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IBN 'ARABI AND HIS INTERPRETERS

PART I: RECENT FRENCH TRANSLATIONS

Part I of this review article introduces a number of recent translations and related studies of works by the great Islamic mystical thinker Ibn 'Arabî (d. 638/1240) that together illustrate the many representative facets of his thought, writing, and integration of earlier Islamic traditions. Part II, to appear in two following issues, outlines some of the main lines of interpretation and influence that marked the reception of his thought by subsequent Islamic writers in a wide range of disciplines and historical settings, again based on a survey of recent publications (primarily translations) in several languages.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars writing (or teaching) about the elaborate disciplines of later Islamic thought - philosophy, kalam, Sufism, etc. - inevitably encounter a dilemma that must be shared by "Orientalists" studying other similar traditions: in the absence of an adequate body of appropriate translations, they can either assume an intimate acquaintance with the texts and traditions in question, in which case their audience is effectively limited to a handful of colleagues with the requisite philological training; or they can undertake the difficult task of explanation and abstraction for a hypothetical "general" audience, an effort whose intrinsic limitations are evident in even the best of the secondary literature on these subjects. This dilemma is all the more frustrating when one recognizes that the interests and capacities required for appreciating the deeper intellectual and spiritual dimensions of those traditions, if only sufficient translations were available, are fortunately much more common than the vocation and training required to decipher them in their original language and cultural setting. In this context, the recent appearance of more than a dozen translations of works by the famous Islamic mystic Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638/1240) and later Sufis of his school is a remarkable phenomenon; these books - and others promised by the same scholars - may open the way not only to a wider appreciation and understanding of the "Greatest Master" (al-Shaykh al-Akbar, as he is traditionally known) and his teachings, but also for substantially improved access to the various Islamic traditions that are integrated in his work.

The purpose of this review article is therefore twofold. First, as is customary, we wish to draw the attention of interested specialists to this large body of new publications and to foreign scholars (some of them young and not yet widely known) working in this field.¹ But secondly, given the potentially wider interest of the subject,² we shall also try to provide the non-specialist

¹ We have also made every effort to mention the recent English - language translations (and some important Arabic publications) in the field, either in the text or footnotes, but have avoided any detailed comments so as not to preclude the full - scale reviews each of those works deserves. Although it falls outside the limited scope of this article, we must also at least mention the recent appearance of Prof. Su'ad al-Hakim's *al-Mu'jam al-Sufi al-Hikma fi Hudud al-Kalima* (Beirut: Dandala publishers, 1981), which is truly a milestone in the study of Ibn 'Arabi - certainly the greatest achievement since Osman Yahia's bio - bibliography (n. 3 below) - and will be an indispensable tool for every serious student and translator of the Shaykh from now on. This monumental work (1311 pp.) provides (in addition to the Koranic and lexical background) definitions and citations, drawn from the *Futûhât* and 77 other works by Ibn 'Arabi, illustrating some 706 of his key technical terms. (The actual number of terms discussed, given the additional cross - references, synonyms, and related roots, is in the thousands.)

² It is a significant and interesting fact (especially for non-Islamicist readers of this Journal) that available Western - language studies of Ibn 'Arabi based on a comparison with cognate traditions of Hindu, Neoplatonic, Christian, Buddhist, and even Taoist mystical thought are perhaps more numerous and more accessible than works presenting him primarily in the context of his own Islamic traditions and sources.

with some basic background for approaching these translations.

Due to the great number and diversity of the works to be covered, this article has been divided into parts. Part I is devoted to the translations of Ibn 'Arabi's own writings, preceded by a brief introduction to the complexities facing all students and interpreters of the Shaykh. Part II, to appear in two future issues, will focus on the historical trends and influences illustrated by the recent translations of works by Ibn 'Arabi's later followers, commentators, and critics (as well as certain "apocrypha" widely attributed to him). However, as we shall see, most of those historical tendencies in interpretation are already reflected in the approaches of contemporary scholars.

PART I

Students of Ibn 'Arabi, whether specialists or beginners, face four daunting obstacles to an integrated and comprehensive appreciation of his work: (1) the sheer volume and variety of his writings, possibly unparalleled in Islamic civilization;³ (2) the extreme diversity of symbols, allusions, rhetorical forms, and subjects which are brought together, often in radically new contexts, in his works; (3) his distinctive personal "inspired" and (most often) non-linear writing style, with its complex parallels to the Koran itself; and (4) his presumption, in most of his works (including all the most famous ones), of a specialized audience with a high degree of spiritual development and immersion in the practice (and vocabulary) of the Sufi path. These difficulties, which readers will find amply illustrated in the translations mentioned below, have often given rise to impressions (whether among Ibn 'Arabi's historical critics or in modern secondary literature) reminiscent of Rumi's fable of the blind men and the elephant.⁴ To transcend these initial obstacles and discover the unifying vision and intention in Ibn 'Arabi's works requires extraordinary efforts and abilities on the part of both the reader and the translator; for the translator - if he is seriously trying to communicate with the non-specialist - must also act as commentator and guide through this labyrinth of symbols.

One traditional response to these problems was to focus on a single "representative" text and interpretive perspective, most often the philosophical, conceptual analysis of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusûs al-Hikam* ("Bezels of Wisdom"). This approach, initiated by Ibn 'Arabi's son-in-law and close disciple Sadr al-Din al-Qonawi and carried out in a line of dozens of extensive commentaries down to the present day,⁵ is now readily accessible in English through the superb study by Toshihiko Izutsu and a complete translation of the *Fusûs* by R. W. J. Austin.⁶ These two works,

³ The standard bibliographical reference work, Osman Yahia's two-volume *Histoire et Classification de l'Oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi* (Damascus: Institut Francais de Damas, 1964), mentions some 846 titles; even if a number of these are apocryphal, excerpts from larger works, or duplicate titles, Ibn 'Arabi's own personal lists of his writings (the *Fihris* and *Ijaza* discussed by Yahia), composed for disciples late in his life, each contain nearly 250 works. The sheer number of these writings should not obscure the comprehensive and authoritative nature of Ibn 'Arabi's *al-Futûhâh at al-Makkiya* ("The Meccan Inspirations") which was composed and added to throughout the last 30 years of his life, and which covers (the full range of subjects and disciplines treated in his many other works.

⁴ One should also not minimize the extent to which these difficulties reflect certain rhetorical features of Ibn 'Arabi's works that may have been consciously intended either to dissuade unqualified readers or - more, positively - to induce a state of *hayra* ("bewilderment") leading to the transcendence of established mental categories and judgments, as with the *kocn*-like *shatahat* ("ecstatic paradoxes") favored by certain famous Sufis. In any case, the bizarre epithets one sometimes finds applied to Ibn 'Arabi, whether in Islamic or modern Western sources - e.g., "incoherent," "pantheist," "heretic," "monist," "madman," etc. - are understandable less as reasoned judgments about the whole of his work than as reactions to the difficult challenge of unifying and integrating such diverse and challenging materials. One of the great advantages of these new translations is that readers can at last begin to form their own judgments on the basis of a more representative sample of his writings.

