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Theophany or "Pantheism"?: the Importance of Balyânî's *Risâlat al-Ahadîya*.

The impact of books has little to do with their size. The first Western translation of a work attributed to Ibn 'Arabi, T.H. Weir's "*Whoso Knoweth Himself...*" (1901), was no more than a brief pamphlet,¹ and Michel Chodkiewicz' study of that same text, now correctly identified as Awhad al-dîn Balyânî's *Épître sur l'Unicité Absolue* (Paris, 1982), is still a short book. Yet it would be difficult to exaggerate the actual and potential significance of his study for bringing about a more adequate understanding of the true dimensions and contexts of Islamic spirituality, among both Western readers and younger, post-"traditional" generations in the new Islamic nation-states. Together with Professor Chodkiewicz' subsequent works on Ibn 'Arabî, this work has already contributed to bringing about a much-needed clarification and rectification of earlier widespread misunderstandings of "Sufism," of the teachings of Ibn 'Arabî, and of the purportedly "monistic" or "pantheistic" character of his doctrines and their ongoing reflection in the many movements of later Islamic thought and spirituality which remain inseparable from the wide-ranging influences of the "greatest Master," *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*.

In order to appreciate the surprisingly far-reaching importance of M. Chodkiewicz' remarks on this brief treatise, we must first explain the wider significance of the early translations of this *Risâlat al-Ahadîya*--and especially of their repeated mis-attribution to "Ibn 'Arabi"--in first mirroring, and then eventually helping to shape, both popular and more scholarly Western conceptions of Islamic spirituality from their first appearance at least on into the 1970's. The detailed history of the formation of these distinctive modern Western notions of "Sufism" and "Islamic mysticism" remains to be written, but there is no doubt that those nascent cultural

¹Originally published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1901, pp. 809-825; now available in a separate paperback reprint under the above-mentioned title (Beshara Publications, 1988). The subsequent Italian and French translations (1907 and 1910) by 'Abd al-Hâdî (Ivan Agueli) are discussed in more detail at the beginning of M. Chodkiewicz' study.

stereotypes were already marked, even before the appearance of Weir's and 'Abd al-Hâdî's translations, by at least the following distinctive features:²

1. The assumption that these matters ("Sufism" or "Islamic mysticism," etc.) were essentially *intellectual, theoretical, or doctrinal teachings* that could be formulated and communicated, by literary or other means, without further reference to the practical dimension of spiritual "realization" (Ibn 'Arabî's *tahqîq*) and the host of very concrete questions, both individual and cultural, that are inevitably raised when one enters that dimension.
2. The assumption of a vaguely "pantheistic"--or at the very least, "immanentist"--focus on the locus and forms of awareness of the ultimate reality, usually seen (at least in the prevalent Anglo-Saxon conceptions)³ as reflecting a radically "individualistic," personalistic perspective explicitly divorced from any essential social and cultural ties with ritual, authority, tradition, practice and the like.
3. The assumption that the teaching or "wisdom" in question was essentially "universal"--or alternatively, vaguely "Eastern," "Oriental," "perennial," etc.--in such a way as to preclude any need for further reference to specific religious and cultural traditions, with their own concrete practical and intellectual demands.

While the *Risâlat al-Ahadîya* did not by itself create those basic pre-conceptions--and especially the wider cultural notions of "mysticism" within which the initial non-specialist images of Islamic spirituality in the West were almost inevitably embedded--, its long tenure as the only

²One has the initial impression that each of these stereotypes was more sharply developed in the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic evolution of these conceptions than in France--due both to the vagaries of radically differing colonial and missionary contacts, and to the equally differing receptivities of predominantly Protestant and Catholic intellectual settings--but the exploration of these significant differences, as well as the larger process of discovery-cum-creation of images of Islamic spirituality, must be reserved for another time.

³It is important to note that the great majority of the preceding English translations of Islamic spiritual texts, whether from Persian or Arabic (or Malay, Hindi, etc.), were guided by sources and traditions rooted in the Eastern Islamic world, especially South Asia, rather than the Ottoman/Arab realms and contacts long reflected in French Islamic scholarship.

completely translated and widely-available⁴ work attributed to Ibn 'Arabi in the West certainly helped to cement and support those stereotypes. Even a cursory reading of that text--or of Jâmî's stories about Balyânî himself, as translated at the end of this article--will quickly make clear how accurately these broad conceptions are mirrored in this work and what we know of its (true) author's own life and teachings.

