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THE IDEA OF THE “PERFECT MAN” IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY: ISLAMIC MYSTICISM AND INTERCULTURAL HARMONY

This article examines the idea of the “Perfect Man” (insān al-kāmil) within the framework of religious anthropology and Islamic mysticism from a historical-philosophical perspective. The research focuses on the spiritual path to perfection in Sufi teachings, its main stages, and anthropological implications. The objective of the study is to reveal the religious meaning and spiritual experience of the perfect man concept in Sufism, as well as its significance in the context of intercultural harmony. The research explores moral and spiritual perfection in Sufism and identifies parallels between these ideas and other religious-philosophical systems such as Neoplatonism and Indian mysticism. The scientific significance of the article lies in emphasizing the special role of Sufism in interpreting the concept of man within Islamic thought. Its practical value is related to the application of Sufi spiritual practices in contemporary moral education and religious studies. The methodological basis of the research includes textual and theological analysis, historical-comparative method, hermeneutic and cultural-philosophical approaches. The ideas of notable thinkers such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, and Mahmud Shabistari were used to examine the structure and content of the spiritual path in Sufism. The study concludes that the image of the perfect man in Sufism is a spiritually disciplined person striving for inner purification and divine harmony. This work contributes to the development of Islamic ethical thought and offers practical insights for modern spiritual discourse.

Keywords: perfect man, sufism, islamic mysticism, religious anthropology, spiritual perfection.

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Діни антропология контексіндегі «кемел адам» идеясы: ислам мистицизмі мен мәдениетаралық үндестік

Бұл мақалада діни антропология контексінде ислам мистицизмі аясындағы “кемел адам” (insān al-kāmil) идеясы тарихи-философиялық тұрғыдан қарастырылады. Зерттеу барысында сопылық ілімдегі рухани кемелдікке жету жолдары, оның негізгі кезеңдері мен антропологиялық мазмұны талданады. Мақаланың мақсаты – сопылықтағы кемел адам концепциясының діни мәнін, рухани тәжірибесін, сондай-ақ мәдениетаралық үндестік аясындағы орнын анықтау. Зерттеу негізгі бағыт ретінде сопылықтағы адамгершілік пен рухани кемелдік идеяларын, сондай-ақ бұл идеялардың неоплатонизм, үнді сопылығы мен басқа да діни-философиялық жүйелермен ұқсастықтарын қарастырады. Жұмыстың ғылыми маңызы – ислам діні аясындағы адам концепциясын түсіндіруде сопылықтың ерекше рөлін көрсету. Тәжірибелік мәні – сопылық рухани тәжірибесін қазіргі замандағы рухани-этикалық тәрбие мен діни білім беру үрдістерінде қолдану мүмкіндігінде. Зерттеу әдіснамасы ретінде мәтіндік және дінтанулық талдау, салыстырмалы-тарихи әдіс, герменевтикалық және мәдени-философиялық тәсілдер пайдаланылды. Жұмыста әл-Ғазали, Ибн Араби, Махмұд Шабистари секілді ойшылдардың еңбектері негізінде сопылықтағы рухани жолдың мазмұны мен құрылымы талданды. Зерттеу нәтижесі ретінде сопылықтағы кемел адам образы – Құдаймен рухани үндестікті мақсат тұтқан, өзін-өзі тәрбиелеу мен тазаруға ұмтылған тұлға ретінде сипатталды. Бұл мақала ислам дініндегі рухани-этикалық ойдың дамуына ғылыми үлес қосады және қазіргі рухани-мәдени дискурста тәжірибелік қолдану мүмкіндігіне ие.

Түйін сөздер: кемел адам, сопылық ілімі, ислам мистицизмі, діни антропология, рухани кемелдік.

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Идея «совершенного человека» в контексте религиозной антропологии: исламский мистицизм и межкультурная гармония

В данной статье рассматривается идея «совершенного человека» (*insān al-kāmil*) в контексте религиозной антропологии и исламского мистицизма с историко-философской точки зрения. Исследование сосредоточено на путях духовного совершенствования в суфийском учении, его основных этапах и антропологическом содержании. Цель работы – раскрыть религиозную сущность и духовную практику концепции совершенного человека в суфизме, а также её значение в рамках межкультурной гармонии. В качестве основных направлений рассматриваются идеи нравственного и духовного совершенства в суфизме, а также их параллели с неоплатонизмом, индийским мистицизмом и другими религиозно-философскими системами. Научная значимость статьи заключается в демонстрации особой роли суфизма в интерпретации образа человека в исламском мировоззрении. Практическая ценность работы заключается в применении суфийского духовного опыта в современной системе нравственно-этического воспитания и религиозного образования. Методологическую основу исследования составляют текстологический и теологический анализ, историко-сравнительный метод, герменевтический и культурно-философский подходы. В качестве теоретической базы использованы труды таких мыслителей, как аль-Газали, Ибн Араби и Махмуд Шабистари. В результате установлено, что образ совершенного человека в суфизме – это духовно очищенный человек, стремящийся к внутренней гармонии и единству с Богом. Работа вносит вклад в развитие исламской этико-философской мысли и может быть полезна в рамках современного духовно-культурного дискурса.