⁵ This process and references to Qonawi, Kashani, and other important figures will be discussed in Part II. See in particular, in O. Yahia, op. cit., the list of 120 commentaries on the *Fusûs* (1, pp.241-56) and the list of some 64 critics and defenders of the *Fusûs* (1, 114-35); neither listing is to be taken as exhaustive of the available sources in this regard.

⁶ Tr. R. W. J. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); another complete English translation, *The Seals of Wisdom*, tr. A. 'Abd al-Rahman at-Tarjumana (Norwich, UK: Diwan Press, 1980), is somewhat more readable, but unfortunately inaccurate in many places. Both translations should be supplemented, where possible, by the partial translation of T. Burckhardt (English tr. from the French by A. Culme-Seymour), *The Wisdom of the*

because of their comprehensiveness, maturity and faithful reflection of a long tradition of commentary, provide an ideal starting point for the study of Ibn 'Arabi. However, relying solely on the *Fusûs* - or more specifically, on the scholastic tradition of commentary focusing primarily on the systematic metaphysical underpinnings of Ibn 'Arabi's thought - ultimately gives a one-sided and highly misleading image of the Shaykh's writings, his historical influence, and his own character and personality.

Two other aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's work are at least as essential to an adequate, integrated understanding of his writings (including the *Fusûs*): they are his concern with the practice and methods of Sufism, his lifelong activity as teacher and spiritual guide, from Andalusia to Anatolia; and his consistent focus on the Koran and teaching of the Prophet Muhammad as the source and context of all his work. These two interrelated aspects, which underlie Ibn 'Arabi's conception of his own unique role as the "Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood" (*khatm al-walaya al-muhammadiya*) and help account for his subsequent veneration as the "Greatest Master" among a wide range of Islamic schools and spiritual paths, may well have been taken for granted in the traditional Islamic teaching context (including the commentators of the *Fusûs*); but their centrality - which is most marked in the *Futûhât* - is not at all reflected in the available English sources.⁷

The point is not a minor one. Many of the standard criticisms and misunderstandings of Ibn 'Arabi's work (e.g., "incoherence," "repetition," "lack of focus" or "order," "contradiction," "extravagance," etc.) arise from misconceptions of his intention as "applying" a pre-conceived doctrine or interpretation to traditional materials, disciplines, etc.⁸ For the unifying intentions and actual rhetorical functions of his writings only become evident when they are viewed in their original perspective of practice and realization; the same is true if one is to appreciate the depths of his treatment of the Koran, *hadith*, and Islamic rites and practices. Since the actual integration of these interpretive aspects of "theory" and practice only becomes apparent through extensive reading and familiarity with Ibn 'Arabi's writings (especially the *Futûhât*) and their cultural context, one of the most important contributions of the new translations discussed below is the

Prophets (Aldsworth, UK: Beshara Publications, 1975), which contains more of the commentary and reference to the underlying Arabic that is often needed to follow the details of Ibn 'Arabi's arguments. However, the Burckhardt translation includes only 9 full chapters (out of 27) and does not have the very important Introduction to the *Fusûs*. The recent publication of a new, revised edition of Toshihiko Izutsu's *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, (University of California Press, 1984) [title slightly different than the original two-volume edition (Tokyo: Keio Institute, 1967)], should help make more accessible this classic study of Ibn 'Arabi's "philosophic" thought. (For those unfamiliar with this work, it should be stressed that Part I of the book is an entirely independent study of the *Fusûs*, relying especially on the famous commentary of 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani (see Pt. III), separate from the relatively shorter Taoist and comparative sections; the section on Ibn 'Arabi is not only clear and reliable, but also contains helpful translations of perhaps 15 - 20% of the *Fusûs*.)

⁷ This is in no way intended as a criticism of the modern authors in question, who most often are the most conscious of the limitations of their particular studies, in view of their direct contact with Ibn 'Arabi's writings. Unfortunately, most readers - including many authors of secondary literature and translators from Western languages back into Arabic - lacking adequate firsthand acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's actual writings have naturally tended to take the limited perspectives, interests, and methods of presentation found in such studies to be representative of the Shaykh's work as a whole. The resulting distortions have been especially remarkable where modern Muslim writers have derived their image of Ibn 'Arabi from accounts and selections intended to "introduce" him to a non-Islamicist audience (see n. 21).

⁸ Unfortunately, there is still no introductory study adequately presenting the essential "rhetorical" aspect of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, i.e., the way he unites many methods, styles, and traditional subjects in view of certain recurrent spiritual intentions - a lack that is not too surprising, given the cultural background, profound knowledge of Arabic, and insight that task would require. However, the best illustration of the needed sensitivity to that crucial dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's writing, usually phrased in terms of comments on "Sufism" in general, is to be found in the various collections of essays by F. Schuon on Islamic subjects; see, among others, *Le Soufisme. Voile et Quintessence* (Paris: Dervy - Livres, 1980) and *Approches du Phénomène Religieux* (Paris: Le Courrier du Livre, 1984). However, those reflections generally presuppose a great familiarity with both the writings of Ibn 'Arabi and the broader Sufi traditions of which they are a part.

way they bring out more forcefully these essential and too often neglected aspects of his work.

The translations are mentioned here roughly in order of their accessibility and importance (in terms of representativeness and scope of issues treated) for non-specialists approaching Ibn 'Arabi's writings, other than the *Fusûs al-Hikam*, for the first time. In addition, readers familiar with the standards and procedures of American or German scholarly publishing should be cautioned that most of these books are marked by a relative lack of indexes, bibliography, adequate proofreading, and scholarly peer review, features which - whether due to considerations of economy or tradition - are not limited to this particular area of French publishing. Hopefully, a growing awareness of the obstacles this poses for readers unfamiliar with the original Arabic will encourage greater attention to these matters in the future.⁹ For those interested in consulting the Arabic originals, each translation has been identified by its number in O. Yahia's "répertoire général," the standard bibliographical reference for Ibn 'Arabi.¹⁰

I. The new translation of M. Asin Palacios' classic study, *L'Islam christianisé: Étude sur le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi de Murcie* [Tr. B. Dubant. Pp.379. Paris: Guy Tredaniel / Editions de la Maisnie. 1982.], despite the age of the original (1931) and the evident limitations of the approach suggested by its title, still remains the best available introduction to Ibn 'Arabi's own life and spiritual practice, and to those crucial practical and experiential aspects of his work which were shared with earlier Sufism (and ultimately with mystics of many religious traditions). As such, it provides an indispensable complement to the metaphysical, "theoretical" aspect emphasized in the *Fusûs al-Hikam* and the studies of Izutsu and most other available sources in English. The fruit of decades of study and reflection on Ibn 'Arabi's work¹¹ (and the often unavowed inspiration of many subsequent studies), Asin's work contains almost as many pages of translation and as wide a range of topics as all the other books reviewed below taken together. The volume is divided into what can be regarded as three distinct books: (a) a detailed biography of Ibn 'Arabi,

⁹ Due to the relative abundance of translated material (at least compared with most areas of Islamic studies), writers on Ibn 'Arabi hopefully will soon begin to give increasing thought to the ongoing, cumulative nature of their work and to their responsibilities to a wider interested public. One sign of this interest (in addition to the sheer volume of recent writing) is the recent organization of a "Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society" in Oxford, England, and their publication (since 1982) of a biannual *Journal*, which may serve as one means of communication and coordination in this field. In any case, readers attempting to compare two or more translations will quickly recognize the need for full indexes of Koran and *hadith* (including important allusions as well as direct citations) and of technical terminology (keyed to the underlying Arabic expressions, given the inevitable variations in choice of equivalents by many translators). Likewise, given the practical impossibility of reading all relevant works on Ibn 'Arabi, it is important that translations (and especially notes and commentary) reflect the input of other qualified scholars in the field - something that was clearly not the case with several of the works reviewed here.

