Mapping the Unseen: Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Maps in Chapter 371 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*

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Abstract

This paper examines a series of sequential cosmological and eschatological maps drawn by Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) in his second recension of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1845+). These images, drawn from the visual language of the rational sciences, map the images of revelation into the cosmology of the day so as to show the vastness of God’s cosmos and the limits of the intellect. Ibn al-ʿArabī, aware of the limits of his medium, explicitly states that these should be a “single composition.” He uses visual cues to mark shifts of perspective, helping the reader visualize the interconnections that bind together this multidimensional representation of the cosmos. By considering their placement and their relation to the narrative, I also argue that the final two maps are a representation of two eyes, identifying the cosmos and the reader as reflections of God, a contemplative use that is lost in their transmission history.

Keywords

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (“the Meccan Openings”), written in the thirteenth century, remains one of the most important texts in Islamic history, and touches, in a sense, on all the sciences of its day. In its 371st chapter, located in its twenty-sixth volume, it contains a sequence of nine maps that depict “the order of coming into being” (*tartīb al-ījād*), situating locations mentioned in the Qur’an and Hadith into a larger cosmological framework. Ibn al-ʿArabī indicates clearly that he meant for these images to be seen together, and their placement and design reveal how he used visual cues to represent a dynamic and multidimensional universe within the confines of a bound codex. His stated goal is to make its “visualization (*taṣawwuriḥā*) near to those who cannot visualize meanings without the striking of an image (*ḍarb mathal*),” mapping thereby how the Seen (*al-shahāda*) is drawn out from the Unseen (*al-ghayb*), a Qur’anic term for the realities beyond our senses. In so doing, he takes a visual language already associated with cosmology to make an argument for the limits of the intellect, particularly in recognizing the vastness of the cosmos. He folds this into the concept of “seeing with two eyes,” one eye that declares difference and negates the presence of God in the cosmos (the intellect) and another eye that declares similarity and affirms God’s presence in the cosmos (the imagination). By being approached through these “two eyes,” the images not only draw new perspectives on previously transmitted discursive knowledge but also facilitate vision and instantaneous realization. When they are experienced together with his narrative explanation of them, the very act of paging back and forth and attention to each facing pair of images allows the reader to realize that the final images are also an image of two eyes. The same two eyes that he instructs the reader to utilize in the beginning of this section look back at the reader at its end. This identifies both macrocosm and microcosm as reflections of God, who is the only one who sees, is seen, and is the very “Sight of the Cosmos (*baṣar al-ʿālam*).” This visionary approach transforms the manuscript from a means to preserve and transmit Ibn al-ʿArabī’s vision to a mirror in which the “receptive soul” of the reader may see itself.

1 **Visualizing the Cosmos**

The intellectual traditions that developed after Islam adapted earlier visual languages to represent their own themes and concepts. The antiquity of these visual languages gave them a measure of universality, such that by Ibn

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al-ʿArabī’s time maps and diagrams had common forms and a recognizable visual language.² By map I mean any visual representation of space, whether abstract, imaginal, or actual.³ Maps have political, social, psychological, and ritual purposes that advance specific visions of the world.⁴ They don’t reproduce the world but rather create new ways of seeing and imagining it.⁵ In this regard, Ibn al-ʿArabī’s goal is clear. He builds in form and meaning on an established visual language to aid the reader in visualizing the order of the cosmos which, for him, is the locus of God’s ceaseless and unrepeating self-disclosure.

These maps are clearly in conversation with the Arabic philosophical and scientific tradition, using its own visual language to highlight its limits in grasping the vastness of God’s creation and thus, the necessity of having faith in the outward meaning of revelation.⁶ While drawing parallels between the language of revelation and philosophy was common among the philosophers,

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² For a thorough survey of the visual traditions associated with cartography up to the medieval period see David Woodward and James Brian Harley, eds., The History of Cartography. Vol. 1: Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), of particular importance to this paper is Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Cosmographical Diagrams,” in The History of Cartography. Vol. 2: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies, ed. David Woodward and James Brian Harley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 71–89. For the reproduction of a work that preceded Ibn al-ʿArabī see Emilie Savage-Smith and Yosef Rapoport, An Eleventh-Century Egyptian Guide to the Universe (Leiden: Brill, 2013), as well as their analysis of this work Yosef Rapoport and Emilie Savage-Smith, Lost Maps of the Caliphs: Drawing the World in Eleventh-Century Cairo (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018). For a broader analysis of a broad range of cartographic images, see Zayde Antrim, Mapping the Middle East (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 17–62. It is important to note that, through the above studies, we can also identify what aspects of the visual tradition Ibn al-ʿArabī was not interested in engaging with, namely, the mapping out of cities and realms. Though, I argue below, he borrows aspects from those too for depicting the Day of Judgment.
³ This definition is inspired by the discussion in Rapoport and Savage-Smith, Lost Maps of the Caliphs, 13. See also the remarks of Antrim whose summary of trends in critical cartography is also an argument for the adaptation of those lessons for understanding pre-modern and non-Western maps. Antrim, Mapping the Middle East, 11–13.
⁴ The classic work in this regard, though about modern maps, is Mark Monmonier, How to Lie with Maps (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). While premodern maps do the same, they are usually upfront about their goals as the notion of empirical facticity and one-to-one correspondence with the actual world were not primary concerns.
⁵ Martin Dodge, Rethinking Maps (New York: Routledge, 2011), 213.
⁶ A succinct and thorough analysis of the cosmological doctrines of the main predecessors to Ibn al-ʿArabī in this regard is Seyyed Hossein Nasr, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), and is still a useful guide to the cosmological backdrop of these images. Nasr also offers many diagrams taken from the works of various philosophers, all of which help think about the underlying type of visual representation at work here. Further research is still needed to situate how these diagrams have been transmitted throughout their reception and what their oldest forms would have looked like.
Ibn al-ʿArabī appears to be the first to literally map those aspects of revelation that appear illogical or irreconcilable with the intellect into these same cosmological schemes. This is rooted in a larger cosmological argument that he wages against those who limit the cosmos to what can be observed with the physical senses and those who posit a chain of causation in the cosmos that distances God from creation. It is difficult to identify all extant pre-twelfth century examples of the visual language he uses, though there are clear precedents. One fruitful comparison is the work of the tenth century Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, whose epistles, similar to the Futūḥāt, are also an encyclopedic approach to the knowledge of their day with the aim of refining the human soul and, tellingly, also include visual representation. As with most other premodern cosmologies, the human being plays a chief role in these cosmologies as the microcosm of the macrocosm (the cosmos). Their cosmic maps are centered around the earth and count up to Saturn, then the Fixed Stars, and the Encompassing Sphere. This is relatively standard – the furthest these earth-centric schema extend is the Zodiac or, at most, the First Intellect, usually understood as the first link in the chain of being that leads to all other beings. In contrast, as we will see, Ibn al-ʿArabī places a full layer between and beyond those two. But the corpus of extant images is not an argument for causation, and I only chose the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā because they represent, in many ways, a well-studied example of the kind of thinking that Ibn al-ʿArabī is responding to. One can also identify the influence of individual astrologists, occultists, or philosophers, chief among them Ibn Sinā, but their use of visual representation is either not extant in its original form or understudied. While Ibn al-ʿArabī affirms the veracity of these schemes in one

8 On the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’s influence on Ibn al-ʿArabī see Michael Ebstein, Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn Al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 2013). The difficulty, of course, is that by Ibn al-ʿArabī’s time these discourses and languages were so crucial to the intellectual traditions of Islam that drawing specific trajectories is beyond the scope of a single paper.
respect, he also challenges them and shows their limits from the perspective of unveiling and revelation. This form of theorization and visual representation was an established form of scholarly discourse by Ibn al-ʿArabī’s time, and many of his contemporaries also used it for their own ends. But Ibn al-ʿArabī’s usage created its own tradition, to the point that visual representation became a hallmark of his interpreters and followers up to the modern period.

2 Visual Representation in the Futūḥāt

The text of the Futūḥāt was first completed in 1231 CE (629 AH) and was revised by the author in a second recension that was completed in 1238 CE (636 AH).


12 Ahmet Karamustafa points out that the tradition of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his students incorporate more cosmographical diagrams than other Islamic textual traditions and provides a survey of some of their features with many examples in Karamustafa, “Cosmographical Diagrams,” 71–89. The afterlife of this style of Sufi visual representation is too vast to be referenced in this article, which will focus only on the images in Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1845+. An important forthcoming volume will do much to advance knowledge in this field, see Giovanni Maria Martini, ed., *Visualizing Sufism* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). For one well studied example from the early 14th century Persia by someone who, in many ways, is seen as articulating themselves against Ibn al-ʿArabī while remaining indebted to him, see Jamal Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of Alāʾ Ad-Dawla As-Simmânī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), particularly 72–88. Two later and important examples from China have been studied in depth by Sachiko Murata, as well as the larger works that they are found in Sachiko Murata, William C. Chittick, and Tu Weiming, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi: Islamic Thought in Confucian Terms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009) and Wang Daiyu, *The First Islamic Classic in Chinese: Wang Daiyu’s Real Commentary on the True Teaching*, ed. and trans. Sachiko Murata (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).

13 Jane Clark and Stephen Hirtenstein have taken on the monumental task of cataloguing, assessing, and analyzing the entire corpus of material transmitted from Ibn al-ʿArabī for
This second recension, in thirty-seven volumes, is held in Istanbul at the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi (formerly Evkaf Müzesi) with the shelfmark 1845+. It measures 250 × 170 mm with a written area of 190 × 120 mm and is extant in its near entirety. These volumes, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's own hand, are the sole basis of what follows.14 There are only twenty-eight images in all its volumes. Ten of these images are maps that depict a particular space and time, nine of which occur consecutively in Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870. This sequence is the focus of this study.15

In keeping with the premodern Arabic manuscript tradition, Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory of visual representation, to which I can only refer to here in short, does not rely on a strict bifurcation between image and text. He remarks that words that are written (raqamiyya), as they are drawn and seen, are simply a series of shapes, and all shapes affect the reader's soul through their particular forms.16 Their efficacy (ʿamal) differs with every hand (aqlām) in which a word is

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14 The reception history of the images is another project in and of itself, and the eight other recensions of the Futūḥāt I have studied, as well as all the published editions, alter the images in significant ways.

15 These images have not been systematically analyzed in the past. Adaptations of them appear in many works on Ibn al-ʿArabī, some of which will be mentioned below. Samer Akkach offers the most detailed analysis of these images as of yet in Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 115–47. He situates five of the maps in his discussion of Islamic cosmology and its relation to architecture and space. While acknowledging that Ibn al-ʿArabī “indicates that they should be seen as one diagram,” he translates and adapts them for his own work, thereby situating them in a far larger context than the present study. The book itself is also an excellent approach to the broader cosmological thinking at work in these and similar images. At the same time, since he does not clarify his own departures from the manuscript and adds other images not from the same sequence, it is not helpful in understanding what Ibn al-ʿArabī was trying to do with this specific sequence. Miguel Asín Palacios also reproduced several of these images from the 1876 published edition of the Futūḥāt in order to argue that they influenced Dante, though they relied on an older published edition and failed to consider them as parts of a single whole (this has no bearing on his argument, of course). Miguel Asín Palacios, La escatología musulmana en la Divina comedia (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1919), 118–23, 196, 223, 223. In fact, most references that can be found to these images do not treat all nine as a single whole.

16 This and all that follows is al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Alā’ lil-Thaqāfa, 2013), 1:577–78.
written or an image is drawn, and thus transmits its effects (from the four prime properties) into the reader's soul. When these shapes are committed to the imagination, they are interiorized and never disappear from the reader's soul, thus continuing to work their effects on it. For this reason, Ibn al-'Arabī valued even the small details of his illustration, a point missed in their reception history, the entirety of which either operated under a different understanding of transmission or was more concerned with fidelity to text.\(^{17}\)

He refers to these images primarily as ṣūra and mithāl, terms rich in significance both in Ibn al-'Arabī's own work as well as the Islamic intellectual tradition at large, and he uses verbs from the root \(r-s-m\), meaning to etch, design, or draw, to describe his process of creating these images.\(^{18}\) The word ṣūra refers to both image and form, and is connected to God's creation of humanity six times in the Qur'an.\(^{19}\) It is also the term used in a well-known hadith that remarks that God created Adam “in his image/form (ʿalā šīratihi).”\(^{20}\) For Ibn al-'Arabī, everything that appears within the cosmos is a form, some subtle and transparent, some dense and corporeal, some constantly changing, others fixed. He also makes it clear that any appearance is a ṣūra regardless of its medium, including different types of text, and he consciously draws distinctions between prose, poetry, and even rhymed prose as we will see below. The other important term he uses in this regard is mithāl or mathal, which means image, likeness, or simile. While this is a standard term for visual representation, including in the rational sciences, it further allows him to connect the use of visual representation to the Qur'an, which identifies mathal with God's choice method of instruction.\(^{21}\) He writes that he will

\(^{17}\) The notion of what a faithful transmission of an image would entail is, of course, a large question. Given my assertion that these images should be considered within, or adaptations of, the visual traditions of scientific/philosophical tradition, it is interesting to note that the transmission of mathematical texts has a similarly complicated history with almost identical issues. See Gregg De Young, “Mathematical diagrams from manuscript to print: examples from the Arabic Euclidean transmission,” *Synthese* 186.1, Diagrams in Mathematics: History and Philosophy (May 2012), 21–54.

\(^{18}\) I will translate ṣūra as form for most of this essay unless otherwise specified.

\(^{19}\) 3:6, 7:11. 42:64. 59:20 (used as a name of God, al-muṣawwir, the Form-giver), 64:3, 82:8.

\(^{20}\) One version is transmitted by Bukhārī 79. Kitāb al-isti'dhān, 1. Bāb bad‘ al-salām, Ḥadīth 6299. It is also narrated by Muslim and Aḥmad. All hadith citations are from editions published by the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation unless stated otherwise.