Ключевые слова: совершенный человек, суфизм, исламский мистицизм, религиозная антропология, духовное совершенство.

Introduction

The concept of the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) occupies a central position in the spiritual, philosophical, and religious consciousness of Islamic civilization. Nowhere is this ideal more thoroughly developed than in the teachings of Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, which views human perfection not merely as a moral aspiration but as a metaphysical reality embedded in the structure of existence. Within this tradition, the Perfect Human is not only the embodiment of ethical excellence but also a reflection of the Divine on earth – a being who has traversed the path of spiritual purification, attained inner knowledge, and reached proximity to God. This ideal serves as both the goal and model of the Sufi path, representing the full actualization of human potential in harmony with divine reality.

In contrast to secular anthropologies that define the human through biological, psychological, or sociological parameters, Sufi anthropology approaches humanity through the lens of divine origin and eschatological purpose. The human being, in this view, is both microcosm and mirror, encapsulating the universe within and reflecting the names and attributes of God. Perfection is achieved not through worldly success, but through the soul's return to its source by means of remembrance (*dhikr*), ascetic discipline, and inner transformation. This journey,

outlined in the works of towering figures such as Ibn Arabi, Al-Ghazali, Mahmud Shabistari, and Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, unfolds through clearly defined stages and states, each aimed at cleansing the self and unveiling deeper dimensions of divine truth.

The enduring relevance of the Perfect Human ideal extends far beyond medieval mysticism. In contemporary contexts marked by moral uncertainty, spiritual alienation, and intercultural fragmentation, the Sufi model offers a framework for ethical self-cultivation and meaningful dialogue. It proposes a vision of human flourishing grounded in compassion, introspection, and universal connectedness – values urgently needed in today's global society. Furthermore, the cultural expressions of this idea, particularly in Turkic Sufism, demonstrate how Islamic mysticism has adapted to diverse historical, linguistic, and civilizational contexts without losing its metaphysical core.

This study aims to explore the concept of the Perfect Human within Sufi tradition from a religious-anthropological perspective, examining its philosophical foundations, spiritual methods, and historical evolution. It also considers the influence of related traditions, including Neoplatonism and Indian mysticism, in shaping the metaphysical contours of this ideal. Through textual analysis, comparative study, and hermeneutic interpretation, this research seeks to clarify how the notion of human

perfection reflects the broader Islamic worldview and continues to inspire spiritual thought and practice in the modern world.

Justification of the choice of the topic, goals and objectives

This research undertakes a religious-anthropological inquiry into the notion of the “Perfect Human” (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as articulated in Sufi tradition, a concept that underpins Islamic views on human essence and the pursuit of spiritual excellence. Several key considerations influenced the selection of this research topic. Foremost among them is the enduring prominence of the “Perfect Human” as a central theme in Islamic philosophy and mysticism, having occupied the attention of Muslim thinkers for centuries. This concept is deeply intertwined with notions of human essence, spiritual purification, moral refinement, and the soul’s relationship with the Divine, as articulated in the works of major intellectual figures such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Arabi, Al-Ghazali, and Shabistari. As such, an inquiry into this theme offers valuable insights into the religious anthropology of Islam.

Next, the growing demand for spiritual and moral education in today’s society, the problems of harmony in religion and intercultural relations increase the relevance of this concept. The path to perfection in Sufi teachings is aimed at educating the inner world of a person, spiritual reflection, which is also in line with the spiritual needs of the modern era.

In addition, during the study, it was noted that the concept of “perfect man” has not only religious and theoretical, but also practical and spiritual significance. This teaching has the potential to be used within the framework of modern religious education, personal development and intercultural dialogue. Taking into account these factors, the topic of the article is recognized as scientifically relevant, has theoretical and practical significance.

The relevance of the study is determined by the importance of Sufi ideas in terms of today’s spiritual and ethical education and intercultural dialogue. The purpose of the work is to reveal the model of spiritual perfection in the Sufi tradition, determine its religious meaning, and show its features in the historical and cultural context.

Scientific research methodology

The study used a thorough methodological approach. Initially, textual and content analysis techniques were used to examine the idea of the “perfect

man” in the writings of Sufi scholars such as Mahmud Shabistari, Ibn Arabi, and Al-Ghazali. These writings were regarded as the primary resources for elucidating the philosophical and religious underpinnings of Sufi anthropology.

Additionally, a comparative-historical approach was used to examine the idea of perfection in Sufism in relation to Indian Sufism, ancient philosophy (Neoplatonism), and other religious and cultural traditions. The symbolic and metaphorical content of Sufic texts was explained during the study using a hermeneutic method.

Furthermore, under the framework of Sufi anthropology, we were able to comprehend the God – human relationship through cultural and philosophical analysis. These methodologies were intertwined and helped to comprehensively reveal the religious essence of a perfect person in Sufism.

Results and discussion

The study and evolution of the concept of the “perfect man” depended heavily on the historical context of medieval Islamic culture, where Sufi discourse played a pivotal role. Sufism in Islam as a mystical and religious path is relevant when analyzing the historic cultural heritage of the Eastern peoples as well as current sociocultural trends. Throughout their lives, Sufis and Muslim mystics strive for the ultimate goal of spiritual, intuitive, direct knowledge of God. All of their thoughts were controlled by this spiritual concept. The concepts of human perfection and moral purification (also known as “spiritual jihad” or “mujahada”) were based on their beliefs of the holy path. The theory of permanent ethical-moral traits (*maqamat*) and short-term, spontaneously forming mental states (*hal*), akin to a fleeting flash of light, has evolved from this concept. Currently, psychologists and physiologists practically designate qualities-states (*maqamat*) as “unconditioned reflexes” since they remain active after they are formed. The primary goal for Sufism adherents in the ninth through thirteenth centuries (who were pragmatists and representatives of the intellectual community) was to have eternal experience through spiritual reincarnation rather than to escape from oneself through ecstatic states. For them, being in a trance was a means rather than an end.

V. V. Barthold contends that the Sufis’ conception of God and methods of approaching him are reminiscent of the teachings of the Neoplatonists and Neopythagoreans, the last surviving representatives of ancient philosophy; there are also indica-

tions of resemblance to Buddhist teachings in the East and Jewish Kabbalah in the West, as well as to Indian Sufism in general. The populace viewed the prominent ascetics as miracle-makers and saints (Vali; both Persians and Turks use the same plural form of the word "Saint"). The biographies of these Valians share characteristics with the Christian lives of the saints. The conflict between faith and truth influenced the development of asceticism and the veneration of saints that are closely related to it in both the Muslim and Christian worlds (Barthold, 1992: 32). Today, the veneration of saints is still relevant. For instance, pilgrimages to "holy places" are a religious phenomenon in many cultures, and their emphasis on understanding and sensual contact with the divine and the irrational serves as an archetype ingrained in a particular culture's cultural code. It is hard to overstate the significance of Sufism as a spiritual phenomena since it demonstrates the existence of religious mysticism in Islam. It is the attempt to internalize the content of the Quranic Revelation in order to directly grasp the Prophet's spiritual message. The Prophet's joyful Ascension, known as the Mi'raj, was devoted to the mysteries of God and served as the model for the experience that all Sufis aspired to for ages (Corben, 2015: 187).

Expansion and Institutionalization of Sufism

By the mid-11th century, Sufi doctrines had proliferated extensively across the Islamic world, despite resistance from orthodox Islamic authorities. During this period, Sufism transitioned from an intellectual pursuit of the elite to a widespread movement embraced by the masses. This shift positioned Sufism as an ideological countercurrent within Islam, as its foundational principles were met with stringent opposition by official Islamic representatives. Adherents often found themselves defending their beliefs and, at times, fleeing governmental persecution. While Sufi practices were never formally integrated into Islamic orthodoxy—due to their perceived dilution of core theological tenets—they persisted alongside mainstream Islam, frequently sparking polemical debates that occasionally culminated in tragic outcomes for the mystics involved.

The late medieval period witnessed the formalization of Sufi orders and fraternities. Notably, scholars like Al-Ghazali played a pivotal role in harmonizing Sufism with Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia) and theology (Kalam). In the XII century, Sufism became deeply ingrained in religious life, a development largely attributed to interpretations of the Quran. The Quran's emphasis on divine love and the knowledge of Allah's beautiful names ('Asma' al-Husna') provided a theological foundation for

Sufi practices, underscoring the pursuit of spiritual refinement as a central objective for Muslims. (Khurramshahi Baha ad-Din, 2016: 44).

N.H. Zholmukhamedova posits that Sufism perceives nature as a manifestation of God's absolute beauty, rendering the material world's imperfections as deviations from this divine aesthetic. She identifies a tripartite conception of beauty in Sufi philosophy: the eternal and unchanging divine beauty, its manifestation within the physical realm, and the unseen spiritual beauty that emerges through human behavior and moral conduct. This intrinsic human inclination towards beauty mirrors the soul's yearning for the Divine (Zholmukhamedova, 2017: 54).

Aziz al-Din Nasafi, in "Kashf al-Haqa'iq," discusses a hierarchy of perfection among living beings, suggesting that each ascending level embodies characteristics of the next. Humans, possessing the faculties of speech and action, occupy the pinnacle of this hierarchy. Consequently, the universe can be interpreted anthropomorphically, with humans serving as the culmination of both physical and metaphysical evolution (Bertels, 1970: 95).

By the early 11th hundred years, By this period, Sufism had evolved from a primarily philosophical endeavor into a widespread and influential spiritual tradition. The ideal of the "Perfect Human" (al-Insān al-Kāmil), which emphasized asceticism and detachment from worldly desires as the path to spiritual fulfillment, strongly appealed to the disenfranchised, offering them solace and the promise of divine mercy and eternal life. Concurrently, Sufi thought experienced significant intellectual development, particularly through the contributions of Ibn Arabi. In his seminal texts, "The Meccan Revelations" and "The Bezels of Wisdom," Ibn Arabi conceptualizes God as both the hidden (Batin) and the manifest (Zahir), with all creation serving as reflections of the Divine. Thus, every being mirrors the absolute, though their true essence remains concealed.

Sufi mysticism outlines a journey towards divine union, emphasizing the renunciation of worldly desires and the cultivation of inner knowledge. Al-Ghazali legitimized Sufism by integrating it with Islamic orthodoxy, critiquing both the atomistic theories of peripatetic philosophers and the mystical approaches of the Ash'arites. He emphasized that true happiness and perfection are achieved through the soul's comprehension of reality, asserting that the pursuit of knowledge is infinite (Al-Janabi, 2010: 156).

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (Brethren of Purity), a X century collective of Arab-Muslim thinkers based

in Basra, aimed to purify Islamic law through philosophical inquiry. Their encyclopedic treatises encompassed various sciences, including mathematics, astronomy, and theology, often incorporating Pythagorean concepts. They envisioned the universe as a macroanthropos, drawing parallels between cosmic structures and the human body. Ethically, they posited that humans are inherently good, with love being the highest virtue driving the connection to God (Zakuev, 1961: 36; Makhshulov, 2012: 84).

William Chittick emphasizes that Islam fundamentally teaches believers to transform themselves to align with the essence of all existence. This transformation involves both actions and understanding, aiming to cultivate virtues inherent in human nature (Fitra). Achieving closeness to God requires demonstrating these virtues, with the “Perfect Human” embodying both transcendental and ontological dimensions. Overcoming personal shortcomings is essential in this journey towards perfection. (Chittick, 2012: 3; Shukurov, 2008: 247).

According to G. Yessim, seekers of truth are categorized into four groups: theologians (mutakallims), esotericists (Batin), philosophers, and Sufis. For Sufis, detachment from worldly existence (zuhd) and asceticism are crucial. Al-Ghazali asserts that true happiness and well-being stem from achieving perfection, attainable through renouncing material possessions and dedicating oneself to divine contemplation. The Sufi path (Tariqa) comprises five stages: initiation (Murid), unity with a spiritual guide (Murshid), acquisition of spiritual knowledge (Arif), annihilation of the self (Fana), and attainment of sanctity (Baqa) (Yesim, 1998: 127).

Al-Ghazali emphasizes that understanding Sufism necessitates both theoretical knowledge and practical application. The ultimate goal is to liberate the soul from passions, purify the heart, and focus solely on God. The heart’s sincerity is paramount in achieving spiritual perfection. M. Mutahhari outlines two approaches to recognizing the “Perfect Human”: through scriptural descriptions and by identifying individuals who embody these qualities in reality. Such individuals are not hypothetical but have historically existed, exemplifying the traits of perfection (Shah, 2001: 86).

Ibn Arabi categorizes knowledge into three levels: rational knowledge (‘ilm al-‘aql), which is susceptible to doubt; knowledge of states (‘ilm al-ahwal), attained through spiritual experience; and knowledge of secrets (‘ulum al-asrar), a superior form inspired by the Holy Spirit, accessible to prophets and saints. This highest form encompasses

all other knowledge and is considered the most noble (Ibn Arabi, 2015: 77).

Ibn Arabi’s concept of the “Perfect Human,” created in God’s image, underscores the intrinsic connection between divinity and humanity. He posits that divinity and humanity are not separate entities but aspects manifesting at every level of creation. In Sufi doctrine, the soul is seen as sharing in the divine essence, with the body serving as its temporary vessel. Life on earth is viewed as an exile from the divine realm, with the soul’s ultimate reunion with the Creator occurring after worldly existence (Nasyrov, 2012: 282; Sirdar Iqbal Ali Shah, 2005: 246).

The spiritually rich and philosophically significant legacy of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi – regarded as the most prominent exponent of Sufism in the Turkic world – holds a distinguished place in the discourse on the “Perfect Human” in Islamic mysticism. As a pioneering figure who profoundly disseminated Sufi teachings among Turkic peoples, Yasawi synthesized the doctrinal framework of Sufism with indigenous Turkic perspectives, shaping it into a comprehensive ethical and practical system. Yasawi’s work “Diwani Hikmet” is not only a religious and ethical science, but also a philosophical and poetic treatise describing the path to spiritual perfection. In Yasawi’s teachings, a perfect man is a spiritual person who has purified his heart, overcomes his desires, and faithfully serves true faith and religion. In his opinion, perfection can be achieved not only through external knowledge, but also through the knowledge of the heart (ma’rifat). Yasawi systematizes the stages of spiritual development through the system of “four gates – forty positions”. This system is a concrete practical example of the path of spiritual purification and self-education of a person. At the same time, Yasawi adapted Sufism to the worldview, language and culture of the Turks, clarifying its folk character. For him, a perfect person is not only a spiritual connection with God, but also a teacher who sets an example for society, spreading justice and mercy. Yasawi’s teachings strengthened the social function of Sufism, and his model of a perfect person was formed as an image of a spiritual leader. Thus, the teachings of Khoja Ahmet Yasawi occupy an important place as a manifestation of the idea of perfection in Sufism in Turkic civilization. He proposed a traditional-moral model of forming a perfect person, harmonizing the spiritual teachings of Islam with local culture.

Sufism emerged as a distinct form of Islamic asceticism, although it did not fully develop into an autonomous spiritual tradition until the eighth and ninth centuries. During this period, Sufi practitio-

ners began to establish independent educational institutions. Nevertheless, Sufism never evolved into a fully systematized or doctrinally rigid set of beliefs. Instead, it has consistently demonstrated an ability to assimilate diverse philosophical and mystical elements – Including those from Zoroastrianism, Christian theosophy, Gnosticism, ancient mythologies, and various strands of mysticism – integrating them harmoniously with indigenous religious practices and local cultural traditions.

Sigmund Freud referred to religion as “the psychological arsenal of culture,” asserting that, on a global scale, religious ideas possess greater cultural value than even the arts or the technological skills that enable humanity to cultivate the earth, ensure its survival, or even bring about its destruction. He regarded religion as one of the most enduring and essential components of human civilization. Some thinkers argue that if religious ideas were to lose their inherent significance, human existence would become unbearable. While Freud did not exaggerate the importance of religion, he convincingly demonstrated its functional role in social life. He identified three primary stabilizing and regulatory roles of religion: firstly, it fulfills human curiosity; secondly, it mitigates fear in the face of life’s uncertainties and provides solace during times of misfortune; and finally, it imposes moral order by articulating commands, prohibitions, and restrictions (Piotrovsky, Prozorova, 1988: 66).

History, according to K. K. Begalinova, “testifies to the formation of the Turkic people on a rich ethno-cultural basis.” Based on the centuries-old material and economic cultural experience of their predecessors, the Turks were famous for their high

moral standards, spirituality, ideals of beauty, virtue, truth (Begalinova, 2017: 106). It is our contention that the Turkic cultural paradigm has exerted, and continues to exert, a considerable impact on the historical and intellectual development of the Arab-Muslim world. A nuanced and thorough examination of the parallels between these traditions is therefore essential.

Conclusion

Within Sufi doctrine, the notion of the “Perfect Man” is regarded as the pinnacle of Islamic spiritual and moral thought, encapsulating the ultimate ideal of human development and divine proximity. This idea describes a person’s desire for self-education and spiritual purification, his desire to establish spiritual harmony with God. The study revealed that this concept is closely related to religious anthropology and has a cross-cultural character.

The idea of perfection in Sufism is not just a religious and philosophical system, it is a paradigm of holistic existence based on spiritual practice. This idea is not only a historical phenomenon, but also has practical significance in modern society in the field of spiritual search and ethical education. This concept is considered as a deep spiritual key to understanding the essence and mission of man in Islamic Civilization.

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