¹⁰ See n. 3 above. Readers unfamiliar with Prof. Yahia's work should be warned that many of Ibn 'Arabi's writings were known under multiple titles, even in his own lifetime, and that the titles frequently are only vaguely or symbolically related to the primary subjects of the works in question. This helps explain why translators - adding to the confusion - have frequently chosen to use their own, more representative titles. As a result, Dr. Yahia's description of the contents of works he was not able to examine directly, where based on indications in the titles, are not always completely accurate. In addition, the work is by no means complete in its citation of earlier translations; a corrected and updated list, by M. Notcutt, is given in the above mentioned *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, III (1984), and should be supplemented in forthcoming issues.

For translations from the *Futûhât* (O.Y., No.135), given the vast extent of that work, we have cited the chapter number (same in all editions) and the volume and pages according to the 1329 Cairo edition, frequently reprinted in Beirut (Dar Sadir) and elsewhere, and followed in Prof. al-Hakim's lexicon of Ibn 'Arab's technical vocabulary (n. 1 above). (Osman Yahia's new, scientific edition of the *Futûhât*, with extensive and invaluable indexes, has not yet reached the end of Volume I of the older editions, and was therefore not used for any of the translations reviewed here.)

¹¹ We may mention in particular the (abridged) English translation of his *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, tr. H. Sutherland, (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968 - reprint of the 1926 first edition), which retains its usefulness as the best available study of Ibn 'Arabi's eschatology and its sources in Islamic tradition, even if it is now outdated as far as the question of influences on Dante is concerned.

based on his own autobiographical remarks throughout the *Futûhât* (pp.23 - 90); (b) an anthology of representative excerpts, focusing on the Shaykh's spiritual method and experience, from a number of key works (pp. 209 - 378); and (c) a comparative study of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual method and "psychology," to a great extent typical of Sufism more generally, which must be approached with caution (pp. 91 - 208).

The biographical section, while by no means exhausting the references available in the *Futûhât* (and other works),¹² does give an indispensable self-portrait of the Shaykh and his dramatic personality - a portrait that not only offers a vivid sense of Ibn 'Arabi as a "practicing" Sufi, but also may suggest some of the underlying reasons for the ongoing hostility and suspicion his works encountered (both during and after his lifetime) among certain groups of more sober-minded theologians, lawyers, and philosophers.¹³ This portrait of Ibn 'Arabi and his Sufi milieu is perfectly complemented by the descriptions of his own masters and companions in the biographical sections of his *Ruh al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fakhira*, readily available in Austin's translation.¹⁴ In addition, Asin's quotations (pp. 79 - 85) of some of Ibn 'Arabi's own descriptions of his distinctive, "inspired" method of composition in virtually all of his works, and of the way the *Fusus* and *Futûhât* were meant to be read, should be required reading for anyone who sets out to study those writings.¹⁵

Probably the most valuable aspect of the work are Asin's translations from six different treatises by Ibn 'Arabi (plus another work now attributed to a later Turkish author) focusing on the Shaykh's spiritual advice and his own discussions - often illuminated by accounts of his personal experience - of stages and conditions of the Sufi path. These selections, although systematically leaving out the more difficult metaphysical and cosmological passages, are representative of a central and still virtually unstudied dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's work that is elaborated, for example, in hundreds of pages of the *Futûhât*. Three of the selections are concerned primarily with what may be broadly called the *adab* aspect of Sufism, "rules" or advice concerning spiritual practice and method. The treatise on "The Essence of What is Indispensable for the Novice" (O.Y., No 352) has since become available in a complete English translation;¹⁶ in clear and straight - forward terms, it gives an excellent idea of what Ibn 'Arabi would have presupposed as the very minimal conditions for most readers of his works. The "Firm Rule Concerning the Conditions Necessary for the People of God's Path" (*K al-Amr al-Muhkam*, O.Y. 28) is a considerably more advanced work, including fascinating advice to spiritual guides on the types of language and teaching they should offer to different audiences and types of students - remarks which could be usefully applied to the interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's own writings. The brief passages from the *K. al-Tadbirat al-ilahiya* (O.Y. 716), while

¹² It should be noted that Asin's references are to the older, Bulaq lithographed edition of the *Futûhât*, also in four volumes, but with entirely different pagination from the edition most often cited in more modern works on Ibn 'Arabi (Cairo, 1329: cf. n. 10 above). Islamicists should be able to decipher the transliteration of references, proper names, etc., which - since the translator clearly was unfamiliar with the underlying Arabic - has sometimes taken some peculiar turns in the passage from Spanish to French (e.g., al-Mariq alMohadam for al-Malik al-Mu'azzam).

The influence of Asin Palacios' biographical selections in this work (and the pervasiveness of the phenomena alluded to in n. 7 above) is illustrated by the frequency with which its partial Arabic translation by 'A. Badawi (*Ibn 'Arabi: Hayatuhu wa Madhhabuhu*, Cairo, 1965) is now cited in contemporary Arabic discussions of Ibn 'Arabi instead of references to the corresponding passages from the *Futûhât* itself.

¹³ See Part II for further references to this problem. These historical phenomena are otherwise almost impossible to comprehend if one approaches the problem from a "doctrinal," purely conceptual study of his writings.

¹⁴ *Sufis of Andalusia*, tr. R. W. J. Austin, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971). The book has also been translated into French, by G. Leconte, *Les Soufis d'Andalousie*, (Paris: Sindbad / Editions Orientales, 1979), but without the indexes and helpful bibliography provided in the original English version. Although Asin does not usually quote from the *Ruh al-Quds*, he does give frequent references to the corresponding biographical entries, which can be easily matched with Austin's translation.

¹⁵ Given the diversity and distinctiveness of Ibn 'Arabi's style of writing, even in comparison with other forms of Sufi literature, a comprehensive study of his methods of writing and rhetorical techniques, in the larger context of his spiritual method - based on the many indications scattered through the *Futûhât* is surely one of the great needs in this field. (See also n. 8 above.)

¹⁶ "Instructions to a Postulant," tr. Arthur Jeffery, pp.640 - 55 in his *A Reader on Islam*, (London, 1962).

not really representative of that major work as a whole,¹⁷ include brief but pointed remarks, for both novices and more advanced seekers, that should be extremely interesting to students of the practical and socio - historical side of Sufism. Such students will find that frequently Ibn 'Arabi's suggestions - e.g., on questions of sama' or the inadvisability of frequent traveling, etc. - are often contrary either to popularly accepted images of Sufism or to common Sufi practice in other regions and periods of the Islamic world.