\(^{21}\) Of course, this is usually interpreted as “simile” or “parable” in the context of the Qur’an. This reading has precedence in Sufism, for instance, in the thought of ʿAyn al-Qudāt Hamadānī, see Mohammed Rustom, *Inrushes of the Heart: The Mystical Theology of ʿAyn al-Qudāt* (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming), ch. 5. To my limited knowledge Ibn al-'Arabī is the first to explicitly connect the Qur'an's usage to visual representation in books, even if it was clearly used outside of Qur'ānic contexts for visual representation as part of its
place all of this in images (amthila) to make their visualization (tašawwurihā) near to those who cannot visualize meanings without the striking of an image (darb mathal), just as God has struck an image of the heart as valleys (Q 13:17) in their capacity when water descends, or how He struck the image of His light as a lantern (Q 24:35). All of this is to draw the situation closer to weak understandings. This is His word, ‘He created the Human Being and taught him the Clarification’ (Q 55:3–4) ... so know how He clarifies ...22

This pedagogical use of image, he argues, is in imitation of the Qur’an, which not only uses a highly visual language but also identifies God’s teaching with mathal/amthāl in thirty one verses, such as “God strikes similes/images for people so that they may remember” (Q 14:25) or “He strikes for you an image from yourselves” (Q 30:28).23 By reading the Qur’an’s aural/textual similitude as an image (keeping, in fact, to his own understanding of form), he shows both the validity and independence of visual representation as its own form of divinely sanctioned communication.

To reinforce this, he also connects visual representation directly to the Prophetic tradition through a hadith where Muhammad draws an image for his companions. By relating this hadith, Ibn al-ʿArabi is marking his choice to draw the imaginal spaces of revelation as an act of imitating the Prophet. The hadith in question states that the Prophet drew a line in the sand for his companions, saying “this is the path (sabīl) of God.” He then drew lines to its left and right, saying “these are diverting paths, on each of them Satan stands calling to it.” He then recited from the Qur’an, “this is my straight path (ṣirāṭ), follow it, and do not follow paths that will separate you from its path (sabīl)” (Q 6:153).24 To make his imitation of the Prophet clear, Ibn al-ʿArabī offers his basic meaning, particularly in scientific illustration. On the intricacies of the usage of the term in optics and mechanics, for instance, see Elaheh Kheirandish, “Science and Mithāl: Demonstrations in Arabic and Persian Scientific Traditions,” Iranian Studies 41:4 (2008): 465–89.

22 Futūḥāt, 9:312.
23 The latter verse connects directly to the “Highest Image” belonging to God, as will be discussed later. The Qur’an also discusses those who use mathal to misguide in 17:48, 25:9, and 36:78.
24 This hadith is transmitted by Ibn Ḥanbal, Sunan ʿAbdullāh b. Masʿūd, Ḥadīth 4225, 4523, and once by al-Dārimī, Bāb fī kirāhiyya akhdh al-raʾy, Ḥadīth 209. There are two other hadith narrations wherein Muhammad draws in the sand using similar wording. The most widely reported version depicts him drawing a quadrilateral with a line in its center that extends out of the quadrilateral, then lines perpendicular to the main line. He identifies the center with the human being, the quadrilateral with his appointed death, the line
own rendition of this image on the same page (Figure 1, lower right), thereby rooting his shift to visual representation in the Prophetic tradition. He uses this image to remark that “the Path” (al-ṣirāṭ), the eschatological bridge that rises from hell to paradise, is a reality in this world too, but hidden except from those for whom reality is unveiled. In the next world, it will be visible to all since all will have to cross it. He connects this hadith to another in which Muhammad says that he has left his community with “the White Path” (al-maḥajja al-bayḍāʾ) whose “night is like its day” because of its clarity (its “whiteness”). This, Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks, is simply “seeing with two

outside of the quadrilateral with his expectations, and the lines to the side impediments. This version is transmitted by Bukhārī, Tirmidhī, Ibn Māja, al-Dārimī, and by Ibn Ḥanbal. Ibn Ḥanbal also transmits a third hadith wherein Muhammad draws four lines in the ground and identifies them with the four greatest women of paradise.

26 Futūḥāt, 8,551. This hadith occurs without the al-maḥajja in Ibn Māja, 1, Bāb ittibāʿ sunna rasūl Allāh, Ḥadīth 5. Al-bayḍā, “the white,” is a way of saying a clear path, which is supported by the following phrase “its night is the same as its day,” that is, it can be clearly
“Seeing with two eyes,” a reference to the Qur’anic verses “have we not made for him two eyes? A tongue and two lips? And guided him on the two broad paths (al-najdayn)?” (Q 90:8–10). By pointing to the Qur’anic insistence that the human situation itself is the ultimate sign of God, Ibn al-ʿArabi creates a whole web of complementary meanings around “seeing with two eyes.”

3 Seeing with Two Eyes

“Seeing with two eyes,” derived from the aforementioned Qur’anic verse, refers to seeing reality without demanding that it conform to one’s own intellect, instead recognizing the unity that lies beyond every semblance of contradiction.27 For Ibn al-ʿArabi, God simultaneously can and cannot be identified with everything in the cosmos. Without both intellect and imagination, negation and affirmation, declaring difference and similarity, one cannot grasp this reality. The superiority of the imaginal language of revelation is in its capacity to bring opposites together in a single form, and the utility of visual representation is in its affinity with that language. By mapping the language of philosophy within that of revelation, the sequence of images aims to show the limits of the intellect in comprehending the vastness of the cosmos, which can only be grasped through God’s imaginal guidance. This guidance leads one to bewilderment, for “one does not say that the entities (aʿyān) of the cosmos are the same as the Real, nor are they other than the Real. Rather, all of Being (al-wujūd) is Real.”28 Note that the Arabic word for entity, ‘ayn, is the same word that is used for “eye” in the earlier discussion, and the play between these two meanings indicates that every entity is itself an eye through which the Real sees and is seen.29

Immediately before the sequence of images in the same chapter, Ibn al-ʿArabi again highlights the importance of seeing with two eyes by illustrating the aforementioned “White Path” in the margin. (Figure 2) He identifies “the White Path” with one of the “two broad paths” identified in the Qur’an. Both paths end in “felicity” (saʿāda) and they “rise from a single root (aṣl),

27 This entire section is a pithy way of encapsulating a major discussion in all of Ibn al-ʿArabi’s work. The notion of seeing with two eyes, which he connects to Q 90:9, will be treated briefly below, but is fully explained in Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 358–61.

28 Futūḥāt, 9.315.

29 On the many meanings of ‘āyn in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s work see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 83–85.
and end in a single root” but they differ “in what is between the two roots.”

The difference is in their ease – those who are capable of seeing “the end of every path” because “they have two eyes” choose “the White Path,” while their other path is “blind” and overcome by dangers and pitfalls, seeing nothing of either path or where they lead. The other path is the path of misguidance that leads to hell, but this discussion ties into a larger point, that all creatures will reach felicity, even in hell, and the suffering of this life and the next stems from an inability to see things as they really are. If one learns to see with two eyes, they can perceive the straight path even when it is hidden in this life, and their road to felicity is easy. Those who cannot do this face pitfalls and difficulties, even if ultimately, they return to the same end as their companion where they too reach felicity.

30 Futūḥāt, 9.311.
31 This is, of course, a direct interpretation of Q 2:156 “We are from God and to Him we are returning.” True to Ibn al-ʿArabī, this is but one way of interpreting these two paths. He offers other alternatives too, see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 362 for another.
The semblance of this image to an abstracted set of eyes (when turned ninety degrees) in the midst of his discussion of “seeing with two eyes” not only further entrenches visual representation and image in the language of the Qur’an and Hadith, but prepares the reader to approach the upcoming sequence with “two eyes.” If they gain a vision that gathers opposites, they can perceive the superiority of revelation and unveiling over the intellect. This superiority, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes, is because “knowledge of placement (al-waḍʿ) and ordering (al-tartīb) cannot be acquired through thought (al-fikr), rather, it depends on the report of the One who enacted it (al-fāʿil lahā) and configured its forms (munshī li-ṣuwarīhā).”32 The most, he argues, that the intellect can achieve in this respect is simply knowing the possibility of a certain cosmic arrangement, not how it is actually ordered, because “ordering can only be recognized through witnessing.”33 These maps aid the reader because, like all things, they have to return to God, and that return is through the cosmos. To travel easily, they need to see its reality with both eyes, not allowing one eye to misguide them. By prefacing the sequence of these images with a discussion of two eyes and their accompanying illustration, Ibn al-ʿArabī prepares the reader to receive the full sequence, alerting them that the primary mode of instruction in what follows is imaginal like revelation, and that his aim is to visualize, not rationalize, the way things are.

Yet vision always occurs from a standpoint, and for this reason, perspective is integral to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s cosmology and plays a crucial role in much of the Futūḥāt.34 “Seeing with two eyes” and “seeing things as they are” is only realized when the person who sees recognizes their own point of view. As delimited beings before the non-delimited, no point of view is absolute. In the explanation that follows the sequence of nine images, he is clear in this regard, writing that:

we will now talk about every form (ṣūra) of it in another form (ṣūra) in regards to what the situation is in and of itself, in nine sections (fuṣūl) just as we drew it in nine faces (wujūh) of form-giving (al-taṣwīr). We didn’t place it in order (al-tartīb) to set priority (al-taqdīm) or posterity (al-taʾkhīr), but rather speech (al-kalām) about it clarifies what is prior or

32 Futūḥāt, 9.307.
33 Futūḥāt, 9.307.
posterior to it, or what is undifferentiated (al-mujmal) or differentiated (al-mufaṣṣal).\footnote{Futūḥāt, 9.328. It should be pointed out that even between the narrative explanation of the images and the images themselves, there are slight differences, including in their titles.}

Face, ṭajh, also means facing and perspective in Arabic. Ibn al-‘Arabī is clear in this chapter that each image is its own unique vantage point and that the order of coming into being changes based on perspective. Thus, within the same chapter, he gives nine different textual versions of this order, three before the sequence of images and six after (not including his detailed narrative of the images). For some of these sets, he is clear what the perspective is, such as ordering based on “manifestation in coming into being” (al-ẓuhūr fī-l ījād) or through “rank” (al-makāna).\footnote{Futūḥāt, 9.362.} He is also clear that the form (ṣūra) of representation itself counts as its own perspective, such as in the two other textual forms that he offers before concluding the chapter: an oration (khuṭba) in rhymed prose and a qaṣīda poem. Each of these differs from the other ordered sets in its arrangement and description of the cosmic hierarchy, and in case the reader misses the point, he explicitly articulates it.

Since all of being (wujūd) is ranked above as well as ranked below [in excellence] (fāḍilan wa mafḍūlan), this leads to equality (musāwā), and to saying that there is none ranked above or below, rather only noble, perfect, and complete being, with no defect in it. And this is so because among the creatures, in all the diversity of their castings (ikhtilāf ḍurūbihā), there is no affair (amr) that is not dependent on a divine reality or relation. There is no ranking in excellence (tafāddul) in God because a thing cannot be more excellent than itself. Thus, there is no ranking in excellence (mufāḍala) within the cosmos in this respect, for He is the one to whom the affair is returned before and after, and on Him depend the folk of bringing together and finding (jamʿ wa-l wujūd). For this they are called the folk of bringing together, for they are the folk of a single entity/eye (ʿayn), just as God has said, “Our affair (amr) is but one” (54:50) Whoever unveils the affair as it is, knows what we have mentioned of the order of the cosmos in this chapter – for it has varied pathways (mutannawiʿ al-masāq), in the oration it has an order that is not in the poem (manẓūm), and so too in the rest of the chapter.\footnote{This is also translated in Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 184. Futūḥāt, 9.370.}
The One is infinite and boundless, so how it is perceived is always subject to perspective, and every form, including those made by humans, such as oration, poetry, or visual representation, furnishes its own perspective. Each of these is true in its own proper place, but where, how, and why that proper place is requires one to “see with two eyes.” Only then can one see how differentiating principles and opposites, when seen from the ultimate perspective, are equal within “noble, perfect, and complete being.”

4 The Sequence of Images

As stated before, the following images, as well as the image of the “White Path” above, are all in the twenty-sixth volume of the second recension (Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870) in chapter 371: “On Knowledge of the Station of a Secret and the Three Secrets that are of the Tablet, of the Unlettered, and of Muhammad.” Assuming that readers read the manuscript in order, they would have already come across discussions of the places and times depicted in these maps multiple times, including thrice in the same chapter.

The labelled and captioned images are drawn using tools and take up full pages in the manuscript after long tracts of unbroken text, creating an overwhelming visual effect that commands the reader’s attention and disrupts the visual flow of the manuscript. Ibn al-ʿArabī indicates that he used red ink (khaṭṭa ... bi-l-ḥamra) in parts of these images. The use of red is faded but still discernable in a brown that clearly differs from the black used throughout the manuscript. This “red” is used for visual clarity to help distinguish between labels and geometric shapes.

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38 Futūḥāt, 9.317.
39 My deepest gratitude to Kristine Rose-Beers, head of conservation at the Chester Beatty who confirmed that the faded brown ink could have been red originally, and indicated that this type of fading, together with the “slight transparency” of the ink is a characteristic of organic colorants. One example of such an ink would have been made by sumac, see Claudia Colini, “‘I tried it and it is really good’: Replicating Recipes of Arabic Black Inks,” in Traces of Ink: Experiences of Philology and Replication, ed. Lucia Raggetti (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 138–41. Ibn Bādīs, according to Rose-Beers, also gives a recipe using lac and wallflowers which may also have faded over time. Kristine Rose-Beers, e-mail correspondence, June 4, 2021.
40 It should be noted that the description of the images that immediately precedes them is also different from the images in the sequence. That would not be strange as Ibn al-ʿArabī constantly shifts perspective, yet given that this is his second recension, it is also possible that he changed the images this time around. I have still to find concrete evidence for
Ibn al-ʿArabī is clear that these images are meant to be seen together. He writes above the first image in the sequence that “the place of the forms of the shapes (mawḍiʿ suwar al-ashkāl) is constrained here without expanding for the forms in the way we intend – as a single composition (tashkīla wāḥida); if it did expand, it would have been clearer to the one who views it.” To make this clear to the reader, he uses labels, visual and textual cues, as well as their placement in relation to one another, furnishing a sense of unity that is maintained with every shift of perspective.

The first image faces text while the following eight face each other. Their arrangement on the page is such that the visual features of each reference and reflect the others. Because of this, some of the aforementioned cues are only effective when their placement in relation to the facing page is maintained. Furthermore, just as Ibn al-ʿArabī’s textual narrative frequently recalls earlier discussions and foreshadows later ones, the forms of his images reference other images in the Futūḥāt, establishing a correspondence that highlights the independence of visual representation as its own form of communication within his work. Yet this independence is not antagonistic to narrative, in fact, it hardly functions without narrative. Narrative guides the reader through the images, and the interplay between the two encourages the reader to use their imagination to “fill in the blanks,” whether through directing their eyes to specific features or by alerting them to what is left out of the illustration. The reader pages back and forth between the image and their explanations, revealing new details with each turn. This is an intended part of the experience of reading the manuscript and can only be realized by following its order and progression, as if the reader was watching a performance. At times he even incites the reader to turn the book by using winding or upside-down script, thereby imparting a sense of movement to the experience of viewing the images. By considering the objecthood of the codex and its limits and opportunities, he uses visual cues and strategies to impart movement and perspective shifts through the readers themselves. This ensured that their visualization would not remain one-dimensional or static.

this, though there are hints of parallel image traditions associated with the Futūḥāt whose source may be the non-extant first recension.

