

## ُThe Adorable LA √ (part II):

### The Icono-Epigraphy of a Mihrab as a Rebus

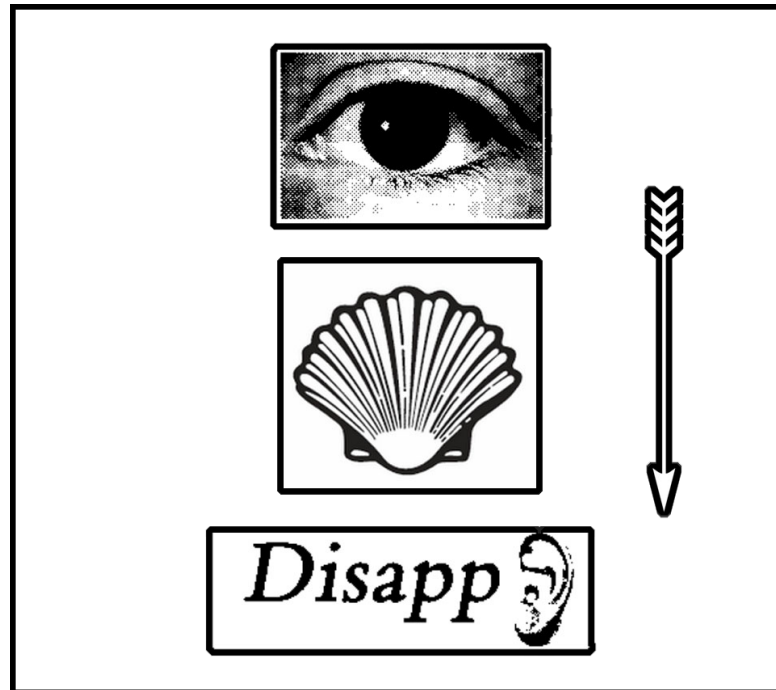
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"بحر طامس و بحري غاطس فيه لالى الاشارات فى اصداغ العبارات فمن ذلك مفتاح حجه و ايضاح محبه"

ابن عربى، عنقاي مغرب

"In the deep and submerged sea, there are pearls of signs in the shells/associations<sup>1</sup> of expressions. This is the key to argument and the explanation of love."

\_Ibn-i Arabi, *Fabulous Gryphon of the West*, p.90



**Fig. 1.** Rebus: "I shall disappear." (Artist: Iraj Esmailpour Ghouchani)

A rebus is a puzzle or word game that involves using pictures, symbols, or letters to represent words, phrases, or parts of words. Typically wordplay combining the images/text will yield a word or phrase. The solver of the puzzle must decode the visual clues to determine the intended word or phrase. Rebus puzzles can be found in various forms, including books, newspapers, and online games. They are often used as educational tools to help develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and vocabulary skills.

<sup>1</sup>In Ibn-i Arabi's writings, the phrase "فى اصداغ العبارات" has a broader meaning beyond its literal translation of "shell". As a Sufi philosopher and mystic, Ibn-i Arabi delves into the hidden meanings of language and symbols, so it's possible he interpreted the phrase as "in the collisions of the phrases" or "in the clashes of the expressions" or "associations" which is the main issue of this chapter.. While "صدف" can mean "collision", its primary meaning is "shell", so the phrase is commonly translated as "in the shells of the expressions". However, given the context of Ibn-i Arabi's writings, "word associations" may be a more fitting interpretation.

## Abstract

What is the meaning of the Rope-Shell riddle, and how does it relate to Freud's Signorelli example?

The Rope-Shell riddle is a complex rebus composed of a verse of Quran written around a shell, which holds an invisible pearl. This describes the ceiling of the mihrab in the Mosque of Cordoba. The verse, 3:103, urges people to hold firmly to the rope of Allah, to stay united and not to be divided, and to *remember* the favor of Allah upon them. The word *remember* in Arabic (انكروا) can also be read as prayer. The riddle can be deciphered by following associative processes, similar to the way Freud analyzed his forgetting of the name Signorelli.

The Signorelli example is a story in Freud's book "*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*" in which Freud could not recall the name of a painter and instead produced the names of two other painters as substitutes. Through his analysis, Freud uncovered the associative processes that had linked Signorelli to these other painters when he could not remember the original name. The whole process has the format of a rebus, in which seemingly trivial or random details can be significant clues to understanding unconscious conceptions of the mind.

This project explores the architectural symbolism of the mihrab of Cordoba using Freud's method of dream analysis, along with a small amount of Lacan's theories on the anamorphosis of projective geometry.

While Freud's method is typically used to uncover hidden meanings and unconscious desires in dreams, this study applies it to the field of architecture. However, to address potential shortcomings of Freud's approach, the project also incorporates some of Lacan's theories in projective geometry, without delving too deeply into them. Additionally, the study attempts to demonstrate how modern mathematics and topology can contribute to this multidisciplinary field through ideas such as the Möbius circle and the Klein bottle. The concept is that the intertwined and toggling nature of inner and outer worlds in medieval theology is similar to a Klein bottle, where one's journey begins from within and leads to the outside, and vice versa. This article illustrates how following associative paths can reveal, in their entirety, a Möbius path between two realms whose terminology has been extensively

He continues with describing of what he calls a "Key Piece"

elaborated through several centuries of theological thinking.

By using a bunch of unconventional complementary methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the mihrab's significance and impact.

## Keywords:

Signorelli; rebus; Quranization of memory; ascension; memory; forgetting; Dhikr (ذکر): remembrance; La (لا), Afaq (أفاق): Horizons; Anfas (أنفاس): Souls, individuals; Alam Asghar (عالم اصغر): The smaller world, typically referring to the microcosm or the individual human being; Alam Akbar (عالم اكبر): The greater world, typically referring to the macrocosm or the universe; Jaan (جان): Soul, spirit; Jahan (جهان): World, universe, cosmos.

## The Key Piece

*"The Koran is written in Arabic, yet Muslims think of it as being prior to the language. Indeed, I have read that they think of the Koran not as a work of God but as an attribute of God, even as His justice, His mercy, and His whole wisdom are."*

—Jorge Luis Borges, "The Riddle of Poetry" in: *This Craft of Verses*, p.9.

Our journey for understanding the iconography of the mihrab of the mosque of Cordoba literally passes through a door: a *Key Piece* jumped out from an archeological report, reported in "*Architectural elements from the Visigothic period in the Archaeological Museum of Córdoba. Monographs of the Archaeological Museum of Córdoba, n°1.*" by Jeronimo Sanchez Velasco, an archeologist who has carefully studied the sacred buildings in the city of Cordova between Late Antiquity and the Umayyad Caliphate (4th - 10th cent.) (check also Sanchez Velasco, 2018). He writes:

*"We believe that we are in a position to ascribe to this historical stage [Visigothic period] a series of pieces of dubious chronology that, from a new perspective, can lay the foundations for future studies on the birth and evolution of Hispano-Muslim art, knowledge of which cannot be found. to avoid the influence of previous art."* (Sanchez Velasco, 2006: 183)

(UNA PIEZA CLAVE):

*"Specifically, the piece to which we refer appeared described as a "Visigothic niche" "nicho visigodo", a reality that would be very different once we were able*

to analyze it in detail. This has been made of white marble of great quality and very fine grain. Its dimensions are 0.62 x 0.67 x 0.31 m. Its discovery was accidental, in 1980, when undertaking the front part.” (ibid.)



**Fig. 2.** “The Key Piece: some works in the religious institution Sta. Rosa, located in c/ Manriquez, just 20 m. northwest of the Aljama Mosque. It was reused, embedded in a wall whose chronology was not specified in the archaeological report. The support is a parallelepiped that has been hollowed out to place a scallop shell on it. Unlike the Visigothic niches<sup>2</sup>, the upper part (the one occupied by the scallop shell) is not framed within this parallelepiped, but forms a semicircular arch that, judging by its exterior decoration, must have been visible.” (ibid.)

Sanchez Velasco continues his argumentations about a niche (Fig. 3) and associates it with the only clearly Visigothic niche that remains in the city:

*“For us, the central representation that appears on the side is, without a doubt, one of the first artistic expressions in the Umayyads of Cordoba of what has been called (more or less accurately) “tree of life” (arbol de la vida), this motif with certain Visigoth antecedents. That will have an exponential development as a central element of the decorative stone plates in Caliphate art.” (Sanchez Velasco, 215)*

What I cannot understand (definitely because of my lack of knowledge), is that how every explanation about the scallop shell and the marianic mineral calcite form of the the so-called *Key Piece* which has again the form of a scallop shell changes into botanic explanations of the form of leaves, stem, etc.. In just ten pages he starts talking about “the tree of life” in respect to an object that is completely similar to the so-called *Key Piece* which is effectively a

<sup>2</sup>It's possible that *acantiform* is a misspelling of *acanthiform*, and if so, the term would likely refer to something with a thorny or spiny appearance: an adjective used to describe anything that has the shape or appearance of a spine or a thorn (from the Greek word *akantha*, which means "thorn" or "spine.")

<sup>3</sup> “what is Islamic” as art based on local aesthetics might be

scallop shell.

**Fig. 3.** Niche from the Visigothic period exposed in the Cordovan Mosque-Cathedral.

As for what refers to the plant elements, he continues to explain about the shape of the beak of the heart-shaped leaves, the small *acantiform*<sup>2</sup> leaves or the stems and scrolls, etc. and they appear to him as the repertoire of plant motifs from the Visigoth period in Córdoba. From his point of view, that is, from the point of view of the study of Visigoth materials, the novelties are also total and radical and this piece for him is crucial for understanding the processes of transition and assimilation that led to the formation of Umayyad art from Cordoba. However, he sees in the very center of this piece rather a palm than a shell. This is exactly what needs a renewal observation according to the arguments of the last chapter (*the story of two Abdullahs*). There is a rich symbolism related to the shell that finds a lot of references in medieval literature of the time<sup>3</sup> and before. These literary references should be investigated carefully if we want to approach a proper answer to this enigma with its deep “*oriental roots*” (cf. Sanchez Velasco, 216), or in the words of the last chapter: Rebus.

The shell is referenced frequently in medieval literature and earlier works. To arrive at a comprehensive understanding of this enigmatic symbol, we must carefully investigate its

found in GRABAR, 2000, 218-224. A study that should be consulted. Also the following resources suggested by Sanchez Velasco: BARROSO-MORIN, 1993, 33-47.. For the relationship between niches and the decorative motif of the tree of life, see. MORIN DE PABLOS, 1994, 169-209. A final update (with new nuances) referring to this matter can be seen in BARROSO-MORÍN, 2000, 288.

literary references, however, the main idea is to treat it as a rebus, as discussed in the last chapter. Back to the key piece:

“... In short, we think that this piece is one of the best examples, and of course one of the most obvious, of that slow process of formation of the first Islamic art in the Peninsula, where local artists accustomed to a very specific formal language must respond to the need of the new rulers to create another aesthetic language that differentiates them sufficiently from their predecessors.” (ibid.)

Sanchez Velasco reflects the influence of the Portuguese predecessors from the Sasanid art, by presenting an example, a Sasanid jug from the Metropolitan museum. Here and just as a support to his argument, I bring two other pieces that reflect the omnipresence of the vegetal side of the motif with its radiating leaves.



**Fig. 4.** Wall decoration with birds and vegetal design  
 CULTURE/Sasanian; TITLE/ Wall decoration with birds and vegetal design; WORK TYPE/Stucco-Reliefs; PERIOD/ Sasanian; ITEM DATE/ca. 6th century A.D.; LOCATION/ Ctesiphon, Mesopotamia.  
*Wall Decoration with Birds and Vegetal Design.* Stucco, ca. 6th century A.D. <a href="https://www.metmuseum.org/">The Metropolitan Museum of Art</a>, *JSTOR*, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.18494506>. Accessed 19 Dec. 2022.

<sup>4</sup>In line with Heidegger's famous quote, "Fragen ist Frömmigkeit des Denkens," which can be translated to English as "Asking is the piety of thought" or "To ask is the reverence of thinking. Heidegger's quote "Fragen ist Frömmigkeit des Denkens" comes from his book "What is

**Fig. 5.** Wall decoration with pomegranates in palmettes  
 CULTURE/Sasanian; TITLE/ Wall decoration with pomegranates in palmettes; WORK TYPE/Stucco-Reliefs; PERIOD/Sasanian; ITEM DATE/ca. 6th century A.D.; LOCATION/Ctesiphon, Mesopotamia; MEDIUM/Stucco; MEASUREMENTS/  
 11 15/16 × 12 3/8 × 2 1/2 in. (30.4 × 31.5 × 6.3 cm)  
*Wall Decoration with Pomegranates in Palmettes.* Stucco, ca. 6th century A.D. <a href="https://www.metmuseum.org/">The Metropolitan Museum of Art</a>, *JSTOR*, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.18615148>. Accessed 19 Dec. 2022.