The other three selections are primarily concerned with the phenomenology and (in the broadest possible sense) "psychology" of the spiritual path, subjects which in Ibn 'Arabi's writings - unlike some of the earlier, "classical" Sufi literature in this area - are usually closely integrated with his mystical theology, metaphysics, etc. The briefest treatise, the *R. al-Anwar* (O.Y. 33), while explicitly concerned with the phenomena experienced during *khalwa*, or spiritual retreat, is also a concise survey of some key stages of the spiritual path, and has often been commented on in that context.¹⁸ Ibn 'Arabi's much longer *Mawaqif al-Nujum* (O.Y. 443), summarized and partially translated here, covers an extraordinary range of spiritual phenomena and insights in a relatively accessible form,¹⁹ and was even more widely read and studied by later Sufis. The culminating selection (pp. 337 - 78) is made up of long passages from chapter 78 of the *Futûhât*, on divine and human love; his subtle analysis of that theme - although its overall role is by no means as predominant in Ibn 'Arabi's work as with the famous Sufi poets, for example - is perhaps unsurpassed in Islamic mystical literature.²⁰

The central, analytical section of Asin's book is undoubtedly the most dated and problematic, given his avowed intention of "explaining" Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual method by reference to Christian mystical precursors. However, it is not too difficult for an attentive reader to transform that historicist perspective into a more appropriate comparative one, thereby bringing out the universality of the underlying phenomena. And for more specialized readers with access to the Arabic texts frequently cited, Asin's detailed references (mainly to works other than the *Futûhât*) represent the fruits of years of research that would be difficult to duplicate. More dangerous than

¹⁷ See the edition, and especially the long German introduction (pp. 1 - 162), of H. S. Nyberg's *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabi*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1919), which gives a detailed analysis of some of the metaphysical concepts of this and related early works. It would appear that the relative accessibility of Nyberg's study of Ibn 'Arabi's "theosophical system" (pp. 29 - 160) - an account which gives no inkling, e.g., of the dimensions represented by Asin's selections from the *Tadbirat* - helps explain the predominance of this aspect in subsequent Western secondary literature and popular conceptions of the Shaykh (See n. 7 above).

¹⁸ This work has also recently been translated into English, under the descriptive title *Journey to the Lord of Power*, tr. R. T. Harris, (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1981), along with important selections from the commentary by 'Abd al-Karim Jili (to be discussed in Part II). O. Yahia (I, p.162) mentions seven alternative titles and, together with Brockelmann, almost 50 manuscripts. The full translation of the standard title would be "The Lights Concerning the Mysteries (or Secrets) Bestowed on One Who is in Retreat (*khalwa*).". See also the translation and extensive commentary on this work - drawing especially on Jili's commentary and corresponding passages from the *Futûhât* (chapters 167 and 367) - in Michel Chodkiewicz' *Le Sceau des saints: Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn 'Arabi*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), pp.181 - 221. [This major new study of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of prophecy and sainthood, based on a thorough study of the *Futûhât* and many other Writings, appeared too recently to be included in the body of this article.]

¹⁹ The subject of this work, which has little to do with astrology of any sort, is better indicated by the alternative title (O. Yahia, II, p.375) *K. Sirr al-Asrar wa muntaha 'ilm al-abrar...*; according to Yahia, it was also commented on by 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani (also discussed in Part II).

²⁰ Long quotations from the same chapter (78) are also available in the English translation (by R. Mannheim) of H. Corbin's *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Bollingen Series XCI, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), especially in the notes to the chapter on the "dialectic of love." Asin's selections - roughly 10 - 15% of the original chapter (= *Futûhât*, II, pp. 320 - 62), although not indicated as such in this translation - leave out the complex metaphysical-theological discussions that form the greater body of the chapter; the selection makes for easier reading, but is not wholly representative as a result.

The four opening pages (pp. 333 - 36) are taken from unidentified sections of the *Futûhât*, dealing with the important difference between the "Sufis" and the "Malamiya" (or malamiya, the foremost of whom being the Prophet Muhammad), in Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive usage of that term: this subject and related spiritual "ranks" and functions are discussed in detail in chapter 73 (beginning of Vol. 11) of the *Futûhât*.

the explicit historicist perspective, however, is the repeated use of alien and inappropriate interpretive categories - e.g., "pantheist," "monist," "theology," "heterodox / orthodox," etc. - which, although understandable in terms of Asin's intended audience, cannot but mislead those lacking a firsthand acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's works. Surely nothing has done more to prevent serious study and understanding of Ibn 'Arabi than the virtually universal repetition of such formulae in modern secondary literature by authors who (unlike Asin) have had no inkling of their appropriateness and limitations.²¹ Finally, readers must be cautioned that the author here - as in his *Islam and the Divine Comedy* - has offered only the evidence that illustrates his thesis; as a result, not surprisingly, one comes away with little sense of the overwhelming role of Koran and *hadith* in all of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, in his own self - image (as the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood"), or in his later influence throughout the Islamic world. Fortunately, however, the translations discussed below offer a much more balanced impression of that aspect of his work.

II. Despite its brevity, this translation of Ibn 'Arabi's *K al-Fana' fi al-Mushahada* (O.Y. 125), *Le Livre de l'Extinction dans la Contemplation* [Tr. Michel Valsan. Pp.57 (translation pp. 25 - 50). Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre. 1984.] offers a remarkable introduction to some of the central and recurrent concerns of all his writing.²² Above all, Ibn 'Arabi explicitly stresses throughout this treatise - what is often only implicitly elsewhere - the decisive importance of the appropriate spiritual realization (*tahqiq*) for a true awareness of each of the classical Sufi topics he discusses: the consciousness of divine Unicity (*ahadiya*) and the illusions of "unification" (*ittihad*); the necessity of carefully crafting one's speech and action when discussing the realities of spiritual "unveiling" (*kashf*) in the midst of those who are unaware of them;²³ the functions of *himma* ("inner intention") and especially its highest spiritual degrees, culminating in the pure devotion (*ikhlas*) of the *muhaqqiqun*; the differences between the revealed Religion (*din*) of the Prophet (and earlier prophets) and the diverse teachings instituted by non-prophetic sages (the *hukama'*);²⁴ and the contrast between the Sufi and both literalist and rationalist understandings of the realities of Faith (*iman*), epitomized in the famous *hadith* on "*Ihsan*" ("Worship God as though you saw him...")

