Suhrawardi: Avicennian Sciartist

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Abstract

Fleshing philosophical issues out by allegory, Suhrawardi constitutes the founder of the Illumination School. And his allegorical issues are deemed Avicennian all the way down the line, requiring us to point his other face out: Avicennian Suhrawardi. I set forth three issues of sense perception, emanation, and cosmology which ever since Aristotle's age has captured the attention of philosophers.

In Suhrawardi's treatises, there are allegories as diverse as ten towers, ten graves, ten flyers, ten straps, ten wardens, five chambers versus five gates, ten old men, nine shells, eleven layers, eleven mountains, and so forth. All of these allegories allude to Avicenna's views. That being the case, Suhrawardi is reckoned as an Avicennian sciartist and philartist writ large, due to encrypt Avicenna's stance by allegory, in lieu of his own illumationist views.

Keyword: Suhrawardi, sciartist, emanation, cosmology, sense perception.

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1. Introduction

Suhrawardi is gauged as the founder of the School of Illumination, providing an original Platonic criticism of the dominant Avicennian Peripateticism of the time in the fields of logic, epistemology, psychology, and metaphysics, while simultaneously elaborating his own epistemological and metaphysical Illuminationist theories. (Marcotte, 2012)

Yet there is another side to me: Suhrawardi as an Avicennian sciartist and philartist. He is sciartist and philartist due to apply allegory, fleshing complicated philosophical, cosmological, and psychological issues on. And his allegories based to a large extent on Avicenna's stance.[1] Such being the case, he might be counted as an Avicennian philartist and sciartist.

In this introductory section, I will not consider the Avicenna's contentions, nor except in passing those of Suhrawardi. However, I lead off with giving an account of sciart, working out that Suhrawardi in sciart issues constitutes Avicennian.

Sciart is reckoned as a bilateral interaction between the types of art and the disciplines of science (Maftouni, 2015, 5), requiring us to be clear about science and art. The example fields of science include various and sundry disciplines such as physics[2], metaphysics[3], economics[4], and medicine[5]. And multiple branches as diverse as literature, painting, music, poetry, and conceptual art are reckoned as art. For all their divergences, both art and science are brought about by creative process. In this process, they can reap benefits from each other. Science may assist art with enriching artworks, as I develop it in Suhrawardi's fictions.[6] Art, on the other hand, can assist science with presenting scientific issues to the public as well as motivating their creativity. The NASA Art Program was founded to present NASA's cutting-edge research to the public. Additionally, many scientific improvements inspired by art. Some ensamples occur mainly in astronomical art, sci-fi, theatre, poetry as well as literature[7] (Grünzweig, 2012, 61-182).

Categorizing in three main groups, a sciartist might be an artistically-inclined scientist, a science-minded artist, or one who deals with both artistic and scientific outlooks albeit I cannot place distinct borders between these three approaches.

Artistically-inclined scientists are the scientists who inclined to artists.

Science in this approach moves front-and-center whereas artists follow it, like NASA Art Program. The science-minded artist might be used to refer to artists inspired by scientific issues or those who inspire scientists. Artists now and again captivate scientists, like Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* fascinating Simon Lake, father of the modern submarine. Some philosophers are representative sample of the third type of sciartist who evenly interact with art and science. Suhrawardi, by and large, does this way in his allegorical treatises, embodying convoluted problems (Suhrawardi, 1999).

Now then, I spell out the treatises expounding on the profound sciart and philart issues: sense perception, emanation, and cosmology.

2. Sense Perception in Suhrawardi's Allegories

The first sciart problem I focus on in Suhrawardi's allegories is sense perception[8] which has long been a preoccupation of philosophers. Avicenna is the first major thinker holding five exterior as well as five interior senses. (Ibn Sina, 1997a, 308-404; 1983, 33-171; 1986, 321-330; 1953, 82-100; 1937, 7-10)[9] The latter consists of the sensus communis, sensorium[10], or common sense that intermingles what it receives from the five exterior perceptions; the imagination that keeps these forms deposited; the imaginative power or active imagination that mingles and separates forms kept in the imagination; the estimative faculty that figures out the specific significances, like the fear of one particular snake; the memory that stores the specific significances.[11]