41 Futūḥāt, 9.319.
42 In so doing, he was building on techniques that were used with other objects in the Islamic world. On how artisans used epigraphy, representation, and other visual strategies in three dimensional objects to create spaces of “animated performance” see Margaret Graves, Arts of Allusion: Object, Ornament, and Architecture in Medieval Islam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 124–38. Ibn al-ʿArabī’s case, of course, would be one wherein script and shape are animating the image. Graves’ whole study is a masterful
As the maps progress from first to fourth (Figures 3, 5, and 8 right, moving right to left), they fit into one another as they move from the level of God’s essence, which is beyond all size and limit, and descend to the level of our earth and its seven heavens, the lowest part of visible reality. This process of descent is marked by the label of the outermost geometric feature in each map which references the “lowest” labelled feature in the previous image. The fourth, fifth, and sixth maps (Figures 8 and 12, right) illustrate the same place in three consecutive temporal moments and from three different perspectives: the earth as it is now, its transformation on the Day of Judgment, and its final transformation into hell. The seventh map (Figure 12, left) moves out again to a perspective that shows ontological and temporal priority and posteriority from origin to return. The eighth map (Figure 15, right) moves to a specific moment and place in paradise where God’s face will be unveiled, and the ninth and last map (Figure 15, left) shifts to show the entirety of the cosmos. I have also provided my own translations and adaptations of these images (Figures 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 16, and 17) for the sake of this analysis, striving to preserve as many of their particularities without “correcting” Ibn al-ʿArabī’s choices. The analysis that follows is, of course, only one reading, gleaned partly from Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own narrative as well as my own prolonged study of his use of visual representation. It, without doubt, fails to consider every discussion that Ibn al-ʿArabī alludes to as his aim is to be exhaustive. I only aim to show the unique ways in which Ibn al-ʿArabī used drawn images as their own independent form of communication to amplify his broader arguments.

4.1 The Cloud

The first image (Figure 3, left, Figure 4) is labelled “The form of the Cloud (al-ʿamāʾ) and what it contains until the Throne of Sitting (al-ʿarsh al-istiwā).” The Cloud is derived from a hadith wherein Muhammad is asked “Where was our Lord before He created His creation?” He replied, “He was in a cloud, beneath which was air and above which was air, and He created His throne on water.” For Ibn al-ʿArabī, this term is tied to “the Breath of the All-Merciful” (al-nafas al-rahmān), another image drawn from hadith that figures prominently in the analysis of how objects were perceived and interacted with, and bears weight on thinking about when and how books become objects.
Mapping the Unseen

Figure 3  MS Istanbul, Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 89b–90a

Figure 4  Translation and adaptation of Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 90a
in his cosmology.\textsuperscript{46} God, he explains, was alone in His oneness but loved to be known, so He created the cosmos so that He would be known.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, He exhaled, an act of love and mercy to Himself, and on this breath, He articulated the entirety of the cosmos.

Love is a ruling property that requires the mercy of the one described by it to their own self. This is why the one who breathes finds ease in their breathing, and the exhalation (\textit{burūz al-nafāṣ}) of the one who breathes is the same as their mercy to themselves. Nothing emerges from Him except the Mercy that encompasses everything and which runs over the entirety of the cosmos.\textsuperscript{48}

The Cloud was the first form to “accept the Breath of the all-Merciful.” It is the “encompassing circle,” and the first shape in being.\textsuperscript{49} There is “no level (\textit{rutba}) above it save for the level of Lordness (\textit{rubūbiyya}) that sought the form (\textit{ṣūra}) of the Cloud from the name ‘the Merciful,’ it breathed and thus, the Cloud existed.”\textsuperscript{50} It is sheer mercy, “a merciful vapor” (\textit{bukhār raḥmānī}) and the first container (\textit{ẓarf}) of Being.\textsuperscript{51} The air that surrounds it is nothing but God Himself, and God “is like its heart,” introducing a discrete anthropomorphism in the series that manifests in every image in one way or another.

The Enraptured Angels (\textit{al-malāʾika al-muhayyima}) that surround this image refer to angels of the highest order who only know the “inward of the Real” (\textit{bāṭin al-ḥaqq}).\textsuperscript{52} He writes that they are unaware of everything inside this circle, which marks the “outward reality of God.” This reframes the image for the reader. Whereas at first glance, one would think that “inward” refers to what is within the circle, after reading his explanation, one sees that what is outside the circle is the “Inward of God” and what is inside of it is His outward.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge}, 125–29. The term “Breath of the all-Merciful” is also derived from hadith, though it is absent from the main collections.
\item This is a famous hadith that is not found in most standard hadith collections, but is commonly cited by Sufis. Ibn al-ʿArabī is aware of this and claims that this is a hadith verified by unveiling, not transmission. Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge}, 361.
\item Futūḥāt, 9.328–329.
\item Futūḥāt, 9.317. Note that he calls this the “encompassing circle,” which is what the rationalists usually call the sphere of the zodiac. The perfection of the circle is an ancient theme that Ibn al-ʿArabī consistently references.
\item Futūḥāt, 9.317.
\item Futūḥāt, 9.329.
\item Futūḥāt, 9.329. He identifies these angels as the Cherubim (\textit{karrūbiyyūn}) elsewhere, such as 1.464.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
This is because, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, creation occurs within God since there is nothing and nowhere but Him.

The triangular First Intellect, the Pen, is one of these Enraptured Angels, distinguished from them all through a “confirmation from God” that “imprints in it the knowledge of what will be until the day of Resurrection, which the other Enraptured Angels do not know.”\(^53\) In cosmological schemes like those of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā and Ibn Sīnā, this would have been our starting point.\(^54\) Instead it is our third point of consideration, subsuming the cosmology of philosophy under that of revelation. “The First Intellect,” which the philosophers already identified with the Qur’ānic “Pen,” only comes to be within “the Cloud” and is one of the Enraptured Angels. It is within and among images that are greater than those furnished by the intellect, reminding the reader again of its limits.

The two circles of the “The Two Powers” (al-quwwatayn) represent the two hands of God, both of which are “open and full of mercy,” and he identifies them with knowledge and action. He is clear that there is no room for wrath at this level.\(^55\) These two correspond to knowledge and action, and when they stretch out from the Essence, he writes that their movement creates the rectangle that encloses them, the Universal Soul which is the Guarded Tablet.

The anthropomorphic language of revelation (its suggestion that God has a body) is a major problem for the philosophers as well as rationalist theologians, and many preferred to either ignore it, accept it as a matter of faith, or interpret it away.\(^56\) While Ibn al-ʿArabī is not an anthropomorphist, his insistence

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\(^53\) Futūḥāt, 9:329.


\(^55\) This is in keeping with long standing discussions rooted in both the Qurʾān and Hadith that make it clear that God’s hands are both associated with generosity and giving, to the point that the contention between Muslim theologians was whether one of the hands can even be called “left.” This is, of course, beyond the scope of this paper; for a thorough analysis of the importance of this theme in the Islamic intellectual tradition and the kind of multiplicity and difference it begets, particularly for Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers, see Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 81–114. For the adaptation of the language of hands and feet to later philosophy, see Mohammed Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 105–9.

\(^56\) The issue of anthropomorphism in scripture was one that led to a great amount of debate among Muslims. A masterful analysis of most of the issues in the background is Livnat Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism in Islam: The Challenge of Traditionalism* (700–1350)
on the truth of the outward meaning of revelation imbibes these images with a subtle anthropomorphism that upholds God’s body while, at the same time, showing that it is not corporeal or similar to any bodies that we know. And by placing the Two Hands between the Pen and the Tablet, the first two realities of philosophical cosmologies, he interrupts any notion of God as simply the Prime Mover or First in a series of causes.

The smaller rectangle of “Nature” (al-ṭabīʿa) is the child of “the Greater Nature” which is the mother of all things and, in fact, the entirety of this image. He writes:

There is nothing in Being but the One, the Many (al-wāḥid al-kathīr). In it, the Enraptured Angels, The Intellect, the Soul, and Nature become manifest. And Nature is the most worthy (aḥaqqa) of relation to the Real (al-Ḥaqq) when compared to what is other than it, because what is other than it is not made manifest except in what manifests from it. And that is the Breath that pervades the cosmos, that is, in the forms of the cosmos ...

Look at the pervasiveness of the rule of Nature, and the confinement (quṣūr) of the rule of the Intellect, for it is, in reality, a form from the forms of Nature. In fact, it is a form from the forms of the Cloud, and the Cloud is a form of Nature.... The nature in which is made manifest the transparent bodies, such as the Throne and what it contains, relates to Nature in the same way a daughter relates to a woman who is her mother, giving birth just as her mother gives birth. And just as the daughter is born from her, she bears all that is born from her. In the same way our Elements, that are close to us, are the nature of all that is born from them, similarly the humors in the bodies of animals. This is why they are all called nature, just as we call the daughter, daughters, and the mother “female” (unthā) and call them all “females.”

The labelled Nature is thus the second mother of all things and is divided into four properties that govern all bodies: Heat, Cold, Dryness, and Wetness. This is the first fourfold nature that is marked in this sequence, mirroring the four “leaders” of the Attributes of God: the Living, the Knowing, the Desiring, and


57 Futūḥāt, 9.316–317.
the Powerful/Speaking. Quaternity continues to rule at every level, and Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts, “Being abides (qāma) through quaternity (al-tarbī),” building on older conceptions that reflect the importance of four to human life. From here, down to the nature of our earth, quaternity appear at every level: “the entity (al-ʿayn) is one, but the ruling property (al-ḥukm) is diverse.” The “Universal Hyle” (al-hayūlā al-kull) at the bottom is Prime Matter (“the Dust” in keeping with the language of revelation), where “place” itself, and thus, the entire cosmos, appears.

There are thirty rectangular spaces around the circumference of the circle that mark the Enraptured Angels, not counting the triangular shape of the Pen. Elsewhere in the Futūḥāt, Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks that the Pen has 360 general knowledges, in keeping with a circle. Three hundred sixty divided by thirty gives us twelve knowledges per each of the Enraptured Angels pictured. In the third image in the sequence, (Figure 5 left, Figure 7) he divides the circumference of the circle by the twelve angels of the Zodiac, remarking that each of them has thirty storehouses of knowledge (totalling 360 again). This marks the first act of mirroring between the levels, and in a sense, roots calendrical time with twelve months of about thirty days in the highest level of reality and also alludes to the identity of God with time itself.

On a similar note, the thirty spaces of the Enraptured Angels can represent the image of an animal’s horn, connecting it to the Arabic word qarn meaning

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58 Futūḥāt, 9.333. See also 2.155. Speech and power are used synonymously in the four space because God’s power is His speech, in keeping with the Qur’anic phrase “When He desires a thing He says, ‘Be’ and it is.” 36:82. This occurs 7 other places in the Qur’an too. Elsewhere in the Futūḥāt, Ibn al-ʿArabī even adds another four that is prior to the Leaders – the Divine Names “the First, the Last, the Outward, and the Inward,” which is Q 57.13. See 8.296–297.


60 Futūḥāt, 9.330.

61 Futūḥāt, 9.364.

62 Futūḥāt, 2.159–160.

63 On Ibn al-ʿArabī’s thoughts about the month and the number of its day, including a mention of the Roman and Coptic calendars, see Futūḥāt, 3.422–423.
both a horn as well as a unit of time. This is based on their appearance (horns rising up to the break of the Pen) as well as their being thirty in number. The horn is, in fact, an image often used by Ibn al-ʿArabī to describe the intermediacy of all of creation within the isthmus (barzakh) of imagination, and he even draws it from a different perspective earlier in the text. He also clearly connects qarn to thirty, building on the hadith tradition. In one of these hadith, Muslims are divided into three different groups based on their seeing the Prophet, seeing someone who saw him, or seeing someone who saw someone who saw him. Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets these levels as representing God’s essence, attributes, and acts. He calls each of these groups a qarn, drawing on another hadith wherein the Prophet says “the best of you is my qarn, then those who follow them...,” upholding in the midst of his explanation the opinion that a qarn means thirty years. While he is clear that there is no numerical time at the level of the Cloud, time or “the aeon” (al-dahr) is also a name of God, so it must be represented at this level even in its undifferentiated form. Furthermore, in keeping with the Qur’an’s assertion that God created the “heavens and the earth” in six days, thirty can also be read as six groups of five, with five representing the breakup of a single day in accordance with revelation (the five prayers).

Thirty, of course has other significances: the Qur’an itself, for instance, has thirty parts. In the Abjad numerical system, thirty equals the letter lām, which in Q 2:1 is wedged between the letters alif and mim. Alif lām mim is the first set of mysterious letters in the Qur’an whose meaning has been speculated on by Qur’an commentators throughout the centuries. In his own commentary on this verse, Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks that lām is the intermediary (wasiṭa) between the unity of God, represented by the alif, and the cosmos, represented by mim, connecting it to the order of creation and the circle that encompasses all reality.

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64 Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1860, 76b–77a. Futūḥāt, 6:113. For more on the horn and an adaptation of his diagram, see Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 14–16.
65 Whereas the identity of qarn with century is taken for granted in the modern period, it was a debated topic in early Islam, particularly as it was used in the Hadith literature, for more on the development of the term see Abed El-Rahman Tayyara, “The Evolution of the Term Qarn in Early Islamic Sources,” Journal of Near Eastern Studies 72.1 (2013): 99–110.
66 Futūḥāt, 5.180. The hadith in question is found in Muslim, 45. Kitāb faḍāʾil al-ṣaḥāba, 52. Bāb faḍl al-ṣaḥāba thumma alladhīna yalūnahum thumma alladhīna yalūnahum, Ḥadīth 6630. It can also be found with a different wording in Bukhārī and in Ibn Ḥanbal.
69 Futūḥāt, 1.232–233.
In this respect, as an image of the Breath and the movements within God that create the cosmos, the numerical symbolism of lām is appropriate here.70

The circular shape of the Cloud, which Ibn al-ʿArabī identifies with the “encompassing circle” (al-ḍāʾira al-muḥīṭa), is also a response to the philosophical tradition which would have placed it directly above the fixed stars, where the zodiac is found. In this vein, the way that the Pen's base is rooted in the circumference of this circle is another form of rooting its reality beyond the limits of reason. Its triangular shape is because the triangle is the first possible polygon, and it makes up all the other shapes.71 Yet at the same time, he subsumes it within the circle made of many angels, and makes clear that it was first one of them, both in this image and in the narrative. The only reason it was able to change, He writes, is because of God's self-disclosure.