The density of Ibn 'Arabi's allusions in this text and the concision of his treatment of subjects developed at great length elsewhere (especially in the *Futûhât*) offer a difficult challenge to any commentator, so that the late translator's annotation in this instance is something of a model in

²¹ The most glaring instance, almost inescapable in secondary literature referring to Ibn 'Arabi, is the formula "*wahdat al-wujud*" (roughly translatable as the "transcendent Unity of Being") - a phrase we have not located anywhere in Ibn 'Arabi's own writings (but see the remarks on Balyani and the school of Ibn Sab'in in Part II). Such formulae may have a certain usefulness as a sort of "shorthand" when used by specialists well acquainted with their intended references (and intrinsic limitations), but their use for a wider audience inevitably ends up conveying something quite different from what was originally intended - a difficulty that is especially compounded in the case of Muslim (or more secular) readers entirely unaware of the complex theological issues and personal commitments that underly the use of these and other theological categories and judgments in this section of Asin's work (or, to take an even more influential case, in the writings of Massignon). The most effective antidote seems to be extended contact with the Shaykh's actual writings themselves.

²² The concision and clarity of this work, which recommend it for teaching and oral exposition, may also explain its place at the very beginning of the widely reprinted Hyderabad (1948) edition of the *Rasa'il Ibn al-'Arabi*, pp 2 - 9. A new English translation, with more complete commentary, would be a welcome service for students approaching this field.

²³ The dimension of "esotericism" in Ibn 'Arabi's writings - underlying such crucial problems as the interpretation of his cosmological symbolism, his understanding of Islamic tradition, the relation of his different writings and their intended audiences, etc. - is still virtually untouched in the available scholarly discussions of his work (see notes 8 and 15 above).

²⁴ The contrast between the relative effectiveness and limitations of '*aql*' (unaided "reason," in this context) and *kashf* ("illumination" or spiritual "discovery" based on the deepening of scriptural indications and prescriptions) is one of the recurrent themes of the *Futûhât*, especially, hearing on virtually all the topics Ibn 'Arabi discusses - most notably, his understanding of spiritual practice or method, and the central role of the interiorisation of the *shar'*, the revealed Path of the Prophet. The implications of these discussions, while impossible to summarize here, are certainly different from what one might gather simply from the analysis of the *Fusûs* and its philosophic commentaries taken by themselves.

its genre. Not only have most of the Koranic and *hadith* references been clearly identified and commented on,²⁵ but the Shaykh's technical terminology (usually with the Arabic terms given in parentheses) has been carefully explained wherever necessary, often with references demonstrating a profound acquaintance with the *Futûhât*. Above all, the commentary is clearly thought out and consistently directed toward the reader's understanding of the text itself; that sort of disciplined pedagogical unity and intelligence is a rare phenomenon not only in translations of Ibn 'Arabi, but in writing on Islamic mysticism in general.²⁶

According to the editor's note, this is only the first in a series of republications of the late Mr. Valsan's many translations from Ibn 'Arabi (including some eleven shorter chapters of the *Futûhât*, as well as many of the treatises included in the Hyderabad edition of the *Rasa'il*) which originally appeared in the journal *Études traditionnelles*,²⁷ and which together constitute perhaps the largest body of translations of Ibn 'Arabi (apart from the *Fusûs*) available in any Western language. While not devoid of mistakes and occasional disputable interpretations, these translations and their accompanying annotation and commentary are of a quality considerably above the average in this field, and their republication would be a most valuable contribution to all students of Ibn 'Arabi, and of Sufism and Islamic spirituality more generally.

III. La Niche des Lumières [Tr. Mumammad Valsan (Son of preceding translator). Pp. 156. Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre. 1983.), a translation of Ibn 'Arabi's personal collection of 101 *hadith qudsi* entitled *Mishkat al-Anwâr* (O.Y. 480 and 11),²⁸ is marked by a simplicity, directness, and accessibility that makes it not only an indispensable reference for students of Ibn 'Arabi, but also an excellent introduction to this fundamental and frequently misunderstood aspect of Islamic devotional and spiritual life. Its usefulness for students - given the deceptive "simplicity" of the Arabic of many *hadith* - is further enhanced by the addition of a facing, fully voweled Arabic text. The translator's brief but dense introduction (pp. 7-14) focuses on Ibn 'Arabi as a *muhaddith*, mentioning his teachers in that domain, his favorite sources, and a number of other personal collections of his (most now lost) referred to in his writings. However, this information, while important, does not even begin to convey the fundamental importance of

²⁵ One of the major difficulties with most available translations of Ibn 'Arabi (including those of the *Fusûs*, n. 6 above), is the inadequate discussion of allusions (as well as direct quotations) to the Koran and *hadith*, without which large parts of the texts are frequently incomprehensible or at least quite puzzling. Even simple page or verse references (without full, appropriate retractions and often elaborate contextual explanations) are often of little use to those 'without a serious knowledge of classical Arabic, ready access to the *hadith* collections, and a thorough acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's often technical use (building on earlier Sufi authors) of those traditional sources. This sort of apparatus - essential for most modern readers, including many Muslims - corresponds to a background and preparation Ibn 'Arabi took for granted among most of his intended audience; obviously the impression or rhetorical effect is radically different in the two cases. (See also notes 4, 8, and 15 above.)

²⁶ In this reprinted version, the editor has also added an index of Arabic technical terms (though not of their French equivalents), which is very useful in this case since the translator has given the underlying Arabic expression in parentheses in most places where a translation alone might be inadequate. Although this procedure does make for a cluttered and perhaps less immediately "readable" translation, it is probably essential for any more serious study of Ibn 'Arabi, especially by non-Arabists, given the lack of a directly equivalent technical vocabulary in non-Islamic languages. (The situation is no different than with translations of philosophic or mystical texts from Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, etc.) The need for common reference to the Arabic is compounded when, as is now the case, students are faced with versions of Ibn 'Arabi's works by a dozen or more translators.

²⁷ A full bibliography of those translations is given in a recent collection entitled *L'Islam et la Fonction de René Guénon*, (Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre, 1984), pp. 194 - 96; the bibliography also lists the same author's many translations of chapters from al-Kashani's commentary on the Koran, often (falsely) attributed to Ibn 'Arabi (see Part II). The same collection also includes the author's translations of part of the Foreword to the *Futûhât* (pp. 180 - 91) and of chapter 20, on the "knowledge of Jesus" (pp. 73 - 82); unfortunately, the apparatus in these latter two cases is more oriented to the author's Guénonian preoccupations, amply illustrated in the remaining articles of this collection.

²⁸ The full title - in this version; O. Yahia (II, 390) mentions eight other titles from other manuscripts - is "The Niche of Lights Concerning the Reports (akhbar) Related From God." (This book, incidentally; is quite distinct from a famous and frequently translated Sufi work by al-Ghazali whose title begins with the same words.)

hadith as sources for all of the Shaykh's work. Those who study attentively even these few examples, though, will soon recognize to what a great extent works such as the *Fusûs* and *Futûhât* are in fact woven out of extensive reflection and commentary on these and other *hadith*, which function much like musical leitmotifs.²⁹ For the most part the ethical and spiritual intentions of these *hadith* (which frequently recall portions of the Gospels) are readily apparent, and eschatological themes are particularly predominant.³⁰

As Ibn 'Arabi explains in his introduction (p.16), this collection consists of three parts (of 40, 40, and 24 *hadith*, respectively, the first group with their full *isnad* going back to the Prophet (who relates them from God or via Gabriel), while the second *arba'un* are related directly from God. (The translator has added an interesting appendix, pp. 145-51, from an 18th - century Maghrebi Sufi writer, concerning the distinctions which were necessarily drawn between these widely recognized "divine sayings" and the words of the Koran itself.) It may be pointed out, given the widespread prejudices to the contrary (at least in modern secondary literature), that the great majority of the *hadith* collected here, including all of those in the first part, are taken from the standard canonical recensions, and were not "invented" by Sufi tradition. This point is further emphasized and elaborately demonstrated in W. A. Graham's *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*,³¹ a work (apparently unknown to Mr. Valsan) which took Ibn 'Arabi's collection as one of its points of departure, and which contains English translations of those *hadith* from the *Mishkat* that are also included in the canonical collections.