Suhrawardi criticizes Avicenna's stance on five interior senses, reasoning that there is at most one faculty for all internal perceptions. Of the foundations of Suhrawardi's disposition of the theory of imagination, the most prominent is the principle of seeing, which he has developed in multiple positions, and based on which he has accounted for imagination as the illumination of the soul (Suhrawardi, 2002a, 150, 214). Apart from intuitive proofs, Suhrawardi's major argument for illumationist imagination is the refutation of manifold cognitive faculties;[12] notwithstanding all this, he indicates the faculties of ten sense perceptions in allegory. The allegories of ten sense perceptions comprise ten towers, ten straps, ten graves, ten flyers, ten wardens, five chambers and five gates.

In "Treatise on Towers" (Suhrawardi, 2002b, 462-471) the towers are ten in number with the five external towers, allegorizing the five traditionally recognized methods of perception, and the internal towers the five parts of the brain reputed to be the seat of our mental capacities.[13]

In "The Language of the Ants" we find the following allegory of the ten senses. And so commences the story: "*Kay-Khosraw* had a cup that showed the whole world: in it he could see whatever he wanted, be informed of all things and gain access to hidden things. It is said that it had a sheath of leather made in the shape of a cone, and there were ten wide straps placed around it." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 81) It is a long shot that we can justifiably regard the ten wide straps as distinct from the ten senses.

"A Tale of Occidental Exile" implies the allegory of ten graves, where the wayfarer utters: "And I cast the sphere of spheres onto the heavens until the sun and moon and stars were crushed, then I was rescued from fourteen coffins and ten graves." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 117-118)

"The Simurgh's Shrill Cry" includes the allegory of ten flyers: "Those who wish to tear down the spider's web must expel nineteen pincers from themselves: of these, five are visible flyers and five are concealed." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 104-105)

In "The Red Intellect" is amplified the allegory of ten wardens. "In the beginning," says the wayfarer, "when the Former wanted to bring me into actuality He created me in the form of a falcon". One day the hunters, Fate and Destiny, laid the trap of Fore-ordination and filled it with the grain of Will, and in this manner they caught him. Then they took him from the realm where his nest was into another realm and appointed ten wardens to watch over him. Five of them faced him with their backs towards the outside. These five refer to the five external senses. The other five wardens faced him representing five internal senses (Suhrawardi, 1999, 20-21).

Suhrawardi fleshes out the last allegory of senses, five chambers and five gates in "On the Reality of Love". On his way, seeks the wayfarer the inhabited quarter and reaches the city, catching sight of a three-storied pavilion. The first story is fitted with two chambers. In the first is someone extremely clever but his dominant trait is forgetfulness. "He can solve any problem in a flash, but he never remembers anything." This first chamber alludes to sensus communis. The faculty of imagination is epitomized by the next camber:

"Next to him in the second chamber reclines someone very nimble and quick but unclean. It takes him a long time to discover allusions, but once he understands he never forgets." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 64-65)

Then the wayfarer goes to the second story. There are two chambers representing the estimative faculty and the imaginative power. The memorizing faculty exists in the third story, storing specific significances:

> When he reaches the third story he will see a delightful chamber ... He is absorbed in thought. The many things left to him in trust are piled around him, and he never betrays anyone's faith in him. Whatever profit is made from these things is entrusted to him so that they may be put to use again (Suhrawardi, 1999, 65).

On the way, confronts the wayfarer with five gates. By the five gates, Suhrawardi alludes to the five exterior senses. At first, the faculty of seeing is depicted: "The first has two doorways, in each of which is an oblong, almond-shaped. Throne with two curtains, one black and the other white, hung before. There are many ropes fastened to the gate. On both of the thrones reclines someone who serves as a look-out." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 65)

The faculty of perceiving sounds is the next:

> Going to the second gate, he will find two doorways, beyond each of which is a corridor, long and twisted and talismanically sealed. At the end of each corridor is a round throne, and over the two reclines someone who is a master of news and information. He has messengers who are continually on the go seizing every sound that comes to be and delivering it to the master, who comprehends it.