The formal symbolism beyond this is clear, moving from a triangle to a rectangle, to a rectangle formed of four triangles, to a circle, increasing in number each time. Furthermore, the number of labelled entities in the circle amount to ten – Two Hands (note their parallel placement in the middle, calling to mind the mirroring of the monad), the Pen (3), the Tablet (4), Lesser Nature (5), the Four Properties within it (6–9), the Universal Hyle (10). The “Stations of the Enraptured Angels” could be seen as an eleventh, but note that their stations are actually marked between two circles, leaving open the possibility of reading it as twelve. In classical mathematics, all numbers are derived from twelve, the units one to nine, then tens, hundreds, and thousands.72 In a sense then, both in terms of shape and number, this image contains everything that we will see in the other images, serving as a visual representation of God's own knowledge. Furthermore, twelve (four times three) also builds on the aforementioned quaternity that runs through this image. Even the amount of space taken by the Pen on the circle's circumference is the equivalent of four of the thirty spaces on the circumference, indicating the four that are above the level of Lesser Nature, the four leading names of God.73

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70 In all of this, there is again a subsuming of philosophical numerology beneath the language of revelation, i.e., the Pen, that represents one, is one among thirty.
72 This is also four cycles of three and is ancient. For a succinct summary see Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: On Arithmetic and Geometry, 16 (59). Also Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses this in multiple places, see for instance 6.182.
73 In this regard, one could object to the division of 360 by thirty as I did before since it doesn't take into account the four at the top. In one sense, the Pen is the one that knows so its knowledge of the circle is of everything outside of it. But from another perspective, one could also divide the circle in at least two other ways. 360 ÷ 34 = 10 10/17 which would be 180/17. Each two would therefore be 360/17, therefore each pair forming a circle of their
The last important point is this image’s abstract sexual imagery, which marks active and receptive realities, and which was already alluded to in relation to the motherhood of Nature. The Pen is a masculine and active reality in relation to the Tablet, hence its triangular form. The receptivity and femininity of the Tablet is in its rectangular form, and the Lesser Nature is born from the marriage of these two realities (rectangle and triangle). Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly articulates this, writing that “the Divine Self-Disclosure pervades over it [the Pen] just as the pleasure of sex pervades over the one who has sex until it makes them absent from every other intelligible and known thing. When the light of self-disclosure pervades over it, its shadow [the Tablet] returns to it and unifies with it,” thus creating the Lesser Nature and, by extension, the cosmos. The Lesser Nature is attached to its mother, and the placement of the Two Powers call to mind the breasts which nourish a child, and hence, are in line with the Lesser Nature. The Lesser Nature combines the shapes of its parents; it has the four triangles of the Four Properties when seen separately, signifying active principles, but is a rectangle when seen together, signifying a receptive principle. It is receptive towards its parents but active towards its children, who are contained in its own daughter, the Universal Hyle or Prime Matter.

The significance of using the number 17 as the base is that it, a prime number, is the number of cycles of obligatory ritual prayer (ṣalāṭ) that Muslims conduct five times every day, (starting from sunset 3, 4, 2, 4, 4) which according to the Qurʾan, is first done by God. We could also separate the four and the thirty, assign ten degrees to each thirty for 300 and fifteen degrees for each four for sixty, for a total of three hundred and sixty. If each of these degrees represents a “day,” as in a day with God whose measure is known to only Him, then there are ten “months” marked by every three of the Enraptured Angels and two “months” by the Pen itself. The two sides can also be read as a reference to two bows from Q 59:9.

This is in keeping with the broader gender dynamics of Islamic cosmology as shown in depth by Murata, *The Tao of Islam*. Futūḥāt, 9.330–331. In this section, since the ordering is different, the level that comes after the Tablet is the Throne, but the meaning is the same.

This is only a small portion of what could be interpreted here, particularly since the first image contains in it the summary of what is to come. For instance, as the image of the Breath on which the cosmos is articulated, we could also contemplate the image’s similarity to charts showing the points of articulation within a mouth. Furthermore, what we read as 1–9 could simply be read as 1–5, as five is the first circular number. Note also that this sequence of nine images can be seen as five images if we take each facing pair as a single image. This multivalence and openness to interpretation is, of course, the point. Furthermore, as a proponent of the perspectival nature of reality, it is without doubt intentional that we can take any of these important numbers as starting points. It is not that those who only see creation in threes, fours, sixes, or sevens are wrong, but rather, that they are only looking through a single perspective.
4.2 *The Throne, Atlas, and Paradise*

The second image in the sequence (Figure 5, right) is labelled “and from that is the form of the Throne of Sitting, the Footstool, the Two Feet, the Water upon which is the Throne, the Air that holds up the Water, and the Darkness.”\(^77\)

It faces the third image (Figure 5, left) labelled “and from that is the image of the Sphere of Atlas, the Gardens, the Root of the Starry Sphere, and the Tree of Ṭūbā.”\(^78\)

4.2.1 Image Two

The second image (Figure 6) moves into the lowest circle of the previous image, as indicated by its outermost feature, “the aforementioned Universal Hyle.” This image illustrates God’s sitting in a way that avoids anthropomorphizing God while still maintaining the outward meaning of Qur’anic verses like “the Merciful sits upon the Throne” (Q 25:59). Thus, the Universal Body (*al-jism al-kull*), the location of time and space, encompasses the Throne giving it an inward orientation unlike earthly thrones, continuing thereby the inward

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\(^77\) Türk ve İslam Eserleri Muzesi 1870, fol. 90b–91a.

\(^78\) Türk ve İslam Eserleri Muzesi 1870, fol. 90b–91a.
movement that began in the first image. The Universal Body is the reality that allows bodies to exist, even if it itself is not a clear body. And since it is “the Merciful” that sits on the Throne, there can be nothing but mercy in creation.

The Merciful sat upon it, one word with no opposite, for it is Mercy in its entirety — nothing in it opposes Mercy. It is a form in the Cloud, the Intellect is its father and the Soul is its mother. It is for this reason that the Merciful sat upon it, for the two parents do not look at their child except through mercy, and God is the most merciful of the merciful. The Soul and the Intellect are two existent things that are noble and beloved to God, so he would not sit on the Throne except through what soothes the eyes of these parents, and that is Mercy. Thus, we learn that anything that comes from it is filled with mercy. And if there befalls some of the world grief, this too is because of some mercy within it, otherwise, they
would not be forced to swallow it. Rather, it is demanded by the natural temperament (mīzāj al-ṭab’) and the opposition of the soul’s selfish desire (gharad al-nafsī). It is like bitter medicine that does not taste pleasing, yet in it is mercy for the one who drinks and uses it, even if they hate it. Thus, “its inward is mercy and before its outward is chastisement.” (Q 57:13)79

The narrative that follows the image again gives it further dimension – the unlabeled circle beneath the Throne is the Water, as is clear in the caption above and the Qur’anic verse it pictures. Beneath the Water is the Air, beneath which is the Darkness. This Darkness (al-ẓulma) is the Unseen, and surrounds the entirety of the sequence, known only to God because it is His own Unseen.80 From this point on, what follows is not “down” but rather suspended between the Water and the Throne, surrounded by the Real on all sides. Ibn al-ʿArabī does not mark the Darkness and the Air in this image because they lie beneath and around everything, and they will not be labeled until Figure 8, where they appear below the Water.

The Throne is carried by this frozen Water, and those who carry its columns only do so out of magnification and declaring majesty. The frozen Water is settled on cold Air, and it is that which has frozen the Water. This Air is the very Darkness that is the Unseen, and none but God knows what this Darkness is, as He has said, “The Knower of the Unseen – He does not make manifest His Unseen to anyone.” (Q 72:26)81

To mark the shift to the world of bodies, Ibn al-ʿArabī’s descriptions grow increasingly vivid from this point on. He describes that “between the concavity of the Throne and the Footstool there is a wide space (faḍā wāsiʿ) full of wind (hawā mukhtariq). Images (ṣuwar) of the actions of some of the children of Adam, from among the Friends (awliyā’), fly from the corners of the throne, from place to place, in this Merciful Expanse (infisāḥ al-raḥmānī).”82 The columns of both the Throne and the Footstool reach down to the frozen Water. Width wise, they reach halfway on both sides such that each column shares a side with another. The columns have a hierarchy between them, surpassing each other in excellence.83 Beyond these, there are even more columns on

79 Futūḥāt, 9.332. See also Murata, The Tao of Islam, 156–57.
80 Futūḥāt, 9.331.
81 Futūḥāt, 9.334.
82 Futūḥāt, 9.334.
83 Each corresponds to knowledge – one is sheer mercy without knowledge of severity, one is mercy whose severities are all inwardly mercy, one is mercy and severity, light and darkness, and another is severity and wrath. Their excellence has to do with the level of
each side, the most important of which are another four between each pair of the primary four. They will not be held until the Day of Judgment, as will be discussed below.84 The other columns lie between these eight, serving as the “adornment” (zīna) of the Throne. All the columns are firmly rooted in the frozen Water, such that the angels that uphold them serve no structural role. They solely do so to honor and magnify God.

While these descriptions are clearly meant to spark the imagination, he also doesn’t want the reader’s imagination to run wild. He writes of the bearers of the throne that, while “their number is known to us, I will not clarify further so that understandings that fall short of grasping realities do not think that these columns are as they fantasize, because they are not. Thus, we do not offer an explanation of their quantity.”85 His insistence on “correct visualization,” as mentioned before, is something that requires both the offering as well as the withholding of details. Similarly, his images are as much about emptiness as they are about shapes and forms, since his descriptions make it clear that the empty spaces are the Unseen itself.

The inverted anthropomorphism continues with the Two Feet (al-qadamān) which hang down into the Footstool, marking the emergence of differentiation. The Right Foot marks mercy and the Left Foot marks mercy mixed with wrath (wrath which, as expressed earlier, is ultimately still mercy). Beneath it, the cosmos hangs suspended above the Water. This level contains all the opposites required for creation and differentiation, including the opposing Names of God, such as “the Raiser” and “the Abaser,” as well as the first angels that are capable of argumentation.86 He describes it as being in the same shape as the Throne but without the columns, and its size in the Throne is like “a cast

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84 This is based on a hadith that is frequently transmitted in the major commentaries on Q 69:17, where the Prophet recites “That day there will be eight,” then follows with, and “today they are four.” Ibn al-ʿArabī narrates the hadith in similar contexts.

85 Futūḥāt, 9.334. Elsewhere he goes into more detail, identifying the eight as Adam and Israfil for the forms, Gabriel and Muhammad for the Spirits, Michael and Abraham for the Sustenances (al-arzāq), and Malik and Ridwan for reward and punishment (al-waʿd wa-l-waʿīd). 462 – he goes into the process of how it becomes eight. 1.462–463 It is important to note here the difference between Ibn al-ʿArabī here and other authors – the fact that this is where he draws the line for the reader’s imagination suggests that these images are not meant as a form of secret or esoteric knowledge, but rather for anyone who is capable of grasping his prose.

86 Futūḥāt, 9.335. Such as the ones who argued with God over His creation of Adam in Q 38:69.
away ring.” This is a reference that he keeps returning to, derived from a hadith wherein the Prophet says, “The seven heavens are to the Footstool as a ring cast away in a vast desert, and the greatness of the Throne against the Footstool is like that of the desert against this ring.” This image of the utter vastness of the cosmos rooted in hadith is another argument that the cosmos is far vaster than what the intellect is capable of measuring, emphasizing thereby the necessity of revelation.

This image also continues the cycles of three: three circles and three quadrilaterals (two nested in each other and a smaller one between the two). Circles and arced shapes generally signify realities that are active and higher, whereas quadrilaterals reflect realities that are lower and receptive. But to reframe our perception again, he makes clear that one of the circles is below the quadrilateral. After our perception’s initial assessment of this image, he uses the narrative to shift our perspective again, showing the mind’s limits even at the practical level. Through this shift, we realize that the space the following images occupy has already opened up between the innermost circle and quadrilateral.

4.2.2 Image Three
The third image (Figure 7) continues to move inwards, indicated by the caption, “the Aforementioned Footstool,” that labels the rectangle that surrounds it. Its transformation from a square (in its facing image) to a rectangle imparts a sense of stretching out. The outermost circle is Aṭlas, meaning black satin and referring to the darkness of the night sky. Together with the second largest circle, it marks the zodiac, divided into twelve sections like the divisions in the first image. These are their realities, not the stars that mark their constellations (those stars are located in the smallest circle in the center). He writes that this sphere has a “transparent (shaffāf) body,” and each section marks a tower (”burj,” the Arabic word for astrological sign) “of the Unchanging Imams,” the angelic realities that rule from them. They progress in cycles of

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87 This hadith is not found in the main Sunni collections, but it does occur in many different and well-respected sources, chiefly in the Saḥīḥ of Ibn Ḥībān.
88 Note that “lower” is not negative. Beneath the entire cosmos is the darkness of God’s Unseen, and there is nothing negative about it. Throughout his use of visual representation, Ibn al-ʿArabī makes it clear that God not only encompasses the cosmos and humans, but that God is also at the very center of it all. In this respect, the difference between a square and a circle is just a matter of perspective. The cosmos can be seen as a square (from the perspective of nature) just as much as it is seen as a circle. Futūḥāt, 8.478. It is, after all, the squared circle.
89 He roots this in Q 85:1. He also takes a jab at those who believe in Twelve Imams, remarking that this is the farthest place that they can reach. Of course, this also means that, while he considers them limited, they can be inhabitants of paradise. Futūḥāt, 9.337. This type of intrasectarian discourse involving archetypal numbers precedes Ibn al-ʿArabī, see Liana
Figure 7 Translation and adaptation of Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 91a

four corresponding to the Elements, starting from Aries, with fire, earth, air, and water, three times. This creates an unillustrated series of triangular correspondences which mark a twelve-pointed star when traced out. While the importance of four has already been covered, Ibn al-ʿArabī connects these three to the three abodes – “this world, the Isthmus, and the next world.”90 As mentioned earlier, they mirror the outer circle of Enraptured Angels in Figure 2, and the correspondence between their numbers is confirmed by his assertion that each of the twelve possess thirty treasuries of knowledge as mentioned above.91 Generation, change, and time, in both paradise and the world, come to be through them.