IV. Stephane Ruspoli's translation of chapter 167 of the *Futûhât*, *L'alchimie du bonheur parfait* [Tr. S. Ruspoli. Pp.151. Paris: Berg International (collection "L'île verte"). 1981.] is certainly the most ambitious and pioneering effort among the studies reviewed here, since it is the first complete Western translation³² of a long chapter of the *Futûhât* (14 pages of Arabic text, or

²⁹ See the extensive indexes of *hadith* references in each volume of O. Yahia's new, ongoing edition of *al-Futûhât al-Makkiya*, and the selective discussion of 44 of the most important of these (not included in the *Mishkat al-Anwar*) at the end of S. al-Hakim's *al-Mu'jam al-Sufi* (n. 2 above), pp.1257 - 69. The importance of this element in Ibn 'Arabi's writings underlies and exemplifies his claim to be the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood" (i.e., among other things, the exemplary interpreter of the inner meaning of the words and teachings of the Prophet), and helps to explain - far more than his difficult metaphysical doctrines - the extent of his widespread veneration in the Islamic world as the "greatest Shaykh." Unfortunately, most available studies of Islam (and of *hadith* in particular) fail to convey the central importance of selected *hadith* (many of which are often literally inseparable from the Koran in popular consciousness) in the religious experience of people from all Islamic regions, Sects, and periods. This spiritual dimension, quite distinct from the "professional" use of *hadith* in legal and theological contexts that has been the object of much modern historical research, is the main focus of Ibn 'Arabi's interest in and pedagogical use of *hadith*.

³⁰ Especially interesting in that regard is the *hadith al-mawaqif* (the "stations" of the Resurrection), here given in several parts in the last two sections, which makes up much of chapters 64 - 65 of the *Futûhât*, on the stages of the Resurrection and the states of the blessed in Paradise.

Unfortunately, the lack of any index - although it would admittedly have been a great deal of work - somewhat limits the usefulness of this translation as a reference (with regard to other writings of Ibn 'Arabi) for those who are not able to memorize its contents.

³¹ The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1977. Prof. Graham's work is by no means exhaustive of the *hadith qudsi* included in the canonical collections; a recent collective survey of the "Six Books," *al-Ahadith al-Qudsiya*, (Cairo: Wizarat al-Awqaf. . . , 1400/1980), cites in full some 400 examples, including full references to the original sources. Many of these *hadith qudsi*, not included in the *Mishkat al-Anwar*, are likewise repeatedly cited and interpreted in Ibn 'Arabi's works (e.g., the "*suq al-janna*," pp. 470ff. in the above - mentioned survey, which is at the heart of his eschatological discussions in the *Futûhât*).

³² The problems posed by complete translations of extensive sections from the *Futûhât* (as opposed to translating only short, self - contained chapters or selected passages, as in Asin Palacios' book above) are basically twofold: (1) what to do with phrases one doesn't really understand, but whose "key" is probably given somewhere else in that massive work (which might take a decade to read and annotate in its entirety); and (2) what to do where, as is often the case, adequate explanation of a single allusion may require whole pages of commentary drawn from other chapters or works by Ibn 'Arabi? It is no doubt the presence of many substantial commentaries, substantially eliminating those two great obstacles, that helps explain the focus of academic interest on the *Fusûs al-Hikam*.

roughly 5% of the book) - one of its most complex and allusive passages, and one whose elucidation and understanding inevitably requires references to many other sections of that immense work. The narrative framework of the chapter is the quest for spiritual perfection undertaken by two friends, a "follower of Muhammad" (with all that implies for Ibn 'Arabi) and an ambitious "theoretician" (part *mutakallim*, part philosopher) who relies on his own theological cosmological reasonings.³³ The contrast of their very different paths and experiences, in the context of the traditional stages of the Prophet's spiritual ascension (*mi'raj*), enables Ibn 'Arabi to allude to many of his most essential spiritual insights and realizations while continually reminding the reader of their practical and personal presuppositions.

However, just as in Ibn 'Arabi's other works using the *Mi'raj* framework (especially the long chapter 367 of the *Futûhât*, recounting the Shaykh's own personal *mi'raj*, and the *K. al-Isra'*),³⁴ the variety of subjects and symbols brought into play in this chapter is so great that an adequate commentary - which the translator has promised for a future volume - would have to be many times longer than the actual translation. In the interim, this version does provide illuminating and essential notes at many points,³⁵ and readers acquainted with the *Fusus*, for example, will recognize discussions of many of the same questions of metaphysics and mystical theology. Moreover, the discussions of cosmology and principles of created being in the concluding sections also form an excellent complement to the equally condensed presentations of those matters in the works translated by D. Gril and M. Gloton discussed below. However, even allowing for the serious challenges posed by this chapter, the quality of the translation and commentary alike show evidence of a certain haste and carelessness that will limit its usefulness for the general reader, and may even give a misimpression of confusion or disorder that does not truly reflect the Arabic original.

V. The two studies dealt with in this section are likely to prove less accessible for those approaching Ibn 'Arabî for the first time. Both of them, in highly condensed and symbolic language, touch on limited aspects of a complex symbolic framework of cosmology, cosmogony, and metaphysical concepts (the *Insan Kamil*, "Muhammadan Reality", etc.) which - in its twofold interrelations with the traditional sources of the Koran and hadith, on the one hand, and their spiritual realization and verification on the other - underlies virtually all of Ibn 'Arabî's writing. Unfortunately, there is really no single work to which non-specialists 'An refer for "keys" (or even adequate clues) for fully deciphering these and many similar symbolic treatises of Ibn 'Arabi.³⁶ But even if these texts cannot really be "understood" in isolation,³⁷ they do offer

³³ This symbolic expression of a recurrent theme in the *Futûhât*, the contrast between the two paths of *kashf* and *'aql* and their relative efficacy (see also n. 24 above) raises a number of difficult problems for modern readers and interpreters, and perhaps calls into question the adequacy of some of the traditional approaches to the *Fusus*. At the very least, this attitude was not without its repercussions in the later attacks on Ibn 'Arabi's works and his Sufi defenders by certain theologians and philosophers (see Part II).

³⁴ Chapter 367 = *Futûhât* III, 340 - 54; *K. al-Isra'*... (O.Y., No.313) = *Rasa'il Ibn al-'Arabi* (Hyderabad, 1948), Pt. I, 13th treatise (pp.1 - 92). An extensive summary of the *hadith* and Koranic sources and symbolism used in these chapters, as well as a broad outline (without interpretation) of each of them, can be found in Asin Palacios' *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (full ref. at n. II above).