The power of smelling is represented by the third gate having two doorways from each one the seeker will go through a long corridor until he emerges in a chamber in which there are two seats, on which someone sits. "He has a servant called Air who goes around the world every day and brings a bit of every good and foul thing he sees." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 65-66)

The fourth gate illustrates the power of tasting. "This one is wider than

the other three. Inside is a pleasant spring surrounded by a wall of pearl. In the middle of the spring is a divan that moves and on it sits someone who is called the Taster." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 66-67)

The faculty of touching is the last gate.

> Then he will come to the fifth gate, which surrounds the city. Everything that is in the city is within the scope of this gate, around about which a carpet is spread, and on the carpet sits someone so that the carpet is filled by him. He rules over eight different things and distinguishes among the eight. Not for one instant is he negligent in his labor. He is called the Distinguisher (Suhrawardi, 1999, 67).

The eight different things hint at the eight tastes, usually enumerated as: sweet, greasy, bitter, salty, sharp, harsh, salty like the sea, and vinegary (Freedman, 2007, 168).

Depictions of the five traditional senses as allegory became a popular subject for seventeenth-century artists, especially among Flemish and Dutch Baroque painters. A typical example is a painting by Gérard de Lairesse, *Allegory of the Five* Senses (1668), in which each of the figures in the main group hints at a sense: sight is the reclining boy with a curved outwards mirror, sound is the boy holding the triangle in one hand and the bar in another hand, smell is alluded by the girl with flowers, taste is embodied by the woman looking at the potato, and feeling is illustrated by the woman bearing the bird.[14]

3. Emanation

Emanation is the second sciart issue I pointed it out. The Peripatetic philosophers believed in ten separate intellects emanate from the First Being. The tenth one, the Active Intellect, generates the sublunary realm (Ibn Sina, 1983, 386-393). The philosophers did not assert that they were acquainted with the manner in which all the other numerous existents emanated, but concerned themselves only with the nine spheres. They have claimed ten intellects, only because it is unfeasible for there to be less (Al-Jami, 69). In traditional cosmology, the nine spheres and the sublunary realm managed by ten intellects are on the well known descending route of the Origin.[15]

Nevertheless, in the book of *Hikmah al-Ishraq* Suhrawardi concentrates on the manifold of planets located on the sphere of the Fixed Stars, arguing that's not feasible just one intellect emanate all of them. And this begged the question how many are the intellects. Suhrawardi holds that the intellects are more than ten, twenty, and two hundred (Suhrawardi, 2002a, 139-140). In *Alvah Emadi,* he also emphasizes that there are too many intellects (Suhrawardi, 2002b, 148-149),[16] quoting Quran's verse: "None knows the armies of your Lord save Himself" (Quran, 74/31), yet in his allegorical treatises, Suhrawardi symbolizes the theory of the ten intellects and the nine spheres in which Avicenna believes (Ibn Sina, 1997b, 165-166; 1983, 401; 1986, 648; 1985, 67-68).

Suhrawardi briefly hints at ten intellects by ten old men in "Treatise on Towers" (Suhrawardi, 2002b, 470).

In "The Sound of Gabriel's Wing", ten intellects are symbolized by ten old men again. The wayfarer says of them, "When I looked I saw ten old men of beautiful countenance seated on a bench. I was so amazed by their magnificence and splendor and so staggered by the sight of their throne, their beauty, their white hair, their garments and trappings that I could not speak." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 9-10)

The old man who was on the end of the bench greeted the wayfarer in a most kindly-disposed manner, saying, "We are a group of abstracted ones, come from the direction of Nowheresville." that denotes the ten intellects are not from material world but are Separate Intellects.

"Why do the elders seated above you keep silent?" asked the wayfarer. "Because the likes of you are unworthy to approach them," responded the tenth and last of them, the Active Intellect, "I serve as their tongue, for they will never deign to address the likes of you."

In some cases just the tenth intellect is mentioned. In "A Tale of Occidental Exile" the Active Intellect is allegorized by the father: "I ascended the mountain and saw our father, an old man from the brilliance of whose light the heavens and earth were nearly split open." narrates the wayfarer (Suhrawardi, 1999, 120).

The luminous elder, the first child of creation, and the Red Intellect are other allegories of the tenth intellect brought in the treatise of "The Red Intellect". Here is a short conversation the wayfarer struck up with him:

> I said, "Young man, where do you come from?"
>
> "My son," he replied, "you have addressed me mistakenly. I am the first child of creation. You call me young?!"
>
> "Why are your features not white?" I asked. "My features are white," said the Red Intellect. "I am a luminous elder (Suhrawardi, 1999, 21).

And in "On the Reality of Love" the tenth intellect is a young old man called *Javid Kherad*, that is, Eternal Wisdom.

> Above this nine-storied pavilion is a vault called the City of the Soul. It has ramparts of might and a moat of power. At the gate to that city is stationed a young old man whose name is *Javid Kherad*. He continually travels about in such a way that he never moves from his place. ... He is old in years but has never seen the passage of time. He is very, very old but is still untouched by decrepitude." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 64)

The Active Intellect has never seen the passage of time because he is the tenth Separate Intellect and there is no time in their world. Consequently, he is young.

The nine-storied pavilion above which is the City of the Soul hints at Suhrawardi's cosmology I will develop it in the next section.

The Red Intellect describes that every white thing that is connected to light appears red when admixed with black, like the sunset at the beginning of evening or the end of dawn, which is white where it is connected to the Sun's light. One side of it is toward the light, which is white, while the other side is toward the night, which is black. Therefore it appears red. When the crescent moon rises, although its light is borrowed, it is nonetheless described as light. Since one side of it is toward day and the other side toward night, it appears red. A flame has the same quality (Suhrawardi, 1999, 21-22).

The white side is the allegory of the Separate Intellects while the black side is the allegory of the sublunary world. For the Active Intellect is the last Separate Intellect and is responsible for the sublunary realm, he has

located between the white and the black sides.

Suhrawardi expatiates on the relation between the intellects and the spheres as well as the relation between the intellects themselves. In "The sound of Gabriel's Wing", when the wayfarer asks the old man about a basin with eleven layers, he explains the relation between the intellects and the spheres. The first layer whose body is greater than any of the other levels, was arranged and put together by the old man who is seated at the highest level. "The second was done by the second one, the third by the third, and so on down to me. These nine comrades and companions produced the nine layers by their own labor and handicraft. The two bottom levels, along with the bit of water and sand, were produced by me. Since their foundation is stronger, their handiwork cannot be rent or pierced, but what I have made can be." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 11-12)

Then the old man explains the relation between the intellects themselves. The elder who is in the highest place is the master teacher and tutor of the second elder, who sits beside him. He has signed the second elder's order of investiture, the second has signed the third's order, the third the fourth's order, and so on down to the tenth (Suhrawardi, 1999, 11-12).

4. Cosmology

As I remarked, the idea of the ten Separate Intellects results in that of the nine spheres. In "A Day with a Group of Sufis" Suhrawardi himself has decoded his allegories about nine spheres. At first, he mentions the theory in allegorical form. Then he explains his own allegories. Given that Suhrawardi is clear about his cosmology, we are allowed to decode his cosmology, corresponding the allegories to the nine and eleven spheres.

When the wayfarer said to his master, "The engraver's craft is amazing," said his master, "There is a well-known tale in their craft, but no one tells it fully, and no one knows the meaning of it." "What is this tale?" asked the wayfarer. His master went through the story: "Once, an engraver had a jewel. He wanted to display his skill on it. So from it he made a round shell like a ball. Then, from the residue left in the middle of the shell he made another shell inside the first. Again, from the residue of the second he made a third, and so on until he had made nine shells."

The engraver then polished the first shell and engraved a few

medallions on the second shell and gilded it. On the third, fourth, and so on to the ninth shells he engraved one medallion each.

After the allegorical tale, Suhrawardi starts decoding it. When the wayfarer heard the tale from his master, he said, "I do not understand what you are saying to me. Tell me clearly that I may benefit fully." His master started explaining the allegories, "When the Creator created these spheres, he sent a light to the first sphere." For a sphere is an intermediary between being and non-being, the first sphere was too subtle to bear it. It borders on existence. Then again, it is continuous with nonexistence. As a consequence, the light reached the second sphere, which was able to bear it.

> The light was broken up against the second sphere, and every part became a star. What was left over from these stars, came to the third sphere, and from that residue Saturn came into being. Again, what was left over from Saturn reached the fourth sphere, and the body of Jupiter came into being. And so on, Mars from residue of Jupiter, the Sun from the residue of Mars, Venus from the residue of the Sun, Mercury from the residue of Venus, and from the residue of Mercury, the Moon (Suhrawardi, 1999, 34-35).

Sometimes Suhrawardi speaks of the eleven spheres, adding two spheres of *zamharir* and *ether*.[17] In "A Day with a Group of Sufis", asked the wayfarer, "Why is the body of the Sun bigger and brighter than the other stars?" His master said "Because it is in the middle. The Sun is in the middle, provided you count the seven planets. And just as there are two spheres above the seven, there are two other spheres below them, *ether* and *zamharir*. Therefore, by any reckoning the Sun is in the middle." (Suhrawardi, 1999, 36)

In "The Sound of Gabriel's Wing" the eleven spheres are allegorized by the eleven layers of a basin which the wayfarer saw in the courtyard a basin with eleven layers (Suhrawardi, 1999, 11). There is no crack or no crevice on the surface of the upper nine levels of the basin. This means there is no crack and no crevice on the surface of the nine spheres

according to Ptolemaic geocentric cosmology. "Although no hole could be made through the nine upper levels, one could easily pierce through the lowest level." For the lowest level demonstrates the sublunary world.

The first level had no button at all, whereas the second level had many luminous buttons on it. Because the first level of the basin is the allegory of the Sphere of the spheres and the second level is the allegory of the sphere of the Fixed Stars. "On each of the remaining seven of the upper nine levels of the basin a bright button was fastened." These buttons represent Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon (Suhrawardi, 1999, 10-12).

In "The Red Intellect", there are eleven mountains surrounded by Mount Qaf hint at the eleven spheres (Suhrawardi, 1999, 22).

In "The Language of the Ants" there are some dialogues between Enoch and all the stars and heavenly bodies.[18] All the stars and heavenly bodies spoke with Enoch, who asked the Moon, "Why is your light sometimes less and sometimes more?" "You should know," answered the Moon, "that my body is pure, polished and black. I myself have no light, but when I am opposite the Sun, a likeness of its light appears in the mirror of my body in proportion to the degree of opposition, just as other corporeal forms appear in a mirror. As the degree of opposition increases I progress from the nadir of being a crescent to the zenith of being a full moon." The conversation goes on, as might be seen, without allegories (Suhrawardi, 1999, 88-89).

In "On the State of Childhood" as well, is some clear hints at the Moon, the Sun, the Earth, and the sphere. Moreover, the Moon is allegorized in it by the Pearl-that-glows-by-night such as in "The Red Intellect". The wayfarer asks his master, "Does the Sun have such strength that the brightness within the Pearl-that-glows-by-night can come from it? "It has such strength," replied the master "All the world is obligated to it, but no one is willing to own up to his obligation." Then the wayfarer asks some questions about the light and position of the Moon as well as the Sun. And the master spells out in clear details rather than allegories (Suhrawardi, 1999, 47-49).

5. Conclusion

As a sciartist as well as philartist, Suhrawardi elaborates philosophical,

cosmological, and psychological problems upon art and literature. In his works, it is art that allows philosophy to be held up against peoples' minds; and it is philosophy that allows art to be held up against supposed realities.

In the field of sense perception, ten interior and exterior senses are allegorized by ten towers, ten wide straps, ten graves, ten flyers, ten wardens, five chambers and five gates.

In the theory of emanation, the ten Separate Intellects are allegorized by the ten old men, whereas the Active Intellect by the father, the master, and the Red Intellect.

In cosmology, the spheres are symbolized by nine shells, eleven layers of a basin, eleven mountains, sons, and mills.

Ten sense perceptions, ten intellects, and nine or eleven spheres are modules of Avicenna's philosophy, forcing us to reckon Suhrawardi as an Avicennian sciartist.

Endnote

1. Allegory in Islamic literatures as a developed literary practice begins at the turn of the eleventh century, As Heath once put it. "Yet allegory draws on earlier periods for crucial constituent narrative forms, topics, themes, source materials, and interpretational frameworks" (Heath, 2011, 83).

2. As a natural science.

3. As a formal science.

4. A branch of social sciences.

5. As an applied science.

6. Additionally, in some media, such as space art, science has been applied for the creation of art (Garfield, 1989, 62-64).

7. Metaphysics in literature, as Heath concedes, emerged in full force in the works of Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufail, and Suhrawardi (Heath, 2011, 88-89).

8 . In the time of Shakespeare, the words "sense" and "wit" were synonyms and thus the senses were known as the five outward wits. (See "wit" in The Merriam-Webster new book of word histories).

9. In the notion of sense perception, we should not lose sight of the distinction between Avicenna and Farabi (See: Maftouni, 2014, 45-54).

10. A sensorium (plural: sensoria) is the sum of an organism's perception, the "seat of sensation" where it experiences and interprets the environments within which it lives (See: "Sensorium" in Oxford English Dictionary).

11. The internal towers, for Reichert, undertake these activities: “In Suhrawardi’s scheme, the first of the interior towers corresponds to the sensorium, the second to the representative imagination, the third to the estimative capacity of the brain, the ninth (the fourth interior sense) to the active imagination and the tenth (the fifth interior sense) to the function of memory” (Reichert, 2014, 108).

12. It is based on this refutation that he devotes an echelon of the universe to suspended archetypes or incorporeal forms (Suhrawardi, 2002a, 209-215).

13. “Treatise on Towers”, “The Risālat al-Abrāj”, otherwise known as “al-Kalimāt al-Dhawqīya” seems somehow controversial to be attributed to Suhrawardi. Walbridge says of it: “Its authenticity has been questioned by some modern scholars. However, the manuscripts seem to consistently attribute it to Suhrawardi, so I see no justification for questioning its authenticity. At any rate, Musannifak thought it was Suhrawardi’s” (Walbridge, 2011, 96).

14 . In Hindhu literature, the traditional five senses are enumerated as the five material faculties. They appear in allegorical representation as early as in the Katha Upanishad (roughly 6th century BC), as five horses budging the chariot of the body, guided by the mind as chariot driver (Furness, 1880, 187; Lewis, 1990, 147).

15. As Chittick holds: “The basic outline is the same as that already present in the Arabic Plotinus: intellect, soul, heavenly spheres, four elements.... Some of the philosophers have developed it into several degrees as did Farabi and Avicenna, who spoke not of one intellect and one soul, but of ten intellects and ten souls” (Chittick, 2001, 57).

16. The multiplicity of intellects and angels could be seen in other opinions: “In his Hebrew adaptation of Avicenna’s Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Ibn Ezra describes the nine spheres, followed by the supernal world of the various groups of angels beyond the spheres, and culminating with God. While Ibn Ezra does not explain these classes, they probably should be understood in terms of the Aristotelian view adopted by Avicenna of the Separate Intellects who are the Movers of the spheres. Ibn Ezra does not attempt to list ten classes of angels, corresponding to the the Separate Intellects (nine Movers of the spheres and the Active Intellect) in Islamic Aristotelian philosophy” (Kreisel, 2009, 32).

17. The eleven spheres system is attributed to Ptolemy and his disciples. “Ptolemy has established the generally accepted order of the heavens, from bottom to top: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Fixed Stars or Starry Heaven, and had added a ninth heaven, the Primum Mobile. This heaven was added by Ptolemy in order to account for two observed movements of the heavens. First, their daily motion east to west around the pole of the equator was attributed to what Ptolemy called the ‘sphere that moved the sphere of the Fixed Stars’ (the Primum Mobile). Ptolemy attributed the other, slow movement of the planets from west to east at the rate of 1° every hundred years around the pole of the ecliptic known as the precession of the equinoxes, first discovered by Hipparchus (190-c.120), to the heaven of the Fixed Stars. Initially astronomers had supposed that the eighth sphere, that of the Fixed Stars, was affected by as many as three different motions, and on the principle that a single sphere must be assigned to each distinct celestial motion, additional spheres plus an immobile Empyrean were often added for a total of eleven spheres” (Cachey, 2015, 221-240).
18. The belief in the Divine source of astronomy was traditionally attributed to the prophet Enoch or Idris some called him also Hermes (Nasr, 1993, 132).

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