The revolution of the zodiac determines the passage of cosmic time. He offers an elaborate discussion of how their rule plays out in each new abode, remarking that while we are under Cancer in this world, we will be under Leo in the next world, and under Virgo in the Isthmus.92 This is the equivalent of summer, which starts in Cancer and ends in Virgo, encompassing water, fire, and earth. When our earth becomes hell (“the Fire”), as we will see later, we will be under the rule of Libra (the beginning of Fall and an air sign). The punishment of the people of hell will end in Gemini, which is the last sign associated with Spring, signifying a whole turn of the cosmos. This turn is “a full day, without night or day” from which all other units of time (such as half a rotation, a full rotation, or 28 rotations) derive down to the shortest, the time that we have on earth.93 Each of these sections has their own duration. When one of the twelve leads, the rest share in that rule in degrees based on their shared element and whether they are cardinal, fixed, or mutable signs (three and four).94

There are eight circles within the zodiac marking the eight levels of the Garden (paradise), all with names from the Qur’an, down to the center which

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90 Futūḥāt, 9.337.
91 He links these treasuries to Q 15:21.
94 Futūḥāt, 9.339.
marks the “Roof of the Starry Sphere.” This innermost circle is not the eighth level. Rather, the eighth level is the text that cuts across the levels, mirrored diagonally, reading al-wasīla, “the Means of Approach,” referring to a level of the Garden unique to Muhammad through which he has access to every level. While the Means of Approach is not mentioned in the top label, it does mention a feature that is unlabeled in the image: the tree of Ṭūbā. Ṭūbā is the Adam of every tree that was planted directly by God. Its trunk is in Eden but its branches stretch over all of paradise, and, in this sense, bears a connection to Muhammad’s “Means of Approach.”

The levels of the Garden are divided from each other inwardly by walls (corresponding to the circles). Eden, which encompasses them all, is the only part built directly by God’s own hands. He writes that it is like the “citadel of a king” wherein lies the “Dune of White Musk” (depicted in the second to last image of this sequence, Figures 15–16). His descriptions grow increasingly vivid here, describing even the clothing of its inhabitants and fruits. He writes (but does not depict) that the Garden has eight gates, corresponding to the eight body parts on which the Sharia has placed obligations: sight, hearing, the tongue, the hand, the stomach, the genitals, the feet, and the heart. It has seventy-nine embrasures in its walls that correspond to the branches of faith (shu‘ab al-īmān), a number derived from the Hadith literature. As we will see later, each level has a reflection in hell, corresponding to the eight body parts again.

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96 The term itself is taken from a prayer done by Muslims after the call to prayer for the Prophet, rooted in a hadith where Muhammad asked them to pray that he attains it, and is found in numerous hadith collections. He identifies it as a place in Paradise in some of these. See, for instance, Muslim, 5. Kitāb al-ṣalāh, 7. Bāb istiḥbāb al-qawl mithl qawl al-mu‘adhdhin ... Ḥadīth 875 and Bukhārī, 65. Kitāb al-Tafsīr, 12. Sura Bani Isrā‘īl, Bāb qawlihi ‘asā an yabʿathaka rabbuka maqāman maḥmūdan, Ḥadīth 4766.
98 Futūḥāt, 9.344–345. He remarks about Ṭūbā that “we are its earth.”
100 Futūḥāt, 9.341–342. This is commenting on several hadith that remark that paradise has eight gates. See Bukhārī, 59. Kitāb bad‘ al-khalq, 9. Siḥat abwāb al-janna, Ḥadīth 3293.
101 Futūḥāt, 9.342. See, for instance, the entire section on the branches of Faith in Muslim, 2. Kitāb al-īmān, 14. Bāb shu‘ab al-īmān. This hadith exists in one form or another in most collections. Note that Ibn al-‘Arabi interprets the Arabic word bīd as nine.
except for the level *Firdaws* (“Paradise”), which corresponds to the heart, and the *Wasīla*. Each garden has a hundred degrees, corresponding to God’s ninety-nine “most beautiful names” and his secret “Mightiest Name,” and its stations (*manāzil*) are the number of the verses of the Qur’an. The lowest circle, “the Roof of the Starry Sphere,” marks the fixed stars that appear in the night sky and is “the earth of these gardens.”

As mentioned earlier, this placement of paradise between the sphere of the Zodiac (the blackness of the night sky) and the stars is a response to earlier cosmographical images which place the zodiac above the heavens and earth, never even attempting to map paradise. The precision with which he describes and numbers these places, including their gates, trees, sections, and degrees is directly in conversation with the precision that usually accompanies similar maps of the cosmos in other genres. In so doing, he asserts that he has directly experienced what has been described in revealed sources with such clarity that he can map them in relation to seemingly universal knowledge.

Formally, as we’ve seen in the previous images, Ibn al-‘Arabī has used multiple visual strategies to tie these images together, and he will continue to do so in the following images. It should be noted that, in this image and the first, he uses mirrored, extended, upside-down, and winding script to incite the reader to move the codex. As he continuously reminds the reader in his narrative, these pictured places and times are always in movement. His play with the direction of the script is a visual reminder of the same.

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102 The inverse relationship between paradise and hell were standard to Islamic discourse. There are several surveys and introductions to notions of paradise and hell in Muslim traditions. The most recent by Christian Lange takes a wide and thorough approach, though his concerns weigh more towards hell. He treats some of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s views, situating them within the development of an “immanentist” view of the otherworld among Sufis. Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 237–39. In French, Atta Denkha gives a thorough survey while drawing comparisons to Christianity. She also deals briefly with Ibn al-ʿArabī under a rubric of Sufism as one out of four approaches to the topic that combined the importance of mystical unveiling with philosophy in its approach to traditions about the afterlife. Atta Denkha, *L’imaginaire du paradis et le monde de l’au-delà dans le christianisme et dans l’islam* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2014), 158–61. Nerina Rustomji also gives an excellent survey of the development of these traditions in their first five hundred years; on this inverse relationship see chapter 4 in particular, though she does not deal with Ibn al-ʿArabī or other Sufis at length. Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

103 *Futūḥāt*, 9.341.

104 *Futūḥāt*, 9.341.

4.3 This Earth and the Next

The fourth image in the sequence (Figure 8, right) is labelled “and from that is the form of the Starry Sphere, the domes of the heavens, and what they have settled upon; that is, the earth, the Three Pillars (al-arkān al-thalātha), the Support (al-ʿamad) through which God upholds the dome, minerals, plants, animals, and humans.”\(^\text{106}\) It faces the fifth image in the sequence (Figure 8, left), which is labelled “and from that is the form of the Earth of Gathering (ard al-ḥashr), and what it contains of the entities (al-aʿyān), the levels, the Throne of Decision and Decree (ʿarsh al-faṣl wa-l qaḍā), those who carry it, and the ranks of the angels.”\(^\text{107}\) The perspective shifts with these two images, returning only to the previous perspective in the image that follows them, the sixth image. All three of these images (four to six) depict the same place – our world – but at three different times: now, the Resurrection, and its final transformation to hell. There are two major points that animate this section – one,

**Figure 8** MS Istanbul, Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 91b–92a

\(^\text{106}\) Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 91b.

\(^\text{107}\) Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 92a.
that we are already in hell, and two, that God’s mercy overcomes everything. Thus, even before the punishment of hell is over, hell is better than this world.

These images are the densest in the entire sequence and have the most labels. Whereas all the previous images were empty in their center, both of these are full at their centers. This density marks the end of the nesting diagrams and visually simulates an arrival at “the lowest of the low” (Q 95:5). As depictions of the visible world and its direct future, they are also the most visible of the images.

4.3.1 Image Four
The fourth image (Figure 9) moves into the center of the previous circle, “the Roof of the Starry Sphere.” It signals this by labelling the Mansions of the Moon, which are a part of the Starry Sphere, in equal sections between the first and second outermost circles. Ibn al-ʿArabī again uses his narrative to mark distance, citing the hadith about a ring cast into the desert to visualize the starry sphere’s

![Figure 9](Turk_ve_Islam_Eserleri_Muzesi_1870_fol_91b.png)
relationship to Aṭlas. The mansions, he remarks, are only marked by the passage of the planets (and the moon) through them, otherwise, the stars within them are no different than other stars. Their form recalls the outer circles in Figures 2 and 4, creating a sequence of thirty, twelve, and twenty-eight, marking thereby different types of time.

This image also shifts perspective from a top-down view of the earth and heavens to a horizontal view. This is partly conveyed through the use of semicircles, which as a composite of circle and square combine in their form heaven and earth (akin to but different from the second image where they were separate). It is also clear through the Water, Air, and Darkness beneath the image, first encountered in the second image (Figure 5, right, Figure 6). The inner arcs mark the heavens, each corresponding to an earth, the flat lines at their bases. Our earth is the innermost half-circle. While the spheres of each heaven are determined by the movement of the planets, he is clear that the heavens are not the planets. Rather, the heavens have transparent bodies.

This image marks the earth as the farthest place from God and the “lowest of the low” (Q 95:5). As the point where the journey from the Origin becomes the journey of the Return, mirroring and reflecting are major features of this map. For instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī points out in his explanation that the celestial Kaaba, al-ḍurāḥ, is found in the roof of the seventh heaven, providing a small marginal image of it (Figure 10). This Kaaba, identified with the “inhabited house” (Q 52:4), has the structure and form of the original earthly Kaaba, which fully contained the ḥijr, an area that is marked today only by a low wall that is not connected to the present Kaaba (though it is still circumambulated around).

In his depiction, its arc faces down. When seen against the upward facing arcs of the heavens while paging back and forth between the image and its explanation, the two images, on opposite sides of the page, reflect each other, demonstrating again that earthly and celestial realities mirror one another. He builds on this by describing, in his narrative explanation, a place between the seventh heaven and the starry sphere where veil-bearing angels guard footstools that carry images of all who are obliged by God’s prescriptive commands (mukallaf), whether human or jinn. These forms reflect their actions – if they do something ugly, the angels drop the veil and hide them.

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108 The size difference between this sphere and the previous is also a commentary on Q 3:133 “And race one another to forgiveness from your Lord, and to a garden whose breadth is the heavens and earth, prepared for the God-wary.”
109 Futūḥāt, 9:345.
110 Futūḥāt, 9:348.
111 In other words, those who had free choice to follow or disobey.
but if they do something beautiful, the angels lift the veil and reveal them. The constant litany of these angels is “Glorified is He who makes manifest the beautiful and covers the ugly.”

Earth, the innermost arc, is home to the Five Progenies (al-muwalladāt). These would normally be confined to minerals, plants, and animals, but Ibn al-ʿArabī has constructed this image in such a way so as to emphasize the role of the Perfect Human Being, separating it (and humans by extension) from the other three. He writes,

the last existent thing is the human animal, the vicegerent of the Perfect Human Being, who is the outward form (al-ṣūra al-ẓāhirah) in which is gathered the realities of the cosmos. The Perfect Human Being is the one

112 Futūḥāt, 9.348–349.
113 Not only is it these three in the philosophic tradition, but even in other parts of his work, Ibn al-ʿArabī keeps the list at three.
who correlates the realities of the Real, which complete his vicegerency, to those gathered realities of the cosmos.\textsuperscript{114}

The Perfect Human Being is the most perfect image of God in the cosmos, and for this reason, is the visual focal point of these images. The line that runs vertically through the Perfect Human Being is “the Support.” This is because the existence of the Perfect Human Being, the true “vicegerent” (\textit{khalīfa}, Q 2:30) that God intended to place on earth, upholds the heavens and the earth through the litany “Allah, Allah,” a reference to a hadith that says “the Hour will not occur until none is left on earth to say ‘Allah, Allah.’”\textsuperscript{115} This, Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks, is because the Perfect Human Being is the only one incapable of negating God, and thus, only repeats His name.\textsuperscript{116} For them, God upholds the heavens from falling on the earth until no one is capable of attaining that level and “the heavens are torn apart” (Q 84:1). This hints at why the perspective changed with this image – most medieval maps of the heavens and the earth are circular like the previous images, centered on the earth. By taking a horizontal perspective, Ibn al-ʿArabī highlights the centrality of the Perfect Human Being in maintaining the heavens and the earth.

This is also the first image to have a full center, and all the previous images were empty at their centers. This marks not only an end to descent but highlights the interconnected nature of these images. His shift to semicircles marks this as the world of things that are incomplete, and which rely on the Necessary Being (and the rest of the sequence) for their existence.\textsuperscript{117} In their very shape, they again build on the theme of mirroring.

This mirroring is expressed more subtly in reference to the Perfect Human Being. When the straight line of the Support is seen in conjunction with the two end points of the expanding lines at the bottom, the reader is able to visualize an upward-facing triangle. Ibn al-ʿArabī explains earlier that the Pen (the downward facing triangle in Figure 3) is the potentiality of the Perfect Human Being, the inner reality of its actualized embodied form.\textsuperscript{118} The upward-facing

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Futūḥāt}, 9:347.
\textsuperscript{115} Muslim, 2. Kitāb al-īmān, 67. Bāb dhahāb al-īmān ākhir al-zamān, Ḥadīth 392. I have left Allah untranslated here because its technical sense as the name that unites all opposites is important in this discussion. The Perfect Human Being is the only one who knows God on God’s own terms.
\textsuperscript{116} Even if others call out to Him, they mean the god of their limited beliefs, not God beyond beliefs.
\textsuperscript{117} He explicitly makes this connection between semicircles and the species of things in \textit{Futūḥāt}, 2:58–59.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Futūḥāt}, 9:330.
triangulation in this image is a reflection of that downward first triangle, the
union of the highest and lowest and thus, a fulfillment of the first map we saw.
Note that these images are also on opposing pages, so they can easily be seen
together by someone holding the book. Furthermore, the central line that
represents the Support corresponds to what the Pen moved in to draw out
(a line that exists on the facing page too). This is a clear depiction of Sufi
doctrine: the Perfect Human Being is the reason for creation, and the order of
coming into being is to “draw out” its reality. When no human can fulfill this
role, this world will end and the heavens and earth will transform into the
“Earth of the Mustered.”