³⁵ The usefulness of Dr. Ruspoli's notes and the advance they represent can be measured against an earlier, partial translation of this same chapter by G. Anawati, "L'Alchimie du Bonheur, d'Ibn 'Arabi, pp. 353 - 86 in the *Revue de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales de Caire, Mélanges* 6 (Cairo. 1959 - 61).

³⁶ In Western languages, the best introduction is certainly the study of the *Fusûs al-Hikam* by T. Izutsu (see n. 6 above), to be supplemented by the German introduction to H S. Nyberg's *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn 'Arabi* (n. 17 above). The broadest and most useful reference, for those able to read Ibn 'Arabi in Arabic, is now no doubt the "Sufi lexicon" of S. al-Hakim (n I above), under the appropriate headings, see, e.g., the entry for *al-Insan al-kamil* (entry no. 66, pp. 158ff.) and its forty synonyms in Ibn 'Arabi's technical terminology for that key term alone.

³⁷ Nor can it be assumed that such brief symbolic writings were always meant to be "understood" in a systematic sense; depending on the case, one 'An hypothesize a number of aesthetic, pedagogical, or even socio - political explanations of certain of these puzzling treatises. It is worth noting, in this connection, that Ibn 'Arabi often praises the condition of *hayra*, of one's ego being "at a loss" - and thus more receptive to the spiritual Truth - in comparison with the (relatively) superficial and schematic Sort of understanding normally sought by the unenlightened *'aql*.

representative cases of important stylistic and rhetorical aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's work which we have not already encountered.

M. Gloton's translation of the *Shajarat al-Kawn* (O.Y. 660), *L'Arbre du Monde* [Tr. Maurice Gloton. Pp.230. Paris: Les Deux Océans. 1982.] previously translated into English by Arthur Jeffery,³⁸ is perhaps most noteworthy for its extensive commentary and additional references (the actual translation covering only pp.48 - 108). That explanatory material includes not only long passages from the Koran and hadith (e.g., those underlying the notion of the "Muhammadan Reality"), Jurjani's definitions of Sufi technical terms, and sections of the *Fusûs* not otherwise available in French, but also certain previously untranslated parts of the *Futûhât* - the most important being chapter 63, on the *barzakh* (both the intermediate, "imaginal" level of reality, and the eschatological state loosely resembling "purgatory").³⁹ Ibn 'Arabi's work itself is divided into three main parts:⁴⁰ (pp.49 - 62) a brief cosmological outline of the "Tree of Being" using primarily Koranic symbolism; (pp.63 - 92) a discussion of the levels and aspects of this cosmic whole (including its microcosmic correspondences) in terms of the "Muhammadan Reality"; (pp.93 - 106) a symbolic recounting, in this cosmic context, of the archetypal spiritual ascension of the Prophet, somewhat shorter than the version in the work translated by Dr. Ruspoli above. While the extensive references illuminate the many individual terms and symbols of the discussion, neither they nor the translator's introduction really provide the commentary that would be necessary to make sense of this work as a whole.

Prof. D. Gril's translation of the *R. al-itihad al-kawni* (O.Y. 319), *L'Arbre et les Quatre Oiseaux* [Tr. Denis Gril. Pp. 73. Paris: Les Deux Océans. 1984.] is as concise and exact as the preceding work is prolix; the poetry and symbolic prose of this text demand such acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi and careful attention to the Arabic that a translation in the full sense is virtually impossible.⁴¹ However, this study does serve to point out both the central importance of Arabic poetry and poetic expression in all of the Shaykh's writings⁴² and the terrible difficulties facing translators who would try to do justice to its meaning (not to mention the form). This is all the more important in that the most striking and controversial formulations of the Shaykh's thought - here, for example, his consistent use of the first person singular when discussing the different aspects of the "Perfect Man" - are frequently expressed in his poetry, although one is seldom quite sure how much weight should be given the rhetorical dimension of dramatic or poetic license. Perhaps more important, this work helps draw our attention to the many aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's character and expression which are profoundly and essentially "Arab" in a way that was often neglected already in his transmission to the Eastern Islamic world.⁴³

³⁸ "Ibn Al-'Arabi's *Shajarat al-Kawn*," *Studia Islamica*, X (1959), pp. 43 - 77 and XI (1960), pp. 113 - 60; recently reprinted in book form in Lahore, Pakistan (1980). The annotation in Jeffery's version is not as useful nor as complete as that in this new French translation, but the translation itself seems more readable, perhaps partly because it has not been so systematically subdivided.

³⁹ We must note the commendable provision of a detailed Index/glossary (covering both Arabic terms and their French equivalents here) and a helpful introductory bibliography. In general, while the wealth of references offered by Mr. Gloton may be redundant and possibly even annoying to scholars already having such background, it should surely be of service to students approaching this work for the first time.

⁴⁰ Our description here does not correspond exactly to the translator's own far more elaborate system of sections and subdivisions - a useful device which may have been carried too far in this case.

⁴¹ This study first appeared (in substantially the same form as reprinted here), along with a full scientific edition of the Arabic text, in the *Annales Islamologiques* XVII (1981), (Cairo, Institut Francais d'Archeologie Orientale), pp. 53ff.

⁴² In English, the best available illustration is the recently reprinted translation of Ibn 'Arabi's *The Tarjumân al-Ashwâq* by R.A. Nicholson, (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911; repr. London: Theosophical Publishing House, Ltd. 1978). Nicholson's book also includes an edition of the Arabic text (O.Y., No. 767) and a partial translation of Ibn 'Arabi's later mystical commentary on these poems, *K. al-Dhakhâ'ir wa al-A'lâq fi Sharh...*, (O.Y. No. 116). Unfortunately Ibn 'Arabi rarely provided such commentaries for the vast number of verses, for the most part more openly metaphysical and pedagogical in nature, which are scattered throughout the *Futûhât* and which a sort of ultimate challenge for the translator, given their depth of allusion and the multiple readings and interpretations they often contain.

⁴³ See Part II for the relative emphasis in the non-Arabic Islamic world on the *Fusûs al-Hikam* and the conceptual,

The subject of the treatise ("addressed to myself," Ibn 'Arabi says), the cosmic unity of divine Manifestation in the *Insan al-Kamil*, is aptly described by the long Arabic title, loosely translatable as "Epistle on the unification of manifest being at the level of immediate vision of the presence of the Tree of Man and the four spiritual birds," where the tree (as in *Shajarat al-Kawn*) symbolizes the "universal Man" and the four birds symbolize the four inseparable principal aspects of manifest existence - the Intellect, Universal Soul, universal Body, and "Dust" (*haba'*) or Prime Matter - which are discussed in dozens of the Shaykh's writings on cosmology and cosmogony. One point worth noting is Ibn 'Arabi's vigorous defense (pp. 69 - 70) of the equal and essential role of the principle of "universal Body" in the manifestation of the world, a key aspect of his theology / philosophy of *tajalliyat*⁴⁴ that brings out its dramatic contrast with the more "dualistic" schemas (of matter and spirit, etc.) adopted by other schools of Sufism and other religious and philosophic traditions - Prof. Gril's concise introduction (pp. 7-31) identifies these main "characters" and some of the standard sources for their interpretation (see n. 36 above), but - no doubt wisely - does not attempt a detailed commentary, which would require many volumes of this size.

