakrī

One of al-Anṣārī's students, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ramlī (d. 957/1550), is known as a distinguished Shāfiʿī jurist. Al-Ramlī taught al-Shaʿrānī and they read *al-Rawḍa*, a jurisprudential work by the Shāfiʿī jurist Abū Zakariyyāʾ al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277-8), together. Al-Ramlī also read through some of al-Shaʿrānī's jurisprudential works (*Kashf al-ghumma* and *Manhaj al-mubīn fī bayān adillat madhāhib al-mujtahidīn*) and commented on them.[85] Al-Shaʿrānī held al-Ramlī in high regard as a jurist, and so did ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ.[86]

Al-Ramlī was also a defender of Sufism and a supporter of Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn Fāriḍ. In his *Fatāwā*, he excuses a notorious declaration by the mystic Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875) – 'Glory be to me!' – by associating it with the mystical experience of annihilation into God's unity (*fanāʾ fī l-tawḥīd*). In al-Ramlī's view, annihilation is the state where a mystic loses sight of himself and witnesses nothing but God.[87] This would mean that, in al-Ramlī's mind, al-Bisṭāmī's utterance only represents a psychological, visionary state, not the world's reality in which his existence ontologically becomes one with God. This reading can be understood against Ibn ʿArabī's view of al-Bisṭāmī as a mystic whose hearing, sight, tongue, and physical faculties become those of God as a result of loving Him passionately – so much so that he sees himself as the same as God.[88] In contrast to this view, al-Ramlī seems rather to believe that God's unity, which the mystics experience at the end of their mystical path,

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[85] al-Shaʿrānī, *Laṭāʾif*, 93-94.
[86] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*, 45.
[87] al-Ramlī, *Fatāwā al-Ramlī*, vol. 4, 252.
[88] Ernst, 'The Man without Attributes,' 11; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya,* vol. 2, 361.

should be separated from the ontological oneness of God and creatures. That is to say, a mystic's loss of awareness of himself does not lead to identification of himself with God. This position accords with that of his contemporaries such as al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar. I will discuss their method of defending Ibn ʿArabī's thought in the next section. Al-Ramlī s son, the renowned Shāfiʿī jurist and a contemporary of al-Shaʿrānī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ramlī (d. 1004/1595), was also a strong champion of Sufism.[89] He learned to admire Ibn ʿArabī from his father, Aḥmad al-Ramlī.[90]

The Shāfiʿī Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 973-4/1566-7), who is also called Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Ḥajar, was a prominent student of al-Anṣārī and a contemporary of al-Shaʿrānī.[91] He is famous for his commentary on al-Nawawī's jurisprudential work *al-Minhāj*.[92] Ibn Ḥajar seems to have had a relatively good relationship with al-Shaʿrānī; he was one of the witnesses when the latter was given a license to train Sufi novices by his Aḥmadī Sufi teacher, Muḥammad al-Shināwī.[93] He also shared with al-Shaʿrānī a hostile attitude towards Ibn Taymiyya. Like al-Anṣārī, Ibn Ḥajar expresses his support of Sufis in his *Fatāwā*. He also defends Ibn ʿArabī by carefully associating him with the group of legitimate mystics. I will detail this point in the next section in regards to the controversies over Ibn ʿArabī's thought.

Ibn Ḥajar names Abū Ḥasan al-Bakrī (d. ca. 951-954/1544-1547) as one of his teachers of jurisprudence and leaves a summary of the latter's teaching in the text entitled *Sharḥ mukhtaṣar Abū Ḥasan al-Bakrī*.[94] Abū Ḥasan al-Bakrī was from an

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[89] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*, 86-88. See also al-Ghazzī, *Shadharāt*, vol. 10, 404.
[90] al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 2, 503, 520.
[91] For Ibn Ḥajar's relation to al-Anṣārī, see Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 108-109. For his view on Ibn Taymiyya, see, El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar,' 276.
[92] Arendonk and Schacht, 'Ibn Ḥadjar al-Haytamī,' in *EI2*.
[93] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*, 94. Al-Shināwī's death date is unknown. See also Winter, *Society and Religion*, 77-78.
[94] al-Ghazzī, *Shadharāt*, vol. 10, 542.

aristocratic family of Shāfiʿī-Shādhilī Sufis and also taught al-Anṣārī and al-Shaʿrānī.[95]

According to al-Shaʿrānī, Abū Ḥasan al-Bakrī excelled both in the spheres of jurisprudence and of Sufism, and was popular amongst the intellectual elites and commoners in this period.[96] He wrote books on Qurʾānic interpretation, jurisprudence, and Sufism, and left commentaries on al-Nawawī's *al-Minhāj* and *al-rawḍā*.[97] His son, the Sufi poet Muḥammad al-Bakrī (d. 994/1586) was a student of al-Anṣārī in jurisprudence.[98] He was also a good friend of al-Shaʿrānī and they met each other on many occasions.[99] Muḥammad al-Bakrī had a profound knowledge of Qurʾānic interpretation and Sufism, and al-Shaʿrānī eulogised his knowledge in religious matters.[100]

As El-Rouayheb insightfully noted, while expressing his respect for Ibn ʿArabī, Muḥammad al-Bakrī rejects his ontological doctrine of the oneness of existence by reinterpreting it as 'the unity of mystical witnessing/experience,' or what I later call experiential oneness.[101] In respect of this, El-Rouayheb writes:

> Bakrī summarized his own view […]: 'The unity is experiential, not ontological (*waḥdatu shuhūdiyyatun lā wujūdiyyatun*).' This is a remarkable anticipation of the position expressed by the later Indo-Muslim Naqshbandi Sufi Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624). Sirhindī's position has often been presented as a radical break with earlier Sufi thought and as ushering in a new period

[95] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 170.
[96] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*, 53-54.
[97] al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 3, 324. For more information of the works by al-Nawawī, see Halim, 'The Axis of Authority.'
[98] al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib* vol. 2, 192.
[99] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*, 88-89.
[100] al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 3 459-460; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣughrā*, 88. He also left commentaries on al-Nawawī's *al-Minhāj* and *al-Rawḍā*. See al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 2, 194.
[101] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 242-246.

in which 'neo-Sufis' abandoned the idea of 'the unit of existence' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and exchanged it for the alternative formula 'the unity of mystical witnessing/experience' (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*). This narrative clearly ignores a powerful Sufi tradition in the Arab world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that explicitly rejected (or explained away) *waḥdat al-wujūd* while at the same time endorsing classic Sufi notions of 'annihilation' in the experience of the divine.[102]

Later in this chapter, I will show that al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar promote a similar position by presenting the oneness of existence as the oneness of mystical witnessing/experience. Furthermore, in Chapter 2, we shall see that al-Shaʿrānī also strikingly endorses this view.

1.1.2.4. ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ al-Burullusī

Despite his connections with some highly educated intellectuals, al-Shaʿrānī did not teach at al-Azhar. He preferred to be amongst the local non-scholarly Sufis led by illiterate mystics like ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ al-Burullusī (d. 939/1532-33). As is clear from al-Shaʿrānī's constant reference to ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's words, the latter was indisputably his greatest influence.[103] Al-Shaʿrānī does not state when he first became a student of ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ.[104] Yet, since one of his first works was written around 931/1525,

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[102] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 244-245.
[103] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 46-47; al-Malījī, *al-Manāqib*, 63. Al-Shaʿrānī also often refers to the words of his Sufi teacher Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Marṣafī (d. 935/1528-1529). Unfortunately, not much is known about this figure.
[104] For details of how al-Shaʿrānī became a disciple of ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, see Winter, *Society*

soon after his becoming ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's disciple, their encounter must have happened sometime before this year.[105]

ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ was an uneducated Sufi who made his living by selling everyday items like soap, sycamore, dates, and oil and by braiding palm leaves. He was illiterate, and hence neither read nor wrote any books.[106] In spite of this, some renowned Egyptian jurists, such as the Shāfiʿī Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ramlī, the Mālikī Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Laqānī (d. 958/1551), and the Ḥanbalī Shihāb al-Dīn al-Futūḥī (d. 949/1542-43) used to visit ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ and heeded his remarks.[107] ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's teacher Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī (d. ca. 877/1472), whose mystic group al-Shaʿrānī's grandfather belonged to, was also illiterate and worked for his living.[108]

One thing that deserves attention regarding ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's thought is his endorsement of Ibn ʿArabī's worldview. ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's statements, frequently quoted in al-Shaʿrānī's works, exhibit the undeniable influence of Ibn ʿArabī's monism, which ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ must have learnt by word of mouth. Al-Shaʿrānī left two writings as collections of ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's sayings. They are entitled *al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar mimmā istafādahu sayyidī ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī min shaykhihi sayyidī ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ* (written in 940/1533) and *Durar al-ghawwāṣ ʿalā fatāwī sīdī ʿAlī Khawwāṣ* (written in 955/1548).[109] The texts are full of mystical terms, including

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and Religion, 46-47; al-Mālijī, *al-Manāqib*, 54-55

[105] Al-Shaʿrānī's first writing is titled *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī bayān ādāb al-ʿubūdiyya* and explains the Sufi etiquettes and virtues. For the date of completion of al-Shaʿrānī's works, see the timetable by Sabra, 'Introduction' in *The Guidebook*, 31-33.

[106] Sabra, 'Illiterate Sufis,' 160; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā*, 490-491. For more information on him, see Geoffroy, 'Une grand figure,' 169-176.

[107] al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 2, 219.

[108] Al-Shaʿrānī never met al-Matbūlī in person, yet he was greatly impressed by him and left a book entitled *al-Ahlāq al-Matbūliyya* that enlists the virtues of al-Matubūlī and other Sufis who belonged to his group. Although al-Shaʿrānī reports that he had no shaykh other than the prophet, the historical record shows that al-Matubūlī had an Aḥmadī shaykh. See more on this in Winter, *Society and Religion*, 75-77.

[109] Sabra, 'Introduction' in *The Guidebook*, 31-32.

those employed by Ibn ʿArabī such as immutable entities (*aʿyān thābita*),[110] exclusive

oneness (*aḥadiyya*) and inclusive oneness (*wāḥidiyya*),[111] God's self-manifestation

(*tajallī*) in the world's beings,[112] and the world of imagination (*ʿālam al-khayāl*) where

God's attributes are manifested.[113]

Another work in which al-Shaʿrānī often adduces ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ and one which

displays the strong effect of Ibn ʿArabī's thought is *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*

al-mubayyina li-ʿaqāʾid al-firaq al-ʿaliyya. I will look at this work in detail later in this

chapter. Suffice it to note here that through the words of ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, *al-Mīzān*

al-dharriyya promotes the dogma of the oneness of existence, whereby God is

considered to be the only real existence and everything else is merely His reflection.

Even though ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ does not mention the formula 'the oneness of existence'

itself, this evidence confirms his support of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological monism.[114]

Regardless of a certain familiarity with Ibn ʿArabī's doctrines, ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ

most likely did not possess a deep understanding of the former's thought, nor much

knowledge of speculative theology, due to his illiteracy and lack of education. This

would explain why al-Shaʿrānī employs his own words or relies on Ibn ʿArabī and other

scholars, but not on ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, when discussing theological issues in his texts on

theology, such as *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, and *al-Qawāʿid*

al-kashfiyya.

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[110] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar*, 167.
[111] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar*, 171-172.
[112] al-Shaʿrānī, *Durar al-ghawwāṣ*, 198.
[113] al-Shaʿrānī, *Durar al-ghawwāṣ*, 218.
[114] Chittick stresses that Ibn ʿArabī's thought cannot simply be categorised as ontological monism, pantheism, and panentheism monism, as he explains the idea of the oneness of existence with so many nuances and in different contexts. However, since I am looking at the reception of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching by his opponents and defenders, who viewed it foremost as being monistic and pantheistic, elsewhere I describe Ibn ʿArabī's worldview as 'monistic.' See Chittick, 'Rūmī and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*,' 73.

1.1.3. Concluding Remark

The above discussion shows that al-Shaʿrānī's interactions with various scholarly and non-scholarly figures influenced his overall attitude towards Ibn ʿArabī. On the one hand, he was strongly inspired by the local and uneducated Sufi Alī al-Khawwāṣ who wholeheartedly embraced the mystical worldview of Ibn ʿArabī. On the other hand, al-Shaʿrānī was affected by the renowned and established Shāfiʿī scholars of his period, who favoured Sufism and Ibn ʿArabī, all the while avoiding supporting his monistic worldview.[115] As we shall see, belonging to both these communities, with their different stances on Ibn ʿArabī, contributed to making al-Shaʿrānī's thought multifaceted.

1.2. Controversies over Ibn ʿArabī

The objective of this section is to investigate the polemics over Ibn ʿArabī's thought prior to al-Shaʿrānī. There are three themes. First, I will provide an account of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological doctrine known as 'the oneness of existence'. This subject has so far received much scholarly attention.[116] I therefore confine myself to a brief overview of the doctrine.

Secondly, I consider the opposition to Ibn ʿArabī's teachings by examining the four of his adversaries who are the most relevant to my thesis. These are: (1) the

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[115] For further information on al-Shaʿrānī's contemporaries from other schools of law, see Winter, *Society and Religion*, 170-174.

[116] For example, Izutsu, *Sufism*; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, *The Self-Disclosure*, and *Imaginal Worlds*.

Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya, from Damascus, whom al-Shaʿrānī himself refers to as one of the most formidable critics of mysticism; (2) the Timurid Ḥanafī-Ashʿarī theologian Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, whose method of classifying mysticism into two types was adopted not only by Ibn ʿArabī's opponents in later generations but also by his supporters in al-Shaʿrānī's period; (3) the Yemeni Shāfiʾī-Ashʿarī theologian Ḥusayn Ibn al-Ahdal, whose attack on Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, especially on the idea of the tripartite hierarchy of creeds, bears a certain relevance to the structure of al-Shaʿrānī's works; (4) the Mamluk Shāfiʿī jurist Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī, from Egypt, who disputed with al-Suyūṭī and al-Anṣārī. In terms of chronology and geography, al-Biqāʿī is the figure most relevant to al-Shaʿrānī and his scholarly circle.

There have been extensive studies of the attacks on Ibn ʿArabī advanced by these scholars. Knysh and Akkach examine Ibn Taymiyya's castigation of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, focusing on the notions of divine predestination (*qadar*), sainthood (*walāya*), and noetic beings called the immutable entities (*aʿyān thābita*).[117] Knysh and El-Rouayheb analyse al-Taftāzānī's metaphysical critique of the oneness of existence.[118] Knysh also refers to al-Taftāzānī's distinction between ontological Sufis (*al-ṣūfiyya al-wujūdiyya*) – who believe that their mystical experience of God's unity represents the objective reality of the cosmos – and moderate Sufis – who only speak of the subjective, visionary truth.[119] Knysh's study further attempts to contextualise Ibn al-Ahdal and al-Biqāʿī's critiques against the historical backgrounds of Yemen and Egypt respectively.[120] These insightful studies, however, have not paid in-depth

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[117] See Akkach, *Letters of a Sufi Scholar*, 42-51; Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 88-111. I will consider his refutation of immutable entities in Chapter 3.
[118] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 153-158; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 313-319.
[119] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 146-152.
[120] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 209-223, 234-246.

attention to how the arguments of these scholars were perceived in later generations, especially amongst Ibn ʿArabī's supporters. Therefore, I will focus on the points of criticism that were raised by Ibn Taymiyya, al-Taftāzānī, Ibn al-Ahdal and al-Biqāʿī against Ibn ʿArabī, and which were of great concern to al-Shaʿrānī's teachers and colleagues.

Lastly, building on the findings from the previous section, I detail the method that some of Ibn ʿArabī's defenders – namely, al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Ḥajar – employ for treating his thought. A close reading of their texts in regards to their defence of Ibn ʿArabī will demonstrate that they read the oneness of existence, intriguingly, as a visionary experience.

Ingalls and Geoffroy recently conducted a study of al-Suyūṭī and al-Anṣārī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī. However, and unfortunately, they did not consider the attitudes of al-Suyūṭī and al-Anṣārī vis-à-vis Ibn ʿArabī in a positive light. As I noted earlier, current scholarship agrees that Ibn ʿArabī's supporters in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Arabic-speaking world were apologists for Ibn ʿArabī.[121] This is based on the observation that they revere Ibn ʿArabī as a great saint of Islam for his piety and sanctity, while at the same time keeping distance from his monistic worldview.[122] For example, al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Ḥajar agree that Ibn ʿArabī's writings have been

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[121] El-Rouayheb, 'Opening the Gate,' 271; Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 239; Winter, *Society and Religion*, 127-133.
[122] Al-Suyūṭī issued the statement that one should have faith in Ibn ʿArabī's sainthood but refrain from studying his books (al-Suyūṭī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 114). In the face of the attack from al-Biqāʿī, al-Anṣārī also ordered a ban on the reading of Ibn ʿArabī's works out of fear that it could cause dissention in the community (*fitna*) (al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-dhurriyya*, vol. 2, 163). In a similar vein, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī ruled that Ibn ʿArabī's writings should not be accessible to those who are not familiar with Sufi terminology, for if innocent laypeople (*aqwām awāmm jahala ṭaghām*) try to comprehend the subject, they might get perplexed with its complexity, so much so that they would stop practising their religious duties. Other scholars expressed the same opinion, notes Ibn Ḥajar, not because they were against the author himself but because of the danger his writings might bring to a reader (Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 296, 336).

falsified and should not be read. They also maintain that Ibn ʿArabī's statements ought

to be interpreted appropriately in accordance with the mystical discipline, for, if taken

literally, they would be deemed outright heretical. Despite these comments, none of

al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī, or Ibn Ḥajar actually explains how such an interpretation is

possible; rather, they avoid discussing his actual teachings. [123] Consequently,

El-Rouayheb and Geoffroy concluded that this combination of admiration for Ibn

ʿArabī and wariness of his ideas was the standard attitude shared by Ibn ʿArabī's

apologists in this period, and that this also applies to al-Shaʿrānī.[124]

El-Rouayheb and Geoffroy's observations on the position of Ibn ʿArabī's 'apologists'

are partially true. However, I disagree with their conclusions, as these 'apologists' took

a more methodical and innovative approach to defending Ibn ʿArabī. Strikingly, this

approach was formulated within the context of the polemics over his thought. In order

to prove this point, in this section, I will argue that al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Ḥajar

carefully incorporate the views of Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries into their own arguments,

thereby reinterpreting Ibn ʿArabī's thought as visionary and experiential.

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[123] See, for example, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 335.
[124] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 248; Geoffory, *Le Soufisme*, 461. In respect of their apologetic attitudes, El-Rouayheb writes as follows:

> [A]n outright defence of the most controversial aspects of Ibn ʿArabī's view was not a live option among Arab-Islamic religious scholars in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Those who dissented from outright condemnations of Ibn ʿArabī were rather inclined to express respect for him as a Sufi saint while remaining uncommitted to – or explaining away – the content of some of his works, especially the deeply divisive *Fuṣūṣ* [El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 248].

For Geoffroy, these apologists of Ibn ʿArabī secretly admired his monistic worldview as the 'défenseurs de la *waḥdat al-wujūd*'. However, they hid it in public in order to maintain the social order and only apologetically defended him (Geoffory, *Le Soufisme*, 475). It must be noted that Geoffroy's designation of Ibn ʿArabī's apologists as 'défenseurs de la *waḥdat al-wujūd*' is irrelevant and lacks sufficient evidence, for, as I shall show, they do not defend the doctrine of the oneness of existence itself; instead, they try to reinterpret it as experiential oneness.

1.2.1. Ibn ʿArabī's Divine Self-Manifestation: Overview

I begin this section by introducing Ibn ʿArabī's mystical thought. Ibn ʿArabī is known as a mystic who preached the tenet known as 'the oneness of existence'. As previous studies have pointed out, he never used this expression; it was actually his disciple Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) who first mentioned it in his writing, and al-Qūnawī's student Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. 699/1300) later started to employ it as a technical term. Despite this, the doctrine of the oneness of existence itself is clearly laid down in Ibn ʿArabī's works. Later, Ibn Taymiyya's criticism strengthened the association between Ibn ʿArabī and the expression by identifying him and his followers as the proponents of the oneness of existence.[125]

The oneness of existence is grounded in the Islamic dogma of God's unity (*tawḥīd*). This is often declared in the following statement, 'there is no god but God' (*lā ilāh illā Allah*), which simply means that Allah is the only god and no one else is comparable with Him. This formula came to assume an ontological implication amongst certain mystics. To put it briefly, they took it as a declaration of the absolute oneness of God's existence, and that nothing else exists except Him. Ibn ʿArabī is viewed as the first mystic who gave this idea a concrete structure.[126]

In Ibn ʿArabī's view, God is the necessary being, by which he means that God does not need anything else in order to exist, and that His existence cannot not exist. This is in contrast with the status of things other than God, that is, the world, the existence of which depends on something other than itself, primarily on God and His act of creation, and which can thus stop existing at any moment. In contrast to God's existence, which

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[125] Chittick, '*Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in India,' 30-31.
[126] Chittick, 'Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*,' 70-71.

is necessary, the existence of creation is contingent and possible (*mumkin*), a term which Ibn ʿArabī borrows from Islamic philosophers like Avicenna.[127] In this respect, only God's existence is real; or rather, He is the sole existence in the cosmos. In other words, God is identical to existence itself, because it is impossible for His existence to be separated from His essence. If His essence were not His existence, then His essence would have to receive existence from somewhere else in order for Him to exist, which violates the definition of the necessary being who does not need anything else to be able to exist.

This is compared to the situation of the world, the essence of which is separable from its existence. The world remains possible in the divine knowledge unless God brings it into being. Accordingly, the world's beings do not have existence of their own, for if they did, this would contradict the principle of God's unity that posits Him as the only existence. Nothing truly and absolutely exists except God and anything other than Him is thus viewed as mere illusion and imagination.

In order to explain how the world comes into being without violating the principle of the oneness of God's existence, Ibn ʿArabī interprets creation as God's self-manifestation. He classifies the notion of divine unity into two parts: the exclusive oneness of God's essence (*aḥadiyya dhātiyya*) and inclusive oneness in respect of the world's plurality (*aḥadiyya al-kathra*, or simply *wāḥidiyya*).[128] Exclusive oneness is the divine unity that precludes any of the modes of the contingent beings as it stands as sheer oneness. Inclusive oneness is the divine unity that relates to the world's beings through God's names and attributes. This is the oneness of God in the sense of unifying His names and attributes, and carrying the possibilities of the world's beings within

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[127] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 12, 81-88.
[128] For these terms, see Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, 168-169.

itself.[129]

At the first stage of God's self-manifestation, God at the level of exclusive oneness reveals His essence to Himself, but not to the outside existence, as His essence is never known to anyone except Him. Through this initial self-manifestation, He becomes manifest as the god of inclusive oneness of His names and attributes. This is where He comes to be recognised as Allah, who is the object of worship of creation.[130] The inclusive oneness of His names and attributes does not mean that God is made many through them, as they are mere non-existent relationships that are envisaged between God and the world.[131]

God at the level of inclusive oneness requires the world's entities, as it is through them that His names and attributes can become manifest. For example, He needs worshippers (*maʾlūh*) and servants (*marbūb*) for His nature of divinity (*ilāhiyya*) and lordship (*rubūbiyya*) to be realised, and the same is true of His being the Merciful one (*al-raḥmān*), the Creator (*al-khāliq*) and so on.[132] It is for this reason that God further manifests Himself to His creation in order for His names and attributes to be realised in it. This is carried out in accordance with the nature of each possible being, which are pre-eternally known to God as immutable entities (*aʿyān thābita*). Thus, the world's entities come into being, each manifesting a certain divine name and attribute.[133] In Ibn ʿArabī's view, inasmuch as the world is the locus of God, it is given a certain degree of independence. However, since it is a mere manifestation of God, the world does not

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[129] Chittick, 'The Five Divine Presences,' 116-117.
[130] Izutsu, *Sufism*, 23-29; Chittick, 'The Five Divine Presences,' 111-112; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 460; vol. 4, 276.
[131] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 35-36.
[132] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 105/119.
[133] Ibn ʿArabī's view on immutable entities will be discussed in Chapter 3. For more on divine names and God's self-manifestation, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 47-58, 212-220.

possess independent existence. The tenet of the absolute oneness of God's existence in the cosmos is therefore retained.[134]

According to Ibn ʿArabī, the one who can manifest all of God's names and attributes at a perfect equilibrium is the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). He was created in the image of God at the level of inclusive oneness, as is seen in the hadith 'God created Adam in His image'. Being attributed with all the divine names and attributes, the perfect man carries within himself the realities of all the world's beings together.[135] In this regard, the perfect man is often described as the microcosm in whose single reality the entire cosmos becomes manifest, whereas the world that manifests God as a whole is viewed as the macrocosm.[136]

The teaching of God's self-manifestation into the world's beings establishes the thesis known as 'He/not He.'[137] This means that the world is God as His loci, yet it is not God in a real sense. In other words, He is immanent in the world's beings (*tashbīh*) but also simultaneously incomparable to them (*tanzīh*). In order to support this thesis, Ibn ʿArabī references the following verse: 'there is nothing like God and He is the hearing and seeing' [Q. 42:11]. The notion of divine incomparability and immanence are also described as 'the non-delimitation of God' (*iṭlāq*) and 'the delimitation of God' (*taqyīd*) respectively.[138] The perfect mystic combines these opposing ideas and finds God in every entity, while denying their identity to Him at the same time.[139] In other

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[134] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 516.
[135] On the theory of the perfect man, see, Burckhardt, *Introduction*, 63-68; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 27, 46, 369-381; Izutsu, *Sufism*, 218-243.
[136] Izutsu, *Sufism*, 218-223; Little, 'al-Insān al-Kāmil,' 43; Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 162, 170.
[137] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 112-115, 361-369.
[138] For these notions of incomparability/similarity and non-delimitation/delimitation, see Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 68-76, 109-111.
[139] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 277-278; Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 54-55, 167-168/69-70, 180-181.

words, he sees God's self-manifestations everywhere in creation but perceives God as the only real existence.

The doctrine of the oneness of existence is thus understood to represent the actual situation of the world. However, as Chittick observes, the word existence (*wujūd*) originally derives from the root *w-j-d*, which means 'to find.' Therefore, *wujūd* refers to being 'found in an objective sense (in other words, to exist out there), but also the act of finding as a subjective experience.'[140] Based on this observation, Chittick argues that Ibn ʿArabī explains God's self-manifestations both objectively and subjectively, and in fact there is no clear distinction between them.[141] He also stresses that in Ibn ʿArabī's texts, the terms *wujūd* and *shuhūd* (witnessing or seeing God) are used as synonyms and it is impossible to draw a line between them.[142] Chittick consequently concludes that one should not label Ibn ʿArabī's teaching simply as existential monism, pantheistic monism, and so on.[143]

Chittick's insightful suggestion should not be dismissed. However, it also needs to be remembered that Ibn ʿArabī's detractors understood his thought as an expression of ontological monism. For them, it discloses the existential reality of the world and blurs the distinction between God and creation. It is this perception of Ibn ʿArabī that his defenders in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries reacted to, and not to the true intention of his teaching, which aims to combine both objective and subjective aspects.

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[140] Chittick, 'Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*,' 74-75.
[141] Chittick, 'Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*,' 74.
[142] Chittick, '*Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in India,' 34-35.
[143] Chittick, 'Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*,' 73.

1.2.2. Opposition to Ibn ʿArabī

In order to understand the approaches of Ibn ʿArabī's defenders in context, I now turn to the arguments advanced by Ibn Taymiyya, al-Taftāzānī, Ibn al-Ahdal and al-Biqāʿī. I will especially focus on the points of their criticisms that were of most concern to Ibn ʿArabī's supporters in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Egypt. They are as follows: (1) Ibn Taymiyya's reception in medieval Egypt and his rejection of the oneness of existence by refuting unificationism and incarnationism at a linguistic level; (2) al-Taftāzānī's classification of mystical beliefs into existential oneness (heretical) and experiential oneness (legitimate); (3) Ibn al-Ahdal's attacks on Ibn ʿArabī, focusing on the tripartite hierarchy of creeds; and (4) al-Biqāʿī's accusation of ontological monism based on al-Taftāzānī's teaching.

1.2.2.1 Ibn Taymiyya

I begin by providing a brief account of Ibn Taymiyya's reception in Egypt. He is known as one of the most vociferous critics of monistic Sufism, as well as being hostile to the theology of the Ashʿarīs, a dominant theological group in Mamluk Egypt.[144] As such, it is easy to find negative views on Ibn Taymiyya in the medieval period. For example, Bori identified anti-Ibn Taymiyya debates amongst the intellectuals of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Damascus and Cairo, such as the Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī scholars Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355) and Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥisnī (d. 829/1426).[145]

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[144] With regard to Ibn Taymiyya's position on the Ashʿarīs, see el Omari, 'Ibn Taymiyya's "Theology of the Sunna,"' 101-119.

[145] Bori, 'Ibn Taymiyya,' 97-102. Adem also refers to al-Subkī's criticism that Ibn Taymiyya's

Furthermore, according to Geoffroy, al-Suyūṭī supports Ibn Taymiyya's arguments against various types of heresies, while at the same time denouncing Ibn Taymiyya's disapproval of some Sufi practices, such as recitation (*dhikr*) and the celebration of the birthdays of spiritual figures (*mawlid*).[146] Al-Suyūṭī also refers to Ibn Taymiyya in narrating the episode of Ibn ʿArabī's advocate and the Mamluk historian, Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363). In this anecdote, al-Ṣafadī reports that he once told Ibn Taymiyya that Ibn ʿArabī was a man of nobility whose words were full of goodness; however, when encountering the passages whose meanings are ambiguous, al-Ṣafadī recommended that it would be better to leave the knowledge of them to God, as it is not necessary to uphold all of Ibn ʿArabī's statements.[147] Here, al-Suyūṭī intends to defend Ibn ʿArabī against the accusations advanced by scholars like Ibn Taymiyya.

El-Rouayheb analyses Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī's condemnation of Ibn Taymiyya for the latter's literalistic approach to anthropomorphic attributes.[148] El-Rouayheb observes that Ibn Ḥajar also excuses the position of the founder of the Ḥanbalī school, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) from the charge of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*).[149] Interestingly, Ibn Ḥajar's view coincides with that of al-Shaʿrānī. As I will show in Chapter 4, al-Shaʿrānī similarly respects Ibn Ḥanbal as a scholar who advocated God's incomparability (*tanzīh*) while dismissing Ibn Taymiyya as one who deviated from

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espousal of the infinite regress of the divine will entails the world's eternity. See Adem, 'Ibn Taymiyya as Avicennian?' 125-133. For Ibn Taymiyya's idea on infinite regress, see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 70-102.

[146] Geoffroy, *Sufisme*, 448-450, mentioned in Bori, 'Ibn Taymiyya,' 102.

[147] al-Suyūṭī, *Tanbiʾat al-ghabī*, 164-165.

[148] Ibn Taymiyya stayed in Cairo between 705/1306 and 712/1313, during which period he was accused of anthropomorphism for his theological views and sentenced to imprisonment. For more on this, see Jackson, 'Ibn Taymiyyah,' 41-85; Holtzman, 'Accused of Anthropomorphism,' 561-587.

[149] El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar,' 271-275.

this.[150]

It is intriguing that al-Shaʿrānī expresses his animosity towards Ibn Taymiyya in his Sufi biography *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*. In its introduction, he makes defensive comments concerning the mystics who were accused of being heretical, and writes as follows:

> It [an accusation against the mystics] is pure prejudice, as we can see in our age in Ibn Taymiyya's denunciation of us and of our brothers [i.e. the mystics]. Therefore, my brother, beware of anyone who is biased and stay away from his gathering.[151]

Significantly, the above passage tells us that the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya's bitter attack on Ibn ʿArabī and his followers was still acutely felt in sixteenth-century Egypt.[152] This raises a possibility that al-Shaʿrānī considered Ibn Taymiyya as one of his main opponents in defending Ibn ʿArabī. In fact, as I will show in Chapter 3, al-Shaʿrānī's discussions of immutable entities show some correspondence with Ibn Taymiyya's critique of this concept.

Now I turn to Ibn Taymiyya's attack on Ibn ʿArabī, focusing on the way in which he refutes the dogma of the oneness of existence by disproving unificationism (*ittiḥād*) and incarnationism (*ḥulūl*). There have not been many studies that specifically treat this subject. It is, however, important to detail his critique of it, as Ibn ʿArabī's supporters, whom I will discuss later, try to respond to it.

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[150] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 59a, 62b.
[151] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 13.
[152] For the details of Ibn Taymiyya's reception during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, see Bori, 'Ibn Taymiyya,' 87-123.

Ibn Taymiyya explicitly rejects the position of the monistic mystics, such as Ibn ʿArabī, al-Qūnawī, ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291), Ibn Sabʿīn (d. ca. 668-669/1269-71) and Ibn Fāriḍ, by calling them the exponents of the oneness of existence and unificationists (*ittiḥādiyīn*).[153] In his view, the doctrine of the oneness of existence identifies the necessary existence of God with the possible existence of His creation, denying any distinction between God and creation.[154] It follows that whatever creatures might do, it is actually God who performs their actions; God is the one who prays, speaks, eats, drinks, fasts, starves, sleeps, wakes up, becomes sick and injured, gets saddened, commits adultery, and so on. Ultimately, God must be attributed with all the wrongdoings and disgraceful behaviours of human beings.[155] As Hoover explains, according to Ibn Taymiyya this means that He will even be identified with pigs, demons, idols and unbelievers, and punish Himself, which is absurd.[156]

In Ibn Taymiyya's view, the oneness of existence is intrinsically associated with the ideas of unificationism and incarnationism. Therefore, as long as these notions are proven wrong, he asserts that the fundamental tenet of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings becomes untenable. Based on this standpoint, Ibn Taymiyya tries to refute unificationism and incarnationism by drawing on the common definition of each word. For example, he argues that since God cannot be attributed with the imperfect attributes of creatures, and creatures cannot be attributed with certain divine attributes such as being eternal, absolute unification between the two is inconceivable. Alternatively, if one assumes creation's limited and partial unification with God, the duality between God and

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[153] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 90; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 110.
[154] Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 110; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 80-81. For Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ʿArabī's belief that God's existence is the same as that of His creation is founded on the idea of immutable entities in the divine knowledge.
[155] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 124; vol. 4, 87-88.
[156] Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 110.

creatures will still remain after their mystical union. For Ibn Taymiyya, this is not unification but pluralisation. But if God and His creation are understood to transform into a third thing as a result of unification, similarly to what Christians believe, this is strictly prohibited in Islam. This is because transformation means that something that has originally existed stops existing, thereby turning into a new entity. For instance, when water and milk are mixed up, they transform into something else, water-milk. Or when fire is used to melt metal, both fire and metal turn into something different from the original materials. However, God, whose existence and attributes are necessary, can neither change nor cease to exist.[157] The assumption of unification between God and the world is therefore absurd. This also means that the first premise of the oneness of existence is wrong.

With regard to the notion of incarnation, Ibn Taymiyya points out that it necessarily presupposes two objects: that which incarnates and that in which the incarnation occurs. Now, Ibn ʿArabī's teaching that God can be seen in the images of His creation is a glaring testimony to his belief in divine incarnation into the world. However, since Ibn ʿArabī views God's existence as identical to that of His creation, literal incarnation is impossible. Even if it is taken to mean the incarnation of God's existence into the immutable entities of the possible beings (*thubūt al-mumkināt*), this is not logically tenable either. In Ibn Taymiyya's understanding, as we shall see in Chapter 3, Ibn ʿArabī's monism leaves no distinction between God and immutable entities.[158] Therefore, Ibn ʿArabī's tenet of the oneness of existence is implausible.

Ibn Taymiyya regards the teaching of monistic mystics as worse than that of Christians. By upholding the oneness of existence, monistic mystics ascribe to a notion

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[157] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol.1, 101-102.
[158] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol.1, 79.

of unbound incarnation (*ḥulūl muṭlaq*), which differs from what he calls specified or limited incarnation (*ḥulūl muqayyad khāṣṣ*). The advocates of limited incarnation, such as Christians, make God's incarnation specific to Jesus (*takhṣīṣ*). Likewise, the Shīʿas limit God's incarnation to ʿAlī, and even Sufis like Abū al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) – who is famous for the utterance 'I am the Truth' – confine it to themselves. On the other hand, the exponents of unbound incarnation, that is to say, the proponents of the oneness of existence, see God everywhere in any objects. According to Ibn Taymiyya, they boldly claim that Christians and idol worshippers are wrong in restricting divine incarnation to Jesus or to certain idols, while they, that is, the upholders of unbound incarnation, rightly embrace worshipping all idols unlimitedly in an unspecified manner (*al-iṭlāq wa-l-ʿumūm*). In Ibn Taymiyya's view, this kind of statement derives from their belief that everything is God and that He can be immanent in every entity. This is tantamount to declaring that whomever you worship, whether it is a human, plant, or mineral, you worship God. From here, Ibn Taymiyya concludes that this teaching is far more heretical than that of Christians.[159]

It is noteworthy that by disproving incarnationism and unificationism, which Ibn Taymiyya believes to be inseparable from the oneness of existence, he attempts to uproot the fundamental doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī altogether. As we shall see, Ibn ʿArabī's supporters deny the notions of incarnationism and unificationism using a similar argument, yet strikingly, with the aim of excusing him from them.

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[159] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 68.

1.2.2.2. Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī

The Timurid Ḥanafī-Ashʿarī theologian and Ibn ʿArabī's antagonist Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī is famous for his commentary on Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's (d. 537/1142) Hanafī creed, *Sharḥ al-ʿaqāʾid al-nasafiyya*. Al-Taftāzānī also left another text, *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, in which he analyses different theological subjects, including the issues of unificationism and incarnationism. *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid* was popular amongst Egyptian scholars during the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries and was also read by al-Shaʿrānī. In his *Risāla waḥdat al-wujūd*, which aims at refuting the claims of the exponents of the oneness of existence, al-Taftāzānī introduces a framework for classifying mysticism into two kinds – experiential and existential – in order to defend the former while castigating the latter. Knysh and Geoffory have already explained the basic structure of this teaching.[160] Nevertheless, considering that not only al-Taftāzānī's disciples but also Ibn ʿArabī's supporters in later generations adopt the same framework (as we shall see later in the section), it is important to discuss al-Taftāzānī's teaching on this point again, further clarifying its details.

Early defenders of Sufism stressed abidance by the Law in order to justify their own discipline and to distinguish genuine Sufis, who follow the Law, from pseudo-Sufis, who dismiss it.[161] Al-Taftāzānī added another yardstick to this, whereby Sufis are judged based on whether their experience concerns subjective or objective one. As Knysh notes, in al-Taftāzānī's view, authentic and legitimate mystics are those

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[160] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 150-151, 206; Geoffory, *Le Soufisme*, 474-475.

[161] See, for example, Ibn al-Ahdal's description of early Sufi defenders in Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭaʾ*, 170-177/vol. 2, 594-621. For the sake of precision, in this study, I referred to two editions of *Kashf al-ghiṭaʾ*: (1) that published by Aḥmad Bakīr in 1964 and (2) the edition published by Dār al-Fataḥ in 2016 (2 volumes).

whose experience of God's unity only reflects their visionary, psychological perception, whereas heretics like Ibn ʿArabī and his followers declare that their experience discloses the ontological truth of the world (i.e. the oneness of existence). Al-Taftāzānī expounds this view by relating it to the concept of 'absolute unity' (al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa). This tenet was first introduced by Ibn Sabʿīn in order to describe his monistic worldview. According to it, nothing truly and absolutely exists, except God who is the one and ultimate reality, and everything else is mere illusion.[162] The doctrine soon came to be denounced by the Andalusian polymath Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 776/1375) as heretical.[163]

Al-Taftāzānī finds two meanings in the teaching of absolute unity. On the one hand, it is employed by a true mystic to express the final stage of his path, wherein he witnesses God's existence and nothing else.[164] Al-Taftāzānī compares the situation of the world at this stage to that of the stars, which become hidden by the daylight even though they still exist. Once this state is over, a mystic starts to see the world again. This means that his mystical experience of God's unity is based only on a visionary, perceptual phenomenon without signifying the actual situation of the world.

On the other hand, when taken up by the exponents of the oneness of existence (al-wujūdiyya), absolute unity points to the reality that only God exists and every entity in the objective world (aʿyān al-akwān fī l-khārij) is perceived as ontologically pure imagination.[165] Al-Taftāzānī asserts that this is downright heretical, because a belief that everything is illusion amounts to denying the existence of prophets, angels, the Islamic community, the Law, heaven and hell, reward and punishment, and

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[162] Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism*, 98; *Le Soufisme*, 470-471; Ibn Sabʿīn, *Rasāʾil*, 65, 141, 170, 357.
[163] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 176-184.
[164] al-Taftāzānī, *Risāla waḥdat al-wujūd*, 3, 32.
[165] al-Taftāzānī, *Risāla waḥdat al-wujūd*, 6, 26, 33; Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 150-151.

revelation.[166] Furthermore, if God is the only being, He becomes identical with the existence of all possible beings. He is the one who worships and is worshipped, prostrates and receives prostration, and the one who thanks and is thanked. This is absurd.[167]

Referring to this typology, Geoffroy identifies those who advocate the subjective truth as the exponents of the oneness of witnessing (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*).[168] As we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, the oneness of witnessing is an expression conventionally associated with the later Naqshbandī Sufi Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1625) in India, who objected to the oneness of existence.[169] Geoffroy's suggestion makes al-Taftāzānī one of the earliest proponents of the oneness of witnessing, with his aim of separating the legitimate, experiential mystics from the heretical, monistic mystics. Strikingly, as I will show, Ibn ʿArabī's defenders adopt al-Taftāzānī's approach, thereby placing Ibn ʿArabī in the group who advocate the oneness of witnessing, but not in the camp of the oneness of existence.

As El-Rouayheb carefully demonstrates, al-Taftāzānī does not regard Ibn ʿArabī and his followers as exponents of unificationism and incarnationism. These notions presuppose the existence of at least two entities, yet the latter's monism lacks dualism in principle.[170] In this al-Taftāzānī differs from Ibn Taymiyya, who believes that Ibn

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[166] al-Taftāzānī, *Risāla waḥdat al-wujūd*, 11, 14-15, 26.
[167] al-Taftāzānī, *Risāla waḥdat al-wujūd*, 3, 24, 33. For al-Taftāzānī's metaphysical critique of the oneness of existence, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 153-165; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 313-319.
[168] Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 475.
[169] On Sirhindī, see Haar, *Follower and Heir*. For his reaction against the oneness of existence, see Chittick, '*Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in India.'
[170] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 315. On this issue, al-Taftāzānī writes:

> One might imagine that the proponents of the oneness of existence (*wujūdiyya*) are not actually advocates of unificationism and incarnationism. This is because these two notions occur between two different beings, yet the exponents of the oneness of existence make God identical to the existence of possible beings, denying their

ʿArabī's thought is fundamentally inseparable from unificationism and incarnationism. Despite this, Ibn Taymiyya and al-Taftāzānī share the same conclusion: Ibn ʿArabī is more heretical than the advocates of these teachings in that he sees God not only in one individual but everywhere, thus identifying Him with all beings in the world. It is this ontology of Ibn ʿArabī that his defenders attempted to reinterpret.

1.2.2.3. Ḥusayn Ibn al-Ahdal

The Yemeni theologian and historian Ḥusayn Ibn al-Ahdal (d. 855/1451) is a strong supporter of Ashʿarism, an opponent of the late Ḥanbalīs, and a critic of Ibn ʿArabī.[171] There is no reference to his name in the writings of the defenders of Ibn ʿArabī whom I will discuss. However, in *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, al-Biqāʿī names Ibn al-Ahdal, along with his text, entitled *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tawḥīd wa-ʿaqāʾid al-muwaḥḥidīn fī l-radd ʿalā Ibn ʿArabī wa taqrīr qawāʿid ʿaqāʾid ahl al-sunna* ('Unveiling the Realities of God's Unity and the Creeds of Those Who Declare God's Unity Against Ibn ʿArabī and the Confirmation of the Creeds of the People of Sunna').[172] This would raise the possibility that Ibn al-Ahdal was known to a certain

difference as well as duality. Hence, one may not associate unificationism and incarnationism [with their teaching]. However, their heresy is worse than the two and it is logically fallacious. The adherents of these notions [i.e. Christians and the Shīʿa] […] only speak of God's unification and incarnation within a few individuals. On the other hand, the proponents of the oneness of existence […] make God identical to the existence of all things, including filthy things [al-Taftāzānī, *Risāla waḥdat al-wujūd*, 37].

As I shall discuss, the above passage is quoted by both Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries and his supporters. In *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, al-Taftāzānī further tries to dissociate monistic teaching from unificationism and incarnationism. See al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, vol. 4, 59-60.

[171] For more details on Ibn al-Ahdal and his milieu, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 234-242; Bori, 'Ibn Taymiyya,' 105-112.

[172] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 151.

extent amongst those who disputed with al-Biqāʿī, such as al-Suyūṭī and al-Anṣārī.

Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ is dedicated to the refutation of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, as well as to the defence of the Ashʿarī position. In it, Ibn al-Ahdal accuses Ibn ʿArabī of upholding the following notions: the world's eternity, determinism, anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), corporealism (*tajsīm*) in the sense of the extreme literalists (*ḥashwiyya*), the oneness of existence, unificationism and incarnationism.[173] It is of interest that Ibn al-Ahdal portrays Ibn ʿArabī's heresy as that of an anthropomorphist (*mushabbiha*) and corporealist (*mujassima*), whereby God's attributes are attributed to creation. These terms are not conventionally used to condemn Ibn ʿArabī's position. In fact, neither Ibn Taymiyya nor al-Taftāzānī attacks Ibn ʿArabī in this way. Nevertheless, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, al-Shaʿrānī tries to excuse Ibn ʿArabī from the charge of anthropomorphism by reinterpreting his teaching of *tashbīh* in a non-ontological, visionary sense.

What is pertinent to this study concerning Ibn al-Ahdal is his critique of Ibn ʿArabī's tripartite hierarchy of the articles of belief (*ʿaqāʾid*). As Morris briefly notes, Ibn ʿArabī identifies three different levels in the articles of belief.[174] They are: (1) creed of the commoners (*ʿaqīda al-ʿawāmm*) amongst the people of Islam, who rely only on their natural disposition (*fiṭra*), (2) creed of the people of distinction amongst the people of God who are positioned between reasoning and unveiling (*ʿaqīda ahl al-ikhtiṣāṣ min ahl Allah bayna naẓar wa-kashf*), and (3) creed of the most distinguished elites amongst those who are dedicated to God (*ʿaqīdat khulāṣat al-khāṣṣa fī Allah*), that is to say, the

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[173] It must be noted that none of these charges are true of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path*.
[174] Morris, '*Ibn ʿArabī and His Interpreters: Part II*,' 743-44; 'How to Study "al-Futūḥāt,"' 81-82.

advanced mystics like Ibn ʿArabī.[175] The first and second creeds are written in the introductory chapter of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, whereas the details of the third creed, as Ibn ʿArabī writes, are explained throughout the rest of the oeuvre.

In Ibn al-Ahdal's view, the three types of creed that Ibn ʿArabī proposes can be identified as follows: (1) creed for the commoners who do not possess any ability to reason, (2) creed for the elite, whom Ibn al-Ahdal believes to be the philosophers, and (3) creed for the elites of the elites, who are the proponents of unificationism, like Ibn ʿArabī. The second and third creeds are characterised as pure heresy.[176]

According to Ibn al-Ahdal, it is wrong to classify the articles of belief in this way, because there should only be one creed, whether a person is a commoner or a member of the intellectual elite. In his view, this creed is the articles of belief upheld by the Ashʿarīs.[177] Ibn al-Ahdal then explains the reason Ibn ʿArabī came to assert separate articles of belief for different types of people. It goes as follows: in case of jurisprudence, all the interpreters of the Law (*mujtahid*) are correct in issuing their legal rulings on the practical application of the Law (*furūʿ*). On the contrary, when it comes to the basic principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*), there is only one truth (i.e., what the Ashʿarīs believe), not multiple. Anyone who objects to this view should be condemned by a consensus of Muslims (*ijmāʿ*). Only certain scholars, such as the Basran jurist ʿUbaydallah ibn al-Ḥasan al-ʿAnbarī (d. 168/784-5)[178] and the Basran Muʿtazilī theologian Abū Uthmān ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-9),[179] claimed that all the

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[175] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 34-47.
[176] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 100/vol. 1, 424.
[177] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 100/vol. 1, 423.
[178] For more information on al-ʿAnbarī, see Tillier, 'al-ʿAnbarī, ʿUbaydallāh b. al-Ḥasan" in *EI3*.
[179] For more details on al-Jāḥiẓ, see Cooperson, 'JĀḤEẒ' in *Encyclopædia Iranica* XIV/4, 386-389.

interpreters were right even in the field of the principles of religion. According to Ibn al-Ahdal, based on this idea al-ʿAnbārī further declared that even the Jewish and Christians were correct in their faith.[180] Ibn al-Ahdal believes that Ibn ʿArabī follows the teachings of al-ʿAnbārī and al-Jāḥiẓ, thereby urging people to affirm three types of beliefs as multiple truths without confining themselves to one specific creed and disbelieving others.[181] For Ibn al-Ahdal, this was a repulsive utterance of heresy.

Ibn al-Ahdal's rejection of the tripartite hierarchy of creeds is an intriguing finding, especially because, as I will discuss later in the chapter, al-Shaʿrānī's theological writings are clearly underpinned by this framework. Despite the criticism, al-Shaʿrānī endorses the structure of the hierarchy of creeds in order to spread Ibn ʿArabī's thought to a wide range of people.

1.2.2.4. Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī

The Mamluk Shāfiʿī jurist Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Biqāʿī was a zealous opponent of monistic Sufism. He studied in Damascus and then in Cairo with Shāfiʿī Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, who was a teacher of al-Suyūṭī and a critic of Ibn ʿArabī and ʿAlī Wafāʾ. Al-Biqāʿī was in dispute with al-Suyūṭī and Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī over his accusation of Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Fāriḍ and others, and left two polemical texts entitled *Tanbīh al-ghabī ilā takfīr Ibn ʿArabī* (Drawing the Attention of the Ignorant to Ibn ʿArabī's Unbelief) and *Taḥdhīr al-ʿibād min ahl al-ʿinād bi-bidʿat al-ittiḥād* (Warning to the Servants of God against the Stubborn Exponents of the Innovation of

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[180] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 182/vol. 2, 626. Ibn al-Ahdal's understanding of al-Jāḥiẓ on this point is incorrect. See Van Ess, *Theology and Society*.
[181] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 182/vol. 2, 626-627; Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 99/113.

Unificationism). In *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, al-Biqāʿī quotes various opponents of Ibn ʿArabī, including Ibn Taymiyya, al-Taftāzānī, and Ibn al-Ahdal, and condemns monistic mystics as exponents of unificationism and incarnationism who believe in the doctrine of the oneness of existence.[182]

Knysh lists the heretical doctrines for which al-Biqāʿī criticises Ibn ʿArabī – although he does not examine each tenet in detail. Some of them, such as the tenets that God is identical to His creatures and that God is immanent in every object of the world, overlap with points which other critics like Ibn Taymiyya have already raised.[183] Al-Biqāʿī's criticism of the idea of God's immanence in His creation needs further explanation, as it becomes relevant when I discuss al-Shaʿrānī's refutation of this idea.

With respect to the tenet of God's immanence, al-Biqāʿī refers to the story of the prophet Nūh, which is recounted in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. In al-Biqāʿī's understanding, Ibn ʿArabī believes that God is present in every object of worship, whether a stone, tree, or stars, as He can be present in the world's beings.[184] Hence, if one is to reach perfection on the mystical path and become a real knower of God, one has to grasp God's immanence (*tashbīh*) as well as His incomparability (*tanzīh*) to the world. Based on this idea, Ibn ʿArabī judges Nūh to be imperfect as a prophet, because Nūh admonished his people, who were idol-worshippers, to abandon their idols when God was actually present in them.[185] Referencing an Egyptian Shāfiʿī critic of Ibn ʿArabī, Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1403), al-Biqāʿī declares it objectionable to claim a defect in a prophet,

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[182] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 176, 179. In response to his attack, al-Suyūṭī wrote a short epistle in their defence entitled *Tanbiʾat al-ghabī bi-tabriʾat Ibn ʿArabī* ('Informing the Ignorant of the Soundness of Ibn ʿArabī's belief') – which is more commonly known as *Tanbīh al-ghabī bi-tabriʾat Ibn ʿArabī* – while al-Anṣārī issued a legal opinion to the effect that their utterances need to be interpreted in accordance with Sufi terminology. For more details on this dispute, see Homerin, *From Arab Poet*, 62-75; Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 209; Ingalls, *Subtle Innovation*, 59-64.
[183] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 214.
[184] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 41-44.
[185] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 46-49.

let alone to promote idolatry and unificationism between God and creatures.[186]

Al-Biqāʿī's discussion of the notion of absolute unity also requires closer analysis. Borrowing the words of Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī, al-Biqāʿī ascribes to Ibn ʿArabī the doctrine of absolute unity in the sense that all of His creation is ultimately God Himself.[187] Yet, while condemning this ontological formula as heretical, al-Biqāʿī proposes a different interpretation of absolute unity in the non-ontological, visionary sense through the words of al-Taftāzānī's close disciple ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Bukhārī (d. 841/1437).[188]

Drawing on al-Bukhārī's words, which he most probably took from al-Taftāzānī, al-Biqāʿī acknowledges that certain mystical terms, such as annihilation (*fanāʾ*), subsistence (*baqāʾ*) and absolute unity, have two meanings: the legitimate, original one and the heretical, distorted one.[189] The former is advocated by the group of authentic mystics (*ʿārifūn*), whereas the latter is promoted by the heretical exponents of the oneness of existence who are in his view considered the philosophers (*kafara wujūdiyya min al-falāsifa*). According to al-Biqāʿī, the monistic mystics cunningly attempt to hide their heresy by taking advantage of the terminology of authentic mystics and altering its originally intended meaning. Hence, they employ annihilation in the sense of causing the realities of the thing to disappear – which in their view are nothing but illusions, subsistence in the sense of subsequent realisation of the absolute existence of God (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), and absolute unity to describe their monistic worldview. That is to say, the existence of every being except God's existence is purely imagination, and each

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[186] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 50-53.
[187] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 66.
[188] For more information on al-Bukhārī, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 204-209.
[189] Al-Biqāʿī's argument is almost identical to that of al-Taftāzānī. Compare al-Biqāʿī's arguments with what is discussed in Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 150-151.

entity in the world, including filthy things, is ultimately God Himself.[190]

Al-Biqāʿī argues that these meanings stand in sharp contrast to authentic mystics' use of the same terms in a manner which accords with the Islamic Law. For instance, they employ annihilation in the sense of effacement of the world's entities from the mystics' vision (*naẓar*), while their actual existence continues. In this mystical state, they lose sight of a connection between their actions and themselves, without losing the actual realities of worldly beings. Furthermore, in the view of authentic mystics, subsistence only means assuming the good, ethical character of God (*takhalluq bi-akhlāq ilāhiyya*) and withdrawing from the impure attributes of human beings.[191] In a similar vein, absolute unity is given the non-ontological, visionary sense, meaning witnessing God alone (*mushāhada*) as a result of working hard to focus on Him. At this stage, all other entities appear to have vanished within the divine light, yet their existence is never lost.

Following al-Taftāzānī's argument, this is compared to the situation of stars; they may appear invisible in the sunlight, though they do actually exist. If a mystic remains aware of himself in this state, it is called annihilation in the divine unity (*fanāʾ fī l-tawḥīd*) for advanced mystics (*khawāṣṣ*). If he completely forgets himself, including his state and annihilation itself, and witnesses nothing but God, just as he sees nothing of the stars during the daytime except the sun, it is called annihilation of annihilation in

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[190] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 186-187, 189. The passage is briefly mentioned in Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 469.