4.3.2 Image Five
The fifth image (Figure 11) marks a temporal shift, from this world to the Day
of Judgment, when the heavens and the earth are stretched out into a single
expansive earth. The rectangle of “The Earth of the Mustered” (ard al-hashr)
recalls the Footstool in Figure 5 as well as the Tablet in Figure 3. Unlike the
other narrative explanations that focused on the cosmological significance
of each feature, the focus here shifts to an account of the Day of Judgment,
walking the reader through its stages. In this image and the next, the audi-
ence shifts to the theologians, and Ibn al-ʿArabi uses this section to respond to
major debates about the next world and hell.119 One of the features of the nar-
rative is that it draws the eyes around the image four times, each time ending
near the center until finally concluding the entire image at the smallest central
circle that marks the end of death. This not only serves a pedagogical role, but
also emphasizes the parallel natures of paradise and hell in preparation for the
next image.

The narrative begins with the blow of the Trumpet and the resurrection,
when everything is extracted from the earth until nothing remains in it except
for “its own entity” (siwāʿaynihā). Everything is extracted instantly in a form that
God desires; there is no growth from the earth as had happened in our world.120
This moment, he writes, is called “the Sleepless” (al-sāhira, Q 79:14) and marks
the end of sleep.121 Ibn al-ʿArabi is clear that the “configuration (nashā) of the
Next World” and its forms are unlike anything that has come before. At

119 This would be the topic of another study. Notable among these is the issue of whether hell
or its punishment is everlasting, how intercession works, and chiefly, in light of this entire
sequence, how to deal with the anthropomorphic aspects of God’s presence in the next
world.

120 Futūḥāt, 9.355.

121 Despite this, Ibn al-ʿArabi argues elsewhere that God will allow the people of hell to sleep
out of mercy. Futūḥāt, 2.177.
Figure 11  Translation and adaptation of Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 92a
the beginning of this new configuration, every created thing is brought to the Darkness that is beneath the bridge in a world without the Sun. They remain there, unable to see anything, until the heavens and earth transform into a single earth, stretched out (Q 84:3) “like leather.”

The bridge humanity finds itself before is “the Path” (al-ṣirāṭ), the same Path that we dealt with at the beginning of the chapter, but now visible. This focuses the reader’s eye on the lower right of the image at the rightmost point of the horizontal line. There, humanity stands at the lowest of the low but the bridge ahead of them “rises to the roof of the Starry Sphere, ending at the meadow that lies outside the walls of the Garden (suwar al-janna).” All will have to cross it, but those who do not make it across will fall to different parts of hell.

This unique shape can be read in multiple ways. While the heavens and the earth are transformed into this new place called hell, it reaches further than the heavens and the earth ever did, hence the opening, in a sense, of the circle. It can also be read as two semicircles, formally recalling the previous image. Note also that its shape resembles a winding stairway from above, an allusion to the stairways of hell. Elsewhere in the Futūḥāt, he makes it clear that the same stairways run up and down paradise and hell, but those in hell cannot ascend them (at least initially).

Those who successfully cross the bridge reach “the Meadow of the Garden” and “the Place of the Feast (maʿduba),” which he identifies as a part of “Bliss.” Here again he is mapping an image from the Qur’an and the Hadith into this sequence: the Qur’anic promise that those who uphold revelation will “eat from above them and from beneath their feet” (Q:351) coupled with an image derived from the Hadith literature that likens paradise to a feast (maʿduba) to which God has invited creation. He writes that the feast is on “a white, clean, and delicate floor covering (darmaka),” citing thereby a description of the ground of paradise from a hadith.

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122 Futūḥāt, 9:350.
124 See “The image of the ascents of paradise and the descents of hell ... and of the ascending and descending staircases...,” Futūḥāt, 7:306. Türk ve İslam Eserleri Muzesi 1864, fol. 73b.
125 The shift in perspective here is amplified in the narrative, as Bliss (al-naʿīm) is depicted everywhere else in the Futūḥāt as being the third highest level of paradise. Yet it is also a commonly used general term for paradise in the Islamic tradition as well as in the Futūḥāt, as it is the opposite of “chastisement” (al-adhāb).
127 Darmaka is used in a hadith in which the ground of paradise is called “a white darmaka of musk.” Muslim, 55. Kitāb al-fitan wa ashrāṭ al-sāʿa, Bāb dhikr ibn šayyād, Ḥadīth 7535.
The scales are then set up for every person who was obligated [before God’s law] at “the Ramparts (al-ʿaʿrāf), the walls that stand between hell and paradise, thus bringing the reader’s eyes back to the center. Everyone has a scale made for them that they receive there, meeting their Guardian Angels (al-ḥafasa) who hold the books of their deeds. They suspend the scale and the books from their necks and through this, humanity is divided into different groups. Those who did good will receive their books in their right hand (Q 69:19). Those who did evil will receive their books in their left hand (Q 69:25). And a third group will receive their books behind their backs (Q 84:10) because “they threw the book in this world behind their backs (Q 2:101) so that they could sell it for a small price (Q 2:86). These are the leaders (aʿimma) of misguidance.” He also indicates that the Ramparts themselves will be the place of those whose scales “are in balance,” indicating an intermediate state. Everyone is then brought forward to “the Pool” (al-ḥawḍ), returning the reader’s glance towards the center of the image. Its gushing surface is covered with floating cups for those who are destined to drink from it directly. There are also two pipes, one gold and another silver, that run to the walls, flowing to the Faithful who drink from them.

He next directs the reader’s attention to the pulpits (manābir) in the upper right and left of the image – four in number with three stairs. The four here is again an expression of the rule of four, and notice that like in the Zodiac, it is four

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128 *al-ʿaʿrāf,* “the Ramparts,” is the name of the seventh chapter of the Qur’an, which contains two references (7:46 and 48) to it as an elevated eschatological place from which a people are capable of seeing both the people of hell and paradise, speaking to both groups. The Hadith literature furthers this in-betweeness, such as in a hadith related in al-Ṭabarānī’s *al-Muʿjam al-Ṣaghīr,* Bāb al-ʿayn, man ismuhu ‘ubaydullāh, Ḥadīth 687. That hadith describes a people who were martyred but who committed major sins, thus, they cannot burn in hell but also cannot enter paradise, so they must wait until God judges them.

129 The division of humanity on the Day of Judgment is a major Qur’anic theme, see for instance, 56:8–10, though the third group there are those who have “outstripped” others in goodness, the opposite of the third group in this image.

130 Futūḥāt, 9.351. See footnote 128 for a description of these people. There is a parallel to the notion of limbo here, for an analysis see Christian Lange, *Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 125.

131 The Pool is a widely mentioned eschatological place in the Hadith literature; the Prophet tells the Anṣār, for instance, to “have patience until you meet me at the Pool.” See, for example, Bukhārī, 81. Kitāb al-Riqāq, 53. Bāb fi-l-ḥawd. While the Pool is not mentioned in the Qur’an, drinking pure water (and water itself) is a major theme of the Qur’anic description of paradise.

132 Futūḥāt, 9.351.

133 Not only building on the previous significance of three, but also reflecting the Prophet’s pulpit in Medina.
groups of three, totaling twelve (their actual number is indeterminate). These are made of “light, differing in brightness and color, and are set up on this earth. A people are brought to sit on them, and the lights will cause them to swoon. None will recognize them [from then on] in the Mercy of Eternity-without-End (raḥmat al-abad). They have divine robes (al-khila’ al-ilāḥīyya) that bring joy to their eyes.”

They are “the Safe Ones” (al-āminūn), a term taken from the Qur’an (27:89 and 34:37) describing those who are exempt from the terrors of the Day of Judgment. He combines this with the “pulpits of light,” an image derived from the Hadith literature of a reward given to exemplary peoples in the hereafter, such as those who were “impartial.”

He then pulls the eyes down again, remarking that everyone is brought forward (towards the top) with their accompanying angels and devils. They follow unfurled banners, for “both the felicitous and the wretched,” placed in the hands of those who led them in life, whether to truth or falsehood. These groups are brought together with their larger community (umma) around their messengers, even if they rejected them. The Prophets and the Solitaries are in a separate place from them all. In front of everyone there is “the Praiseworthy Station” (Q 17:79), the spot specific to Muhammad that extends up to the aforementioned wasīla, his unique level of paradise. This brings the reader’s gaze back to the center a second time.

Once everyone is gathered, the angels and books arrive. The angels of each heaven form ranks, drawing the reader’s glance around the whole lower half of the image. Then, “The Spirit” (al-rūḥ), the Angel of Revelation, leads them all and settles in front of where the Throne will descend, centering the gaze a third time. All the revealed “books and scrolls” are brought down and placed in front of their respective communities. Two groups of people will not have books: those who were between cycles of prophecy and those who “made themselves a servant in accord with a book that was not revealed for them … but whose laws (nāmūs) were from the rational consideration (naẓar ʿaqlī) of a guided (mahdī) possessor of intellect (ʿāqil).” This latter group is, at the very least, a reference to some of the philosophers.
Finally, God arrives on a Throne transformed from the quadrilateral in Figure 5 to the eight-pointed star at the top, now carried by eight angels. Paradise is to the right of the Throne and hell to its left. He writes that “humans, angels, jinn, and wild animals” will be overcome by the “Divine Awe” (al-haybat al-ilāhiyya), “they will only speak in murmurs (Q 20:108), through alluding with their eyes, or through whispers.” The veils will lift between God and creation and all will be commanded to prostrate. Those who lived sincerely, “no matter what religion (dīn) they had,” will prostrate but the hypocrites will fall on their backs. This prostration tilts the scales of those who were stuck on the Ramparts between paradise and hell, and they will finally enter paradise through it. Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks that God immediately forgives everything his creatures did against Him, judging only “his servants in regard to what was between them.” The time for intercession then arrives, starting with the first intercessor, Muhammad, and lasting until everyone who is capable of interceding intercedes on behalf of those who are still in hell, bringing many of them out. Finally, when no interceder is left, God Himself intercedes as “the Most Merciful of the Merciful before the Avenger, the Compeller,” in keeping with multiple hadiths where the greatest and final acts of Mercy belong to God alone.

God’s left foot, mercy mixed with wrath, descends into hell, while His right foot, sheer mercy, descends into paradise and “mercy encompasses everything.” Once the last of those destined for paradise reach it, the Earth of the Mustering “becomes the Fire, that is, the Abode of the Fire, even if there is within it freezing cold, and hell reaches from the concavity of the Starry Sphere to the Lowest of the Low (Q 95:5).” With this, he illustrates the meaning of another difficult Qur’anic verse about hell, “There is none of you

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139 This is in keeping with Q 69:17 and the hadith mentioned in footnote 84. Note also that, in the image, together with the four pulpits around the throne, you can read the numerical significance of the higher half as twelve, representing the entirety of all numbers (the digits 1–9, and tens, hundreds, and thousands).

140 *Futūḥāt*, 9.352.

141 He identifies this with the “baring of the leg” Q 68:42 that sparked many debates in the Islamic tradition about whether or not the Faithful will see God.

142 *Futūḥāt*, 9.352.

143 The most common hadith in this regard, which Ibn al-ʿArabī quotes partially, says “... God will say ‘the Angels, Prophets, and the Faithful have interceded, and there remains the Most Merciful of the Merciful.’ And He will grab a fistful from the Fire and remove from it a people who never knew any good ...” Muslim, 2. Kitāb al-īmān, 83. Bāb maʿrifat ṭarīq al-rūʿyā, Ḥadīth 472.

144 *Futūḥāt*, 9.353.

that will not enter it” (Q 19:71). His interpretation is clear – everyone will enter hell because they are already in it.

The last part of the narrative is mentioned only in the next section since it occurs after the people of hell and paradise are settled in their respective locations, directing the reader to the center a fourth time at “the Slaughtering Place of Death.” With this, he maps a well-known hadith wherein Gabriel brings Death itself in the form of a ram atop the Ramparts between hell and paradise. Gabriel shouts out to the people of both sides, “Do you recognize this?” They all look and reply, “Yes, that is Death.” Then, John the Baptist comes forward with a knife and slaughters the ram while Gabriel cries out, “Perpetuity and no death.” Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks that this is when the people of paradise lose any fear of leaving paradise and the people of hell lose any hope of escaping hell.

The form of this image contains many unarticulated correspondences that are of note. The first two relate to the rectangular shape of this land, which, as mentioned before, indicates lower and receptive realities and calls to mind both the Footstool (Figure 5, left) as well as the Tablet (Figure 3). This correspondence is intentional. First, the Two Feet were already hanging in the Footstool, so their movement into paradise and hell, coupled with the descent of the Throne, simply imparts a sense of cosmic motion into the sequence of images where not only our perspective shifts, but the sequence itself moves. Furthermore, at a deeper level, its similarity to the Tablet and God’s Two Hands suggests how the Return, the future of the earth, is simply an ascent back to the realities of the Origin, mirrored in increasing intensity in each subsequent configuration. The movement of that original rectangle, like his use of upside down and winding script in the previous images, continues that sense of movement and rotation.

When seen together with its facing image (Figure 8), the continuity between the two center lines transfers the notion of the line as the writing of the Pen to the next world. As mentioned before, this connection is because the Perfect Human Being is the reason for creation, and in the next world, those who are perfect will seek a place that is neither paradise nor hell. This is because, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, “the Station of No Station” is the furthest attainment for human

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146 Bukhārī, 65. Kitāb al-tafsīr, sūra kāf hā yā ‘ayn šād, 1. Bāb qawluhu wa andhirhum yawm al-ḥasra, Hadith 4777. This is also narrated by Muslim, Tirmidhī, and Aḥmad.

147 Futūḥāt, 9:355.

148 The rectangle was also used in cartographic traditions for representing the earth, though not commonly. Rapoport and Savage-Smith, Lost Maps of the Caliphs, 75–100. At times it was also used around a circular map. Antrim, Mapping the Middle East, 24–28. Note that the use of geometric shapes to mark place in this map mirrors the cartographic tradition.
beings.\textsuperscript{149} Only from such a station, through choosing to stand between paradise and hell, can they see the complete revelation of God with all of its opposites, for they do not shy away from any aspect of His face.

The breakup of the heavens and the earth, marked in the previous image by the seven semicircles (combined arcs and straight lines), is visually represented through the placement of the seven lines of the angels to the bottom, left, and right, signifying a ruptured earth where their domes have “broken open” and now define its limits.\textsuperscript{150} When seen together with the order and balance of the throne and minbars at the top, the rule of eight and twelve in a sense, this image marks the union of the previous four images that reshape it into a new form. The persistence of only the central line between the two facing images is but another visual insistence on the centrality of the Perfect Human Being.