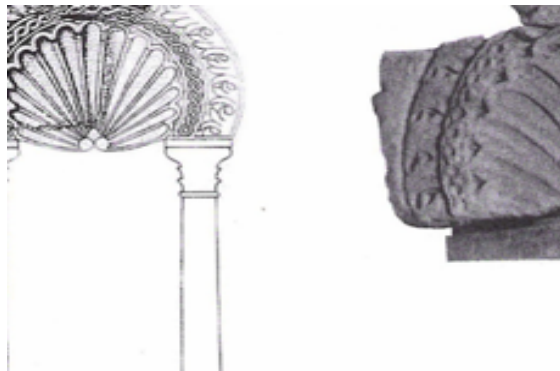
Now we are gradually reaching to the navel of this thema. To an overwhelming question that Sanchez Velasco puts on our plate, asking about the mechanism of evolution of this type of decoration towards that *horror vacui* characteristic of later decorations (cf. Sanchez Velasco, 219). He reviews a set of niches for finding a proper answer From Byzantine pieces till the time of Abd-ul- Rahman I.

He deliberately does not enter into the very strong scientific controversy about whether the origin of the mihrab lies in its functionality as a sign or as a symbol or whatever (cf. Sanchez Velasco, 221). Yet, I am carefully asking<sup>4</sup> about the symbolic meaning of a mihraba and to its related architectural elements. I present also some parallel thoughts derived from medieval literature regarding the symbolic meaning of the shell during the time these niches were constructed, taking the "classical niche" as their

Called Thinking?" (Was heißt Denken?), which was first published in 1954. The quote is from the section titled "The Nature of Thinking" (Die Natur des Denkens), which is the opening chapter of the book. In this section, Heidegger is reflecting on the nature of thinking and the importance of questioning as a fundamental aspect of genuine thinking.

original model and formal reference, of which the Visigoth is merely an epigone (cf. *ibid.*)<sup>5</sup>

**Fig. 6.** Monolithic mihrab preserved in Archaeological Museum of Baghdad (Fig. 73 in Sanchez Velasco's report)



**Fig. 7.** Fernandez Puertas' theory on the mihrab of the Abd al-Rahman I Mosque. (Fig. 74 in Sanchez Velasco's report)

In the last chapter I had suggested to look on Pamlette as a "Eurasian" object: Something related to or originates from the combined continental landmass of both Europe and Asia. Pamlette is a cultural, historical, and geopolitical phenomenon spanning both regions. Again, my suggestion here is a sort of Anthropological methodology that proposes a diachronic approach to understanding the symbolic

<sup>5</sup>Material to be consulted to understand the functionality of mihrab and niches as a sign (reflected in the positions of

meaning of the shell in Eurasian medieval Islamic culture. By trying to put ourselves in the epistemological mindset (cf. Riedel) of the medieval time (though impossible), we can gain a better understanding of the symbolism used by Muslims at that time: The time in which the Quran served as a foundational text that shaped various aspects of social, cultural, and intellectual life. This diachronic approach should take into account the appropriation of pre-Islamic era into Islamic symbolism and architecture, however, the premise is that all that belong to the pre-Islamic should find a way for exaptation. The premise is that Quran was the major measure for this exaptation and adoption to see if a symbol is ever able to survive or not. To come into a better understanding of the medieval Euroasian Muslims episteme and to its related measures for appropriation the past there is another theoretical term that is used here as a theoretical tool: "*The Quranization of the Memory*" (*qoranisation de la mémoire*). (Nwyia, 1986; check also Virani, 2008: 309)

## Quranization of Memory

Paul Nwyia, a 20th-century scholar of Islamic theology and philosophy, wrote extensively on the topic of the Quran and its role in shaping the human mind and memory. Nwyia describes the concept of "Quranicization" (or "Quranization") as "a process by which the Quran engraves itself on the memory" of the believer, shaping their consciousness and worldview. Nwyia insisted that "*the Quranic text remains primary for the Sufi; that is to say, the Muslim mystic does not impose his own ideas on the Quranic text, but rather discovers ideas in the course of his experiential dialogue with the text.*" (Nwyia, 1970 via Sands: 2)

This as we will see gives us a key and methodology for decoding the Moorish architecture, and perhaps to put it more generally, the Islamic architecture, having Quran as their cookbook based on the material at hand: "exaptation", "adaptive reuse", "architectural salvage" or "architectural reclamation" of the remainders of previous civilizations. Paul Nwyia succinctly summarizes the essential significance of the Quran for the early mystical movement by calling it "*quranization of memory*" (Nwyia: 46)

Paul Nwyia's concept of "*quranization of memory*" refers to the ways in which the Quran has influenced the collective memory and cultural practices of Muslim societies throughout history. It involves the internalization and embodiment of the Quranic teachings and values, leading

BCUBAKEUR, 1988 or DAOULATU, 1988) or a symbol (PAPADOPOULO, 1988a), nuanced by GOLV1N, 1988 or GRABAR 1988.



to the Quran becoming a central reference point for shaping individual and communal identity, ethics, and worldview. Nwyia argues that this process of *quranization* has been a key factor in the formation and preservation of Islamic tradition, as it has helped to maintain a sense of continuity and coherence across diverse Muslim communities and contexts. Many early Muslim scholars were renowned for their contributions to various fields of knowledge such as astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy. However, the relationship between Islam and the *sign system* is somehow complex. Remember that Arabic name for each verse of Quran is *Ayat* آية which literally means *sign* and in a very recursive way, there are many instances in Quran that Allah refers to objects as signs:

*“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature, and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are **signs** for a people who use reason.”* (2:164)

To see how the *quranized* system of interpretation works, here are some examples out of my dissertation that show how Quran is used for the interpretation of the symbolic language of the dreams:

*“For example, seeing the number six or six objects means the end of works because: “...[God] created the heavens and earth in six days ...” (Quran, 7:54) and eating meat in a dream means backbiting someone as it is stated in Quran that: “And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead?” (Quran, 49:12) or seeing a stone stands for ruthlessness: “Then your hearts became hardened after that, being like stones or even harder.”(Quran, 2:74) and seeing sandals stands for obedience and becoming closer to God, referring to this verse in Quran where God asked Moses to come closer after taking his sandals off: “Indeed, I am your Lord, so remove your sandals. Indeed, you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa (طوى) “ Quran, 20:12), and finally opening a door with a key stands for victory and acceptance of the prayers from God not only*

*because of the 48th Surrah of Quran (Al-Fathح الفتح which means victory) or the verses like 8:19 (cf. Rāzi: 143) but also because of the relationship that exists between the word key or miftāḥ (مفتاح) and the root of this word in Arabic, F TH (ف ت ه) which means victory and opening= fathح (فتح). The examples are numerous. In fact, the whole life of a practicing Muslim was constellated with Quranic formulas, as well as prayers, litanies and invocations in Arabic as seen in the examples above. The interpretation of many dream objects relies on their interpretation in Quran”* (Esmailpour, 2017: 187-188)

According to the argumentations above, the same might also be true for the interpretation of the architecture of a mosque as it is founded on the same tradition-based exegesis of Quran. They are both a “*model of*” and a “*model for*” (Geertz, 1972: 169; see also Van Hulst) a collective Quranized mindset of their era. Bryan Rennie explains these two terms coined with the American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, perfectly:

*“That is to say, the “model of” something copies a pre-existing observable thing. The model for something pre-dates that thing and can exist without it. A “model of” something shows us what something is like; a “model for” something shows us how something ought to be. Religion, according to Geertz, is both types of model simultaneously”* (Rennie: n.p.)

Now to analyze the mihrab of Cordova means to decipher it as a visual-riddle based on the Quranic symbolic order working behind it. Why? because Quran itself is written in the body of a set of symbols as the “*model for*” everything. This is the key rule for interpreting a dream which is again a visual-riddle:

*“One also can find solid references to dream interpretations from the Holy Qur'an, its firm wisdom, parables, and clear meanings. For example when God Almighty spoke of unity, He said: "And hold fast to the rope of God." (Qur'an 3:103)”* (Al-Akili: XXVII)

Under this light, the Quranic text is not merely a collection of words, but a force that transforms the memory. Through the process of Quranization, the believer internalizes the teachings of the Quran, allowing them to shape their thoughts, actions, worldview and... architecture.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Another scholar who could also be associated with the concept of “*Quranization of the Memory*” in more recent

times is Allama Iqbal, a Pakistani philosopher, poet, and politician who lived in the late 19th and early 20th

## Global Connections:

### The Role of Islam in Shaping Medieval Networks of Trade and Culture

Why is the concept of *Quranization of memory* important here? Because I need to explain the main and unusual method used to decipher the architecture based on Islamic literature and philosophy, partly from Persian sources. While each of them belongs to a completely different geography and human habitat, the *Quranization of the memory* is a good starting point to explain this unified field of symbols through the large empire of Islam, but it is not the only one.

There are many other factors by which the philosophy and symbolic language in medieval Islam became globalistic: the Islamic empire was vast and diverse, spanning from Spain in the west to India in the east. This created a multicultural and multilingual context in which Islamic scholars and thinkers engaged with a wide variety of philosophical, theological, and mystical traditions.

One of the key factors contributing to the globalistic nature of Islamic philosophy and symbolism was the Islamic concept of *tawhid*, or the unity of God, found its best expression in the works of Ibn Arabi who believed that everything in creation is a manifestation of God's divine attributes and that the ultimate reality is the oneness of God: *wahdat al-wujud* وحدت وجود. This idea emphasized the oneness of God and the interconnectedness of all things in creation. Islamic scholars and thinkers drew on this concept to explore the relationship between God and the universe, as well as the nature of existence and reality.

Another factor was the translation movement that occurred during the Islamic Golden Age, in which Arabic-speaking scholars translated works from Greek, Persian, Indian, and other languages into Arabic. This facilitated the exchange of ideas and the development of a rich and diverse intellectual culture within the Islamic world. Islamic philosophy and symbolism also drew on the legacy of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, as well as the mystical and philosophical traditions of Persia, India, and other regions. This allowed Islamic scholars and thinkers to engage with a wide range of philosophical, scientific, and mystical ideas, which in turn contributed to the development of a rich and nuanced intellectual tradition.

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centuries. Anne Marie Schimmel, a German scholar of Islam and Sufism, has referred to Iqbal's concept of "*Quranic education of the mind*" in her own work,

Overall, the globalistic nature of Islamic philosophy and symbolism can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the multicultural and multilingual context of the Islamic world, the concept of *tawhid*, the translation movement, and the engagement with a wide range of philosophical and mystical traditions. This created a rich and diverse intellectual culture that continues to influence scholars and thinkers around the world to this day. However, none of the above mentioned factors could work without an effective network for communication: The use of a standardized language (Arabic), a sophisticated system of postal and bureaucratic services (*Divan*), and a culture of information sharing and dissemination were another factors in globalization of philosophical ideas.

One example of the rapid transmission of news in medieval Islam is the system of postal routes established by the Abbasid caliphs in the 9th century. This system, known as the *barid*, utilized a network of post offices and courier stations to transmit mail and important news across the caliphate (check Bennisson, 2018 and Gazagnadou, 2017). The *barid* was highly efficient and reliable, with messengers traveling on horseback or camel and changing mounts at regular intervals to ensure swift delivery.

Another example is the development of the *maqama* genre of literature, which emerged in the 10th century and was characterized by its focus on travel, exploration, and the transmission of news and information.

The *maqama* is a genre of Arabic literature that emerged in the 10th century. It consists of a series of short stories, each of which follows a similar structure: a narrator encounters a clever and witty protagonist who engages in a conversation or debate with someone else, often showcasing their linguistic and rhetorical skills. The first *maqama* is widely considered to be the *Maqama of 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz*, written in the 9th century however, *Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadani*, also known as *Badi' al-Zaman Abu'l-Hasan al-Hamadani* (d. 1008), who was a prominent Persian poet and scholar who lived during the 11th century is known also as the first inventor of this genre. He was born in Hamadan, in present-day Iran, and was known for his mastery of Arabic and Persian literature, as well as his contributions to Sufi mysticism. Rina Drory in her chapter on "*The Literature of Al-Andalus*" explains how in the eleventh century this genre inspired Andalusian scholars and how this mode of writing was widespread in the whole world of Islam: "*Few classical Arabic literary phenomena have*

particularly in her book "*Mystical Dimensions of Islam*". Anne Marie Schimmel: *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

achieved as much fame, both inside and outside the Arabic world, as the *maqama*.” (Drory: 190)

*Maqama* stories often featured itinerant scholars, poets, and other travelers who moved between different cities and regions, collecting news and disseminating it through their writings and performances. The *Maqamat of Al-Hamadhani* is a significant work in the *maqama* genre, known for its intricate language, its vivid descriptions of medieval Arabic society, and its portrayal of a clever and witty protagonist who uses his linguistic and rhetorical skills to succeed in the world around him. As a philosopher and novelist, he is most famous for writing the first philosophical novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* (The Living Son of the Vigilant), considered a major work of Arabic literature emerging from Al-Andalus.

*Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* (known in Latin as *Philosophus Autodidactus* (=The Self-Taught Philosopher) is an allegorical novel written in mystical symbolic language that serves as a prime example of the rapid exchange of ideas and knowledge among Islamic medieval scholars. *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* literally means “*The Living Son of the Vigilant*” and serves a metaphor for عقل فعال or the *active ration* in Islamic philosophy. This allegorical masterpiece stands as the pinnacle of *Ibn Tufail's* (1105-1185) literary career, considered a major work of Arabic literature emerging from Al-Andalus, encapsulating the core principles that define an ideology that he has borrowed from *Ibn Sina* as he mentioned in the very first sentence of his book. Being well-versed in the varying schools of thought, *Ibn Tufail* had a comprehensive understanding of the diverging viewpoints of *Al-Ghazali* and the “*Neoplatonizing Aristotelianists*” *Al-Farabi* and *Ibn Sina*. ( see Goodman)

Shihab al-Din Yahya al-Sohrawardi known as سهروردی (*Suhrawardi*) (1154-1191) was a 12th century scholar born in northwestern Iran and is considered one of the most important figures in Islamic philosophy and mysticism. *Suhrawardi* has mentioned in his introduction of his book ‘*The Story of Western Exile*’ (قصة الغربة الغربية) that he had read *Ibn Sina's Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* and intended to write this story to complete it.

This shows how symbolism was reified and recognized in a vast region and circulated in a relatively short time. The widespread use of Arabic as a standardized language of communication and scholarship in medieval Islam also facilitated this rapid transmission of information. Arabic was used not only for literary and scholarly works but also

for administrative documents, legal texts, and other forms of communication. This helped to create a common language and culture of information sharing across the vast territories of the Islamic world, allowing for the rapid dissemination of news and ideas.

## In Pursuit of the Pearl of the Soul: the Logos

The aim now is to examine how, in the context of this network, the symbolism of the shell was widespread throughout the medieval Islamic world, serving as a symbol for the human body or mouth, which is capable of holding the soul/word of God symbolized by the pearl. This kind of personification of Word and Flesh (Pearl and the shell) has an old tradition dating back to Plato (cf. Malter, 453). It seems that there was a general belief among both Christians and Muslims in the medieval ages, giving pearls a celestial origin. “*This idea is originated in the Book of Stones of Aristotle, in which pearls are said to be impregnated with rain drops just as a womb is fertilized by a sperm*” (Schalem: 44) . Some others emphasize that pearls are made from a mixture of water and fire. I have already put an emphasize on this in the chapter named “*Muqarnas as Visual Ascension*”. Another version is this one:

“*Pearls come from shells much like oyster shells. When stimulated by the season for procreation, they open up, as it were, and are impregnated with dew, so the story goes. Then these pregnant shells give birth, and their offsprings are pearls of a quality corresponding to the quality of the dew they have received.*” (ibid.)

Let us begin our journey and seek for the meaning of the shell and the pearl with Saadi, also known as *Saadi of Shiraz* (سعدی شیرازی, *Sa'dī Shīrāzī*; born 1210; died 1291 or 1292), who was influenced by the genre of *maqama* (Mohammadi, 2018). In one of his anecdotes, he explains the creation of the pearl:

یکی قطره باران ز ابری چکید  
خجل شد چو پهنای دریا بدید  
که جایی که دریاست من کیستم؟  
گر او هست حقاً که من نیستم  
چو خود را به چشم حقارت بدید  
صدف در کنارش به جان پرورید  
سپهرش به جایی رسانید کار

<sup>7</sup>For more check the following sources:  
Mircea Eliade. Images and Symbols. London: 1961. pp. 125-44 (to be checked)

H.Bushhausen: “Die frühchristlichen figürlichen Reliquiare”, Wiener byzantinische Studien 9. 1971, cat. no. B.25, pp. 257-59. (to be checked)



که شد نامور لؤلؤ شاهوار  
بلندی از آن یافت کاو پست شد  
در نیستی کوفت تا هست شد  
تواضع کند هوشمند گزین  
نهد شاخ پر میوه سر بر زمین

A raindrop fell from the clouds one day,  
And felt so small compared to the vast bay.  
"Who am I?" it cried in despair,  
"If this sea exists, then I'm not even there."

But then a shell beside it grew,  
And with humility, it began to renew.  
Through the grace of heaven, it was nurtured and born,  
And became the famous pearl لؤلؤ , majestic and adored.

Knocking on nothingness' door<sup>8</sup> with all its might,  
Till something emerges from the darkness of the night.  
The wise man chooses humility,  
And bears fruit that bends to the ground in tranquility.  
(Saadi, Boostan, Chapter 4 on Humility)

It seems that the pearl لؤلؤ , was a reified metaphor for *Logos* and speech in that era. Here is another example from *Saadi* however the examples are unbelievably long:

لبت بدیدم ولعلم بیوفتاد از دست  
سخن بگفتی و قیمت شکست لؤلؤ را

I saw your lips and my ruby fell from my hand  
You spoke, and shattered the value of the pearl.

The pearl is a precious and valuable object, symbolizing permanence, beauty, purity, and perfection of the words. It can also mean unity specially when comes with *Yatim* (orphan) as its attribute: در یتیم. Meanwhile, the shell is often used as a metaphor for the human body, as well as for the imperfect and transitory nature of worldly things.

In some texts, the shell is described as a container that holds the pearl, representing the human body as a vessel that holds the soul. The pearl inside the shell is seen as a hidden treasure, representing the Godness/goodness of the human soul. Human is seen as God's treasure who lives with(in) us. The shell, then, is symbolically seen as a temporary container that holds the pearl until it can be revealed and appreciated for its true worth. In some other texts, the pearl can symbolize wisdom or

knowledge, while the shell represents the veil or barrier that must be overseeded or penetrated in order to access that knowledge. The following verses are from *Nasir Khusraw* ناصر خسرو, an important Persian poet, traveler, Ismaili missionary (*Dā ī*), and philosopher:

بنگر که صدف ز قطره باران  
در بحر چگونه می کند لؤلؤ  
Look at how the shell turns the raindrop into a pearl in the sea.

قیمت بتو یافت این صدف زیرا  
. ای جان تو در او لطیف مرجانی  
This shell [body] has found its value because you, oh dear,  
are delicate coral within it.

جان گوهر است و تن صدف گوهر  
در شخص مردمی و تو دریائی  
The soul is the jewel and the body is the shell. You are a person, and like a pearl in the sea.

تن صدقست ای پسر بدین و بدانش  
. جانن بپرور درو چو لؤلؤ مکنون  
Your body is the shell, my son, nurture your soul within it like a pearl.

Here the shell is a symbol for body as something ephemeral, worldly, and subjected to death. Then, one of the main meanings behind the shell symbolism is death. Rumi writes:

چون زین قفس پرستی، در گُلشن است مسکن  
چون این صدف شگفتی، چون گوهر است مُردن

As you break free from this cage of yours,  
In the garden blooms a home to explore.  
And just like a shattered shell on the shore,  
Death becomes a gem worth dying for.

The word گوهر (or جوهر in Arabic) means both gem and essence. This is the most central connotation for decoding the meaning of the hidden pearl (which I also like to name it the "*purloined pearl*" following Lacan's discussions on the "*purloined letter*") or در المکنون and its relation to ذات in the analytical language of Islamic mysticism.

Overall, the symbolism of the shell and pearl in medieval Arabic literature reflects a sort of philosophical and spiritual understanding of the human condition and the

<sup>8</sup>The reader may find the "nothingness' door" combination

a significant one in the next chapter.

pursuit of truth and beauty. The contrast between the valuable pearl and the temporary shell represents the struggle to discover and appreciate the eternal and immutable amid the impermanent and mutable nature of the world. I will go deeper into shell symbolism in the addendum of this chapter, however, here are some footprints of this symbolism in Andalusia.

The mihrab was finished on 971 (check Barrucand: 84ff.) which is more than one and half century before the birth of Ibn-i Arabi, however, we can trace the same tradition and symbolism in the works of Ibn-i Arabi. Ibn-Arabi is of special importance because his thoughts lay in the same phenomenal attribute that has already erected many Moorish architectures<sup>9</sup>, however, before starting with him let us see a few examples in which the “*hidden pearl*” is used as a common figure of speech to allude into speech. The following verse is from Bashir ibn Burd البشار ابن برد (784-714) CE) was an Arab poet from the tribe of Banu Tamim, who lived during the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods:

جَرَى اللُّؤلُؤُ المَكْتُونُ فَوْقَ لِسَانِهَا  
لِزَّوَارِهَا مِن مِّزْهَرٍ وَزَيْرَاعِ  
إِذَا قَلَّبْتَ أَطْرَافَهَا العُودَ زَلْزَلْتَ  
قُلُوباً دَعَاها لِلصَّبَابَةِ دَاعِ

The hidden pearl runs on her tongue,  
For her guests, wine and grass she'd bring,  
When she turns the edges of her wood,  
Then sober their hearts with her soulful ring<sup>10</sup>.

The next example is from *Al-Būṣīrī* (Arabic: ابو عبد الله محمد بن سعيد بن حماد الصنهاجي البوصيري *Muhammad ibn Sa'īd al-Ṣanhājī al-Būṣīrī*; 1212–1294):

كأنما اللؤلؤ المكنون في صدق  
من معدني منطقي منه ومبتم

As if the pearls hidden in a seashell  
from a mine of his logos, smiling  
(I have a full description on this poem in my dissertation,  
check for instance Esmailpour: 318)

(Mohammad in Islamic philosophy is often considered as the “*first ration*” عقل اول mentioned by Ibn-i Arabi and

others as the *hidden pearl* درمکتون as well as the *orphan pearl* دریتیم and this poem is again a praise for Mohammad the Prophet orphaned at his early age)

Now let us confine our survey in shell symbolism to the works of Ibn-i-Arabi who the history of Islamic thought subsequent to him “*might largely construed of footnotes to his word*” (James Morris: 733 via Sobieroj). This will not only prove the overspread symbolism, but also will ease our way and argumentation for coming into a better understanding of the mihrab of the mosque of Cordoba in which an epigraph (verse 103 from the third chapter of Quran) is combined with a visual element (a shell) to create a larger meaning. Ibn-i Arabi, the famous Andalusian Sufi mystic, often used the symbol of the shell to represent the human body in his works. Here are a few examples:

In his *Fusus al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), Ibn-i Arabi argues that the body is like a shell, and the spirit is the pearl. The pearl is the essence, while the shell is accidental. He refers to a Hadith (saying of Mohammad) which I have discussed fully in the chapter entitled “*Muqarnas as Visual Ascension*”:

أي، حقيقة الحياة سارية في الماء وكلاهما متقاربان، لأن الهوية الإلهية هي المتجلية بالصفة الحياتية لا غيرها. وإنما جعل الماء أصلاً لغيره من العناصر والأركان، لما نطق به الحديث النبوي من (ان الله خلق درة بيضاء، فظفر إليها بنظر الجلال والهبة، فذابت حياء، فصار نصفها ماء ونصفها نارا، فحصل منهما دخان، فخلق السماوات من دخانها والأرض من زبدها).

[“Yes, the truth is that life is alive in water and both are closely related because the divine identity is manifested in the vitality attribute, and nothing else. But water was made originally for other elements and components, as mentioned in the prophetic saying: “Verily Allah created a white pearl, so He looked at it with majesty and awe, it became shy and half of it became water and half of it became fire, and smoke emerged from them, so He created the heavens from its smoke and the earth from its foam.”] (Qaysari Rumi: 989)

In his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (Interpreter of Desires), Ibn Arabi writes:

لؤلؤة مكنونة في صدق،

<sup>9</sup>To see the mutual influence of Architecture and Ibn-i Arabi’s school of thought check the following sources: mahsa rahmani. “Towards an Ontological Understanding of Architecture (Focusing on Mystical Experiences of Ibn Arabi)”. *The Monthly Scientific Journal of Bagh-e Nazar*, 18, 94, 2021, 65-78. doi: 10.22034/bagh.2020.215403.4426 Akkach, Samer. Cosmology and architecture in premodern

Islam: An architectural reading of mystical ideas. State University of New York Press, 2012.

<sup>10</sup>URL: <https://www.aldiwan.net/poem62348.html> last accessed 26.02.2023.

من شَعْرٍ مِثْلِ سِوَادِ السَّبَجِ  
لَوْلُو غَوَاصِهَا الْفِكْرُ  
فَمَا تَنْفَكُ فِي أَغْوَارِ تِلْكَ اللَّجْجِ

"A hidden pearl in a shell,  
with hair as black as the darkness of caves.  
A pearl whose diver is the thought  
never lost in the depth of its waves"  
(Ibn Arabi, Tarjuman al-Ashwaq: 55-56)<sup>11</sup>

In *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations), Ibn-i Arabi argues that body is like a shell that holds the precious pearl of the spirit. Just as the shell is subject to decay and destruction, so too is the body. But the pearl, which represents the essence of the human being, is eternal and immutable:

يا درة بيضاء لاهوتية  
قد ركبت صدقا من الناسوت

O white divine pearl, you have boarded a shell of the material world  
(Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* (Vol. 4): 556)

These examples illustrate how Ibn-i Arabi uses the symbol of the shell to convey the idea that the body is merely a temporary vessel that holds the precious essence of the human being, which is eternal and immutable. However there is more in this as there is more in the Arabic word of احد that means both person and the One as name of God.

## A Rebus-Inspired Journey into the Symbolic Depths of a Mihrab as a Symbolic Soulport for Ascension

Upon the previous assumptions, we can trace some associations and exegesis of what we see and what we read in the architectural complexes, for instance the mihrab of the mosque of Cordova. I am aimed to interpret it like a dream which is a visual riddle or as Freud has put it: a rebus (cf. Freud, 1900: 235) and here is the way to solve it:

*"Die richtige Beurteilung des Rebus ergibt sich  
offenbar erst dann, wenn ich gegen das Ganze und die  
Einzelheiten desselben keine solchen Einsprüche  
erhebe, sondern mich bemühe, jedes Bild durch eine*

*Silbe oder ein Wort zu ersetzen, das nach  
irgendwelcher Beziehung durch das Bild darstellbar  
ist. Die Worte, die sich so zusammenfinden, sind nicht  
mehr sinnlos, sondern können den schönsten und  
sinnreichsten Dichterspruch ergeben. Ein solches  
Bilderrätsel ist nun der Traum."* [Freud, Sigmund:  
*Gesammelte Werke*; Anaconda Verlag GmbH, 2014, S.  
214-215.]

["The correct assessment of the rebus apparently only arises when I do not raise any objections against the whole and the details of it, but rather strive to replace each image with a syllable or a word that is representable through some relationship by the image. The words that are thus assembled are no longer senseless, but can give rise to the most beautiful and meaningful poetic phrase. Such a picture puzzle is now the dream."]

Here the whole mihrab is considered as a dream-object, in other words, as a product of the unconscious which, "structured like a language, is at the heart of the work of alluding, implying, being silent, being the oracle, quoting, being enigmatic, half-saying things, revealing" (metrevelli, Lacanian Review Online). In other words, it is a mere interpretation, and perhaps one among many, and as such, it couldn't be wrong. The whole idea is to view the architecture of a mosque as a rebus and to interpret it like a rebus. In general, a mosque is a combination of words (verses of the Quran) and images - architectural elements that have, in an exaptational way, taken on certain forms that can be read as abstract geometry or as representations of known objects such as shells, palms, birds, and so on. These forms can include intricate geometric and vegetal patterns, and are a blend of epigraphs and decorative motifs used as design elements.

On the other hand and in the chapter entitled "*Muqarnas and the Divine Comedy*," we saw that the identity of prayer with ascension is reflected in one of the renowned sayings of Mohammad: "*Prayer is the ascension of the believer*" (الصلاة معراج المؤمن). In the same vein, there should be an association between ascension and the mosque, as well as its architecture, since it is the place where ascension is supposed to happen, including the heart of every mosque: the Mihrab. The Mi'raj, as the most important dream in Islam, has a simple core plot and structure: Mohammad

<sup>11</sup>There is a wordplay between the word "شعر" meaning "hair" and the word "شعر" meaning "poetry", as well as between "تنفك" meaning "getting lost" and "فك" meaning

"jaw" or "unleashing". These types of word associations can create a sense of unity or coherence within a text, while also adding layers of meaning and nuance.

ascended to visit Allah (the name of the Father) and drank a drop of water sweeter than honey. This is manifested in every Mi'raj-Nāme (Mohammad's hagiography of his ascension). Here is a quote from *Seyed Bahā ol-dīni Shamsi Ghoreyshi*:

*"Each time I took one step forward, he said 'stop.' Then I held my steps and stopped. I knew that I had reached between the two hands of power and fell into great fear because of the manifestation of his proximity. [The poet refers here to a verse in the Quran, namely 53:9.] On the tip of my tongue, a drop fell and I realized that it was sweeter than honey. As soon as I tasted that drop on my tongue, all the sciences of the world became disclosed to me..." (Shams: 107).*

In any Islamic narratives on ascension, including the one narrated by *Shams-i Qosheyrī*, a transcendental experience happened after a sweet drop falls upon Mohammad's tongue. This theme had already become relatively a standard feature in later versions of *Ibn-i Abbas's* narrative (Colby: 238). There is a strong link between dropping a drop of water into the mouth as a symbolic act and ascending to a higher stage of awareness and wisdom or calmness (in some variants this sweet drop calms Muhammad's nerves (Colby: 254))

Anyway, the intimate colloquy scene in which Mohammad become conversant with Allah is the climax of Mohammad's ascent in which he nears the divine throne. This scene encompasses the sweet drop episode as a standard portion of Islamic ascension narratives after medieval centuries. Colby has recognized a symbolic and allegorical aspect inside the Islamic ascension narratives. After discussing on Ibn Sina's philosophical treatise, he denotes that such an allegorical approach to the Prophet's ascension is by no means unique (Colby: 153). Ibn-i Arabi's own visionary ascension has Mohammad's ascension as its model. Both Ibn Sina's and Ibn-i Arabi's versions offer a mystical and allegorical commentary on the experience of proximity with Allah: Intoxication for Ibn Sina (Colby: 152) and a sweet drop for Ibn-i Arabi (Colby: 154). (Esmailpour: 305 check also Ibn-i Arabi's book of ascension: *al-Isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā aw kitāb-i almi'rāj*)

The climax point of the Ibn-i Arabi's book of Ascension is a short episode named "مناجاة در البيضاء" which literally means "The Prayer of the White Pearl" started with:

عبدی دره عذرا غضه البيضاء ابرزتها من قعر بحر غیب ذاتی ما عرفت قط صفة  
من صفاتی (ibid.: 183)

[My servant! Is a pearl, pure and white, brought high from the depths of the unseen ocean ذات بحر غیب of my essence Known none of my attributes صفات.]

Afterward he reports of a sort of *hieros gamos*, the marriage between heaven and earth which is about the sowing of the seed of a Word into the pearl which is depicted in the text as a virgin bride. This Word is "أحد" (Ahad) as the narrative goes on (ibid.: 184): In Islamic tradition, the word "أحد" (Ahad) refers to the concept of the absolute Oneness of God, also known as the doctrine of Tawheed. It emphasizes the unity and uniqueness of God in His essence, attributes, and actions. Ibn-i Arabi believed in the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud*, the unity of existence. He saw the concept of *Ahad* as a reflection of this unity in the Oneness of God.

Again, the concepts of prayer and ascension are interwoven in the books of ascension. the climax of the story is a point in which the horizons fuses into the self making altogether an *orphan pearl* در الیتیم (a metaphor for a pearl that has no equal (Shalem: 42)). This concept is depicted in the following calligraphy of the verse 41:53 of Quran that brings the horizons and the self into One:

سَنُرِيهِمْ ءَايَاتِنَا فِي الْغُفَاقِ وَفِي أَنفُسِهِمْ

"We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves" Surah of *Fussilat* [part of verse 53]

**Fig. 8.** Notice the word "La" ل in the middle of this calligraphy. It is

a sign for Tawhid and the most central motto of Islam: *there is no other God than Allah* لا إله إلا الله.

Source: Annemarie Schimmel: "Introduction." Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam. State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 1-14. ISBN: 978-0791419823.

Ibn-i Arabi in his report of his ascension also cites a part of the verse 14:21 of Quran (ibid.: 184):

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا [فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي]

"Indeed I am Allah—there is **no** god except Me. [So worship Me, and maintain the prayer for My remembrance.]"

This is kin to another wellknown spiritual declaration: "أنا الحق" (*Ana al-Haq*); an Arabic expression that can be translated to "I am the Truth" or "I am the Reality", as well as "I am the God". In this context, the phrase refers to the idea of the union with the divine or to "die in God" فنا في الله (*fanā fī Allāh*). hence the term "La" is a hypernym or an umbrella term that governs everything in One.

One reads also the notion of prayer in the verse 14:21 of Quran though omitted in Ibn-i Arabi's narrative for ascension. In Islamic tradition, prayer and ascension are indeed closely interrelated concepts. The act of prayer is seen as a means of spiritual ascent, through which the worshipper can approach closer to God and experience a sense of transcendence. Furthermore, in Islamic architecture, the mihrab (as a niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of Mecca), can be seen as a physical manifestation of this idea of ascension. These spaces are designed to create a sense of elevation and transcendence, through their use of height, light, and geometric patterns that direct the worshipper's attention towards the divine. Thus, they can be considered as *soulports* for spiritual journeys that provide a pathway for the believer to reach the divine. Ibn-i Arabi's narrative for ascension, while not explicitly mentioning prayer, can be seen as part of this broader tradition of spiritual ascent in Islam (the idea of transcending the limitations of the material world and ascending towards a higher spiritual realm and so on...). In this sense, Ibn-i Arabi's narrative can

be read in context of prayer as a mean of spiritual ascent.

Overall, the interrelatedness of prayer and ascension in Islamic thought highlights the importance of the role of physical spaces such as mosques and mihrabs in facilitating this journey. Nuha N. N. Khoury also takes Mihrab as a place that "acts as a metaphor for height" (Khoury, 11). The same meaning is also connotated whenever appears in Quran and Islamic sources:

وَهَلْ أَتَاكَ نَبُؤُا الْخَصْمِ إِذْ تَسَوَّرُوا الْمِحْرَابَ

"And has there come to you the news of the adversaries, when they **climbed over** the wall of [his] prayer chamber" – 38:21.

## The complexity of a solution: from Signorelli example to Rope-Shell as riddle

"Now those souls to whom fate has assigned new bodies, draw from Lethe's stream its placid waters, so that they may drink long forgetfulness."

—Vergil's Aeneid

Now let us return to our rebus and the task of solving it. Before proceeding, it is important to acknowledge its complexity, as well as all the critiques that already exist against this kind of Freudian analysis. This mixture can be seen as somewhat poisonous, but if you bear with it, you may find it as something *gifted*<sup>12</sup> and hence, "good to think with"<sup>13</sup>.

We have two main elements here: A verse of Quran written around a shell. The verse said:

"And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And **remember** the favor of Allah upon you – when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided." (3:103)

<sup>12</sup> Gift is a German word for poison and is used here as a substitute for Pharmakon: A word that could stand both for poison and medicine which are clearly opposite. Pharmakon is essential in the writing of Derrida upon which he has developed his theory of deconstruction which in turn is based on Husserl's phenomenology (see Derrida, Dissemination, 1981: 80ff. check also: Wiener Zeitschrift für Suchtforschung; In: Jg. 31 2008 \_ Nr. 1, pp. 13 – 18, P:

<sup>13</sup> URL: [http://www.api.or.at/wzfs/beitrag/WZ\\_31\\_2008\\_1\\_02\\_Augusta.pdf](http://www.api.or.at/wzfs/beitrag/WZ_31_2008_1_02_Augusta.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> In 1962, French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss coined the phrase "animals are good to think with" in his work on totemism. Today, this phrase is often used to justify abstract thinking anchored in concrete material (see Graber).

Let us start by focusing on the word remember اذكروا which could be read also as prayer:

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

“Indeed, I am Allah . There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance.”  
20:14

By taking this word (remember) literally, I would like to continue by implementing the case of *Signorelli* as a proper parallel to the enigma at hand. *Signorelli* is about Freud's encounter with a stranger and his problem in recalling this name. The story is mentioned in his book "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life," chapter 1, "Forgetting of Proper Names." In that chapter, Freud discusses the phenomenon of forgetting names and the psychological factors that contribute to it, including the influence of unconscious desires and conflicts. In this case, Freud was unable to recall the name of the painter of the *Orvieto* frescos (*Signorelli*) and instead produced the names of two other painters, *Botticelli* and *Boltraffio*, as substitutes. Through his analysis, Freud uncovered the associative processes that had linked *Signorelli* to these other painters when he could not remember the original name. For Freud the whole process has the format of a rebus:

“The names were therefore treated in this process like the written pictures of a sentence which to be transformed into a picture-puzzle (rebus)” (Freud, 1914: 10)

This rebus served as an example of the way in which seemingly trivial or random details can be significant clues to understanding unconscious thoughts and desires. The analysis of the words is somehow complex (Fig. 9).

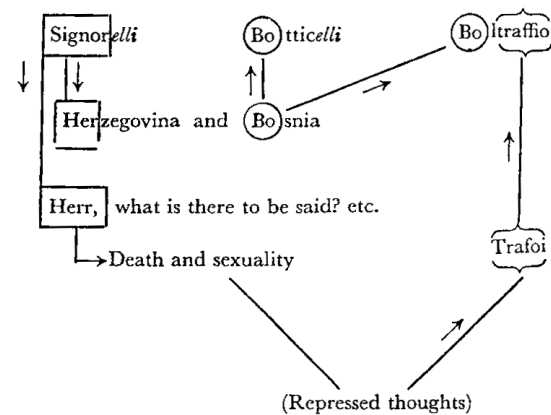


Fig. 9. Moenic, Rastko. (2013). Historical transformation and epistemological discontinuity. *Filozofija i društvo*. 24. 30-62. 10.2298/FID1304030M.

At the end of his chapter, Freud draws our attention to a type of forgetting that is motivated by repression. As a negative parallel to this, in the following pages, I want to draw your attention again to commemoration (*dhikr* in Arabic, which also means prayer) aimed at pulling up the prayer into La ʾ as an essence that cannot be captured by any attribute or action<sup>14</sup>. Instead of forgetting, here the emphasis is on remembrance, and instead of suppressing death, the emphasis is on ascension, and meeting the Death: Dying in God or *annihilation in Allah* (فنى في الله). The one who commemorates (*dhikr* in Arabic, which also means prayer) will become (in contact with) La.

In both cases, (the rebus of *Signorelli* and the rebus of the mihrab of the mosque of Cordoba) there is a transcendental word that acts like a powerful magnet, absorbing, attracting, and directing all other words and relations: for Freud, it is death, and for Islamic thought, it is "La". However, these two are ultimately the same if we remember one of the meanings behind the shell as a symbol of death.

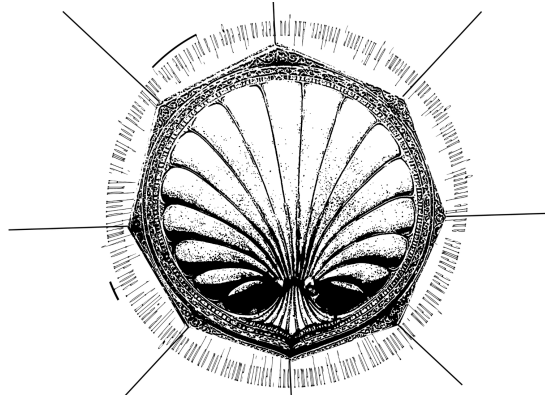
I will attempt to draw a parallel by deciphering the architectural elements of the mihrab of cordoba seen as a rebus and their related association found in the Quran. These associative processes may not be as trivial or random as they seem, especially if we consider the argumentation about the "Quranization of memory" discussed earlier. The only limitation I face is my own lack of knowledge about the Quran. However, this limitation does not disprove my conclusion, which recognizes an over-condensed cluster of meanings in the early stages of deciphering the mihrab,

<sup>14</sup>"لا" is an Arabic word that is commonly appears as the adjective for "لؤلؤ" or pearl. It could be translated as "shiny", "bright" or "radiant"; it can also mean "lustrous" or

"sparkling". As we will see this shiny feature of the pearl will find its place in the symbolism related to the school of illumination مكتب الشراق.



consisting of a verse (3:103) written around an empty shell or better to say, around a shell that holds an *invisible pearl* در المكنون (Fig. 10.). I am able to recognize a coherent web of meaning between these two elements even with my limited Quranic knowledge, someone equipped with a *Quranic memory* during medieval times would certainly have been able to discover much more and much denser cluster of associative paths.



**Fig. 10.** The Mihrab of the Mosque of Cordoba as a Rebus: A Visual Riddle Blending Word and Flesh. The Quranic Verse (3:103) is written on an octagon, and the words 'rope' and 'pit of fire' from the verse are underlined to emphasize their significance.

Associations with words are likely to be subjective and personal rather than universal or objective, however, seeing the world through the lens of a Quranic memory should not necessarily stifle creativity (although it often does, as seen in cases of radical Islamism), as the door of *illumination* اشراق is open to turn the whole thing into a sort of absolute subjectivism. *Suhrewardi* known as *Sheikh of Illumination* writes:

“قرآن را چنان بخوان که گویی تنها در شأن تو نازل شده است.”

Read the Quran in such a way that you think it has been revealed only for your sake  
(Suhrawardi. (n.d.). *مجموعه مصنفات* [Collected Works, Vol. 4, p. 139])

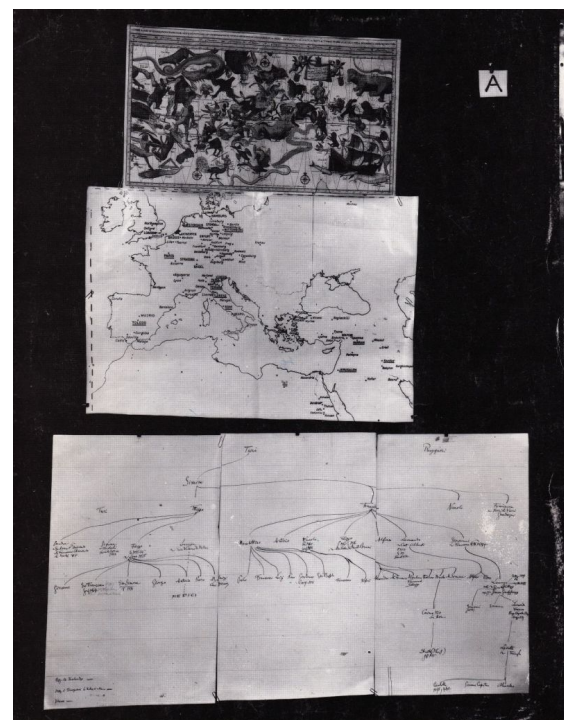
Let us now embark on an upside-down journey, in which modern psychoanalysis takes on a Dantean quality. Like Dante's descent into the underworld, our journey will hopefully lead us through the hidden depths of a human psyche, that is analogous to a post-human with an implanted chip-memory in his brain, a book is enhanced into it as his memory.

In ancient Greece, it was believed that those who drank from the waters of the River *Lethe* would lose their memories before entering the realm of the dead. According

to another tradition, the souls had to drink from the river in order to forget their past lives and be reborn. Another river of the underworld was also known, the *Mnemosyne*. Those who drank from it remembered everything and were endowed with the gift of omniscience. Here, things were reversed and brought out of forgetfulness. Do you recall Aby Warburg's usage of the term *Mnemosyne* in previous chapters? Aby Warburg (1866-1929), scion of a Hamburg banking family, earned his doctorate in 1892 on the Italian Renaissance painter *Sandro Botticelli*. Subsequently, he intensively studied the interaction of myths, images and rituals from various cultural contexts, leading him to his main theme, the afterlife of antiquity in the Renaissance. In the 1920s, he developed his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, a visual reference system that was far ahead of its time and has since become a myth of modern art history and a basis for image studies.

You may remember that he used his atlas to refer to the associative paths that connect various words and images resembling branches of a river (Fig. 11). He gave the map of these paths the name *Atlas*. together the project is named: *Mnemosyne-Atlas of images (Bilderatlas-Mnemosyne)* (see Ohrt and Heil, 2012).

Warburg's concept of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* was a visual encyclopedia of sorts, consisting of a vast collection of images arranged in a way that allowed for the exploration of their interconnections and associations. The Atlas was not organized in a linear fashion like a traditional book, but rather as a network of paths that allowed for a non-linear, multi-layered exploration of its contents.



**Fig. 11.** Mnemosyne Atlas, Panel A. “The first panel that opens Mnemosyne offers an initial general overview of the historical, geographical, and gnoseological co-ordinates of the Atlas. Just three figures suffice to show, according to Warburg’s notes for the panel, the “different systems of relations with which man is connected: cosmic, earthly and genealogical. Convergence of all these relations in magic thought, as identifying descent, place of birth and cosmic place presupposes an act of thought. 1) Orientation 2) Exchange 3) Place in the social order.[Notes on Panel A written by Warburg and his collaborators; folder of materials relating to the final version of Mnemosyne, WIA III.104.1]”<sup>m</sup>

Source: Orientation: Cosmology, Geography, Genealogy. A Reading of Panel A of Mnemosyne Bilderatlas; in: La Rivista di Engramma, 135, April/May 2016. ISSN 1826-901X. Retrieved from [http://www.gramma.it/eOS/index.php?id\\_articolo=2807](http://www.gramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=2807).

For Warburg, the Atlas was a way of representing the complexity of cultural memory and the ways in which images and ideas are connected across time and space. By using the metaphor of the Atlas, he emphasized the idea that cultural memory is not a fixed or static entity, but rather a dynamic and evolving network of associations subjected to endless exploration.

Now, it is possible to interpret *Mnemosyne* and *Lethe* as two sides of the same coin: two rivers that flow into each other. It suffices if we hold the map upside down to turn *Mnemosyne* into *Lethe* and vice versa. Memory and forgetfulness are intertwined and associative paths of memory are a kind of map that can be turned upside down to reveal different aspects of memory with two main directions for remembering and forgetfulness:

*“I wanted to forget something, I repressed something. To be sure, I wished to forget something other than the name of the master of Orvieto; but this other thought brought about an associative connection between itself and this name, so that my act of volition missed the aim, and I forgot the one against my will, while I intentionally wished to forget the other”* (Freud, *Psychopathology of everyday life*, 1914: 9)

Now, the idea is that even by replacing the words for their

opposite, that is replacing the volition for surrender, forgetting for remembrance and so on, the entire body of “association paths” remain intact, analogous to a map held upside-down. This topsy-versy map is used here as a methodological guide for recollecting the meaning of an architectural space filled with symbols that are “replaced-names” if read from the other side. We will examine this two-sided system of signification in its own chapter more deeply, for the time being, however, let us make a short visit to this reversed map.

## From Forgotten Names into Remembering, From Repression into *Aletheia*<sup>15</sup>

*“Oh do not ask what is it! let us go and make our visit!”*  
\_T.S. Eliot

The line above is from the opening stanza of T.S. Eliot’s poem “*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*”. It suggests a sense of urgency and a desire for exploration, even in the face of uncertainty or ambiguity. And this is exactly what I am going to do by holding the map proposed by Freud in his “*Psychopathology of everyday life*” (Freud, 1914) upside down in the hand to read a completely new map of the mind and to its related association processes. Here is a mirrored reading of Freud:

For Freud the “correct name” (ibid.: 4) escapes from the consciousness and is displaced by a set of “substitutive names”. Here, in our reversal hold of the map of the associations, these “incorrect substitutes” turn into “symbols” that “follow lawful and rational paths” (ibid.). In the same vein, “death and sexuality” which are the repressed thoughts for Freud (ibid.: 7) will turn into “Truth and Body”. In Islamic mysticism, Body, which is also the loci of sexuality, is the *most dark place* ظلمات geographically symbolized by *West* مغرب, in which the soul might forget its origin: The *East* مشرق from which the sun rises attributed to *Ishraq* اشراق or *Illumination* of the same root. Truth or حَقّ is the name used for God or Allah. ‘Ana-al-ḥaq انالحق means “I am the truth/God!” expressed by the Iranian arch-Sufi *Manṣour al-Ḥallaj* 309-244 (الحالج منصور AH.), accused of

<sup>15</sup> Philosophically, *Aletheia* or *Alethia* (/æliˈθeɪ.ə/; [1] from the Ancient Greek: ἀλήθεια) refers to truth or disclosure. While its roots lie in Ancient Greek philosophy, the term has also been employed by 20th-century philosopher Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, however, argues that *Aletheia* is distinct from conventional notions of truth, and can be variously translated as “disclosure”, “unconcealedness”, “revealing”, or “unclosedness”.

The literal translation of ἀ-λήθεια is “the state of not being hidden; the state of being evident.” In addition, it can denote factuality or reality. The opposite of *Aletheia* is *lethe*, which means “oblivion”, “forgetfulness”, or “concealment”. In Greek mythology, the river *Lethe* λήθη was located in the underworld, and it was believed that the souls of the dead had to drink from its waters in order to forget their past lives

heresy and executed for his self-identification with 'Truth' (*haq* or God).<sup>16</sup> Accordingly there is well-known expression that brings the death and truth into an adhoc relation: الموت الحق (*Death is the Truth*). Death here means to return to God as the ultimate Truth: "إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ" (This is a common Arabic expression used by Muslims when faced with a calamity or upon hearing news of someone's death. It is derived from a part of verse 156 of Surah Al-Baqarah in the Quran. The translation of the phrase is "Verily we belong to Allah, and verily to Him do we return.") Rumi writes:

چرا ز صید نبرد به سوی سلطان باز  
چو بشنود خبر ارجعی ز طبل و دوال

بهر بپر هله ای مرغ سوی معدن خویش  
که از قفس برهید و باز شد پر و بال

مبین که قالب خاکی چه در جوال کرد  
جوال را بشکاف و برآر سر ز جوال

Why doesn't the hunter heed the king's command,  
And soar back to him at his mere demand?

Fly, fly, oh bird, back to your domain,  
For you've broken free, and your wings can sustain.

Don't be swayed by the body you carry in your hold,  
Open your bag, and raise your head bold.

In the final analysis, a big attractor<sup>17</sup> fills the position of both "Death and Sexuality" like a *Fabulous Gryphon of the West* or *Simurgh* that nests in the East but also fills the West (Sohrevardi, Aghl-e-Sorkh: 126). There is a tension between the "La" and the body in play. This is the main idea behind the bird symbolism discussed in the chapters on muqarnas as well as in the cited article over there entitled "It's a Bird. It's a Plane. No, it's the World!: An Exploration of the Spiritual Meanings Underlying the Bird Forms Used in Islamicate World Maps- Geography and Religious Knowledge in the Medieval World", written by Karen C. Pinto. The Prayer as remembrance is an answer to the invitation or call-back (لیبک = response to the call of

Allah). Prayer in this sense is to oblate the body on the altar and become free from the restrictions of the physical body: to fly back like a bird to its creator. This is also the core idea behind geometrical tessellations. Ascension means to transcend the restrictions of physicality which is restricted to spatial directions and entering into a space of absolute symmetry and self-referency. However everywhere we read that iconoclasm and visual prohibition is the main reason for the lack of figurative arts inside the mosques. This sort of argumentation is blind of the numerous pictorial arabic books on science, astronomy, and so on... I will come back to this in next chapters. For instance it is important to note that the body of the worshiper comes in touch with the "La" as a transcendental essence. This is a small death just like what Lacan calls orgasm the little death: *La petite mort* which refers specifically to "the sensation of post orgasm as likened to death"<sup>18</sup> where death meets sexuality as a sort of *self-intersection*<sup>19</sup>. The parallel term for this in our analysis is *Shahadah* شهادة which means both witness and death (martyrdom); an Arabic name given to the most pivotal sentence in the Islam that reciting it turns the person into a Muslim: لا اله الا الله *There is no God other than Allah*.

*Forgetting* as a phenomenon is always motivated by repression (cf. Freud, 1914: 12) where, commemoration here is supposed to be a deliberate visit of the death as it is the case by martyrdom. Death is going to obtrude itself but not in an unwelcome way as the word obtrude implies, but by the surrender of that person احد who visits or returns to God احد as its origin.

The method I propose involves carefully and attentively deciphering the meaning behind the signs, which have taken on the position of an analysand's *enunciation*. This approach assumes that these signs are originated from a "Quranic memory", and that the Quran can serve as a manual and guide for decoding and reverse-engineering of this dense symbolic order.

<sup>16</sup> Ana-al-*haq* انالحق is perhaps the most known *shaṭaḥ* شطح or overstatement (type of poetry characterized by its divination as well as deviation from traditional rules and structures) in Islamic mysticism.

<sup>17</sup> In fractal geometry, an attractor refers to a set of points in phase space (a mathematical space that describes the state of a system) that a dynamical system tends to approach over time. This set of points may have a fractal structure, which means that it has self-similar patterns at

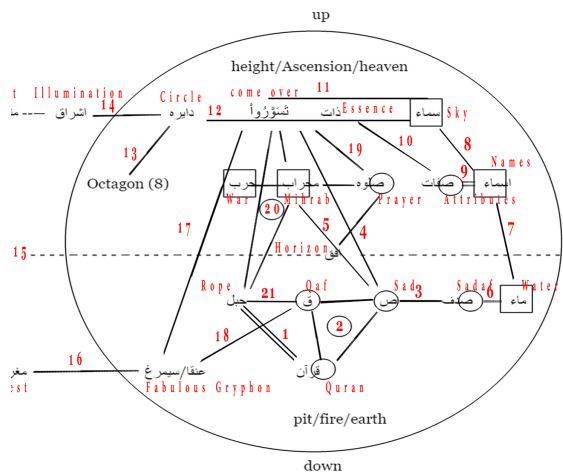
different scales.

An attractor, can be thought of as an "attracting force" that pulls the system towards a particular set of states.

<sup>18</sup> "petite mort". Oxford English Dictionary (Third ed.).

Oxford University Press. 2005. Retrieved 21 August 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Kunze, D. (n.d.). Architecture of the Span [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.psu.edu/dist/8/144490/files/2021/12/kunze-SPAN.pdf>



**Fig. 12.** This is a suggested Quranic map that depicts the celestial geography of a mystical and Quranic memory, designed to help recall the *invisible pearl* (در المكنون) located inside the mihrab - the heart of the mosque of Cordoba, likened to a shell. In compare to three orientations in Aby Warburg'S plan A (Fig. 11), here *cosmology* (universe) collapses onto *geography* (spatial orientations of the earth's surface) to synthesis a special sort of *cosmogony* which is focused on the relation between the origin and evolution of the universe and steadily toggles in a *self-intersectional* way between *afaq* أفق (pl. of horizons) as the outer world and *anfös* انفس as the human soul or the inner world.

Now we continue our journey by reading the map above in which every connection and association designated with a number:

**1-** Quran as the “God’s rope”: The word “rope” حبل mentioned in the verse 3:103 of Quran is mostly considered and the God’s covenant which is itself a figurative word for Quran itself. Kevin Van Bladel has recognised the “heavenly ropes running along or leading up to the top of the sky-roof” as a common figure of words in Medieval:

“ This notion of sky-cords is not as unusual as it may seem at first, for various kinds of heavenly cords were part of Western Asian cosmologies in the sixth and seventh centuries CE. According to the Quran, a righteous individual may ascend by means of these cords to heaven, above the dome of the sky, where God resides, only with God's authorization. The heavenly cords are a feature of quranic cosmology and part of a complex of beliefs by which true prophets ascend to heaven and return bearing signs.” (Van Bladel: 223)

He reflects that the Quran itself was also dubbed “God’s rope”.

**2-** ص and ق are both two letters that belong to what is called “disjointed letters” حروف مقطعة (*hurūf muqatta‘a*) in Quranic school of knowledge. The third Surah of Quran (whose verse is inscribed above the mihrab) also starts with “disjointed letters”. These are individual letters that appear at the beginning of 29 chapters (suras) of the Quran after the Basmala. These letters are not connected and are read as separate letters of the alphabet. They have a sort of mysterious and enigmatic aura. Generally, in Islamic culture, letters are often believed to convey meanings beyond their literal sound or shape. This belief is based on the concept of “harf,” which literally means *edge* or *border* which also refers to the intrinsic and hidden meaning of a letter beyond its phonetic value. The idea of *harf* is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition, particularly in Sufism, where it is believed that the Quranic letters have esoteric meanings that can only be understood through divine revelation and spiritual insight, which means going to the “other side” (German: *Jenseits*): *Otro mundo*. Death (just like the issue of “*death drive*” in psychoanalysis) is not a question of biology (cf. Lacan, *Écrits*: 102); it is a question of symbolic. Overall, the belief that letters have deeper meanings beyond their literal sound or shape is an important aspect of Islamic culture and has influenced the development of various art forms and intellectual traditions within the Islamic world for instance *Horoufieh* Brotherhood in Sufism. From the perspective of Islamic studies, there is evidence to suggest that these letters are part of the original text of the Quran and were recited as separate letters from the beginning. For over 14 centuries, these letters have astonished and fascinated Muslim scholars resulting in a wide range of interpretations in traditional Islam and Islamic studies. In addition to the shared *disjointed letters*, there are other elements that further link Surahs ص and ق together. One such similarity is the way they both begin. The Surrah of ص starts with the following verse:

صنّ وَالْفُرَّانِ ذِي الْذِكْرِ

“*Sād. By the Quran, full of reminders!*”

(Notice that the word ذكّر is another word for prayer in Arabic.)

And the Surah of Qaf starts very similar to Sad:

ق وَالْقُرْآنِ الْمَجِيدِ

”!Qāf. By the glorious Quran“

**3-** In the same way that Botticelli is related to Bosnia through the similarity in their beginning sounds (Bo), Sadaf

can be linked to Surah Sad through the Arabic letter ص. Furthermore, verse 21 of Surah Sad contains the word "Mihrab" (one of four instances where this word appears in the whole Quran):

وَهَلْ أَتَاكَ نَبَأُ الْخَصْمِ إِذْ تَسَوَّرُوا الْمِحْرَابَ

"And has there come to you the news of the adversaries, when they climbed over the wall of [his] mihrab –"

In the mihrab of the Cordoba mosque, there is a shell (صدف) mounted on its ceiling, above the walls. The mihrab ultimately brings ص (or صاد) and صدف (shell) together: Mihrab as a word appears in the ص chapter and صدف (shell) as flesh appears in mihrab. They are echoing each other.

Sadaf or shell (صدف) is an umbrella term for various concepts such as confrontation, pilgrimage (زيارة), becoming one with someone, meeting someone, and so on. In Surah Sad, the prophet David confronted in his mihrab, two angels in the form of his enemies.

During prayer, the worshipper is supposed to ascend and speak with God. This confrontation is expressed in the word Sadaf, which means colliding and coincidence. From this root, words such as صدفة and تصادف are derived, which mean coincidence, encounter, collision, and the like. Perhaps the shell is named صدف in Arabic because its two cups come into contact with each other. In its architectural use in the mihrab of Cordoba, the ceiling (cf. to the canopy raised high سقف المرفوع in Quran 52:5) is a structure that brings people together like a large umbrella.

**4 and 5-** these concepts are connected through the verse 21 of the Surah of صاد (see above).

**6, 7 and 8-** The relationship between shells, names, and the sky is complex and multifaceted. While the connection between shells and water is obvious, given that shells are marine creatures living in the sea, Islamic medieval narratives suggest a deeper relationship. According to these accounts, a drop of water from the sky can make the shell perceptive and turn it into a pearl if it remains content with it.

<sup>20</sup> There is a useful reference to the meaning of the sea, its ambivalent relation to both water and fire etc. in Islamic mysticism in the following article:

Hossein Agha Hosseini and Zahra Moeinifar. "An investigation of the non-referentiality of sea image in Shams's ghazals." "بررسی بینامتنی تصویر دریا در غزلیات شمس" Literary and Mystical Research (Gohargoya), vol. 4, no. 3, 2010, pp. 1-28

This drop of water is a metaphorical expression for words or signifiers, known as اسماء or names, that we use to identify things. In Arabic, there is a well-known expression that says: ان الاسماء تنزل من السماء (*The names descend from the sky*). Additionally, there are 18 verses in the Quran that bring together the words ماء (water) and سماء (sky) as a sign of God, including the 9th verse of the surah ق. All three words are also similar in writing and rhyme. The word ماء (water) on the otherhand is associated with fire or نار as its antonym. The relation between these two was discussed in the chapter entitiled "Muqarnas as a visual ascension". There are more to find if we look for the meaning of the "sea of fire" بحر من النار in Arabic literature as a metaphor of the life on earth<sup>20</sup>. Ibn-i Arabi has a chapter (باب lit. door) in his "Biggest Diwan" (ديوان الاكبر) named البحر المسجور. (Ibn-i Arabi, *Eddiwān elakbar*: 2)

In verse 13:17 of Quran we can clearly read the association of the water descended from the sky to a sea of fire, however the combination of :

وَالسَّقْفَ الْمَرْفُوعَ . وَالْبَحْرَ الْمَسْجُورَ

"And by the canopy raised 'high'! And by the seas set on fire!" (52: 5-6)

It is beyond the scope of this study to delve deeper into the mystical meanings and symbols at work here. However, I would like to briefly highlight the most important implication of these concepts, which can be found throughout the works of Ibn Arabi (especially in chapter 9 of the *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, check Anguita, 2008). According to Ibn Arabi, Heaven (Jannah) is derived from the Arabic word 'Jann' جن, meaning hidden or concealed, and is also related to the word 'Jinn' جن, a supernatural creature made of fire. In short, as previously discussed in our chapter on muqarnas, Heaven is covered in fire and concealed in everything is the name of God. This is the cornerstone of Ibn Arabi's school of thought.<sup>21</sup>

**9 and 10-** In Islamic medieval philosophy, "ذات" (*dhāt*) and "صفات" (*ṣifāt*) are concepts used to describe respectively the essence and attributes of God. *Dhāt*, *ṣifāt*, and *Asma* are the most essential terms in premodern Islamic theology, and their role as the ideology behind Islamic architecture of that time is fully introduced and examined

<sup>21</sup> Rumi also writes:

عقل من گنجست و من ویرانهام  
گنج اگر پیدا کنم دیوانهام

My mind's a treasure, I'm ruin and plain,  
Unearth the gem, I'll go insane.



by Samer Akkach in his seminal book, "*Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*." The book delves into this intricate order, revealing how it affected the daily lives of people in the medieval Islamic era and how their cosmological ideas materialized in the buildings and spaces around them.

As we will see, Persian literature and poetry frequently explored cosmological ideas, and the relationship between these philosophical concepts and the symbolism of shells was a recurring theme. The following passage is just one example of this connection among many:

شاه جهان ابرذات و بحرصفتاست  
ز آن صدف ملک ازو چنین گهر آورد  
خاقانی

The king of the world is the cloud of essence and the sea of attributes,  
From that shell, the Lord brought forth such a pearl.  
Khaghani (c. 1120– c. 1199)

"*Dhāt*" refers to the essence or being of God, which is considered to be beyond human comprehension and knowledge. It is believed that God's essence is infinite, eternal, and indivisible, and that it cannot be fully grasped or understood by human beings.

"*Ṣifāt*" refers to the attributes or qualities of God, which are used to describe God's actions and behavior. These attributes are believed to be essential to God's nature and include qualities such as omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence. In Islamic theology, there are traditionally considered to be 99 such attributes or names of God, which are derived from the Quran and Hadith.

The relationship between "*dhāt*" and "*ṣifāt*" is a central topic in Islamic philosophy and theology. Some philosophers and theologians have argued that God's attributes are identical with God's essence, while others have held that the attributes are distinct from the essence. These debates have played an important role in shaping Islamic thought about the nature of God and the relationship between God and the world.

Several prominent Islamic philosophers and theologians have discussed the concepts of "*dhāt*" and "*ṣifāt*" in their works each of them have different view and possible combinations of unity or distinction as well as, separation or inseparation of these concepts. The most prominent among them are Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Ghazali,

Ibn-i Rushd (Averroes), Mulla Sadra and Ibn-i Arabi.

In his works, Ibn Arabi also discussed the concepts of "*dhāt*" and "*ṣifāt*," but his approach was somewhat different from that of many other Islamic philosophers and theologians. He emphasized the importance of understanding God's unity and the relationship between God and creation, and argued that all of creation is a manifestation of God's essence and attributes. It seems that the ideas of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of the being) in Ibn Arabi's philosophy and *unos mundos* in Jung's work are sharing a similar emphasis on the underlying unity and interconnectedness of all things, and the importance of exploring and understanding this unity for personal growth and spiritual insight. (check also Lama Suárez)

To summarize: In premodern Islamic theology, the relation between the divine names of Allah (*Asma*) and his essence and attributes is categorized into three types: names of essence (*asma al-dhat*), names of actions (*asma al-afal*), and names of attributes (*asma al-sifat*) (Akkach: 50). For instance and according to Akkach, Ahad or One is a name of essence. He goes on to describe these terms and their relation to architecture in detail over several pages and distinguishes seven principle names or اسماء, which were considered "*the mother of all names*" or امهات الاسماء, that constitute the fundamental order of the divine presence.

**11 and 12-** The relationship between the sky and "up" is self-evident, and I'm not sure if further explanation is necessary. However, the relationship between the sky and the circle is more complex. When viewed from a desert or in the middle of the sea, the horizon draws a circular shape. Additionally, domes in architecture are often designed to imitate the shape of the sky (as seen in the chapters on Muqarnas).

Moreover, the connection between time, the sky, and the circle is apparent as well. For example, consider the face of a watch or Isaac Newton's watchmaker analogy, which suggests that God is a divine watchmaker (Macey: 67ff.).

There is a famous quote attributed to Ibn Arabi, which states:

الزمان مكان مسائل  
و المكان زمان متجمد

Time is a fluid place, and place is a frozen time.

This quote may seem reminiscent of modern physics, and



scholars like *Mohamed Haj Yousef* have devoted their lives to relating Ibn Arabi's ideas to modern physics, thereby revealing even more profound connections (check Yousef) dissecting the multilayered relationship between the sky and the circle.

**13** - Based on the writings of Ibn-i Arabi, Akkach explains the number eight as the number that represents the body (Akkach: 50-82). We have also discussed this before in a chapter on Muqarnas. In short, according to the Islamic medieval theology “*though divine Essence is one, God has many names and attributes, which in turn have many loci of manifestations in the world. This multiplicity of Divine names and attributes is the ontological root of multiplicity in the world... On this ontological foundation stands Ibn-i Arabi's masterly apology for the body.*” (Shahzad: 525)

It is important to discuss the symbolism behind the number eight in the mihrab, as it is an octagonal prism. The article “*The Wisdom of the Number Eight in Islamic Art and Architecture*” (Vasoughzadeh et al.) delves into the significance and symbolism of this number in Islamic art and architecture. The authors, *Vahideh Vasoughzadeh, Mahboobeh Hosseini Panah, and Babak Alikhani*, highlight the use of the number eight in various Islamic art forms, including calligraphy, tilework, and architecture. In the abstract of this article we read:

“...In addition to mentioning this number in the Quran and narrations and relating it to the number of paradises and the number of angels carrying the throne, a cryptic reference to this number is found in philosophical and mystical sources. It is where Sheikh *Ishraq* speaks for the first time about the world of similitudes and calls it the “*eighth climate*”. By visualizing the geometry of the worlds and relating the number eight in art and architecture to the concept of the intermediate world or the world of similitude, a magnificent window is opened to the theoretical and belief foundations of Muslim architects.” (Vasoughzadeh et al., abstract)

This addresses us to another number in our Quranic map of the mihrab: *Illumination*.

**14**- *Ishraq* or *illumination* might be comparable to what Ibn-i Arabi calls *ma'rifa*. According to Ibn Arabi, everything in the universe reflects some aspect of God's

nature, and human beings are capable of understanding and experiencing these aspects through spiritual insight and intuition. He believed that the ultimate goal of human existence is to achieve a direct and unmediated knowledge of God, which he called *ma'rifa*.

Ibn Sina, using the Eastern symbolic language, places the place of form in the East and the place of matter (physicality) in the West, and what is between the East and the West is the place of objects that are a combination of form and matter (Check Ghodazgir for a full discussion). East and *illumination* are linguistically linked. Their connection is even more internal than the linguistic similarity between *sama* (sky), *asma* (names), and *ma* (water). Quranic verses such as this verse from the Noor (light) Surah of Quran:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِثْلِكَ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ مِصْبَاحٌ فِي زُجَاجٍ ۚ  
الزُّجَاجُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ  
زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ ۚ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ ۗ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ  
الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

“*Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is that of a niche, in which is a lamp. The lamp is within a crystal. The crystal is like a brilliant planet, fueled by a blessed tree, an olive tree, neither eastern nor western. Its oil would almost illuminate, even if no fire has touched it. Light upon Light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents the parables to the people. And Allah knows everything.*”<sup>24:35</sup>

Undoubtedly, *Suhrevaradi* has been influenced by the verses of the “*Noor*” chapter in his discussions on photology, which is the central topic of his philosophy known as the philosophy of *Ishraq*:

وَأَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا

“*And the earth shone with the light of its Lord.*” 39:69

**15**- Ibn-i Arabi has a very interesting interpretation on the 9th verse of 73th Surah of Quran. He writes:

“*(رب المشرق والمغرب) \* أي: الذي ظهر عليك نوره فطلع من أفق وجودك بإيجادك، والمغرب الذي اختفى بوجودك وغرب نوره فيك واحتجب بك.*”

“*Lord of the East and the West*” meaning: *the one whose light appeared to you, rising from the horizon of your existence by creating you, and the West that disappeared*

<sup>22</sup> *Shahab al-Din Sohrevaradi*, شهاب الدين سهروردی, who was also referred to as *Suhrevaradi*, is recognized as a prominent

Persian philosopher and the originator of the Iranian school of *Illuminism*, which had a significant impact on Islamic philosophy during his time (1154-1191)..

*in your being and its light set within you and veiled in you.*" (Ibn-i Arabi. Tafsir Ibn Arabi: 360)

This veil or حجاب in mystical language stands for the body itself. Hafiz writes:

حجاب چهره جان می شود غبار تنم  
خوشا نمی که از آن چهره پرده برفکنم

Veiled is my soul's face with the dust of my body  
How sweet the moment when this veil is made shoddy.

We see the same and similar instance in Ibn-i Arabi's interpretation of the first verse of this Surah:

(يا أيها المزمّل) \* أي: المتلفف في غواشي البدن وملابسه

"(O you who wraps himself [in clothing])" meaning the one who wraps himself in the folds of his body and garments." (Ibn-i Arabi. Tafsir Ibn-i Arabi: 359)

West is a symbol for "darkness and the body": ظلمات البدن (ibid.: 402). Hence it is also related to the number eight discussed earlier.<sup>23</sup>

Rumi writes:

عدم تو همچو مشرق - اجل تو همچو مغرب  
سوی آسمان دیگر - که به آسمان نماند

ره آسمان درونست - پر عشق را بجنیان  
پر عشق چون قوی شد - غم نردبان نماند

Your absence is like the dawn, in the east it will show  
And your departure, like the sunset, in the west it will go.  
Towards another world, that does not look like a sky  
The path to heaven is within, love's wings will fly.

When the wing of love grows strong and bold  
No need for a ladder more, sorrow cannot hold.

**16, 17 and 18-** The first person to write about birds during the Islamic era was Ibn Sina. After him, scholars and intellectuals used the language of birds as a means of expressing their mystical, political, and social ideas. Among these thinkers, Ghazali and Najm al-Din Razi can be mentioned (Sheikh Hosseini and Jafarzadeh).

In the same symbolic story of his called *Hai ibn Yaqzan*, Ibn-i Sina asserts that the human body is a veil and barrier to the soul, which belongs to God. Therefore, as long as a person's soul is intertwined with their body and occupied with managing it, they cannot attain complete knowledge of the truth and the knowledge of the other world, unless they disregard the body and remove the veil of the body. For this reason, the mystics consider death as liberation from this cage like a bird. The *Simurgh* in Persian literature is the same as the *fabulous gryphon of the West* مغرب: This is the name of one of Ibn Arabi's books, which is chaptered based on pearls and marjan which also refers to both small delicate pearls and corals.

The story of *Simurgh* (*fabulous gryphon*) and the *Mountain of Qaf* is a popular mythological tale from Persian literature. According to the story, *Simurgh* is a mythical bird that lives on the *Mountain of Qaf*, which is said to be located at the farthest reaches of the world. The story tells of a group of birds who set out on a quest to find *Simurgh* and undergo various trials and tribulations along the way. Eventually, they reach the summit of the *Mountain of Qaf* and discover that *Simurgh* is not a separate entity, but rather a reflection of their own inner selves.

From the other hand, the Surah Qaf is the 50th chapter of the Quran and is named after the Arabic letter "Qaf" that appears at the beginning of the Surah. One of the most well-known verses in Surah Qaf is verse 16, which states, "And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein حبل". Consider that the word vein is the same word used for rope: حبل. This verse highlights the concept of Allah's closeness to His creation and His knowledge of their innermost thoughts and feelings. However Qaf in Islamic

<sup>23</sup>West has the similar meaning in the thought model of *Suhrawardi*:

"Occidental exile, for *Suhrawardi*, symbolizes the ontological situation of the human soul as "prisoner in the land of the Occident" and eager to be saved "from the prison of nature and the impediment of matter." (Bostani, abstract) Check: Ahmad Bostani: "Henry Corbin's Oriental Philosophy and Iranian Nativist Ideologies. Religions 12: 997." (2021).

In contrast to Corbin who draw a contrast between Oriental and Occidental school of mysticism and in this way, between the meaning of Orient and Occident, East and West etc. (cf. ibid.), *Dibaji* and *Abadi* explore in their article the significance of light in the philosophy of

illumination and why *Suhrawardi* uses the concepts of light and the geography of the east and west to describe the *homeland* وطن. The main argument of the paper is an explanation of *Suhrawardi's* Illuminist cosmology. Through an analysis of *Suhrawardi's* ontology of light and his understanding of the concept of homeland in the philosophy of illumination the article reveals that *Suhrawardi's* ontology is intertwined with the concept of homeland, and that in his thought, the homeland is not only a part of existence but is co-extensive with it. According to *Suhrawardi's* view, as humans are connected through a universal truth of light, there is no inherent difference among them. Check: *Dibaji* and *Abadi*. "The World of Luminous Homeland as an Eastern Utopia." *Hekmat va Falsafeh*, vol. 13, no. 51, 2017, pp. 47-62.

mystical literature is a symbol for the most far (a mountain in the most west) and the most near because at the end of story they understand through an anamorphic perspective provided to them through a big round around all landscapes and horizons or أفاق that they are themselves that very *fabulous gryphon of the west* that they striving for it. The most far collapses onto the most near in one single point.

The *Mountain of Qaf*, which represents the farthest reaches of the world, is a metaphor for the journey of self-discovery that one must undertake in order to reach the ultimate goal of spiritual enlightenment and self-discovery. The story teaches that the answers to life's greatest questions lie within oneself, and that the quest for knowledge and enlightenment requires perseverance and dedication or perhaps ascension because at the end of he day they are birds.

**19-** The relation between prayer and sky is fully described in preceding chapter. Again, the article written by Karen C. Pinto ("It's a Bird. It's a Plane. No, it's the World!: An Exploration of the Spiritual Meanings Underlying the Bird Forms Used in Islamicate World Maps- Geography and Religious Knowledge in the Medieval World") is a good source to see how the relation between ascension and Prayer (reflected also in a saying of Mohammad (الصلوة معراج (المؤمن)) could write itself on the whole map of the world even in the geographical sense of the word. This alone governs and invites all other issues of horizon, east, west, direction of mecca together into the mihrab as an *axis mundi*.

**20-** Rope and the mihrab. In verse 3:103 written on the ceiling of the mihrab we have the word rope as a signifier. It literally signifies that the worshiper down there is dropped in a pit (see Fig. 13.) and should recourse the rope (Quran as the word of Allah for instance) to come over.

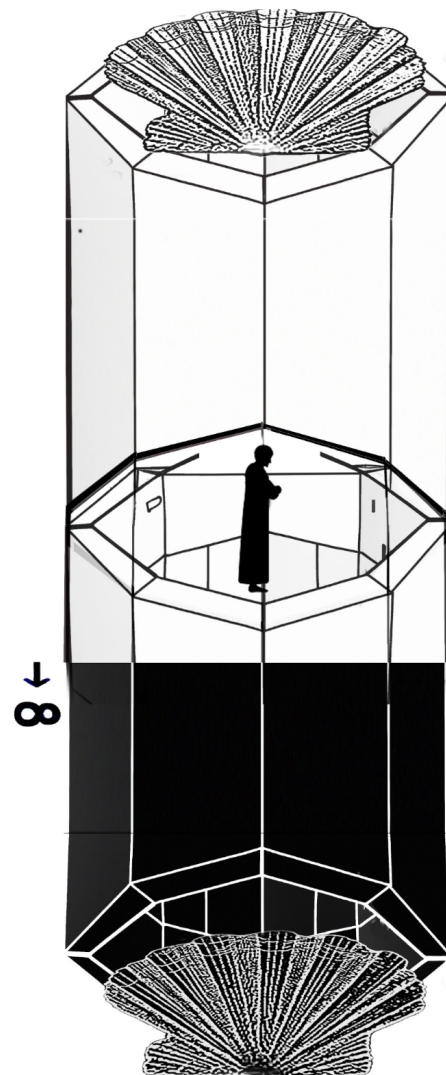
**21-** Qaf ق and rope حبل: In the Qaf Surah of Quran we read:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعَلِمَ مَا تُوسُوْنَ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ ۖ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

"Indeed, 'it is' We 'Who' created humankind and 'fully' know what their souls whisper to them, and We are closer to them than 'their' jugular vein." (50:16)

Here again the word حبل is appeared as a signifier but this time it is attributed to the innermost part of the human biology. As explained, this is symbolized as the most far destination in mystical literature relating the body to the

foremost west as the most far place: an exile from the east as our primordial homeland.



**Fig. 13.** The Mihrab in its entirety connotes a bottomless pit, as one of the valves (the bottom side) of the shell is absent. This is an architectural visualization of verse 3:103, which describes the position of a group of people who should remember that they were once in a 'pit of fire' and Allah has rescued them however they are always of the need of the rope to climb out: "And hold firmly to the **rope of Allah all together** and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you – when you were **enemies** and He brought your **hearts** together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a **pit of the Fire**, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided." (3:103) What brings the people together is a single rope which is geometrically a line: A minute single point which is stretched for infinity. Accordingly the whole structure is a shell infinitely stretched in an octagon prism with an invisible pearl made of words, something to be read as Quran (Quran itself has reading as its root) transformed into a line/rope in this geometrical transformation.

There are many other words that remain unexplored. However, it is important to note the provoking role of prayer and commemoration in the explained associations, as well as the agency of Quranic memory as the *Key-register* that brings all these associations together under one shell.

The relation between the choose of the verses of Quran for decorating the mosques and the mosque's structure might be really complex if we put in mind that the verse written at the ceiling of the Mihrab of Cordoba (3:103) orders to hold firmly to the *rope of Allah* all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you – when you were *enemies* ...

Janina Safran also reads a political meaning in the epigraphy – *“The inscriptional programme in its entirety ... explicitly asserts the caliph's guidance and leadership of the community”* – she adds that an essential aspect of this role was as *‘spiritual guide’*.” (Safran 2000, 63. via Rosser-Owen)

She is perhaps right, at least the symbolic meanings of the pearl is supporting this: *“As for a scholar, a pearl in a dream represents knowledge, and for a governor, it means expansion of his power.”* (Al-Akili: 323)

There are many other interesting aspects that could be added to this, such as national identity and political geography, which I discussed in the last chapter about the story of two Abdullahs. It's important to note that the journey itself was much like a circle, a Möbius circle, where geography and the mind intersected with each other at every turn. In the story of *Simurgh*, the thirty birds, or "*Si-Murgh*" in Farsi, come to realize that they are all part of one fabulous bird that they set out to visit. This transformation of multiplicity into unity, or "*wahdat*" in the words of Ibn-i Arabi, is very significant and explained very well in this story. However, there is a lot lost in translation of the word "*Si-Murgh*," which contains a wordplay in Farsi that both stands for the name of a *fabulous gryphon of the west* and for thirty birds when divided into "*Si*" and "*Murgh*."

Through this wordplay, we can see the unity of all things, despite their multiplicity. I suggest using "*Dribytrith*" as a proper-substitute or translation for the *fabulous gryphon of the west*. It's essentially the "*Thirty-Bird*" subjected to a mirror transformation. And that is how the story ends.

چون نگه کردند آن سی مرغ زود  
بی شک این سی مرغ آن سیمرغ بود  
خویش را دیدند سیمرغ تمام  
بود خود سیمرغ سی مرغ تمام  
محو او گشتند آخر بر دوام  
سایه در خورشید گم شد و السلام

When they caught those thirty birds, so quick,  
Without doubt, those thirty birds were Dribytrith.  
They saw their own selves in the Dribytrith's eyes,  
For the Dribytrith was all of those thirty birds in disguise.  
In the end, they vanished into the Dribytrith's flight,  
Like a shadow lost in the sun's bright light.

\_Attar

## Conclusion

In the rebus of *Signorelli*, repression pops up a set of "*substitute names*" up to the consciousness. In the mirror of a double-side system of signification used by the medieval theology doctrines, these "*substitute names*" turn into symbols inside a denser map of associations. Together, they construct a quranized memory as a *meta-register* or mirror, through which repression can be transformed or read as "*return*." This transformation is often accomplished through daily prayers, which serve as a short temporal visit to eternity, akin to a deliberate daily death. Ascension involves flying back from the earthly West of bodily faculties to the East of illumination, which in turn is symbolized with the daily turn of the sun. *Remembering*, in this context, means *re-membering*, or recognizing the *Ahad* both as a person and as the almighty One. Furthermore, consider this verse from the Quran:

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَنْذُرَكُمْ وَأَنْذَرُوكُمْ إِلَىٰ وَلَا تَكْفُرُونَ

*“Remember Me; I will remember you. And thank Me, and never be ungrateful.”* (2:152)

Here we have the word *تكفرون* which could be translated both as unfaithful or ungrateful but *كفر* literally means “to cover”. Again remembering is positioned as the counterpoint of covering which is a proper substitute for *repression* (German: *Verdrängen*, to push something out of sight) which is already affiliated with *forgetting*. Here we see a culture of symbols that are aligned to confront their users eye to eye with the *death* and *witnessing* *شهادة* it instead of repressing it as the ultimate Truth. This is the “*Mortality salience*”: being aware that I am a living dead and celebrating it. Here is a doorway to a vital culture, as one can read about in '*Duende in Andalusia*.' It's no wonder that Spanish culture finds the need for a word to reflect the significance of mortality. If I think from the perspective of

cultural evolutionism<sup>24</sup>, I will believe this concept is deeply rooted in the phylogenetic heritage of Moorish architecture, which is a profound cultural inheritance. Now we are back to that overwhelming question of Sanchez Velasco at the very beginning of this chapter: asking about the **horror vacui** characteristic of later decorations (cf. Sanchez Velasco, 219). The ultimate horror is the La: Nothing, becoming aware of our death as our most essence symbolized by Vacui or as we will see in the next chapters, by the darkness of a door left open.

Finally we might remember that what Freud was vainly striving to recall was the name of the master who made the imposing frescoes of the “*Last Judgment*” in the dome of *Orvieto*. *Orvieto* is itself a condensed rebus: It tastes like oblivion as a word and from nostalgia as an old city with historical significance. “*The Last Judgment*” is also about *remembrance*; we will remember everything we have done under heaven, even the smallest of details. It is essentially a courtroom in which we swear to “*tell the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth!*”

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<sup>24</sup> *Cultural evolutionism* is a theoretical framework that posits that cultural traits and behaviors evolve over time in a manner similar to biological evolution. In this view, the concept of mortality, as reflected in the Duende in Andalusia and other aspects of Spanish culture, may be

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seen as having evolved and been inherited from earlier cultural traditions, such as those of Moorish architecture. This perspective can help us understand how cultural practices and beliefs are shaped by historical and environmental factors and how they can persist and change over time.

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