[191] Ibn ʿArabī also employs the expression 'assuming the traits of God', yet he uses it both in the sense of a spiritual obligation for the mystics, and on the ontological plane for the advanced mystics to reach perfection and to fully manifest the divine names and attributes. However, as Esbstein notes, in Sufi thought in general, the expression can only mean the assumption of the good characteristics of God 'as an ethical-spiritual obligation', and 'not an ontological statement concerning the essential nature of God's friends'. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 149. In the current context, al-Biqāʿī clearly only meant the former, non-ontological, visionary sense. See more on this subject, Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 21-26, 283-288.

the divine unity (*fanāʾ al-fanāʾ fī l-tawḥīd*); this is for the elite of the elites (*khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*). In either case, a mystic has achieved absolute unity by being veiled from everything except God, while he and other beings firmly retain their ontological status.[192]

By painting it this way, absolute unity, which some monistic mystics associate with the existential reality of the world, is turned into an innocuous expression to signify a mystic's perceptual, visionary experience. In al-Biqāʿī's view, the latter is the correct, original meaning of absolute unity. This is no other than the typology proposed by al-Taftāzānī – experiential mysticism as sanctioned and ontological mysticism as errant. It is evident that Ibn ʿArabī and his followers were placed in the second group.[193] Most significantly, this idea was even adopted by Ibn ʿArabī's defenders.

1.2.3. Defence of Ibn ʿArabī before al-Shaʿrānī

Having considered the criticisms against Ibn ʿArabī, I now set out to investigate the arguments of his supporters in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Egypt – al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Ḥajar. First, I discuss al-Suyūṭī's approach to Ibn ʿArabī, focusing on how he excuses the latter from the charges of unificationism and incarnationism. I incorporate Ingalls's study on al-Suyūṭī and further analyse his defence of Ibn ʿArabī, paying special attention to al-Suyūṭī's references to the ideas of the latter's adversaries.[194] This will enable us to understand al-Suyūṭī's methods in context.

I then turn to al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar's approaches to Ibn ʿArabī's defence. I will

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[192] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 188-189.
[193] See also Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 469-470.
[194] Ingalls, 'Suble Innovation,' 228-231.

consider Ibn Ḥajar's refutation of unificationism and incarnationism and examine the interesting attempts of al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar to place Ibn ʿArabī in the circle of legitimate mystics. I will look in particular at their treatment of al-Taftāzānī's teaching. The examination of this subject, which has not yet been studied in modern scholarship, will provide us with an intriguing finding concerning the widespread influence of al-Taftāzānī on Ibn ʿArabī's supporters in this period.[195] It will emerge that despite the reticence of al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Ḥajar to Ibn ʿArabī's actual teachings, their defence of him was actually very strategic and carefully considered.

1.2.3.1. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī

Al-Suyūṭī's unquestionable support of Ibn ʿArabī is expressed in his short treatise *Tanbiʾat al-ghabī bi-tabriʾat Ibn ʿArabī* ('Informing the Ignorant of the Soundness of Ibn ʿArabī's Belief'), which was written in response to al-Biqāʿī's criticism of Ibn ʿArabī.[196] In this work, al-Suyūṭī provides apologetic reasons for discouraging others from declaring Ibn ʿArabī an infidel. They are summarised as follows: (1) Ibn ʿArabī's statements that sound heretical should not be taken in the literal sense, as he might have used certain words differently from their conventional, apparent meaning; this is in relation to some Qurʾanic expressions, such as God's face, hands, and eyes, that ought

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[195] Explicating al-Taftāzānī's metaphysical denunciation of the oneness of existence, El-Rouayheb mentions that al-Taftāzānī's arguments were cited with approval in later generations by Ibn ʿArabī's critic al-Biqāʿī, his advocate Muḥammad al-Bakrī, and others. My analysis of al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar will clarify the details of how al-Taftāzānī's arguments were accepted amongst Ibn ʿArabī's supporters, proving his favourable reception by both pro- and anti-Ibn ʿArabī scholars in late Mamluk and early Ottoman Egypt. See El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 313-319.

[196] As I noted in f.n. 182, this work is more commonly known as *Tanbīh al-ghabī bi-tabriʾat Ibn ʿArabī* (or *Tanbīh al-ghabī fī takhtiyyat Ibn ʿArabī*). Since the copy of the published text to which I have access is entitled as *Tanbiʾat al-ghabī bi-tabriʾat Ibn ʿArabī*, I will refer to the work by this alternative title.

not be interpreted literally to mean His actual body parts. (2) There is a chance that Ibn ʿArabī's works were interpolated by his opponents; therefore, he should not be blamed for the remarks one can find in his writings. (3) No one truly knows Ibn ʿArabī's real intention when he utters something, except God; therefore, one ought not judge him an infidel.[197]

Following this, al-Suyūṭī quotes several episodes concerning Ibn ʿArabī in order to prove his veracity, virtues, and sainthood, as well as introducing the remarks of various pro-Ibn ʿArabī scholars. This includes a reference to al-Ṣafadī's aforementioned speech to Ibn Taymiyya. At the end of the treatise, al-Suyūṭī quotes al-Ṣafadī again and makes the striking remark that Ibn ʿArabī's articles of belief as mentioned in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* are identical with those of al-Ashʿarī.[198] It is not entirely clear which part of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* al-Ṣafadī meant exactly, except that he is referring to the first volume of the work.[199] If he had in mind the articles of belief for commoners that are found in the introductory chapter of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, they do seem to agree with the position of the Ashʿarīs. It must be mentioned, however, that the creedal view that Ibn ʿArabī expresses in the rest of the text is grounded in his mystical experience and does not necessarily accord with that of the Ashʿarīs. Whether or not al-Ṣafadī and al-Suyūṭī were aware of Ibn ʿArabī's real intention, it is certain that by referring to al-Ṣafadī's statement, which associates Ibn ʿArabī's stance with that of the Ashʿarīs, al-Suyūṭī aimed at promoting the latter's legitimacy. This attempt to defend Ibn ʿArabī from a theological perspective probably laid the foundation for al-Shaʿrānī to pronounce, at the beginning of his *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, that there is no difference in creed

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[197] al-Suyūṭī, *Tanbiʾat al-ghabī*, 114-118, 135-137.
[198] al-Suyūṭī, *Tanbiʾat al-ghabī*, 166.
[199] al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī*, vol. 4, 125. Knysh also refers to al-Ṣafadī's association of Ibn ʿArabī's creeds with those of the Ashʿarīs. See Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 118, 325, n. 22.

between mystics like Ibn ʿArabī and the theologians represented by the Ashʿarīs.

Apart from in *Tanbiʾat al-ghabī*, al-Suyūṭī also announces his legal opinion on the heretical speeches of some Sufis in his *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, in the section entitled: 'Removing one's faith from unificationism and incarnationism' (*Tanzīh al-iʿtiqād ʿan al-ḥulūl wa-l-ittiḥād*).[200] Although al-Suyūṭī does not directly mention Ibn ʿArabī's name in this section, there is no doubt that he intends to refute the critics of the latter. The beginning of the section reads as follows:

> It is reported that a group of extreme Sufis (*ghulāt min al-mutaṣawwifa*) preached what is similar to the Christians' unificationism and incarnationism, and they went further than Christians by multiplying the objects [with which God is unified and into which He is incarnated] while the latter limited it to Jesus. If this were true, then they would become more heretical than Christians.
>
> The best example to defend those who professed this kind of position is the statement that 'I am God (*anā al-ḥaqq*).' For, he [al-Ḥallāj] declared it in the state of mystical intoxication (*sukr*) and absence of reason, and hence God did not impose upon him any sanctions and He revoked his speech.[201]

The above statement was most likely issued against al-Biqāʿī's critique of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers. According to al-Biqāʿī, while Christians or Shīʿas confined God's unification only to Jesus or ʿAlī, extreme Sufis such as Ibn ʿArabī, amongst others,

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[200] Cf. Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 473; Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovations,' 229.
[201] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2, 130.

extended the object of God's unification to themselves.[202] I have also discussed earlier how Ibn Taymiyya expresses a similar opinion on incarnationism. He maintains that extreme Sufis like Ibn ʿArabī are worse than Christians, because they multiply the objects into which God is incarnated, instead of confining His incarnation to one person.

Responding to this kind of attack from al-Biqāʿī and Ibn Taymiyya, al-Suyūṭī first argues that those who profess what sounds like a heretical teaching of unificationism or incarnationism should be condoned, as they were in a state of mystical intoxication at that moment. After this, al-Suyūṭī demonstrates the impossibility of the occurrence of actual unification between God and creation. According to him, a person cannot become one with another person due to a difference in their essences. Based on this observation, it is all the more impossible that a man becomes one with God due to the absolute distinction between the two. Consequently, when the mystics referred to the idea of unificationism, they did not employ it in the sense of literal and ontological unification between God and creation. They rather intended the effacing of their own ego (*fanāʾ*), whereby they annihilate their disgraceful attributes, retreat from worldly matters, and firmly affirm God's reality.[203]

Borrowing the words of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), al-Suyūṭī compares the non-ontological sense of unification – wherein the mystics annihilate their human attributes and retreat from the world – to the Qurʾanic episode of the women who cut their hands with a knife at the sight of Joseph's beauty [Q. 12:30-31]. Just as the women were unaware of their hands' being cut when they were attracted to him, the mystics are

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[202] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 172-173.
[203] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2. 134. In regards to this, al-Suyūṭī references the opinion of an early Sufi Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896).

completely oblivious to their attributes and even to themselves in the state where they perceive nothing but God.[204] Al-Suyūṭī's reference to this passage shows that he takes the idea of unification with God as sound, as long as it only concerns a mystic's perception without indicating an ontological oneness between God and creation.

Hence, in al-Suyūṭī's view, the term unificationism can be used both in the despicable sense of pure unification and incarnation and in the licit sense of mystical annihilation. By the latter, he means a mystic's psychological state, wherein his awareness of himself disappears temporarily as a result of being enraptured by the divine reality while his existence remains in the meanwhile.[205] As Ingalls points out, al-Suyūṭī justifies this view by treating unificationism as an equivocal term (*lafẓ mushtarak*). This is based on a conventional usage of the term *ittiḥād*. For example, a person may say that 'there is an accord between me and my friend Zayd (*baynī wa bayna ṣāḥibī zayd ittiḥād*).'[206] The hadith scholars and the jurists also employ the word to mean 'the agreement of the source of the hadith (*ittiḥād makhraj al-ḥadīth*)' and 'the union of the type of cattle (*ittiḥād nawʿ al-māshiyya*)' when defining the act of alms-giving.[207]

This observation shows that, similarly to al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī's approach to certain mystical terms, al-Suyūṭī finds two meanings in the mystics' profession of unificationism: that which is professed by authentic mystics (*muḥaqqiq al-ṣūfiyya*) in order to describe their perceptual experience – wherein their ego, will and choice are

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[204] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2. 130-131.
[205] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2, 134. In respect of this, he also quotes ʿAlī Wafāʾ's poem that goes: 'Your knowledge that everything belongs to Me is what is meant by *ittiḥād*.' *Ittiḥād* in this poem means only the psychological awareness that everything is entrusted to God (*taslīm*). al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2, 135.
[206] Ingalls, 'Subtle Innovation,' 230.
[207] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2, 134. See also Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 473.

annihilated within God – and is hence legitimate, and that which stands for the ontological oneness of God and the world and is therefore detestable. Regarding this, al-Suyūṭī interestingly references a disciple of Ibn Taymiyya and a critic of Ibn ʿArabī, the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350).[208] According to al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya also differentiates a correct, authorised meaning of unificationism from a prohibited one. The first type of unificationism only means the oneness of God's intention and that of a servant (*murād*), whereby the servant faithfully follows and performs the divine order. In contrast, the second type of unificationism signifies the ontological oneness of God and a servant. This is claimed by the proponents of absolute unity and is accordingly objectionable.[209] There can be little doubt that, by the proponents of absolute unity, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya intends Ibn ʿArabī and his followers, who deny the world's plurality and identify the world as being the same as God.[210]

Following Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's position, al-Suyūṭī rejects absolute unity in the ontological sense.[211] Furthermore, by referring to al-Taftāzānī's aforementioned classification of mysticism – experiential and visionary mysticism on one pole and ontological and monistic mysticism on the other – al-Suyūṭī expresses his support for the former kind of experiential mysticism.[212] However, it needs to be remembered that, in contrast to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and al-Taftāzānī, al-Suyūṭī does not regard Ibn ʿArabī as an advocate of the existential formula of absolute unity, nor as a heretical

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[208] One of al-Suyūṭī's teachers, Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, who also taught his rival al-Biqāʿī, was a student of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. This would suggest that al-Suyūṭī was acquainted with Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's texts through Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī to a certain extent.

[209] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2, 137.

[210] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 116. I will return to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's view on absolute unity in the next chapter.

[211] Al-Suyūṭī sees the idea of absolute unity as an infiltration of Avicennan philosophy into Sufism. See El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 241.

[212] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī*, vol. 2, 136.

member of monistic mysticism. For al-Suyūṭī, Ibn ʿArabī belongs to a group of authentic mystics whose controversial statements – if they are interpreted appropriately in the context of experiential mysticism – pose no threat to religion.

The above discussions show that, by drawing on the arguments of Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries such as al-Taftāzānī, al-Biqāʿī, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, al-Suyūṭī understands Ibn ʿArabī as a mystic who declares his mystical experience of God's unity as a perceptual and subjective truth which does not represent actual reality. This approach is more distinctly observed in Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī's and Ibn Ḥajar's defences of Ibn ʿArabī, which I will consider now.

1.2.3.2. Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī

Like al-Suyūṭī, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī show their respect for Ibn ʿArabī, while discouraging commoners from reading his books.[213] Al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar also agree on their rejection of the tenet of the oneness of existence. For example, Ibn Ḥajar explicitly denies the monistic worldview expressed in statements such as: 'There is no being but for God' (*lā mawjūd illā Allāh*).[214] In *Iḥkām*, al-Anṣārī also rejects the ontological doctrine by remaining reticent on this subject, and also by stressing the importance of the role of the 'heart' (*qalb*) in the mystical experience. According to al-Anṣārī, the perfect state for a mystic is when he sees God alone in his

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[213] Ibn Ḥajar describes Ibn ʿArabī as a man of abstinence (*zuhd*), worship (*ʿibāda*), and miracles (*karāmāt*) who combined religious knowledge and practice (*ʿilm wa ʿamal*) See Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 296-297, 336. Ibn Ḥajar's attitude towards Ibn ʿArabī is also recorded by al-Munāwī. The story goes that an unnamed teacher of Ibn Ḥajar and a critic of Ibn ʿArabī became ill one day. Ibn Ḥajar ascribed it to his criticism of Ibn ʿArabī and exhorted him to repent his attitude. Al-Munāwī reports that as soon as the teacher regretted his attitude he got better (al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 2, 165). As for al-Anṣārī's order to prohibit Ibn ʿArabī's books, see al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 2, 163.

[214] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 335.

heart, nothing else. With respect to this, he notes that the highest stage of divine unity occurs when a mystic's heart is filled with the notion of the oneness of God, so much so that he temporarily forgets everything but Him.[215] This idea suggests that in al-Anṣārī's view, the mystical experience of divine unity is concerned only with a mystic's perception, but not with the actual reality of the world where God is taken as the only real existence.

In what follows, I will further investigate al-Anṣārī's and Ibn Ḥajar's view on Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism, clarifying their support for visionary, experiential oneness in opposition to the oneness of existence. To this end, it is first relevant to discuss the fact that in an attempt to excuse Ibn ʿArabī and his fellow mystics, Ibn Ḥajar disproves the notions of unificationism and incarnationism through the words of Ibn ʿArabī's critic, al-Taftāzānī. Ibn Ḥajar dedicates one of the sections in his collection of legal opinions, *al-Fatāwī al-ḥadīthiyya*, to this subject. It is entitled 'the meaning of God's unity according to the Sufis that makes one imagine unificationism and incarnationism between the necessary being and the world's plurality, and which the jurists oppose'.[216]

According to Ibn Ḥajar, the reason for which the divine unification with creation is prohibited is that it would require either cases of the necessary being (*al-wājib*) turning into the possible beings (*al-mumkin*), or of the possible being changing into the necessary being, both of which are absolutely impossible.[217] He then adduces three reasons that prove the implausibility of God's incarnation. First, the incarnation of a thing into something else, whether it is the incarnation of body into a place, a form into a matter, substance into accident, or a quality into an object of qualification, means that

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[215] al-Anṣārī, *Iḥkām*, vol. 1, 61; vol. 2, 837, 847, 877, 880, 895, 1063,
[216] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 332.
[217] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 333.

the former is in want of the latter (*iftiqār*). This contradicts the idea of God as the necessary being who does not need any other beings except Himself. Secondly, the incarnation of God into something else – if He were to incarnate into something imperfect – violates the doctrine of God as the necessary being who is perfect by Himself. If He incarnates into something perfect instead, it follows that the necessary being only becomes perfect through this thing, which is absurd. Thirdly, if one assumes that God incarnates into a body – as some unbelievers claim – He comes to be divided or becomes part of the body, which is also impossible.[218]

Ibn Ḥajar's argument here is in fact a summary of what is originally found in *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid* of al-Taftāzānī.[219] In the section entitled 'the necessary being is not unified with anyone else nor incarnated in it', al-Taftāzānī explains how the notion of incarnationism is logically impossible, giving six reasons, of which Ibn Ḥajar quotes the first, third and fourth point.

It bears reiterating that this is not the only time Ibn Ḥajar draws on al-Taftāzānī's teaching. As I discussed earlier, in al-Taftāzānī's view, Ibn ʿArabī's monism is not characterised by unificationism and incarnationsm, as it does not presuppose the existence of two entities to begin with. Intriguingly, Ibn Ḥajar summarises al-Taftāzānī's statement on this subject, with the objective of defending Ibn ʿArabī. In order to indicate a difference between al-Taftāzānī's original text and Ibn Ḥajar's actual quotation of it, I have translated below a rather long passage from al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*. It reads:

When a traveller [i.e. a mystic] completes his path and reaches God, that is to

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[218] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 333-334.
[219] al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, vol.4, 57-59.

say, to the level of His nearness and witnessing, […] he immerses himself in the ocean of God's unity and knowledge in the sense that his essence disappears into His essence and his attributes into His attributes, and he becomes hidden from everything but for God and he sees nothing in existence but for God. This is what the Sufis call self-effacement in the divine unity (*fanāʾ fī l-tawḥīd*) and is indicated by the hadith, 'My servant keeps drawing near Me until I love him; and when I [God] love him, I am his hearing with which he hears […].' Hence, he [the mystic] might issue utterances that sound like unification with God and incarnation of God into His creation. This is due to the lack of expressions to describe his state, but the mystical unveiling will sanction his speech […].

There is a second group that makes you imagine this [unificationism and incarnationism], but they are not [the advocates of these notions] either. Their position is that the necessary being is absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) that is solely one and has no plurality at all. Plurality only emerges through relations (*iḍāfāt*) and entifications (*taʿayyunāt*) at the level of imagination and illusion. Everything is one in reality and it becomes many in the loci (*maẓāhir*) […]. Therefore, there is neither incarnation nor unification with God, because in reality there is no duality (*ithnayniyya*) and no otherness (*ghayriyya*) […].[220]

In al-Taftāzānī's view, the members of the first group are legitimate mystics who view their experience only as visionary and psychological. On the other hand, those of the

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[220] al-Taftāzānī, *al-Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, vol. 4, 59-60. The passage is referred to in El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 315. It is also translated in Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 474.

second group are heretical mystics like Ibn ʿArabī who, by upholding the absolute oneness of God's existence, believe that their experience represents the ontological truth. Al-Biqāʿī quotes the same passage with the aim of condemning Ibn ʿArabī's monism.[221]

Significantly, Ibn Ḥajar attempts to recontextualise al-Taftāzānī's statement. According to Ibn Ḥajar, neither early nor late Sufis declared anything like pure unificationism and incarnationism. If they had done so, their real intention would have been something different. Therefore, Ibn ʿArabī's remarks have to be interpreted appropriately in order to prove his innocence from any heretical charges. It is in this context that Ibn Ḥajar quotes al-Taftāzānī's passage translated above, whereby he associates Ibn ʿArabī with the first camp of authentic and experiential mysticism. When doing so, Ibn Ḥajar inserts his own comment to further clarify the passage's meaning. In the following passage, Ibn Ḥajar refers to the first group of the mystics and writes as follows (his comment is highlighted in bold):

> That is to say, his [a mystic's] essence disappears into His essence and his attributes into His attributes, **not in the sense of the world's reality, but as the expression of their witnessing (*bi-iʿtibāri al-shuhūd lā al-ḥaqīqa*), and** he is hidden from everything but God and he sees nothing in existence except God.[222]

As the passage suggests, Ibn Ḥajar supports al-Taftāzānī's view that the authentic mystics' experience is perceived as a perceptual, visionary truth that does not represent actual reality. He then paraphrases al-Taftāzānī's latter passage concerning the second

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[221] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 82-83.
[222] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 334.

group of monistic mystics, adding the following comment at the end. It reads:

> It is known by this statement [of al-Taftāzānī] that the utterances issued by
> Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Fāriḍ and their followers – may God show them mercy and
> facilitate them in the presences of His unity – are [at] the station (*manzil*) of
> which al-Taftāzānī spoke [with regard to the first group of authentic
> mystics].[223]

Considering Ibn Ḥajar's denial of the monistic doctrine, it is assumed that his intention in this remark is to relate Ibn ʿArabī and his followers to the first group of legitimate and experiential mystics, but not to the second group.[224] This reading is further supported by Ibn Ḥajar's reference to his teacher, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, who quotes the same part of al-Taftāzānī's passage in question. Below is a translation from al-Anṣārī's *Sharḥ al-rawḍ*, which is excerpted by Ibn Ḥajar. In the first paragraph, al-Anṣārī expresses his own opinion regarding Ibn ʿArabī and others. In the second paragraph, he paraphrases al-Taftāzānī's text, employing it as an interpretive comment on the first paragraph. Al-Anṣārī writes:

> With regard to disbelieving a group of Ibn ʿArabī [and others], their remarks
> – if taken literally – may signify unificationism in the view of those who do
> not belong to them [i.e. Ibn ʿArabī's group]. This is because of what the
> literal meaning [of their remarks] implies […]. A group of the mystics, such
> as [the Shādhilī Sufi] Tāj al-Dīn ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh (d. 709/1309) and [the

223 Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 334.
224 Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 335.

Yemeni mystic] ʿAbd Allāh al-Yāfiʿī (d. 768/1367), have already issued a statement regarding Ibn ʿArabī's sainthood (walāya), that the literal meaning of their remarks – which are reported by the non-Sufis – does not actually malign Ibn ʿArabī and his group for the following reason.

That is to say, when a mystic immerses himself in the ocean of God's unity and knowledge until his essence disappears into His essence and his attributes disappear into His attributes – and [at this stage] he is covered from everything except for God – he might issue utterances that sound like unificationism and incarnationsim. This is due to a lack of [proper] expressions to describe the state he has reached. Yet, there is nothing like unificationism and incarnationism in reality, just as al-Taftāzānī and others [e.g. al-Biqāʿī] have asserted.[225]

In al-Anṣārī's view, when Ibn ʿArabī and his followers uttered what could have been taken as the espousal of unificationism and incarnationism, they were in the mystical state of witnessing nothing but God. Hence, they should be condoned. It is important to note that al-Anṣārī associates this view with al-Taftāzānī. As al-Anṣārī's second passage vividly shows, by recontexualising al-Taftāzānī's argument, al-Anṣārī places Ibn ʿArabī

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[225] al-Anṣārī, *Sharḥ al-rawḍ*, vol. 4, 119. Ibn Ḥajar's summary of this statement goes as follows:

> By quoting al-Taftāzānī, our teacher [Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī] stated in his *Sharḥ al-rawḍ* […] that whoever disbelieves a group of Ibn ʿArabī [and his followers] is himself an unbeliever, because they are in fact great teachers; that al-Yāfiʿī, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ al-Allāh, and others acknowledged Ibn ʿArabī's status as a friend of God; that his technical term is correct amongst his group based on the way they employ it; and that a mystic who immerses himself in the ocean of God's unity can issue the statements that may make a person imagine unificationism and incarnationism, but they are not [related to unificationism and incarnationism] [Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, 52].

in the group of legitimate mystics whose experience of God's unity only concerns their visionary and perceptual experience.

It is clear by now that both al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar interpret Ibn ʿArabī's worldview as experiential mysticism. Most markedly, they attribute this view to al-Taftāzānī. This reading of al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar is certainly misleading, as there can be little doubt that al-Taftāzānī tried to accuse Ibn ʿArabī of being a member of the heretical group of monistic mystics.[226] Considering al-Taftāzānī's formidable attack on Ibn ʿArabī's thought, it is hard to imagine that al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar failed to notice al-Taftāzānī's real intention. A possible explanation for this is that their misinterpretation was deliberate. By borrowing al-Taftāzānī's typology of legitimate and heretical mystics, al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar modified the original meaning of his statement, with the objective of presenting Ibn ʿArabī as a legitimate mystic whose mystical teaching should only be taken as visionary, not as ontological.

Thus, our observation demonstrates that Ibn ʿArabī's supporters in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Egypt established their own method of reinterpreting his ontological worldview as experiential. As El-Rouayheb showed, a similar view was also proposed by Ibn Ḥajar's contemporary, Muḥammad al-Bakrī.[227] However, al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar's defence of Ibn ʿArabī is considered unique in that they draw on the very teachings of Ibn ʿArabī's antagonists. This evinces that their approaches to defending Ibn ʿArabī's thought were innovatively formulated in relation to the polemical context of this period, and that they were too methodical to be dismissed as merely apologetic.

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[226] Geoffroy has already noted that some 'défenseurs de la *waḥdat al-wujūd*' make reference to a part of al-Taftāzānī's passage in question. However, Geoffroy does not analyse this subject further. See Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 475, n. 419.
[227] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 242-246.

1.2.4. Concluding Remark

This section's objective was to consider the polemics over Ibn ʿArabī's thought before al-Shaʿrānī by focusing on how the arguments of anti-Ibn ʿArabī scholars were adopted by later generations, especially amongst Ibn ʿArabī's supporters. I discussed how, by employing the arguments of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and al-Taftāzānī, al-Suyūṭī and Ibn Ḥajar reject the tenets of pure unificationism and incarnationism in order to refute the attacks of Ibn Taymiyya and al-Biqāʿī. I further demonstrated that by recontextualising al-Taftāzānī's passage, which is also quoted by al-Biqāʿī, al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar present Ibn ʿArabī's teaching as visionary and experiential and hence legitimate, thereby dismissing the very doctrine of the oneness of existence for which Ibn ʿArabī was criticised.

As I noted earlier, Chittick certainly reiterates that existential oneness and visionary oneness are two sides of the same coin and inextricable from each other, because Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of oneness exhibits both ontological/objective and psychological/subjective implications.[228] However, this analysis does not necessarily mean that all of Ibn ʿArabī's supporters should endorse the two notions of oneness and that – in contrast to Chittick's comment – those who do not do so are mistaken in their interpretation of Ibn ʿArabī. Our observation of al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Ḥajar's arguments reveals that they intentionally distinguish existential oneness from visionary oneness, thus taking the two types of oneness as fundamentally distinctive principles. In their view, whether one expresses one's mystical experience as an objective truth or as a subjective truth is a crucial threshold that divides orthodoxy from heresy. It is most

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[228] Chittick, 'Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*,' 74-75; '*Waḥdat al-wujūd* in India,' 32-36.

probable that the context of Ibn ʿArabī being accused of upholding the oneness of existence prompted his defenders to present him as an advocate of experiential oneness.

These findings establish the distinction of al-Suyūṭī, al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar's approaches to the defence of Ibn ʿArabī. They carefully and ingeniously incorporate the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī's critics into their own arguments. This confirms that Ibn ʿArabī's supporters during the fifteenth- and the sixteenth-century Arabic-speaking world were more strategic than previously thought and that their defensive techniques should be understood against the backdrop of the polemics over Ibn ʿArabī.

As I shall discuss in Chapter 2, the method of reading Ibn ʿArabī's oneness of existence as experiential oneness is more explicitly promoted by al-Shaʿrānī. He further elaborates on it by reinterpreting the latter's actual statements. Before discussing this subject, the next section will examine al-Shaʿrānī's theological works.

1.3. Al-Shaʿrānī's Theological Oeuvre and Project

This section introduces al-Shaʿrānī's theological oeuvre. I first examine the idea of the tripartite hierarchy of creeds proposed by Ibn ʿArabī. I then consider how al-Shaʿrānī adopts this teaching in his own theological project. Finally, I look at eight of al-Shaʿrānī's theological works. The analysis will fill the gap in scholarship by providing an understanding of al-Shaʿrānī's scholarly goal in these writings, as well as shedding light on his stance on Ibn ʿArabī's thought.

1.3.1. Ibn ʿArabī on the Tripartite Hierarchy of Creeds

As noted earlier, the Ashʿarī, Ibn al-Ahdal upholds the view that there should be only one set of creedal doctrines for the believers, that is to say, those of the Ashʿarīs. Based on this idea, he castigates Ibn ʿArabī's idea of separating the articles of belief into three different levels as mentioned in the introduction of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. To repeat them here, the first level is the creed for commoners (*ʿaqīdat al-ʿawāmm*). The second level is the creed for the people of distinction amongst the people of God who are positioned between reasoning and unveiling (*ʿaqīdat ahl al-ikhtiṣāṣ min ahl Allah bayna-l-naẓar wa-l-kashf*). The third is the creed for the most distinguished amongst those who are dedicated to God (*ʿaqīda khulāṣa al-khāṣṣa fī Allah*). The third group includes Ibn ʿArabī himself, and those who fully embrace his thought.

Ibn ʿArabī regards these three types of creed as being true and legitimate. In his view, the creed for commoners is sound, because it is simply taken from the apparent sense of revelation (*ẓāhir al-kitāb*) through the natural disposition (*fiṭra*) of commoners.[229] Some of the articles of belief that he writes down for commoners include the following: that Allah is the only god and nothing is compared with Him, that the world exists through Him, that He is neither an atom (*jawhar*), accident (*ʿaraḍ*), nor body, that He sits upon the throne in the way He intends, and so on. These articles may sound similar to what is commonly upheld by the Ashʿarīs. However, Ibn ʿArabī rejects the rational discipline adopted by the Ashʿarīs and asserts that anyone can affirm this creed without the employment of reason – as long as he has faith in the divine word.[230]

Ibn ʿArabī does not explain whom exactly he means by the second group (the

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[229] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 34-47.
[230] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 34,

people of God between reasoning and unveiling), except by mentioning that they are aware of the limit of human reason and understand that what reason cannot explain can be explained through the mystical discipline.[231] He lists sixty-five articles for this level of creed, each of which starts with the heading 'a problem' (*masʾala*). These articles cover various theological issues ranging from humans' acquisition of their actions (*kasb*), figurative interpretation, to the divine knowledge of creation. Some of the creedal tenets, such as the relationship between God's essence and His attributes, are clearly proposed against those of the Ashʿarīs.

Considering that the third group are the elite of the elites amongst the mystics who are fully ready to receive Ibn ʿArabī's thought, the second group can be surmised as being mystics who are not as advanced as the third group, and who are unprepared for the complete reception of his worldview. In fact, the creedal beliefs that are addressed to the second group do not make any references to Ibn ʿArabī's mystical teachings. Nevertheless, some articles of belief show a certain similarity to those upheld by the third group of the elitists. For example, one of the articles for the second group goes as follows:

A problem (*masʾala*): that the creator is knowing, living, powerful, and so on, through the rest of His attributes, is due to His relations and connections, not due to entities that are additional to Him, as this would lead to His imperfection. This is because anyone who is perfect through additional beings is imperfect in his essence […] the statement that the divine attributes are not God Himself but they are not other than Him is far from

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[231] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 41.

the point. For anyone who believes in this doctrine [*madhhab*, i.e., the Ash'arism] has already confirmed an additional entity that is other than God.[232]

As opposed to the standard Ash'arī view, the passage reveals that the second group should believe that God's attributes are identical to God Himself and that they are not concrete entities that exist by themselves. Ibn ʿArabī also promotes this teaching as a creed of the elitist mystics. This is observed in that the same argument recurs in the main part of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, wherein he discusses the mystical tenets for the third group of the elite of the elites. It needs to be pointed out that the elitist mystics understand this tenet from a different perspective; in their view, God's attributes are the same as God Himself, based on their observation that He is ultimately the only real being, and nothing else exists except Him. They are aware that God's attributes do not exist on their own and only become manifest within God as a result of divine self-manifestation. This awareness that God is the sole existence is not in the creed of the second group, as they are not advanced enough to appreciate the existential truth.

In this regard, the third group (the elite of the elites, that is, the mystics who endorse the doctrine of the oneness of existence) can be called advanced mystics. In contrast, the second group of mystics, who have faith in similar beliefs to those in the elitist group, but who have not yet grasped the ontological reality of the world, can be described as non-advanced mystics. In what follows, I will employ the expressions of 'advanced mystics' and 'non-advanced mystics'.

At the end of the introductory chapter of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Ibn ʿArabī states

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[232] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 42.

that the creed for the third group is explained throughout the rest of the text. This is an announcement that his main audience is advanced mystics and that his goal is to explicate his mystical discipline for them, based on the tenet of the oneness of existence. Most of Ibn ʿArabī's famous disciples, such as al-Qūnawī and al-Qāshānī, shared this aim and further elaborated on the monistic doctrines for advanced mystics. Significantly, unlike Ibn ʿArabī and his followers, al-Shaʿrānī dedicates himself to presenting Ibn ʿArabī's teachings to non-advanced mystics, while adopting the framework of different creeds for believers at different stages.

1.3.2. Al-Shaʿrānī's Reception of the Tripartite Hierarchy of Creeds

Although there is no explicit reference to Ibn ʿArabī's tripartite hierarchy of creeds, there is little doubt that al-Shaʿrānī supports this framework and regards the creeds of commoners, non-advanced mystics, and advanced mystics as being legitimate.[233] Following Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī believes that a theological discipline based on reasoning is not suited to establishing religious creeds, because human reason always errs and ends up producing contradicting theological opinions. On the other hand, borrowing Ibn ʿArabī's words, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that the commoners' creed, derived through the natural disposition of commoners, is sound and that God will reward them for their belief in His revelation.[234] He then refers to Ibn ʿArabī's list of what the commoners should have faith in.[235]

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[233] Interestingly, this accords with al-Shaʿrānī's legal position that the truth in jurisprudential rulings is not one but plural. See Ibrahim, 'Response to Legal Purism,' 126-129.

[234] Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī expresses the same opinion (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 96).

[235] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 30-31; *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 82-88. For al-Shaʿrānī as well as for Ibn ʿArabī, the commoner's creed is made up of the basic principles of faith that one should return to whenever it is necessary, and is not something that should be

Having thus acknowledged the soundness of the commoners' creed, al-Shaʿrānī argues that the mystics can draw their creed through both revelation and unveiling. Unlike human reason, the unveiling given by God is always correct and reveals the truth of things as they really are.[236] According to al-Shaʿrānī, the mystics' creeds are further divided into two types: those of non-advanced mystics and those of advanced mystics (*qawm makhṣūṣīn/al-firaq al-ʿaliyya*). For al-Shaʿrānī, advanced mystics correspond to the third group, the elite of the elites in Ibn ʿArabī's expression. As we shall see, in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, al-Shaʿrānī supports Ibn ʿArabī's monistic teachings the theological text addressed to advanced mystics. However, it must be noted that al-Shaʿrānī was not concerned with addressing advanced mystics as much as non-advanced mystics. In fact, and to my knowledge, he only dedicated one work to the explication of the teachings of advanced mystics.

Al-Shaʿrānī's main audience was, rather, non-advanced mystics. The relatively large number of books written for this group supports this view.[237] Although he does not employ Ibn ʿArabī's expression to describe the second group (i.e. the people between reasoning and unveiling), al-Shaʿrānī clearly addresses the mystics who are not advanced enough to understand Ibn ʿArabī's ontological monism. In *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* and others, by drawing on the words of advanced mystics, including Ibn ʿArabī amongst others, al-Shaʿrānī expounds on the creed of mystics – whom al-Shaʿrānī calls the people who follow the path (*al-qawm*), or the people of unveiling (*ahl al-kashf*). It must be noted that, in these works, he avoids referring to Ibn ʿArabī's mystical teachings of the oneness of existence and the

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disbelieved. See al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 111b.

[236] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 32-33.

[237] As far as I am aware, at least five out of eight of the theological works of al-Shaʿrānī are dedicated to this group.

cosmological theory of God's self-manifestation. In this regard, the readership of these texts is identified as non-advanced mystics who correspond to the second group, the people between reasoning and unveiling.

Al-Shaʿrānī's works addressed to non-advanced mystics are also written for theologians who have doubts about Ibn ʿArabī's thought. In these works, al-Shaʿrānī attempts to demonstrate the superiority of the latter's teachings by presenting them as solutions to certain theological issues, such as, amongst others, the problem of the divine anthropomorphic attributes.

Following these observations, a main goal of al-Shaʿrānī's theological project is to provide non-advanced mystics and theologians with the articles of belief that strike a middle ground between the theological discipline and Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism. To this end, al-Shaʿrānī selectively quotes passages from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and discusses them in a theological context, without referring to Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview except in the text intended for advanced mystics. This approach to Ibn ʿArabī's thought, – which is based on the structure of the tripartite hierarchy of creeds – makes al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī distinctive. Interestingly, as I showed earlier, this is contrasted with the approach of Ibn ʿArabī's other supporters before al-Shaʿrānī (al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ḥajar and al-Anṣārī), who stayed aloof from discussing the former's actual teachings.

1.3.3. Al-Shaʿrānī's Theological Works

Al-Shaʿrānī himself notes that he authored around three hundred works, amongst

which eighty to one hundred are currently known to be extant.[238] Nearly fifty of them

have been published so far and the rest remain in manuscript form. They cover a wide

range of subjects. Sufi etiquette makes up by far the biggest sector, including around

forty titles or more. This is followed by theology, biography, jurisprudence and

others.[239] The abundance of his works on Sufi etiquette led al-Shaʿrānī to be recognised

in the modern period as one of the major Sufis who contributed to this field.[240] Winter,

al-Dālī, and others examined some of these works on Sufi etiquette in order to discuss

al-Shaʿrānī's views on different issues of society, religion, and politics.[241] There,

al-Shaʿrānī's arguments often proceed by meticulously listing the manners and

behaviours that a Sufi ought to follow when confronting certain situations.

Al-Shaʿrānī's biographical and jurisprudential works have also been subject to much

scholarly examination, as I mentioned in the introduction of this study.

Unfortunately, it is outside of the scope of this thesis to analyse al-Shaʿrānī's

works on Sufi etiquette, let alone those on biography and jurisprudence. Rather, the

current study sheds light on his theological oeuvre. These works are the most relevant to

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[238] The total number of titles recorded in Brockelman, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* and WorldCat catalogue, including a few more works I have found, reaches 80. *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* states that more than 100 works of al-Shaʿrānī are presently extant. Based on this I make the number between 80 and 100. Al-Dālī, on the other hand, maintains that he has come across 165 works. It must be noted that these include the titles which are only reported in al-Shaʿrānī's own works and in his biography, and they are not necessarily extant. Al-Dālī further includes the writings that have come down to us bearing slightly different titles as separate texts of al-Shaʿrānī. However, they are most probably the same work (for example, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī bayān ʿaqīdat al-ṣūfiyya* and *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī maʿrifa qawāʿid al-ṣūfiyya*. Or, *al-Mīzān al-Shaʿrāniyya al-muqarrara [bi-]jamīʿ ʿaqāʾid ahl al-sunna al-Muḥammadiyya* and *Mīzān al-ʿaqāʾid al-Shaʿrāniyya al-mushayyada bi-l-kitāb wa-l-sunna al-Muḥammadiyya*). These factors explain the larger number of al-Shaʿrānī's writings that al-Dālī proposes. See al-Dālī, *al-Khiṭāb al-siyāsī*, 87, 317-332.

[239] For a list of the main titles in each subject, see Kaplan, 'Šaʿrânî,' *İslâm Ansiklopedisi.*

[240] al-Aṭṭār, *Hāshiyat al-Aṭṭār ʿalā jamʿ al-jawāmiʿ*, vol. 2, 513. The author is the Egyptian Shāfiʿī scholar and then Shaykh al-Azhar, Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Aṭṭār (d. 1250/1835), who comments on al-Shaʿrānī's texts along with Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb* (d. 386/996) and al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ* (d. 505/1111) as the texts that delineate Sufi etiquettes and rituals.

[241] They analysed in particular *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī bayān ādāb al-ʿubūdiyya*, *Baḥr al-mawrūd fī al-mawāthiq wa-l-uhūd*, *Lawāqiḥ al-anwār al-qudsiyya fī bayān al-ʿuhūd al-Muḥammadiyya* and its abridgement, *al-Kibrīt al-aḥmar fī bayān ʿulūm al-shaykh al-akbar.*

the theme that I intend to highlight; indeed, it is in these writings of theology that al-Shaʿrānī exhibits his unique approach to the defence of Ibn ʿArabī's thought and his interpretation of it.

Theology is al-Shaʿrānī's second most popular subject, yet remains largely unstudied.[242] As far as I am aware, he left behind eleven works in the field of theology, of which I have access to eight.[243] The titles are as follows (listed in chronological order as far as the date is known):

(1) ***al-Mīzān al-dharriyya al-mubayyina li-ʿaqāʾid al-firaq al-ʿaliyya***

(2) *Mukhtaṣar iʿtiqād ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa lil-ḥāfiẓ Abī Bakr*

   al-Bayhaqī

(3) ***al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir fī bayān ʿaqāʾid al-akābir***

(4) *Kashf al-ḥijāb wa-l-rān ʿan wajh asʾilat al-jānn*

(5) *al-Qawl al-mubīn fī l-radd ʿan al-shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn*

(6) ***al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya fī ʿaqāʾid akābir al-ṣūfiyya***

(7) ***al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya al-muwaḍḍiḥa li-maʿānī al-ṣifāt al-ilāhiyya***

(8) ***al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya fī tawḥīd ahl al-khuṣūṣiyya***

Amongst the above, I will mainly examine the five texts indicated in bold, i.e. numbers (1), (3), (6), (7), and (8). With regard to the rest, (2) *Mukhtaṣar iʿtiqād*, which is an

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[242] As a comparison, al-Shaʿrānī composed about seven biographical works and six jurisprudential works.

[243] The three titles that I do not have access to are as follows: *Muqaddima fī ʿilm al-tawḥīd*; *Farāʾid al-ʿaqāʾid fī ʿilm al-ʿaqāʾid*; *Ṭahārat al-jism wa-l-fuʾād min sūʾ al-ẓan bi jamīʿ al-ʿibād*; *Tadhkirat bi aḥwāl al-mawtā wa umūr al-ākhira* (also known as *Mukhtaṣar Tadhkirat al-Imām Abū ʿAbd Allāh*). *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* further includes *Asrār arkān al-Islām* (also known as *Fatḥ al-mubīn fī jumlat min asrār al-dīn*) as a theological text by al-Shaʿrānī. I did not include this text, as its objective is to explain the details of the five pillars of Islam and the etiquette that should be observed in performing them, rather than exploring theological issues.

abridgement of al-Bayhaqī's *iʿtiqād*, does not provide much information about al-Shaʿrānī's view on theology and his reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought. For this reason, and in the context of the aims of the current thesis, I will not conduct an in-depth and an independent analysis of *Mukhtaṣar iʿtiqād*. (4), that is, *Kashf al-ḥijāb*, appears to be a much shorter version of *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, and I will occasionally draw on this work as a reference. The content of (5) *al-Qawl al-mubīn* is repeatedly discussed in different parts of al-Shaʿrānī's works of theology and therefore, I will restrict myself to briefly mentioning this work when discussing other texts on the same subject.

The topics of each of the five texts that I will survey – (1), (3), (6), (7), and (8) – are more or less similar, and so is their style. As the titles inform us, they aim to explicate the articles of faith (*ʿaqāʾid*) or creedal principles (*qawāʾid*) that the mystics uphold when drawing on Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and the works of other mystics, especially ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ. In what follows, I will outline the structure of al-Shaʿrānī's texts listed above, with a special focus on these five texts.

It bears reiterating that al-Shaʿrānī takes different positions in accordance with his readership. In a text intended for commoners and those who are not inclined to mysticism, that is (2), he keeps silent on any mystical thought. In the works addressed to non-advanced mystics and theologians, that is (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), he defends Ibn ʿArabī's teachings but excludes his monistic tenet. For advanced mystics, that is (1), al-Shaʿrānī endorses the latter's ontological worldview. The audience of (8) is not entirely clear. However, it is most likely addressed to theologians who object to the formula of the oneness of existence.

(1) *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya al-mubayyina li- -ʿaqāʾid al-firaq al-ʿaliyya* (**'Fine balance in explaining the creeds of a group of the elevated people'**)

Composed between 945-951/1538-1545, this is one of al-Shaʿrānī's relatively early works.[244] One of the manuscripts contains eighty folios with twenty-one lines on each page, making it a middle-length work of his.[245] It stands apart from the rest of al-Shaʿrānī's theological writings in terms of its readership and content; as he clearly states in the introduction, it is addressed to a group of the most advanced mystics (*qawm makhṣūṣīn*) who, in his view, are ready to appreciate Ibn ʿArabī's teaching in full.[246] It is the most esoteric work of al-Shaʿrānī, and clearly displays the influence of Ibn ʿArabī's mystical worldview. To my knowledge, al-Shaʿrānī does not discuss the idea of divine self-manifestation – through which God as the sole being in the cosmos manifests Himself in His creation – in any other text. This explicit endorsement of Ibn ʿArabī's most controversial tenet led some later scholars to perceive the work as a profession of heretical teaching. For example, the Egyptian scholar ʿUmar al-Fārisukūrī (d. 1018-1019/1610) denounced the work as advocating unificationism.[247] On the other hand, mystics under the influence of Ibn ʿArabī, such as the Syrian Sufi and defender of oneness of existence, ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), amongst others, were in favour of the work.[248]

The text starts by explaining the reason for its composition. According to al-Shaʿrānī, he was inspired to write down what is in his view the legitimate creed

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[244] For analysis by the editor of this work on the completion date, see the introduction of al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 14-16.
[245] al-Shaʿrānī, in the introduction of *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 13.
[246] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 19.
[247] El-Rouayheb, 'Heresy and Sufism,' 364-367.
[248] According to the editor of this work, al-Nābulusī left some comments on one of the existing manuscripts. See the editor's introduction to al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 10-14.

(ʿaqīdat sharīʿa) of advanced mystics, after reading the words of some great friends of God (awliyāʾ). These include the Andalusian mystic Abī al-Qāsim ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151-2), Ibn ʿArabī, a follower of Ibn ʿArabī in Yemen, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 815/1412) who is famous for the work entitled 'The Perfect Man' (al-insān al-kāmil), Muḥammad Wafāʾ, and ʿAlī Wafāʾ.[249] In al-Shaʿrānī's view, their statements ultimately lead one to realise what he calls 'the balance' (al-mīzān) between the two divine self-manifestations of non-delimitation and delimitation or divine incomparability and similarity (tashbīh). This balance facilitates the understanding of the anthropomorphic attributes of God.[250] In regards to this, al-Shaʿrānī writes:

> The scholars who take a look at this balance will find it to confirm all the verses, sayings, and reports on divine attributes as well as confirming all the statements of people who have discussed the divine essence and attributes.[251]

After the introduction, the first half of the text is dedicated to examining subjects such as the vision of God, the knowledge of God, the denial of unificationism, and the anthropomorphic attributes of God, quoting Ibn ʿArabī's al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya. The latter half of the text analyses the dogma of divine unity and the relationship between God and creation through the theory of divine self-manifestation. There, al-Shaʿrānī discusses the idea of God being the only existence and Adam being the perfect man who – being created in the divine image – can manifest all the realities of the world. The

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[249] al-Shaʿrānī, al-Mīzān al-dharriyya, 17.
[250] al-Shaʿrānī, al-Mīzān al-dharriyya, 20.
[251] al-Shaʿrānī, al-Mīzān al-dharriyya, 18.

discussion in many cases proceeds in the form of a dialogue between al-Shaʿrānī and his teacher, ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ. The intimate relationship between the two suggests that al-Shaʿrānī's words reflect his teacher's view.

Towards the end of the work, al-Shaʿrānī begins to explain the concept of the balance that peacefully resolves the issue of the divine anthropomorphic attributes. This balance is repetitively mentioned in his other writings, playing an important role in his thought.[252] Its meaning will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Let it suffice to mention here that in this work, al-Shaʿrānī aims at bringing harmony to the disputes on divine attributes through the notion of the balance, while introducing the creed of advanced mystics.

The work concludes with a warning against declaring fellow Muslims infidels (*takfīr*), by referring to the definition of *takfīr*. Al-Shaʿrānī also stresses the superiority of mystics, who can affirm all the anthropomorphic attributes without relying on reasoning, over rational theologians.

(2) *Mukhtaṣar iʿtiqād ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa lil-ḥāfiẓ Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī* ('The Abridgement of the Creed of the People of Sunna written by Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī')

This work was completed in 953/1546 and is relatively short in length. The editor of the work notes that the manuscript he has access to only contains twenty-seven folios with twenty lines on each page.[253] It beings with the following statement: 'this [text] is

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[252] The balance in al-Shaʿrānī's theological works is related to but should not be confused with the balance discussed in his jurisprudential works, in which it means a balance between stringency and leniency in legal rulings. For more on this, see Dajani, 'Ibn ʿArabī's Conception of Ijtihād,' 166-172, 176-182, 191-193. I will discuss the details of al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of a balance in his theological writings in Chapter 4.

[253] See the introduction to al-Shaʿrānī, *Mukhtaṣr iʿtiqād* edited by Yūsf Riḍwān al-Kūd, 197.

[concerning] the creed of the people of Sunna recounted by Imām Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī in his work entitled *al-Iʿtiqād* ('the Creed') and I [al-Shaʿrānī] selected some of it in the hope that it would benefit the brothers.'[254] The whole text is thus presented as a much shorter version of *al-Iʿtiqād* written by the Shāfiʿī jurist and Ashʿarī theologian Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), and al-Shaʿrānī rarely adds his own comments on it. It summarises from *al-Iʿtiqād* the subjects of divinity, God's attributes, the vision of God, the creation of humans' actions, divine punishment, prophethood, the prophet's followers, his family, and his successors.

The reason al-Shaʿrānī chooses to abridge *al-Iʿtiqād* is not explained. The author's name scarcely appears in his other theological writings. One possible reason for this is the fact that al-Bayhaqī leant towards traditionalism rather than rationalism. Furthermore, his theological works relied on scriptural evidence much more than other Ashʿarī theologians of his age who put stress on rational thinking. This might have made al-Shaʿrānī, who was against the usage of the rational discipline, interested in traditional al-Bayhaqī.

It is worth noting that al-Shaʿrānī does not refer to any mystical terms in this work. This suggests that its intended audience is a group of ordinary Muslims, written in order to provide them with the Sunni creed that they ought to believe in, rather than for those who are engaged in the mystical path, nor those who have an interest in Ibn ʿArabī's teaching. This would explain why some of the views that al-Shaʿrānī expresses in this text do not accord with his opinions in other works. For example, he cites from *al-Iʿtiqād* the representative view of the Ashʿarī theologians concerning the relationship

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Unless otherwise indicated, in what comes below, I chiefly refer to *Mukhtaṣar iʿtiqād* edited by Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī.
[254] al-Shaʿrānī, *Mukhtaṣar iʿtiqād*, 219.

between God's essence and His attributes. Quoting al-Bayhaqī, al-Shaʿrānī writes that according to the majority of the Ashʿarīs, the essential attributes of God, such as life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, seeing, and speech, are inherent in God's essence and additional to it. These attributes are not God Himself, yet neither are they other than God.[255] On the other hand, in works in which he explicates the creed of non-advanced mystics, al-Shaʿrānī dismisses this tenet, thereby maintaining that God's attributes are identical to Himself.[256] I will come back to this subject in Chapter 5. This observation shows al-Shaʿrānī's flexibility in supporting different positions depending on the readers' spiritual or intellectual level.

(3) *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir fī bayān ʿaqāʾid al-akābir* ('Precious Gems and Jewels in Explicating the Creed of the Great Masters')

Composed in 955/1548, this became one of the most famous and widely read texts of al-Shaʿrānī. It is available in various editions up to the present day. The findings of Hudson confirm that it was popular in Ottoman Syria well after al-Shaʿrānī's death.[257] Chodkiewicz also points out that it was well circulated in the Muslim world and that its heavy reliance on *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* helped spread Ibn ʿArabī's teaching.[258] It is also one of al-Shaʿrānī's lengthiest works. The edition at hand is composed of two volumes and has nearly five hundred pages with thirty-two lines on each page.

In the introduction, al-Shaʿrānī states that the purpose of the work is to build a

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[255] al-Shaʿrānī, *Mukhtaṣar iʿtiqād*, 227.
[256] Other passages from *al-Iʿtiqād* concur with a general position of al-Shaʿrānī. For example, he quotes al-Bayhaqī's emphasis on affirming the anthropomorphic attributes of God, such as His eyes and face, as divine attributes without questioning their modality or assuming any corporeal features. This view is upheld elsewhere by al-Shaʿrānī (al-Shaʿrānī, *Mukhtaṣar iʿtiqād*, 229, 234-235).
[257] Hudson, 'Reading al- Shaʿrānī,' 39-68.
[258] Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore*, 10.

bridge between the creeds of the people of unveiling [*ahl al-kashf,* i.e., the mystics, or more specifically non-advanced mystics] and the people of speculation and proof [*ahl al-naẓar wa-l-istidlāl,* i.e., the rational theologians].[259] By the people of speculation and proof, al-Shaʿrānī means the Ashʿarīs and the Māturīdīs – who were minorities in early Ottoman Egypt.[260] As mentioned earlier, al-Suyūṭī's reference to a harmonious relationship between Ibn ʿArabī's creed and that of the Ashʿarīs might be behind this work.

At the beginning of the work, al-Shaʿrānī declares his intention not to differ from the position of the major theologians. Despite this, he occasionally expresses views that do differ from theirs. In fact, based on mystical teaching, al-Shaʿrānī proposes alternative solutions to certain theological conundrums, thereby demonstrating the mystics' superiority to theologians. The objective of the work is thus to establish the Sunni articles of belief, not through theological reasoning and speculation, which is prone to error, but through revelation and unveiling that discloses things as they really are.[261] For this purpose, al-Shaʿrānī turns to *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya,* which is in his view the articulation of Ibn ʿArabī's creed, while carefully dismissing its monistic aspects.[262] As this observation indicates, the work is an attempt to fuse the mystical and theological disciplines. It especially endeavours to establish the mystical discipline as a scholarly approach to probing the creedal issues which were conventionally taken up by theologians. As I noted earlier, this was briefly attempted by Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī.

As this objective suggests, the work's readership is primarily the mystics in

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[259] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir,* vol. 1, 3. This passage is translated in El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History,* 238-239.
[260] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir,* vol. 1, 4
[261] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir,* vol. 1, 28-38.
[262] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir,* vol. 1, 4, 32.

al-Shaʿrānī's circle. His reticence on Ibn ʿArabī's monistic teaching implies that it is specifically intended for non-advanced mystics. It is also addressed to rational theologians who are suspicious of Ibn ʿArabī, with the aim of convincing them of the legitimacy of his teachings.

The structure of the writing is very clear. After a brief introductory remark, al-Shaʿrānī inserts four small sections in defence of Ibn ʿArabī. This is followed by the main part, which is divided into seventy-one chapters and is presented in a style reminiscent of Sunni creedal texts.[263] Each chapter begins by introducing the theologians' opinions on different theological subjects, quoting the *Minhāj* of Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), *Jamʿ al-Jawāmiʿ* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459), a commentary on *Jamʿ al-Jawāmiʿ* by Kamāl al-Dīn ibn Abī Sharīf (d. 905/1500), *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* by al-Taftāzānī, and others. These theologians' views are compared to those expressed in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and other mystical works.[264] A summary of the structure of the text is as follows:

Introductory Part:

(1) The explanation of Ibn ʿArabī's status amongst prominent Sunni scholars and how they defended him.[265]

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[263] At the beginning of *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, al-Shaʿrānī notes that he does not necessarily support the statements he has quoted from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, nor does he understand everything he has cited (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 3). Scholars such as Winter and El-Rouayheb reference the same remark as evidence of al-Shaʿrānī's apologetic stance on Ibn ʿArabī. However, in my view, the remark should not be taken as indicating al-Shaʿrānī's reluctant support for Ibn ʿArabī. As the study will demonstrate, al-Shaʿrānī positively engages with some of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings and innovatively reinterprets them, thereby incorporating them into his own theological and mystical worldview. Considering this, al-Shaʿrānī's remark is rather viewed as his careful strategy for evading criticism from his readers.

[264] See also El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 238-239.

[265] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 9-15.

(2) Interpretation of some controversial remarks that are attributed to Ibn ʿArabī.

(3) Excusing the mystics' statements that are abstruse for non-mystics.

(4) Principles that are necessary for exploring the theological discipline, and how

one only needs the scripture and the unveiling.

Main part:

Chapters 1 to 28: issues related to divinity (*ulūhiyya*)

Chapters 29 to 50: the concepts of prophethood (*nubūwa*), apostleship (*risāla*), and

sainthood (*walāya*)

Chapters 51 to 60: the issue of faith

Chapters 61 to 71: the concepts of death and the hereafter[266]

In the current study, I will mainly investigate the first part, concerning divinity (Chapters 1 to 28). The discussions in this part are the most pertinent to the objective of this study. They also concerned al-Shaʿrānī the most, as he treats the similar subjects in his other theological works.

The work ends by mentioning that al-Shaʿrānī's contemporaries in all four different schools of Law highly praised the book. He also notes that he read *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* every single day in order to select the appropriate passages for each subject.[267] This would imply that al-Shaʿrānī's quotation from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*

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[266] Amongst the various subjects he covers, al-Shaʿrānī dedicates relatively many pages to the following chapters: Chapter 4, a belief that God's reality is different from all other realities in the world; Chapter 16, an explanation about eight [essential] names of God; Chapter 22, an explanation that God is seen by the believers in this world by heart and by sight in the hereafter without modality; Chapter 32, an affirmation of the prophethood of Muḥammad and an explanation that he is God's best creation; and Chapter 71, an explanation that heaven and hell are real and both were created before the creation of Adam. The selection of Chapters 4, 32, and 71 can be understood in relation to criticism against Ibn ʿArabī for identifying God with His creation and denying the existence of revelation, prophets, and heaven and hell.

[267] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 2, 493.

is a carefully considered attempt to choose only what suits the intellectual level of his audience.

(4) *Kashf al-ḥijāb wa-l-rān ʿan wajh asʾilat al-jānn* ('Removing the Veil from the Questions of the Jinn')

Al-Shaʿrānī was inspired to compose this when he received eighty theological questions raised by his teachers and other scholars. It was shortly after he completed *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* in the year 955/1548. The published text at hand contains a hundred and twenty-five pages with seventeen lines on each page, making it one of his shorter works. It refers to the remarks of several mystics, such as Ibn ʿArabī, ʿAlī Wafā, and ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ. However, it is mainly composed of al-Shaʿrānī's own words.

The text is addressed to the mystics, whom al-Shaʿrānī strangely describes as believers in the jinn (*al-jānn*). These mystics are not well advanced on their mystical path, but are eager to understand divine issues through the mystical discipline. Some of the subjects the work covers are as follows: the legitimate sense of unificationism (*ittiḥād*) that a servant's will becomes God's will; the interpretation of the hadith 'I [God] am his hearing with which he hears […]' without pure unificationism and incarnationism; the concepts of annihilation and subsistence; the relationship between the divine pre-eternal knowledge and the world prior to the creation; the understanding of the anthropomorphic attributes of God and figurative interpretation; the issue of human actions; and the concepts of prophethood and sainthood. Many of these topics are also discussed in the aforementioned *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*. Similarly to the position taken in his other works addressed to non-advanced mystics, al-Shaʿrānī stresses in this text that sometimes only the mystical unveiling can offer better solutions

to these theological problems.[268]

In his concluding remarks, al-Shaʿrānī writes that if there are any questions that the readers do not understand, they should bring them to him or to other mystics so that they can be elevated further than where they are now.[269] As in *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, the work does not refer to Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview, because the intended readers are not advanced mystics. It is much shorter version of *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* and serves as a concise handbook for non-advanced mystics, answering different questions that they may encounter in a simple way.

(5) *al-Qawl al-mubīn fī l-radd ʿan al-shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn* ('A Clear Word in Defence of Ibn ʿArabī')

This was written in 964/1557, nine years before al-Shaʿrānī's death, making it one of his last works.[270] It is a very short treatise, with the published text containing just twenty-one pages in total. Its main focus is to discharge Ibn ʿArabī from charges of belief in the world's eternity, unificationism, and incarnationism. To this end, al-Shaʿrānī mainly quotes *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and another work Ibn ʿArabī called *al-Lawāqiḥ al-anwār*, as well as referring to ʿAlī Wafāʾ.[271] This would indicate that adversaries of Ibn ʿArabī, who accused him of propagating these ideas were still present and influential during al-Shaʿrānī's lifetime.

The work is a recapitulation of al-Shaʿrānī's position, as most of its arguments are found in his earlier writings. Of particular interest is his comment in the text that none

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[268] See, for example, al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the hadith, 'I am his hearing [...]' (al-Shaʿrānī, *Kashf al-ḥijāb*, 10-12).
[269] al-Shaʿrānī, *Kashf al-ḥijāb*, 131
[270] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawl al-mubīn*, 31.
[271] *Al-Lawāqiḥ al-anwār* was recently published. Al-Shaʿrānī often makes a reference to this work. Unfortunately, however, I do not have access to it.

of the copies of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* that he found in Damascus and Cairo were true to the original, as they had been falsified to contain passages that oppose the Islamic Law. Following this remark, al-Shaʿrānī notes that he came across the original copy of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, written by Ibn ʿArabī himself. Al-Shaʿrānī rejoiced upon reading it, because he did not find in it anything that went against the Law.[272] It is impossible to confirm the veracity of this statement, as there are no other available sources. It is hard to believe al-Shaʿrānī's claim that every copy of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* in Damascus and Cairo was interpolated. The implication of this remark would then be that no one has access to the original version of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* except al-Shaʿrānī, who luckily found it. Therefore, people ought to read al-Shaʿrānī's books, since they give a concise summary of what is written in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*.

(6) *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya fī ʿaqāʾid akābir al-ṣūfiyya* ('The Balance of al-Khiḍr in Explicating the Creeds of the Sufi Masters')[273]

A copy of this work exists in manuscript form.[274] The title page of the existing manuscript attributes the authorship to al-Shaʿrānī. Its writing style, the subjects it covers, the scholars and the writings it refers to support this attribution. It contains one hundred and seven folios with twenty-five lines on each page and is relatively long among al-Shaʿrānī's theological texts. The date of completion is not entirely clear. There is a reference at the end of the work stating that he finished writing this in the year 933/1527, making it one of his earliest works. However, significantly, it refers to

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[272] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawl al-mubīn*, 30-31.
[273] This is different from al-Shaʿrānī's jurisprudential work *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, which became the basis for his later jurisprudential work *al-Mīzān al-kubrā*.
[274] The manuscript details are as follows: MS, Süleymaniye Ktp., Haci Mahmud Efendi, no. 1281, 107 fols.

his *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir,* which was composed in 955/1548.[275] This makes the completion date of the text sometime after 955/1548, or within this year at the earliest. There is a chance that it was revised after the composition of *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir,* but this is unverifiable.

The work starts by explaining that its objective is to provide a precious balance based on the Qurʾān, the Sunna and the statements of Sunni scholars (*aʾimma*), in order to remove differences amongst theologians concerning their understanding of the divine attributes.[276] Following this, al-Shaʿrānī briefly defines the meaning of the balance as representing the two levels of divine self-manifestation of incomparability and similarity. It should be remembered, as we shall see in Chapter 4, that divine self-manifestation is not employed in this text in the ontological sense of God's manifesting Himself in the world's beings, but in relation to the scriptural report through which He describes Himself with various attributes. The introductory chapter ends with al-Shaʿrānī's definition of a sound belief. It reads:

> Most of those who do not walk on the [mystics'] path with the help of a shaykh are ignorant of the knowledge of God […] The sound belief (*ʿaqīda ṣāliḥa*) which is safe from doubt (*shabah*) is that you worship God alone who is incomparable to all attributes of the creatures that you can think of, and this was the case of the pious predecessors.[277]

This passage is partly directed against the rational theologians who compare divine

[275] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 97b, 103b.
[276] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 2a.
[277] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 6a.

attributes to those of creatures in order to interpret them figuratively. Elsewhere too, al-Sha'rānī tries to link what he believes to be the correct belief of the mystics with that of the pious predecessors, while rejecting the reasoning of the rational theologians.

In order to expound the notion of the balance, al-Sha'rānī divides the rest of the work into eight chapters, each being dedicated to examining various anthropomorphic attributes of God and showing how the balance relates to them. The text also serves to defend Ibn 'Arabī against charges of believing in the world's eternity, incarnationism, and unificationism, and to prove his legitimacy. Since the titles of each chapter describe the work's content well, I translate them below:

Chapter 1: Poems of the Sufis who witnessed two divine self-manifestations/ What I saw among the poems of the Sufis who witnessed the level of God's incomparability along with the level of His descent to human minds (*tanazzul lil-'uqūl*)[278] or just the level of God's incomparability.[279]

Chapter 2: The calls from God (*hawātif rabbānī*)[280] on witnessing the aforementioned two divine self-manifestations/ What I saw amongst the calls from God issued by those who witnessed the two levels of incomparability and descent to reason, including the words of Muḥammad 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī (ca. 366/976-7).[281]

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[278] The meaning of this expression will be discussed in Chapter 4.
[279] The latter title is what appears at the beginning of the chapter, while the former is what al-Sha'rānī writes in the introductory chapter.
[280] The calls from God (*hawātif rabbānī*) are the divine speeches that are recounted through the mouths of the mystics, with God being their subject. One example of this is: 'I [God] am the Light without shadow, while you [creation] are the light mixed with your possibility [for coming into being]; hence, you stand between existence and nonexistence' [al-Sha'rānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 121].
[281] Little is known about al-Niffarī. He is believed to be a Sufi from Iraq who was under the great influence of al-Ḥallāj. A main commentator on al-Niffarī's works is al-Tilimsānī. See

Chapter 3: What I understood from the words of the people of unveiling and the most eminent theologians in explicating the temporal origination of the world, and an explanation of Ibn ʿArabī's innocence and that of other mystics of utterances about the world's eternity, unificationism and incarnationism.

Chapter 4: Explanation of the impossibility of the creatures' knowing the divine essence, that God is different from the creatures' attributes through His incomparability, that divine self-manifestation through striking similitudes came as a way of having Himself understood and getting closer to feeble reason, and that the confusion of the great mystics (*akābir al-khalq*) over God strengthens knowledge of God.

Chapter 5: Explanation that God's essence does not accept increase nor decrease and that it is not temporally originated through His origination of the world in His essence, and an explication of the impossibility of talking about incarnationism, unificationism, corporealism, and direction on the side of God in the view of all Sufis and Ḥanbalīs, and a reference to their remarks about its impossibility in contrast to what is often attributed to them, especially to Ibn ʿArabī.

Chapter 6: Comments of Ibn ʿArabī and others amongst the friends of God about the meaning of God's statement that 'the Merciful one sat upon the throne.'

Chapter 7: Comments of the scholars about the expression of the vision of God during waking and sleeping and that it is through hearts in this world and

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Arberry, 'al-Niffarī' in *EI2*; Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 59-60. Ibn ʿArabī also mentions al-Niffarī's work entitled *al-Mawāqiḥ*, in which the author describes various stations for the mystics to reach. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 318. A reference to al-Niffarī's remarks also appears in al-Shaʿrānī's *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*.

through eyes in the hereafter/ Clarifying the meaning of a vision of God based on the two levels of the balance.

Chapter 8: Elucidation of the sound section [*nubdha ṣāliḥa*] in theology regarding divine names and attributes and whether they are identical to God or other than Him, or neither identical to God nor other than Him, and an explication that God's names are dependent and that the names of His essence are clearly specified as eight, and an explanation of the first names that appeared in the world, which you will not find in any texts of the Sufis [except Ibn ʿArabī].

Al-Shaʿrānī begins every chapter by describing the agreed view of the Sunni theologians, followed by lengthy quotations from Ibn ʿArabī and other mystics to clarify their position on each subject. Its occasional reference to *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* and overlapping topics between that text and this suggest that this work was written based on *al-Yawāqīt*. A noteworthy difference between the two writings is that while *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya* focuses on expounding the notion of the balance in relation to the two levels of divine self-manifestation (in the non-ontological sense), *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* does not refer to the balance nor to divine self-manifestation. In this regard, the main readership of *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya* is considered to be mystics, rather than theologians who are unfamiliar with these ideas, but not advanced mystics who rather endorse the ontological theory of divine self-manifestation.

The work ends by listing the basic articles of belief in which Muslims ought to believe, whether advanced mystics, scholars or pious people.[282] It is taken from the

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[282] all-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol.106a.

commoners' creed in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, quoted almost verbatim.[283] However,

there, al-Shaʿrānī makes some subtle changes. For example, Ibn ʿArabī's statement

that 'No attributes of His creation are attributed to Him with which He was not

characterised before'[284] becomes: 'His essence does not resemble any of the essences

[of the creatures] and His attributes are not similar to any of the attributes [of the

creatures].'[285] This correction would suggest that al-Shaʿrānī took the original

passage by Ibn ʿArabī to be inappropriate for the commoners, as it could mean that the

attributes of His creation always correspond to those of God, undermining the

absolute incomparability of the divine to the world's beings. Similar changes are also

made in *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, which I will discuss next.

(7) *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya al-muwaḍḍiḥa li-maʿānī al-ṣifāt al-ilāhiyya* (Unveiling Foundations in Explicating the Meanings of Divine Attributes)

The date of completion of the work is unknown. In the introduction, al-Shaʿrānī

hints that he was inspired to write this after the year 961/1553.[286] Since he died in

973/1565, it must have been completed at some point within the last thirteen years of

his life.[287] It is relatively long in length, with each manuscript containing one hundred

and ten to one hundred and thirty folios, with roughly twenty lines on each page.[288]

Its objective is to answer the issue of the anthropomorphic attributes of God in

order to refute the heretics' position and to respond to people of lower intelligence so

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[283] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 104a-106b.
[284] *Lā tarjiʿ ilayhi ṣifatun lam yakun ʿalayhā min ṣanʿat al-maṣnūʿāt* [Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 36].
[285] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 104a.
[286] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 63.
[287] The text ends with reference to the completion date as being the year 979/1571, six years after his death (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 63).
[288] al-Shaʿrānī, in the introduction of *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 44-46; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 2, 493.

that they will not harbour heretical ideas.[289] After his introductory remarks, al-Shaʿrānī states the correct belief of the people of Sunna as a reference for the readers to return to if they get confused at any point. Although he does not mention the source, this is without doubt taken from the articles of the commoners' creed in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, with some changes. One of the changes al-Shaʿrānī makes is the aforementioned statement that 'no attributes of His creation are attributed with which He was not attributed before,' which becomes: 'nothing of His attributes resembles the attributes of the created beings.'[290] As is the case with *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, this alteration indicates al-Shaʿrānī's intention to avoid a pantheistic meaning of the original sentence.

As already mentioned in relation to his other works, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, the commoners who follow their natural disposition and hold belief in revelation as it is reported are correct, in contrast to the rational theologians, who establish their creed by relying on rational proof (*adilla*) or interpretation (*taʾwīl*), which can lead to mistakes.[291] At the same time, al-Shaʿrānī firmly believes, quoting ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, that only the mystical experience of unveiling, which discloses things as they really are, can break the theological impasse over the understanding of divine attributes.[292]

Based on this standpoint, the main part of the work discusses various theological subjects, starting with the following sentence: 'amongst the things that I have said to to those who imagined (*tawahhama*) that […], the answer is […]'. The argument often develops by first describing the fallacy at hand, then giving a summary of the agreed view of major theologians, and lastly presenting the position of mystics like Ibn

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[289] al-Shaʿrānī, in the introduction of *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 63, 97.
[290] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 83.
[291] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 96.
[292] al-Shaʿrānī, in the introduction of *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 65

ʿArabī and ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, without referring to their mystical worldview. The main subjects it covers are as follows: God's creation *ex nihilo*; God's knowledge of His creation; the relationship between God and His attributes; the understanding of the anthropomorphic attributes of God; the vision of God; and the relationship between God's creation and humans' actions. In many cases, the conclusion that al-Shaʿrānī arrives at disagrees with that of the rational theologians.

Apart from this, al-Shaʿrānī dedicates a few sections to excusing Ibn ʿArabī from the charges of advocating the world's eternity, unificationism, and incarnationism. He also explicitly denies the idea of absolute unity in the ontological sense, for which the latter was criticised.[293]

The work ends by recalling the warning of al-Ashʿarī and other Ashʿarī theologians against declaring other Muslims unbelievers. Compared to *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* which covers similar subjects without treating Ibn ʿArabī's mystical cosmology, the argument in *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* is more succinct and straightforward and is primarily dedicated to the issue of anthropomorphic expressions in scripture. Hence, the intended readership is considered to be non-advanced mystics, as well as theologians who are not entirely happy with their methodology.

(8) *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya fī tawḥīd ahl al-khuṣūṣiyya* ('The Sunni Principles Regarding the Divine Unity amongst a Group of the Elites')

A copy of this work exists in manuscript form.[294] His biographer, Abū Ṣāliḥ

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[293] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 120-122.
[294] MS, Süleymaniye Ktp., Esad Efendi, nr. 1621, 118 fols.

Muḥammad al-Malījī, counts this as one of al-Shaʿrānī's major works.[295] *Īḍāḥ al-maknūn* also attributes the work to al-Shaʿrānī.[296] Its writing style, the topics it covers, and certain expressions and passages that it employs, support this attribution. The copy at hand contains a hundred and nineteen folios with twenty-one lines on each page. Unfortunately, it finishes abruptly halfway through. This tells us that the original text was much longer, making it one of al-Shaʿrānī's lengthiest works. There is no reference to the date of composition. It is difficult even to surmise the approximate date, as it does not refer to any of al-Shaʿrānī's other works.

The objective of the work is to introduce the legitimate articles of belief promoted by elite mystics such as Ibn ʿArabī, ʿAlī Wafāʾ, al-Niffarī, a Baghdad mystic Sitta al-ʿAjam (who died after 852/1448),[297] and Ibn ʿArabī's disciple and contemporary Ibn Sawdakīn (d. 646/1248). Its intended readers are primarily the scholars who were suspicious of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers. The work begins as follows:

This book is full of signs and symbols for the principles of God's unity […] which I gathered from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* […] so that the scholars of Islam who are well-versed in theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) can have a look at this work and determine what is true and what is wrong. […] For those who declare the Shaykh [Ibn ʿArabī] to be wrong without any proof of what is said of him, I extracted [this book] from the branches of his statements with reference to their beginning and what comes after. This is because most of the people copy each other in condemning the Shaykh for his creeds […], so

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[295] al-Malījī, *Manāqib al-kubrā*, 70.
[296] Pasha, *Īḍāḥ al-maknūn*, vol. 2, 242.
[297] Pasha, *Īḍāḥ al-maknūn*, vol. 2, 485.

much so that some of them prohibit others from reading his texts due to their ignorance of his intention. The truth is to follow, because they have only prohibited it for their lack of capacity [to understand Ibn ʿArabī's words].[298]

In another passage, al-Shaʿrānī expresses his intention to help those people of reasoning (*aṣḥāb al-ʿuqūl*), who do not walk on the mystic path, to understand some ideas of the mystics.[299] Furthermore, he also spends several pages introducing Ibn ʿArabī's remarks against the notions of incarnationism and unificationism.[300]

In the introduction, al-Shaʿrānī briefly states the articles of belief held by the people of Sunna (*ʿaqīdat ahl al-Sunna wa-l-jamāʿa*) – which is actually an abridgement of the commoners' creed written in the introduction of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. This is followed by the quotation of another passage from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* regarding the soundness of the commoner's creed (*ʿaqīdat al-ʿawāmm*).[301]

After this, al-Shaʿrānī begins the main text by citing the selected passages from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, starting from Chapter 1 and very occasionally inserting his own comments. On the whole, it is presented as a summary of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching in a manner that is reminiscent of the Sunni creedal texts. The main topics it includes are as follows: the notion of God's unity; the divine essential attributes; the relation between His attributes and His essence; the tenets of divine incomparability and immanence; the divine anthropomorphic attributes; the divine names; and the vision of God. As I have shown, similar arguments are also recorded in other theological works of al-Shaʿrānī.

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[298] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 2a.
[299] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 22b-23a.
[300] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fols. 54a, 61a, 83a, 89a.
[301] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 61a.

Despite its being addressed to theologians, the text strangely refers to several controversial ideas held by Ibn ʿArabī (e.g. the perfect man as the divine image,[302] the interdependent relationship between God and creation as explained through a metaphor of a mirror,[303] and the idea that the world is He and yet not He[304]). This implies that while being addressed to theologians, the work's objective is to expound on the creed of the advanced mystics. Nevertheless, unlike *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, wherein al-Shaʿrānī openly upholds the doctrine of the oneness of existence, the current text avoids promoting this teaching; rather, and more markedly, it tries to reinterpret the passages concerning the oneness of existence as 'the oneness of witnessing' or experiential oneness. This will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Al-Shaʿrānī dedicates the first part of the work to a summary of the creeds upheld by advanced mystics, with abundant references to Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and ʿAlī Wafāʾ's *Waṣāyā*.[305] After this, al-Shaʿrānī introduces Ibn ʿArabī's commentary on his *Tarjmān al-ashwāq* and Ibn al-Sawdakīn's recount of Ibn ʿArabī's *Lawāqiḥ al-anwār*. Unfortunately, the manuscript at hand ends abruptly while quoting Ibn Sawdakīn's view on the issue of the divine anthropomorphic attributes. As is indicated at the beginning of the work, the text is meant to proceed to the statements of al-Niffarī from his *al-Mawāqiḥ* and Sitta al-ʿAjam from her commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Sharḥ mashāhid*.

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[302] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʾid al-sunniya*, fol. 71a-b.

[303] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʾid al-sunniya*, fol. 75a. According to al-Shaʿrānī, the world is a mirror in which God reflects Himself, and creation sees the divine image within itself. A similar idea was proposed by Ibn ʿArabī.

[304] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʾid al-sunniya*, fols. 72a, 82a-b. Quoting Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī writes that the world becomes manifest within God, and God is manifested within the world. For this reason, the world receives the two properties of God and His creation, and so does God. In the meantime, al-Shaʿrānī repeatedly refers to Ibn ʿArabī's denial of the identification between God and the world.

[305] Many of ʿAlī Wafāʾ's statements excerpted in this text are also quoted in al-Shaʿrānī's *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*.

The overall stance of this text remains unclear. It is certainly addressed to theologians who are doubtful of Ibn ʿArabī, with the aim of removing their suspicion. Nevertheless, it treats several controversial ideas of Ibn ʿArabī that are not considered in other works of al-Shaʿrānī intended for non-advanced mystics. The structure of the text also seems unelaborate in comparison to his theological works that have been treated earlier in this section. This would entail that al-Shaʿrānī wrote the text at a relatively early stage in his career, while pursuing a way to present Ibn ʿArabī's teaching in the best way possible to people of different intellectual and mystical levels. However, this is unverifiable.

1.3.4. Concluding Remark

Al-Shaʿrānī's theological oeuvre that I have examined above is thus written for the following readership: advanced mystics who are prepared to appreciate Ibn ʿArabī's oneness of existence; non-advanced mystics who have not yet reached this highest stage, including theologians who are suspicious of Ibn ʿArabī's thought; and ordinary Muslims who do not need any mystical discipline. Each work is dedicated to establishing the creed of each level. Amongst them, non-advanced mystics were al-Shaʿrānī's main readership, as evidenced by the relatively large number of texts that explain the creed of this group. In this respect, he differs significantly from Ibn ʿArabī and his famous followers, whose main concern was to explicate the monistic creed of advanced mystics.

Building on this structure of the tripartite hierarchy of creeds, as the subsequent chapters will show in detail, al-Shaʿrānī endorses Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview for

advanced mystics. At the same time, and intriguingly, al-Shaʿrānī reinterprets Ibn ʿArabī's teachings differently in his works for non-advanced mystics. This multi-faceted approach to Ibn ʿArabī's thought demonstrates the remarkable prominence of al-Shaʿrānī amongst other defenders of Ibn ʿArabī of his age.

Chapter 2

Al-Shaʿrānī's Reinterpretation of Ibn ʿArabī

In Chapter 1, I explored how Ibn ʿArabī's advocates in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Arabic speaking world approached his teachings, clarifying the strategies that they carefully adopted from his antagonists. As I showed, these supporters refute the notions of unificationism and incarnationism just like Ibn Taymiyya. They also employ the spectrum of experiential/legitimate and monistic/heretical mysticism, which was originally proposed by al-Taftāzānī and endorsed by other scholars, whereby they read Ibn ʿArabī's thought as promoting experiential oneness.

In order to present Ibn ʿArabī's worldview as less problematic, al-Shaʿrānī also applies a similar methodology in his theological texts written for non-advanced mystics and theologians. However, compared to other contemporary advocates of Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī's approach is distinctive in that he selectively cites Ibn ʿArabī's passages and comments on them, thus formalising the interpretation of the oneness of existence as experiential oneness. In this sense, al-Shaʿrānī can be considered as one of the earliest thinkers to have read Ibn ʿArabī in this particular way. Some of al-Shaʿrānī's discussions also bear a striking similarity to those of anti-Ibn ʿArabī scholars, implying that al-Shaʿrānī's view is aptly constructed in the intellectual context of Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt.

The current chapter consequently considers the interpretive method that al-Shaʿrānī took in defence of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings. While previous studies on al-Shaʿrānī explained his general, apologetic presentation of Ibn ʿArabī, they did not pay in-depth

attention to its underlying scheme.[306] They therefore concluded that al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of Ibn ʿArabī is haphazard and occurs only at the textual level. Contrary to this existing thesis, I will argue that there is underlying systematicity in al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the latter's thought. By using the hitherto unstudied texts (*al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* and *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*), I bring this topic to light for the first time. Moreover, our investigation will show that al-Shaʿrānī's reading method actually emerged against the backdrop of the polemics over Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, thereby contextualising his defence of Ibn ʿArabī.

In the first section of this chapter, I provide an account of what is commonly known as the 'oneness of witnessing' (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*). This formula has been subject to much attention in modern scholarship.[307] Hence, I will briefly review it in order to highlight the meaning of what I describe as the notion of 'experiential oneness'.

In the following section, I examine al-Shaʿrānī's attempt to read Ibn ʿArabī's oneness of existence as experiential oneness; I will do this by treating three subjects. First, the section investigates al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of the popular hadith 'When I [God] love Him, I am his hearing [...]'. This will be followed by an analysis of al-Shaʿrānī's view on the notion of absolute unity. In each discussion, I will point out an interesting resemblance between al-Shaʿrānī's position and that of Ibn ʿArabī's antagonists – most notably, al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī. Lastly, I will consider the position of another adversary of Ibn ʿArabī – Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya – regarding the issue of ontological and experiential oneness. In keeping with the insights given by Anjum and Schallenbergh into Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's approach to mysticism, in the

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[306] Especially Winter, *Society and Religion*, 124-133; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 237-247.
[307] For example, Rahman, *Islam*; Friedman, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī*, 59; Haar, *Follower and Heir*.

present study, I will discuss his view by relating it to the polemical context of Ibn ʿArabī.[308]

2.1. Oneness of Witnessing (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*): A Brief Account

As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, the tenet of the oneness of existence is attributed to the Naqshbandī Sufi, Aḥmad Sirhindī of India. He has long been known as a scholar who, by abandoning the concept of the oneness of existence, became a pioneer of so-called 'neo-Sufism'.[309] According to Friedman, Sirhindī interprets Ibn ʿArabī's oneness of existence as 'to consider Existence as one, to regard everything else as nonexistent and to consider the manifestations of that [One] as one, despite their nonexistence.'[310] The proponents of this dogma are compared to those who look at the sun and deny the existence of the stars. In Sirhindī's view, this tenet amounts to the declaration that the world is essentially the same as God.[311]

Sirhindī objected to the notion of the oneness of existence when he observed that it had been employed as a pretext to avoid abidance with the Law.[312] According to this theory, if the world's existence is identical with that of God, and if the world is merely imaginary, there is no point in following the Law that God has imposed upon His creatures. In order to refute this idea, Sirhindī proposed the tenet of the oneness of witnessing. This claims that the mystics' experience of the oneness of God's existence

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[308] There are two main studies which have already investigated Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's view on mysticism: Anjum, 'Sufism without Mysticism?,' 161-188; Schallenbergh, 'Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's Manipulation,' 94-122.

[309] On the notion of neo-Sufism, see Rahman, *Islam*, 148, 164, 195, 202. The idea of neo-Sufism has since been reconsidered. See Voll, 'Neo-Sufism.'

[310] Friedman, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī*, 59.

[311] Friedman, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī*, 60.

[312] Chittick, 'Waḥdat al-Shuhūd,' in *EI2*.

in the cosmos only amounts to their subjective witnessing and experience, and not to actual reality.[313] The exponents of this tenet see nothing but God in their mystical state, while firmly acknowledging the world's existence. The situation is compared to a person seeing the sun without losing the awareness that, in reality, the stars continue to exist.[314]

Noting that Sirhindī's position presents a useful case for understanding the ongoing debates on the oneness of existence in later generations, Chittick views Sirhindī's reading of this doctrine of the oneness of existence – as entailing absolute identification between God and creation – as being a misreading. This is because Ibn ʿArabī simultaneously affirms and denies the view that the world is He, and espouses the theory of the oneness of existence both in the ontological and experiential sense. Thus, in Chittick's view, Sirhindī's failure to grasp the subtleties of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching leads Sirhindī to correct the tenet of the oneness of existence, presenting it as the oneness of witnessing.[315] Whether or not Chittick's suggestion on Sirhindī's 'failure' in his understanding of Ibn ʿArabī holds true, al-Shaʿrānī was undoubtedly aware of the difference between the two meanings of oneness (ontological and experiential). Nevertheless, as we shall see, al-Shaʿrānī deliberately examined them separately in order to make Ibn ʿArabī's thought more acceptable for a wider audience.

Interestingly, Sirhindī's approach to the oneness of witnessing coincides with the aforementioned positions of al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī on the authentic mystics who, for their part, only advocate a perceptual, rather than an existential, truth. Although

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[313] Chittick, 'Waḥdat al-Shushe,' in *EI2*.
[314] Friedman, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī*, 59-60.
[315] Chittick, 'Waḥdat al-Shuhūd' in *EI2*, where he writes: 'his [Sirhindī] interpretation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* exhibits no understanding of the subtleties of Ibn ʿArabī's position or of the various meanings that had been given to the term over the centuries […]'. See also Chittick, '*Waḥdat al-wujūd* in India,' 29-40.

al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī did not intend to interpret the oneness of existence as the oneness of witnessing, this similarity suggests that the foundation of the tenet of the oneness of witnessing was laid down well before Sirhindī. With regard to this, El-Rouayheb recently established that the trend of interpreting the oneness of existence as the oneness of witnessing had started among Ibn ʿArabī's supporters by the sixteenth-century. According to El-Rouayheb, Muḥammad ʿAlī Ibn ʿAllān al-Ṣiddiqī (d. 1058/1648), a Meccan contemporary of Sirhindī, employed the expression 'the oneness of witnessing' independently of al-Sirhindī to describe the position of the Shādhilī Sufis in the sixteenth century Arabic speaking world.[316] In order to highlight this point, El-Rouayheb references al-Shaʿrānī's contemporary, the Shādhilī Muḥammad al-Bakrī, whom I mentioned in Chapter 1, as being a representative of this interpretive trend.[317] I have also demonstrated that, by turning to al-Taftāzānī's work, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī uphold a similar view. Most significantly, as we shall see below, al-Shaʿrānī applies this interpretive method and further elaborates on it.

It must be noted that neither al-Bakrī, al-Anṣārī, Ibn Ḥajar nor al-Shaʿrānī directly use the expression 'the oneness of witnessing', although there is little doubt that they interpret the doctrine of the oneness of existence in relation to this concept. Considering this, in what follows, I will approach their reading method by describing it as 'experiential oneness'. Experiential oneness stands for the same tenet as the oneness of witnessing by Sirhindī. However, their contexts do differ. Whereas the oneness of witnessing was formulated against the antinomian mystics, who dismissed the Law by using the notion of the oneness of existence as an excuse, experiential oneness was conceived in response to the criticisms of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological monism.

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[316] El-Rouayheb, *Intellectual Islamic History*, 245.
[317] El-Rouayheb, *Intellectual Islamic History*, 244.

2.2. Oneness of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) versus Experiential Oneness

In the introduction to this thesis, in discussing the study conducted by Winter, I referred to several apologist techniques al-Shaʿrānī applied in his defence of Ibn ʿArabī. I argued that al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of Ibn ʿArabī's monistic remark – 'There is no existence but God' – led Winter and others scholars to the view that al-Shaʿrānī was mediocre and uncritical in his understanding of Ibn ʿArabī.[318] Unfortunately, while judging al-Shaʿrānī in this reductive manner, Winter did not pay attention to al-Shaʿrānī's further comment on the same statement. Crucially, the subsequent comment demonstrates that al-Shaʿrānī's stance on Ibn ʿArabī's thought should not be treated this simply. It reads:

> If the Shaykh [Ibn ʿArabī] indeed stated 'There is no existence but God', he must have said it when all beings (*kāʾināt*) became annihilated (*talāshat*) in his view, as a result of witnessing (*shuhūd*) God alone in his heart. This is similar to [the situation of] Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, who said 'Whoever witnesses God does not see His creation [as a result of seeing nothing but God]'.[319]

The above passage underlines al-Shaʿrānī's intention to reinterpret one of Ibn ʿArabī's

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[318] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 131; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 344-345. As noted in the introduction, al-Shaʿrānī excludes the monistic implication of this statement by commenting on it as follows: 'If indeed he [Ibn ʿArabī] did say so, it must mean that nothing exists independently except God and everything else exists through others' [translation taken from Winter, *Society and Religion*, 131].

[319] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 17.

monistic statements within the context of experiential oneness. Here, al-Shaʿrānī stresses that the statement is ascribed to Ibn ʿArabī's experience of perceiving God alone in his heart as a result of focusing only on Him. This view indicates that, to al-Shaʿrānī's mind, Ibn ʿArabī's mystical experience is not concerned with the actual reality of the world, but only with a person's perception. Al-Shaʿrānī then associates Ibn ʿArabī's position with that of al-Junayd, the representative of the moderates Sufis.

Building on this preliminary observation, in the following section, I aim to investigate al-Shaʿrānī's approach to Ibn ʿArabī's ontological worldview in greater depth, illuminating in particular al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of the oneness of existence as experiential oneness. For this purpose, I will especially examine al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the meaning of the popular hadith ('When I [God] love him I am his hearing [...]'), as well as the tenet of absolute unity, with a reference to the opinions of al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī on these tenets. The study of these two cases will expose al-Shaʿrānī's espousal of the idea of experiential oneness.

Following these discussions, as a second thread to this section, I will consider a similarity between al-Shaʿrānī and one of the anti-Ibn ʿArabī scholars prior to al-Shaʿrānī, namely, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, by drawing attention to their shared endorsement of the dichotomous framework of the oneness of existence and experiential oneness. As I will show, al-Shaʿrānī interprets Ibn ʿArabī's thought within the context of this spectrum in order to defend him, whereas Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya employs the same idea with the objective of denying monistic, ontological mysticism on the one hand, and excusing moderate, visionary mysticism on the other. The arguments in this section will contribute to our understanding of al-Shaʿrānī's efforts to promote Ibn ʿArabī's thought within this intellectual context.

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2.2.1. Experiential Oneness in Interpretation of the Hadith

In an attempt to clarify al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of Ibn ʿArabī's oneness of existence as experiential oneness, it is important to examine al-Shaʿrānī's reading of the famous hadith, 'When I [God] love him, I am his hearing with which he hears […]'.[320] Here, al-Shaʿrānī treats the hadith by relating it to the idea of experiential oneness.

Ibn ʿArabī originally references the hadith in order to express his monistic worldview – that is, that there is nothing in existence but God and that He is identified with creation.[321] In this regard, a passage in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* reads:

> So He is the spirit of the cosmos, its hearing, its sight, and its hand. Through Him the cosmos hears, through Him it sees […]. When the servant draws near to Him through supererogatory works, He loves him, when He loves him He says, 'I am his hearing, his sight, and his hand […]'. God's words 'I am' show that this was already the situation, but the servant was not aware. Hence, the generous gift this nearness gives to him is the unveiling and the knowledge that God is his hearing and his sight. He had been imagining that he hears through his own hearing, but he was actually hearing through his Lord.[322]

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[320]   The entire hadith goes as follows: 'Whosoever is hostile to me and towards My friend, I declare with him. My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved by Me than what I have imposed as his duties. And My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory actions until I shall love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks'.

[321]   Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 67-68; *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 175/189.

[322]   Ibn ʿArabī, a*l-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 67-68. Translation taken from Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 326.

In a different section, Ibn ʿArabī similarly interprets the hadith to mean that the essence called a servant is in reality God, for there is nothing but His essence in the cosmos.[323] Thus, in his view, the hadith attests to the doctrine of the oneness of existence.

It must be noted that on other occasions, Ibn ʿArabī explicates the hadith differently by associating it with the affirmation of the duality of God and His creation. According to him, the hadith confirms the existence of someone other than God through the third-person pronoun [i.e. 'his']. Clearly, this reading demonstrates Ibn ʿArabī's rejection of the notion of unificationism.[324]

Ibn ʿArabī's reference to the denial of the notion of unificationism, however, did not hinder his antagonists from accusing him of upholding this tenet. For example, Ibn Taymiyya condemns Ibn ʿArabī and his followers for interpreting the hadith in the context of their ontological worldview. Ibn Taymiyya argues that, for these monistic heretics, God is meant to retain His absolute oneness before and after He shows His love for His servant; accordingly, when He becomes his hearing, his sight and so on, He has to become his limbs, organs, hair, and everything else. This is because affirming someone's existence is to admit plurality in existence, which violates the principle tenet of the oneness of existence. Consequently, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the proponents of the oneness of existence must interpret the hadith as attesting to (1) the identification of creatures' existence with that of God, (2) the immanence of God's existence in each entity in the world, and (3) the unification between God and His creation.[325] For him, this conclusion is nothing but pure heresy.[326]

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[323] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 175/189.

[324] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 194-195; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4, 372.

[325] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿa fatāwā*, vol. 2, 245-246. Cf., *Majmūʿa fatāwā*, vol. 5, 84, 149.

[326] Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the content of the hadith attests to the existence of someone who loves (i.e. God) and that of the one who is loved (i.e. servant), as well as the existence of a

Ibn Taymiyya's attack on the heretical interpretation of the hadith would explain the different approaches al-Shaʿrānī took to the hadith depending on his readership. On the one hand, addressing most advanced mystics, and in keeping with Ibn ʿArabī's thought, al-Shaʿrānī interprets the hadith within the context of ontological monism to mean the identification of God with His creation. I will discuss this point in Chapter 3. On the other hand and quite intriguingly, in the writings addressed to non-advanced mystics and theologians, al-Shaʿrānī denies such an interpretation and explains the hadith in relation to a mystic's visionary experience, the details of which I will now discuss.

In *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* and *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, as well as in *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, al-Shaʿrānī expresses his objection to interpreting 'I was his hearing […]' as signifying the ontological oneness between God and the world. He quotes ʿAlī Wafāʾ on this point and writes as follows:

> With regard to [the meaning of] the hadith, 'When I [God] love him, I am
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> his hearing with which he hears […]', in accordance with ʿAlī Wafāʾ's
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> statement, it does not concern the existential occurrence [of God becoming
>
> his hearing] in actual fact (*ḥudūth fī nafs al-amr*). If this were the case, it [i.e.
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> God becoming a servant's hearing] would be through His essence [which is

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servant's sight, hearing and so on. According to him, this contradicts the very principle of the oneness of existence (See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿa fatāwā*, vol. 2, 245).

In Ibn Taymiyya's view, the hadith in question should rather be taken to mean that God comes to love a servant when he practises all religious duties and supererogatory actions, so much so that 'he comes to know things through [the order of] God, act through [the order of] God, hear, sees, and strikes through [the order of] of God'. By interpreting the hadith in this way, Ibn Taymiyya believes that one can avoid the implication of literal unificationism between God and a servant, thereby disproving the tenet of the oneness of existence [Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿa fatāwā*, vol. 8, 204].

illogical, as the divine essence is absolutely incomparable to creation].[327]

Rather, the hadith means that the attainment of [His] love is based on (*murattab*) a visionary thing (*kawn shuhūdī*); [that is to say,] it [i.e. God becoming his hearing] has to occur as being based on a visionary order (*tartīb shuhūdī*), rather than through existential confirmation (*taqrīr wujūdī*).[328]

There are two important implications in the above passage. Firstly, as the first paragraph indicates, al-Shaʿrānī rejects the monistic view that God literally becomes identical with a servant's hearing and that this represents the actual situation of the world. Secondly, and further to this idea, al-Shaʿrānī insists that the hadith only concerns a mystic's visionary experience. Therefore, his understanding of the hadith is that by experiencing God's unity as a visionary, perceptual truth, rather than ontological, a mystic feels that God becomes as if He is his hearing and so on, thereby attaining His love for him.

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[327] This expression 'for if this were the case, it would be through essence' appears in *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya* and *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, but not in *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*.

[328] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 193-194; *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 99a-b; *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 317. To this passage, al-Shaʿrānī adds the following comment:

> This is similar to what God said in revelation, 'No message comes from their Lord anew (*muḥdath*)' [Q. 21:2]. The intention of this report is that it [His revelation] is newly originated in terms of its descent to His creatures (*muḥdath al-nuzūl*), but [it is] not [newly originated] as existence [for it existed pre-eternally as the divine speech] (*lā muḥdath al-wujūd*). This [meaning] is similar to [that of] the following expression, 'One evening a visitor happened to us (*ḥadatha*)'. The expression is [true] despite the fact that the visitor is more than a hundred years old [that is to say, that which is newly originated is his visit to us, but not the visitor's existence itself] [al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 194; *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fols. 99b].

Similarly to the idea of divine revelation, which is pre-eternal, and a visitor who is aged, al-Shaʿrānī believes that, based on the notion of experiential oneness, God becoming a servant's hearing does not actually occur as a temporally originated being; rather, the situation was always like this, and the servant only needs to perceive it through mystical experience. Within this context, the hadith in question means that when God loves a servant and becomes his hearing, it is imperative that he experiences this situation as a perceptual, visionary truth, rather than as the ontological one that Ibn ʿArabī asserts.

Noticeably, al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of the hadith here is similar to that of al-Taftāzānī. Al-Taftāzānī explains the meaning of the hadith in relation to his understanding of the two types of legitimate annihilation (*fanāʾ*) of a mystic. According to him, in the first stage of annihilation, a mystic withdraws from seeing any beings other than himself when things visually disappear from his eyes through his contemplation of himself. This is followed by the second stage of annihilation, during which a mystic contemplates nothing but God, withdrawing from witnessing himself as well as from being aware of his external and internal conditions. In this state, he becomes completely absorbed in the divine orders. At this second stage of annihilation, a mystic loses consciousness of himself until he feels as if God is one with him and He becomes as if He is his hearing, yet without this involving the denial of his own existence.

In al-Taftāzānī's view, such is the situation described by the hadith in question, wherein a mystic feels one with God through his visionary, perceptual experience, but this is not the existential truth. As noted in Chapter 1, al-Taftāzānī regards this second type of annihilation as being legitimate, because it only concerns a mystic's psychology. In contrast, he condemns yet another form of annihilation, the one wherein the things' realities ontologically disappear as mere illusion, as advocated by Ibn ʿArabī.[329]

Al-Taftāzānī's position of rejecting monistic teaching while supporting the mystical discipline based on the idea of experiential oneness is in accordance with al-Shaʿrānī's – as long as the audience addressed are non-advanced mystics and theologians, rather than advanced mystics. As I will show next, al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the notion of absolute unity further reveals his endeavour of reinterpreting the doctrine of the oneness of

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[329] al-Taftāzānī, *Risāla waḥdat al-wujūd*, 33.

existence as experiential oneness. It also discloses another intriguing similarity between al-Shaʿrānī and al-Taftāzānī, as well as al-Taftāzānīs's disciple al-Biqāʿī.

2.2.2. Experiential Oneness in Absolute Unity (*al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa*)

In Chapter 1, I discussed that Ibn Sabʿīn promoted the doctrine of absolute unity with the aim of expressing his monistic worldview where there is only God, nothing else. I noted that the monistic implication of this tenet was rejected by Ibn ʿArabī's antagonists. Despite this, as I demonstrated in the same chapter, al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī find two meanings in the concept of absolute unity: (1) that which is founded on a visionary, perceptual experience (legitimate), and (2) that which relates to the ontological reality of the world (heretical). Strikingly, in the texts addressed to non-advanced mystics and theologians (especially in *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* and *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*), al-Shaʿrānī treats the notion of absolute unity by drawing on a similar typology to that of al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī, whereby al-Shaʿrānī simultaneously denies and promotes this teaching.

In one of the sections in *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, al-Shaʿrānī explicitly disproves the ontological implication of absolute unity. According to him, the exponents of absolute unity falsely assume that whatever a person sees in the world is actually God. Hence, they boldly declare that nothing exists but God, thereby disregarding the Law and the divine orders. In order to refute this teaching, al-Shaʿrānī recounts an episode in which he was visited by a Persian mystic.[330] The mystic introduced himself by saying

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[330] 'By Persian mystics,' it is not clear whether al-Shaʿrānī meant those who were influenced by Ibn ʿArabī's monism, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 688/1289), Maḥmūd al-Shabistarī (d. 720/1320-1321), and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (d. 898-9/1492).

that 'I am God, Iblis, a Prophet, a pig, and everything in existence'. When asked by al-Shaʿrānī how he could make such an audacious statement, the mystic answered: 'For every entity derives from God when there was nothing but God, and to Him it returns'. Al-Shaʿrānī declared the mystic's belief to be wrong and contrary to what the people of the Sunna hold.[331] In his view, the real mystics (*ahl al-kashf*) firmly believe in the existence of both God and His creation. Hence, they should not be confused with this kind of heresy ascribed to the advocates of absolute unity.[332]

While objecting to the existential formula of absolute unity (i.e. that everything is in reality God), al-Shaʿrānī espouses its legitimate meaning. In *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, he quotes several passages from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* concerning the meaning of God's unity amongst those who declare Him one (*muwaḥḥid*). To summarise the arguments there, the principle definition of God's unity is that it is ascribed to God alone. The implication is that as long as a person relies on human reason, it is impossible to attain the understanding of God's unity and declare Him one. This is because assuming its possibility (that human reason can declare divine unity) would entail judging God with what He has created (i.e. human reason). This results in violating the basic principle of God's unity as belonging only to Him, which is absurd. Therefore, no created being can declare divine unity, as this would undermine the definition of God's unity.[333] Consequently, in order to achieve the pure oneness of God, He has to declare Himself one, not His creation.[334]

In *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Ibn ʿArabī relates these passages on the issue of divine

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[331] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 122.

[332] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 120-121.

[333] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 83; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fols. 23a-b.

[334] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 93.

unity to his ontological worldview – that is, that there is in reality no plurality, and that there is only God's oneness. In his view, no one can declare God's unity but He, for God is the only real being and other beings are nothing but His manifestations.

In contrast, and most markedly, in quoting the same section of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, al-Shaʿrānī avoids the passages that would suggest the idea of ontological monism and the unification of God's existence with that of His creation.[335] Al-Shaʿrānī then comments on the passages which he has carefully selected, thereby helping the rational theologians understand the mystics' ultimate goal; that is to say, the denial of plurality and the witnessing of the oneness of God, based on a non-ontological, visionary experience. Al-Shaʿrānī's comment reads as follows:

> While I was writing on this subject [of God's unity from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*], the idea occurred to me that would make the concept of denying [the world's] plurality (*nafy al-kathra*) and witnessing [divine] oneness (*shuhūd al-waḥda*) more approachable for the rational theologians (*ahl al-ʿuqūl*), who do not walk on the mystics' path (*ṭarīq al-qawm*).
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> It [denying plurality and witnessing oneness] means, my brother, that you see yourself with God and existent (*mawjūd*) when nothing else is with Him except you; no time, no location, and no creatures are with Him, as expressed in 'There is God, and nothing is with Him'. Then, God necessarily finds Himself taking a space (*mutaḥayyz*) in your mind (*wahm*) [but not actually in you]. If this [God being present only in a person's

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[335] For example, 'you are the loci for My existence' (*antum al-maẓāhir li-ʿaynī*) and 'the plurality is nothing but Him' (*mā thumma illā Allāh*) are not quoted in al-Shaʿrānī's text. See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 83; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 23b.

mind] is the case, there is no [ontological] incarnation and no unification between God and His creation. This is the stage of the Lord and His servant alone, nothing else.[336]

As the above passage shows, for al-Shaʿrānī, when a mystic completes his mystical path, he reaches a state wherein he sees nothing but God's oneness, all the while being aware of his existence with Him. Al-Shaʿrānī explains this situation as occurring in the mystic's mind alone, without entailing the ontological notions of incarnationism and unificationism. Thus, the mystical experience of denying the world's plurality and witnessing divine oneness is a representation of his perception, not actual reality.

Following this comment, al-Shaʿrānī further explains his understanding of denying plurality and witnessing oneness, by focusing on the difference between those who are mystics and those who are not. According to him, ordinary people can only perceive the world's plurality, whilst being veiled from truly witnessing divine oneness. On the other hand, the mystics, through the process of practicing mystical discipline, stop seeing things in the world and experience a state wherein nothing remains except the one who witnesses God's oneness (*mushāhid*; i.e. a mystic) and the One who is witnessed by him (*mashhūd*; i.e. God). Al-Shaʿrānī maintains that this is the furthest a traveler who is along the mystical path (*sālik*) can go in denying the witnessing of plurality and achieving divine oneness. Here, al-Shaʿrānī does not assume a sheer rejection of the existence of the external world, nor an acceptance of the oneness of existence. In his view, the world remains as it is even after a mystical experience, and the essence (*ʿayn*) of the world continues to exist. Therefore, the tenet of denying plurality only signifies a

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[336] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 23b.

denial of the world's beings in his vision and mind.[337]

It is important to notice that al-Shaʿrānī describes this highest stage for the mystics as 'the most holy place of witnessing' (*mashhad aqdas*), wherein 'absolute unity' becomes manifest (*tajallī*) in a mystic's heart after he ceases to see things other than God.[338] His reference to the notion of absolute unity needs close attention. In the present context, the doctrine is not employed in the ontological sense of the denial of the world's existence or the absolute unity of God's existence. Instead, it relates to a mystic's experience of witnessing God alone in his heart, during which the world's entities disappear from his sight, although they continue to exist in reality.

In order to further elucidate the meaning of absolute unity in this context, al-Shaʿrānī adduces the example of a father grieving the loss of his son. In his devastation, the father does not notice when someone visits him and sits near him from early morning to midday. Sometime later, when the father has somewhat recovered, he finds the guest and asks him why he was so late to come see him. The guest tells him that he had been sitting at the entrance to his home from the early morning, yet remained unnoticed. The father replies that he did not see his guest because of his distress and grief, even though there was nothing wrong with his eyesight and he was roaming in and out of the room during this time.[339]

After narrating this episode, al-Shaʿrānī notes that this is the best he can say to the rational theologians (*aṣḥāb al-ʿuqūl*), who do not follow the mystical path, about the denial of seeing plurality. He argues that, at this stage of mystical experience, the mystics may declare that 'I witness nothing but God', which should not be taken to

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[337] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 24a.
[338] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 24a.
[339] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 24a.

mean the rejection of the world's existence and its properties (*aḥkām*) altogether.[340] For al-Shaʿrānī, the mystics' psychological and visionary state makes them temporarily unaware of anything other than God's oneness. However, this does not concern the real situation of the world.

The above analysis confirms al-Shaʿrānī's approval of the notion of absolute unity by understanding it as a perceptual experience in a person's mind. At the same time, he disproves the concept of absolute unity as attesting to the existential reality of the world. It is thus clear that, as far as his texts written for non-advanced mystics and theologians are concerned, al-Shaʿrānī's approach to mystical experience differs from that of Ibn ʿArabī. On Ibn ʿArabī's part, in the process of completing a mystical path, it is necessary for a mystic to realise that God is the only real existence and that the world is merely His manifestation, thereby experiencing the oneness of God's existence and the ontological disappearance of the world's plurality.

In contrast to this position, al-Shaʿrānī associates a mystic's goal of witnessing oneness and denying plurality with a visionary state, wherein he sees God alone while being veiled from seeing other beings. In this sate, nothing is existentially lost. And when his sensation comes back, he starts to see things again. This is no other than the expression of the oneness of witnessing, or experiential oneness. As I have shown in the analysis so far, in order to reinforce this interpretive method, al-Shaʿrānī selectively quotes passages from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. Most prominently, he recontextualises the chosen passages by commenting on them in his own words, whereby he remarkably reinterprets Ibn ʿArabī's oneness of existence as experiential oneness. These intellectual efforts are not seen amongst al-Shaʿrānī's teachers and colleagues, who adopt a similar

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[340] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 24a.

stance on Ibn ʿArabī's worldview but do not engage with the interpretation of or even a reference to his actual statements. In this regard, al-Shaʿrānī's approach to Ibn ʿArabī exhibits his theological uniqueness, establishing him as one of the earliest proponents of this reading method. Furthermore, our analysis here exposes a careful methodology and systematicity that al-Shaʿrānī applies in his defence of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings.

Although al-Shaʿrānī does not refer to al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī in his discussions on the principle of absolute unity, as we have seen, his approach is much like theirs; by taking two approaches to the notion of absolute unity, al-Shaʿrānī, al-Taftāzānī, and al-Biqāʿī endorse its experiential meaning, but reject its ontological implication. Despite this, their goals are clearly different. Whereas al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī associate the ontological tenet of absolute unity with Ibn ʿArabī, accusing him of upholding this teaching, al-Shaʿrānī rather ascribes the perceptual, visionary (and hence legitimate) meaning of absolute unity to Ibn ʿArabī. Al-Shaʿrānī then maintains that Ibn ʿArabī should not be condemned, because his worldview is only based on the idea of experiential oneness.

2.2.3. Ibn ʿArabī's Opponents on Experiential Oneness: Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya

With regard to the classification of mystical discipline into two types, which was widely shared by Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries as well as by his supporters, in what follows, I further consider a position of yet another opponent of Ibn ʿArabī; namely, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya. Previous studies on one of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's famous texts – *Madālij al-sālikīn*, which is a commentary on *Manāzil al-sāʾilīn* of the Ḥanbalī

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Sufi, Abū Ismāʿīl al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089) – vividly describe Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's favourable view of moderate Sufis as well as his refutation of the monistic mystics.[341] Building on the findings provided by Anjum and Schallenbergh, this section explains Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's approach to mysticism – his criticism of ontological monism and his tolerance of experiential oneness – in relation to the debates over Ibn ʿArabī's notion of the oneness of existence. The examination of this subject will add further clarification to the polemical context, which al-Shaʿrānī closely engaged with.

Preceding al-Taftāzānī by a few decades, the legacy of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's attack on heretical mysticism was most probably still felt in al-Shaʿrānī's period. In *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, al-Shaʿrānī repeatedly mentions Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's critical comments on certain Sufi practices, teachings and remarks, excusing the Sufi positions.[342] As discussed in Chapter 1, al-Suyūṭī also references Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya with regard to the latter's differentiation between a correct, authorised meaning of unificationism and a prohibited one, i.e. the one claimed by Ibn ʿArabī and his followers. Furthermore, as we shall see in Chapter 5, the Shādhilī Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, whose epistle on the idea of God's with-ness or divine presence al-Shaʿrānī quotes in his theological works, makes an interesting reference to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's classification of legitimate mystics and heretical ones. To put it

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[341] Anjum, 'Sufism without Mysticism?', 172-177; Schallenbergh, 'Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's Manipulation,' 94-120.

[342] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, 440, 443, 452-455, 458, 460, 462, 473-474, 477, 487-512. For example, al-Shaʿrānī excuses the Sufi practices of throwing money into the river to focus on God and rubbing salt on the eyelids to stay awake, which were condemned by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. Al-Shaʿrānī also defends al-Shiblī's monistic remark, denounced by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, that says 'the one whose heart is God'. According to al-Shaʿrānī, al-Shiblī issued this statement as a comment on the Qurʾānic verse 50:37, understanding it as an abbreviation of 'the one whose heart is [supported] by God'. See al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, 452. For al-Shiblī's own explanation of his statement, see Avery, *Shiblī*, 21.

briefly here, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya admits the possibility that the mystics experience divine presence (or 'divine with-ness', as we shall see later) in their heart as a result of remembering God and drawing near to Him. In his view, the mystical state of divine presence is acceptable, as long as the mystics remain conscious of the distinction between the pre-eternal God and temporally originated beings. If the situation is taken as representing the ontological reality, their position will become the same as that of the heretical advocates of the oneness of existence, who repulsively identified God with the world.[343] These observations suggest that al-Shaʿrānī was aware to a certain extent of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's view on the two types of mystical discipline.

Let us now turn to the analysis of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's own text. In *Madālij al-sālikīn*, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya castigates the position of 'the proponents of the oneness of existence' and 'the exponents of unificationism' by perceiving their tenet of divine oneness as signifying both ontological and experiential truths. With regard to this, he writes as follows:

> There is a difference between denying a thing its existence at an intellectual, visionary level (*wujūd ʿilmī shuhūdī*) and at an external, existential level (*wujūd khārijī ʿaynī*) […]. As for the exponents of the oneness of existence, their intention is that the presence of synthesis and existence (*ḥaḍrat al-jamʿ wa-l-wujūd*)[344] refuses pluralisation (*takaththur*) and delimitation (*taqyīd*) both in witnessing and existence (*fī l-shuhūd wa-l-wujūd*) – so much so that nothing remains except the reality that the object of knowledge (*maʿrūf*),

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[343] Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib*, 157-159.
[344] The expression 'synthesis and existence' is associated with al-Qūnawī who views it as belonging to the higher stage on his mystical path. See Tod, *The Sufi Doctrine*, 32.

knowledge (*maʿrifa*), and the knower (*ʿārif*) are one and the same thing (*ʿayn wāḥid,* i.e. God) […]. Then they arrive at what lies behind the veil, that is, witnessing absolute unity (*al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa*) without any delimitation (*qayd*) and attribution (*waṣf*).[345]

As the above passage shows, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya distinguishes the denial of the existence of worldly beings on a visionary level from that on an existential level. That is to say, in his view, it is possible to assume the denial of the thing's existence perceptually in a person's mind, but not ontologically. Despite this, the exponents of the oneness of existence claim the rejection of the world's plurality in both an existential and a visionary sense, thereby espousing the doctrine of absolute unity (wherein there is only God, and nothing else). According to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, this amounts to identifying God with creation and denying Him as the Lord of the world, which is downright heretical.[346]

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya further censures the advocates of the oneness of existence by associating their mystical state of annihilation with the ontological tenet of absolute unity. He writes:

With regard to 'annihilation from any other beings except God's existence' (*fanāʾ al-wujūd al-siwā*), this is heretical annihilation advocated by the proponents of the oneness of existence. It means that there is nothing but God and that the ultimate state of the mystics and the travelers is to annihilate themselves in absolute unity (*al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa*), that is to say,

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[345] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 115.
[346] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 116.

to deny plurality and pluralisation in existence by all means. Hence, they only see God, nothing else; rather, they see the existence of His creation the same as being His existence; or rather, in their view, there is neither the Lord nor the servants in reality.[347]

Thus for Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, the proponents of the oneness of existence are condemnable, as they understand their experience of annihilation as representing the ontological reality of the world, thereby refusing the world's plurality at an existential level. As a result, they identify God with creation and deny any distinction between the divine and the world.

Following the argument of the above quotation, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya intriguingly separates the heretical notion of annihilation from the excusable one, describing the latter as 'annihilation from witnessing nothing but God' (*fanāʾ al-shuhūd al-siwā*). As Anjum points out, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's opinion on the latter type of annihilation is mixed. With regard to this, Anjum writes:

The normative judgment of this type of annihilation is mixed: it is praised for love, fear, hope, reliance, and attention, inner and outer, towards God that it entails, and blamed for the loss of reason and distinction that it entails. More specifically, this type of annihilation may have one or two causes: either the weakness of the recipient (*ḍuʿf al-mawrūf*), caused by the overwhelming power of the experience (*quwwat al-wārid*), which is excusable, or the loss of knowledge and normative distinction, which is

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[347] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 115.

blameworthy.[348]

In Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's view, annihilation from witnessing nothing but God, which was supported by many of the late Sufis, means the mystics' being unconscious of themselves temporarily so that they can contemplate God alone, yet without involving a denial of the existence of worldly beings. In this mystical state, the mystics remain aware of the ontological difference between God and creation.

It bears reiterating here that, while Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya decries the ontological notion of annihilation as entailing the tenet of absolute unity or the oneness of existence, he does not deem the experiential notion of annihilation, which is only concerned with an individual's perception and vision, as heretical in itself.[349] For Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, an upholder of what can be described as experiential annihilation is excusable (ma'dhūr) due to his weakness of mind (ḍu'f qalb-hu), unlike a proponent of the oneness of existence who heretically promotes what can be called existential annihilation – even though experiential annihilation is regarded a deficient and unnecessary state for those who walk on the path of God (sālikīn).[350]

Thus in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's view, the mystical discipline is accepted, if not praised, inasmuch as it is related to the attainment of experiential, perceptual knowledge, which does not entail any ontological implications. According to Anjum, by classifying the concept of annihilation in this manner (existential and hence heretical, versus experiential and therefore tolerable), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya aims to place al-Anṣārī – whose statements a monistic mystic, al-Tilimsānī, interpreted as preaching monism – in

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[348] Anjum, 'Sufism without Mysticism?,' 174-175.
[349] Anjum, 'Sufism without Mysticism?,' 184.
[350] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 117. See also Anjum, 'Sufism without Mysticism?,' 174.

the camp of 'testimonial' (*shuhūdī*), rather than monistic (*wujūdī*) mystics, and to understand al-Anṣārī's mysticism within the context of epistemology, rather than ontology.[351] This is a framework that al-Shaʿrānī was most likely aware of.

In addition to these two types, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya further identifies another, third type of annihilation, that is, 'annihilation from willing anything except what God wills' (*fanāʾ ʿan irādat al-siwā*). It allows a mystic's will to become one with God's (*ittiḥād*), making him an obedient servant who performs only what God wills. According to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, this state is attainable by the elitist friends of God (*khawāṣṣ al-awliyāʾ*).[352]

There is little doubt that Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's argument on mystical annihilation is borrowed from his teacher, Ibn Taymiyya, who similarly classifies it into three types.[353] According to Ibn Taymiyya, the first and correct type of annihilation is imposed by God and is defined as a withdrawal from obeying and relying on anything except God and His orders. He regards this annihilation as signifying the true meaning of God's unity.

The second type of annihilation, less perfect than the first one, is upheld by most of the Sufis. It means to annihilate oneself from witnessing anything other than God. In this state, they cease to see any difference between God and His creation; however, as soon as their reason returns after this experience, their realisation of fundamental difference between God and the world also comes back into their mind. This stage corresponds to what I earlier described as the notion of experiential oneness. Admitting

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[351] Anjum, 'Sufism without mysticism,' 176-177. See also Schallenbergh, 'Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's Manipulation,' 97-100.

[352] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 124-125.

[353] The passages are translated in Michot, 'Textes spirituels,' 6-9. See also Bori, 'Ibn Taymiyya,' 108-110; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 62-63.

a certain benefit (*faḍīla*) to this annihilation (or experiential annihilation) in the sense that the mystic's heart is fully focused on God, Ibn Taymiyya is also concerned about its deficiency; it makes the mystic dismissive of the distinction between God and the world or between divine command and prohibition even temporarily. For this reason, the second type of annihilation is not recommended. Nevertheless, like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibn Taymiyya considers the mystics' weakness and incapability to perceive the difference between the divine and creation at this stage of annihilation to be excusable (*maʿdhūr*).[354]

The third type of annihilation is endorsed by the exponents of the oneness of existence and unificationism, i.e. Ibn ʿArabī and his followers. It is defined as annihilating oneself from any existence except God, which results in the belief that the world's existence is ontologically identical with that of God. For Ibn Taymiyya, this is a heretical notion of annihilation (or ontological annihilation) and utterly unacceptable.[355]

Thus, building on the tripartite classification of annihilation, both Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and Ibn Taymiyya tolerate – if not approve of wholeheartedly – the mystics who uphold experiential oneness, which is associated with the second type of experiential annihilation, attributing their mystical state to the weakness of mind. At the same time, the two scholars harshly denounce the mystics who advocate the oneness of existence, which is represented by the third type of ontological annihilation. Their position coincides with that of al-Taftāzānī and al-Biqāʿī, who similarly sanction unificationism and annihilation inasmuch as they are concerned with one's perception

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[354] According to Ibn al-Ahdal's report, Ibn Taymiyya regards the second type of annihilation, which is only upheld by some Sufis, as being deficient and unnecessary. Interestingly, Ibn al-Ahdal does not mention here Ibn Taymiyya's view that this annihilation is excusable. Ibn al-Ahadl, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 123; Bori, 'Ibn Taymiyya,' 109-110.
[355] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿa fatāwā*, vol. 2, 224; *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vols. 1-3, 96-97.

and experience, all the while denying these notions when they are related to the existential reality.

Strikingly, al-Shaʿrānī adopts the same typology in drawing a line between experiential and authentic (or 'excusable' in the eyes of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya) mystics and ontological and heretical ones. It is clear that al-Shaʿrānī's objective is to place Ibn ʿArabī in the camp of experiential mysticism, rather than ontological mysticism, and in this regard, his position is fundamentally different from that of Ibn ʿArabī's detractors. Nevertheless, considering that Ibn ʿArabī's supporters, such as al-Suyūṭī or Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī (as will be discussed in Chapter 5), refer to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's way of differentiating existential from experiential mysticism, it is likely that the dichotomous framework employed by Ibn ʿArabī's opponents prior to al-Shaʿrānī urged him to present Ibn ʿArabī's teachings using the same framework.

Our findings here tell us that Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's approach to mysticism can be understood within the polemical context of Ibn ʿArabī. They also indicate that, as the controversies on Ibn ʿArabī continued, his supporters came to internalise the discourse of his critics. Hence, al-Shaʿrānī's reading method was aptly formulated in response to the intellectual backdrop of his own period.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that, contrary to the currently agreed upon view of al-Shaʿrānī as an uncritical apologist for Ibn ʿArabī, there is a certain systematicity in his defence of Ibn ʿArabī; namely, he presents Ibn ʿArabī as an advocate of experiential

oneness. Although al-Shaʿrānī's teachers and contemporaries, whom I discussed in Chapter 1, uphold a similarly interpretive approach, his position is especially remarkable in that he meticulously reinterprets Ibn ʿArabī's passages by recontextualising them. This establishes al-Shaʿrānī's prominence as one of the earliest proponents of reading the oneness of existence as experiential oneness, and indeed one of the precursors of Sirhindī's oneness of witnessing.

Moreover, this chapter detailed certain similarities in thought between al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn ʿArabī's most famous adversaries in the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries – al-Taftāzānī, al-Biqāʿī, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, the teachings of whom al-Shaʿrānī was most probably familiar with – over their employment of the typology of experiential/ authentic (or excusable at least) and ontological/heretical mysticism. I did this by focusing on their approach to the hadith of 'when I love him', the tenet of absolute unity, and the notion of annihilation. As I have shown, similarly to al-Suyūṭī, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, al-Shaʿrānī adopts the spectrum of Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries and converts it into another model, thereby placing Ibn ʿArabī in the group of authentic mystics. Al-Shaʿrānī's arguments in defence of Ibn ʿArabī are thus carefully conceived in relation to the intellectual milieu of his period. This analysis greatly contributes to our understanding of al-Shaʿrānī's engagement with other scholars, about which we have so far known so little.

Most markedly, the finding of this chapter (that al-Shaʿrānī reinterprets Ibn ʿArabī's mystical teachings as being founded on a visionary, rather than ontological, experience) is pertinent to the central question of this thesis – that is, al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the issue of the anthropomorphic attributes of God, and most importantly, his integration of Ibn ʿArabī's thought into his own mystical and theological worldview.

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I will discuss this subject in Chapter 4.

As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, many of al-Shaʿrānī's theological works are dedicated to clarifying Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, while at the same time suppressing their ontological and monistic implications. If al-Shaʿrānī's works indeed helped spread Ibn ʿArabī's thought, it must have been this approach of reading the oneness of existence as experiential oneness that enabled the latter's ideas to be widely accepted in the Arabic speaking world. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that al-Shaʿrānī was entirely dismissive of Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview. I will show in the next chapter that al-Shaʿrānī in fact supports the ontological doctrines of Ibn ʿArabī on the condition that they are preserved for advanced mystics alone.

Chapter 3

The Ontology of God's Self-Manifestation and Immutable Entities

In Chapter 2, I argued that, when addressing non-advanced mystics and theologians, al-Shaʿrānī reads Ibn ʿArabī's oneness of existence as experiential oneness in order to defend the latter's thought. As I mentioned, this does not necessarily mean al-Shaʿrānī's complete rejection of Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview. Interestingly, as long as the intended audience is advanced mystics, al-Shaʿrānī openly supports the tenet of the oneness of existence and other monistic theories related to it. On the other hand, in his texts for non-advanced mystics and theologians, al-Shaʿrānī presents one of the controversial teachings of Ibn ʿArabī's ontology, that is, the theory of the immutable entities, in a way that does not entail any ontological implications.

In order to illuminate his multi-faceted stance on Ibn ʿArabī's thought, this chapter concerns two subjects. Firstly, I set out to investigate al-Shaʿrānī's endorsement of the doctrine of the oneness of existence and the theory of ontological divine self-manifestation as discussed in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*. It needs to be remembered that this text is addressed to advanced mystics who are ready to accept Ibn ʿArabī's ontological monism, and not to non-advanced mystics who are unprepared for it. In this chapter, I will examine al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the ontology of God's self-manifestation. This is distinguished from his approach to the non-ontological, visionary aspect of God's self-manifestation at a perceptual level, which I will discuss in Chapter 4.

As I will show shortly, al-Shaʿrānī does not try to develop Ibn ʿArabī's theory of ontological divine self-manifestation, nor does he differ from it. Nevertheless, it is

important to discuss this subject, as it has barely been examined. The existing scholarly consensus is that al-Shaʿrānī was not interested in Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview. For example, Trimingham clearly stated that al-Shaʿrānī had no pantheistic leanings and no thought of God as immanent in His creation.[356] This seems to have inhibited further scholarly interest in the subject. However, by examining *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* – which remains largely unstudied[357] – I will argue that al-Shaʿrānī in fact upholds Ibn ʿArabī's monistic teachings for advanced mystics. Considering al-Shaʿrānī's reinterpretation of the oneness of existence as experiential oneness, this argument will highlight his flexibility in terms of his reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought.

As the second thread of the chapter, I turn to examine al-Shaʿrānī's view of the immutable entities. In Ibn ʿArabī's thought, the theory of the immutable entities is closely related to the structure of ontological divine self-manifestation, according to which God manifests Himself in the world's beings following what has been predetermined by each immutable entity from eternity. In the current chapter, I will draw attention to al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the immutable entities in his texts written for non-advanced mystics and theologians; namely, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* and *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*. As I discussed in Chapter 1, al-Shaʿrānī avoids referring to Ibn ʿArabī's ontology in these works. Despite this, al-Shaʿrānī endorses the idea of the immutable entities in them, by presenting it not within the context of ontological discipline but in relation to theological arguments.

The significance of investigating this topic is that not only does it remain uninvestigated in modern scholarship, but it also situates al-Shaʿrānī's arguments in context. As we shall see, his discussions of the immutable entities are offered in some

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[356] Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 223. See also Winter, *Society and Religion*, 128.
[357] The text is mentioned in passing in El-Rouayheb, 'Heresy and Sufism,' 365-367.

parts as responses to the criticisms submitted by such scholars as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Ahdal. Furthermore, it will underline al-Shaʿrānī's innovative treatment of Ibn ʿArabī's thought in relation to theological discourse. Thus, as in Chapter 2, the study will contribute to contextualising al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings within the contemporary polemics and to demonstrating the uniqueness of al-Shaʿrānī's intellectual efforts of presenting Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism to a wider audience.

Most importantly, building on the findings of Chapter 2, our observation in this chapter will show that al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought needs multiple analyses. In this regard, the study will disprove previous studies' reductive assessment claiming that al-Shaʿrānī was as an uncritical, self-contradicting apologist for Ibn ʿArabī.[358]

3.1. Al-Shaʿrānī on the Ontology of God's Self-Manifestation

In this section, based on analysis of *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, I aim to expose al-Shaʿrānī's acceptance of the doctrine of the oneness of existence for advanced mystics. This is approached by elucidating al-Shaʿrānī's reception of the ontology of God's self-manifestation. Constructing his view on this topic is a difficult task, as his discussions of it are very brief and are scattered throughout his work.

I begin by considering al-Shaʿrānī's view of God's oneness in the process of His self-manifestation, then go on to detail his understanding of the relation between God and the world. Al-Shaʿrānī's arguments are based on the dialogues that took place between him and his Sufi teacher, ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ. Since al-Shaʿrānī does not show

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[358] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 127-129, 233-235.

any disagreement with his teacher's remarks (he rather accepts them as his own views and comments on them if necessary), I treat the discourse in what follows as al-Shaʿrānī's own opinions, even though some of the statements are attributed to ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ.

3.1.1. God's Oneness in His Self-Manifestation

Al-Shaʿrānī expresses his support for the ontology of divine self-manifestation in the section entitled, 'a section with respect to questions on the knowledge of God's unity as I heard them from my teacher [ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ], and I have never heard anything like them from other mystics'. This is one of the longest sections in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*.[359] It starts with a conversation between al-Shaʿrānī and ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ which goes as follows:

I asked him [ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ] about the meaning of the hadith, 'Our Lord descends to the world's heaven every night'. And he said to me as follows: 'God is the all-knowing by virtue of His essence (*bi-nafsihi*) and we only need to have faith in the report'. Then I said to him: 'I want a clearer explanation'. Then he said to me: 'When God wished to manifest Himself in the delimited image (*ṣūrat al-taqyīd*) which is described as "descent", He epitomised (*ikhtaṣara*) His exclusive oneness (*aḥadiyya*) from His essence to become the all-comprehensive image (*ṣūra jāmiʿa*) that is the totality of

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[359] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 125-151. Some of the statements that are introduced as those of ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ actually correspond to passages of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. Considering that ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ was illiterate, it is highly probable that al-Shaʿrānī composed the section by combining ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's words with the quotations of Ibn ʿArabī.

what is contained in His non-delimited essence (*dhāt muṭlaqa*). And He put down this image within His light, and that was the image in which Adam was created. When He goes up from this descent, He returns to the non-delimited essence'.[360]

The passage implies that there are two possible interpretations of the hadith on God's descent to the world's heaven. Based on a traditionalist approach, one of them is simply to have faith in the prima facie sense of the report without questioning what it really means. As we shall see in Chapter 4, this reading is recommended for non-advanced mystics who are not prepared for the other, hidden interpretation, which is only approachable by advanced mystics. The second answer issued by ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, when al-Shaʿrānī asked him for a clearer explanation, is addressed to advanced mystics. It takes God's descent to mean that God who is at the level of exclusive oneness manifests Himself in the all-comprehensive image, which can be identified as the image of inclusive oneness, and then manifests Himself in the image of His creation, starting with Adam.

When I discussed Ibn ʿArabī's ontology of God's self-manifestation in Chapter 1, I explained the difference between exclusive oneness (*aḥadiyya*) and inclusive oneness (*wāḥidiyya*). Al-Shaʿrānī upholds these two notions in the same manner as Ibn ʿArabī. In al-Shaʿrānī's words, exclusive oneness is a term to describe the non-delimited reality of God's essence which excludes any relationship to the world's beings. Inclusive oneness, on the other hand, is an expression for the delimited reality of God as the object of the creatures' worship (*ilāh*). It is called delimited, because God as the object

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[360] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 125-126.

of worship is only manifest through the relationships between the Lord and the servants, the Creator and the creatures, and so on.[361]

Al-Shaʿrānī believes that when God at the level of exclusive oneness manifests Himself to Himself, He becomes manifest at the level of inclusive oneness, which is attributed with the realities of all contingent beings that have the possibility of coming into existence. When God manifests Himself at the level of inclusive oneness, Adam, the first human being, is created in this image of God, and God sees His perfect image manifested in him. The above passage thus demonstrates al-Shaʿrānī's reception of a worldview based on the ontology of God's self-manifestation. He holds that this is composed of the level of exclusive oneness – which is also called the level of non-delimitation (*iṭlāq*) –, and the level of inclusive oneness – which is also identified as the level of delimitation (*taqyīd*).[362]

Al-Shaʿrānī does not refer to the term 'the oneness of existence' in any of his works of theology. However, in contrast to what previous studies on him maintain, my analysis shows that he certainly upholds this doctrine. For example, in the same section on questions about the knowledge of God's unity, he encapsulates ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's teaching by stating that 'There is nothing in existence but God' (*mā fi al-wujūd illā Allah*).[363] The same remark is occasionally issued by Ibn ʿArabī in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* in relation to his tenet of the oneness of existence.[364] Here, al-Shaʿrānī explains the meaning of 'There is nothing in existence but God' with the example of a mirror. In it, God is compared to one who stands in front of a mirror, while the world is likened to the image of God reflected in the mirror. The implication of this metaphor is

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[361] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 147.
[362] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 157-159.
[363] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 130.
[364] See Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 94-96.

that only God exists while the world as His image does not. Intriguingly, al-Shaʿrānī further interprets the hadith, 'There was God and nothing was with Him', through the monistic statement that goes: 'There is no reality in existence except God, and what is perceived as plurality is His manifestations and His properties'.[365] These examples show that, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, the world's beings are only manifest as the divine loci and are deprived of concrete, independent existence; consequently, there is nothing but one reality in the cosmos, which is God.

Al-Shaʿrānī's explanation of the inception of God's self-manifestation also attests to his espousal of the oneness of existence. According to al-Shaʿrānī, when God at the level of exclusive oneness wishes to manifest Himself, He finds His non-delimited reality to be divided into two: the one who looks at Himself and the one who is looked at. At this stage, God comes to be attributed with His attributes. When He wishes to manifest these attributes, He manifests Himself in the world's beings. Thus the world is the manifested image of God and His attributes. Nonetheless, existence is ultimately one that is God, and it only becomes many through the manifestations of His attributes.[366] Here, it is worth taking note that al-Shaʿrānī ascribes the beginning of the divine self-manifestation to God's wish to be manifested. This is a reminder of the hadith widely used by Sufis, 'I [God] was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known.' Ibn ʿArabī, for example, uses the hadith in support of his ontological worldview.[367]

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[365] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 130. Al-Shaʿrānī's approach in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* contrasts with that of his other works. As El-Rouayheb observes, in *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, al-Shaʿrānī interprets a similar statement ascribed to Ibn ʿArabī that goes 'there is no existent other than God (*lā mawjūda illā Allāh*)' as follows: 'there is no self-subsisting entity besides God and that all other entities are in need of something, extrinsic, viz. God, to keep them in existence' [El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 239]. Here, al-Shaʿrānī tries to avoid the tenet of the oneness of existence. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, this is al-Shaʿrānī's stance in the texts for non-advanced mystics, but not in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*.

[366] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 88, 146-147.

[367] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 66-67, 391, no. 14.

Al-Shaʿrānī's indirect reference to the idea expressed in the hadith (i.e. God's wish to manifest Himself) suggests his intention to follow the discourses of this mystical cosmology.

Along with the ontology of God's self-manifestation, al-Shaʿrānī supports the theory of the perfect man created in the divine image. Following Ibn ʿArabī, he finds the primary evidence for this teaching in the hadith 'God created Adam in His image' and maintains that the most perfect manifestation of God is the perfect man.[368] Created in the image of God, specifically His inclusive oneness, the perfect man is capable of bringing together all of the realities of the world's beings (*majmūʿ al-wujūd*).[369] Through his all-encompassing reality, every being is brought into existence, and to him they are ascribed.[370]

According to al-Shaʿrānī, there is always one perfect man in each period. He must be unique in the cosmos, as it is absurd to assume that two distinctive perfect men can arise from one divine image.[371] The first perfect man was Adam, the first human being on earth. At the moment of his death, he was replaced by another, and the succession of the perfect man continues until the day of resurrection.[372] The prophet Muḥammad is unquestionably viewed as the perfect man of his age, and so is Ibn ʿArabī, whom ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ and al-Shaʿrānī admire as the greatest master.

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[368] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 131-132.

[369] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 135.

[370] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 133-134, 151-152.

[371] If there were two perfect men, there must be a difference between the two individuals whether in their attributes or actions in order to distinguish one from another. This assumes that one man's attributes or actions are more perfect than those of the other. In this case, the one with less perfect attributes cannot be the perfect man. If they were absolutely identical to each other with no difference at all and perfect on the same level, they would not be two distinctive individuals but one.

[372] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 131. According to ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ's report, the Baghdadi mystic Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945) once said: 'there is nothing but God in my cloak.' Al-Shaʿrānī notes that this remark indicates al-Shiblī's status as the perfect man of his time. See al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 130.

In order to reach the rank of the perfect man, a mystic has to annihilate himself (*fanāʾ*) in the divine self (*huwiyya*) and come to be attributed with God's attributes. Everything becomes one at this stage of mystical union with God (*uṣūl*). Despite this closeness between God and the perfect man, the perfect man is not identical to God, as he is ultimately the image of God and does not possess a reality of his own independently of Him. Once again, there is only divine reality, and nothing else exists beside Him.[373]

In the above discussion, it is important to note that al-Shaʿrānī employs annihilation in the sense of a mystic's effacing his reality in divine essence in order to attain the oneness of God's absolute reality. As we saw in Chapter 2, this is a kind of annihilation that the aforementioned opponents of Ibn ʿArabī denied as existential and heretical. Nevertheless, al-Shaʿrānī endorses the concept in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, because the text's readership is advanced mystics, rather than non-advanced mystics and theologians who may not understand such a mystical view.

In a different section of *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya,* al-Shaʿrānī mentions the idea of 'the immutable entities' (*aʿyān thābita*), the theory that plays a central role in Ibn ʿArabī's ontology of divine self-manifestation. In this work, al-Shaʿrānī only passingly refers to the teaching with the objective of refuting the thesis of the world's eternity. According to him, the immutable entities are possible beings that are pre-eternally known to God in their state of non-existence, and they are in want of God's bestowal of existence upon them. In this regard, the immutable entities are His servants from eternity, prior to the divine creation, and God is their Lord for eternity. The world is therefore considered pre-eternal in the divine knowledge but temporally originated in

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[373] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 132, 138, 146.

the external world.[374] Although *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* does not explore this theory any more than what I have just explained, more details on it are discussed in the texts for non-advanced mystics and theologians. I will return to this topic later in the chapter.

3.1.2. The World in the Image of God

It is clear by now that al-Shaʿrānī does support the ontological theory of divine self-manifestation, along with the doctrine of the oneness of existence and the perfect man. As I showed, his presentation of these teachings is very similar to that of Ibn ʿArabī. In order to further elucidate al-Shaʿrānī's endorsement of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological monism and to compare it to his position for non-advanced mystics, in what follows, I will focus on al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the relationship between God and the world.

As I have repeatedly mentioned, previous studies on al-Shaʿrānī agree that he tried to keep a distance from the monistic teaching of Ibn ʿArabī, as it was harshly criticised by the latter's opponents as heretical. However, the following statement of al-Shaʿrānī, in the section entitled 'with respect to denying God's being body (*jism*), substance (*jawhar*), and accident (*ʿarad*)' in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, demonstrates that this thesis is not thorough. It reads:

The truth that we have faith in is the all-encompassing nature (*ʿumūm*) of God's self-manifestation in all of the beings, because His self-manifestation only occurs in the image mixed with the world (*ṣūrat amzijat al-ʿālam*). For

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[374] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 90-91.

this reason, many things that are not God were worshipped: a stone, fire, an angel, a calf, a tree, stars, and so on. Whoever possesses the scale of the Law can distinguish what God permitted and what He did not.[375]

The above passage shows al-Shaʿrānī's acceptance of the idea of God's immanence in the world's beings through the ontology of divine self-manifestation, whereby various worldly objects come to be worshipped as gods.

Strikingly, Ibn ʿArabī employs a similar argument in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Chapter 3, in the words of Nūḥ. In it, he expresses the view that God can be manifest in different objects in the world, such as a stone or a tree, yet without restricting Himself to these particular objects, because He can be in anything.[376] As I discussed in Chapter 1, Ibn ʿArabī's opponents, such as al-Biqāʿī, condemned the ostensibly pantheistic view expressed here for justifying the idol-worshippers as those who rightly see the divine manifestations in the world's beings. Perhaps in reply to this kind of criticism, al-Shaʿrānī tries to downplay this teaching by stating, at the end of the above passage, that God's manifestation in the world's objects does not necessarily mean that the Law permits the worshiping of them.

In keeping with the idea of divine self-manifestation in the world's beings, al-Shaʿrānī interprets the hadith, 'I [God] am his hearing with which he hears and his sight with which he hears […]', as follows:

It is known that he hears through God's hearing or he hears by virtue of His own essence [*bi-dhātihi*]. Whichever the case might be, God has already

[375] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 64.
[376] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 57.

made His own self (*huwiyya*) identical to (*ʿayn*) the servant's hearing, sight, hand, and foot; whether He intended [being identical to] the servant's essence, his attributes, or his relations [to other beings] (*nisba*).[377]

In Chapter 2, I discussed that, addressing non-advanced mystics and theologians, al-Shaʿrānī interprets the same hadith as attesting to the idea of experiential oneness, whereby God becomes as if He is a mystic's hearing, not ontologically but only perceptually in his mind. In contrast to this, in the above passage for advanced mystics, al-Shaʿrānī intriguingly admits the possibility of God's becoming the servant's hearing and other faculties through His essence. This idea implies the identification of God with His creation, which Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries harshly criticised.

However, while interpreting the hadith within the context of the oneness of existence, al-Shaʿrānī carefully denies the notion of ontological unificationism (*ittiḥād*) between the essence of God and that of the world. According to him, God is the only essence in existence and therefore, there are no other essences in the cosmos that can be unified with that of God. Al-Shaʿrānī thus disproves the idea of literal unificationism.[378]

Within this ontological worldview, the distinction between the divine and the world only arises through the relationships that God's essence assumes via His attributes. To secure the notion of the absolute oneness of God's existence, al-Shaʿrānī identifies the relationships between the divine attributes and the world as non-existent (*nisab ʿadamiyya*). For example, through His attribute of hearing as is reported in 'God hears those who praise Him' or His speech in 'then give him asylum so that he may listen to the words of God' [Q. 9:6], God comes to be distinguished as the Lord to His

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[377] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 77.
[378] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 74-75.

servants.[379] The world then becomes manifest by being related to the divine attributes

as their objects, yet without having their own existence. Following this argument, when

human beings hear and see, it is God who actually hears and sees as the only essence in

the cosmos; and this is the ultimate reality of this world.

Building on the tenet of the oneness of existence, the advanced mystics' experience

of divine unity becomes fundamentally different from that of non-advanced mystics.

Al-Shaʿrānī explains the doctrine of divine unity as upheld by the devoted ones (*ṣiddīq*,

who in the context of the discourse are non-advanced mystics) as being based on the

concept of God's uniqueness; that is to say, God is unique in that He is distinguished

through His attribute of ever-lasting life or through His utter incomparability to His

creation.[380] This approach necessarily presupposes the existence of things other than

God in relation to which He is declared unique. Consequently, this type of divine unity,

supported by non-advanced mystics, does not involve the ontological doctrine of the

oneness of existence.

In contrast, al-Shaʿrānī explains divine unity as understood by a mystic (*ʿārif*, who

in this context is an advanced mystic) as declaring all beings as one by annihilating their

realities in the divine reality. In their state of annihilation, advanced mystics realise that

everything is ultimately ascribed to God, as they see attested in the verse 'indeed to

your Lord is the return' [Q. 96:8],[381] and that they are not fundamentally different from

Him. In other words, advanced mystics declare the oneness of God's essence, whereby

they deny ontological duality (*thanawiyyya*) between Him and creation.[382] Even after

they leave this mystical state, the awareness of the distinction between God and the

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[379] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 75-76.
[380] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 148-149.
[381] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 138.
[382] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 138.

world only returns to them perceptually (*idrākan*), not ontologically.[383]

Building on these observations, al-Shaʿrānī describes the situation of worldly beings as non-existence that become manifest (*ʿadam ẓāhir*) in God's existence through His self-manifestation.[384] In *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, he does not refer to Ibn ʿArabī's expression 'He/not He' (discussed in Chapter 1) to illustrate the intricate relationship between God and the world. Nevertheless, as our analysis shows, there can be little doubt that al-Shaʿrānī supports the thesis 'He/not He' – that is, the world is 'He' as the image of God, but simultaneously 'not He' inasmuch as the world remains merely His image. For al-Shaʿrānī, much like Ibn ʿArabī, this worldview is not entirely monistic in that the world is given a certain kind of existence as the locus of God. This is not pure pantheism either, because the world is not in theory identical to God.

I have so far examined al-Shaʿrānī's arguments in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, clarifying his support of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological worldview. Admittedly, al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the oneness of existence and the ontology of God's self-manifestation is not as comprehensive and not as detailed as that of Ibn ʿArabī. Nevertheless, al-Shaʿrānī's espousal of these teachings is itself a very important finding. Significantly, the evidence gained in this study shows that Winter and Trimingham's understanding of al-Shaʿrānī as being a representative of moderate ascetics, who is not inclined to Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview, is flawed.[385]

The relatively early composition of *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* – between 945-951/1538-1545, while many of al-Shaʿrānī's other works of theology were written later – would suggest a change in his doctrinal position in the later period. The

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[383] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 138.
[384] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 105, 137-138.
[385] Winter, 'al-Shaʿrānī,' in *EI2*.

following analysis of *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* (composed in 955/1548) and *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* (written after 961/1553), which concentrates on al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the theory of the immutable entities, will reveal that his approach to Ibn ʿArabī is indeed varied; in these works, he focuses on defending Ibn ʿArabī's teaching of the immutable entities by relating it to certain theological issues, and not to ontological teaching.

3.2. Immutable Entities and Divine Knowledge

The objective of this section is to consider al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the theory of the immutable entities in relation to God's knowledge of His creation. As noted earlier, although al-Shaʿrānī only makes a fleeting reference to the notion of the immutable entities in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, in his texts for non-advanced mystics and theologians, especially *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* and *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, he discusses the subject in more detail.

In Ibn ʿArabī's worldview, the theory of the immutable entities is inseparable from the doctrine of God's ontological, cosmological self-manifestation. For him, it is through the immutable entities which are pre-eternally known to God that He becomes manifest in the world's beings. In this regard, the immutable entities are within God, or God Himself. As we shall see, some theologians, such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Ahdal, attacked the idea of the immutable entities. Ibn Taymiyya, for example, maintains that it undermines not only the dogma of God's creation *ex nihilo* but also His omnipotence and omniscience. Ibn al-Ahdal, on the other hand, believes that the

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supposition of the immutable entities leads to the heretical idea of the world's eternity as well as to determinism.

Considering this, it is worth observing that al-Shaʿrānī endorses the notion of the immutable entities in his texts for non-advanced mystics and theologians. However, it must be noted that his primary focus in presenting the concept of the immutable entities is to defend Ibn ʿArabī's thought, rather than to elaborate on the ontology of God's self-manifestation based on this teaching. As I will show, al-Shaʿrānī seems to respond, although not explicitly, to the accusations raised by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Ahdal against the immutable entities. To this end, al-Shaʿrānī carefully selects palatable features of the theory, all the while excluding its problematic perspectives.

In order to delineate al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of the theory of the immutable entities to contextualise his arguments as much as possible, this section treats four subjects. First, I provide an account of Ibn ʿArabī's view on the immutable entities. The topic has been subject to due scholarly attention.[386] Hence, I will focus on some of its important features, looking in particular at the thesis stating that the non-existent is a thing. I will then examine Ibn ʿArabī's approach to the verse 'until We know' [Q. 47:31] in relation to God's knowledge of His creation. The investigation will help us understand al-Shaʿrānī's stance on Ibn ʿArabī in context, highlighting a difference between the two. Next, utilising the insights offered by Knysh and Akkach's studies on Ibn Taymiyya, along with my own analysis of Ibn al-Ahdal's work, I will consider their critiques of the theory of the immutable entities, paying special attention to issues such as the world's eternity and divine predestination. In keeping with the findings gained

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[386] See, for example, Izutsu, *Sufism*, 159-192; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 83-89; Bashier, *Ibn ʿArabī's Barzakh*, 97-111; Rustom, 'Philosophical Sufism,' 401-405; Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man*, 90-95.

there, lastly, this section will consider how al-Shaʿrānī responds to these attacks. In particular, I will analyse his interpretation of 'until We know'. The study will demonstrate the extent to which he incorporates Ibn ʿArabī's arguments and identify areas of departure from the latter. The outcome of this examination will also illuminate al-Shaʿrānī's intellectual attempts to treat certain theological issues in the sphere of mysticism.

3.2.1. Ibn ʿArabī on Immutable Entities

As discussed in Chapter 1, Ibn ʿArabī explains divine creation through the process of God's self-manifestation. According to this theory, God, who is the only being, manifests Himself in the world's beings in accordance with what they have pre-eternally been in His knowledge. As a general consensus amongst the major theologians, God's knowledge is pre-eternal and does not change – if it did, His knowledge would either increase or decrease, which is impossible, as it would entail temporal origination or ignorance of His knowledge. Accordingly, the contents of God's knowledge are pre-eternal and are not subject to change either. The unchangeable objects of God's knowledge have the possibility of coming into being by receiving existence from Him. Ibn ʿArabī sees these possible beings, which are for eternity present in God's knowledge in their state of non-existence, as immutable entities. In his view, it is through the courses of the immutable entities that God manifests Himself in the world.

According to Ibn ʿArabī, the immutable entities are attributed with pre-eternity as the objects of the pre-eternal knowledge of God. Yet their eternity is secondary and

dependent on God.[387] Only after being given existence through the process of God's self-manifestation do they come to be in the external world, having been in His knowledge for eternity. With regard to this, Ibn ʿArabī writes:

> Eternity is ascribed to the immutable entities in respect of their presence (*thubūt*) in God's knowledge [prior to creation], and temporality (*ḥudūth*) is ascribed to them in respect of their existence [in the external world] and manifestation [of God] (*ẓuhūr*).[388]

In this regard, as Chittick notes, Ibn ʿArabī strikes a middle ground between the Islamic philosophers who believe that the world is eternal and the theologians who maintain that it is temporally originated.[389] Despite this intermediate view, as we shall see later, Ibn ʿArabī's antagonists accused him of upholding the world's eternity.

Ontologically speaking, the immutable entities that are pre-eternally present in the divine knowledge stand halfway between existence and pure non-existence.[390] This means that their non-existence, prior to God's bestowal of existence, is characterised as relative nonexistence (*ʿadam iḍāfī*). It is called 'relative' in the sense that its existence is possible. This is contrasted with the absolute nonexistence (*ʿadam muṭlaq*) of things the existence of which is impossible altogether.[391] As Chittick stresses, Ibn ʿArabī does not employ the immutable entities in the Platonic sense of archetypes or models for individuals. They are already individual beings before they come into being in the

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[387] Izutsu, *Sufism*, 162-163.
[388] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 197.
[389] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 84; Izutsu, *Sufism*, 162-163.
[390] Rustom, 'Philosophical Sufism,' 402.
[391] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 84-88; *The Self-Disclosure*, 30.

phenomenal world, and hence, 'there is no difference between the entity known in God's knowledge and the entity in the cosmos, except that in the first case it is "nonexistent" while in the second it is "existent"'.[392] Thus their reality never changes before or after existence.

Ibn ʿArabī himself states that he owes the idea of immutable entities to the Muʿtazilīs, while maintaining that their understanding was not perfect.[393] The similarity is especially observed in the way the Muʿtazilīs treat the non-existent beings as 'things'. Ibn ʿArabī maintains that the immutable entities in the divine knowledge are attributed with 'thingness of immutability' in the state of non-existence and then with 'thingness of existence' when they come to be in the external world.[394] With regard to this, Ibn ʿArabī adduces the Qurʾānic verse, wherein it is suggested that God takes things as the objects of His attributes. He writes:

'God is powerful over each thing [Q. 2:20]', not over what is not a thing, for a nothing does not accept thingness. If it did accept thingness, its reality would not be a nothing. But no object of knowledge departs from its reality, so the ruling property of a nothing is to be a nothing forever. As for that which is a thing, its ruling property is to be a thing forever.[395]

As the passage indicates, in Ibn ʿArabī's view, the immutable entities in God's

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[392] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 84.
[393] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 83, 204.
[394] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 88; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4, 108.
[395] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 171, translation taken from Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, 45. The same passage is also quoted by al-Shaʿrānī (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 99; *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 211). See also Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4, 108.

knowledge have to be things in their state of non-existence. If they were to change their status from not a thing (*lā shayʾ*) to thingness (*shayʾiyya*), it would imply a change in His knowledge, which is absurd against the principle of pre-eternal divine knowledge.

Interestingly, this idea corresponds to the Muʿtazilī thesis stating that the non-existent is a thing, a controversial subject that has received a lot of scholarly attention. The Muʿtazilīs find textual support for this idea in the Qurʾānic verse: 'indeed, Our word upon a thing when We intend it is only to say to it, "Be!" and it comes to be' [Q. 16:40].[396] In their view, the non-existent being has a certain kind of reality prior to its creation, so that God can address it when He wills it and brings it into being. Klein-Franke explains that if there is not a thing of which one can speak before it actually exists, this results, according to the Muʿtazilīs, in God's ignorance, as it would mean that God gains knowledge of a thing only after He creates it.[397] Consequently, the Muʿtazilīs conclude that 'thingness' can be applied not only to what already exists, but also to what does not exist at the present moment yet has the possibility of coming to be in the future. Therefore, both non-existents and existents have thingness (*shayʾiyya*).[398]

The Muʿtazilīs believe that the non-existent thing is a possible being that has an essence which determines what it is in itself.[399] Its essence is known to God from eternity as a particular thing and is latently related to His power prior to its coming to be.[400] When God gives its essence existence, it comes into being in the way it has

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[396] Wisnovsky, 'Notes on Avicenna,' 184.

[397] Klein-Franke, 'The Non-Existent is a Thing,' 381. The following verse is further adduced to support the Muʿtazilīs' thesis: 'O mankind, fear your Lord; verily the earthquake of the Hour [that is, the day of the Judgement] will be a tremendous thing (*shayʾ*)' [Q. 22:1]. The event that will happen on the day of the Judgement does not currently exist. Despite this, God already mentions it as 'a thing.' Klein-Franke, 'The Non-Existent is a Thing,' 380.

[398] Wisnovsky, 'Essence and Existence,' 30; 'Notes on Avicenna,' 190.

[399] Klein-Franke, 'The Non-Existent is a Thing,' 377; Frank, 'The Non-Existent and the Possible,' 32-35.

[400] Frank, 'Al-Maʿdūm wal-mawjūd,' 203-207.

always been in itself, realising its essential attribute (e.g. the atoms' occupying of space).

Based on this idea, the Muʿtazilīs distinguish a thing's essence from its existence; existence is an accident that happens to an essence through the divine creation.[401]

The Ashʿarīs object to the Muʿtazilī thesis that the non-existent is a thing, as it is tantamount to admitting that the non-existent thing has an essence of its own or an extra-mental reality outside of God's knowledge prior to creation. In the view of the Ashʿarīs, the non-existent being is not a thing but pure nothing. It is certainly known to God and remains a potential object of His power. However, it does not have any essence nor reality in the external world before it comes to be. God causes a thing to exist and originates its essence at the same time, at the moment of its creation.[402] Hence, the Ashʿarīs maintain that to speak of a thing in a state of non-existence before its creation is to uphold the existence of pre-existent matters that are co-eternal with God. Such a view violates the concept of divine unity as well as undermining the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.[403]

Ibn ʿArabī rebuffs the Ashʿarīs' denial of the Muʿtazilī thesis that the non-existent is a thing. For his part, since God explicitly addresses the non-existent beings as things before creation, the immutable entities have to be things in the state of non-existence.[404] This does not mean that Ibn ʿArabī endorses the view that they have an extra-mental reality prior to their coming to be. He certainly insists that the immutable entities in the state of non-existence are attributed with their own properties (*aḥkām*) or the inner

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[401] Klein-Franke, 'The Non-Existent is a Thing,' 380; Frank, 'Al-Maʿdūm wal-mawjūd,' 196, 203-204; Wisnovsky, 'Notes on Avicenna,' 190.
[402] Frank, 'The Non-Existent and the Possible,' 32-35.
[403] Frank, 'Al-Maʿdūm wal-mawjūd,' 186; Wisnovsky, 'Notes on Avicenna,' 184-5; Klein-Franke, 'The Non-Existent is a Thing,' 377. In fact, some earlier Muʿtazilīs denied the formula of the non-existent being a thing out of fear that things could then be regarded as eternal. Klein-Franke, 'The Non-Existent is a Thing,' 381.
[404] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 204-205; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4, 46-47.

meanings of how the things will be manifest. These properties are pre-eternally present in the divine knowledge and become manifest in God's existence at the moment of His self-manifestation, realising what God has known about them for eternity.[405] However, ontologically speaking, the properties of the immutable entities always remain neither purely existent nor purely non-existent.[406] They are not entirely existent even when they are manifest in the phenomenal world, because they are only manifested images of God. Nor are they purely non-existent before God's self-manifestation in them, as they are pre-eternally the objects of God's knowledge. This idea suggests that, for Ibn ʿArabī, the immutable entities and their properties are things in their state of non-existence inasmuch as they are present in God's knowledge, yet they do not possess realities of their own independently of Him. Despite this, as I will show later, Ibn Taymiyya's attack on the doctrine of the immutable entities is based precisely on the view that they are believed to have extra-mental realities before creation.

3.2.2. Ibn ʿArabī on Qurʾān 47:31

In order to explain Ibn ʿArabī's approach to God's pre-eternal knowledge of His creation, his treatment of the verse 'We [God] will test you until We know [who strive for the sake of God]' [Q. 47:31] deserves special attention. As we shall see, Ibn Taymiyya disproves Ibn ʿArabī's interpretation of this verse, whereas al-Shaʿrānī tries to understand it in relation to the issue of divine predestination, dismissing Ibn ʿArabī's approach to it.

The prima facie sense of 'until We know' causes a theological problem. It implies

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[405] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4. 211,
[406] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4, 473-474.

that God comes to know who strives after having not known, contradicting the notion of divine perfect knowledge. In the chapter on the word of Luqmān in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn ʿArabī refers to the divine name 'the All-Aware' (*al-khabīr*) and defines it to mean that God is knowing through actual experience (*ʿālim ʿan ikhtibār*). He then applies this idea to the meaning of the verse 'I will test you until We know'. That is to say, Ibn ʿArabī holds that God has revealed Himself as acquiring knowledge through experience (*ʿilm dhawq/ ʿilm al-adhwāq*) when He already knows what the things really are prior to their coming to be. Based on this observation, Ibn ʿArabī classifies God's knowledge into two: His pre-eternal and absolute knowledge (*ʿilm muṭlaq*) of the world in its state of non-existence – which can be identified as the divine knowledge of the immutable entities – and His knowledge of the world through actual experience.

This approach to 'until We know' seems to pose little doctrinal threat. The majority of the Sunni Qurʾān commentators, such as the Shāfiʿī jurist Abū Muḥammad al-Baghawī (d. 515-516/1121-1122 or 510/1117), the Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), Shāfiʿī Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), the Mālikī jurist Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Qurṭbī (d. 621/1273), and Shāfiʿī jurists Jalāl al-Din al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and al-Suyūṭī uphold similar views on it. They maintain that God knows each being before creation, and yet He also comes to know who in reality strives when they are created in the concrete world. This means that God rewards those who actually strive, not through His knowledge of their potential actions but through His knowledge of their concrete actions.[407] These scholars see God's knowledge of the world's beings prior to the

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[407] Some early Muslims like Abū Bakr reportedly opted to read it with the third person singular so that it means 'he [one of God's servants] challenges you until he knows' instead of 'We' for God. See, for example, al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl* (*Tafsīr al-baghawī*), vol. 7, 289; al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwāl al-tanzīl* (*Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*), vol. 5, 124; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, vol. 19, 286; al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf*, 1022.

divine creation as knowledge of the invisible (*ʿilm al-ghayb*),[408] whereas God's knowledge of the created world is knowledge of the visible (*ʿilm al-shahāda*),[409] actual knowledge (*ʿilm fiʿlī*),[410] manifested knowledge (*ʿilm ẓuhūr*),[411] and knowledge of existent beings (*ʿilm wujūd, ʿilm al-wujūd*).[412]

Ibn ʿArabī's stance on 'until We know' becomes controversial when he further explicates it in relation to his mystical cosmology. According to him, divine knowledge through experience depends on what the creatures experience in the actual world. From this perspective, God's knowledge of them is qualified and limited (*muqayyad*) by human faculties and organs. Now, based on the doctrine of the oneness of existence, the real subject of phenomenal experience is ultimately God. For God said of Himself that He is the essence (*ʿayn*) of the servant's faculties as is suggested in 'I [God] was his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees [...]'.[413] As a result, it is God who in reality acts through the servants' sight, hearing, speech, and limbs and acquires knowledge through His experience in the image of His creation.

Ibn ʿArabī does not take this as entailing literal unification between God's essence and that of His creation. As discussed earlier, there are no other essences in the cosmos that can be unified with that of God, as there is only God's essence. With regard to this, Ibn ʿArabī writes:

The essence (*ʿayn*) that is called a servant is no other than God Himself, but

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[408] al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 28, 70.

[409] al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 28, 70; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 19, 285-286.

[410] Abū al-Suʿūd, *Tafsīr al-Suʿūd*, vol. 8, 101.

[411] al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, vol. 1, 510.

[412] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-musīr*, 1313.

[413] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 131-132/189.

this is not to say that the essence of the servant is God Himself […] for He is the only essence that exists in all relationships [between God and the world].[414]

Hence, in Ibn ʿArabī's view, when the servants know things in this world, God is the actual knower of them, without entailing unificationism between Him and creation.

The identification of God's knowledge with that of His creation through the doctrine of the oneness of existence is explicitly stated in the chapter of the word of Jesus in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. In it, Ibn ʿArabī refers to the dialogue between God and Jesus when He was at the station called '"until We know" [Q. 47:31] and indeed He knew (*maqām ḥattā naʿlam wa-yaʿlam*)'.[415] Quoting the Qurʾānic episode, Ibn ʿArabī notes that when God asked Jesus: 'did you say to the people "take me and my mother as gods besides Allah?"' [Q. 5:116], Jesus answered by saying: 'if I had said that then You would have already known [if this was the case or not] [ibid.]'.[416] To this, Ibn ʿArabī adds the following comment, incorporating the aspect of the oneness of existence. It reads:

'If I [Jesus] had actually said that then You would have already known it', because You [God] are the speaker in my image. Whoever says something, he knows what he has said and You are the mouth (*lisān*) through which I

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[414] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 175/189. This is of course only one side of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching. He would immediately add that God is simultaneously not His creation, because the world is merely His image.

[415] It is most probably based on this expression in the chapter on Jesus that Ibn Taymiyya writes 'until He knew' on page 60 of his *Majmūʿa al-rasaʾil*, as opposed to 'until We know' on page 54 which he quotes from the chapter of Seth. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasaʾil*, vol. 4, 54, 60.

[416] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 131-132/146.

speak, as the Prophet reported to us about his Lord in the hadith 'I [God] am

his mouth through which he speaks'. Thus, God made Himself (*huwwiyya*)

identical to the mouth of the speaker, attributing speech to His servant […]

and the speaker is indeed God.[417]

The passage indicates that when the servant articulates something and immediately

knows what he has said, God also comes to know what he has said; rather, it is actually

God who has spoken through his faculties as the real speaker and His is the real knower.

Hence, at the station of '"until We know" and indeed He knew', God attains knowledge

of created beings through experiencing the creatures' speech as His speech, while He

knows everything in its state of non-existence through His absolute knowledge.

Following this idea, when the creatures gain knowledge of something, God knows it too.

As we shall see shortly, the identification of God's knowledge with that of His creation

comes to be condemned by Ibn Taymiyya as heretical.

3.2.3. Critique of Immutable Entities and Divine Knowledge

Considerable criticisms were raised against the notion of the immutable entities by

Ibn Taymiyya. Knysh, and more recently Akkach, have extensively analysed this topic.

To recapitulate their studies, Ibn Taymiyya attacks the theory of the immutable entities

based on the following points: (1) Ibn ʿArabī's assumption that the immutable entities

in their state of non-existence always have empirical counterparts in concrete reality is

wrong. This is because one can imagine the essences of things that only exist mentally

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[417] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 132/146.

but not externally, such as a mountain of sapphire, a sea of mercury and a man of gold.

(2) The idea that the immutable entities first exist in God's knowledge and are then given existence through His creation implies that the immutable entities are uncreated and that existence is superadded to the essence. This view is opposed to the opinions of the people of the Sunna, who believe that when God brings something into existence, He creates its essence and existence at the same time.[418] (3) If the immutable entities were things by themselves in their state of non-existence, uncreated by God (*majʿūla*), it would infringe upon the Sunni dogma of God's creation *ex nihilo*. (4) This point further denies God's being the creator of the world by confining His role to that of the giver of existence to the immutable entities. (5) In relation to (4), the assumption of entities that are immutable in the divine knowledge leads to the denial of God's omnipotence, as it implies that He cannot change the course of events that is pre-eternally determined by the properties of the immutable entities.[419]

Incorporating the findings of previous studies, in what follows, I aim to demonstrate the criticism of the immutable entities raised by such scholars as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Ahdal, detailing the points that are the most relevant to al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of this theory. I will mainly examine three subjects: (1) the rejection of the view that the immutable entities have extra-mental realities outside of God's knowledge; (2) the attribution of belief in the world's eternity and in determinism to Ibn ʿArabī; and (3) Ibn Taymiyya's critique of Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of 'until We know'. The study will help situate al-Shaʿrānī's arguments in context by relating

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[418] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 19.
[419] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 100-105; Akkach, *Letters of a Sufi, Scholar*, 42-51. Knysh also analyses al-Taftāzānī's refutation of the immutable entities from the ontological aspect. This is directed more towards al-Qūnawī than Ibn ʿArabī. See Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 153-158. I am not going to examine al-Taftāzānī's arguments here, as al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the immutable entities is submitted as a response to Ibn Taymiyya's critique rather than to that of al-Taftāzānī.

them to these points of criticism.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, the theory of the immutable entities is built on two teachings: the tenet that the world's existence is identical to that of God and the thesis that the non-existent being is 'a thing' and is present in a state of non-existence.[420] Ibn Taymiyya attributes the latter thesis to the Muʿtazilīs, who maintain that the non-existent possible being is a thing that has an essence of its own. He argues that, similarly to the Muʿtazilīs' stance, the immutable entities proposed by Ibn ʿArabī possess extra-mental realities in their state of non-existence independently of God. For Ibn Taymiyya, a difference between the Muʿtazilīs and Ibn ʿArabī with regard to this point is that while the former at least upholds God's creation of the non-existent thing in the world, the latter identifies the world's existence with that of God, thereby denying Him the divine role of creator, as well as the fundamental distinction between God and His creation.[421]

Ibn Taymiyya admits that the non-existent being can be called a thing as long as it is entirely dependent upon God's knowledge without having any real essence of its own. Referring to the verse 'the earthquake of the hour will be a tremendous thing (*shayʾ*)' [Q. 22:1], he states that this is a report about a future event, not a current one, and that describing a future event as a 'thing' is only possible with reference to God's knowledge and decree of it (*taqdīr*).[422] In his view, since an essence is created at the moment of the creation of its existence, even if it is designated as a thing in the divine speech, a thing which is a future event possesses no essence.

Ibn Taymiyya believes that the error of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers lies in taking

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[420] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 8-9.
[421] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 8, 86-87.
[422] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 18.

the non-existent being as a thing in itself. According to Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ʿArabī

falsely imagines – based on the verse 'His order to a thing when He wills it is that He

says to it "Be!" and it is' [Q. 36:82] – that there are non-existent essences which are

called things prior to their creation and that they are pre-eternally present outside of

God's knowledge.[423] With respect to this, Ibn Taymiyya writes:

> If one says that the non-existent being is a thing in the [divine] knowledge,
>
> existent in the [divine] knowledge, or present (*thābit*) in the [divine]
>
> knowledge, this is correct, whereas if he says [like Ibn ʿArabī and others] that
>
> the non-existent is a thing by itself [with an independent reality that has its
>
> external existence], this is wrong.[424]

Here, it is important to note that Ibn Taymiyya's view of the immutable entities – that

they are non-existent things that have extra-mental realities in themselves, upon which

God bestows existence and create the world – entails the denial of creation *ex nihilo*. In

other words, the theory of the immutable entities leads to the espousal of the world's

eternity.

Recent scholarship agrees that the tenet of the world's eternity is certainly not a

part of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching.[425] Nowhere does Ibn ʿArabī express his endorsement of

the world's eternity in the way that philosophers like Avicenna do.[426] Nevertheless, the

attribution of this idea to Ibn ʿArabī seems to have been relatively common amongst his

detractors before al-Shaʿrānī. According to Knysh, the Syrian Shāfiʿī and Ashʿarī

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[423] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 18.
[424] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 17.
[425] Izutsu, *Sufism*, 162; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 84; Cillis, *Free Will*, 184-185.
[426] For the position of Avicenna on this issue, see McGiniss, *Avicenna*, 178-208.

theologian Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262), who is considered to be the earliest detractor of Ibn ʿArabī, declares Ibn ʿArabī an unbeliever for advocating the world's eternity. Ibn Taymiyya himself counts the world's eternity as one of the heretical professions often ascribed to Ibn ʿArabī.[427]

As Ibn Taymiyya carefully points out, Ibn ʿArabī's thought is not technically identical to that of the philosophers. This is based on Ibn Taymiyya's understanding that whereas the philosophers establish the existence of both God and the world, Ibn ʿArabī ultimately denies the world's existence by identifying it as that of God.[428] The Meccan historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī (d. 832/1429) holds a similar view to that of Ibn Taymiyya. While referring to Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām's accusation that Ibn ʿArabī promotes the world's eternity, al-Fāsī believes that Ibn ʿArabī's identification of God with the world is more heretical than the beliefs of the philosophers who identify God as the necessary existence from which all beings proceed from eternity.[429] Based on this observation, Knysh maintains that, in the opinions of Ibn Taymiyya and al-Fāsī, Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām's criticism of Ibn ʿArabī as a proponent of the world's eternity missed the target. By the time of Ibn Taymiyya, let alone al-Fāsī, argues Knysh, Ibn ʿArabī's teaching was too well known to have been confused with that of the eternalists.[430]

Despite Knysh's conclusion, the Yemeni Ashʿarī Ibn al-Ahdal repeatedly associates Ibn ʿArabī and his followers with belief in the world's eternity.[431] In Ibn al-Ahdal's view, the tenet of the oneness of existence necessarily accompanies the idea of the world's eternity. If the world is unified with God, who is pre-eternal, and each

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[427] On Ibn Taymiyya's view on creation theory and his espousal of the world's eternity, see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 70-95.
[428] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 82.
[429] al-Fāsī, *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn*, vol. 2, 170.
[430] Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 69-72.
[431] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 182-185/vol. 2, 626-632.

entity is considered to be identical to God, the world must be eternal like Him.[432] Ibn al-Ahdal references the aforementioned Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, the Damascene historian Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), and the Egyptian jurist Ibn al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) as those who condemned Ibn ʿArabī for preaching the world's eternity.[433] Ibn al-Ahdal also notes that Ibn ʿArabī and his followers were known in Damascus in this period as the group of unificationists whose thought was identified as that of the philosophers.[434] Against Knysh's reading, these findings from Ibn al-Ahdal's text indicate that the attribution of the world's eternity to Ibn ʿArabī was still held amongst his opponents well after Ibn Taymiyya (who died in 728/1328), and most probably after al-Fāsī (who died in 932/1429, while Ibn al-Ahdal died in 855/1481).

Even though Ibn al-Ahdal does not clearly relate the teaching of the immutable entities to belief in the world's eternity, strikingly, El-Rouayheb's finding confirms this relationship. According to his study, the sixteenth-century Egyptian scholar al-Fārisukūrī, who castigated al-Shaʿrānī's *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* as monistic (as I mentioned in Chapter 1), denounced Ibn ʿArabī and his followers as advocates of the world's eternity for their espousal of the immutable entities.[435] This is an insightful suggestion indicating the connection between the immutable entities and the charge of the world's eternity amongst Ibn ʿArabī's opponents. The widespread attribution of the world's eternity to Ibn ʿArabī explains al-Shaʿrānī's effort to distance Ibn ʿArabī's teachings from this view.[436] As I will show later, al-Shaʿrānī insists that the theory of immutable entities in fact supports the dogma of creation *ex nihilo*.

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[432] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 184, 197, 207/vol. 2, 632, 662, 729.

[433] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 207, 225-226, 230/vol. 2, 690, 729, 739-740.

[434] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 230/vol. 2, 739-740.

[435] El-Rouayheb, 'Heresy and Sufism,' 364-365.

[436] This is explicit in many of his works; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, 404-407; *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 40b; *al-Qawl al-mubīn*; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 52

Ibn al-Ahdal also accuses Ibn ʿArabī and his followers of promoting determinism (*jabr*) or of being determinists (*jabriyya*).[437] Quoting Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Ahdal calls Ibn ʿArabī and his followers 'the deterministic Sufis' (*al-mutaṣawwifa al-jabriyya*), whereby Ibn al-Ahdal attacks them for not making a distinction between receiving divine guidance and going astray, between obedience and disobedience, and between those who go to paradise and those who go to hell.[438] If everything is predetermined prior to the divine creation by the immutable entities, these teachings lose their values, which is heretical.

It must be noted that, in Ibn al-Ahdal's understanding, human actions according to Ibn ʿArabī are forced upon them by their own immutable entities, rather than by God. With regard to this, Ibn al-Ahdal observes that, in Ibn ʿArabī's view, the world's entities come into being as distinctive beings, not through God's will and choice, but through their own preparedness (*istiʿdād*).[439] Preparedness in Ibn ʿArabī's thought is what specifies the extent to which each immutable entity can manifest divine self-manifestation.[440] Its determination is pre-eternal and unchangeable. Thus, human beings act in the way their immutable entities have foreordained.[441] This deterministic view, that the immutable entities force actions upon humans, further places God under the compulsion (*iḍṭirār*) of what the immutable entities of His creation determine.[442]

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[437] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 226, 280/vol. 2, 729, 857-858. Determinism conventionally means that human beings are forced to act in a certain manner, with God being the real agent. For more on this, see Holtzman, 'Debating the Doctrine of *jabr*,' 61-63.

[438] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 233/vol. 2, 745; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwī*, vol. 3, 78-79. Ibn Taymiyya does not actually use the expression 'the deterministic Sufis'. He only talks about a group of people in error who contemplate divine destiny. A reference to the deterministic Sufis is inserted here by Ibn al-Ahdal.

[439] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 190/vol. 2, 647-648.

[440] For more details on this concept, see Izutsu, *Sufism*, 175-182; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 91-94.

[441] For information on the secondary literature concerning the debates as to whether or not Ibn ʿArabī indeed held a deterministic view, see Alsamaani, 'An Analytic Philosophical Approach,' 121-123.

[442] Ibn al-Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 190/vol. 2, 647-648.

The deterministic nature of the immutable entities is closely related to what Ibn Taymiyya sees as another major problem concerning this theory. As Knysh writes, if God were to create the world in accordance with the properties of the uncreated and pre-eternal immutable entities, it would strip God of His omnipotence by limiting His role to bringing them into existence, while denying Him power to change their course.[443] Objecting to this view that the immutable entities restrict God's omnipotence, Ibn Taymiyya writes as follows:

God is then incapable of increasing or decreasing even a grain or a drop of rain in the world. Nor can He change the height of humans beings […], move the position of a stone or running water, guide the astray to a right path and lead the guided astray, or move the stationary object and stop the moving object. In a nutshell, God cannot do anything other than what is found (*mā wujida*) and what is found is the essence (*ʿayn*) that is immutable (*thābita*) in its state of non-existence. Hence, He cannot do more than what is manifest (*ẓuhūr*) in these entities.[444]

According to Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ʿArabī describes the situation in which God cannot do other than what He knows of the immutable entities as 'the mystery of divine predestination' (*sirr al-qadar*). Following this idea, Ibn Taymiyya concludes that the destiny of phenomenal beings is predetermined by their immutable entities and that it is the immutable entities that do good and evil and are praised and punished.[445]

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[443] Knysh, Ibn ʿArabī, 102; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 21.
[444] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 59.
[445] Knysh, Ibn ʿArabī, 102; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 21, 58.

Further to this analysis, not only does the teaching of the immutable entities deny God His omnipotence, but it also damages His omniscience in that God's knowledge of His creation occurs to Him, not from Himself but from His knowledge of the immutable entities in their state of non-existence. The issue of divine omniscience is pertinent to al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the immutable entities; hence, I will consider this topic below.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ʿArabī perceives the immutable entities that possess extra-mental realities as being real in themselves and dispensable for God (*ghanī*). This view entails the implication that God is in need of the immutable entities in order for Him to acquire the knowledge of creation from them (*istafāda*), which amounts to the denial of God's perfect and self-sufficient knowledge.[446] With regard to this idea, Ibn Taymiyya critiques Ibn ʿArabī's approach to 'until We know' (as discussed earlier) as being based on the doctrine of the oneness of existence and the identification of God's existence with that of His creation. In Ibn Taymiyya's mind, Ibn ʿArabī believes that just as human beings come to know things that they did not know, God also knows them after having not known them previously. In other words, God does not know what would occur to His creation in the world (i.e. the immutable entities), until His servants come to know them first in the phenomenal world (because God is identical with His creation and His knowledge is the same as that of His creation). Following this observation, Ibn Taymiyya concludes that Ibn ʿArabī identifies the renewal of the creatures' knowledge with the renewal of God's knowledge (*tajaddud*), depriving Him of the knowledge of divine predestination (*qadar*).[447] The

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446 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 21, 58.
447 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 4, 54, 60. Ibn Taymiyya does not state here how he interprets 'until We know'. However, the exegesis of one of his disciples, the Syrian Ḥanbalī

thesis of the immutable entities, combined with the tenet of the oneness of existence, thus jeopardises God's foreknowledge of His creation.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, it is not permitted to hold that God's knowledge is gained from the immutable entities the realities of which are independent from Him.[448] Since God is self-sufficient in His knowledge, it is incumbent that He knows His creation from eternity without supposing the existence of other beings from which He acquires knowledge. Regarding this critique of the immutable entities, it must be noted that Ibn Taymiyya misunderstands Ibn ʿArabī's position. It is true that, within the context of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological worldview, God comes to know things in the external world through actual experience and that when the servants know something, God knows it too as a real knower. However, he does not hold that God's knowledge is renewed when His creation comes into being, nor does he believe that God was ignorant of the world's beings before acquiring knowledge of them in this world. For Ibn ʿArabī, God is pre-eternally the perfect knower of all beings through His absolute knowledge of the immutable entities.

I have so far examined the criticisms of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Ahdal against the theory of the immutable entities. I have especially looked at their attacks from three perspectives, clarifying the following points. Firstly, Ibn Taymiyya objects that the immutable entities have extra-mental realities independently of God's knowledge. Secondly, Ibn al-Ahdal condemns Ibn ʿArabī for advocating the world's eternity – a

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historian Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) might give us a clue. According to Ibn Kathīr, there is no doubt that God knows everything prior to its coming to be. The expression of 'until We know' is only related to its actual occurrence in the world. Hence, it should be read as 'so that We know' or 'so that We see' who strives in concrete reality. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*. This can be taken as the standard interpretation amongst the traditionalists, as well as amongst many Ashʿarīs scholars, whom I mentioned earlier.

[448] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasaʾil*, vol. 4, 59-60.

charge that was widely attributed to Ibn ʿArabī prior to al-Shaʿrānī – as well as for being deterministic. Lastly, and quite intriguingly, Ibn Taymiyya denies Ibn ʿArabī's interpretation of 'until We know' stating that God comes to acquire knowledge of the His creation after He did not know of them, as this idea results in undermining the notion of divine perfect knowledge. As we shall see next, these observations are related to al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of the immutable entities and his approach to divine knowledge.

3.2.4. Al-Shaʿrānī on Immutable Entities

This section concerns al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the immutable entities in *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* and *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, the theological writings addressed to non-advanced mystics and theologians. I will demonstrate how al-Shaʿrānī accepts some key aspects of the immutable entities and offers the teaching as a solution to certain theological issues, highlighting the extent of his reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought. For our purposes, we shall consider three themes: (1) al-Shaʿrānī's endorsement of creation *ex nihilo* based on the thesis of the non-existent being a thing; (2) his treatment of God's foreknowledge, predestination and human accountability; and (3) his interpretation of the verse 'until We know'. As will become clear, al-Shaʿrānī's arguments show some correspondence in ideas, if not directly, to those of the critics of the immutable entities, with the aim of undermining their positions. The examination of this subject, together with our observations in Chapter 2, will thus situate al-Shaʿrānī's endeavour of defending Ibn ʿArabī in the scholarly context of his own period.

3.2.4.1. Immutable Entities and Creation *ex nihilo*

Al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the immutable entities resembles that of Ibn ʿArabī on many points. Amongst them is the thesis that the immutable entities are things in their state of non-existence. In the texts addressed not only to non-advanced mystics but also to theologians, al-Shaʿrānī openly supports the Muʿtazilī thesis of the non-existent being as a thing by referring to the verse 'indeed God is powerful over each thing' [Q. 3:165]. To underline this view, al-Shaʿrānī quotes the aforementioned passage by Ibn ʿArabī on 'thingness' (*shayʾiyya*) and maintains that thingness is a pre-eternal property.[449] If an existent being is a thing attributed with thingness, it should have the same property in its state of non-existence prior to its coming to be. If one supposes the transition of the reality of that which is not a thing (*lā shāyʾ*) to that which is a thing in the process of creation, this is to postulate change in His pre-eternal, unchangeable knowledge. In other words, the divine knowledge is renewed when that which was not a thing comes into being as that which is a thing. This conclusion is absurd, and accordingly, the premise that the non-existent being was not a thing prior to divine creation is proved wrong. Thus, the non-existent being is already a thing in God's knowledge even before its creation.

Al-Shaʿrānī sees the non-existent things, which are present in God's knowledge, as being the immutable entities. They are the possible beings of the world's entities that come into being by receiving existence from God.[450] Since it is impossible to imagine a moment when His perfect knowledge lacks its objects, the immutable entities in their

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[449] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 211; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 99; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* vol. 2, 171; cf., vol. 4, 108.
[450] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 210-221; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 98-99.

state of non-existence must be pre-eternal like God. Nevertheless, there is an ontological difference between the divine and these entities. While the objects of God's knowledge remain to be the objects of creation, God is always their creator.[451]

Like Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī does not hold that the immutable entities possess extra-mental realities. In al-Shaʿrānī's view, the immutable entities are things only inasmuch as they are present in the divine knowledge, and not independently of it. Therefore, the idea of the immutable entities does not undermine the tenet of creation *ex nihilo*, as no independent realities exist before creation; rather, and intriguingly, it helps complement the doctrine by reconciling the positions of the Ashʿarīs and the Muʿtazilīs in regards to the creation theory.

In order to explain this point, al-Shaʿrānī refers to two types of non-existence, 'absolute non-existence' (*ʿadam muṭlaq*) and 'relative non-existence' (*ʿadam īḍāfī*), which I have mentioned earlier when discussing Ibn ʿArabī's view of the immutable entities. I have translated below a passage from al-Shaʿrānī's *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, from the section entitled 'the illusion of bringing the world into existence from absolute non-existence that precedes it.' It reads:

> To those who are under the illusion (*tawahhum*) that God brought the
> world into existence from absolute non-existence (*ʿadam muṭlaq*) that
> precedes it [its existence], like some of the Ashʿarīs, I answered as follows.
> Know this my brothers. There are two types of non-existence, absolute
> non-existence and relative non-existence (*ʿadam īḍāfī*). As for absolute
> non-existence, God's knowledge does not include it and it will never have

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[451] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 166, 172; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 53. See also Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 261-262.

existence, because absolute non-existence does not pertain to an entity that is present (*'ayn thābita*) in His knowledge. On the contrary, relative non-existence, which people speak of, pertains to an entity that is present in God's knowledge. Relative non-existence is therefore non-existent only in respect of the creatures' knowledge, but it is existent in relation to God's knowledge.[452]

As the passage shows, the immutable entities prior to their creation are characterised with relative non-existence in the sense that they are known to God and have the possibility of coming into being. In this regard, divine creation is understood to be creation based on the immutable entities in their state of relative non-existence.

Al-Shaʿrānī insists that it is impossible to posit creation out of absolute non-existence. God cannot create what He does not will and He cannot will what He does not know. If He knows something before the creation, it has to be present in His knowledge pre-eternally. If it were possible for Him to create what His knowledge did not contain, the world must have existed by itself independently of God, which is absurd. Consequently, the world is created out of immutable entities that are known to God from eternity. And in order for Him to know them, the immutable entities have to be things in their state of relative non-existence.[453]

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[452] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 209-210. See also al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 98.

[453] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 213-214; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 100. In relation to this, al-Shaʿrānī writes:

> It was already affirmed through the decisive evidence of God's words such as 'does He who created not know?' [Q. 67:14] and 'He is the Knower of all things' [Q. 42:12] that He is the knower of everything, that His knowledge is eternal, that He originated us without any preceding archetype (*mithāl*), and that we were brought into existence in accordance with what we were in His knowledge. If this

Following this idea, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that the Ashʿarī theologians' thesis of the non-existence being 'not a thing' – as they gathered from the verse 'I already created you before when you were not a thing' [Q. 19:9] – should be understood to entail that the non-existent is 'not a thing' only in relation to the creatures' perception, but not in God's knowledge wherein it is already a thing. The world is thus attributed as eternal in His knowledge and as temporally originated in its manifestation in the visible world (*ʿālam al-shahāda*).[454] Al-Shaʿrānī here notes that the philosophers wrongly advocated the world's eternity based on the observation that the world is from eternity the object of the pre-eternal knowledge of God; while saying so, they did not realise the temporality of the world when it actually comes into existence.[455]

Dismissing faith in the world's eternity as upheld by the philosophers, al-Shaʿrānī tries to show the superiority of Ibn ʿArabī's view on the world's creation based on the theory of the immutable entities, demonstrating its reconciliatory role between the two theological parties of the Muʿtazilīs and the Ashʿarīs. With respect to this, al-Shaʿrānī writes:

> The reconciliation (*jamʿ*) of the words of the Muʿtazilīs and the Ashʿarīs holds true (*yaṣiḥḥ*), for the words of the Ashʿarīs can mean that whatever is brought into existence by [God's command] 'Be!' is brought into existence from nonexistence in the state of relative nonexistence, not in the state of

were not the case, we would be brought into existence in accordance with what He does not know. God does not will what He does not know, and He does not bring into existence what He does not will. This means that we would be existing by ourselves […]. Yet it has already been affirmed by decisive proof that our existence is from non-existence, that is, from relative non-existence' [al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 213-214].

[454] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 103, 209-211; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 100.
[455] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 100.

absolute nonexistence. On the other hand, the words of the Muʿtazilīs can mean that the whole world is brought into existence from that which has presence (*thubūt*) in the [divine] knowledge but [does] not [possess a] state of concrete existence (*wujūd ẓāhir*). If this is the case, then the world is pre-eternal in the [divine] knowledge and temporally originated in its manifestation [into the external world] (*ẓuhūr*).[456]

According to al-Shaʿrānī, the Ashʿarīs hold that the world is created out of absolute nothingness, whereas the Muʿtazilīs believe that it is created out of a non-existent thing that has extra-mental reality.[457] He then presents the doctrine of the immutable entities in the state of non-existence as what mediates between these positions. In al-Shaʿrānī's view, it harmoniously combines the Ashʿarī thesis of creation *ex nihilo* – by interpreting *nihilo* as relative nonexistence – with the Muʿtazilī tenet of the non-existent thing – by rejecting the idea that it possesses an extra-mental reality.

Al-Shaʿrānī's view – that the immutable entities reconcile the position of the Ashʿarīs and that of the Muʿtazilīs concerning the creation theory – is drawn from an examination of Ibn ʿArabī's presentation of the immutable entities, and in this sense,

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[456] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 211. See also al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 99.
[457] Al-Shaʿrānī quotes the Ashʿarī theologian and al-Suyūṭī's teacher Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī from his commentary on *al-Jamʿ al-jawāmiʿ* and writes as follows:

> The non-existent being (*maʿdūm*) is not a thing extra-mentally; it does not have any essence (*dhāt*) nor is it present (*thābit*), that is to say, it does not have any reality (*ḥaqīqa*) in the external world. The non-existent being only gains reality when it comes to exist in the external world. This is what al-Maḥallī said and it was also the view of many other theologians [i.e. the Ashʿarīs]. On the other hand, most of the Muʿtazilīs maintained that the non-existent possible being is indeed a thing extra-mentally; that is, it has an affirmed reality (*ḥaqīqa muqarrara*) [al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 199].

there may not seem to be much originality in al-Shaʿrānī's thought. Nevertheless, our observation is significant in that it is al-Shaʿrānī, regarded in present scholarship as an Ashʿarī scholar and a mediocre apologist for Ibn ʿArabī, who arrives at the conclusion that the theory of the immutable entities can synthesise the views of the two opposing theological groups of Muʿtazilism and Ashʿarism. Furthermore, this reconciliatory role of the immutable entities affirms the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, thereby disproving the charge of the world's eternity that was commonly attributed to Ibn ʿArabī prior to al-Shaʿrānī. As I will show below, the notion of the immutable entities further secures belief in divine predestination and human accountability, along with the notion of divine foreknowledge.

3.2.4.2. Immutable Entities and Divine Predestination

Earlier, I referred to Ibn Taymiyya's attack concerning the deterministic implications of the immutable entities. As we have seen, based on the observation that God gains knowledge of His creation not from Himself but from the immutable entities in their state of non-existence, Ibn Taymiyya accuses Ibn ʿArabī of claiming that God comes to know things after not knowing them, thereby undermining God's foreknowledge of creation and divine predestination. Ibn al-Ahdal, on the other hand, censures Ibn ʿArabī for being a determinist in the sense that his teaching entails that God's creation is pre-eternally determined by the properties of the non-existent immutable entities and cannot be changed.

Although al-Shaʿrānī does not name these critics, his presentation of the immutable entities suggests that he tried to make sense of these critiques by demonstrating how

these entities guarantee the notions of divine predestination and human accountability, as well as divine foreknowledge. Borrowing Ibn ʿArabī's words, al-Shaʿrānī states that God does not have any effect upon the course of events that is predetermined by each immutable entity. The knowledge of something is always preceded by the presence of the known object. Therefore, God only knows that which has been pre-eternally present in His knowledge, without entailing a change in the objects of His knowledge.[458] In al-Shaʿrānī's view, these immutable entities that God necessarily knows from eternity are not His creation, because His knowledge has no beginning and neither do its objects. Based on this idea, divine creation occurs when God gives existence to what He has pre-eternally known, and the world comes to be just as it has always been in His knowledge. In this regard, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that the immutable entities are entirely dependent upon God for their existence, as the decision regarding whether to bring them out of the realm of divine knowledge into the visible world is made through God's will and choice, while God in no way depends on their existence.[459]

To al-Shaʿrānī's mind, the unchangeable and uncreated nature of the immutable entities protects the notion of divine predestination and human accountability, rather than violating God's perfect foreknowledge or promoting determinism. He argues that those who do not know God (*jāhil bi-Allah*) might protest to Him by asking how He can punish them for what He has predestined from eternity, despite His foreknowledge that they will not be able to defy these foreordained actions. To them, it appears unfair for God to make them accountable for their deeds when He is the creator of their realities,

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[458] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 166, 171. See also Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4, 222-223.
[459] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 159; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 202.

attributes, and faculties and they can only behave as He orders.[460] In al-Shaʿrānī's view, this kind of complaint is resolved through a proper understanding of the immutable entities. For him, God is certainly the creator of the existence of the immutable entities, but not of their realities, which have been predetermined and are immutable in the divine knowledge. This idea does not diminish God's omnipotence, as the immutable entities are dependent upon His knowledge and are forever nonexistent in it unless they are given existence. Rather, the idea establishes human beings' accountability for whatever their immutable entities have specified for them in this world.[461] Following this idea, when something deplorable happens to a person, he should blame himself or what his immutable entity has pre-eternally determined, but not God, as is suggested in the verse 'We [God] did not wrong them but they wronged themselves' [Q. 16:118].[462] For al-Shaʿrānī, this is the attitude required from non-advanced mystics.

In order to make sense of the fixed character of the immutable entities, al-Shaʿrānī also mentions al-Ghazālī's statement 'there is nothing in possibility more wondrous than what is' or 'there is no possible world more wondrous than the current world' (*laysa fī l-imkān abdaʿ min mā kāna*). As Ormsby carefully demonstrated, this remark stirred controversy among later generations, as it was taken to entail God's imperfection in lacking the power to create a better world. As far as I am aware, al-Shaʿrānī refers to al-Ghazālī's statement in four of his texts, two of which are mentioned by Ormsby.[463] In these texts, al-Shaʿrānī takes two approaches to the statement. One of them is to

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[460] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 154-156.

[461] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 156-162, 167, 171; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 119, 201-202.

[462] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 157. See also Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4, 16.

[463] Ormsby names two texts, *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya* and *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 119, n. 90. Two more titles I have found are *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya* and *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*. In Ormsby's study, al-Shaʿrānī is introduced as a scholar who was in favour of this saying, but his view remained unexamined.

associate 'there is nothing in possibility […]' with a denial of belief in the world's eternity. Regarding this, al-Shaʿrānī writes:

God is characterised with the level (*rutba*) of eternity, while the world is characterised with the level of temporal origination; since God's creation will never leave the level of temporal origination, al-Ghazālī's statement becomes true.[464]

As the passage implies, al-Shaʿrānī takes al-Ghazālī's expression 'more wondrous' to mean that the world goes beyond its level of temporal origination until it becomes eternal like God. However, the current world, which is temporally originated, can never be so wondrous as to attain the level of eternity. Therefore, al-Ghazālī's statement is true in the sense that it denies belief in the world's eternity.

Another interesting interpretation is approached through the issue of God's foreknowledge and predestination. Quoting ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, al-Shaʿrānī states that the prophet is a prophet from all eternity, and so is the friend of God, the rebel, the unbeliever, the hypocrite, and so on. And every one of them is perfect in their own way in the sense that they are all brought into existence from the divine knowledge through God's favour and generosity.[465] With regard to this, al-Shaʿrānī writes:

The pre-eternal knowledge is not receptive to any increase at all (*lā yaqbal*

[464] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, 431-432; *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 76a; *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 125; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 51, 138. In *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, al-Shaʿrānī notes that this is a quotation from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. However, I have not been able to identify its location in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*.
[465] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 76

ziyāda), nor is the object of His knowledge [receptive to any increase]. Hence, the profession that there is nothing in the divine knowledge more wondrous than this world becomes true (*laysa fī ʿilm al-ḥaqq abdaʿ min mā kāna*) […].[466]

Here, al-Shaʿrānī understands al-Ghazālī's statement in relation to the pre-eternity and fixity of God's foreknowledge and its objects (i.e. the immutable entities). In al-Shaʿrānī's view, the current world is created in accordance with God's perfect knowledge of creation or the immutable entities. Since divine knowledge is not receptive to change, this world must be the only possible and the most wondrous one, thus justifying divine predestination.

Markedly, this approach is contrasted with Ibn ʿArabī's treatment of the same statement. As Chittick notes, Ibn ʿArabī frequently adduces 'there is nothing in possibility [...]' in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* within the context of the ontology of God's self-manifestation. For Ibn ʿArabī, the current world holds perfection, not because it is in accordance with God's foreknowledge, but rather because it is manifest as the perfect image of God as His locus.[467] On the other hand, al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of 'there is nothing in possibility [...]' avoids any reference to Ibn ʿArabī's cosmological speculation. While supporting Ibn ʿArabī's idea of divine creation of the world following the courses predetermined by the immutable entities, al-Shaʿrānī does not discuss al-Ghazālī's remark in relation to the monistic worldview of ontological divine self-manifestation.

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[466] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 76a.
[467] For reference to Ibn ʿArabī's citation of the saying, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 409, n. 6; Abrahamov, *Ibn ʿArabī and the Sufis*, 120, n. 22.

As the above discussions show, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, the teaching of the immutable entities should be understood in relation to the support of divine predestination and human accountability. This is also suggested in one of the passages in *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, which reads:

It is now clear that the determinists (*jabriyya*) and others would not have fallen into what they fell into, except by their attesting (*shuhūd*) one aspect of the creation; namely, the temporal origination and the created nature of the servants [based on God's predetermination]. If they [the determinists] had attested another aspect of the servants, that is to say, their eternal nature in God's knowledge [i.e. the world as the immutable entities that are uncreated and that predetermine their course from eternity], they would have attributed the decisive argument (*al-ḥujja*) [concerning who is accountable] to God against themselves [and taken responsibility for their actions from the perspective that their uncreated immutable entities determine their events]. Be aware so as not to let this slip out of mind.[468]

As the passage indicates, for al-Shaʿrānī, Ibn ʿArabī is not an upholder of pure determinism in the sense that God forces humans to act in a certain manner. This is because unlike the determinists who dismiss human responsibility, Ibn ʿArabī advocates the idea of the uncreated immutable entities that predetermine the future events of each being from eternity. In other words, these entities, which are uncreated, make human

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[468] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 205. A reference to the argument (*al-ḥujja*) derives from the Qurʾān 6:149, which says: 'to God belongs the decisive argument (*ḥujja bāligha*); if He had willed, He would have guided all of you.'

beings accountable for their actions. Yet belief in the immutable entities does not necessarily mean a denial of divine predestination, because they do not have extra-mental realities in themselves and are entirely dependent on God. As I showed, they rather secure the notion of predestination in that they are present in the divine pre-eternal knowledge from eternity without beginning and are entirely dependent upon Him.

It has become clear that al-Shaʿrānī treats Ibn ʿArabī's theory of the immutable entities as guaranteeing the notions of divine foreknowledge, predestination and human accountability, not as the ontological teaching of the divine self-manifestation. With regard to this, al-Shaʿrānī notes that those who are not aware of the immutable entities may complain to God concerning what His knowledge has foreordained when a calamity hits them. However, those who have realised that God only creates what their immutable entities in the divine knowledge have predetermined accept whatever happens to them in this external world. Importantly, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, it is the mystical unveiling that enables a person to be aware of this situation.[469] Only through the mystical discipline does he attain the intricate combination of divine predetermination and human accountability. For al-Shaʿrānī, this is the core doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī's immutable entities as relating the mystical discipline with the theological issues, without discussing them in the context of the ontological worldview.

3.2.4.3. Al-Shaʿrānī on the Interpretation of Qurʾān 47:31

In the analysis of al-Ghazālī's statement 'there is nothing in possibility [...]', we

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[469] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 158-161, 171; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 119, 204-205.

have seen that al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the immutable entities excludes Ibn ʿArabī's ontology of God's self-manifestation. In order to expose the extent of his acceptance of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching, it is important to examine al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of 'We [God] will test you until We know [who strives for the sake of God]' [Q. 47:31]. This is where al-Shaʿrānī's stance clearly differs from that of Ibn ʿArabī.

As I demonstrated, Ibn ʿArabī interprets 'until We know' in accordance with his tenet of the oneness of existence. In his view, the verse means that when a person performs an act in this world, God knows it too as the real performer and knower of this action, even though He knows it pre-eternally prior to its coming to be. Ibn Taymiyya condemns Ibn ʿArabī's reading of 'until We know' as heretical, as it supposes the identification of God's existence with that of the world, as well as the renewal of His knowledge, undermining His perfect, pre-eternal knowledge. As I will demonstrate, the approach al-Shaʿrānī takes to the scriptural expression in question is understood as a form of conciliation towards this criticism, whereby, in keeping with what I have discussed earlier, he balances God's foreknowledge of creation with human accountability.

Al-Shaʿrānī takes several approaches to the meaning of 'until We know'. One of them resembles the interpretation of many Qurʾān commentators. As mentioned earlier, they understand the verse by associating it with God's knowledge of visible, actual things while He already knows all beings through His knowledge of the uncreated, invisible world.[470] In explaining the same verse, al-Shaʿrānī similarly states that God

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[470] Al-Shaʿrānī explains the Ashʿarī approach to 'until We know' as reliant upon the notion of 'a relation' (taʿalluq) between God's knowledge and the objects of His knowledge, and refutes it. The rational theologians maintain that when the world's beings go through a change, it is a relation that changes, not His knowledge. In this way, they try to protect immutability of the divine attributes. For al-Shaʿrānī as well as for Ibn ʿArabī, however, these theologians' idea of the origination of a relation (ḥudūth al-taʿalluq), as things appear and disappear, causes a

already knows in potency (*bi-l-quwwa*) who strives prior to the creation, and He also knows in actuality (*bi-l-fiʿl*) who strives after they come to be in the phenomenal world.[471]

It is noteworthy that, following the idea that God knows all beings from eternity prior to their coming to be, including the changes they go through, al-Shaʿrānī denies (against the critique of Ibn Taymiyya) the renewal of God's knowledge at any point. Al-Shaʿrānī then introduces a different interpretation of it. He writes:

To those who had imagined that God acquires knowledge of His creation after He did not [possess that knowledge] – as befell a group of weak-minded people (*ahl al-fahm al-saqīm*) based on the divine report 'We [God] will test you until We know' – I have answered as follows. It is prohibited to have faith in the view [that God acquires knowledge of His creation]. For God has always been the knower of all things prior to their coming to be in the phenomenal world (*ʿālam al-shahāda*). Then He brought them into existence [from His knowledge] into the phenomenal world in accordance with what He has known. Even when things are renewed (*tajaddud*), His knowledge of them will not get renewed, as I noted in the beginning. All beings of different ranks with various images are thus pre-eternally known to God.[472]

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doctrinal issue. If God comes to know things in this world differently from how He used to know them by changing a relation between His knowledge and its objects, the concept of time is applied to God, which is absurd. See more on this in al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 165-172; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 119; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 692. On the teaching on relations, see Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 151-152; al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-afkār*, vol. 1, 477-478; *Ghāyat al-marām*, 77.

[471] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 158.

[472] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 168. Cf., *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 98.

As the passage clearly indicates, al-Shaʿrānī holds the view that God does not acquire His knowledge anew, as He knows everything from eternity. Nevertheless, he admits the possibility that weak-minded people – or those whom he views as commoners – would support the idea of the renewal of God's knowledge; in al-Shaʿrānī's view, as a courtesy (*adab*) and submission to God (*taslīm*), they prefer to believe in the prima facie sense of the divine report.[473] Thus, they take the verse 'until We know' at face value and imagine that God comes to know things from His creation when they are created, just as human beings acquire new knowledge after having not known.[474]

Remarkably, building on this observation, al-Shaʿrānī interprets 'until We know' from a different perspective, whereby he promotes faith in its prima facie sense in the context of his mystical discipline. With respect to this, one of his passages reads:

'Until We know', that is to say, until Our knowledge of what We knew about your states prior to testing you becomes manifest to you [and then God comes to know them in the phenomenal world through actual experience]. This is [God's] descent to [people's] minds [*tanazzul lil-ʿuqūl*] as is seen in other reports of divine attributes, the prima facie sense of which [*ẓāhir*] is close to the anthropomorphic attributes [*qurb min ṣifāt tashbīh*].[475]

In a similar vein, al-Shaʿrānī further states:

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[473] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 159.
[474] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 167-168.
[475] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 169.

God's intention in the prima facie sense of 'We will test you until We know' is related to the meaning of 'the All-Aware'; that is to say, He acquires the knowledge [of His creation through experience] after the [actual] trial, not before that, although God is the knower of all that happens to His creation prior to their existence or their manifestation [through His absolute knowledge]. It is thence from His mercy that God descends to the minds of His servants [*tanazzul li-ʿuqūl ʿibādi-hi*]. This is similar to His descent to their minds in the reports of God sitting upon the throne, His descent to the lowest heaven, and so on, even when the prima facie senses of these [expressions, which are anthropomorphic] contradict the divine attributes that declare His incomparability.[476]

In these passages, al-Shaʿrānī acknowledges that the prima facie sense of 'until We know' is anthropomorphic. Therefore, the literal acceptance of its meaning is impermissible, as it leads to pure anthropomorphism, undermining the notion of divine incomparability. Nevertheless, at the same time, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that the divine message has to be believed as such, because God has revealed it Himself.[477]

In order to affirm the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes while rejecting literal anthropomorphism, al-Shaʿrānī employs the expression 'His [God's] descent to people's minds'. This is an important notion within his mystical worldview. To put it shortly, it means that God describes Himself with various features of His creatures in order to facilitate people's understanding of God in their minds. I will

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[476] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 172.
[477] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 172.

discuss the details of this in Chapter 4.[478] For now, suffice it to note that following the

idea of God's descent to people's minds, al-Shaʿrānī justifies the anthropomorphic

meaning of 'until We know' as securing human accountability and their prayers to God.

That is to say, a belief that God acquires knowledge of the world's beings from those

beings makes it worthwhile for people to appeal to God – for instance, when pleading

with Him to show them mercy or to grant them patience in the face of ordeals – even

though God knows everything in advance. Thus, the prima facie sense of 'until We

know', along with the deterministic nature of the immutable entities, makes humans

responsible for their actions and encourages them to accept their tribulations, as well as

to appeal to God in times of need.[479]

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[478] See also al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 116-117, wherein he writes as follows (the first paragraph is taken from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, whereas the second one is al-Shaʿrānī's own comment):

> Ibn ʿArabī writes in Chapter 552 [of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*] regarding the meaning of the divine name 'the All-Aware' (*khabīr*) as follows: Know this my brother, the All-Aware is that which obtains knowledge through experience (*ikhtibār*). This is reported in the prima facie snse of the divine report 'We will test you until We know' requires [Q. 47:31].
>   May God be above this requirement; rather, He knows all that will occur to the servants. And therefore, did He [not] create [them in accordance with what He knew]? Nevertheless, God descends (*nazzala*) to the level (*manzila*) of one who acquires knowledge, just like He lowered Himself to our reasons in the verse of sitting upon the throne, descent to the world's heaven and others. This is so despite the fact that these reports deny the divine attributes of incomparability (*tanzīh*) [al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 116-117].

As I will discuss in the next chapter, quoting a lot from Ibn ʿArabī, the discussions concerning the expression 'God's descent to people's minds' in relation to the divine anthropomorphic reports are unique to al-Shaʿrānī. They are actually his main concern in his theological project.

[479] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 157-159. His passage on this goes as follows:

> Some mystics have stated that God did not report this [that is, 'We will test you until We know'] except as the corridor (*dihlīz*) through which they establish the decisive argument of their accountability to themselves, or as 'the [divine] descent to their minds' (*tanazzulan li-ʿuqūli-him*) in order for God to demonstrate to them the veracity of their supplication for the divine love, contentment with the divine decree, and patience under the divine trial. This is so despite the consensus of all religious communities that God knows everything that happens to His servants in the future of this world and the hereafter [al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 158].

Al-Shaʿrānī's approach to 'until We know', as discussed above, differs from that of commoners. It is certain that, by having faith in the prima facie sense of the report that God does not know what actions they would take, the commoners also ascribe accountability to themselves. However, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, without the mystical awareness that their immutable entities, not God, have predetermined what happens to them from eternity, they are likely to protest to God and against His predestination when things go wrong.[480] This is also different from the view of the Qurʾān commentators who accept neither the literalistic approach to 'until We know' nor the notion of the immutable entities.

Furthermore, and most markedly, al-Shaʿrānī's approach to 'until We know' in relation to its prima facie sense disagrees with Ibn ʿArabī's view on the same verse, which identifies God's knowledge with that of creation based on his tenet of the oneness of existence. As I demonstrated, while supporting some features of the immutable entities, in the texts addressed to non-advanced mystics and theologians, al-Shaʿrānī avoids the monistic implications of the teaching proposed by Ibn ʿArabī. Thus, instead of discussing 'until We know' within the context of the ontological worldview, al-Shaʿrānī holds that its prima facie sense has to be believed as such in order to make humans accountable for their actions despite God's foreknowledge of creation – on the condition that it does not accompany a purely anthropomorphic implication that God in reality comes to know that which He did not know.

To conclude this section on the theory of the immutable entities, I have first

Note that al-Shaʿrānī again refers to the expression of 'the descent to their minds' in this passage in order to make sense of people's pleas and prayers to God in times of trial, when in reality their destiny is pre-determined and fixed in His knowledge through the immutable entities.
[480] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 160.

demonstrated al-Shaʿrānī's support of Ibn ʿArabī's tenets of the non-existent thing and creation *ex nihilo* (i.e. creation out of relative nonexistence). Like Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī identifies the non-existent things that are pre-eternally known to God as the immutable entities. As I pointed out, these immutable entities do not have extra-mental realities outside God's knowledge. Rather, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, they are dependent upon His knowledge.

I have also shown that al-Shaʿrānī presents the idea of the immutable entities as a means of reconciliation between the Muʿtazilī view and that of the Ashʿarīs on divine creation. The outcome of his discussion is to demonstrate Ibn ʿArabī's superiority to the views of these theological groups, as well as to refute the attribution to Ibn ʿArabī of belief in the world's eternity, widely attributed to him before al-Shaʿrānī.

Furthermore, I have argued that, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, the assumption that God cannot change the course of events fixed by the immutable entities actually proves people's accountability for their actions, thereby protecting belief in divine perfect knowledge and predestination, rather than undermining divine omnipotence and omniscience as Ibn Taymiyya claims. To al-Shaʿrānī's mind, this is one of the most important features of the notion of the immutable entities. It enables the mystics who have this awareness to balance divine predestination with human accountability.

Lastly, and most significantly, with regard to the extent of al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching, I have demonstrated that al-Shaʿrānī avoids discussing the immutable entities within the context of ontological divine self-manifestation, nor does he promote the identification of God's knowledge with that of His creation through the report 'until We know'. Al-Shaʿrānī rather insists on faith in this scripture without acceptance of pure anthropomorphism. In his view, its prima facie sense has to be

believed, as the idea of God's acquiring knowledge of creation makes people's supplication to Him meaningful and preserves their accountability. This is a striking finding indicating al-Shaʿrānī's intention to explain the anthropomorphic expression from the mystical perspective of his own. This informs our discussion in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was first to examine al-Shaʿrānī's acceptance of the doctrine of the oneness of existence. I have argued that in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, a relatively early work of al-Shaʿrānī addressed to advanced mystics, he clearly supports this tenet, along with the ontological theory of God's self-manifestation in the world's beings, the idea of the perfect man, and the aforementioned thesis as the world He/not He. Most importantly, our observation differs from existing scholarship, which perceives al-Shaʿrānī as a moderate Sufi who is not interested in Ibn ʿArabī's monistic teachings.

Another objective of this chapter was to consider al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the immutable entities, the theory that is essential to the ontology of Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism. Based on an analysis of *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* and *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, which are written for non-advanced mystics and theologians, I discussed that al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the immutable entities is very palatable. As I showed, al-Shaʿrānī certainly advocates some of the key features of the teaching: that the immutable entities are the non-existent things which are present in God's knowledge prior to creation; that the immutable entities are characterised with relative nonexistence; and that God cannot

change what the immutable have predetermined from eternity. However, in contrast to Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī does not situate this teaching within the ontology of God's self-manifestation or the oneness of existence. Excluding the ontological implications of the immutable entities, al-Shaʿrānī discusses them, instead, in relation to certain theological issues, focusing on how the immutable entities complement belief in creation *ex nihilo*, secure the notion of divine predestination and the attribution of accountability to human beings, and protect the notion of God's perfect knowledge.

The selection of these particular topics shows al-Shaʿrānī's intention to respond to Ibn ʿArabī's antagonists such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Ahdal. Thus this observation helps us to understand al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī in the intellectual backdrop of his period. It also highlights al-Shaʿrānī's attempts to present the mystical teaching within the context of theological discipline.

The findings of this chapter, in conjunction with those of the previous chapter, expose variations in al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought across his works, as well as the centrality of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings throughout al-Shaʿrānī's scholarly life. The opposing views submitted by al-Shaʿrānī (i.e. his simultaneous support and denial of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological worldview) should not be taken negatively as entailing contradiction and confusion in his thought. Rather, the contrast results from his methodology of carefully taking different stances depending on the audience. As I noted, the date of composition of al-Shaʿrānī's works would also suggest a development in his theological position. He was possibly more interested in showing his support for Ibn ʿArabī's ontological worldview when he wrote *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, and then gradually became inclined to present it in a different manner for non-advanced mystics and theologians with the objective of defending Ibn ʿArabī.

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In the next chapter, by focusing on the issue of the anthropomorphic attributes of God, I will discuss al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of Ibn ʿArabī's theory of divine self-manifestation as a perceptual and visionary experience. There, I will examine how al-Shaʿrānī approaches the theological problem of the anthropomorphic attributes based on his own mystical discipline inspired by Ibn ʿArabī.

Chapter 4
Al-Shaʿrānī on Anthropomorphism

In the second part of Chapter 3, we briefly examined al-Shaʿrānī's attempt to discuss theological issues within the sphere of mystical discipline. I argued that he endorses the prima facie sense of 'until We know' [Q. 47:31], that is to say, the idea that God acquires knowledge of the world's beings from those beings, which makes it worthwhile for people to appeal to God. According to al-Shaʿrānī, the anthropomorphic meaning should be retained as indicating 'God's descent to people's minds', despite the reality that God already knows everything.

'God's descent to people's minds' is a key expression to which al-Shaʿrānī draws much attention in his theological works addressed to non-advanced mystics and theologians. The objective of the current chapter is to explore this idea further and to analyse al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes. Here, I shall investigate the central question of this thesis, concerning the integration of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings into al-Shaʿrānī's own mystical and theological worldview. It will emerge that, like Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī intends to synthesise the opposing notions of divine *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* – yet crucially, he does so within the framework of visionary divine self-manifestation, not in relation to ontological divine self-manifestation. It will be demonstrated that while he confirms Ibn ʿArabī's core theories of the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* and of divine self-manifestation, al-Shaʿrānī remarkably recontextualises them in his theological works in an attempt to defend Ibn ʿArabī. In this regard, the previously mentioned comment by Winter, that al-Shaʿrānī distorts the intended meanings of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, may well hold true. However, as we shall

see in this chapter, al-Shaʿrānī's purported 'distortion' is in fact a creative reinterpretation of Ibn ʿArabī's thought in a way that suits al-Shaʿrānī's theological project. Therefore, this topic, hitherto uninvestigated, merits close examination in terms of understanding al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism – especially in the view of his distinctive theological endeavour of defending Ibn ʿArabī.

This chapter consequently treats four topics. It begins with a brief overview of the notions of divine incomparability (*tanzīh*) and anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), and considers Ibn ʿArabī's views on them. The second section concerns al-Shaʿrānī's refutation of the rational theologians' figurative interpretation (*taʾwīl*), to which he was originally introduced by Ibn ʿArabī. It should be noted that whilst he is dismissive of figurative interpretation, al-Shaʿrānī allows its use for commoners, who may otherwise naively believe in pure anthropomorphism. However, when addressing the mystics – especially the non-advanced ones – al-Shaʿrānī encourages faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes, all the while avoiding any implication of literal anthropomorphism.

The structure of this particular teaching is the subject of the third section. By focusing on the aforementioned expressions 'God's descent to people's minds' and the 'balance' (*al-mīzān*) between the two levels of divine self-manifestation, I first investigate al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the tenet of *tashbīh*, in the sense of God's assimilating Himself to creation through the perceptual similarity evoked in the mind. As I will show, within the context of these teachings, al-Shaʿrānī promotes faith in the prima facie sense for a practical reason. I then discuss his espousal of the theory of visionary divine self-manifestation through which God describes Himself as having various attributes in scripture, in contrast to ontological divine self-manifestation,

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whereby God becomes manifest in the world's beings. It will emerge that, based on his own understanding of divine self-manifestation, al-Shaʿrānī combines the two principles of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*, just like Ibn ʿArabī, but with the different objective of solving the issue of the anthropomorphic attributes, rather than explaining the ontological reality of the world.

The last section of this chapter concerns al-Shaʿrānī's resemblance to the Ḥanbalī traditionalists in terms of their approaches to the anthropomorphic attributes. It will be argued that al-Shaʿrānī intends to establish a certain similarity between Ibn ʿArabī and the Ḥanbalīs in terms of their rejection of pure anthropomorphism. As we shall see, al-Shaʿrānī's stance on the anthropomorphic attributes is characterised by a combination of the traditionalist position and Ibn ʿArabī's theophany. The study of this topic will thus illuminate the innovativeness of al-Shaʿrānī's theological project, dedicated to non-advanced mystics and theologians.

4.1. Divine Incomparability (*tanzīh*) and Anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*)

Over the centuries and throughout the intellectual history of Islam, the issues of divine incomparability and anthropomorphism were extensively debated. This subject has attracted much scholarly interest.[481] In what follows, I provide a brief account of these notions and restate how each theological group deals with the references in scripture to God's anthropomorphic attributes. I will then consider Ibn ʿArabī's view on the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*.

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[481] For information on secondary sources, see Shah, '*Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh*.'

4.1.1. Anthropomorphism: Overview

The notion of *tanzīh*, which literally means 'to declare something above something else', is drawn from the Qurʾānic statements that describe God as being peerless and unique, such as 'nothing is like Him' [Q. 42:11]. Generally speaking, most theologians tried to defend the principle of God's incomparability to the world. On the other hand, the term *tashbīh* – the literal meaning of which is 'to make something similar' or 'to liken/compare something to something else' – is often employed as a pejorative expression to condemn someone who is deemed to have breached the dogma of divine incomparability. The associated term is corporealism (*tajsīm*), which literally means 'to make something corporeal' or 'to give something a body.' Historically, no theological groups declared themselves as anthropomorphists (*mushabbiha*) or corporealists (*mujassima*). These terms were primarily used in a polemical context as a way to censure the opposing position on the divine anthropomorphic attributes.

The anthropomorphic attributes are the various scriptural descriptions of God that are based on traits of creatures. These include corporeal features (e.g. His hearing, sight, hands, and legs); physical actions (e.g. His sitting upon the throne and His descent to the world's heaven); human-like emotions (e.g. His anger and laughs); and spatial expressions (e.g. His being closer to human beings than the jugular vein [Q. 50:16], His nearness to the prophet at a distance of two bow lengths [Q. 53:49], and His being with creation in any place [Q. 57:4]).

A problem arose amongst Muslim scholars as to how to address these attributes without violating the notion of divine incomparability. Throughout the history, theological groups took three different approaches to understanding the

anthropomorphic attributes: the noncognitive approach known as *bi-lā kayfa*, figurative interpretation (*taʾwīl*), and the delegation of knowledge to God (*tafwīḍ*). Before comparing their position with al-Shaʿrānī's, I briefly summarise each stance below.

The first approach, the *bi-lā kayfa* formula, encourages one to accept the anthropomorphic attributes in the way that they were reported, but without enquiring about their real meaning or their relation to God. For example, God sitting upon the throne should be affirmed; however, His sitting is unlike human sitting, and no one knows what the expression really means when applied to God. This position is primarily associated with the traditionalist Ḥanbalīs, who stressed the importance of transmitting the report rigidly as it came down to them.[482] In their view, affirming (*ithbāt*) the prima facie sense (*ẓāhir*) of the anthropomorphic expressions does not necessarily lead one to acknowledge the physical, corporeal features of God or to compare God to His creation, as there is absolutely no likeness between the divine reality and that of creation.[483] Thus, many Ḥanbalīs uphold faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic reports, but do not claim any apprehension of their real meaning or modality. This 'noninterventionist'[484] or 'noncognitive'[485] doctrine is recognised as *bi-lā kayfa* (which is conventionally translated as 'without modality', 'without asking how', or 'without further comment)'.[486] The formula was developed as a rejection against the position of

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[482] Williams maintains that up until the end of the formative period of Islamic theology (i.e., third-fourth/ninth-tenth century), many scholars had little problem with accepting anthropomorphic attributes in the form in which they were reported. See Williams, 'Aspects of the Creed,' 441-463.

[483] A hadith of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), 'God sitting upon the Throne is known, but its modality (*kayf*) is unknown,' is often adduced to describe this position.

[484] Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*, 123, n.176.

[485] Shihadeh, 'Three Apologetic Stances,' 3-4.

[486] Abrahamov, '*Bi-lā kayfa* doctrine,' 365; Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism*. Amongst the Ashʿarī scholars, the *bi-lā kayfa* formula came to mean 'without attributing any corporeal qualities to God. Frank, 'Elements,' 155-160; Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism*, 188.

pure anthropomorphism and figurative interpretation.[487] The Ḥanbalīs' noncognitive method invited criticism from rational theologians for being literalistic. It eventually led to the trial of Ibn Ḥanbal – the founder of this theological group – who was arrested and charged for promoting pure anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*).[488]

Another well-established approach to the anthropomorphic attributes is to interpret them figuratively. Adopted by rational theologians – such as the Muʿtazilīs and later the Ashʿarīs – the figurative, non-literal interpretation (*taʾwīl*) is defined as an effort to replace the prima facie sense of the Qurʾānic verses with the tropical, figurative sense by positing the problematic verses as metaphors or tropes (*majāz*). This method is based on analysis of the conventional usage of each word in Arabic language, poetry, and scripture.[489] For instance, since hand (*yad*) in Arabic can be metaphorically employed to mean 'favour', 'power', or 'aid', rational theologians interpreted God's hands to mean His favour or power. This enabled them to avoid the literal likening of God to His creation. Accordingly, the verse 'a hand of God is over their hands' [Q. 48:10] figuratively means that 'God's goodness (*iḥsān*) towards creatures is greater than their goodness towards Him' or that 'God's aid (*nuṣra*) to creatures is stronger than their aid'.

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[487] Abrahamov, '*Bi-lā kayfa* doctrine,' 378; Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism*, 189.

[488] In order to refute the charges of heresy, later Ḥanbalīs like Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) and Ibn Taymiyya adopted a more rationalistic approach. See Holtzman, 'Does God really laugh?' 184-200; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 46-69; 'Ḥanbalī Theology,' 633-641; Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*.

[489] Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*, 58; Gleave, 'Conceptions of the Literal Sense,' 183-190. After converting from the Muʿtazilī group, the founder of the Ashʿarī school, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-6), is believed to have endorsed the affirmation of the anthropomorphic attributes as they were reported, and adhered to a *bi-lā kayfa* doctrine like the Ḥanbalīs, whilst objecting to the Muʿtazilīs' figurative interpretation. However, as the Ashʿarī school inclined more towards the usage of reason in developing arguments against the Muʿtazilīs, later Ashʿarīs like Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015), al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and al-Rāzī eventually adopted figurative interpretation as their main method to treat scripture (Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism*, 6-8; Frank, 'Elements,' 168; Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism*, 234-245, 306-312). During the medieval period when the influence of the Muʿtazilīs waned, this brought about contention between the Ashʿarīs who employed figurative interpretation of the anthropomorphic attributes and the Ḥanbalīs who refused it based on their belief that such expressions should be taken literally (Bell, *Love Theory*, 47-62).

In the view of the rational theologians' reasoning, this reading is more fitted to God's nature, because His goodness or His aid is indeed greater than that of His creation. By elucidating the linguistically and theologically acceptable figurative meaning as an alternative to the prima facie one, these theologians endeavoured to avoid anthropomorphism, thereby securing divine incomparability.[490]

In addition to the *bi-lā kayfa* doctrine of the traditionalists and the figurative interpretation of rational theologians, there existed one other strategy to help deal with anthropomorphic expressions. This strategy is called 'the delegation of knowledge to God' (*tafwīḍ*). Theologians associated it with the esteemed position of the pious predecessors (*salaf*). The Ashʿarīs also approved the delegation of knowledge as another interpretive method for those who do not intend to employ figurative interpretation.[491] Similarly to figurative interpretation, this approach rejects the prima facie sense of scripture in order to dismiss pure anthropomorphism. However, unlike figurative interpretation, which aims to find the non-literal, figurative sense as an alternative, this approach does not seek another meaning, and instead entrusts the knowledge of the intended meaning entirely to God.[492] With respect to this, Shihadeh writes:

> Others, especially within the *kalām* tradition, espoused the 'stronger' attitude
> of 'delegation' (*tafwīḍ*, which means the same as *taslīm* 'acquiescent assent'),
> whereby one affirms merely the words in ambiguous scriptural statements as
> they are in their original form, and suspends the ordinary meanings thereof,

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[490] El-Rouayheb, 'Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 275; Spevack, *The Archetypal*, 128-129.
[491] Hoover, 'Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya,' 269.
[492] El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 275-287; Spevack, *The Archetypal*, 126-133.

'delegating' the matter to God. For them, modality is inseparable from the ordinary meaning of an expression; wherefore, it will be irrational to affirm the latter but suspend the former. Both attitudes are ascribed by their proponents to the pious predecessors (*salaf*).[493]

In contrast to the *bi-lā kayfa* formula, which accepts the prima facie sense and denies the knowledge of its modality when applied to God, delegation affirms the divine message in the original manner and denies our ability to understand its meaning entirely. El-Rouayheb analyses the difference between delegation and the *bi-lā kayfa* formula as follows:

> The former [delegation] is that we do not know the meaning of a word such as *istawā* or *yad* when used of God, but know that it does not mean 'to sit' or 'hand', while the latter [*bi-lā kayfa*] is that we do know what the expressions mean, but do not know what it is like for God to be seated or have a hand.[494]

Al-Shaʿrānī perceives Ibn ʿArabī as a proponent of delegation and acquiescent assent (*taslīm*) who also disregarded figurative interpretation. It should be noted, however, that al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of delegation seems rather similar to the *bi-lā kayfa* formula. One of his passages reads:

> They [theologians] were then divided in their opinions over whether they should interpret the ambiguous expression or delegate (*yufawwiḍ*) the

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[493] Shihadeh, 'Three Apologetic Stances,' 4.
[494] El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 282.

knowledge of its meaning. That is to say, to delegate the intention of it (*murād*) to God, while declaring Him incomparable (*tanzīh*) to the prima facie sense of the expression (*ẓāhir al-lafẓ*); and this is our state of delegation. The pious predecessors adopted acquiescent assent, whereas the late scholars (*khalaf*) opted for figurative interpretation.[495]

Following this passage, al-Shaʿrānī describes the pious predecessors' acquiescent assent as having faith in what God has reported in the way He has intended, leaving the knowledge of its modality to God without any inquiry as to what it really is. This comment implies acceptance of the prima facie sense, but denial of its modality. If this is the case, it is the very definition of the *bi-lā kayfa* theory, rather than that of delegation. Al-Shaʿrānī then connects this view with Ibn ʿArabī, by way of evidencing the latter's loyalty to the pious predecessors.[496] As we shall see next, however, this position is only one side of Ibn ʿArabī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes. His real intention is to establish the problematic expressions as aspects of ontological similarity between God and the world.

4.1.2. Ibn ʿArabī on the Synthesis of *Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh*

Regardless of their differences, the three approaches I have explained above all agree on two points: the espousal of divine incomparability and the rejection of literal anthropomorphism. Consequently, and in the view of the theologians, the notions of *tanzīh* (which establishes God's uniqueness) and *tashbīh* (which compares God to His

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[495] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 141-142.
[496] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 142-145.

creation) are incompatible. This explains the negative reaction of Ibn ʿArabī's opponents against his synthesis of 'divine incomparability' and 'anthropomorphism' (which can also be translated, as I we shall see, as divine immanence or divine similarity).[497] In what follows, I summarise Ibn ʿArabī's approach to synthesising *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*, with a special emphasis on the criticism it incited from certain Ashʿarī scholars, such as al-Biqāʿī and Ibn al-Ahdal. Later on, Ibn ʿArabī's view will be compared to al-Shaʿrānī's synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*.

As I noted in Chapter 1, based on the theory of ontological divine self-manifestation, Ibn ʿArabī sees the world as simultaneously He and not He.[498] In other words, from one perspective, the world is God as His loci, and in this sense He is immanent in creation and similar to it (*tashbīh*). From another perspective, however, the world is not God in reality, because His essence, which is the only existence in the cosmos, is absolutely incomparable to the world's beings (*tanzīh*). Ibn ʿArabī argues that this thesis is drawn from the observation of two distinct relations (*nisbatayn*) through which God reveals Himself in scripture: the relation of divine incomparability on the one hand and 'the relation of the divine descent to people's imagination through striking divine immanence' (*nisba tanazzul ilā al-khayāl bi-ḍarb min al-tashbīh*) on the other.[499] The former relation is shown in the verse 'nothing is like Him', whereas the latter is suggested in anthropomorphic passages, such as 'wherever you may see, there is a face of God' [Q. 2:115], amongst others. According to Ibn ʿArabī, the faculty of

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[497] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 68-76.
[498] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 112-115, 361-369.
[499] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 3. In Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 277, it is translated as 'descent to the imagination through striking a kind of similarity'. I chose the word 'divine immanence' for the translation of *tashbīh*, as 'similarity' alone does not really transmit the implication of the cosmological resemblance that occurs between God and the world through His self-manifestations and the doctrine of the oneness of existence; it must be noted, however, that for Ibn ʿArabī, God is not literally similar to His creation in terms of His essence.

imagination, not reason, allows one to realise divine manifestations in creation. Therefore, it is said that God descends to people's imagination in order for His immanence in the world to be perceived by it.[500]

In Ibn ʿArabī's view, a mystic who has realised the reality of the cosmos being He/not He, and affirmed the notions of divine incomparability and immanence, is called the possessor of the two eyes (*dhuʾ-l-ʿaynayn*). He can see God both as one in His essence and many through His manifestations in the world.[501] This does not mean that Ibn ʿArabī believes in pure anthropomorphism in the sense of assuming physical or corporeal features in God. For him, the world's beings are the images of His manifestations, and as such they are not identical to Him in a real sense. Ibn ʿArabī thus approves of the notion of *tashbīh* as far as it is understood in relation to cosmological divine self-manifestation and the doctrine of the oneness of existence. In respect of this, El-Rouayheb writes as follows:

> According to Ibn ʿArabī and his followers, the tension between the *tanzīh* demanded by theology and the *tashbīh* suggested by certain passages in the Qurʾān and Sunna was ultimately resolved by invoking the notion of divine epiphany or manifestation (*tajallī*). God is in Himself radically different from anything created, but He can manifest Himself in the world of created phenomena. All references to God's anthropomorphic and spatial attributes should be understood to refer to the divine epiphanies, and not to the divine

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[500] According to Ibn ʿArabī, in the world of imagination, which stands between the spiritual world and the corporeal world, formless things become corporealised. It is where the divine self-manifestations take place. For more details on the role of the faculty of imagination and the world of imagination, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 115-118; *Imaginal Worlds*, 70-79; 'Ibn Arabi.'
[501] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 356-363.

Self.[502]

Ibn ʿArabī's approach to *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* through the theory of divine self-manifestation was shared by his later followers, such as the Shāfiʿī Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690) and ʿAbd al-Ghanī Nābulusī, both of whom openly defended the tenet of the oneness of existence. In their view, despite his espousal of God's immanence in the world, Ibn ʿArabī was not an upholder of literal anthropomorphism, as he would immediately stress the otherness of God's essence and the oneness of His single reality.[503]

In modern scholarship, Ibn ʿArabī's idea of the synthesis of divine incomparability and divine immanence is considered one of the central doctrines of his mysticism.[504] It was also a controversial topic for his adversaries. As I discussed in Chapter 1, one of Ibn ʿArabī's critics, al-Biqāʿī, describes the objective of the mystical path according to Ibn ʿArabī as realising God's immanence in the world's beings yet affirming His incomparability to them. Al-Biqāʿī then objects to this teaching, for it leads to justifying the idol-worshippers who see God's presence in worldly objects, thereby identifying God with creation.[505] With respect to this, al-Biqāʿī quotes part of the poem from Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, which goes as follows:

If you only speak of His incomparability (*tanzīh*), you limit Him (*muqayyid*).

And if you only talk about His immanence (*tashbīh*), you define Him

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[502] El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 302.
[503] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 312-346. For al-Nābulusī, see Akkach, *ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī*.
[504] Izutsu, *Sufism*, 48-87; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 68-76, 356-378.
[505] al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 41-53.

(*muḥaddid*).

If you speak of the two, you are right.

Then, you are an Imam and a master (*sayyid*) in mystic knowledge.[506]

According to Ibn ʿArabī, since God manifested Himself in the world's beings, one has to declare God both incomparable and immanent in order to complete the mystic path. For al-Biqāʿī, however, the idea of divine immanence in the world is utterly unacceptable. Ibn al-Ahdal also adduces the same part of the above poem, introducing it as testament to Ibn ʿArabī's synthesis of divine incomparability and immanence (*al-jamʿ bayna al-tanzīh wa-l-tashbīh*). Ibn al-Ahdal then condemns it as an admission of gross anthropomorphism that promotes literal identification between God and creation.[507]

As I showed in Chapter 3, in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, al-Shaʿrānī supports the combination of divine incomparability and immanence based on the theory of ontological divine self-manifestation.[508] However, and as we shall see in the current chapter, this does not encapsulate his entire mysticism. Elsewhere in his theological works addressed to non-advanced mystics and theologians, al-Shaʿrānī endorses the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* in the different context of visionary divine self-manifestation, thereby reinterpreting Ibn ʿArabī's teaching in relation to his own mystical and theological worldview. Before considering this topic, let me first investigate al-Shaʿrānī's rejection of figurative interpretation.

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[506] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 55/70; al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-ghabī*, 44.
[507] Ibn Ahdal, *Kashf al-ghiṭāʾ*, 189-190/vol. 2, 646.
[508] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 125-152.

4.2. Al-Shaʿrānī on Figurative Interpretation

As I noted earlier, Ibn ʿArabī was dismissive of the use of figurative interpretation and speculative theology.[509] For him, mystical experience is superior to human reasoning. The divine anthropomorphic attributes should therefore be treated through the mystical discipline of the oneness of existence and understood in relation to divine immanence in the world. Al-Shaʿrānī adopted the same negative stance on human reasoning, expressing his disapproval of figurative interpretation in many of his theological works intended for both advanced mystics and non-advanced mystics. These texts include: *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, *Kashf al-ḥijāb*, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, *al-Qawāʿid al-khiḍriyya*, *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, and *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*. Al-Shaʿrānī's repeated rejections of figurative interpretation suggest that this is one of the chief aims of his theological project. However, his dismissal of figurative interpretation does not necessarily mean that he deals with the anthropomorphic attributes in the way Ibn ʿArabī does. I will discuss this point in the next section.

The main concern of the present section is to detail al-Shaʿrānī's denial of figurative interpretation. He borrows most of his arguments on this issue from Ibn ʿArabī's *Lawāqiḥ al-asrār wa-l-lawāʾiḥ al-anwār* and *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. Although Ibn ʿArabī's criticism of figurative interpretation has been pointed out in recent scholarship, its details have barely been examined.[510] Moreover, since *Lawāqiḥ al-asrār* remains unstudied, a recurring reference to some of its passages throughout al-Shaʿrānī's texts merits special attention, especially in terms of understanding Ibn

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[509] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 73, 201-202; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 281, 285.
[510] Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 199-202; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 275.

ʿArabī's teaching.[511]

Al-Shaʿrānī's positions on figurative interpretation are founded on two arguments: (1) that there is originally no metaphor and anthropomorphism in scripture, and (2) that the figurative sense with which the rational theologians replaced the prima facie sense is in fact another form of anthropomorphism. It will become clear that al-Shaʿrānī, following Ibn ʿArabī's idea, broadens the meaning of *tashbīh* by applying it not only to pure anthropomorphism, which can be caused by literally having faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes, but also to another form of anthropomorphism, which is itself originated through the non-literal, figurative meaning.

It bears reiterating that al-Shaʿrānī's rejection of figurative interpretation is primarily addressed to mystics and theologians. For commoners, on the other hand, he rather recommends figurative interpretation and urges them to replace the prima facie sense with the figurative one, in order to prevent them from upholding literal anthropomorphism.

4.2.1. Anthropomorphism in Scripture

A staring point of al-Shaʿrānī's denial of figurative interpretation is his conviction that a person who interprets scripture in an attempt to avoid pure anthropomorphism trusts reason over the divine message. Such a person is therefore weaker in faith than one who simply believes in the prima facie sense of God's revelations. By interpreting scripture figuratively, there is also the risk of arriving at something that is not what God

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[511] *Lawāqiḥ al-asrār* was reportedly compiled by one of Ibn ʿArabī's disciple, Ibn Sawdakīn (d. 636/1248), as a collection of his teacher's remarks. Although the text was recently published in 2015, I have unfortunately not been able to access it.

originally intended.[512] In addition to this, for al-Shaʿrānī, one of the fundamental issues concerning figurative interpretation is that the anthropomorphism which rational theologians attempt to avoid is not actually found in scripture. This is based on his view that the metaphor or trope (*majāz*) does not originally exist in Arabic.

Al-Shaʿrānī's view on this point is attributed to Ibn ʿArabī's *Lawāqiḥ al-asrār*. Quoting a passage from *Lawāqiḥ al-asrār*, in which it is stated that every scriptural expression is employed in a literal, veridical sense (*ḥaqīqatan*), al-Shaʿrānī writes as follows:

Those who have realised the truth have already agreed that there is no metaphor (*majāz*) in Arabic; people employed the terms in regard to what they referred to literally (*ḥaqīqatan*). Consequently, they applied the word 'hand' (*yad*) to refer to power (*qudra*), organs (*jāriḥa*), and also to favour (*maʿrūf*). Even if someone claims that a hand in each case is employed metaphorically and hence they have to be transferred (*naql*) [to a figurative sense], there is no way of doing this [because it is not intended to be metaphorical]. When they said that 'someone is a lion', they put it that way in a literal sense. This is based on their language [i.e. Arabic] in which a courageous person is [conventionally] designated a lion. Therefore, they used the term, 'lion', [in order to refer to a courageous person], not metaphorically but literally (*ḥaqīqatan wa-lā majāzan*).

If the matter is like this, then you will understand that all of the reports in the Qurʾān and the Sunna where a reference to the divine hand, eye, side,

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[512] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 93; *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 248.

fingers and so forth is made, none of them requires the comparing of God to creation (*tashbīh*). This is because it [the comparing of God to creation] only occurs through employing certain expressions such as [the preposition of] 'like' (*mithl*) which means being equal (*musāwī*), or 'as' (*kāf*) of an attribute [in order to indicate the comparison]. Things without these two are nothing but equivocal terms (*alfāẓ ishtirāk*) [and not metaphors]. Accordingly, when the anthropomorphic attributes were revealed in the Qurʾān and the Sunna, they were attributed to each entity (*dhāt*) [in a literal sense] in accordance with what the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of that entity demands [and hence, there is no figurative sense and no anthropomorphism to avoid].[513]

In the conventional view, 'someone is a lion' is a metaphorical expression, according to which a person's courageousness is likened to that of a lion. Hence, the meaning of 'lion' must be transferred to the non-literal, figurative sense of a courageous person. In contrast to this, in the view of al-Shaʿrānī, the word 'lion' can be understood as literally meaning 'a courageous person'. Rather than endeavouring to uncover the expression's alternative, non-literal meaning, the expression is perceived to represent a separate reality from that of a ferocious animal. For al-Shaʿrānī, the same thing is said of the divine anthropomorphic attributes; they are reported not in a figurative sense but in a literal sense. This is underpinned by the observation that they are accompanied by certain prepositions such as 'like' or 'as', which indicate the comparison of God to something else (*tashbīh*). Henceforth, there is no need to engage in figurative

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[513] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 94; *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 247; *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 72a; *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 118a-b. *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1. 147.

interpretation to avoid anthropomorphism. The meanings of the anthropomorphic attributes can be affirmed in their original manner, even if the reality of those attributes is not known.

As the above passage shows, al-Shaʿrānī sees the anthropomorphic expressions as equivocal terms (*alfāẓ ishtirāk*), each of which signifies a separate reality.[514] An equivocal term is defined as a word which carries multiple meanings in one form and is applicable to different referents. For example, the word *yad* in Arabic can mean a physical hand, power, and favour, and *ʿayn* can refer to an eye, a spring of water, and the letter *ʿayn* of the Arabic alphabet; yet each reality is evidently distinct from the other. According to al-Shaʿrānī, rational theologians understand equivocal terms in relation to the dichotomy between literal speech (*ḥaqīqa*) and non-literal, figurative speech (*majāz*).[515] For instance, in keeping with the view of the rational theologians, al-Shaʿrānī argues that the word 'finger' (*iṣbaʿ*) is an equivocal term which is applied to a physical hand in the literal sense, and to a favour (*niʿma*) or an influence (*athar*) in the figurative sense. Hence, God's fingers as alluded to in the following hadith, 'the heart of a believer lies between two fingers of the Merciful one', are interpreted metaphorically to mean God's dual favour of granting existence (*ʾījād*) and succour (*imdād*).[516] By this means, the rational theologians reject the prima facie sense that could lead to pure anthropomorphism, opting instead for the figurative sense that suits God's

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[514] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 148. The idea is originally taken from Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 95.

[515] The dichotomy between *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* was most likely conceived after the 3rd/9th century by the Muʿtazilīs as a hermeneutical device to avoid reading the anthropomorphic expressions at face value. For more on this, see Heinrichs, 'On the Genesis,' 111-117; Ovadia, *Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, 201-206.

[516] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 148. Cf., Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 95-96.

incomparability and authority.[517]

On the other hand, al-Shaʿrānī's reading of the anthropomorphic attributes as being equivocal terms disposes of the dichotomy between the literal sense and the metaphorical sense. According to him, anthropomorphic expressions are applicable both to God and to His creatures in a literal sense; furthermore, they are understood without figurative interpretation. This does not blur the sheer distinction between God and creation, because each term refers to the distinct reality of its referent.[518] For instance, God's hand and a human being's hand have no resemblance to each other, and both can be acknowledged in a literal sense on condition that the reality of the divine hand is never believed to be known. Al-Shaʿrānī states that this is supported by the divine statement that 'nothing is like Him', in which God Himself explicitly denied anthropomorphism, that is, actual similarity between the divine and the world.[519] Despite this, the rational theologians wrongly imagine that the affirmation of the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes amounts to literal anthropomorphism, and thus choose to read them as metaphors, interpreting them figuratively. In opposition to this, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that, because of the sheer distinction between God's reality and that of His creation, those attributes do not actually lead to anthropomorphism.[520]

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[517] On the usage of *ḥaqīqa-majāz* and *ẓāhir-taʾwīl*, see Weigelt, 'Samaritan Bible,' 223; Gleave, 'Conceptions of the Literal Sense,' 183-203.

[518] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 96.

[519] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 147-148.

[520] Ibn ʿArabī expresses a similar opinion in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* as follows:

> I am amazed at two groups of the Ashʿarīs and the pure anthropomorphist (*mujassima*) in their mistakes concerning an equivocal term. How can they bring this to the likening of God to the creatures (*tashbīh*) when it only occurs between two things through the word 'like' (*mithl*) or 'as' of an attribute (*ṣifa*) in language? And it is difficult to find in the Qurʾān and the Sunna anthropomorphism as they imagined […]. [Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 43 (Translated in Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 73)].

Moreover, and as we shall see shortly, the practice of figurative interpretation, though aimed at avoiding anthropomorphism, actually engenders another type of anthropomorphism.

Here, al-Shaʿrānī's explicit stance on the denial of the figurative sense of anthropomorphic expressions is worth noting, particularly because his other teachers and colleagues, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī,[521] Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ramlī,[522] and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī[523] engaged in figurative interpretation.[524] This is another case that demonstrates the important influence of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings on al-Shaʿrānī's thought. Ibn ʿArabī's dismissive attitude towards figurative interpretation is most probably related to his sympathy with certain principles of the Ẓāhirī school of Law, which also denied the presence of the figurative sense in the Qurʾān.[525]

Another striking finding here is the similarity between Ibn ʿArabī/al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn Taymiyya in terms of the rejection of the figurative sense. As Shah observes, Ibn Taymiyya denounced both the occurrence of the figurative sense in scripture as well as the dichotomy between the literal and the figurative senses, attributing them to the later development advanced by theological groups such as the Muʿtazila.[526] Ibn ʿArabī/al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn Taymiyya also agree in their opposition to the application of

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[521] al-Anṣārī, *Iḥkām*, vol. 1, 49, 67-68. Nevertheless, al-Shaʿrānī sees al-Anṣārī as a scholar who was dismissive of figurative interpretation. See al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 2a.
[522] al-Ramlī, *Fatāwā*, vol.4, 286-285, printed on the margins of Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā al-fiqhiyya*.
[523] For Ibn Ḥajar's position, see El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 271-275.
[524] As for al-Suyūṭī's view on this subject, see Holtzman and Ovadia, 'On Divine Aboveness,' 263-264; Shah, 'Philological Endeavours (Part II),' 60.
[525] Osman, *The Ẓāhirī Madhhab*, 43, 46, 212. For the reasons behind the Ẓāhirīs' rejection of the figurative sense, see Heinrichs, 'On the Figurative (*majāz*),' 260-265. With regard to the question of whether Ibn ʿArabī was a member of the Ẓāhirī school of Law, see Dajani, 'Ibn ʿArabī's Conception,' 90-150.
[526] Shah, 'Philological Endeavours (Part II),' 44-53; 'Classical Islamic Discourse,' 334-339. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya held a similar position. See, Holtzman and Ovadia, 'On Divine Aboveness,' 258; Shah, 'Philological Endeavours (Part II),' 53-59.

figurative interpretation. [527] Nevertheless, as Hoover notes, Ibn ʿArabī differs fundamentally from Ibn Taymiyya in his view of the mystical discipline, and so does al-Shaʿrānī. As I will later demonstrate, al-Shaʿrānī clearly disagrees with Ibn Taymiyya and other Ḥanbalī scholars over the treatment of the anthropomorphic attributes within the context of the mystical teaching.

4.2.2. Figurative Sense as a Form of Anthropomorphism

After rejecting figurative interpretation by explaining that there is no metaphor in scripture and no anthropomorphism through which God is compared to creation, al-Shaʿrānī sets out to refute figurative interpretation further by demonstrating that it engenders another kind of anthropomorphism. For this belief, he refers to the account of God sitting upon the throne (*istawāʾ ʿalā al-arsh*) [Q. 7:54, 20:5, 25:59, 32:4]. As is well known, the rational theologians refused to acknowledge the prima facie sense of this passage in order to avoid assuming God's physical movement from one place to another.[528] They thus interpret 'sitting' (*istiwāʾ*) figuratively as 'God's conquering' or 'God's making Himself a master of' (*istīlāʾ*). This interpretation derives from a line of poetry that goes: 'Bishr conquered Iraq' or 'Bishr made himself a master of Iraq' (*istawā Bishr ʿalā al-ʿIrāq*, which literally means that Bishr sat upon Iraq). Regarding the throne upon which God is revealed to have sat, it is interpreted as 'a seat of sovereignty' (*sarīr al-mulk*).[529] Hence, the figurative sense of 'God sitting upon the

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[527] Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 47-48.

[528] al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 17, 14.

[529] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 651; al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 157, 312. By saying that 'God sits upon a seat of sovereignty in the way that befits Him', al-Suyūṭī intends to avoid interpreting sitting (*istawā*) as conquering (*istawlā*).

throne' is specified as 'God gaining control of the world' or 'God possessing power (*istiqdār*) over the world'.[530] This became a standard interpretation of the verse of the throne amongst the Muʿtazilīs and the late Ashʿarīs such as al-Juwaynī and al-Rāzī.[531]

Defying this interpretive approach, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that as soon as the theologians replace the prima facie sense of God sitting with His gaining control of the world (*istawlā*), they come to liken God to the very meaning they have just drawn. In his view, the figurative sense proposed by the rational theologians is a newly originated being, and as such, God should not be compared to it. With respect to this, al-Shaʿrānī gives the following account:

> Then, the following thing has become certain to us: God is not likened to corporeal bodies (*al-ajsām*). [If He is likened to corporeal bodies] then He becomes physically settled (*mustaqirr*).[532] Also God is not likened to conceptual meanings (*maʿānī*). [If He is likened to conceptual meanings] then His sitting (*istiwāʾu-hu*) becomes His gaining sovereignty (*istīlāʾ fī-qahr*). If this is the case then we will say: whoever relates God to the conceptual meanings has already slipped into the likening of God (*tashbīh*) to the originated meanings (*maʿānī muḥdatha*). If the likening of God to the originated beings (*muḥdathāt*; i.e. God gaining sovereignty) has already occurred [through figurative interpretation], then how could they [the rational theologians] disprove those [anthropomorphists] who advocated settling

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[530] al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 22, 6-7; al-Juwaynī, *Lumaʿ al-adilla*, 108.
[531] For more details on this topic, see Achtar, 'Contact Between Theology'; Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism*.
[532] As for the rational theologians' refutation of taking God sitting as His settling in repose, see Fitzgerald, 'Creation in Tafsīr al-Kabīr.'

(*istiqrār*), which is one of the attributes of sensory perception (*ṣifāt al-ḥiss*),

when both of them [i.e. settling and gaining sovereignty] are originated.[533]

Here, al-Shaʿrānī expands the definition of anthropomorphism to include not only the likening of God to the physical and corporeal features, but also the likening of God to the figurative meanings that are drawn through figurative interpretation. In his view, comparing God to the meanings newly conceived by human beings equates to bestowing upon Him anthropomorphic features. As such, the use of figurative interpretation should not be permitted.

Furthermore, al-Shaʿrānī demonstrates that figurative interpretation leads to a change in God, thereby contradicting His perfection. As I noted earlier, the rational theologians interpret the throne to mean God's sovereignty (*mulk*), the seat of which God comes to possess (*istawlā*). Refuting this reading, al-Shaʿrānī argues that the reality of possessing (*istīlāʾ*) requires the occurrence of a new qualification (*ṭurūʾ waṣf*). This is based on the observation that someone only comes to possess something following a state in which he did not possess. Applied to the verses in which God sits upon the throne, this means that the absence of God's sovereignty of the world precedes the origination of His sovereignty.[534] This conclusion is absurd, because it is impossible to assume that God did not possess a certain attribute in the beginning, only to acquire it later.

It is noteworthy that al-Shaʿrānī's approach here is similar to the Ḥanbalī jurist, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200). According to Ibn al-Jawzī, the reality of *istawlā* is that someone

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[533] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 95; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 149-150; *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 47b; *al-Mīzān al-sunniyya*, fol. 19a. A similar argument is found in Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 43-44; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 73.

[534] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 95-96.

comes to possess something after he did not. Theologically speaking, this meaning is not suited to God, as He has been in possession of everything from eternity. The figurative sense that the rational theologians propose as an alternative to the prima facie sense thus turns out to be illogical, not least for suggesting that there is something God has not yet possessed. Ibn al-Jawzī therefore denounces figurative interpretation, likening it to the unbeliever (*mulḥid*) stripping God of His attributes (*taʿṭīl*) or the anthropomorphist (*mujassima*) comparing God to His creatures (*tashbīh*).[535] Yet again, the significant difference between al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn al-Jawzī as well as other Ḥanbalīs lies in their treatment of the mystical discipline, in particular their stances on *tashbīh*. I will return to this subject shortly.

Following these arguments, al-Shaʿrānī concludes his refutation of figurative interpretation as follows:

> Sitting (*istiwāʾ*) is a well-known attribution (*nisba maʿlūma*), and it is related
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> to each referent [whether it is God or humans] in accordance with what the
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> reality of that referent requires.[536] If this is the case, then how can one say
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> that God sat upon the throne just like Bishr sat upon Iraq (*istawā*)? We
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> already know Bishr in definition and in reality, and we know how Bishr's
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> sitting is attributed to Iraq [i.e. in the sense of conquering or gaining control
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> of Iraq]. Is then the reality of the One who sits upon the throne analogous to
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> the reality of Bishr who sat upon Iraq, so that a correlation (*muqābala*) and
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> correspondence (*munāsaba*) [between God's sitting and Bishr's sitting]

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[535] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 500. With regard to al-Rāzī's response to this kind of criticism, see al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 20, 7.

[536] This part is originally found in Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 44, translated in in Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 73.

becomes real? [It cannot be analogous, as their realities are fundamentally different.] We have already realised that 'nothing is like Him', and accordingly, there is no correspondence [between the divine reality and the reality of Bishr].[537]

The conclusion is that they [i.e. those who figuratively interpret the divine message] only departed from the likening of God to a temporally originated thing [*tashbīh bi-muḥdathin mā*; i.e. His physical sitting] to the likening of God to another temporally originated thing [i.e. His conquering or gaining control of the world], which is better than the former in terms of its meaning [*fawqah fī l-maʿnā*]. Thus, human reason in its attempt to declare God incomparable did not reach the level of 'nothing is like Him' in the end.[538]

In the first paragraph, al-Shaʿrānī perceives 'sitting' as a common attribution applicable both to God and to creatures. In keeping with the notion of the equivocal terms, this does not mean that the reality that each sitting refers to is the same. The reality of Bishr's sitting is of course known, whereas the divine sitting is not. Since nothing is like God, it is impossible to apply the figurative sense of Bishr's sitting to that of God by positing a correspondence between them.

Building upon these observations, in the second paragraph al-Shaʿrānī reiterates that the rational theologians' attempts to replace the prima facie sense with the figurative sense in the hope of avoiding anthropomorphism ironically leads to another kind of anthropomorphism; they only shift from the likening of God's action to the

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[537] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 96.
[538] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 96.

physical sitting, to the likening of His action to the newly originated meaning of conquering or sovereignty.[539] They thus fail to attain God's incomparability, which they had originally aimed to secure.[540]

As a possible alternative to figurative interpretation, al-Shaʿrānī offers a different type of interpretation that does not require the likening of God to originated beings; namely, interpretation of the scripture through the scripture (*tafsīr al-qurʾān bi-l-qurʾān*). Here, al-Shaʿrānī refers to the text of the Ashʿarī theologian, Abū Ṭāhir al-Qazwīnī (d. 756/1355), entitled *Sirāj al-ʿuqūl*.[541] According to al-Qazwīnī, 'God sitting' can be read as 'completion of the creation' (*istitmām*). This is based on the use

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[539] Another example demonstrating how figurative interpretation incurs anthropomorphism is observed in the hadith, 'God descends to the world's heaven every night'. Al-Shaʿrānī argues that most of the rational theologians, including the traditionalists, prefer to interpret this hadith to mean either a descent of His command or His angel, without taking it as a descent of God Himself. However, their interpretation that God's angel or His command descends from Him leads to confining God in a specific direction, thereby promoting anthropomorphism. In al-Shaʿrānī's view, the relation (*nisba*) between God and His attribute of descent to the world's heaven should not be denied, and it ought to be believed as such without figurative interpretation (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 162).

[540] According to al-Shaʿrānī, divine incomparability is secured only by having faith in scriptural expressions, such as 'nothing is like Him', and not through reasoning. This is because God would then be a substratum for the act of human reasoning, which is absurd. In relation to this, quoting his teacher ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, al-Shaʿrānī writes:

> Then our teacher [ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ] said as follows. God only ordered those who think with reason (*ʿuqalāʾ*) to declare Him incomparable with what He has transmitted through revelation, but not with their reason […]. It is prohibited that God's essence becomes a substratum (*maḥall*) for what the unbelievers (*mulḥidūn*) described Him with. God is incomparable in His essence by Himself (*li-nafsi-hi*) and He does not become incomparable by a servant's declaring God incomparable (*tanzīh*). For this reason, the divine incomparability amongst scholars is achieved only by knowing it, and not by making it [through reasoning] (*huwa ʿilmun lā ʿamalun*). For, if it were by making it [through reasoning], God who is incomparable by Himself would become a substratum for the effect of this act (*ʿamal*) […]. We can never attain God's absolute incomparability (*tanzīh muṭlaq*) disengaged from the likening of God to the creatures (*tashbīh*), because His absolute incomparability is only provided by revelation (*sumiʿa fī l-sharʿ*) and it is not found in reason (*ʿaql*). The highest point their reasons have reached is their declaration that God's sitting is compared to that of Bishr over his kingdom [i.e. gaining sovereignty] [al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 96-97].

[541] The copy of the manuscript is available at the British Library. However, I obtained access to it too late to consider it here. Unfortunately, little is known about who al-Qazwīnī was. Given al-Shaʿrānī's frequent references to this figure, further research on him and his text is necessary in order to fully understand al-Shaʿrānī's theological position.

of *istawā* in other Qurʾānic verses, such as 'when he came of age and became mature (*istawā*)' [Q. 28:14] in the sense of 'when his youth was completed (*istatamma*)', or 'like a seed that produces its shoots and strengthens them so that they become thick and settle upon their stalks (*istawā*)' [Q. 48:29] in the sense of 'when the seed has come to a completion and become strong (*istatamma*).' Al-Qazwīnī then observes that whenever 'God sitting upon the throne' is mentioned in the Qurʾān, it always follows a reference to the divine creation of heaven and the earth [Q. 7:45; 10:3, 20:4-5, 25:59, 32:4, 57:4]. Therefore, the verse of the throne can be taken to mean that God's creation settled upon the throne (*istawā*) – that is to say, His creation came to completion (*istatamma*) with the creation of the throne, which is the greatest creation of all. This interpretive method differs from figurative interpretation in that it neither relies on external sources other than scripture, nor replaces the prima facie sense with the figurative sense. Al-Shaʿrānī notes that al-Qazwīnī's approach is distinguished that of both early and late scholars, and it eventually came to be criticised.[542] This is an interesting example indicating al-Shaʿrānī's dependence on the opinion of the lesser-known, less popular Ashʿarī theologian.

Regardless of proposing a different approach to the anthropomorphic attributes, al-Shaʿrānī's focus is primarily set on affirming the attributes in relation to his worldview of God's visionary self-manifestation. It is based on this framework that a mystic can strike the perfect balance between *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*. I will now further explore this subject.

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[542] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 144-146; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 139-141.

4.3. Al-Shaʿrānī on Anthropomorphic Attributes

The objective of this section is to consider al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes and to discuss his reinterpretation and integration of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching into his own mystical and theological worldview. In particular, I will examine how al-Shaʿrānī treats the anthropomorphic attributes differently from both the theologians and from Ibn ʿArabī. As I will show, based on belief in what can be called visionary divine self-manifestation, rather than cosmological and ontological divine self-manifestation, al-Shaʿrānī upholds the notion of *tashbīh* and supports the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes for a practical purpose, while at the same time excluding the implications of pure anthropomorphism and divine immanence. The findings of this section will highlight al-Shaʿrānī's prominence in the defence of Ibn ʿArabī's thought.

In what follows, I first investigate al-Shaʿrānī's view on the anthropomorphic attributes of God, focusing on his understanding of the following notions: 'the balance' (*al-mīzān*) between the two levels of non-delimitation and delimitation; 'God's descent to people's minds' (*tanazzul lil-ʿuqūl*); and 'divine self-assimilation' (*tashbīh*) to creation through perceptual similarity. While doing so, I will clarify a practical role that faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes serves. In the following section, I turn to al-Shaʿrānī's presentation of the notion of visionary divine self-manifestation, examining in particular his reinterpretation and recontextualisation of a statement by Ibn ʿArabī. Finally, in order to further clarify al-Shaʿrānī's position, I consider the likeness of his views to those of the Ḥanbalīs, as well as his difference from them concerning their approaches to the subject of the anthropomorphic attributes.

4.3.1. The Function of Anthropomorphic Attributes

Earlier, I mentioned that al-Shaʿrānī associates Ibn ʿArabī's stance on the anthropomorphic attributes with the approach of the pious predecessors, who 'delegated' meaning to God, and upheld acquiescent assent. Although Ibn ʿArabī supports these ideas, it must be reiterated that his position is not limited to them. We have already seen that, based on the ontological theory of divine self-manifestation, Ibn ʿArabī perceives the anthropomorphic attributes in relation to the oneness of existence and divine immanence in the world's beings. Hence, the hadith that says that 'God created Adam in His image' is interpreted as 'God manifests His image in Adam who is the perfect man'. Another passage, 'I [God] am his hearing with which he hears', is taken to mean that God is indeed His servant's hearing, since there is only His essence in the cosmos. Similarly to Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī expresses support for the idea of delegating meaning to God.[543] Nevertheless, as is the case with Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī also takes another approach to the anthropomorphic attributes. As we shall see, al-Shaʿrānī employs the prima facie sense of the attributes for a practical purpose within the context of his own mystical teaching.

In order to detail al-Shaʿrānī's position on the anthropomorphic attributes, the current section focuses on three of his key ideas in his theological works – 'the balance', 'the divine descent to people's minds', and 'divine self-assimilation' – and clarifies the function of the anthropomorphic attributes. In addition to this, I will also consider the differences between al-Shaʿrānī's and Ibn ʿArabī's positions regarding these key

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[543] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 141-142.

concepts. It will emerge that the most striking feature of al-Shaʿrānī's view of *tashbīh* is that it only upholds similarity between God and the external world on a perceptual level. In other words, and contrary to Ibn ʿArabī's proposition, al-Shaʿrānī's interpretation of *tashbīh* does not signify God's ontological identification with the external world.

It needs to be reminded, first of all, that the word *mīzān* bears a resemblance to the title of al-Shaʿrānī's famous jurisprudential work, *al-Mīzān al-kubrā*, in which he develops a notion of the balance between the two extremes of the Law: stringency (*tashdīd*/ʿ*azīma*) and leniency (*takhfīf*/*rukhṣa*). With regard to this, Dajani argues that according to al-Shaʿrānī, every legal issue can have two rulings: the more stringent ruling for those who are able to execute it, and the more lenient ruling for those who are unable to follow the former. Through the notion of the balance of the Law, al-Shaʿrānī attempts to clarify the ostensible contradictions that appear in scripture, thereby allowing the co-existence of different legal opinions suitable for people of different abilities.[544]

On the contrary, in his theological works, al-Shaʿrānī considers the balance in relation to the theory of divine self-manifestation. For his part, this balance is composed of the two levels of divine self-manifestation: non-delimitation (*iṭlāq*) and delimitation (*taqyīd*). It must be noted that al-Shaʿrānī takes two different approaches to the concepts of non-delimitation and delimitation – namely, ontological/cosmological and perceptual/textual.

On the one hand, in his support of Ibn ʿArabī's ontology as discussed in Chapter 3, al-Shaʿrānī holds in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* that God manifests Himself to Himself at the divine level of non-delimitation. Following this initial manifestation, God manifests

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[544] For more on this concept, see Dajani, 'Ibn ʿArabī's Conception of *Ijtihād*,' 166-182.

Himself in the world's beings at the divine level of delimitation, making Himself immanent in them.[545] Based on this ontological worldview of divine self-manifestation, an accomplished and advanced mystic accepts the anthropomorphic attributes as testaments to God's manifestations in creation, while upholding His sheer transcendence through the perspective of His essence. Such a mystic simultaneously affirms both divine incomparability (*tanzīh*) and divine immanence (*tashbīh*), thus synthesising the two notions.[546] I demonstrated that this was al-Shaʿrānī's main position for advanced mystics.

On the other hand, in many of his other theological works addressed to non-advanced mystics and theologians, most notably in *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, al-Shaʿrānī explains divine self-manifestation from a different perspective. There, he stresses the idea that God manifests Himself to creation in scripture by describing Himself as having various attributes. According to al-Shaʿrānī, at the level of non-delimitation, God becomes manifest as incomparable to creation through the attributes of incomparability (e.g. His mightiness, loftiness, supremacy, and so on). At the level of delimitation, God reveals Himself to the world through the divine anthropomorphic attributes that make people imagine certain similarity between God and creation. In his view, the divine manifestations at these two levels ought to be upheld, as they are simply drawn from the observation of scriptural expressions.[547]

Markedly, al-Shaʿrānī identifies this level of delimitation as 'God's descent to our minds through striking similitudes that are similar to our attributes' (*tanazzul-hu*

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[545] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 171-172.
[546] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 152-153.
[547] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-khiḍriyya,* fols. 8a-12a.

li-ʿuqūli-nā bi-ḍarb min al-amthāl allatī tuwahhim al-qurb min ṣifāt-nā).[548] In order to

delineate al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of the balance between the two levels, let us

examine the details of his idea of the divine descent to the mind, along with his espousal

of the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes and his interpretation of

tashbīh.

To my knowledge, the expression 'God's descent to people's minds through

striking similitudes (sg. *mathal*; pl. *amthāl*)' does not appear in Ibn ʿArabī's writings. It

is true to say that it is similar to his aforementioned statement '[God's] descent to the

imagination through striking a kind of similarity [i.e. through divine immanence]'

(*tanazzul ilā al-khayāl bi-ḍarb min al-tashbīh*).[549] Nevertheless, as I have shown, Ibn

ʿArabī means here that one can perceive God's immanence and see His manifestations

in creation through the faculty of the imagination. In the main body of *al-Mīzān*

al-dharriyya, and in the context of ontological divine self-manifestation, al-Shaʿrānī

certainly refers to Ibn ʿArabī's expression 'God's descent to people's imagination'.[550]

However, when al-Shaʿrānī treats the idea of 'God's descent to peoples' minds through

striking similitudes' in his other texts, the expression bears little to no implication of

divine immanence. In respect of this, a passage in *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya* reads as

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[548] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 15b. In *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* and *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, it appears as 'God's descent to people's minds through striking similarity in the imagination' (*tanazzul li-ʿuqūl-him bi-ḍarb min al-tashbīh al-khayālī*) [al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 48; *al-Qawāʿid al-sunniyya*, fol. 14a]. In *Kashf al-ḥijāb*, it is introduced as God's descent to our minds (*tanazzul al-ḥaqq taʿālā ilā-ʿuqūli-nā*) [al-Shaʿrānī, *Kashf al-ḥijāb*, 110]. Interestingly, halfway through the argument in the last section of *al-Mīzān al-dhariyya* – which begins with: 'Let us start to talk about the balance (*mīzān*); all the sections [in this text] were preparation (*tamhīd*) for the understanding of it' – al-Shaʿrānī proceeds to discuss 'God's descent to people's minds through striking similitudes and assimilating Himself [to creatures]' (*tanazzul ilā ʿuqūl-him bi-ḍarb min al-tamthīl wa-l-tashbīh*) [al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 156, 172]. Although *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* is addressed to advanced mystics who are ready to accept Ibn ʿArabī's mystical monism, this shift of the subject towards the end of the text suggests that al-Shaʿrānī's ultimate focus was to propose the teaching of the balance that treats divine self-manifestation at the visionary, rather than the ontological, level.
[549] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 3, translated in Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 277.
[550] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 55-56.

follows:

> The attributes through which God descended to people's minds (*tanazzala*
>
> *al-ḥaqq taʿālā bi-hā lil-ʿuqūl*) do not require the [actual] likening of any
>
> divine attributes to created beings (*tashbīh*). They are merely [used by God]
>
> for striking similitudes and making Himself known to [people's] minds
>
> (*taʿrīf*). This is why neither the prophets nor the founders of the schools of
>
> Law needed figurative interpretation, for they knew that the
>
> anthropomorphic attributes (*ṣifāt al-tashbīh*) are not admitted to the divine
>
> from any aspects, regardless of what creation understands from those
>
> attributes […].[551]

As the passage indicates, a demand for figurative interpretation only arises from the

assumption that faith in the prima facie sense of the divine attributes leads believers to

comparing God to creation. The prophets did not employ figurative interpretation,

because they knew that the anthropomorphic attributes – which are the similitudes

through which God descends to people's minds – do not engender literal

anthropomorphism.

Al-Shaʿrānī expounds upon the notion of the similitudes by relating them to the

Qurʾānic idea of God's striking similitudes or symbols (*ḍarb al-amthāl*).[552] In reference

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[551] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 7a,

[552] Ibn ʿArabī discusses a similar idea of God's striking similitudes. He insists that the whole cosmos is full of similitudes for God thorough which believers come to know that He is He. However, his context differs markedly from that of al-Shaʿrānī. In Ibn ʿArabī's case, the striking of similitudes is discussed in relation to the ontology of divine self-manifestation, whereas for al-Shaʿrānī, it has to do with the process of God's descent to people's minds through the perceptual similarity evoked by scriptural expressions.

to the divine light which the Qurʾān likens to a light in a niche ('God is the light of the heavens and the earth; the similitude (*mathal*) of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp [...] He guides whom He wills to His light and He strikes similitudes to the people' [Q. 24:35]), al-Shaʿrānī argues that it is impossible for the divine pre-eternal light to be placed in a temporally originated niche. Here, the divine light in a created niche does not reflect the divine reality; it is merely used as a symbol in order to facilitate people's understanding of what the divine light is. Following this idea, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that once that which the similitude stands for is perceived, the image of the divine light in a niche needs to be removed from people's minds, as it has served its purpose. All that is left in their minds is the image of that which the similitude represents[553], i.e. the divine guide.

Like the case of the divine light in a niche, other similitudes that God strikes in order to reveal Himself to worldly beings do not signify any actual similarity between the divine and the external world. According to al-Shaʿrānī, this is contrasted with the concept of 'likeness' (*mithl*). A likeness equates to the thing that it signifies in every aspect. In contrast, a similitude is only analogous with the thing that it intends to clarify, or its image.[554] Understanding the distinction between a likeness and a similitude enables us to affirm 'the divine form' as reported in the controversial hadiths about the

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[553] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 173; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 47. Another example is the divine pre-eternal speech (*kalām*). The divine speech is not originally accompanied by any sounds or letters, but it came down to human beings with sounds and letters so that they would understand the divine messages through them. Yet as soon as they know the meanings and remember the divine message by heart, the sounds and letters that are similitudes to the divine speech should be dismissed, for they can now recall the divine message without reciting or reading the text (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 173; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 47).

[554] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 25-27, 175. *Mithāl* is also used as a synonym for *mathal*. The distinction between *mithl* and *mathal/mithāl* is originally proposed by Ibn ʿArabī in relation to his theory of cosmological imagination. On this subject, see Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 72-77; *The Sufi Path*, 117.

dream vision of God: 'I saw my Lord in the most beautiful form' or 'in the form of a young man'. Here, the divine form is taken as God's similitude – but not His exact likeness.[555] What follows is that faith in these passages in their original manner does not entail any actual anthropomorphism, as there is no literal similarity between the divine form and the form of a young man; rather, it is incumbent upon one to believe in the hadiths as God reported them.

If the anthropomorphic attributes, as divine similitudes, do not correspond to divine reality, what exactly is the purpose of God's descent to people's minds through them, and what is the sense in having faith in them? Al-Shaʿrānī tries to answer these questions while taking into consideration human beings' recognition of God. In his view, the realities of the anthropomorphic attributes when applied to God are never known. Despite this, their prima facie sense helps people to perceive the image of God, who otherwise remains utterly unknown. Regarding this, al-Shaʿrānī writes:

> If God had not spoken to us through His names and attributes, regardless of
>
> the fact that [the realities of] these names and attributes are not similar (*naẓīr*)
>
> to [what we imagine from] them, we would not have understood anything
>
> about Him. If this had been the case, He would not have informed us of
>
> Himself.[556]

As the above passage suggests, the purpose of the divine revelation of the

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[555] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 26. For the interpretation of these hadiths amongst the Ḥanbalīs and the Ashʿarī theologians, see Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme*, 148-153, 161-164; Williams, 'Aspects of the Creed,' 443-447; *Tajallī wa ruʾya*, 174; Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*, 176-183.
[556] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Kashf al-ḥijāb*, 17.

anthropomorphic attributes is for God to make Himself understood (*taqrīb lil-ʾafhām*).[557] Therefore, the servants should be able to comprehend what God is like in the mind via the prima facie sense of these attributes.

According to al-Shaʿrānī, without God's descent to people's minds through the anthropomorphic attributes, such as His seeing and hearing, there would be a lack of resemblance (*mujānasa*) between God and human beings, which would make it difficult for them to love Him. Anyone who expresses love for God loves the divine similitude (*mithāl*) imagined in his mind. In respect of this, al-Shaʿrānī writes:

Were it not for God's assimilating Himself [to the world's beings through the similitudes; *tashbīh*], the lovers would not love Him. Were it not for their imagining (*takhayyul*) God's similitude, the lovers would not be related to Him (*taʿallaqa*).[558]

Human beings can only understand and relate to what is similar to them. Consequently, God attributes Himself with features similar to theirs, so that human beings can establish faith in God through belief in His affinity to them – even when there is no real correspondence between the divine attributes and those of creation. This is the motif behind al-Shaʿrānī's support for the affirmation of the anthropomorphic attributes.[559]

Here, it is imperative to observe that, while he denies the occurrence of *tashbīh* as pure anthropomorphism, al-Shaʿrānī nonetheless promotes *tashbīh* in the sense that God

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[557] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols., 77a-86b.

[558] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 175. This passage is taken from Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, but it is mentioned there in the different context of the identification of God's existence with that of His creation. See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* vol. 3, 449-450.

[559] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 175; *al-Kashf al-ḥijāb*, 17. This comes with the condition that the realities of the anthropomorphic attributes are never known to human beings.

assimilates Himself to creation's attributes in order to be known through them. This form of *tashbīh* can be defined as divine self-assimilation to the images of the world's beings through perceptual similarity, which the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes evokes in the mind, and whereby human beings recognise and worship God. This kind of similarity between God and creation is indicated in scripture and perceived only mentally, without entailing ontological similarity between the two. Building upon these ideas, al-Shaʿrānī retains the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes for a practical purpose.[560]

With regard to al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of the function of having faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes, I will further consider his view of the divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) behind the expressions 'God sitting upon the throne' and 'His descent to the world's heaven'. About these passages, he writes:

> Know my brothers that God is the great Lord, and it is incumbent upon the Lord to remain in a specific presence (*ḥaḍra muʿayyana*), so that His servant can turn to it when necessary. This is regardless of the fact that God's essence never accepts a space. This level (*martaba*) of God [as the object of humans' worship] demands the creation of the throne. [After the creation of the throne] He then said to His servants that He sat upon it; that is to say, He became present upon it (*ḥaḍara*). Therefore, whoever seeks help from God who is

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[560] It must be noted that in order to reject the notion of literal anthropomorphism, al-Shaʿrānī is occasionally involved with figurative interpretation. For example, quoting ʿAlī al-Khawwāṣ, al-Shaʿrānī writes that the above-ness (*fawqiyya*) of God upon the throne is not ascribed to His physical place, but to His rank (*rutba*). Al-Shaʿrānī then argues that a servant's prostration on the ground when contemplating God – when his intention at that time is actually directed upwards – shows that God is not confined to being high or low in a physical sense (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 139).

upon the throne [that is above heaven], He will answer him. A similar thing is said of the following hadith: 'our Lord descends to the world's heaven every night, and He says: "Who is seeking help from me so that I may answer you? Who is being afflicted so that I may cure him?"' This [the report of God's descent to the world's heaven every night] is despite the fact that God listens to the prayer of His servants at any moment whether it is during the day and the night. Nevertheless, revelation is conventionally full of these descriptions of 'God's descent to the servants' minds' (*tanazzul li-ʿuqūl al-ʿibād*).

This situation [of God sitting upon the throne and descending to the world's heaven every night] is compared to a procession of worldly kings and the veil that hangs down between them and their people. To God belongs the greatest similitude (*al-mathal al-aʿlā*). If He had not reported it to His servants and had He not descended to their minds (*tanazzul-hu li-ʿuqūl-him*), they would have remained confused, not knowing where to turn their face when they need to seek help from Him [...].[561]

According to al-Shaʿrānī, the wisdom behind the prima facie sense of God's sitting upon the throne and His descent to the world's heaven – which he interprets as the divine descent to people's minds – is for God to show His creation where to invoke Him (i.e. heaven). Even though God is not confined to any location, it is necessary to affirm these attributes for the sake of having humans worship God in a specific direction;

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[561] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 137; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 136. Al-Shaʿrānī notes that this is a passage from chapter 370 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. However, I have not yet found the expression of 'the divine descent to the mind' (*tanazzul lil-ʿuqūl*) in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. See also al-Shaʿrānī, *Kashf al-ḥijāb*, 110, where he views divine attributes as divine descent to the mind.

otherwise, they would not know where to direct their attention and would fall into confusion. This position, which is directed to non-advanced mystics and theologians, is readily contrasted with al-Shaʿrānī's approach to God's descent to the world's heaven directed to advanced mystics. As we already discussed in Chapter 3, for advanced mystics, al-Shaʿrānī adduces the same hadith in support of the ontology of God's self-manifestation.

As al-Shaʿrānī indicates in *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, the passages translated above are originally drawn from Chapter 370 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. Remarkably, he actually paraphrases a part of the chapter in order to recontextualise it in his own texts. In order to consider the nature of al-Shaʿrānī's attitude to Ibn ʿArabī's thought, it is important to compare their texts, which I will do below.

In the original passage of Chapter 370 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Ibn ʿArabī focuses on explaining the levels of Lordship and servanthood in relation to his mystical ontology. To summarise, God as the Lord of His creation creates the world in order to manifest His attributes in the world's beings, whereas the world's beings as God's servants, given existence from Him, manifest the divine attributes in themselves as His loci. Ibn ʿArabī argues that if it were not for the levels of the Lord and the servant, that correlate to one another through divine self-manifestation, the world would not have come to exist.[562] It is in this context that Ibn ʿArabī writes the following passage, which is paraphrased by al-Shaʿrānī. It reads:

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[562] Ibn ʿArabī notes that this relationship between God and creation (*nisba*) is not existentially real and can only be observed in the mind. This is compared to the relationship that lies between humans and other animals in their belonging to the same genus of living creatures, but which does not exist outside the mind. Hence, everything is through His manifestations and returns to God alone (Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 408).

Do you not see [that] the level of God who has no place (*makān*) required Him to create a heaven to make into a Throne (*ʿarsh*)? Then He mentioned that He 'sat upon it' so that people could supplicate Him and seek their needs from Him. Otherwise the servant would remain bewildered, not knowing where to turn, since God created the servant possessing directions (*jiha*). So the Real attributed Himself with aboveness (*fawqiyya*) in terms of heaven and the Throne and the fact that He encompasses all directions. He did this through His words, 'Whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God' [Q. 2:115], and His words, 'Our Lord descends to the heaven of this world every night and says, 'Is there any repenter? Is there any supplication? Is there anyone asking for forgiveness?' And His Prophet said about Him, 'God is in the *kibla* of him who performs the prayer.'[563] All of these are properties of the levels [of Lordship and servanthood], if you have intelligence. If the levels were to disappear from the cosmos, the entities would have no existence whatsoever.[564]

The last sentence of this passage indicates that Ibn ʿArabī's objective here is to demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between the divine and the world based on the theory of ontological divine self-manifestation. This is clearly different from al-Shaʿrānī's intention when he quotes the same passage.

Ibn ʿArabī's subsequent discussions further confirm that the main focus of Chapter 370 is to explain how the world comes into being when God is the only real existence.

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[563] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 409.
[564] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 408-409. Translation taken from Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 51.

There, Ibn ʿArabī refers, in passing, to the expression 'God's descent to His creation,' and writes:

> If the Higher one [i.e. God] wished the lower one [i.e. creation] to know Him [...] it is necessary that the Higher one lets Himself be known by the lower one through His descent to him (*yatanazzalu*), because it is impossible for the lower one to reach the Higher one, for he has no essence of himself.[565]

In Ibn ʿArabī's view, the reason for God's descent to the world is explained through His wish to be known by manifesting His names and attributes in creation.[566] Later in the chapter, this idea develops into the theory of the perfect man and the cosmological divine self-manifestation, establishing the tenet of the oneness of existence. According to this theory, each existing being manifests the divine image to a certain extent in keeping with its own ontological level. In this regard, every entity in the cosmos is given relative existence, which is ultimately ascribed to God who is Himself the real existence. Amongst them, the perfect man alone can manifest the perfect image of God.[567]

Following a close reading of Chapter 370, it is evident that Ibn ʿArabī only references the anthropomorphic attributes – such as God's sitting upon the throne and His descent to the world's heaven – as foundations for advancing his ontological monism later in this chapter. Thus, in contrast to al-Shaʿrānī, Ibn ʿArabī is not concerned with exploring the practical wisdom behind these attributes. While Ibn

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[565] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 409.
[566] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 409.
[567] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 409.

ʿArabī does mention 'God's descent to creation', the context for the expression differs distinctively from that of al-Shaʿrānī. As we have seen, whereas Ibn ʿArabī discusses 'God's descent to creation' in relation to the ontological divine self-manifestation and immanence in the world's beings, al-Shaʿrānī treats 'God's descent to people's minds' as divine self-assimilation to creation (*tashbīh*), whereby human beings perceive the similarity between Him and the external world at a textual and perceptual level. As repeatedly mentioned, this notion of *tashbīh* is indicated in scripture through the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes and is evoked only in the mind for a practical reason, without the implication of actual anthropomorphism.

Before concluding this section, it must be noted that despite his acceptance of the prima facie sense, al-Shaʿrānī nonetheless maintains that people who have understood the wisdom behind these attributes should, in order to avoid pure anthropomorphism, turn away from their prima facie sense.[568] Commoners are particularly susceptible to falling into literal anthropomorphism through their acceptance of the prima facie sense. Thus al-Shaʿrānī argues that the scholars should provide them with the figurative sense so that they will not commit this error.[569] The view that commoners need figurative interpretation disagrees with that of the majority of the Ashʿarīs, who believe that it is actually the scholars for whom figurative interpretation is appropriate. Along with his

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[568] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 6a.

[569] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 161; *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 248-249; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 142. In *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, al-Shaʿrānī notes that Ibn ʿArabī also felt it necessary to offer figurative interpretation to those who are at risk of falling into pure anthropomorphism. Al-Shaʿrānī's disciple, al-Munāwī, shares the same view and states that the commoners should be given figurative interpretation so as not to believe in heretical ideas, whereas the knowers of God (*ʿārif*) ought to have faith in what God has reported, without assuming any relationship between the divine attributes and the creatures' realities. See al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr*, 313 (Hadith no. 1934). However, El-Rouayheb points out that al-Munāwī sometimes engaged in figurative interpretation (El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn al-Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 283-284). Further research is needed in order to clarify al-Munāwī's view on the anthropomorphic attributes.

reliance on the opinion of the lesser-known al-Qazwīnī, this is another intriguing example indicating al-Shaʿrānī's unique position as a member of the Ashʿarīs.

With regard to non-advanced mystics, as I have discussed above, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that they should believe in the anthropomorphic attributes in their original form for practical purposes. This is not to advocate pure anthropomorphism, since the anthropomorphic attributes through which God assimilates Himself to the world's beings do not actually correspond to divine reality. Therefore, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, this divine self-assimilation, suggested in scripture and perceived in people's minds as perceptual similarity, does not contradict the notion of divine incomparability. Such a worldview harmoniously synthesises God's incomparability and His self-assimilation (*tanzīh* and *tashbīh*), thereby realising the intricate balance of divine self-manifestation at the two levels of non-delimitation and delimitation (*iṭlāq* and *taqyīd*), without entailing the ontological thesis of the world's being He/not He.

In the next section, I shall further explore the subject of divine self-manifestation at the two levels, expounding on al-Shaʿrānī's integration of Ibn ʿArabī's worldview into his own. Together with the findings from Chapter 2, this will underline al-Shaʿrānī's attempt to reinterpret the latter's thought as being founded on a visionary experience.

4.3.2. Visionary Divine Self-Manifestation

This section examines al-Shaʿrānī's reinterpretation of the divine self-manifestation (*tajallī*) advanced by Ibn ʿArabī, and answers the central question of this thesis concerning al-Shaʿrānī's integration of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings into his own mystical and theological worldview. In order to differentiate al-Shaʿrānī's view of

divine self-manifestation from that which Ibn ʿArabī promotes in the context of his ontological monism, and which al-Shaʿrānī holds in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya* for advanced mystics, in what follows, I will describe al-Shaʿrānī's theory, as mainly discussed in *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, as 'visionary divine self-manifestation'. As we shall see, some of the arguments concerning this idea overlap with those of the previous section, as the subjects are closely related to each other. Nevertheless, through the discussions on al-Shaʿrānī's view on visionary divine self-manifestation, I will aim to demonstrate how he innovatively recontextualises Ibn ʿArabī's thought within the context of visionary and experiential mysticism for non-advanced mystics and theologians.

In *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, al-Shaʿrānī explains the idea of visionary divine self-manifestation, without any implication of the oneness of existence and divine immanence in the world. His basic presentation of this theory is as follows. When God as the essence manifests Himself to Himself at the level of non-delimitation (*iṭlāq*), which al-Shaʿrānī also calls the level of His incomparability (*tanzīh*) and exclusive oneness (*aḥadiyya*), God lets His creation know about His absolute, pre-eternal existence prior to the creation of the world. This is reported, for instance, in the divine message 'when there was God, and nothing was with Him'. Following this first divine self-manifestation, the second manifestation occurs at the level of His delimitation (*taqyīd*), which al-Shaʿrānī identifies as the level of His names and attributes, and relative oneness (*wāḥidiyya*). Through this stage, God comes to be known in the world by delimiting Himself through the effects of His attributes.[570]

It is important to note that al-Shaʿrānī here employs such mystically charged terms as exclusive oneness and inclusive oneness, which I discussed in Chapters 1 and 3 in the

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[570] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 8b-10b.

context of ontological monism, in order to describe his understanding of divine self-manifestation. However, and crucially, while referring to these terms in *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, al-Shaʿrānī carefully dismisses their originally intended monistic implications. Significantly, in this text, the second stage of divine self-manifestation at the level of delimitation and inclusive oneness is said to occur only in the minds or hearts of the believers (*qulūb*), and it is the awareness of this second manifestation that is understood to grant people knowledge of God.[571]

As discussed in the previous section, al-Shaʿrānī also explains the second level of divine self-manifestation as the divine descent to people's minds through striking similitudes. The wisdom behind the striking of similitudes is for God to let Himself be known to creation by assimilating Himself to the world's beings through the anthropomorphic attributes that scripture reports.[572] In other words, this divine self-manifestation, evidenced in scripture, evokes perceptual similarity between God and creation in the mind and heart, without being related to existential reality. Therefore, in this study, I call this form of divine self-manifestation as 'visionary', as opposed to 'ontological', in that it concerns the process of God's describing Himself with various attributes in scripture, and that the images which these attributes evoke in people's minds facilitates their understanding of God.

In relation to the argument in the previous section concerning faith in the prima facie sense, al-Shaʿrānī reiterates that were it not for the similitudes that God strikes at the level of delimitation, no one would be able to understand anything about God. Hence, God describes Himself with various anthropomorphic attributes similar to those

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[571] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 2a.
[572] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 3a-13b. It is also described as the divine approach to the minds (*taqrīb lil-ʿuqūl*) of the believers.

of His creation.[573] According to al-Shaʿrānī, it is for this reason that the prophet affirmed the faith of a slave girl who, when asked by the prophet where God was, answered that 'God is in heaven'. A belief that God is located in heaven allows the slave girl and other servants to recognise and address God in a specific direction; otherwise He would not be envisaged anywhere at all. God thus manifested Himself at the level of delimitation for His servants, describing Himself in this way, even though He is not literally located upwards (i.e. in heaven).[574] This anthropomorphic expression therefore needs to be upheld as part of visionary divine self-manifestation, whereby God made Himself known to His creatures as someone similar to them.

Another passage by al-Shaʿrānī also underpins his view that visionary divine self-manifestation occurs not ontologically, but rather perceptually in people's minds, and that it is a mercy that God has granted us. The passage reads:

> It is a part of His mercy that God manifested Himself to our hearts at the level that resembles anthropomorphism (*qurb min al-tashbīh*), but without [actual] anthropomorphism (*min ghayr tashbīh*), so that our minds come to be related (*tataʿallaqa*) to knowledge [of God and know something of Him].[575]

As I demonstrated earlier, al-Shaʿrānī encourages a form of *tashbīh* which evokes certain similarities between God and creation in our minds, while firmly denying *tashbīh* which leads to belief in the actual likeness of God to creatures. Similarly to this, he espouses visionary divine self-manifestation as a perceptual experience without the

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[573] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 8a-12b; *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 177-178.
[574] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 163-165.
[575] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 12a. The passage is ascribed to the statement of his Sufi teachers ʿAlī al-Marṣafī.

implications of ontological monism and divine immanence.

In keeping with this worldview of visionary divine self-manifestation, the divine attributes of incomparability – which attest to God's transcendence – are ascribed to the level of non-delimitation, whereas the divine anthropomorphic attributes – which assimilate God to the images of creation – are affirmed as belonging to the level of delimitation and as signifying perceptual similarity between Him and the external world on a textual level. Following this idea, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that all of the contradicting opinions of theologians on the subject of the divine attributes derive from their failure to realise the balance between the two levels of visionary divine self-manifestation. They see God either as incomparable or as literally similar to the world; if they only believe in His incomparability (like the majority of rational theologians) while dismissing the aspect of His similarity, they deny any belief in the anthropomorphic attributes in their original form. On the other hand, if they only focus on the aspect of His similarity through the anthropomorphic attributes (like the anthropomorphists), this leads them to pure anthropomorphism.[576]

According to al-Shaʿrānī, only the mystics, who uphold the balance between the level of non-delimitation and that of delimitation based on the theory of visionary divine self-manifestation, can rightly and harmoniously synthesise both divine incomparability and divine self-assimilation to creation through perceptual similarity. Thus, they affirm the anthropomorphic attributes in scripture as a perceptual truth, which does not reflect divine reality, thereby resolving the tensions regarding this issue amongst the theologians of different schools.[577] This is indeed one of al-Shaʿrānī's

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[576] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 2b-3a, 13b; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 146.
[577] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 3b. Solving antagonisms between theologians is also set as a goal for advanced mystics (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 172-179). However, as I

main goals in his theological project.

Having explained the structure of visionary divine self-manifestation in the introductory chapter of *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, al-Shaʿrānī dedicates Chapters 1 and 2 to the reinterpretation of Ibn ʿArabī's statements from the perspective of this theory.[578] To put it briefly, al-Shaʿrānī tries to resolve controversial passages in Ibn ʿArabī's writings by ascribing them to the two levels of visionary divine self-manifestation. In what follows, I will study one of these cases, examining al-Shaʿrānī's endeavour of integrating Ibn ʿArabī's teaching into his own worldview.

One example of this integrative method is al-Shaʿrānī's reinterpretation of part of the poem in Chapter 372 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. It goes as follows:

When we see God in the image of human beings, we know that reason (*ʿaql*) is in the state of danger.

Whoever delimited (*qayyada*) God with His reason and whoever did not delimit Him does not have revelation (*khabar*).

Whenever God manifests Himself to me in what is similar to my image (*ʿalā mithli ṣūratī*),

I become manifest, being incomparable to the rest of the images [that

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have already stressed, advanced mystics primarily understand *tashbīh* in relation to the notion of divine immanence – whereby God is viewed as the only existence in the cosmos –and see divine manifestations in the world's beings. On the other hand, non-advanced mystics perceive *tashbīh* as perceptual similarity that does not bear any real resemblance to divine reality.

[578] As noted in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the titles of Chapters 1 and 2 in *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya* are as follows:
Chapter 1: What I saw among the poems of the Sufis who witnessed the level of God's incomparability along with the level of His descent to reason or just the level of His incomparability.
Chapter 2: What I saw amongst the calls from God (*hawātif rabbānī*) issued by those who witnessed the two levels of the divine incomparability and descent to reason, including the words of Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī.

become manifest in the world].[579]

For Ibn ʿArabī, the original intention of this poem was to describe the beauty of the world that is created in the divine image. Each thing in the world reflects the image of God who is the most beautiful. As such, the world is like a divine mirror in which He sees Himself. Based on this idea, Ibn ʿArabī continues as follows:

> God is manifest (*mutajallī*) in every aspect, sought after in every sign of the world […] worshipped in every object of worship, and intended in the visible and invisible world. No one fails to find Him in His creation through his natural disposition. Hence, the entire world worships Him and glorifies Him.[580]

With this expression of the monistic worldview in mind, the poem in question is read as signifying the theory of ontological divine self-manifestation, which reason cannot grasp. Every entity in the world is thus the manifestation of the divine image.

On the other hand, al-Shaʿrānī interprets the above quoted poem in relation to his idea of the two levels of non-delimitation and delimitation. After quoting Ibn ʿArabī's poem verbatim, al-Shaʿrānī appends the following comment:

> Reason does not comprehend God as He is in Himself. It only recognises Him by delimiting Him (*muqayyad*), whether it is in a person's heart when he is awake or in a dream (*manāman*). May God be exalted in the loftiness

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[579] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 21b; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 449.
[580] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 449.

of His essence above any images (*ṣuwar*). Those images [in which God

manifests Himself] came to be attributed with a human image (*ṣūra*

ādamiyya), through which it [the human image] came to acquire a certain

honour (*sharaf*) that is not possessed by other images. This is for God to let

Himself be known to His servants in that image in a dream. Thus, the

situation returns to the two levels of the balance (*mīzān*); namely,

non-delimitation (*iṭlāq*) and delimitation (*taqyīd*).[581]

According to al-Shaʿrānī, God as divine essence is incomparable to any of the images of

the world at the level of His non-delimitation. Human beings can only perceive God as

being delimited in their minds at the level of His delimitation. The purpose of divine

self-manifestation at this level is therefore for God to make Himself known through the

anthropomorphic attributes. It is important to note in this passage that al-Shaʿrānī

associates the image of God – through which He manifests Himself to the world – with

an image seen in a dream, as reported in the hadith 'I saw my Lord during sleep in the

form (*ṣūra*) of a beardless young man with long hair and with sandals of gold on his

feet'. In doing so, he crucially avoids Ibn ʿArabī's idea of the divine image

ontologically becoming manifest in the world's entities.[582]

This analysis demonstrates al-Shaʿrānī's intention to dismiss the original context of

Ibn ʿArabī's passages – that is to say, his ontology of divine self-manifestation – and to

integrate them into his own worldview of visionary divine self-manifestation, whereby

God assimilates Himself to creation through perceptual similarity as suggested in

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[581] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 21b-22a.
[582] For the interpretation of this hadith amongst the Ashʿarīs, see Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme*, 163-164.

scripture. In *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya,* al-Shaʿrānī approaches other passages of Ibn ʿArabī with this interpretive method, ascribing the latter's monistic statements to the levels of non-delimitation and delimitation of visionary divine self-manifestation.[583] Hence, our observation establishes al-Shaʿrānī's remarkable reinterpretation of Ibn ʿArabī's mystical teaching as promoting visionary and experiential mysticism.

4.3.3. Al-Shaʿrānī on the Ḥanbalī Traditionalists

When I discussed the issue of figurative interpretation earlier in this chapter, I pointed out an interesting correspondence between al-Shaʿrānī/Ibn ʿArabī and the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya along with Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, in their dismissive attitudes towards this theological method. In order to further delineate

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[583] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya,* fols. 16a-26b. Another interesting example to demonstrate this attempt is al-Shaʿrānī's recontextualisation of a line of the poem in Chapter 3 of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* starting with 'If you only speak of His incomparability (*tanzīh*) [...]', which I quoted earlier in this chapter (4.1.2). Originally, it is concerned with the mystics' goal of the synthesis of God's incomparability and immanence through the realisation of the cosmos being He/not He (Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* 55/70). As I explained in Chapter 1, quoting the same part of the poem, al-Biqāʿī and Ibn al-Ahdal condemn Ibn ʿArabī's ostensibly pantheistic statement for confirming gross anthropomorphism and literal unification between God and the world.

However, at the beginning of Chapter 1 of *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya,* al-Shaʿrānī introduces the same poem by Ibn ʿArabī, but reads it in a different context. Al-Shaʿrānī's quotation from the poem is as follows (the underlined words indicate a difference between the original wording in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and al-Shaʿrānī's quotation of it):

> If you only speak of His incomparability (*tanzīh*), you define Him (*muḥaddid*).
> And if you only speak of defining Him (*taḥdīd*), you delimit Him (*muqayyid*).
> If you speak of the two, you are right.
> Then you are an Imam and guided (*taqtadā*) in Sufi knowledge [al-Shaʿrānī,
> *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya,* fol. 16b].

Setting aside a few differences from the original text, it is highly likely that al-Shaʿrānī chooses to quote this controversial poem with the objective of responding to Ibn ʿArabī's critics. Al-Shaʿrānī does this by reinterpreting the text differently; commenting on the poem, he writes that it affirms the level of divine incomparability and, crucially, that of 'the divine descent to people's minds' (*al-tanazzul lil-ʿuqūl*). This comment suggests that al-Shaʿrānī aims to understand the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* expressed in this poem within the context of visionary divine self-manifestation (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya,* fol. 16b).

al-Shaʿrānī's theological position, in this section, I will consider his similarity to the Ḥanbalī traditionalists with regard to their approaches to the anthropomorphic attributes

As this chapter has already demonstrated, al-Shaʿrānī encourages faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes of God while rejecting the figurative interpretation of the rational theologians. In his view, the anthropomorphic attributes need to be believed as such, because God revealed them in scripture. This comes with the condition that these attributes do not represent divine reality at all, as God is absolutely incomparable to the physical, corporeal features that occur to people's minds. Hence, the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes is known; however, their relations to God are never known. Therefore, the knowledge of their modality should not be questioned (*ghayr takyīf*).[584] This view is similar to the *bi-lā kayfa* formula. An examination of the following two passages shows that al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the anthropomorphic attributes actually resembles that of the majority of the Ḥanbalī traditionalists:

> Amongst all of the divine attributes reported in the Qurʾān and the Sunna that are close to anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), their meanings are understandable to us (*maʿqūla*), yet their relations to God are unknown (*majhūla al-nisba ilā Allah*), and they ought to be believed as such. For the ruling (*ḥukm*) that God gives of Himself is superior to that of reason (*ʿaql*).[585]

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[584] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Kashf al-ḥijāb*, 95. El-Rouayheb argues that there is a certain common ground between Ibn ʿArabī-inspired Sufis and traditional Ḥanbalīs on this point. El-Rouayheb takes as an example al-Kūrānī, who openly endorsed Ibn ʿArabī's oneness of existence while showing his sympathy towards Ḥanbalī scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayim al-Jawziyya. See El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 275-284.

[585] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 243. Al-Shaʿrānī attributes this remark to his Sufi teacher ʿAlī al-Marṣafī. Ibn ʿArabī issues a similar statement in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 484.

In this passage, al-Shaʿrānī calls for faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes. With respect to this, he also writes:

> The people of God have agreed that one ought to have faith in scripture and the divine attributes, in accordance with what He knows of them, what His essence accepts, and what is suited to His authority. It is not permitted for us to reject any of them, nor is it allowed for us to ask how they are (*lā takyīf*); nor is their relation (*nisba*) to God the same as how they are related to us, because none of us knows His essence either in this life or in the hereafter, and we do not know how it is.[586]

These passages indicate that al-Shaʿrānī and the Ḥanbalīs, who are representatives of the *bi-lā kayfa* formula, agree upon their initial approach to the anthropomorphic attributes: a belief in the prima facie sense and a rejection of inquiry about its real meaning.

In relation to this, it is worth mentioning al-Shaʿrānī's positive view on the Ḥanbalī scholars in general. During al-Shaʿrānī's lifetime, the Ḥanbalīs were the smallest school of Law in Cairo. They were so small that they had to invite teachers from other schools of Law.[587] As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, al-Shaʿrānī felt a certain animosity

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[586] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 241. A similar statement is provided in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 241-243. The passage is translated in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, 287-288.

[587] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 173-174. In *Mīzān al-ṣughrā*, al-Shaʿrānī mentions several Ḥanbalīs. One of them is his contemporary, the Ḥanbalī jurist, Aḥmad Shihāb al-Dīn al-Futūḥī (d. 949/1542-43), who was once against the Sufis but later changed his attitude and became an admirer of them.

towards several of Ibn ʿArabī's Ḥanbalī antagonists, such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya.[588] Despite this, al-Shaʿrānī otherwise thought highly of the Ḥanbalīs, notably for the emphasis they put on the notion of divine incomparability. In Chapter 5 of *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, he spends several pages explaining the position of the Ḥanbalīs; moreover, he defends the Ḥanbalīs as well as Sufis such as Ibn ʿArabī, amongst others, against the charges of incarnationism, unificationism, and corporealism.[589] Here, al-Shaʿrānī's concern is to associate Ibn ʿArabī's position with that of the early Sufis such as al-Junayd and al-Qushayrī, and also, strikingly, with the early Ḥanbalīs.

Al-Shaʿrānī respects the founder of the Ḥanbalī school, Ibn Ḥanbal, as well as the early Ḥanbalī scholars, as exponents of divine incomparability who, by rejecting figurative interpretation and pure anthropomorphism, followed the path of the pious predecessors.[590] In order to clarify their position, al-Shaʿrānī quotes the statements of several of the Ḥanbalīs. For example, referencing Ibn ʿAqīl (d. 513/1119),[591] al-Shaʿrānī notes that the Ḥanbalīs do not question the modality (*kayf*) of the anthropomorphic attributes; do not strip God of His attributes (*taʿṭīl*) as the Muʿtazilīs

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[588] In *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, al-Shaʿrānī refers to Abū Yazīd al-Basṭāmī's profession to the effect that there is no hellfire for creation, which Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya condemned as a heretical statement. In response to the critic, al-Shaʿrānī defends al-Basṭāmī by stating that he was only veiled from perceiving hellfire for creation due to his presence with God; in such a mental state, every entity except God disappears from sight. Al-Shaʿrānī applies a similar rationale to al-Basṭāmī's famous profession, 'Glory be to me', and says that al-Basṭāmī only issued this statement in a state where perception of the world had vanished from him due to his witnessing God alone, whereby he became a deputy of God (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, 460-463).

[589] As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the title of Chapter 5 of *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya* is: 'Explanation that God's essence does not accept increase nor decrease and that it is not temporally originated through His origination of the world in His essence, and explication of the impossibility of talking about incarnationism, unificationism, corporealism, and direction on the side of God in the view of all Sufis and Ḥanbalīs, and a reference to their remarks about its impossibility in contrast to what is often attributed to them, especially to Ibn ʿArabī'.

[590] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 59b, 62a

[591] For more information on Ibn ʿAqīl, see Holtzman, 'The Miḥna of Ibn ʿAqīl.'

do; and in contrast with the pure anthropomorphists (*mushabbiha*), they do not espouse the likening of God to creatures (*tashbīh*).[592] Al-Shaʿrānī also quotes Abū Yaʿlā (d. 458/1065),[593] Abū Muḥammad al-Tamīmī (d. 488/1095),[594] and other Ḥanbalīs regarding their understanding of God sitting upon the throne. According to al-Shaʿrānī, they agree that God's sitting is an essential attribute of God (*ṣifa dhātiyya*) and that it is real; however, His sitting is unlike human sitting, and it is not accompanied by any physical movement, nor does it imply God's spatial contact with anything else. God sits upon the throne in the manner that He has intended; hence, it should be believed without further investigation into the matter'.[595] Al-Shaʿrānī argues that, despite the fact that these Ḥanbalīs denied any actual similarity between God and creation, later scholars wrongly associated Ibn Ḥanbal and his school with the heretical idea of corporealism.[596]

Al-Shaʿrānī's references to Ḥanbalī statements are descriptive and simple. Nonetheless, their presence highlights his sympathy with the school's approach to the divine anthropomorphic attributes; that is to say, the acceptance of these attributes in the way they were reported, without suggesting that God has any real similarity with creation. After defending the early Ḥanbalīs as proponents of divine incomparability, al-Shaʿrānī turns to similarly inclined Sufis, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d.

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[592] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 62b.

[593] Abū Yaʿlā was accused by some Ḥanbalīs of upholding an anthropomorphic view. For example, Ibn al-Jawzī objected to Abū Yaʿlā's view that God's leg, mentioned in some hadiths, is an essential attribute. See Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*, 152.

[594] Abū Muḥammad al-Tamīmī was an older contemporary of Ibn ʿAqīl in Baghdād and supported a non-literalist approach to the divine attributes. He was held in high regard by Ibn al-Jawzī (Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*, 61 and 125, n., 181).

[595] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 60a-b. Swartz points out that Abū Yaʿlā regards God's descent as being one of the divine attributes and as being real, taking a middle road between literalists and those who apply figurative interpretation. See Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*, 216.

[596] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 58b.

298/910) and the Persian Sufi Abū ʿAlī al-Rūdbarī (d. ca. 320/ 932).[597] Quoting the Egyptian Sufi, Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861), al-Shaʿrānī maintains that God's sitting is a pre-eternal attribute and ought to be affirmed, without assuming any location in Him or upholding any actual similarity between the divine attributes and those of the creatures.[598] Remarkably, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, Ibn ʿArabī is also included in the same group as these early Ḥanbalīs and Sufis who advocate divine incomparability and deny the notion of literal, pure anthropomorphism.

As noted in Chapter 1, al-Shaʿrānī carefully excludes Ibn Taymiyya from the camp of these righteous Ḥanbalīs − Ibn Taymiyya was censured as a scholar who deviated from the school's path.[599] Nevertheless, once again, there is an interesting similarity between al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn Taymiyya with regard to their approaches to the anthropomorphic attributes. Ibn Taymiyya's scholarly aim was to ascertain the meaning of the anthropomorphic attributes and to give them a concrete reality, while refusing to dismiss the prima facie sense. As Holtzman demonstrates, in an attempt to affirm the divine anthropomorphic attributes, Ibn Taymiyya does not hesitate to draw analogies between the divine and creatures.[600] For instance, he maintains that God in reality (*ḥaqīqatan*) sits upon a throne which is above the heavens, and that He is in reality (*ḥaqīqatan*) in the direction of 'above'. In opposition to rational theologians, he argues that if God were not sitting upon the throne, Muslims would not raise their hands when they pray to God.[601] The fact that they raise their hands evinces that God in reality sits

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[597] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 62a-65b.
[598] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 65a.
[599] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 62a. With regard to Ibn Taymiyya's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes, which was eventually censured for being literalistic, see Holtzman, 'Does God really laugh?; 'The Bedouin Who Asked Questions,' 447-463.
[600] Holtzman, 'Does God really laugh?' 183-199.
[601] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 217; *Majmūʿa fatāwā*, vol. 3, 166.

upon the throne that is above the heavens; hence, the verse of the throne ought to be affirmed as such, on condition that His sitting is unlike human sitting and its modality is never known.[602] In this example, Ibn Taymiyya relies on common sense and convention to strengthen his view.[603]

Ibn Taymiyya also refers to the expression 'God is above the throne that is glorious in His essence (*fawq al-ʿarsh al-majīd bi-dhātihi*)', which was issued by the Mālikī jurist Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996). According to Ibn Taymiyya, the agreed upon interpretation of this statement amongst the people of the Sunna is that God sits upon the throne in His essence in reality (*ḥaqīqatan*), not metaphorically, and that He is above the throne in His essence.[604] The reality of God being upon the throne in His essence is thus confirmed, without questioning its modality and without literal anthropomorphism.[605]

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[602] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 215-216, 220.

[603] Ibn Taymiyya condemned the rational theologians, whom he describes as having detached themselves from their natural disposition (*fiṭra*) and denied God's aboveness (Holtzman, 'The Bedouin Who Asked Questions,' 457). For more information on God's aboveness, see Holtzman and Ovadia, 'On Divine Aboveness.'

[604] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 218-220; *Majmūʿa fatāwā*, vol. 3, 164, 166. Ibn Taymiyya states that this was the opinion of Yaḥyā ibn Uthmān, Ibn Abī Zayd (d. 386/996) and Abū ʿUmar al-Ṭalamankī (d. 428-9/1036-1037). Ibn Abī Zayd was the head of Mālikī school in Qayrawān and also a proponent of Ashʿarī thought (Idris, 'Ibn Abī Zayd al-Ḳayrawānī'; Spevack, *The Archetypal*, 55). Abū ʿUmar al-Talamankī was an Andalusian scholar who attempted to reinvigorate Islam through mystical means (Fierro, 'al-Ṭalamankī'; *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, 902).

[605] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 219-220. On this point, Ibn Taymiyya refers to the opinions of the early scholars such as Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), his disciple and early Sufi Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ (d. 187/803), and Sufyān Ibn ʿUyayna (d. 196/811).

Al-Shaʿrānī's contemporary, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ramlī, who was a sceptic of the *bi-lā kayfa* doctrine and an advocate of figurative interpretation, also refers to the same statement 'God is above the throne that is glorious in His essence (*fawq al-ʿarsh al-majīd bi-dhātihi*)'. In order to avoid the anthropomorphic implication that God is above the throne in reality, al-Ramlī quotes the interpretative method issued by al-Ashʿarī's teacher Abu ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303-303/ 915-916). According to this, the first possible interpretation of the above remark is to ascribe 'in His essence' to the throne; hence, 'God is above the throne that is glorious in its essence of mightiness or loftiness'. 'Aboveness' (*fawqiyya*) in this context is taken conceptually (*maʿnawī*) to mean 'His perfection' and 'authority' (*makāna*), not 'His physical location' and 'direction' which cannot be applied to God. If the throne here is understood as 'His realm' (*mulk*), the statement means 'God's subjugation of His creation' (*qahr*). On the other hand, if the pronoun of 'in His essence' is ascribed to God, not to the throne, it means that God has the conceptual

Ibn Taymiyya's literalistic approach infuriated his Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī antagonists, who rebuked him as a proponent of pure anthropomorphism and corporealism (*ḥashwī*, *mushabbih*, *mujassim*).[606] They reported that Ibn Taymiyya, when he was preaching to the public about God's descent to heaven, had stepped one step down from the pulpit to show how He actually descends; he also declared that God sat upon the throne as he was then sitting.[607] According to El-Rouayheb, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī reprimanded Ibn Taymiyya for his claim that God is in reality (*ḥaqīqatan*) in the direction of 'above' and that He in reality (*ḥaqīqatan*) descends to the lowest heaven. In their view, these statements imply a heretical idea that God is a body and that He is in space.[608]

Considering this background, it is noteworthy that both al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn Taymiyya affirm the reality of God sitting upon the throne, accepting its prima facie sense. On some occasions, they also allow an analogy between God and His creation by appealing to people's common sense in order to give the anthropomorphic attributes a certain reality. For example, Ibn Taymiyya insists that if God were not in reality sitting upon the throne that is in the highest heaven, Muslims would not raise their hands when

aboveness in His essence, not through what is other than Himself. In this case, 'that is glorious' (*al-majīd*) is read with the nominative (*ḍamm*) to be ascribed to God, rather than the genitive (*ḥafḍ*) that is ascribed to *arsh*; it then means that 'God, who is glorious in His essence, not by others, subjugates creation'. By this means, al-Ramlī avoids the reading of 'in His essence' as 'in reality' (al-Ramlī, *Fatāwā*, vol. 4, 268; see also El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 281-282).

Ibn Taymiyya was most probably aware of this kind of hermeneutic technique submitted by the rational theologians. In opposition to the interpretation of ascribing 'in His essence' to the divine lofty status, he argues that the interpretation 'God who is glorious in His essence' is an expression of flagrant ignorance, for this is tantamount to saying 'God who is merciful in His essence', 'God who is mighty in His essence', and so on; in these cases, the expression 'in His essence' does not signify anything meaningful. Consequently, in Ibn Taymiyya's view, 'in His essence' ought to be understood as affirming the divine reality that God is actually above the throne (Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 218).

[606] Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 55; Jackson, 'Ibn Taymiyya on Trial'; Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism*, 328-339.

[607] Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism*, 330-332.

[608] El-Rouayheb, 'From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,' 271-274.

they pray to God.[609] Similarly, as we have seen, al-Shaʿrānī states that if God had not revealed Himself as sitting upon the throne, human beings would get perplexed and would not know where to look when seeking His help.[610] In other words, Muslims look up when they pray to God, because He in reality sat upon the throne that is above the heavens.

Nevertheless, al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn Taymiyya, or more generally speaking, al-Shaʿrānī and the Ḥanbalīs, disagree on some fundamental points. The most obvious difference between them is in their treatment of *tashbīh* and divine self-manifestation. According to al-Shaʿrānī, the anthropomorphic attributes are affirmed in relation to visionary divine self-manifestation on two levels. In conjunction with this view, he endorses the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*, an idea that the Ḥanbalī scholars would adamantly reject. Despite their differences, intriguingly, these discussions demonstrate that al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes is explained through the combination of the Ḥanbalīs' discipline and Ibn ʿArabī's teaching, taking the middle road between the two.

Before concluding the current chapter, there is one more question that needs be asked. I have argued in this chapter that *tashbīh* in al-Shaʿrānī's thought means no more than divine self-assimilation to the images of creation through perceptual similarity, without implying any actual similarity of the divine to the external world. The prima facie sense of anthropomorphic attributes enables people to mentally picture the image of God, whereby they come to believe in Him. If *tajallī* is thus perceived as signifying

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[609] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 217.
[610] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 137; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 136. The idea that God sits upon the throne so that His servants know where to supplicate Him was originally submitted by Ibn ʿArabī. In this regard, Ibn ʿArabī also shares a similar view with Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 408-409, translated in Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 51.

visionary, rather than ontological, divine self-manifestation, and *tashbīh* is understood through the perceptual similarity that the scriptural expressions evoke in the mind, as opposed to ontological similarity, what is mystical about al-Shaʿrānī's worldview? What is the role of mystical experience in his thought? He partially answers these questions in *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* wherein he writes as follows:

If someone asks about the statement issued by some people, that the knowledge of God (*maʿrifa*) does not become perfect except by knowing Him through the perspectives of divine incomparability and anthropomorphism [or divine immanence] in the sense that divine similarity exists in reality (*ḥaqīqatan*), I shall answer him as follows: we believe that there is no anthropomorphism in reality (*tashbīh lā wujūd la-hu ḥaqīqatan*). This [the notion of pure anthropomorphism] only occurs to certain people due to their poor witnessing (*shuhūd*) [of God] and the thickness of their veil. If their veil were to be removed, they would know with certainty (*yaqīnan*) that there is no [literal] anthropomorphism between God and creation in all of the anthropomorphic attributes that are [together] a descent [of God] to the servants' minds (*tanazzul*). Contemplate over this, my fellow.

'The thirsty one supposes a mirage to be water from the distance; but when he gets closer to it, he finds nothing' [Q. 24:39]. [This verse means that] he judged [the situation] with a wrong supposition. Compare this with the hearing of the divine speech with sounds and letters or the vision of God in different forms upon the manifestation of the hereafter. These expressions only signify the divine descent to people's minds (*tanazzul*) [and not the real

similarity of the divine to created beings]. If God were to remove their veil, they would listen to His speech without any sounds and letters, and they would see God without any of the images that are comprehensible to human beings.[611]

In the above passage, it is suggested that the anthropomorphic attributes would lead people, who have not attained a mystical experience, to believe in pure anthropomorphism. Only the process of mystical unveiling allows them to have faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes as the divine descent to people's minds, thereby acknowledging perceptual similarity between God and the external world – yet without entailing actual anthropomorphism. For al-Shaʿrānī, this delicate combination of accepting the prima facie sense in the mind, while rejecting the ascription of its reality to God, is only attainable by the mystics. And this is the intricate 'balance' that can be realised through the awareness of visionary divine self-manifestations.

Thus, in keeping with the framework of visionary divine self-manifestation, the mystical experience enables one to affirm all of the divine attributes in scripture, by ascribing them either to the level of non-delimitation (where God manifests Himself through the divine attributes of incomparability) or to the level of delimitation (where God manifests Himself through the anthropomorphic attributes), and to synthesise the notions of divine incomparability and divine self-assimilation. A mystic who upholds these two notions is also a possessor of the mystical balance between the levels of non-delimitation and delimitation. In al-Shaʿrānī's view, this is the mystical goal that

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[611] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 157.

non-advanced mystics should aim to achieve.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to investigate al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes, demonstrating his difference of opinion with Ibn ʿArabī, and to consider his attempt to integrate Ibn ʿArabī's mystical teaching into his own mystical and theological worldview. Several findings have arisen from our study.

Firstly, I discussed al-Shaʿrānī's rejection of figurative interpretation as applied by the rational theologians. His rejection was based on the assumption that there is originally no trope and no anthropomorphism in scripture. In his view, figurative interpretation, which aims to avoid pure anthropomorphism, actually amounts to the comparison of God with a figurative sense. This results in another form of anthropomorphism through the newly originated meaning. Therefore, its use should be avoided, except when it is employed for commoners, who may otherwise uphold literal anthropomorphism. I have shown that al-Shaʿrānī's stance on figurative interpretation agrees with that of Ibn ʿArabī.

With regard to their treatment of the anthropomorphic attributes, I have demonstrated that Ibn ʿArabī and al-Shaʿrānī endorse the position of the pious predecessors, which is known as the delegation of meaning to God – although al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of delegation is closer to that of the *bi-lā kayfa* theory. Yet I have highlighted that this is only one aspect of their teaching, as both Ibn ʿArabī and al-Shaʿrānī address the anthropomorphic attributes from the perspective of their own

mystical worldview. Ibn ʿArabī's position primarily stands on his monistic theory of ontological divine self-manifestation, wherein he treats the anthropomorphic attributes as evidence of the identification of God with creation. He thus synthesises the notions of divine incomparability and immanence. I have shown that al-Shaʿrānī also espouses the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*. However, his treatment of *tashbīh* excludes any possibility of pantheistic implications. As this chapter has clarified, al-Shaʿrānī reinterprets *tashbīh* as divine self-assimilation to the world's beings through perceptual similarity, without implying divine immanence. Based on this idea, he perceives the anthropomorphic attributes as part of the divine descent to people's minds and encourages faith in their prima facie sense. In al-Shaʿrānī's view, the affirmation of these attributes is necessary, especially because they serve the practical purpose of enabling human beings to know God via the perceptual similarity evoked in the mind.

Furthermore, I have shown that al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes is built on what can be called the theory of visionary divine self-manifestation. Al-Shaʿrānī's explanation of this teaching is based on his observation of the scriptural expressions, wherein God manifests Himself at the two levels of non-delimitation and delimitation, describing Himself with different attributes of incomparability and anthropomorphism at each level. Hence, the divine anthropomorphic attributes in scripture ought to be believed in their original form as part of this divine self-manifestation. Whoever confirms these anthropomorphic attributes at the level of delimitation, along with the divine attributes of incomparability at the level of non-delimitation, is a possessor of the delicate balance between these two levels. In al-Shaʿrānī's view, through the realisation of this balance, the problems surrounding the understanding of the divine attributes are peacefully resolved.

Most significantly, al-Shaʿrānī considers that visionary divine self-manifestation is only concerned with the individual's perception. This means that it only occurs on a perceptual and textual level, in contrast with Ibn ʿArabī's idea of ontological divine self-manifestation, which reveals the existential reality of the world. With regard to this subject, I have underlined al-Shaʿrānī's innovative integration of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching into his own mystical and theological worldview, reinterpreting Ibn ʿArabī's ontological monism as visionary and experiential mysticism. Strikingly, this accords with my finding from Chapter 2 that al-Shaʿrānī reads the oneness of existence as experiential oneness.

In this chapter, I have provided further evidence of the considerable similarity between al-Shaʿrānī and the Ḥanbalīs with regard to their literalistic approach to the divine anthropomorphic attributes. Of course, they fundamentally disagree on the espousal of divine self-manifestation and the notion of *tashbīh*, which the Ḥanbalīs do not accept. However, considering certain similarities between the two, al-Shaʿrānī's stance on the anthropomorphic attributes can be perceived as taking a middle path between the tenet of the traditionalists and Ibn ʿArabī-inspired mysticism.

Lastly, another significant finding from this study is that according to al-Shaʿrānī, as far as non-advanced mystics are concerned, the primary role of the mystical unveiling is not the disclosure of the ontological reality where the world is considered to be God and not God; rather, based on the awareness of visionary divine self-manifestation, the mystical unveiling helps one to simultaneously deny the occurrence of pure anthropomorphism and affirm the perceptual similarity brought to mind by the images of the anthropomorphic attributes. In many of his theological works, al-Shaʿrānī's focus is indeed set on demonstrating this idea.

This chapter has thus investigated al-Shaʿrānī's reinterpretation and integration of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological teachings into his own worldview of visionary and experiential mysticism, through which al-Shaʿrānī approaches the anthropomorphic attributes in a way that differs from that of Ibn ʿArabī and other theologians. By relating the mystic teaching to the theological conundrum of the anthropomorphic attributes, al-Shaʿrānī creatively merges the mystical and theological disciplines. His theological efforts in this regard consequently deserve a more positive assessment in modern scholarship. In the next and final chapter of this study, I shall further focus on al-Shaʿrānī's attempt to fuse the theological discipline with the mystical one, analysing his view on another anthropomorphic expression, namely, divine with-ness.

Chapter 5

Al-Shaʿrānī on God's With-ness (*maʿiyya*)

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that al-Shaʿrānī refutes the use of figurative interpretation and upholds faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes. I argued that al-Shaʿrānī integrates Ibn ʿArabī's theory of divine self-manifestation into his own thought by reinterpreting it as a visionary experience that only occurs in people's minds. It emerged that al-Shaʿrānī tries to provide an answer to the theological problem of the anthropomorphic attributes from a mystical perspective, thereby conflating the mystical discipline with the theological sphere.

In order to analyse this subject further, the current chapter investigates al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the anthropomorphic notion of divine 'with-ness' (*maʿiyya*).[612] This is reported in various Qurʾānic verses ('God is with the patient ones' [Q. 2:249]; 'Do not grieve; indeed, God is with us' [Q. 9:40]; 'Indeed, God is with those who fear Him and those who do good' [Q. 16:128]; 'Indeed, I am with you both – I hear and I see' [Q. 20:46]; 'God is with you wherever you are' [Q. 57:4]; 'Except that He is with them wherever they are' [Q. 58:7]). To put it simply, the debate over the notion of God's with-ness concerns how God, who is absolutely incomparable to creation, is understood to be with worldly beings. As we shall see, theologians tried, on one hand, to figuratively interpret the above verses on God's with-ness. On the other hand,

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[612] This translation 'with-ness' is taken from Chittick (Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 88; *Self-Disclosure*, 37). I have considered an alternative translation such as divine 'immanence' or 'indwelling'. However, as we shall see, al-Shaʿrānī employs the term *maʿiyya* in the sense that God is in reality with creation, all the while carefully excluding the idea of pure anthropomorphism. In other words, he upholds the prima facie sense of *maʿiyya* but denies any literal correspondence between the divine reality and that of creation. Considering this, I judged that 'immanence' and 'indwelling', which indicate that God is literally in creation, were not appropriate translations here. Therefore, I have chosen 'with-ness' for the sake of precision.

al-Shaʿrānī, who refutes the use of figurative interpretation, took another approach by drawing on Ibn ʿArabī's idea of the relation between God's essence and His attributes – that is, his thesis that the divine attributes are identical to God Himself. In addition to this, and quite intriguingly, al-Shaʿrānī here relies on the teachings of the Shādhilī Sufis in fifteenth-century Egypt, who are almost unknown to modern scholarship.

Al-Shaʿrānī discusses the issue of divine with-ness in many of his theological works, exhibiting his great interest in this subject. Our study of this topic, which has as yet to be treated in modern scholarship, will thus explore al-Shaʿrānī's commitment to Ibn ʿArabī's position on the relation between God's essence and His attributes. It will also reveal the influence that the little-known Shādhilī mystics had on al-Shaʿrānī's thought in his approach to the issue of divine attributes. This will illuminate the innovative efforts they made in applying Ibn ʿArabī's teaching to a theological topic of their own concern.

In what follows, I will explore two main arguments. First, I examine the question on whether or not God's essential attributes are identical to His essence. In particular, I will treat the positions held by the Ashʿarīs, Muʿtazilīs, Ibn ʿArabī, and al-Shaʿrānī regarding this subject. Building on the findings of the first section, in the subsequent section, I will consider al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of the notion of divine with-ness. I will expound on how he merges the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī with those of two hitherto unstudied Shādhilī Sufis, Muḥammad al-Maghribī (d. 910-911/1504-1506) and his disciple Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī (d. 914/1508-9), with a reference to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's view on the concept of divine with-ness.

5.1. The Relation between God's Essence and His Attributes

This section examines Ibn ʿArabī and al-Shaʿrānī's shared view on the relation between God's essence and His essential attributes. Within the Islamic tradition of rational theology, the divine essential attributes (*ṣifa nafsiyya*) are that which God is essentially characterised by and which His essence necessarily requires. Ashʿarī theologians primarily count seven divine essential attributes: His life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, sight, and speech. Permanence (*baqāʾ*) can also be added to these. First, I will briefly consider the Ashʿarīs' and Muʿtazilīs' opinions on the relation between divine essence and these attributes, a subject which has attracted much scholarly attention.[613] This will be followed by an analysis of Ibn ʿArabī and al-Shaʿrānī's stance on the subject.

One of the issues that the Ashʿarī theologians confronted regarding the understanding of the essential attributes of God is the relation of these attributes to His essence. According to the Ashʿarī theologians, the essential attributes are pre-eternal, as it is impossible to think of any moment when God was not living or knowing. However, this assumption posed a theological question: if God is believed to be absolutely one, how can the plurality of His eternal attributes in relation to divine unity be explained? As a solution to the problem, the Ashʿarīs devised the thesis that the essential attributes are neither identical to, nor other than, God Himself.

According to this thesis, the essential attributes are considered to be real entities that are distinct from God. In order for them to be meaningful, they are also distinct from each other. As Belo writes, 'if God is made identical with His attributes, one is

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[613] See, for example, Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 259-281.

forced to accept the absurdity that the knowledge is knowing, or that the knower is the knowledge'.[614] In order to avoid the conclusion that the knowledge, power, and so on are identical to God and that God is knowing through His knowledge as much as through He is knowing through His power, the essential attributes ought to have existence independently of God, thereby sharing the quality of eternity with His essence. Accepting the plurality of eternal beings aside from divine essence does not violate divine unity. In the view of the Ashʿarīs, the essential attributes are additional to and inherent in the divine essence. In this regard, these attributes are other than God Himself. God is then the knowing, powerful, living and so on, through His attributes of knowledge, power, and life, which are independent entities. Yet, inasmuch as these attributes subsist in God, neither are they other than Him.[615]

This position stands in contrast to that of the Muʿtazilīs, whose main objective is to protect the concept of absolute divine unity. In their view, the thesis that the essential attributes have independence of their own distinctive from God's essence leads to the conclusion that they are eternal in themselves, entailing the plurality of eternal beings apart from God. If they are eternal through another eternal being, rather than in themselves, this results in an infinite regress, which is absurd. For this reason, the divine attributes cannot be given the status of real entities, and accordingly they are identical to God Himself. Consequently, in the view of the Muʿtazilīs, God is knowing not through an attribute of knowledge that is an independent existent in itself and additional to God, but through knowledge that is identical to God Himself. In other words, God is knowing, powerful, and living in His essence. All of these divine attributes are thus reduced to the

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[614] Belo, 'Muʿtazilites,' 122.
[615] Wisnovsky, 'Essence and Existence,' 33-35; Ramli, 'The Predecessors of Ashʿarism,' 217-218.

divine essence alone.[616] In maintaining this, the Muʿtazilīs did not intend to deny the essential attributes altogether. However, their antagonists censured their position for stripping God of His attributes.[617]

As Chittick points out, Ibn ʿArabī denies the Ashʿarī position on the essential attributes as being neither identical to nor other than God Himself. Instead, Ibn ʿArabī upholds a thesis that appears similar to that of the Muʿtazilīs.[618] Al-Shaʿrānī shares the same view as Ibn ʿArabī on this issue, and explains it by quoting *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. In what follows, based on an analysis of al-Shaʿrānī's arguments, I shall discuss their shared position.

Quoting Ibn ʿArabī, al-Shaʿrānī explicitly dismisses the Ashʿarī view on divine essence and the essential attributes. The quotation reads:

> As for the remark of some theologians [the Ashʿarīs] that the divine attributes are not identical to God, this is because they assumed knowledge to be additional to God and denied that the attribute is the same as Him. Yet, since he [also] refused to affirm God without the qualification of His knowledge, he instead stated that knowledge is not other than God. Then, his mind got confused and issued a statement that his reason gave him. It goes: 'divine attributes are neither identical to nor other than God Himself'. Ibn ʿArabī said that this is a meaningless profession with no spirit in it. It shows that the speaker does not possess any mystical unveiling (*kashf*) […]. We [the mystics] do not speak of [the divine attributes as being] something additional,

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616 al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 108.
617 Wisnovsky, 'Essence and Existence,' 33-35; Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 250-252.
618 Chittick and Morris, *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 1, 48, 62, 244, n.53.

for our mystical unveiling coincides with the view that the divine attributes are identical to God Himself.[619]

The above passage shows Ibn ʿArabī and al-Shaʿrānī's rejection of the Ashʿarī teaching, as well as their espousal of the Muʿtazilī tenet which states that the divine attributes are identical with God's essence.[620]

Borrowing Ibn ʿArabī's words, al-Shaʿrānī then explains the rationale behind the Ashʿarī tenet which states that the essential attributes are neither identical to nor other than God Himself. According to al-Shaʿrānī, the Ashʿarī theologians insist that the essential attributes are not the same as God; for example, an attribute of knowledge is, according to them, removable, while the essence of a knower remains intact. This is based on an analogy between God and creation; in the case of human beings, it is possible to assume a separation between a person's essence and the attribute of knowledge and imagine a man without knowledge. Should someone lose his knowledge and become a lunatic, he is nonetheless himself, and his essence remains the same. This is also supported by the observation that no human beings are knowing in their essence. They only become knowing by acquiring knowledge, which is additional to and inherent in their essence. The theologians applied this analogy to God, who is

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[619] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya,* 219-220; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 111. Al-Shaʿrānī does not explicitly associate the thesis that God's attributes are neither identical to nor other than God Himself with the Ashʿarīs, whereas Ibn ʿArabī names the Ashʿarīs who articulate this tenet. See Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 4, 236.

[620] A similar argument against the Ashʿarīs' view is also found in the following passage:

> If we say that these relations [divine attributes] are things superadded to His Essence, that they are ontological (*wujūdī*), and that He possesses no perfection except through them – even were He not to have them – this would mean that He is imperfect in essence but perfect through superadded ontological thing [a passage from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, chapter 558, translated by Chittick, *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 1, 62].

all-knowing, and concluded that His attribute of knowledge is also additional to and subsists in His essence. Thus, they concluded that it is neither identical to nor other than God.[621]

Al-Shaʿrānī attempts to refute the Ashʿarī position based on the following observations. Firstly, al-Shaʿrānī maintains that God is perfect, knowing, powerful, and so on in Himself, not through something that is additional to His essence. In other words, God cannot be an effect of something other than Himself. If, on the other hand, the divine attributes of knowledge and power are viewed as entities that are distinct from God and additional to His essence, as the Ashʿarīs claim, and if it is presumed that He only becomes God who is knowing and powerful through these entities, divinity becomes an effect of a cause that is a divine attribute. If this were the case, it must entail one of two things. Either the divine attributes are the same as God Himself, or other than God. They cannot be the same as God, because a cause (i.e. the divine attributes) cannot be the cause of itself (i.e. God). Yet neither can they be other than God because God cannot become an effect of a cause that is not Himself. This is because a cause ontologically precedes its effect; thus, if God were caused by an effect other than Himself, God would inevitably become secondary to His cause, which is fundamentally absurd. Furthermore, this argument entails that God, being an effect, is in need of the additional entities that are causes to Himself. It also follows that the caused thing (i.e. God) would have plural causes (i.e. the divine attributes), through which He becomes God. These outcomes are altogether illogical for the divine. Hence, the original premise, which maintains that the divine attributes are distinctive entities and additional to His

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[621] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 218; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 109; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 284.

essence, has been proved wrong.[622]

Secondly, al-Shaʿrānī insists that God cannot be ruled by something other than Himself. If God were to become knowing though an additional and separate attribute of knowledge, it would follow that the attribute that is other than God is the determinant (*ḥukm*) of His being a knower. However, it is entirely impossible to assume that God is ruled by something that is not Himself.[623]

Lastly, the idea that God becomes perfect only through something additional to His essence (i.e. the essential attributes) would entail that His essence becomes attributed with imperfection and deficiency when (as a hypothetical argument) these additional attributes do not inhere in it. The conclusion is fundamentally absurd, for God is constantly perfect and self-sufficient from and for all eternity.[624]

As opposed to the Ashʿarīs, al-Shaʿrānī, following Ibn ʿArabī, believes that the essential attributes are inseparable from God's essence. Were it not for His attributes of knowledge, power and others, He would no longer be God. Consequently, the divine attributes are identical to His essence, not other than Himself.[625] In the view of al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn ʿArabī's teaching, the divine attributes are relations to God that do not possess separate existence independently of Him.[626] This is also explained in relation to Ibn ʿArabī's ontological worldview. According to this worldview, as we have seen in Chapter 1, God is the only real existence, and everything else is ascribed to His

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[622] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 217; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 110; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 163.

[623] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 109; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 3, 468. Note that Ibn ʿArabī explicitly identifies this view with the Ashʿarīs while al-Shaʿrānī does not.

[624] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 218; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 109; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 284.

[625] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 218; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 109; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 284.

[626] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 217; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 108; Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 1, 163.

single essence. Therefore, divine attributes cannot be real and distinctive. Otherwise, their independent existence would violate divine unity. It is thus concluded that God is knowing, powerful, and so on through attributes of knowledge and power that are identical to His essence.

It is intriguing to observe that in many of his theological works, al-Shaʿrānī supports Ibn ʿArabī's statement that God's attributes are identical to His essence – a thesis which was developed by the Muʿtazilīs. This not only confirms al-Shaʿrānī's loyalty to Ibn ʿArabī's thought, but also al-Shaʿrānī's amicable attitude towards the Muʿtazilīs' teachings. In fact, despite belonging to the scholarly circle of the Ashʿarīs, al-Shaʿrānī acknowledges a certain similarity between the Muʿtazilīs and Sufis on the issue of the divine attributes.[627] Of course, this does not equate al-Shaʿrānī's position with that of the Muʿtazilīs. A significant difference between them concerning the notions of the divine attributes is that, whereas the Muʿtazilīs attempt to reduce the anthropomorphic attributes to the realities of the essential attributes through figurative interpretation, al-Shaʿrānī opts for affirming the realities of the anthropomorphic attributes as they are, as I have already discussed in Chapter 4. Furthermore, as we shall later see, al-Shaʿrānī states that the divine attributes are identical to His essence in establishing the reality of divine with-ness.

5.2. Interpretation of Divine With-ness

In al-Shaʿrānī's view, the thesis maintaining that the divine essential attributes are

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[627] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, 289; *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 20; al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 3, 436.

identical to God Himself is closely related to the discussion on divine with-ness. This section starts with a brief overview of the theologians' approach to the notion of divine with-ness, with special attention given to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's views. This will be followed by analysis of divine with-ness in Ibn ʿArabī's worldview. Lastly, I will demonstrate al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of the notion of divine with-ness, focusing on the scholarly gathering that took place among the two Shādhilī mystics before him – Muḥammad al-Maghribī and his disciple Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī – as well as Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī and two of his contemporaries. In this section, I aim to unveil al-Shaʿrānī's innovative treatment of Ibn ʿArabī's view and underscore the centrality of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching, along with that of other Shādhilī mystics, in al-Shaʿrānī's thought.

5.2.1. Theologians on Divine With-ness

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the Qurʾān frequently reports that God is with human beings. This is observed in the Qurʾān (9:40, 20:46, 57:4, 58:7, and so forth). Theologians include the notion of God's being with His creation, or divine with-ness (*maʿiyya*), amongst the anthropomorphic descriptions of God. In their view, the literal meaning of divine with-ness implies that God is physically with human beings, occupying a space in this world. In order to avoid this anthropomorphic implication, the majority of theologians choose to interpret the idea of divine with-ness figuratively.

On the whole, the theologians maintained that God is with His creation through His attributes, such as His knowledge, power, mercy and protection. Based on the observation that God is the Knower of everything and He is aware of whatsoever we

may do wherever we are, it is concluded that God is with us in His knowledge. Likewise, inasmuch as God is the Powerful one over every being, nothing in this world escapes His authority. Hence, it is surmised that God is with the world in His power. Many of the Ashʿarī and Māturīdī theologians, including Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Salām, and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī supported this interpretive method and understood the verses on with-ness to mean God's with-ness in His various attributes.[628] Al-Ghazālī also writes that the people with reason know that God is not restricted to any direction and that He is with every entity in His attributes of knowledge and comprehension (*iḥāṭa*), whereas the ignorant people may take such expressions literally.[629] The Muʿtazilī theologian Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) similarly upholds this approach and interprets Qurʾānic verse 57:4 to mean that God is present with human beings in His knowledge of their conversation, while at the same time being far above any place and location.[630]

Similarly to the rational theologians, Ibn Taymiyya interprets divine with-ness in relation to His attributes. According to him, God is in reality seated upon the throne in His essence, and He is also with human beings in His knowledge. In order to elucidate

[628] al-Maghrāwī, *al-Mufassirūn*, 894, 994, 1150-1151, 1170
[629] al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī l-iʿtiqād*, 265-267. Similarly, in relation to the notion of divine nearness, al-Ghazālī argues that the ignorant people take God's nearness in the hadith, 'whoever draws near Me a span of the hand, I draw near him an arm's length' to mean His actual nearness in physical distance, whereas the people with reason, or the theologians know that it only means His nearness in His mercy and favour. Elucidating the Qurʾānic verse 57:4, al-Rāzī also maintains that the theologians interpret God's with-ness figuratively to mean with-ness in His knowledge, protection, or custody, in order to avoid the notion of God's with-ness in a physical space and direction. For more details on al-Rāzī's treatment of God's with-ness, see his *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 29, 215-216.
[630] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 6, 62-63. Verse 57:4 reads: 'There is no secret conversation of three but that He is the fourth of them, nor of five but that He is the sixth of them; no less than that and no more except that He is with them wherever they are'. He also elucidates the Qurʾānic verse 29:69 – 'Indeed, He is with the ones who do good' – as God's nearness in His support and aid to them (al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 562).

these contradictory reports, Ibn Taymiyya insists that with-ness consists in God watching over and knowing His creation. As Hoover explains, this is compared to the situation of a traveller who was told that the moon and stars are with him, or a farther, who is sitting on a roof, tells his son below not to be afraid because the father is with him.[631] Ibn Taymiyya attributes the idea that God is with His creation in His knowledge to the pious predecessors, such as Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) or Ibn ʿUyayna (d. 196/811).[632] Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī also notes that the idea of God's being with creation or His being near us in His knowledge dates back to the pious predecessors represented by Sufyān al-Thawrī and others.[633] This suggests that interpreting God's with-ness through the divine attributes has been a standard position amongst scholars from the early Islamic period.

With regard to the mystics who are also strong advocates of Ashʿarī theology, they seem to take two different approaches to divine with-ness. On the one hand, like other theologians, they understand divine with-ness in relation to God's attributes. For example, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī endorses al-Qushayrī's position, which – through a reference to the interpretation of al-Junayd – maintains that divine with-ness means God's with-ness in His aid and protection, or in His all-comprehensive knowledge. This allows them to deny the anthropomorphic implication of divine with-ness in the sense of God's vicinity (*mujāwara*) and togetherness (*muqārana*) to creation.[634]

On the other hand, al-Anṣārī suggests that there is another approach to the notion of divine with-ness. In relation to this, he refers to an episode reported by the Persian mystic Abū ʿAlī al-Rūdbārī (d. 322/934). According to this account by al-Rūdbārī, a

[631] Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 55.
[632] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, vol. 1, 219-220.
[633] al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmāʾ wa al-ṣifāt*, vol. 2, 341-342; Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*, 160, n. 114.
[634] al-Anṣārī, *Iḥkām al-dalāla*, vol. 1, 59.

mystic replied to the question of God's location by saying: 'May God annihilate you (*asḥaqa*); how can you ask where God is?' Commenting on this statement, al-Anṣārī writes:

> [As a comment on 'May God annihilate you'] it means that one ought to forget oneself through the perfection of one's contemplation on God. [As a comment on 'how can you ask where God is?'] the Sufi was in the state of being present with God (*fī ḥāl al-ḥaḍra maʿa Allah*), wherein he perceives nothing but God in any moving object as well as still object. Consequently, God became like [the object of] his direct vision (*ʿiyān*). Because of such dominance of God over his heart, the Sufi responded in this way.[635]

Although the passage is not directly concerned with the notion of divine with-ness, it implies the possibility that Sufis may experience God's presence with them in their heart as a result of forgetting themselves and focusing on God, and perceive nothing but Him in their vision. This understanding clearly differs from the theologians' interpretation of God's presence with creation in His attributes of aid and knowledge.

It is noteworthy that Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya also considers the possibility that the mystic perceives divine presence through his direct experience with God. In one of the sections of his *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib*, wherein he enumerates the various benefits of the mystic remembrance of God (*dhikr*), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya notes that a mystic who remembers God (*dhākir*) becomes close to (*qarīb*) the One who is remembered (*madhkūr*); thereby the One who is remembered (God) comes to be with him. Ibn

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[635] al-Anṣārī, *Iḥkām al-dalāla*, vol. 1, 60.

al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya describes this notion of divine with-ness as special with-ness (*maʿiyya khāṣṣa*). According to him, this special type of divine with-ness should be distinguished from the other kind of divine with-ness, namely, God's with-ness in His knowledge and comprehension as agreed upon among theologians.[636] Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya certainly acknowledges various benefits in the theologians' divine with-ness in His attributes. Nevertheless, he intriguingly expresses the superiority of the mystics' experience of divine with-ness, which words cannot describe and which is only experienced through the remembrance of God and the mystical experience of tasting (*dhawq*).[637]

While supporting this special type of with-ness based on the mystical discipline, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya also warns that unless a mystic is fully aware of the distinction between the pre-eternal God and temporally originated beings, he might take his mystical experience of divine with-ness as representing the existential reality of the world.[638] This will lead to the incarnationism of the Christians or the unificationism of the proponents of the oneness of existence.[639] It is obvious that by this remark, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya intends to criticise Ibn ʿArabī and his followers who, in his view, denied the ontological distinction between the divine and the world and identified God with creation. For Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, they understood the meaning of divine with-ness in a heretical manner.

In relation to this, in Chapter 2, I explained that whereas Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya condemns the ontological notion of annihilation for denying the difference between God and His creation, he tolerates the kind of annihilation based on a visionary experience.

[636] Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib*, 157.
[637] Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib*, 157-159.
[638] Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib*, 157-159.
[639] Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib*, 157-159.

A similar conclusion is interestingly drawn in the case of divine with-ness. As we have seen, while Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya rejects the divine with-ness that entails the ontological presence of God in creation, he nonetheless accepts the experiential and perceptual state of divine with-ness as special with-ness, whereby human beings experience divine presence psychologically in their minds. Strikingly, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's view on this special kind of divine with-ness is referred to by Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, whom I shall discuss shortly.

5.2.2. Ibn ʿArabī on Divine with-ness

Before discussing al-Shaʿrānī's view on divine witness, I will briefly look at Ibn ʿArabī's. It must be noted that Ibn ʿArabī does not analyse the notion of divine with-ness in depth. It is at least certain that he considers the idea in relation to his mystical worldview. Based on the theory of ontological divine self-manifestation, Ibn ʿArabī perceives God to be with His creation inasmuch as they manifest divine names and attributes as His loci. In this regard, God is with them wherever they are in the forms of His creation, wherein God becomes manifest.[640] Even when they are not yet existent –that is, before the world receives the divine self-manifestation – Ibn ʿArabī maintains that God is already with them, because they are from all eternity known to Him.[641]

Therefore, God is pre-eternally present with the creation in His knowledge, which is identical to His essence, and He is also with them in His manifestations in the world's beings. In Ibn ʿArabī's view, only the mystics can attain this divine with-ness. In one of

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[640] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 558; vol. 3, 101.
[641] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* vol. 2, 56.

the passages in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, he describes the mystical experience of witnessing God's with-ness as divine 'union' (*waṣl*) to creation and writes:

> The Real is perpetually in a state of 'union' (*waṣl*) with engendered existence. Through this He is a god. This is indicated by His words, 'He is with you wherever you are' [Q. 57:4], that is, in whatever state you have in nonexistence, existence, and all qualities. Such is the actual situation.
>
> What takes place for the people of solicitude, the Folk of Allah, is that God gives them vision and unveils their insights until they witness this withness.[642] This – that is, the gnostic's witnessing – is what is called 'union.'[643] So the gnostic has become joined (*ittiṣāl*) to witnessing the actual situation.[644]

As the passage indicates, the real situation of the cosmos is that God is with all things in creation in a state of union, whether they are existent or non-existent, and this can only be grasped by mystical unveiling. There is little doubt here that Ibn ʿArabī's approach to divine with-ness is built on the ontology of divine self-manifestation and the tenet of the oneness of existence; God is with the creatures in the sense that He is manifest in them in reality.

Similarly to this, another monistic mystic, Ibn Sabʿīn, whom I mentioned in Chapter 1, relates divine with-ness to his worldview of absolute unity. According to him,

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[642] That is to say, until the mystics realise the situation of God being with creation in His pre-eternal knowledge and through His manifestation in them.
[643] This means that when a mystic receives mystical experience and witnesses the real situation of the world wherein the world is He/not He, he becomes as if he is unified with God.
[644] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 558, translation taken from Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 365.

divine with-ness – as alluded to in the verse 'God is with those who fear Him and those who do good' [Q. 16:128] – shows divine selection and solicitude for a chosen, good servant. Based on this idea, Ibn Sabʿīn maintains that God makes a good servant a divine vessel for His names and attributes, and, most notably, makes His attribute of goodness the essence of the good servant. In his view, much like that of Ibn ʿArabī, the divine attribute is not additional to the one who is attributed with it (i.e. God), but identical to God Himself. It follows that a good servant whose essence is identical to the divine attribute of goodness is God.[645] It is thus concluded that God is with those who do good from the perspective that He is none other than those good servants. In this way, Ibn Sabʿīn articulates the tenet of absolute unity through the notion of divine with-ness. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya clearly objected to this kind of monistic worldview.

However, Ibn ʿArabī's view on divine with-ness varies and lacks consistency. On the one hand, he denies that the divine essence can be with creation, as His essence is never known.[646] On the other hand, he notes that the divine name 'the Watchful one' (raqīb) and its presence in creation as 'watchfulness' (murāqaba) imply that God is with us in His essence.[647] In Chapter 73 of al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, he also writes that God is with the chosen ones (aṣfiyāʾ) in being their friend (tawallī); with the prophets through His supporting their call to the path of God; and with the elites (khāṣṣa) through their dialogue with God without intermediaries, and through His intimacy with

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[645] Ibn Sabʿīn, Rasāʾil, 153.
[646] Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, vol. 2, 118-119.
[647] Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, vol. 4, 254. In Ibn ʿArabī's view, the Watchful one implies that God observes all beings, including their attributes, properties, movements, and minds. In order for this to be possible, God has to know their essence all-comprehensively. To Ibn ʿArabī's mind, this requires the Watchful one to accompany the divine essence that is present with all the divine names and attributes, whereby God can watch over every being in creation in His knowledge, power, aid, grace, and so on.

them (*uns*); and all of these are united in the prophet Muḥammad.[648] Thus Ibn ʿArabī understands the notion of divine with-ness through God's actions. Furthermore, as noted earlier, Ibn ʿArabī insists that God is with the creatures through His knowledge, which is identical with His essence; hence, God is with them both in His essence and attributes. Interestingly, this conclusion, which is easily drawn from his arguments, is central to al-Shaʿrānī's thought, but not Ibn ʿArabī's.

As I have shown, Ibn ʿArabī generally perceives God's with-ness in relation to his mystical ontology of divine self-manifestation; God is with creation in His pre-eternal knowledge and in His manifestations in them. Yet as we shall now see, the notion of God's with-ness concerned al-Shaʿrānī much more than it did Ibn ʿArabī.

5.2.3. Al-Shaʿrānī on Divine With-ness

Having discussed the theologians' and Ibn ʿArabī's views on divine with-ness, I turn to al-Shaʿrānī's treatment of this concept. The discussions in this section draw on the description of the scholarly gathering that took place in fifteenth-century Egypt concerning the meaning of divine with-ness. I will especially examine al-Shaʿrānī's reports of this incident, along with Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's unpublished and unstudied epistle, 'The Light of the Sunnis in Explicating The Meaning of With-ness' (*al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya fī bayān maʿnā al-maʿiyya*). The investigation of this subject will highlight al-Shaʿrānī's relationships with lesser-known local Sufis, clarify the similarity between their ideas and those of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in their understanding of God's with-ness, and elucidate the extent of al-Shaʿrānī's acceptance of Ibn ʿArabī's

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[648] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, 118-119.

teachings.

I begin with a brief sketch of the epistle's author, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, paying special attention to his teacher, Muḥammad al-Maghribī. Winter mentions Muḥammad al-Maghribī as one of al-Shaʿrānī's teachers from the Shādhilī order, who also taught al-Suyūṭī and Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī.[649] Muḥammad al-Maghribī studied under the Shādhilī Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Sarsī (d. 861/1456), who was a disciple of the influential Shādhilī teacher, Muḥammad al-Ḥanafī (d. 847/1443).[650] According to Geoffroy, Muḥammad al-Ḥanafī established the second major branch of the Shādhilī order, after Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī's (d. 625/1288) succession to leadership following the death of the Shāhdilī order's founder, Abū Ḥasan al-Shāhdilī (d. 656/1258). Al-Sarsī, followed by Muḥammad al-Maghribī, inherited al-Ḥanafī's Shādhilī branch.[651]

Muḥammad al-Maghribī was known among his fellow Egyptian scholars for his mastery of the fields of the Islamic Law and Sufism.[652] Since al-Shaʿrānī was only twelve years old when Muḥammad al-Maghribī died, Winter surmises that it is unlikely that he was al-Shaʿrānī's actual teacher. Winter also points out the scarcity of references to Muḥammad al-Maghribī in al-Shaʿrānī's works compared to other favourite teachers of his. Winter therefore concludes that the influence of Muḥammad al-Maghribī on al-Shaʿrānī's thought was minor. However, Winter's analysis is not thorough, as he disregards references to Muḥammad al-Maghribī made by al-Shaʿrānī in such works as *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* and *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* in regard to the debate over the

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[649] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 71. See also al-Shaʿrānī, a*l-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 12; *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 445; al-Nabhānī, *Karāmat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 1, 289.
[650] Winter, *Society and Religion*, 71; McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism*, 175, n. 36.
[651] Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 210. The first major branch of al-Shādhilī is the Wafāʾī order. For more on this branch, see McGregor, Sanctity and Mysticism.
[652] Muḥammad al-Maghribī seems to have had a close relation with the Mamluk rulers; the Sultan Qāʾit Bāy is reported to have sent him some money to distribute it to other Sufis, but he refused to receive money from the Sultan. See, al-Munāwī, *Kawākib*, vol. 3, 435-436.

notion of divine with-ness. As we shall see, this observation raises the possibility that

Muḥammad al-Maghribī played a certain role in shaping al-Shaʿrānī's view on this

concept.

One of the disciples of Muḥammad al-Maghribī was Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, who

was also a student of the Shādhilī Sufi and ardent supporter of ʿAlī Wafāʾ, Abū

al-Mawāhibī (d. ca. 911-4/1505-9).[653] Aside from *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya fī bayān maʿnā*

al-maʿiyya, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī left a commentary on Sufi aphorisms, *Kitāb al-ḥikam*,

which was authored by the second successor of the Shādhilī order, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allah (d.

709/1310).[654] He also wrote a text on the notion of divine unity, *al-Tafrīḍ wa ḍawābiṭ*

qawāʿid al-tawḥīd.[655] Along with Muḥammad al-Maghribī, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī was

under the influence of Ibn ʿArabī's thought. According to al-Munāwī, when asked by

his teacher al-Maghribī about his mystical experience, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī answered

that he had witnessed absolute unity (*al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa*), and that his spirit was

elevated as a result of this.[656] Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī also employs several terms

developed by Ibn ʿArabī, such as exclusive oneness (*aḥadiyya*) and inclusive oneness

(*wāḥidiyya*), in explaining his view on divine with-ness.[657] Apart from these facts, very

little is known about Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī.

Several copies of Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* are extant in

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[653] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 376-390.
[654] al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib al-sāʾira*, vol. 1, 110-111; *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, vol. 10, 90-91; al-Munāwī, *Kawākib al-dhurriyya* vol. 3, 320-321.
[655] al-Munāwī, *Kawākib al-dhurriyya* vol. 3, 321.
[656] al-Munāwī, *Kawākib al-dhurriyya* vol. 3, 320-321.
[657] al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (a), fols. 2b-3a. According to Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, divine with-ness is ascribed to inclusive oneness wherein God is with all beings in His attributes, whereas nothing is with Him at the stage of exclusive oneness wherein everything disappears in His oneness. Although Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī refers to Ibn al-Fāriḍ rather than Ibn ʿArabī for the clarification of these two terms, it is fair to assume that Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī was influenced by Ibn ʿArabī's mystical worldview. A reference to exclusive oneness and inclusive oneness does not appear in manuscript (b).

manuscript form. I have access to two of these, located at the following libraries: (a) Dār al-Kutub, Cairo (no. cc 74160) and (b) Maktabat al-Azhar, Cairo (no. 68390/1544).[658] The work is a very short epistle, with only two to five folios contained in each manuscript copy. Its main theme is summarised at the beginning of the text:

This is the light of the Sunnis in explicating the meaning of with-ness, as it appears in the Qurʾān and in the authentic hadith. Hence, it is incumbent upon us to have faith in it [i.e. divine with-ness] and witness to it from the perspective of the mystical experience (*dhawqan*) and reason […]. God's with-ness to His creation is in His essence as well as in His attributes, as is understood from the divine message, 'God is with you'. The verse's meaning is gathered in relation to what the divine name 'the Generous one' (*al-karīm*) implies; that is to say, it is necessary for His essence to accompany the divine attributes in order for Him to be related to all beings [so that He is generous to the entirety of His creation]. Yet divine with-ness is unlike the with-ness of those who occupy space, because God does not have any likeness (*mumāthala*) except Himself […] divine with-ness is then based on what suits Him for His perfection. May God be above pure anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*).[659]

As suggested in the passage, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's objective in the epistle is to

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[658] Other copies are found in the following places: Dār al-Kutub, Cairo (no. 3594); Maktaba al-Azhar, Cairo (no. 28624/2655; no. 55054/1208); Juma Al Majid Centre for Culture and Heritage, Dubai (no. 576798); Mauritania (Wallatah) – Collection of Ahl al-Ṭālib bi-Bakr, Mauritania (no. sp 10306). Each copy of the manuscripts contains only two to five pages.
[659] al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (a), fols. 1b-2a; *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (b), fols. 2a-2b.

establish the reality of God's with-ness to creation both in His essence and in His attributes, without ascribing any corporeal or physical features to Him.

Before setting out to investigate the arguments in the epistle, I will first examine al-Shaʿrānī's description of the gathering (*majlis*) over the meaning of divine with-ness. The gathering took place at al-Azhar in the year 905/1499. The main attendants were Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, Muḥammad al-Maghribī, the Shāfiʿī chief judge Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, the Ḥanafī chief judge Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-ʿAlāʾī al-Ḥanafī (d. 942/1535), and the Shāfiʿī jurist Burhān al-Dīn Ibn Abī Sharīf (d. 923/1517). I have already introduced al-Shaʿrānī's teacher, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī in Chapter 1. Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-ʿAlāʾī al-Ḥanafī (d. 942/1535) was one of al-Anṣārī's later students. He is known for having written a chronicle of the events that had taken place in Cairo between the years 917/1511-934/1528. According to Escovitz, this untitled chronicle is considered to be among the most important historical materials of early Ottoman Egypt. Unfortunately, Muḥammad al-ʿAlāʾī's chronicle has been lost. Its fragments are only preserved in Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī's (d. 1061/1651) biographical dictionary, *al-Kawākib al-sāʾira*, in which al-ʿAlāʾī also recounts details of al-Anṣārī's life.[660]

Burhān al-Dīn Ibn Abī Sharīf (d. 923/1517), also known as Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad Ibn Abī Sharīf, was a colleague of al-Anṣārī. He was well-versed in Qurʾānic exegesis and Ashʿarī theology. Although Ibn Abī Sharīf supported Sufism, he was suspicious of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, and in particular of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Ibn Abī Sharīf's works include commentaries on theological works such as *Jamʿ al-jawāmiʿ*, *Sharḥ al-ʿaqāʾid* and *ʿAqāʾid al-nasafī*. In *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, al-Shaʿrānī frequently quotes Ibn Abī Sharīf in order to explain different theological issues. Ibn Abī

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[660] Escovitz, 'A Lost Arabic Source,' 513–18; al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib al-sāʾira*, vol. 1, 201; vol. 2, 71; *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, vol. 10, 353; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, vol. 7, 10.

Sharīf also left a summary of *Risāla al-Qushayrī*.[661]

The events of the scholarly gathering at al-Azhar can be summarised as follows. Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, Muḥammad al-ʿAlāʾī, and Ibrāhīm Abī Sharīf one day approached Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, objecting to his statement that God is with creation not only in His names and attributes, but also in His essence. While Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī was clarifying his view with reference to the Ibn ʿArabī-influenced mystic Shāfiʿī-Shādhilī Muḥammad Ibn Labbān (d. 749/1349),[662] his teacher Muḥammad al-Maghribī came in and defended Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's position for its confirmation of the notion of divine incomparability.[663] At the time of this incident, al-Shaʿrānī was around six years old, and still living in the countryside. Therefore, he could only have learnt about it either from his teacher al-Anṣārī (most probably) or from Ibrāhīm al-Maghribī himself.[664] Abundant references to this gathering in al-Shaʿrānī's works suggest that it was of great interest to him – it is recorded in at least five of his works. These include: *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya* (in Chapter 4, on the professions of the great Sufis); *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (in the entry on Muḥammad al-Maghribī); *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya* (in the section titled 'the false imagination that God in His with-ness occupies space'); *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya* (in Chapter 6 on the meaning of 'God is with you wherever you are'); and *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* (in Chapter 18, titled 'it is necessary to believe that God is with us wherever we are, in His state of being in the sky,

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[661] al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, vol. 3, 308-313; al-Sakhāwī, *Dawʾ* vol.1, 134-136. For Ibn Abī Sharīf's relation with Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, see Ingalls, *Subtle Innovation.*

[662] Ibn Labbān grew up in Damascus and Cairo. He was investigated by jurists for his opinion that allegedly agrees with that of the proponents of unificationism (*ittiḥādiyya*) and the oneness of existence (*waḥda*). See Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina* vol. 3, 330-331; Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 379. Al-Subkī reports that Ibn al-Labbān explained some Qurʾānic verses and hadiths based on mystical teaching (al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, vol. 9, 94; Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 52).

[663] Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 379-380.

[664] Al-Shaʿrānī does not mention where or not he had any direct interaction with Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī.

seated upon the throne, in the heaven and the earth, and closer to us than the jugular vein').[665] The most detailed description is given in the last three works (*al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, and *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*). Noticeably, there is no reference to this gathering in *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*.[666] This suggests that al-Shaʿrānī's intended audience in reporting the argument on divine with-ness did not include advanced mystics (who are most likely able to perceive divine with-ness based on Ibn ʿArabī's ontology of divine self-manifestation), but rather consist of non-advanced mystics and theologians who need a different approach to this notion. In what follows, I expound al-Shaʿrānī's view on divine with-ness through an analysis of the gathering's details, along with a close reading of Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's epistle.

In the previous section, I demonstrated that the majority of the theologians understand God's with-ness to occur through His attributes of knowledge, aid, and so on. In their view, it is impossible to assume that God is with human beings in His essence, as this would imply that He is literally with them in physical space. With respect to their view, al-Shaʿrānī makes the following statement:

It is obvious that the one who states that God is with us in His attributes is greater in his reverence for God than the one who says that He is with us in His essence and attributes, even though the attribute is inseparable from the One who is attributed with it [i.e. God]. This is so, because the Qurʾān

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[665] It appears in the following pages; *al-Ajwiba al-marḍiyya*, 301; *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*; 442-443; *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 202-204; *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 68a-69b; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 90-92.

[666] In *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, al-Shaʿrānī does not talk about the thesis maintaining that divine attributes are identical to God Himself. Nor does he mention the meaning of divine with-ness. On only one occasion, he refers to the verse 'God is with you wherever you are,' and denies the implication that we are with God from eternity. In his view, God is said to be with creation in His knowledge pre-eternally and in His manifestation temporarily (al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 159).

and Sunna do not speak of divine with-ness in His essence.[667]

Like other theologians, al-Shaʿrānī here acknowledges that divine with-ness should be understood as occurring through God's attributes, but not in His essence. As he implies in the above passage, however, the aforementioned thesis that the divine attributes are identical to God Himself inevitably leads to the idea that God is with creation both in His essence and attributes.[668]

It is worth noting that Ibn ʿArabī does not relate his thesis that the divine attributes are identical to God's essence to the concept of divine with-ness. It is in the thought of Muḥammad al-Maghribī, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, and al-Shaʿrānī that this thesis is associated with the understanding of God's with-ness in His essence and attributes. With respect to this, al-Shaʿrānī quotes Muḥammad al-Maghribī and states:

Our teacher, the Shādhilī mystic, Muḥammad al-Maghribī used to say as follows: it is necessarily concluded from the thesis that God is with us only in His knowledge that the divine attributes are independent (*istiqlāl*) of the divine essence. However, this idea is forbidden. Perhaps whoever stated this [i.e. the theologians] said so based on the analogy of the attributes of creation. In other words, he [a theologian] probably observed that even when the knowledge of a human being was removed, his essence [as a human being] remained perfect, with nothing lacking in his essence. He then applied this

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[667] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 205. See also al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* vol. 1, 90; *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 68a. This remark is attributed to al-Shaʿrānī's Sufi teacher, ʿAlī al-Marṣafī.

[668] In order to support the idea of divine with-ness in essence, al-Shaʿrānī also refers to Ibn ʿArabī's comment on the divine name, 'the Watchful one. See al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 202; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 90.

observation to God; yet this is a wrong analogy.[669]

Although Ibn ʿArabī is not mentioned in this passage, Muḥammad al-Maghribī's reference to the theologians' analogy – that a person's essence remains the same even without his knowledge as I mentioned earlier in this chapter – would indicate his familiarity with Ibn ʿArabī's teaching regarding this subject. Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī holds the same tenet as Muḥammad al-Maghribī that God is with creation in His essence and attributes, while endorsing the aforementioned Muʿtazilī thesis. With respect to this, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī writes:

As the Muʿtazilīs maintained, God's attributes are identical to His essence. This is in contrast to [the situation of] human beings' attributes and their essences; in case of human beings, their attributes are additional to their essences and are separable from them, whereas the divine attributes are not [contrary to the theologians' analogy].[670]

As evident in these two passages, Muḥammad al-Maghribī, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, and al-Shaʿrānī agree with the Muʿtazilī-inspired thesis of Ibn ʿArabī that the divine attributes are identical to His essence. They thus reject the Ashʿarī tenet that the divine attributes are additional to His essence and that they are independent entities. However, whereas the Muʿtazilīs like al-Zamakhsharī prefer to interpret divine with-ness in relation to God's attribute of knowledge, and not His essence, Muḥammad al-Maghribī, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, and al-Shaʿrānī – based on the thesis that the divine attributes are

[669] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 202.
[670] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fol. 68b.

the same as Him – maintain that God is with His creation both in His essence and attributes. This is an intriguing example indicating how these mystics develop an original teaching – first advanced by the Muʿtazilīs and then adopted by Ibn ʿArabī – by applying it to another theological issue.

Muḥammad al-Maghribī, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, and al-Shaʿrānī's view was eventually confronted by that of the theologians and jurists who believed that God is with creation only in His attributes. When Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī held a gathering at al-Azhar over the understanding of the Qurʾānic verse 57:4, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAlāʾī, and Ibrāhīm Abī Sharīf argued against Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's interpretation that God is with His creation in His essence and attributes. In response, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī stated that God's attributes cannot be separated from His essence, for if one could assume the existence of the divine attributes without the divine essence, they would become independent entities, which in his view was illogical. Thus, he insisted that the notion of divine with-ness in attributes necessarily entails divine with-ness in essence. In other words, since God is only related to the creatures through His attributes of knowledge of them, power over them, and so on, the idea of divine with-ness in essence inevitably entails divine with-ness in attributes.[671]

Hence, it is established that God is with us both in His essence and in His attributes. This thesis affirms the reality of God being with us in His essence. It also results in the notion of divine with-ness in His attributes, which is a similar view to that of the theologians. Remarkably, this idea (divine with-ness in essence and attributes) does not require figurative interpretation, which, in al-Shaʿrānī's view, leads to anthropomorphism by comparing God to the newly originated meaning.

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[671] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 202; *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 90-91; *al-Mīzān al-khiḍriyya*, fols. 68a-68b.

Let us now consider Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's epistle in relation to this concept. According to him, the notion of divine with-ness ought to be taken literally (*ḥaqīqī*), not metaphorically (*majāzī*).[672] This view coincides with al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes as discussed in Chapter 4; in his view, divine hands, legs, and so on are employed in a literal sense in scripture, just as the lion is literally used to stand for a courageous person.

Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī asserts that the literal meaning of with-ness is that something accompanies another – whether it is between God and His attributes, two contingent beings like human beings, or the necessary being (i.e. God) and the contingent being. The assumption that God accompanies human beings does not necessarily entail His incarnation in any physical direction, time, and space, because God is utterly incomparable to these notions. God's with-ness is unlike creation's with-ness; He is with us in the way that is suitable for His authority and perfection, without the implication of anthropomorphism. In Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's view, as discussed earlier, if divine with-ness is only in God's attributes but not in His essence as the theologians claim, this would result in the separation of the divine attributes from God's essence. Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī maintains that this is tantamount to the assumption that the divine attributes keep a physical distance from the divine essence and that they occupy a certain space. These properties are evidently prohibited from being applied to God.[673] Therefore, divine with-ness should be understood to involve both God's essence and His attributes.

When asked by the jurists if anyone agreed with his opinion, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī

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[672] al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (a), fol. 2a.
[673] al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (a), fol. 2a; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Qawāʿid al-kashfiyya*, 201-202.

named aforementioned Ibn al-Labbān. Referring to Ibn al-Labbān's explanation of the meaning of God's nearness – as seen in the hadith 'We are nearer to him than you, but you do not see (*yabṣur*)' [Q. 56:85] – Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī writes:

> This divine message demonstrates that God's nearness to His creation is real nearness (*qurb ḥaqīqī*) – in the way that is appropriate for Him[674] – for He is above physical place. If His nearness were in His knowledge, power, and other attributes[675] [as the theologians would insist], God would have said instead 'but you do not know [God]' and so forth, instead of 'but you do not see'. That God said 'but you do not see' shows that it is real nearness that can be perceived by mystical vision (*baṣar*) – when God unveils our vision.[676] Due to its function of perceiving something (*idrāk*), vision is not related to abstract qualifications (*ṣifāt maʿnawiyya*). It is only related to realities which can be seen (*ḥaqāʾiq marʾiyya*).[677]

In the above passage, Ibn al-Labbān attempts to establish the reality of divine nearness via a literalistic approach to scripture. According to him, God said that one would not 'see His nearness'. Therefore, divine nearness should not be interpreted to mean His nearness in knowledge and other attributes, as they are not related to a vision.

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[674] The underlined sentence is inserted by al-Shaʿrānī and does not originally appear in al-Mawāhibī's text, nor in Ibn Labbān's. See al-Shaʿrānī *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* vol. 1, 91; Ibn al-Labbān, *Izāla al-shubuhāt*, 130-131.

[675] In *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, it is 'His knowledge, power, and ordering (*tadbīr*), for example.'

[676] The underlined sentence is inserted by al-Shaʿrānī and does not originally appear in al-Mawāhibī's text, nor in Ibn Labbān's. See al-Shaʿrānī *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* vol. 1, 91; Ibn al-Labbān, *Izāla al-shubuhāt*, 130-131.

[677] al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (a), fol. 2b, (b), fols. 3a-3b; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir* vol. 1, 91.

Accordingly, divine nearness in the verse in question means divine nearness in reality, which our vision can perceive – but only if accompanied by the divine unveiling.

In an attempt to strengthen his view on the reality of divine with-ness, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī also treats Ibn al-Labbān's approach to the verse, 'We are nearer to him than his jugular vein' [Q. 50:16]. This is one of the ambiguous verses that rational theologians prefer to interpret figuratively in order to avoid anthropomorphism. According to al-Rāzī, for example, the verse is interpreted to mean that God is nearer than the jugular vein in terms of His knowledge. This reading is based on the notion that our jugular vein is covered by our bodily parts and hidden from our sight, whereas nothing is concealed from God's knowledge. In the sense that God even knows our jugular vein, which is invisible to us, His knowledge is considered to be nearer to us than our jugular vein. This is divine nearness in knowledge, not in essence.[678]

On the contrary, in the view of Ibn al-Labbān as well as Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī and al-Shaʿrānī, verse 50:16 confirms that God's being nearer to human beings than the jugular vein is actually real.[679] With regard to this, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī writes as follows:

> There is no equivocality of meaning (*ishtirāk*) between the nearness of the
>
> divine attributes and the nearness of the jugular vein, for the nearness of the
>
> divine attributes is conceptual (*maʿnawī*), which differs from the nearness of
>
> the jugular vein – which is sensible (*ḥissī*).[680] Therefore, a relation (*nisba*)
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> [between God and creation] through God's being nearer (*aqrabiyya*) to

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[678] al-Rāzī, al-*Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 28, 162-163.
[679] See also Ibn al-Labbān, *Izāla al-shubuhāt*, 45.
[680] The underlined description is inserted by al-Shaʿrānī and does not originally appear in al-Mawāhibī's text. See al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 91.

human beings than the jugular vein, which is real, evidences the reality

(*ḥaqīqī*) of divine nearness [that is to say, divine nearness is real]. This is to

say, God's nearness is through His essence, which necessarily entails His

attributes.[681]

Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's denial of equivocality between the nearness of the jugular vein

and that of the divine attributes, and his subsequent espousal of the reality of divine

nearness accord, once again, with al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic

attributes as I discussed in Chapter 4. God informs us of His nearness through the

sensible notion of the nearness of our jugular vein, which differs from the conceptual

meaning of God's nearness in His attributes. Consequently, the verse has to be believed

as such to mean His real nearness in His essence. Yet, as the last sentence in the above

passage indicates, divine nearness in essence entails the nearness of the divine attributes,

as they are essentially inseparable from His essence. Therefore, as with the notion of

divine with-ness, it is established that God is near us both in His essence and

attributes.[682]

Remarkably, in order to justify the reality of divine with-ness, Ibrāhīm

al-Mawāhibī references the aforementioned remark by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya about

the special type of divine with-ness. As discussed, unlike divine with-ness in attributes,

this special kind of with-ness enables a mystic who practices the remembrance of God

to be present with Him in his mystical vision and perception, but not in reality. Quoting

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī writes as follows:

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[681] al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (a), fol. 2b, (b), fol.3b; al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 91.
[682] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse Ibn al-Labbān's view on this subject. Further study is necessary in order to understand his theological position.

No words can describe this [special] with-ness and no qualifications are given to it, since it is only known by the mystical experience of tasting (*dhawq*). [The espousal of] this with-ness will be presumptuous, unless the servant differentiates between the eternal Being and the temporally originated being.[683]

The reference to this statement suggests Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's intention to associate his position with what is in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's view a sanctioned idea of divine with-ness. This divine with-ness is experienced by authentic mystics, who continue to bear witness to the absolute distinction between the divine and creation while rejecting with-ness in relation to Ibn ʿArabī's ontology of divine self-manifestation.

According to al-Shaʿrānī's report, Muḥammad al-Maghribī intervened in the gathering shortly after Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī clarified his view on the reality of divine with-ness and nearness in God's essence and attributes. Addressing the jurists, Muḥammad al-Maghribī explained the meaning of divine with-ness in relation to divine foreknowledge. According to him, God is with each being pre-eternally before and after the creation, as everything is known to God and present in His knowledge for all eternity.[684] Understanding with-ness in relation to divine knowledge is similar to the theologians' approach, discussed earlier. However, Muḥammad al-Maghribī notes that anyone who wants to perceive the situation of divine with-ness from the perspective of mystical unveiling needs to follow a mystic path. This comment implies that, for the

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[683] al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (a), fols. 2b-3a. A reference to Ibn al-Qayyim's remark does not appear in the manuscript (b) nor in al-Shaʿrānī's works but in the manuscript (a).
[684] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, vol. 1, 91-92; al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya*, (a) fol. 3b; (b) fols. 4a-4b.

mystics, there exists another approach to divine with-ness. Upon hearing this remark, the attending scholars reportedly showed Muḥammad al-Maghribī's answer respect by kissing his hand, then left the room.

Intriguingly, Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, referring to Muḥammad al-Maghribī's explanation, describes the notion of God's with-ness to creation in His pre-eternal knowledge as common with-ness (*maʿiyya ʿāmma*). This is contrasted with special with-ness (*maʿiyya khāṣṣa*), which Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī defines as the witnessing of common with-ness through mystical experience (*shuhūd*). He finds supporting evidence for the idea of special with-ness in the verse, 'If you are one of those who are brought near to God' [Q. 56:88], on which he comments: 'That is to say, those to whom God disclosed the pleasure of [special] divine nearness'.[685] Following our arguments, it is understood that, in contrast with common with-ness, special with-ness has to be directly experienced and cannot be explained. It ought to be believed not metaphorically but literally, and its reality must be affirmed. As indicated by Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's reference to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, the affirmation of the reality of special with-ness does not entail the thesis that the world is He and not He as Ibn ʿArabī asserts. In Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's view, God is with creation in reality both in His essence and attributes in the manner that is suitable for His incomparability.

Thus, al-Shaʿrānī's approach to divine with-ness which draws on Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's position, in conjunction with Ibn ʿArabī's thesis that the divine attributes are identical to God's essence and inseparable from it, enables one to accept the prima facie sense of the verses on divine with-ness, affirming its reality through His essence and attributes without relying on figurative interpretation and without pure

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[685] al-Mawāhibī, *al-Lumʿa al-sunniyya* (a), fol. 3b. This passage not appear in the manuscript (b).

anthropomorphism. Like other anthropomorphic attributes examined in Chapter 4, al-Shaʿrānī counts the notion of with-ness amongst the divine anthropomorphic attributes that belongs to the level of delimitation, treating it as part of the divine descent to people's minds.[686] Hence, non-advanced mystics ought to have faith in it in the form in which it was reported and affirm its reality through mystical experience.

Conclusion

Following the findings in Chapter 4, this chapter aimed to deepen the understanding of al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the anthropomorphic attributes by considering his treatment of the notion of divine with-ness. To this end, I first investigated al-Shaʿrānī's espousal of the theological thesis stating that the divine attributes are identical to His essence, which was proposed by the Muʿtazilīs and then supported by Ibn ʿArabī. It has emerged that, while being a member of the Ashʿarī theological group, al-Shaʿrānī explicitly denies their tenet that the divine attributes are neither identical to nor other than God Himself, and shows his commitment to the Muʿtazilīs' and Ibn ʿArabī's teaching on this matter.

In the section that followed, I discussed al-Shaʿrānī's approach to the notion of divine with-ness. As evidenced by the analysis of al-Shaʿrānī's report of the scholarly gathering regarding this concept, as well as by the contents of Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī's untreated epistle, al-Shaʿrānī understands divine with-ness in relation both to God's essence and to His attributes. Thus, he affirms the reality of God's being with His

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[686] al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Mīzān al-dharriyya*, 178.

creation yet without actual anthropomorphism. This approach to divine with-ness –
which differs from that of the major theologians, who figuratively interpret the concept
in relation to God's attributes, and also from that of Ibn ʿArabī, who discusses it within
his theory of the ontological divine self-manifestation – demonstrates al-Shaʿrānī's
intellectual and theological uniqueness.

Furthermore, al-Shaʿrānī's reference to the opinions of the two fifteenth-century
Egyptian mystics – Muḥammad al-Maghribī and Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī, who have
previously been almost unknown to modern scholarship – shows that Ibn ʿArabī's
supporters in the Arabic speaking world of this period actively engaged with the
interpretation of his teachings, rather than apologetically eulogising him as a great saint.
Most significantly, I argued that by drawing on these mystics, al-Shaʿrānī innovatively
integrates Ibn ʿArabī's thesis that the divine attributes are identical to His essence into
his own understanding of divine with-ness. It also exposed an interesting similarity
between these mystics and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya over their understanding of divine
with-ness.

The evidence shown in this chapter confirms our observation in Chapter 4 that
al-Shaʿrānī affirms the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes without
admitting literal anthropomorphism. The present chapter has further demonstrated that
al-Shaʿrānī upholds the reality of divine with-ness, which is in his view only attainable
through the mystical experience, based on Ibn ʿArabī's teachings. This analysis
establishes, once again, the uniqueness of al-Shaʿrānī's efforts in applying the mystical
discipline to the theological one, thereby merging the two spheres.

Further research is necessary in order to better understand the teachings of
Muḥammad al-Maghribī and Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī and to fully illustrate al-Shaʿrānī's

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intellectual milieu. Nevertheless, these findings contribute to the clarification and contextualisation of al-Shaʿrānī's multi-faceted thought as a defender of Ibn ʿArabī.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate al-Shaʿrānī's reception of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings. Scholars have for some time agreed that al-Shaʿrānī was an uncritical apologist of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, perceiving al-Shaʿrānī to be a moderate Sufi who was not interested in Ibn ʿArabī's mystical worldview and who only defended him by haphazardly and superficially editing his statements. According to the existing scholarship, this attitude of admiring Ibn ʿArabī whilst staying aloof from his actual thought was standard amongst his other defenders in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Arabic speaking world. Despite the consensus on al-Shaʿrānī's recognition as one of the most important Sufis in this period, this reductive and dismissive view left those theological works of al-Shaʿrānī that are concerned with Ibn ʿArabī's defence barely examined.

The overarching objective of this study was therefore to understand al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī in a more positive and detailed manner, and to consider the extent to which he endorses Ibn ʿArabī's thought. To this end, I analysed al-Shaʿrānī's theological works which aim to defend Ibn ʿArabī, contextualising al-Shaʿrānī's methodology within the intellectual milieu of his own period, and examining his approach to Ibn ʿArabī's teachings in relation to his own theological arguments.

From this impetus, the study provided a thorough and comprehensive analysis of al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī in a theological context, delineating the careful strategies that al-Shaʿrānī adopts for this purpose. In Chapter 1, the thesis showed that al-Shaʿrānī's attitude towards Ibn ʿArabī was conceived against the backdrop of sixteenth-century Egypt. I demonstrated that al-Shaʿrānī's teachers and colleagues – such as al-Suyūṭī, Zakariyyāʾ al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī – whom previous

studies have labeled as apologists for Ibn ʿArabī, develop their own remarkable methods for defending Ibn ʿArabī. The evidence of our observation confirmed that these scholars reinterpret the tenet of the oneness of existence as the oneness of witnessing or experiential oneness, thereby placing Ibn ʿArabī in the category of the sanctioned and moderate mystics. In order to reinforce their position, and quite remarkably, these followers of Ibn ʿArabī turn to the idea proposed by one of the most famous critics of Ibn ʿArabī, al-Taftāzānī, who presents a spectrum with ontological, heretical mystics on one pole, and experiential, authentic mystics on the other. In the same chapter, I also highlighted the underlying theme in al-Shaʿrānī's theological works – namely, the tripartite hierarchy of the articles of faith – which allows al-Shaʿrānī to disclose Ibn ʿArabī's teachings differently in accordance with the needs of the readership.

In Chapter 2, I demonstrated that, in keeping with the intellectual trend that was set by his teachers and colleagues, al-Shaʿrānī explicitly advances the reading of the oneness of existence as experiential oneness by reinterpreting Ibn ʿArabī's actual remarks. This significant finding shows that al-Shaʿrānī can be viewed as one of the first proponents of the idea of treating the oneness of existence as the oneness of witnessing prior to Sirhindī. Interestingly, this approach was conceived in relation to the arguments made by Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries. These findings illuminate the necessity of understanding al-Shaʿrānī's theological thought in its intellectual context.

In Chapter 3, I first provided evidence of al-Shaʿrānī's espousal of the idea of ontological divine self-manifestation. Based on the tripartite hierarchy of the articles of faith, al-Shaʿrānī supports the theory and other ontological tenets in statements intended for advanced mystics. This is contrasted with the subsequent argument of the chapter with regard to his treatment of the theory of the immutable entities for non-advanced

mystics and theologians. I demonstrated that al-Shaʿrānī palatably presents the otherwise controversial teaching of the immutable entities in a theological context – all the while excluding its ontological implication – and secures the notions of creation *ex nihilo*, divine predestination, the attribution of responsibility to human beings, and God's perfect knowledge of creation. The findings of this chapter, in conjunction with those of Chapter 2, highlight the degree of al-Shaʿrānī's acceptance of Ibn ʿArabī's mystical teachings, as well as variations between al-Shaʿrānī's approaches to the latter across his different works.

Having provided enough evidence of al-Shaʿrānī's general approach to Ibn ʿArabī's mystical thought (Chapter 2) and his multifaceted stance on some of Ibn ʿArabī's key doctrines (Chapters 3), in Chapter 4, the thesis drew attention to the structure of al-Shaʿrānī's integration of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings into his own theological and mystical worldview, giving special attention to al-Shaʿrānī's understanding of the anthropomorphic attributes. I demonstrated that al-Shaʿrānī shares Ibn ʿArabī's rejection of the application of figurative interpretation to the anthropomorphic attributes in scripture. I then showed that al-Shaʿrānī adopts Ibn ʿArabī's tenet of the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* along with Ibn ʿArabī's idea of divine self-manifestation. However, and most markedly, al-Shaʿrānī discusses these ideas in relation to his teaching on visionary divine self-manifestation, which is perceived in the mind, as contrasted with Ibn ʿArabī's theory of cosmological divine self-manifestation, which is concerned with the ontological, actual reality of the world. In keeping with this notion of visionary divine self-manifestation, and based on the understanding of *tashbīh* as divine self-assimilation through perceptual similarity, al-Shaʿrānī promotes faith in the prima facie sense of the anthropomorphic attributes for practical purposes, while denying the

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implication of pure anthropomorphism. Despite its certain similarity to the Ḥanbalī position, al-Shaʿrānī's view is nonetheless mystical. As discussed, his teaching is firmly grounded in the belief in visionary divine self-manifestation; the synthesis of God's incomparability and His self-assimilation through perceptual similarity evoked in the mind; and the balance of the two levels of non-delimitation and delimitation wherein God describes Himself with various scriptural expressions in order to make Himself known to creation. According to al-Shaʿrānī, all of these are attainable through mystical experience.

Building on the findings of Chapter 4, in Chapter 5, I turned to the investigation of al-Shaʿrānī's view on the anthropomorphic notion of divine with-ness. I first demonstrated his adherence to Ibn ʿArabī's thesis that the divine essential attributes are identical to His essence, which clearly differs from that of the Ashʿarīs. I then argued that, by drawing on the opinions of the lesser known Shādhilī mystics of fifteenth-century Egypt – Muḥammad al-Maghribī and Ibrāhīm al-Mawāhibī – al-Shaʿrānī applies this tenet on the divine essential attributes to the understanding of the notion of divine with-ness. This is a striking observation that underlines the intellectual efforts of Ibn ʿArabī's supporters during this period as they tried to understand his thought in the theological setting. The finding opposes recent scholarship claiming that these supporters merely admired Ibn ʿArabī as a great saint. Intriguingly, it also illuminates al-Shaʿrānī's attempt to conflate the mystical sphere with the theological one.

The centrality of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings is a consistent feature of al-Shaʿrānī's thought. As we have seen, however, a hallmark of al-Shaʿrānī's theological project is his reinterpretation and recontextualisation of Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism. This establishes

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al-Shaʿrānī's distinction in presenting Ibn ʿArabī's worldview in a way that is acceptable for a wider audience.

A worthwhile project would be to explore the influence al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī had upon later scholars, especially al-Shaʿrānī's close disciple al-Munāwī. It is unfortunate that at this stage I am not in the position to examine the legacy left by al-Shaʿrānī's theological project. However, given the popularity of al-Shaʿrānī's works dedicated to the defence of Ibn ʿArabī's thought in later generations (especially *al-Yawāqīt wa-l-jawāhir*, in which al-Shaʿrānī tries to fuse the latter's mysticism with the theological discipline), it is plausible to assume that al-Shaʿrānī's well considered presentation of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings contributed to establishing al-Shaʿrānī's fame as a populariser of Ibn ʿArabī.

Based on the idea of the tripartite hierarchy of the articles of faith, the structure of al-Shaʿrānī's theological works would also have been helpful in restricting access to the in-depth contents of Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, except for advanced mystics. Addressing non-advanced mystics and theologians who are not prepared to be exposed to Ibn ʿArabī's ontological monism, al-Shaʿrānī left behind a number of writings as concise textbooks elucidating Ibn ʿArabī's thought as non-ontological, experiential mysticism. In these texts, al-Shaʿrānī endeavoured to highlight how some of Ibn ʿArabī's doctrines are pertinent for solving certain theological problems from a mystic standpoint. In particular, with regard to the issue of the anthropomorphic attributes, as we saw in Chapter 4, al-Shaʿrānī attempts to take a middle path between the traditionalist and Ibn ʿArabī's approaches by integrating Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism into his own worldview, presenting it to a wider audience of non-advanced mystics and theologians.

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The assumption that al-Shaʿrānī's abridgements of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* controlled access to this work among the public partly accords with Pagani's observation. Although Pagani's study (discussed in the introduction of the thesis) focuses on al-Shaʿrānī's jurisprudential, rather than theological, works, his analysis demonstrates the likelihood that those works of al-Shaʿrānī, which explicate Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, indeed facilitated the widespread dissemination of Ibn ʿArabī's thought in society.[687] Dajani also observes that al-Shaʿrānī made Ibn ʿArabī's jurisprudential ideas more accessible through the simplification of the latter's teaching.[688] Building on the findings of these studies, my analysis has shown that al-Shaʿrānī's arguments certainly make Ibn ʿArabī's mystic doctrines more acceptable to a broader audience of non-advanced mystics and theologians, if not the layperson as Dajani maintains. In other words, al-Shaʿrānī makes Ibn ʿArabī's thought available beyond a small group of advanced mystics by carefully excluding its ontological implications and reinterpreting it. Considering these observations, al-Shaʿrānī's works are very likely to have exerted a certain influence over the acceptance of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings among later generations.

Setting this issue aside, the thesis certainly illuminated a significant feature of al-Shaʿrānī's theological project – that is, merging the mystical sphere with the theological one, which he possibly took over from his teacher al-Anṣārī, wherein Ibn ʿArabī's monistic worldview is excluded and is presented as a visionary experience. Most crucially, the findings of the thesis establish that al-Shaʿrānī was indeed an innovative and strategic thinker who dedicated meticulous efforts to the theological defence of Ibn ʿArabī, adopting different approaches to this end.

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[687] Pagani, 'The Meaning of the *Ikhtilāf al-Madhāhib*,' 183.
[688] Dajani, 'Ibn ʿArabī's Conception of Ijtihād,' 192-193.

The evidence I have provided in this thesis therefore enables us to situate al-Shaʿrānī's defence of Ibn ʿArabī in context, understand it in a more favourable light, and perceive al-Shaʿrānī's creativity in his theological and mystical thought. It is evident that the degree of the acceptance of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings amongst his followers is not always monolithic, and should therefore be considered from different perspectives. This tells us of the necessity for further investigation of the history of Sufism in this period through thorough and extensive examination of unexplored materials.

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