Lastly, one of the most important features is the placement of the Scale of the Beautiful Deeds (al-ḥasanāt) and the Scale of the Ugly Deeds (al-sayyiʾāt). These two circles represent two pans of a single scale centered on the Throne and Spirit. The pan of the Beautiful Deeds is further away from the pan of the Ugly Deeds. While many interpreters have taken this as a mistake on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s behalf, it is not a mistake. When one side of a scale is longer than the other, less weight on the longer side is equivalent to more weight on the shorter side. This placement is thus in keeping with the domination of mercy over all things and the Qur’an itself, which says that “whomever comes with a beautiful deed will have ten the likes of it, and whomever comes with an ugly deed will only be recompensed the like of it. They shall not be oppressed” (Q 6:160).

4.4 \textbf{Hell, the Names, and Time}

The sixth image in the sequence (Figure 12, right) is labelled “And from that is the form of hell (ṣūrat jahannam), its gates (abwāb), its waystations (manāzil), and its descents (darakāt).”\textsuperscript{151} It faces the seventh image (Figure 12, left), labelled, “The form of the Presence of the Divine Names (al-asmā al-ilāhiyya), the World, the Next World, and the Isthmus (al-barzakh).”\textsuperscript{152} Note that after a turn towards quadrilaterals, the images turn again towards circles signifying ascent and a return to the origin.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{149} See Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge}, 379.
\item \textsuperscript{150} In a sense, the seven circles that are of the same size also continue this theme.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 92b.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 93a.
\end{itemize}
4.4.1 Image Six

Image Six (Figure 13) marks another temporal and perspectival shift to the final form of our world, hell, but returning to the perspective of Figures 3–7 (particularly that of paradise) and moving into the lower right circle of the previous image. There are a few important differences between the image of paradise and hell: while the center of paradise (Figure 5, left) was its lowest point, the center of the image of hell is its highest point. If we were to situate this image into the center of the previous image of paradise and look at them from a side view, they would form a concave shape where the top and bottom inversely reflect each other.153 All of hell is, in fact, the inverse of paradise, with

153 This parallelism is further elaborated by Ibn al-ʿArabī in another image mentioned in footnote 124, from a side view, earlier in chapter 297 (Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1864, fol. 73b). This image depicts the parting ways of the people of hell and the people of paradise in the next world. It is drawn without the use of any tools and takes up a full page. The descending steps of hell descend lower than the ascending stairs of paradise, and the point where the stairs and steps start is not drawn. This is because unlike the previous
Like paradise, its gates correspond to the parts of the body, but hell has no level corresponding to the heart, leaving the total number of gates at seven. The heart is marked by the center, labelled “the Veil of the Heart” (al-ḥijāb al-qalb), and does not mark a part of hell, but rather, the final gate of hell located in the Ramparts (the center line in the previous image). It is hidden and locked, “the inward of hell, full of mercy, even though wrath is what outwardly appears” (Q 57:13).155

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154 Futūḥāt, 9:355.
The text throughout this image is written at different angles, encouraging the reader to rotate the book. The visual effect of the columns of text together with the stretched-out text mirrors the image of paradise except doubled at axes ninety degrees to the left. The vertical stacked columns, like those in paradise, are names derived from the Qur’an. The horizontal stacked columns are the same “body parts of obligation” that were referenced in the image of paradise but not mapped there. Unlike the image of paradise, the bottom side of the repeated lists are not written upside down. Rather, they are differentiated through the Arabic text that stretches horizontally across them, signifying that half of each column is “Outward” and half is “Inward.”

The diagonal axes correspond at their ends to a Qur’anic verse quoting Satan that says, “Then I will come upon them from before them, from behind them, from their right hands, and from their left hands” (Q 7:17). The verse is split into four based on the directions mentioned in it and runs counterclockwise around the greatest circle. This, like much of this image, is a continuation of the rule of four pertaining to the four directions, a connection he makes elsewhere too in reference to this verse. Building on this earlier commentary, the relationship of this verse with the stretched-out labels on the diagonal axes is as follows. “From before them” corresponds to “the Hypocrite,” and this is “casting doubt in the senses” (al-tashkik fī-l ḥawāṣṣ). “From behind them” corresponds to “the Lie,” and this is “rendering God ineffectual” (taʿṭīl). “From their right” corresponds to “the Liar,” and this is “weakness” (al-ḍaʿf). And “from their left” corresponds to “ascribing partners to God” (al-shirk), about which he doesn’t comment beyond the obvious. The two terms corresponding to a type of person, Liar and Hypocrite, are on the same axis, as are the two concepts, “the Lie” and “Ascribing Partners to God.” The two persons are in realms that are combinations of the Outward and the Inward, whereas the Lie is fully in the Outward and Ascribing Partners to God is fully in the Inward.
Hell is the same place as the previous two images but now in its last form. It has taken their straight lines (the seven earths and the Support in the fourth image and the rows of the seven heavens and the walls in the fifth image) and has used stretched Arabic text to position all eight around its center – one at every forty-five degrees. Note also the persistence of seven layers, each with their own dots and circles, recalling the heavens in the fourth image. Furthermore, the repeating of the circles in each column gives us seven by four, which is twenty-eight, as if the twenty-eight stations that surrounded the heavens and the earth are now part of the very makeup of hell.\(^{161}\) This is, in a sense, the summation of the apocalypse. What was above fell and was reshaped. In the same sense, the descent of the eight-pointed throne is reflected in the eight crossing lines here, four thick lines in one cross and another four thin lines in a diagonal cross. But whereas that was defined through its edges and outline as an eight-pointed star, this, as an inverse, establishes eightness through the fullness of its center. This same fullness of center is again used to convey that we are still looking at the lowest parts of the cosmos.

The planets and the sun are gone, but “the stars rise and set over the Folk of the Fire.”\(^{162}\) The fire in not intrinsic to hell itself, but rather, it comes with its people whose punishment is only for a stated time.\(^{163}\) When it is over, the intense fire and intense cold that it experiences become a source of bliss and joy for its inhabitants. Note that the form of the image combines “the Inward” and “the Outward,” and represents a fulfillment of the last two images where the “lowest of the low” is fully penetrated by the highest of the high. Unlike our world, “shapes change in the two abodes [paradise and hell] like the thoughts

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161 Ibn al-ʿArabī clearly states that this is the case in *Futūḥāt*, 2.153.
163 Lange gives an adapted and simplified version of this image aiming to show the correspondence of the names to the body parts, but the treatment of these images in the secondary literature meant that its role in the larger sequence was missed. For instance, he does not seem to be aware that this is also an image of the future of the earth or that it is a part of a larger sequence. This is further indicated by his point that “cosmological maps that represent the structure of the universe, including paradise and hell, appear to be a rare and late (post-eighteenth century) phenomenon” citing Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqi Būrsawī’s eighteenth century *Maʿrifatnāma* as an example. Būrsawī’s images, of course, are firmly in the tradition of Ibn al-ʿArabī. This is a larger problem in the secondary literature wherein the influence of Ibn al-ʿArabī on Muslim eschatology as a whole, particularly its relation to imagination, is diminished. Further attention to Ibn al-ʿArabī and his school would, at the very least, reveal more examples of such maps. Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, 242, 246. Lange’s engagement with Ibn al-ʿArabī’s visual representation seems to follow the analysis of Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, 118–20, 196.
of a human. What is inward in this world is outward in the abode of the next world, and what is unseen here, is witnessed there.\textsuperscript{164}

4.4.2 Image Seven

Image Seven (Figure 14), facing and following the final transformation of the heavens and earth into hell, is a major shift in perspective. It looks at what is before and after our world ontologically and temporally. At the very top, the divine attribute “the Living” (\textit{al-hayy}) precedes and leads all other names, followed by the four “Leaders of the Names.”\textsuperscript{165} In his narrative explanation, as he does in many places in his work, Ibn al-ʿArabī identifies these four as the root of all other fours that we have seen at play throughout the cosmos. He gives a different list in his narrative explanation, adding “the Living,” pictured above the four here, to the four and subsuming “the Speaker” (\textit{al-qāʾil}) and “the Powerful” (\textit{al-qadīr}) into a single name (in the fourth, not second place.) He does this because he attributes “the Speaker” to the language of revelation and “the Powerful” to the language of philosophy.\textsuperscript{166} While at one level this is because even the narrative of these images is its own form that necessitates a different order, it also reveals again that visual representation is where he directly maps the language of revelation and philosophy onto each other.

The next four circles are the means through which difference arises and thus, creation. “The Governing” (\textit{al-mudabbir}) needs to make decisions which leads to “the Differentiator” (\textit{al-mufaṣṣil}), for decisions cause difference. This leads to the next two circles, parallel to one another, “The Bestower” (\textit{al-jawād}) and the “The Impartial” (\textit{al-muqsit}). The former gives without ceasing while the latter gives as is appropriate, and through this duality, creation happens.\textsuperscript{167} This pair corresponds to the Two Feet that were imaged before.

The large circle in the center is “the Abode of this World” (\textit{al-dār al-dunyā}) and is surrounded by “the Isthmus” (\textit{al-barzakh}).\textsuperscript{168} The Isthmus is the intermediary between our world, what precedes it, and what follows it. It corresponds

\textsuperscript{164} Futūḥāt, 9.356.

\textsuperscript{165} There is a discrepancy between these four and the four that were mentioned in reference to Figure 3, but Ibn al-ʿArabī’s commentary makes it clear that again, this is because of the perspective shift. From one perspective, two names seem the same whereas from another perspective, they are different.

\textsuperscript{166} Futūḥāt, 9.356.

\textsuperscript{167} Futūḥāt, 9.357.

Figure 14  Translation and adaptation of Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 93a
to both the Imaginal World as well as the Grave, where the soul resides until the Resurrection. Its placement around the world serves as a barrier or frontier that shares the properties of non-existence and existence, and through which forms enter and exit the present world.

The future of this world is the “Earth of the Musterings” (ard al-ḥashr), which we already saw. Note that it touches this world, and these are the only touching circles. Touching in the first image (Figure 3) signified a parental relationship and, in that sense, what happens in “the Musterings” is born from what happens now. The actions committed in this world are born in the next, determining the ultimate differentiation of our world into two, the Fire and the Garden (reflecting the division among the Attributes before it). The lower placement of paradise in the image, compared to hell, is intentional and highlights the temporal and spatial relationship between the two. Paradise is always temporally, spatially, and ontologically ahead and beyond hell.\textsuperscript{169} This is lost in almost the entirety of the reception history these images.

The abstract anthropomorphism that has featured in the sequence so far is again clear in this image.\textsuperscript{170} In one sense, since the first pair above the large circle of the world represents the Two Feet and the sequence already mapped the Cosmos as God’s Throne, it can represent God on His Throne. The image would be facing upwards, towards God’s Essence as “the Origin,” away from the World because the Name that corresponds to the Right Foot, “the Bestower,” is on the right side. But after the transformation of this world, this changes through his placement of hell (where the Left Foot will descend) to the right and paradise (where the Right Foot will descend) to the left, as if the figure turns around and faces God’s Essence as “the Return,” the lower part of the image. If the movement of the upper half of the image makes a reader uncomfortable, one could consider it as a depiction of a king sitting cross-legged on his throne who then uncrosses and lowers his feet into paradise and hell. One could also connect the image back to birth and see it as a depiction of the birth of the next world from the womb of this world.

\textsuperscript{169} This spatial relationship of higher to lower levels exists even in the hadith, which describes the inhabitants of the lower heavens looking up at the inhabitants of the higher heavens and seeing them as if they were stars and planets. Bukhārī, 59. Kitāb badʾ al-khalq, 8. Bāḥ mā jaʾa fī ṣifat al-janna, Ḥadīth 3292. This is also narrated in Muslim.

\textsuperscript{170} While it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that of all these images, this bears the most formal resemblance to the later sefirot of kabbala, which is a sister tradition to this in many regards rooted in the same historical context. On its similar relation to the “Greco-Arabic scientific tradition,” see Jeffrey Howard Chajes, “Spheres, Sefirot, and the Imaginal Astronomical Discourse of Classical Kabbalah,” \textit{Harvard Theological Review} 113.2 (2020): 230–62.
The unarticulated diagonal relationship between the circle of “the Bestower,” the Right Foot, with “the Garden,” where it will descend, and the circle of “the Impartial,” the Left Foot, with “the Fire,” where it will descend imparts a sense of turning, continuing the rotation that animates the rest of the sequence and connecting it to the movement of the Throne from “before creation” to “after creation.” This is a macrocosmic interpretation of Qur’anic verses like “To Him you will all return, God’s true promise. He originates creation and then returns it . . .” (Q 10:4), identifying time with the movement of the Feet. There is a play on the Arabic word for eternity, qidam, here too, which is from the same root and spelled identically with the word for foot, qadam. As noted earlier, the discrepancy between the position of hell and paradise is intentional because paradise is always a “step ahead” of hell. By being closer to the bottom, it is closer to returning to the Unseen that, as mentioned before, encompasses and surrounds the entirety of this sequence.

Finally, like the previous images, there are various numerical significations at play here. One leads, followed by a line of four, then another four but in a triangular configuration, totaling nine. Then, if we don’t count “the Present World” and interpret it rather as the place where number is made manifest, we can read the three circles after as ten, eleven, and twelve, signifying the movement towards infinity. This can be seen visually too if we connect them, creating a cross and a quadrilateral at the bottom (three groups of four). But if we take the aforementioned notions about time always being three stages to account, then ten is the present world and the Isthmus, eleven is “the Earth of Gathering,” and twelve is both paradise and hell since they originate at the same point and parallel one another.

There are also multiple continuities with the facing image. At a basic level, hell is represented on both sides, in detail to the right and as a small circle to the left, imparting a sense of drawing back again to the widest perspective. But also, the two layers of the inner circle mirror the center of hell, reinforcing the notion that this world is hell. The continuity of the shape of the two crosses, but now separated, also binds the images to each other while adding a sense of pulling out from where they penetrated one another.

4.5 Unveiling the Cosmos

The eighth image (Figure 15, right) is labelled “and from that is the form of the Dune of Vision and the ranking of creation (marātib al-khalq) within it.” It

171 Arabic orthography doesn’t normally include short vowels, hence why it would be identical.

172 Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi 1870, fol. 93b.
faces the ninth image (Figure 15, left), labelled, “and from that is the form of the entirety of the cosmos, the ordering of its layers, of spirit and body, and of high and low.”

4.5.1 Image Eight

Image Eight (Figure 16) shifts to a specific time and place in paradise. The Dune (al-kathīb) “is made of white musk in the Garden of Eden,” “the citadel” of paradise where God, as “the King,” resides with His elect who are divided according to their rank. After people are settled in paradise, they are invited...
to see God, “and they hurry in obedience to their Lord in the measure of their mounts and gaits, some slow, some fast, some medium.”\textsuperscript{176} When they arrive, they recognize and reach their places “like a child to the breast” and “iron to a magnet” without desiring any other place. There, they “reach the furthest reach of their hopes and aims.”\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{176} Futūḥāt, 9:359.
\textsuperscript{177} Futūḥāt, 9:359.
While the narrative depicts the image as a court, note that the image also resembles a mosque oriented towards the center like the mosque in Mecca (not towards a qibla wall).\footnote{While this image seems similar to many depictions of the Kaaba, I was unable to access an extant image from before the Futūḥāt, but it is worth noting that there is a tradition of depicting both the Kaaba as well as mosques. See Antrim, Mapping the Middle East, 55. For a sense of what later mosque plans looked like, see Gülru Necipoğlu, “Plans and Models in 15th- and 16th-Century Ottoman Architectural Practice,” Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 45.3 (1986): 224–43.} This is because the qibla, on that day, is the Face of God which appears from the Essential Gardens (\textit{al-jannāt al-dhātiyya}). The section of “the Messengers” (\textit{al-rusul}) has the image of a pulpit (\textit{minbar}), in the same shape as we saw in figure 8. This is because they brought books and thus take the place of those who give sermons. The section of “the Prophets” (\textit{al-anbiyā}) has the image of a throne (\textit{sarīr}), resembling the raised platforms of a mosque where other lessons would be given (or where the sermon would be amplified). The sections of “the Friends” (\textit{al-awliyā}) has the image of a footstool (\textit{kursī}) for those who take on an even more subsidiary role in education. And the section of “the Faithful” (\textit{al-muʾminūn}) has the image of a row or rank (\textit{martaba}) signifying those who respond to and follow the other groups.\footnote{This correlation between court and mosque is natural to Islam in its premodern form, as Muslims call God by His name, “the King,” in every one of their daily prayers; and the Qur’an makes it clear that God is the true King and the cosmos His kingdom, see 3:26 for instance.}

When all are assembled, God discloses Himself from the Essential Gardens in the “forms of belief” (\textit{ṣuwar al-ʿitiqādāt}), a single self-disclosure that is received in a myriad of ways.\footnote{Futūḥāt, 9.359. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 333–81.} This vision “colors” each in the light of the form that they see.

Those who knew Him in every object of belief will receive the light of every object of belief (\textit{muʿtaqad}), but those who knew Him in a particular specified belief (\textit{iʿtiqād khāṣ muʿayyan}) will only experience the light of that specified belief. As for the one who believed in terms of being itself, without any judgment about it (\textit{wujūd lā ḥukm fīhī}), either in terms of declaring difference (\textit{tanzīh}) or declaring similarity (\textit{tashbīh}), simply believing that He is as He is (\textit{annahu ʿalā mā hūwa ʿalayhi}) ... having faith in what has come from Him ... he has the Exclusive Light (\textit{nur al-ikhtiṣāṣ}).\footnote{Futūḥāt, 9.360.}
Note again the centrality of those who place no restrictions on God’s self-disclosure. When this revelation is over and all return to their own “palaces” in paradise, they find the same light has colored their abode, providing them with continuous pleasure and knowledge. While the first vision “annihilated them,” the subsequent visions bring enjoyment without annihilation.\(^{182}\)

This also marks when the chastisement and torment of the people of hell reaches its peak because they realize that they are veiled from seeing God’s face.\(^{183}\) But like any peak, things only subside after because the first unveiling marks the overflowing of all-inclusive mercy. In every subsequent unveiling of God’s face, which continues without end, mercy dominates everything and even the people of hell “will see God through the embrasures of hell’s gates” in keeping with the goodness of their character.\(^{184}\) While paradise remains a step ahead of hell, that is, further in its experience of unveiling, everything will always remain in increase. And since the Qur’an described the present world as “the lowest of the Low” (Q 95:5), there can only be ascent after it, whether in hell or paradise. The afterlife is everlasting because the finite can never reach the infinite.\(^{185}\)

As the source of a mercy that will forever change the cosmos, this image emphasizes again the primacy of four by depicting one center that spreads out in four directions. Note also its similarity to the center of hell in image six (Figure 12, right), which was identified with the “Veil of the Heart,” whose center is the point from which the image emanates. In this vein, as noted at the beginning of the sequence, Ibn al-ʿArabī likens the Real to the heart of the cosmos, and the human heart to the ultimate “house of God” or Kaaba.\(^{186}\) In this sense, this image’s full meaning can only be grasped in tandem with its facing image.

4.5.2 Image Nine
The ninth and last image in this sequence (Figure 17) represents the entirety of the cosmos. Whereas the previous image was a specific place in a specific

\(^{182}\) The palaces of paradise are an incredibly common feature of them in the Hadith literature. See, for example, Ibn Māja, 1. Kitāb al-Muqaddima, 7. Bāb ijtīnāb al-bida‘ wa-l-jadal, Ḥadīth 53, which says that those who abandon arguments, lying, and have good character traits receive palaces in paradise.

\(^{183}\) Futūḥāt, 9:359.

\(^{184}\) Futūḥāt, 9:359.

\(^{185}\) Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 156–59.

part of paradise, this is the broadest perspective possible. The image itself is twenty-two circles leading into the center circle, which is the twenty-third circle. The twenty-third is separated from the rest by four sections leading out from the center. Twenty-three is, of course, an important number – it is the ninth prime number, the Qur’an was revealed over twenty-three years, and one of the strong candidates for the first night of its revelation is the twenty-third of the ninth month. Yet Ibn al-ʿArabī does not explain this image in any detail, allowing it to be read in multiple ways. From one perspective, we could posit the earth as the center, the four quadrants as the four elements, then the seven heavens, the eight levels of paradise, Atlas, the Footstool, the Throne, The Universal Body, Nature, the Tablet, and the Cloud. Yet we can also read it the opposite way too, with the center being the Greater Nature (which is also the Cloud), the four quadrants representing the principle of quaternity, and
then counting backwards from the Tablet to earth (without the four elements). On the upper left side of the image, there is a small note that reads “6 and 7 and 7 and 8.”\(^\text{187}\) This adds up to twenty-eight, the letters of the Arabic alphabet, which form on the aforementioned Breath.\(^\text{188}\) The lines only add up to twenty-eight if one not only counts the four quadrants separately, but also takes the center point as a part of that counting (likely representing hamza).

The imagery at its center mirrors and turns the previous image. This is not mentioned in his explanation and lost in almost the entirety of its publication history, as well as many of its later recensions, all of which did not consider why these two images were chosen to face each other. In one sense, given the relationship of the previous image to the heart, this image maps the meaning of God being “like the heart” of the cosmos that was mentioned earlier. Through the facing image, the center marks the perpetual unveiling of God’s face as the heart of the cosmos, which is nothing but the form of the Real. He writes in his narrative explanation:

> The cosmos is nothing in its existence except for the forms (al-ṣuwar) that were received by the Cloud and thus achieved manifestation in it. And the cosmos, when you gaze at its reality, is a vanishing accident (ʿaraḍ zāʾīl) ... The fixed substance (al-jawhar al-thābit) is the Cloud, which is nothing but the Breath of the all-Merciful, and the cosmos is everything that has become manifest in it of the forms. They are accidents that can possibly vanish. These forms are the possible things, and their relationship to the Cloud is the relation of forms that become manifest in a mirror to the eye of the one who sees. The Real, exalted is He, is the Sight of the Cosmos (baṣar al-ʿālam) and He is the one who sees. He is the Knower of the possible things, and he has not perceived anything but what was in His knowledge from the forms of the possible things. Thus, the cosmos was made manifest between the Cloud and the Vision of the Real (ruʿyat al-ḥaqq). What is made manifest indicates the one who sees, and that is the Real. So discern and know what you are.\(^\text{189}\)

\(^\text{187}\) This could also be read as 796 and 897 or 796 and, below it, 8979, but this seems an unlikely reading.

\(^\text{188}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī devotes the whole second chapter of the Futūḥāt to the order of the cosmos from the perspective of the letters. For a good summary see Chittick, *The Self Disclosure of God*, xxix–xxxii. The perspective of letters is itself another “form” with its own order.

\(^\text{189}\) *Futūḥāt*, 9.361.
The human and the cosmos, the microcosm and the macrocosm, are nothing but God’s reflection, and it is God who is seeing the cosmos. As the reader looks at the unveiling of God’s face to the right and the cosmos as a whole to the left, these maps are transformed into an image of the cosmos as God-seeing-Himself. The two eyes that preceded the sequence, with two circles connected by lines (Figure 2), now look back at the reader who has opened both of their eyes. By following Ibn al-ʿArabī’s visual and textual narrative, the codex becomes a means for experiencing a revelation and a mirror in which the reader sees their own reality – that they are nothing but a reflection of God. When the reader looks with two eyes, one that sees with difference to the left and one that sees with similarity to the right, they realize that two eyes gaze back. God remains beyond reach and description while also making Himself known to (and through) humans. Similarly, the Qur’an twice attributes “the highest image (mathal)” to God (Q 16:60 and 30:27) while also forbidding the striking of an image (mathal) of God (16:74). “The highest image” is the human form that God created in His own image. Just as one should not describe God except how God described Himself, one should not imagine God save how God imaged Himself. When a human looks with two eyes, they see their own two eyes looking back. The Real is beyond eyes; He is vision itself without any limitation. But for vision to be even possible, He delimits Himself out of mercy in a form that His servants can know and recognize. Everything they see in the cosmos is God making Himself knowable to them, and the multiplicity of reflections is the strongest indicator of His sheer unity. Through this, Ibn al-ʿArabī breaks the barrier between the microcosm and macrocosm by showing that each and every individual is their own cosmos, and the way that God makes Himself known to each is unique to that individual – no one else will see it.190 This is why Ibn al-ʿArabī instructs the reader in his explanation to “know what you are.” Everything the specific individual sees in the cosmos is that reflection of God that makes them uniquely who they are. This can only be seen with two eyes, not one, for the intellect cannot grasp how a thing simultaneously is and is not. Only an image can convey that paradox. When the reader sits with these images, they are not only meant to impart the entirety of the lessons of the Futūḥat in visual form, but also to leave them confounded, bewildered by the reality of who they are.

5 Conclusion

Beyond their pedagogic use, the images in the Futūḥāt are also integral parts of the contemplative aspect of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s work. With his own hand, he took great care in producing this sequence so that it would function as a single multi-page image that transforms the reader’s soul. As such, the images not only require a familiarity with the Futūḥāt to be fully understood, they also need their original context and order. Ibn al-ʿArabī utilizes inverse shapes, facing pages, visual and narrative cues, and references to other images and texts in order to synthesize discursive knowledge and induce a visualization of the cosmos as not only the reflected Face of God, but the reflection of the reader’s true identity.

This recourse to images in the Futūḥāt is natural to his highly visionary and image-based cosmology. Through these maps, he places the cosmology of his day into a wider universe populated by the places and times of the Qur’an, Hadith literature, and Sufi visionary experience. These succinct acts of representation synthesize the imaginal language of revelation with the abstraction of philosophy and rational discourse so as to show the limits of the latter. Yet Ibn al-ʿArabī takes pains to show that no image is final or all-encompassing. He strives to counter the limits of the codex by using multiple visual strategies, illustrating the same layers of reality from multiple perspectives while using cues to transmit movement and continuity to the reader. By intending for these maps to be seen together as one image, even as they change from perspective to perspective, he uses text and image to guide the reader page by page from the point of origin, before creation, to the point of return, the vision of God’s face, thereby transforming the sequence into an object of contemplation. While this is not a representation of God in and of Himself, it is a representation of how God shows Himself, primarily to the Perfect Human Being, his most complete image who is like His shadow, but also to all people by extension.191 If God had a body, it would be this reality reflecting into the cosmos, a cosmos that is always within God. The mirror is the darkness of the Unseen that surrounds the entirety of the images in the previous sequence, the darkness of the Inward of God.192

192 The notion of the cosmos as a mirror is an important part of Sufi discourse, but its full depth is in the work of Ibn al-ʿArabī and those influenced by him. See Jamal Elias, Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Islam (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 225–35.
Know that this darkness is the darkness of the Unseen, and from this it is called the darkness, in other words, what is in it does not manifest. Whatever appears from the Unseen manifests to us, and we look at what is made manifest from the forms of the cosmos in the mirror of the Unseen (mirāt al-ghayb), and we don't recognize that this is the mirror of the Unseen ... When the Real discloses Himself to it, it imprints in it the forms and entities of the cosmos that are in the divine knowledge. The Real does not cease to self-disclose to it, and the forms of the cosmos do not cease [to be] in the Unseen. Everything that manifests to those who come into being in the cosmos is just what faces their sight in this mirror, the Unseen.\(^{193}\)

The sequence is not an image of God, but an image of what appears to the reader in the mirror of the Unseen when they look with two eyes. In sum, it is nothing more than their own reality through which they can know God.

God created the cosmos (al-ʿālam) that is external to the human being only as the striking of an image (darb mithāl) for the human being, so that they may know that everything that manifests in the cosmos is within them, and that in being, it is the human that is the Intended Entity (al-ʿayn al-maqṣūda). They are the gathering of all wisdoms (majmūʿ al-hikam), for their sake was created the Garden and the Fire, this world and the next, and all states and qualities. In them becomes manifest the sum of the Divine Names and their effects. They are the blessed and chastised, the one who is shown mercy and the one who is punished, and only then are they made to chastise or bless, show mercy or punish. They are free to choose in their obligation (al-mukallaf al-mukhtār) yet compelled in their choice.... The orbit (madār) of the whole cosmos is around them, for their sake the resurrection occurs, through them the Jinn were taken, for them were subjected ‘what is in the heavens and what is in the earth’ [Q 31:20], and in their need does the entirety of the cosmos move, both the high and the low, both this world and the next.\(^{194}\)

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s order of the cosmos, in the final analysis, is a single dynamic representation of how the vast and moving universe is ultimately the reader's own reflection, the real reflection of God, now and forever, from Origin to Return.

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\(^{193}\) Futūḥāt, 9:331.  
\(^{194}\) Futūḥāt, 3:309–310. This is also translated in Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, 189.
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