VI. The two recent books by Mr. Charles-André Gilis, which can only be partially considered as translations of Ibn 'Arabi,⁴⁵ are curious contemporary illustrations of the perennial phenomena of "scholasticization," glosses, and supercommentaries that were often manifested in the reception of Ibn 'Arabi's work, especially in the non-Arabic Islamic world.⁴⁶ As is inevitable in such cases, the commentary tradition - rather than serving to re-create or make accessible the spiritual and intellectual insights that motivated Ibn 'Arabi's writing - easily takes on a life of its own, becoming a "doctrine" or intellectual object of study in its own right, accessible only to members of the particular school or sect in question. In this instance, excellent and thoughtful translations of important works of Ibn 'Arabi, and serious reflection concerning them, have been clothed in an elaborate supercommentary on the author's "two masters" (R. Guénon and M. Valsan) which unfortunately will tend to obscure Ibn 'Arabi rather than to illuminate him, for those who are either unfamiliar with those writers or who happen, to find the author's distinctive mélange of (among others) numerology, astrology, Hermeticism, Masonic ritual and Vedantic terminology less congenial.⁴⁷

If we have not simply passed over these two books in silence, it is because the underlying works of Ibn 'Arabi are of substantial value in their own right, are capably and seriously translated and, at least in the second case, would well repay the effort of study in abstraction from their exotic surroundings. *La Doctrine Initiatique du Pèlerinage à la Maison d'Allah* [Tr C. - A Gilis. Pp.331. Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre 1982.], based loosely on chapter 72 of the *Futûhât* ("On

philosophic understanding of the Shaykh's writings. In addition to the role of Arabic poetry and other rhetorical and aesthetic tendencies in Ibn 'Arabi's writings (see n. II above), one may also note his distinctive "etymological" form of Koranic interpretation (amply illustrated in the *Fusûs*) - thinking, or at least presenting his thought, through the association and analysis of verbal roots and derived forms - and his analogous emphasis on the importance of small details of the "literal," outward aspect of the *shari'a* and tradition to a degree which is perhaps more broadly typical of Arab forms of Sufism.

⁴⁴ T. Izutsu, op. cit. (n. 6 above), gives an especially clear account of this dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics. See also the important discussion of the basic differences between Ibn 'Arabi's outlook and the system of Ibn Sab'in and his followers, in M. Chodkiewicz' introduction and commentary of Balyani's *Éptire sur l'Unité Absolue* (often attributed to Ibn 'Arabi), (Paris: Les Deux Oceans, 1932); the significance of this point will be brought out in Part II.

⁴⁵ In contrast with the previous works, it is the translator / commentator's name - and not Ibn 'Arabi's - which figures prominently on the cover of these books.

⁴⁶ See Part II for details; if the phenomenon is universal with the heritage of all great original thinkers, it is still especially easy to comprehend in the case of Ibn 'Arabi, given the diversity and volume of his writings and the altogether exceptional variety of sources and traditions that are integrated in them.

⁴⁷ In all fairness, it must be noted that the author's commentaries in both volumes also include some contributions from two classic Islamic interpreters of the Shaykh's school who will be encountered in Part II, 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri, whose remarks are usually more obviously relevant to the texts of Ibn 'Arabi. However, the references to their works here are almost impossible to separate from their occultist surroundings.

the Hajj and Its Secrets")⁴⁸ - although it is virtually impossible here to separate the author's personal commentaries from any translations of Ibn 'Arabî, even with Arabic text in hand - should at least draw attention to the central position in the Shaykh's thought and practice of the prescriptions of Islamic law; his developments in that area are more profound and subtle, as well as more voluminous, than the better - known comparable passages in al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*.⁴⁹

Le Coran et la Fonction d'Hermès [Tr. C. - A. Gilis. Pp. 226. Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre. 1984.], despite its title (which has nothing directly to do with Ibn 'Arabi or the text in question), is in fact centered on a translation of chapter 198, section 9 (II, pp. 405 - 21) of the *Futûhât*, consisting of Ibn 'Arabî's interpretation of the thirty - six Koranic statements of *tawhid* (the Unity of God), corresponding to the *shahada* but each set forth in slightly different terms.⁵⁰ The fascinating way in which Ibn 'Arabi brings out unsuspected riches of insight and meaning in each of those Koranic verses, in conjunction simultaneously with the spiritual states and corresponding metaphysical realities they manifest and express, is a remarkable illustration of his extraordinary capacities of interpretation, as well as an excellent practical introduction to the central role of the divine Names and Attributes in his thought.

One cannot read this work through, challenging as that may be, without gaining at least some sense of the persuasiveness of Ibn 'Arabi's repeated claims that all his writings and inspirations are nothing more than the fruits of reflection on, or internalization of, the Koran and *hadith* (and not the application to them of an external schema of interpretation). Nor can one study any work of his for long without developing a transformed awareness of and sensitivity to the words and deeper dimensions of the Koran. It is just this sort of realization, that can only be reached through actual meditation on Ibn 'Arabi's writings - not from any account of that work, no matter how capable - that helps justify (and no doubt partly motivated) the years of devoted effort that are represented by all these new publications.⁵¹

⁴⁸ To give some idea of the abridgement involved (and at the same time of the detail of Ibn 'Arabi's interest in this subject and the depth of his interpretation), the lithographed Arabic text of almost 100 pages (I, pp.665 - 661) would be equivalent to some 1000 printed pages of a complete, annotated English translation.

⁴⁹ The most monumental and accessible illustration of this dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching is the sections in the *Futûhât* on the "Secrets of the Shari'a and the basic rituals of Islam (*salat, hajj, etc.*), vol. I, 322 - 763, equivalent to thousands of pages in English translation; there are also many shorter treatises by the Shaykh along similar lines, some of them discussed in Asin Palacios' work mentioned above.

An excellent introduction to this still largely neglected area of his thought is the article by M. Chodkiewicz, "Ibn 'Arabi, la lettre et la Loi," pp. 27 - 40 in the *Actes du Colloque "Mystique, Culture et Société"*, (Paris: Univ. de Paris - Sorbonne, 1984).

⁵⁰ Fortunately the translator's personal commentaries on this work are clearly separated from a complete translation of Ibn 'Arabi's own remarks, following each of the 36 sections. Mr. Gilis' comments, while still reflecting (as in his title) the same occultist concerns, are considerably more closely related to Ibn 'Arabi's writing than in the volume on the Hajj.

⁵¹ Certain translations of other books frequently attributed to Ibn 'Arabi! which one might expect to find here in Part I are instead dealt with in Part II. In particular, these include the *R. al-Ahadiya* of al-Balyani (see n. 44 above); "*La Profession de Foi*," tr. R. Deladrière; and works concerning the *Tafsir* of 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani.