



Ibn Arabi's Perceptions of Gabriel's Tamathul to Mary and Its Relationship with the Characteristics of Christ and Christian Art

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Abstract

To explain the personality traits, miracles of Jesus, and Christian iconography, Ibn Arabi relies on his interpretations about Gabriel's *Tamathul* (representation) to Mary in the Holy Qur'ān. The spiritualization of Jesus' body and the completion of his guardianship is related to the incarnation of *Rul al-Qudus* (Holy Spirit) in his Genesis, and his expansion and hopeful heart is related to Mary's expansion state when Gabriel announced that she would have a son. Since the Holy Spirit breathed the Divine breath into Mary during Jesus genesis, accordingly, Jesus could revive the dead by breathing into them. The iconography of the saints is influenced by the incarnation of the Holy Spirit in transformation of the Word of Jesus. Jesus is similar to Holy Spirit; The Divine Spirit was embodied in him. Christians who seek to embody the meanings through imagery to worship God put the icons of Jesus in churches. Although iconography is forbidden in Islam, Ibn Arabi presents one of the benefits of the principle of the effect of parents' imagination on the child which is effecting nature through interference in the imagination faculty of the parents and of parents and simulation of the patterns in the next generation.

Keywords: *Ibn Arabi; Christ; Gabriel; Christian Art*

Introduction

In explaining the *Tamathul* (representation) of Gabriel to Mary, commentators have two different ideas:

Some commentators argue that this *Tamathul* occurs only in Mary's imagination: "It means that within Mary's perception, Gabriel represented himself like a human being, while out of her perception, it is not so". (Tabatabai, 1997, vol 14. P 36)

"The descent of an angel and the revelation and dream do not occur outside of us. In the verse "... We sent her a Spirit [of Light] from Our Presence who presented Himself to her in the form of a Human Being" (19:17), this *Tamathul* means that it occurs within you. The revelation occurs internally. Those who experience the relationship with the world of spirits know that it occurs within man. (Hassanzadeh, 1999, 7)

The second group consider this Tamathul as the presence of Gabriel in the form of a human being outside the imagination of Mary, which "is truly represented in the form of the body, not as an imagination or a dream". (Imam Khomeini, 1994b, 439)

The personal Tamathul of the angel to the Prophets and saints, and the descent of the revelation and miracles in material forms to reveal the issues of the Hereafter in their hearts and their inner faculty are of this kind (Sadr al-Din, 1981, 232-232)

According to Ibn Arabi, the Tamathul of Gabriel to Mary occurred in *Haḍrat-e Mahsus* or *Molk* (the material world). *Haḍrat-e Mahsus* is the natural world and one of the *Haḍarāt-e Khāms* (Five Realms of Existence), which includes levels of *Lahut* (Realm of Divinity), *Jabarut* (Realm of Omnipotency), 3. *Malakut* (Angelic Realm), *Nasut* or *Molk* (Realm of Humans), and Perfect man.

The revelation of the rational immaterial meanings occurs in the restricted sensory forms in imagination when the person is asleep or it is experienced in the form of sensory perceptions in *Haḍrat-e Mahsus* when the person is awake. As God says: "... We sent her a Spirit [of Light] from Our Presence who presented Himself to her in the form of a Human Being" (19:17), (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 2: 58).

If the Tamathul of Gabriel occurs in the natural world and the physical form, then the question arises as to what the relationship between the Gabriel that represented in the form of a human being and the truth of Gabriel is.

Ibn Arabi considers the Tamathul of Gabriel as a type of similarity and, on the other hand, considers the Tamathuled form as the same very being:

The Tamathul of an object is not the very same object, rather is similar to it, and ... it is the case with Gabriel who represented to Mary in the form of a well-formed human being. Is the one whom Mary sees someone other than Gabriel?

No, I swear to God that he is Gabriel himself (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 2: 211-210).

Accordingly, the one who represented to Mary in the form of a human being is no one but Gabriel. However, he is not exactly him. At first glance, this phrase seems contradictory. In explaining how the Tamathuled Gabriel relates to the truth of Gabriel, Imam Khomeini says, "Sometimes Gabriel represents himself in the imagial world (imagination) and sometimes He appears in the external reality (material world); in other words, he emerges from the invisible world in the visible world and reveals the Divine subtle substance; and in every ecstatic state, the possessor of revelation perceives and observes it in a different way (Imam Khomeini, 1999: 323). In other words, Gabriel can appear in the *Malakut* (Angelic Realm) and the *Molk* (material realm) while maintaining unity and by expanding his identity. In other words, Gabriel can appear in all the realms.

In this regard, Ibn Arabi names three types of *Istihalah*(transformations). First, the transformation of an angel from the spirit world into a human being form, which is done quickly. Second, the transformation of imaginary forms in the imagination faculty, which takes place at the moment and in which time is not important. Third, the transformation in the natural world, like the transformation of water into the air, which occurs slowly (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 2: 311). Gabriel is an immaterial Truth that is able to transform materially in the natural world.

The question that arises about the Tamathul of Gabriel is whether the transformation of Gabriel in any form is possible?

According to Fakhr Razi, the transformation of an angel in any form is permissible. However, narrative evidence show that an angle cannot appear in the form of an animal. (Fakhr Razi, 2000, *ibid.*, Vol 21: 521)

On the other hand, Sadr al-Din argues that in the *Malakut*, there is a correspondence between the outward and the inward, and the angelic form is the expression of meaning and truth. The angels appear only in beautiful forms. That is why Gabriel presents Himself in the form of Dihyah al-Kalbi (one of the good-looking companions of the Prophet (PBUH)) and the devil appears in the form of the dog and the pig (Sadr al-Din, 1975: 471-470). Therefore, the possibility of an ugly form for Gabriel is void.

According to Ibn Arabi, Gabriel appears on his own will, just by imagining the form, and imagination of the form depends on the previous existence of the same form. Hence, Gabriel cannot appear in a form that does not exist:

"Spirits cannot be formed in any shape and expression except the ones they already know. And they do not know anything unless they see it." (Ibn Arabi, n.d. vol 3: 390)

This is because "spirits have imaginations, but their imagination is not like the Human beings' imagination faculty [the ability to imagine things that don't exist] ". (Ibn Arabi, n.d. vol 3: 390)

On the other hand, Ibn Arabi believes in the recurrence of the periods. According to the periods and courses theory, many Adams come and go, and the world must be repeated in every period and cycle. (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol. 1, 123) The periods and courses theory states that after the destruction of the spheres and inspiration of their life, they are rebuilt. If we accept the periods and courses theory, Ibn Arabi's statement that before Adam, angels had no idea about the man (Ibn Arabi, n.d. vol 3: 390) should be rejected since before Adam there had been other Adams and that angles could imagine him. (See Mostafavi, 1394)

Ibn Arabi's Interpretations of the Tamathul of Gabriel based on Jesus and His Miracles

A related principle to the Tamathul of Gabriel is the influence of the mother's imagination and states on the child during his genesis. Based on the Tamathul of Gabriel to Mary, Ibn Arabi finds some characteristics of Jesus and his miracles, which can be classified as follows:

1. The Spirituality and Expansion of Jesus

The representation of Gabriel to Mary in the form of a human being and its effect on her imagination lead to the resemblance of Jesus to the form by which Gabriel appeared to Mary. Not only was the appearance of Jesus similar to Mary's imagination, but also his characteristics resembled it such that Gabriel seemed to be Jesus' father. Just as the child resembles his father in terms of name, appearance, and character, so Jesus is similar to Gabriel in terms of name, appearance, and meaning. The similarity of Jesus' and Gabriel's titles, "Spirit of God" and "Holy Spirit", respectively, their resemblance in appearance and spirituality are some of the interpretations of Ibn Arabi from this Tamathul.

In terms of meaning, name, and appearance, Jesus was similar to the truth and appearance of Gabriel. So (in this Tamathul), the spiritual human (Jesus) and the spiritual being in the form of a human being (Gabriel) had single form. (Ibn Arabi, n.d. vol 1: 237)

In terms of spirituality and attention to unity, Jesus was titled the *Word of God* and the *Spirit of God*:

"The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only an apostle of Allah, and His Word that He cast toward Mary and a spirit from Him (Qurān, 4:171).

Being effected by the Tamathul of an angle in the form a man, Jesus appear similar to his father in the form of both a human being and a spirit so that both forms (human and spiritual for of Gabriel) would gather in him" (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 3: 182).

All divine Prophets enjoy the status of survival after annihilation and unity of intuition in multiplicity. However, Jesus, among the divine prophets, is a Messenger whose true aspect (attention to unity) prevails over the moral aspect (attention to plurality). Accordingly, Ibn Arabi attributes the prophetic wisdom to Jesus (Ibn Arabi, 1991, 347).

In Moses, the multiplicity overcame the unity, while in Jesus, unity overcame the multiplicity. The Last Prophet was middle ground - which is the middle and straight path. (Imam Khomeini, 1994a: 92)

Guardianship is an internal and True (Divine) aspect and from the point of view of Ibn Arabi, Jesus completes the General guardianship and Hazrat Mahdi (A.S) completes the guardianship of Muhammad (PBUH.). (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 1: 150) Regarding the completion of Jesus's guardianship, Allama Hassanzadeh writes:

The reason why Jesus completes the general guardianship is that he was selected as a prophet – before he legislatively became Prophet- in the cradle and (Mary / 30) and in his mother's womb (Hassanzadeh, 1999, 348).

Another issue to be considered is related to the hopeful heart of Jesus. The heart in mysticism is the same as the rational soul in transcendent wisdom in terms of observing the partial and general meanings. (Qeisari, 1984, 270) Because of its transformation in worlds and its different facets, it is called the heart. In Ibn Arabi's intellectual system, the heart is the center of the words, actions, and thoughts of man (Madadpour, 2005, 195).

The saints' hearts are divided into three general categories based on what they symbolize:

Hopeful Hearts: In these hearts, the desire and hope for Divine mercy overcome the fear of divine justice because the manifestations of the Divine names of *Jamal* (Beauty) prevail over the manifestations of the names of *Jalal* (Glory).

Fearful hearts: the hearts in which manifestations of the Divine Glory prevail over manifestations of the beauty of God and fear and contraction prevail over desire, hope, and expansion.

Fearful and hopeful hearts: hearts that manifest both hope and fear. (Imam Khomeini, 1992: 143-142)

A typical example of the Fearful heart is Hazrat-e Yahya (A.S) and the supreme example of the hopeful Hearts is Jesus (AS), and the comprehensive and middle of the two is the heart of Mohammad (Imam Khomeini, 1994b: 361)

Because of Yahya's fearful heart, Ibn Arabi attributes the wisdom of Glory to him. (Ibn Arabi, 1991, 175) In describing this attribution and the difference between the Fearful hearts and hopeful Hearts, Qeisari explains:

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) announced that Yahya (AS.) and Jesus (A.S) met each other. When Jesus laughed, Yahya rebuked him and said, "It seems you are safe from Allah's scheming and punishment." Jesus replied, "You seem to be disappointed in Allah's grace and mercy. And Allah revealed to them: "The most beloved of you to me is the one who has better faith in me. (Abi Al-Hadid, 1984, vol 6: 333-332). Therefore, the wisdom of Glory was assigned to the word Yahyawiya. "(Qeisari, 1996, 1011 and Hassanzadeh, 1999, 455).

Another principle related to the Tamathul of Gabriel is the influence of the mother's mental states during the genesis of the child. When Mary saw Gabriel in the form of a Human being, she did not recognize him and therefore, was frightened. Gabriel introduced himself. Thus, Mary's state of contraction and fear turned into the state of expansion. If in the state of fear, the Divine Breath was breathed into Mary, Jesus would also be in a bad mood and people could not bear his bad temper and would scatter from him. (Ibn Arabi, 1991, 139-138).

In other words, the hopeful Heart and the opened breast of Jesus is the result of the good news that Gabriel gave to Mary during the genesis of Jesus (PBUH). This expansion affected Mary's face and, ultimately, Jesus' mood. (Ibn Arabi, 1991, 139).

2- The Miracle of Jesus

Another interpretation of Ibn Arabi is the relationship between the Tamathul of Gabriel and the miracle of Jesus. Under the title "on the Divine Birth", Ibn Arabi describes the relationship between the divine Breath and the reviving breath of Jesus:

Divine breath is the cause of life at the time of birth, as God says: so when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit... (Qur'ān, 38: 72) And this is the same breath by which God revives faith in the hearts, and God granted Jesus the knowledge of this Divine Breath so that he would breathe into the dead in the grave or bird made of Mud and by Divine permission, they became alive. (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 1: 168).

God introduces Jesus as His Spirit (Qur'ān, 4:171) "Jesus is the Spirit of God in terms of reviving of the dead because he revived the one into whom he breathed (Ibn Arabi, 1991, 142). And this miracle is because "when creating the spirit of Jesus in form of a human being, Gabriel appeared as an Arab man. Gabriel's breathing into Mary caused Jesus to have the Holy Spirit so that as soon as he breathed into the dead, they became alive." Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 1: 168).

The discussion of Gabriel's reviving ability and his Tamathul to Samiri - a rebellious follower of Moses who created the golden calf and attempted to lead the Hebrews into idolatry- and the Samiri industry are also relevant here:

When the Samiri saw Gabriel, he knew that his life was Divine life and that whatever he stepped on would revive, so he made a golden statue of a calf and poured a handful of dust on which Gabriel had stepped into the statue of the calf. It state making sound like a living calf. (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 1: 168)

Ibn Arabi's Perceptions of Tamathul and Its Relationship with Art and Industry

Ibn Arabi also uses the Tamathul of Gabriel to Mary to justify iconography in Christian art. Religious iconography is a Christian tradition. However, in the second period of Byzantium, i.e., the eighth and ninth centuries AD, Christian art witnessed the growth of iconoclasts so that in this period, the statues of saints were considered as the manifestation of idolatry and were excluded from the Temples and all kinds of iconography were excommunicated. As a result, the religious art stopped flourishing and instead, worldly and decorative art gained attention (Marzban, 2012, 109-108). The iconoclasts cited the Bible, which forbade stone carving; but the iconolatry was based on ancient hadiths that Christ allowed St. Luke to paint his portrait. The second reason for the iconolaters was that the icons of Christ and Mary miraculously appeared to the inhabitants of the earth and became the model of man-made icons. After this interregnum in Christian iconography, the history of Christian art witnessed the dominance of iconographic thought once again so that the icons of Mary and Christ, in the form of a sculpture and fresco, were placed on the entrance, prayer halls, readers' place, and naves of the churches. In the Renaissance, God was also portrayed in the form of a human being. The famous Italian artist Michelangelo spent four years painting the roof of the Sistine Church. On this ceiling, he depicted biblical stories including the stories of Ezekiel and Daniel, the creation of Adam, and the ancestors of Christ, and by depicting the creation of Adam, he depicted the God the Father in the form of an old man with a long beard and long white hair, stretching his hand out towards Adam and it is as if Adam has just woken up from a deep sleep and is looking at the paternal face of his Creator. In this fresco, which depicts the

moment of breathing life into the human body, God the Father is illustrated as a human being. (Figures 1 and 2)

2



1



1. The Creation of Adam, Michelangelo, Part of the Painting of the Ceiling of the Chapel of the Sistine Chapel, Rome, 1508-1512 AD

2. Roof of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome

To explain why the religious art of Christianity is the art of iconography and the churches are full of images of saints, Ibn Arabi, in *Futuhat-ul-Makkiyyah* states that Gabriel represented as a human to Mary and the birth of Christ is the result of the Tamathul of the soul in the form of a human being. For this reason, the secondary Christians, who were not present in of Jesus' time and did not see him, illustrated an image of him and base their religion on abstract monotheism through example, and worship God by seeing these portraits. However, the Shari'a of Muhammad (PBUH) forbade the *ummah* (nation) from depicting the faces and legislated that worship God as if you see him and illustrate God in your imagination and do not give him an appearance (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol 1: 223).

To better understand this matter, the Christian philosopher, Plotinus, writes about the statue of Zeus,

"Phidias did not make the statue of Zeus from a model, but created it in such a way that if Zeus came to our world, he would appear to us" (Plotinus, 2010: 758)

Plotinus interprets Zeus as the second person or the Holy Spirit who, if embodied, is embodied in the same way that Phidias carved it. This shows that the Christian thought is still looking for the embodiment of meanings and an imagery approach and this imagery approach, according to Ibn Arabi, is due to the fact that the figure of Jesus is an example of the Holy Spirit and Jesus is the place of the embodiment of the Divine Spirit. That is why Christians consider the portrait of Jesus to represent God and place portraits of Jesus in the church to worship God.

"Gabriel was the transmitter of the Divine Word to Mary just As the Holy Prophet (PBUH) quotes the Word of Allah for his nation" (Ibn Arabi, 1991, 139)

The transmission of the Word to Mary through the Tamathul of Gabriel is the source of centralization of the Christian art around the icon and image, and the miracle of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) for his nation is the Divine Word. As a result, this miracle focuses Islamic art around the Word.

Ibn Arabi states that since the demise of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), it is the last third of the night of history, and at this time, God reveals secrets and teachings to the hearts, which are immaterial meanings and cannot be articulated in words and news. These inexpressible sciences are the most complete ones (Ibn Arabi, vol. 3, 188). Accordingly, this can be extended to art; that is, in the last third of the night of history, the dignity of the completeness of the art is that the meaning overcomes the appearance.

History has passed its day and reached the night. Today, we are at the time of the end of prophecy, in the arena and context of the night of history, not its day. At night, ears and tongue are not only work completely but also are factors determining and describing the direction. And at the night of history, the Word serves as a guide to help the man out of the darkness. Therefore, perhaps this is why verbal art surpasses visual art. (Bolkhari, 2006, p. 37).

To create an existential relationship between ourselves and other beings, we must hear them as the Words of God. From this, it can be inferred that according to Ibn Arabi, the auditory arts are superior and more honorable than the visual arts. The history of Islamic art also shows the fact that if Muslims create visual arts, it is because "seeing" is a prelude to "hearing and listening to the voice of God" (Hekmat, 2014, 234).

Ibn Arabi considers the highest point of the prevalence of meaning over the appearance in the art of poetry and believes that poetry is based on awareness and understanding:

"Poetry stems from understanding and it is based on brevity and details, and this is contrary to the expression" (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol. 2, 274).

The language of poetry is the language of brevity and in proportion to their astonishment to express the most complete knowledge:

"But the *Ahl Esharah* (Those who speak briefly and implicitly) are astonished when preaching" (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol. 1, 172).

Among the Islamic arts, the only industry that Ibn Arabi does not consider worthy to praise and avoids is the sculpting of living beings:

Avoid being surrounded by illustrators depicting living animals on the Day of Judgment. If you depict a form of animal images, it takes a spirit from God that you do not understand in this world, and in the Hereafter, God will place a spirit for every image in the fire if it is made so that torment him in the fire of hell (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol. 4, 483)

In forbidding the sculpting of living beings, Ibn Arabi narrates a prophetic hadith:

The Holy Prophet of Islam said, "Whoever depicts a face will be punished and (in the Hereafter) he will be compelled to breathe into it, which he is unable to do" (Ibn Babawayh, 1983, vol. 1, 109.)

He explains this prohibition in Islam as "creating images is for human beings and granting life and soul is Allah duty" (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 4, 61). The religion of Islam is based on the combination of transcendence and imagery. According to the imagery, man is a creator like God the Creator, and craftsmanship is similar to the Divine Creation and is considered one of the highest sciences among the elites. (Ibid. vol. 3, 457). According to the transcendence view, animism belongs to God.

The soulless images are imaginative images. On the Day of Judgment, God addresses them, "revive what you have created" and they cannot since reviving is not for man. (ibid., Vol. 4, 61)

Perhaps one of the reasons why making sculpture is forbidden in Islam is that the imagery does not reach a point where nothing remains of the transcendence of Allah. Another reason can be attributed to the issue of Arab idolatry in the pre-Islamic era (Pazouki, 2015, 87)

Here, a question arises as to if reviving is a Divine act, then how did Jesus revive the dead?

Ibn Arabi, in response, points out that Jesus revived the dead by the Divine permission, and it was the worship by which he approached God. In fact, Jesus was commissioned and authorized to do so. (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 149)

Although in Islam, it is forbidden to visually depict living beings, this does not mean other types of visual arts are also forbidden.

Based on the Tamathul of Gabriel to Mary during the genesis of Jesus, Ibn Arabi infers the principle that the imaginations, and emotional states of the parents during the genesis of the sperm affect the characteristics of the child. The expansion of Jesus is due to the expansion of Mary resulting from receiving the annunciation from Gabriel, and the effect of Gabriel on Mary's imagination resulted in the resemblance of Jesus' face and character to the Holy Spirit. Based on this principle, Ibn Arabi argues that portraying the great Muslim scholars in public places would affect the next generations of the society by affecting the imagination of the parents.

That is why the sages order to portrait the great scholars so that while engaging in intercourse, men and women can see those images, so the images will be reflected in their imaginations, which will naturally affect the appearance and character of the children (Ibn Arabi, n.d., vol. 1, 169).

The principle of the effect of parents' imagination on the appearance and character of their children is not only used in painting but also can be used in the field of performing arts and can be a model for artists to produce plays and movies about the lives of the great scholars to be simulated in the next generations through the couples imagination faculty.

Conclusion

Ibn Arabi's ideas on the Tamathul of Gabriel and its effects can be summarized as follows:

1. The Tamathul of Gabriel who acts as a father for Jesus and captures Mary's imagination is the source of Jesus' similarity to him, both in appearance and spirituality. The spiritualization (in which the body becomes a spirit and ascends to the fourth heaven) and spirituality of Jesus and the completion of the guardianship by him also goes back to the same principle.
2. "The states of the parents affect their child during his genesis ". Therefore, the annunciation of Gabriel was effective in Jesus' expansion, the breast opening, and the hopeful Heart.
3. Given the Tamathul of Gabriel and Jesus' resemblance to him, Christians visualize the portraits of Jesus as the Holy Spirit and the incarnated God and put them in the place of worship. Christian art is full of such illustrations.
4. The Word was conveyed to Jesus through Tamathul of Gabriel and conveyance of the Word to the Last Messenger (PBUH) was done as a miracle of the Word. This is what distinguishes Islamic art from Christian art. The perfection of Islamic Art revolves around the Word and the prevalence of meaning over form. According to the Tamathul of Gabriel and its effect on Mary's imagination faculty, it can be concluded that illustrating the great scholars' portraits affects the imagination faculty of the parents and their simulation in the next generation.

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