The second essential backdrop to the wider influence of M. Chodkiewicz' study has to do with an even broader and much more dramatic historical phenomenon: i.e., the ironic way that these recently created and historically quite anomalous Western stereotypes of "Sufism" and "Islamic mysticism"--and of the often mythical role attributed to Ibn 'Arabî in both--gradually came to be re-inserted into the ongoing polemical struggles of several generations of would-be "reformers" and "revolutionaries" seeking to shape and direct new nation-states and social realities throughout the Islamic world.⁵ Whatever their ideological stance (traversing the whole spectrum from Marxist to Islamist!), those nationalist political and social reformers have almost everywhere tended to share a common distaste for the "corruption," "decadence," and other defects they typically associate with these same mythical stereotypes of "Islamic mysticism," "popular religion," and with the intellectual and cultural traditions and accomplishments of (at least) the preceding six centuries of Islamicate civilization--not coincidentally, the period during

⁴While Nyberg's subsequent editions and commentary (1919) had a noticeable influence on later scholars writing on Ibn 'Arabi, they did not reach a wider public; and Asin-Palacios' pioneering works long remained either untranslated into other European languages or known mainly to specialists in non-Islamic fields (Dante studies, medieval history, etc.). The increasing availability in more recent decades of translations (T. Burckhardt, 1955) and then detailed studies (most notably, by H. Corbin and T. Izutsu) focusing on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusûs al-Hikam* and its later Muslim philosophic commentaries did not in itself seriously call into question these same underlying pre-conceptions about Ibn 'Arabi and "Islamic mysticism."

⁵By discussing the anti-"monistic" polemics of Ibn Taymiyya and his earlier emulators in their actual historical contexts, throughout all of his writings on Ibn 'Arabî, Professor Chodkiewicz has helped to highlight the radically different nature and context of these modern polemics involving the name of Ibn 'Arabî, even when their language and themes are clearly drawn from earlier medieval discussions. Another of the particularly striking phases in this continually ironic process of cross-cultural "transmission" that M. Chodkiewicz has often highlighted in his notes to these studies is the remarkably far-reaching direct and indirect influence, throughout so many parts of the Islamic world, of the highly charged polemic images of Ibn 'Arabî and his "followers" (faithfully mirroring all the above-mentioned stereotypes) to be found throughout the writings of Louis Massignon.

which Ibn 'Arabî's actual influence became so widespread, at every level of religious teaching and expression, in Muslim cultures from Africa to China and Indonesia.⁶

Against this background, then, the essential contribution of Michel Chodkiewicz' work on Balyânî, as with each of his succeeding and increasingly detailed studies of Ibn 'Arabî himself, has been to undermine and radically "de-construct" these far-reaching mythologies that have come to be symbolically associated with the name of Ibn 'Arabî, in both East and West. He has done so, like an authentic *'âlim* in any culture, not by articulating some new, alternative mythology, but rather by conscientiously exploring and re-presenting the actual religious, cultural and historical contexts within which Ibn 'Arabî--and, in this case, Balyânî and the earlier Islamic figures who were his own inspiration, like Shushtarî and Ibn Sab'în--were actually writing and teaching. In the study of the *Risâlat al-Ahadîya*, in particular, Prof. Chodkiewicz began to develop three basic facets of that far-reaching effort of rectification and clarification which have been pursued in all his subsequent publications concerning the Shaykh.

The first of those facets, part of a much wider transformation in scholarship on Islamic subjects, has been to re-situate the "theoretical" writings and doctrines of figures such as Ibn 'Arabî (or Balyânî) within their original contexts, with all that implies for the relative weighting of religious, practical, literary, aesthetic and social dimensions that have typically been lost or forgotten when such texts came to be viewed only through a narrow philosophic, theological or political prism. The second key aspect of that scholarly effort, in some ways a subset of the first, has been to distinguish the actual teachings and writings of Ibn 'Arabî himself from the host of images and stereotypes with which his name has become associated--through the combined efforts of generations of "supporters" and detractors alike, in both Islamic and Western settings. One outstanding result of that effort, brilliantly illustrated in both of M. Chodkiewicz' subsequent books on Ibn 'Arabî, has been to restore appropriate emphasis to the absolutely central role of Islamic *scriptures* (Qur'an and hadith) and of spiritual *practice* throughout all of his writing and teaching, and specifically in his monumental *al-Futûhât al-Makkîya*.

⁶For the almost unimaginable extent of that ongoing historical influence, see the superb and densely allusive summary of the available research (by dozens of contemporary scholars) in M. Chodkiewicz' Introduction to *Un océan sans rivage: Ibn Arabi, le Livre et la Loi* (Paris, Seuil, 1992), now available in translation as *An Ocean Without Shore* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1993).

The third facet of this new approach, most strikingly illustrated already in this study of Balyânî, is that it has freed serious scholars and historians--too often distracted by the mythic dualisms of ideological polemics, past and present--to turn their attention to the *creativity* and *diversity* of Islamic religious and mystical *thought, practice* and *social expression* throughout the crucial formative period of the late 12th/6th to 14th/8th centuries. As we indicated at the beginning, this is potentially much more than a merely scholarly or academic contribution. Simply recognizing the very fact of this diversity and creativity, and bringing it to the attention of those obsessed by the polemics and ideological orthodoxies of our own time, can help to open doors that unfortunately are too often closed throughout much of the Islamic world today.

Indeed it may have been in this same spirit and with something of the same far-sighted intentions that the celebrated Persian poet and philosopher of Herat, 'Abd al-Rahmân Jâmî (d. 1492)--commentator on the *Fusûs al-Hikam* and devoted lifelong student of all of Ibn 'Arabî's work--mentioned Balyânî (d. 1287/686) in his famous hagiographic work, *Nafahât al-Uns*. The practical opposition so visible in each of these anecdotes between Balyânî's radical spiritual individualism ("antinomianism" would be almost an understatement) and the far more sober, consistently Sharia-based injunctions underlying virtually all of Ibn 'Arabî's practical spiritual teachings is at least as dramatic as any of the multitude of doctrinal contrasts and disagreements between these two figures that are highlighted in M. Chodkiewicz' telling notes to Balyânî's treatise. But instead of "censoring" Balyânî, either by openly censuring him or by simply leaving him out of his work (as he surely did with other Sufî figures), Jâmî seems to have delighted in drawing attention to the eccentricities of his character and method and, by implication, to their inner connections with his more theoretical teachings. Each reader is left to draw the appropriate conclusions....

JÂMÎ'S DESCRIPTION OF ABÛ ʿABDALLÂH BALYÂNÎ⁷

His surname was Awhad al-Dîn, and he was one of the descendants of Abû ʿAlî Daqqâq. Balyânî's lineage goes back to Abû ʿAlî as follows: (he was) the son of ʿAbdallâh, son of Masʿûd, son of Muhammad, son of ʿAlî, son of Ahmad, son of ʿUmar, son of Ismail, son of Abû ʿAlî Daqqâq--May God bless their innermost souls. Master Abû ʿAlî [Daqqâq] had one son, Ismâʿîl, and a daughter, Fâtima Bânû, who was married to Abû al-Qâsim al-Qushayrî.⁸

As for his chain of initiation, he took the *khirqâ*⁹ from his own father, Diyâ' al-Dîn Masʿûd, who is also known as "Imâm al-Dîn" Masʿûd. He received it from Shaykh Asîl al-Dîn Shîrâzî, [p. 259] who took it from Shaykh Rukn al-Dîn Sanjâsî, from Shaykh Qutb al-Dîn Abû al-Rashîd Abharî, from Shaykh Jamâl al-Dîn ʿAbd al-Samad Zanjânî, both of whom received it from Shaykh Abû al-Najîb Suhrawardî¹⁰--May God bless their innermost souls.

Balyânî said: "At the beginning (of my path) I sought to seclude myself from people, and I spent eleven years up on Mount Ligâm. When I came down from the mountain, I kept

⁷The actual author of the "Treatise on the (Divine) Unicity" (*Risâlat al-Ahadîya*) often attributed to Ibn ʿArabî, translated by T.H. Weir as "*Whoso Knoweth Himself...*". This text is the translation of his biographical notice in ʿAbd al-Rahmân Jâmî's (d. 1492) renowned Persian hagiographic dictionary, *Nafahât al-Uns* (Tehran, ed. M. Tawhîdîpûr, 1336 h.s./1957), pp. 258-262. For additional historical background on Balyânî's probable historical connections with the "monist" Sufi school of Ibn Sabʿîn and al-Shushtarî, drawn from discussions by Ibn Taymîya and other later sources, see M. Chodkiewicz' Introduction to his translation of Balyânî's *Epître sur l'Unicité Absolue* (Paris, les deux Océans, 1982), pp. 17-41.

⁸Daqqâq (d. 405/1014) and Qushayrî (d. 465/1074, author of the celebrated *Risâla*, perhaps the most widely read traditional Islamic work on the Sufi path) are two of the most important figures in the development of Sufism in Nishapur before the two Ghazâlîs. Annemarie Schimmel (*Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 427) mentions that Qushayrî's wife, Fâtima-Bânû, also became famous for her learning and knowledge of hadîth as well as her piety.

⁹The "patched garment" (in actual practice often simply a cap or other symbolic object) symbolizing the spiritual "poverty" of the Sufi, bestowed in the formal initiation ceremony connecting a novice with a particular chain of spiritual teaching (*silsila*) usually traced back to the Prophet.

¹⁰Died 563/1168, the influential founder of one of the oldest surviving Sufi orders, the Suhrawardîya, and author of an early Sufi "rule", the *Kitâb Adâb al-Murîdîn* (trans. M. Milson, *A Sufi Rule for Novices*, Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1975). He was an uncle of the equally famous Abû Hafâs Suhrawardî (d. 632/1234) mentioned by Balyânî later in this notice (n. 14). Most of the other shaykhs in this portion of Balyânî's *silsila* were influential enough to be mentioned elsewhere in Jâmî's work (e.g., al-Sanjâsî as master of the famous Persian poet and disciple of Ibn ʿArabî, Awhad al-Dîn Kirmânî, p. 588).

company with¹¹ the ascetic (*zâhid*) Abû Bakr Hamadânî. He was a man with spiritual powers and true spiritual insight.¹² His personal form of worship (*wird*) was always as follows: every night he got up and placed an iron rod under his chin, and remained standing (in prayer) until day. With his assent, I likewise stood behind him; from time to time he would look back and encourage me, saying (mockingly): "Go and lie down somewhere!" I would sit down on the ground while he was occupied with his own (spiritual) task, and after a while I'd get up again. I emulated him until the time when his spiritual state also descended on me; at that point I (again) chose solitude. Zâhid Abû Bakr was so very happy with me that he called me "Gypsy". I heard that one day he said: "'Gypsy' came and took something from me and carried it off; now I don't know where he went!"

After some time I went back to see him. "Where were you", he asked, "and what did you bring?" I modestly said nothing. After we'd sat together for an hour Zâhid asked me a question, in answer to which I responded that "I am not other than God." Zâhid said: "So you've brought the saying of Mansûr (al-Hallâj)?!"¹³ "With a single sigh that I make," I answered, "I can find a hundred thousand (God-intoxicated souls) like Mansûr!" As soon as I said that, Zâhid picked up his rod and threw it at me. I jumped aside, and that rod just missed me. Zâhid cursed me roundly and said: "They crucified Mansûr and *he* didn't run away, but you fled from this little stick!" "That's because Mansûr wasn't yet spiritually perfect (*tamâm*)," I replied, "or else he would have run away. For with God--May He be exalted and sanctified--all things are one." Once I'd said that, Zâhid said: "Maybe you've eaten some (psychedelic) plant?" "Yes indeed," I

¹¹This phrase loosely translates a key technical Sufi term (*suhbat*) referring to a person's regular, constant contact with a particular spiritual guide, in which they "learn" from all the actions and influences of the guide in question, not simply from formal teachings or specifically assigned disciplines. As can be seen from the remainder of Balyânî's story, it can sometimes be misleading to describe this often relatively informal process as a "master-disciple" relationship.

¹²*Karâmât*, or "spiritual powers" [literally "acts of (God's) grace"], refers to the supra-normal psychic and psychokinetic powers possessed by certain saints. *Firâsat*, or "spiritual insight", refers to the specific type of *karâma* involving the ability to "see" into the heart, mind and general spiritual state of another person; it is mentioned in a famous hadîth: "Beware the *firâsa* of the person of faith, for they see with the light of God!"

¹³I.e., *Anâ al-Haqq*, "I am God (the Truly Real)", the notorious "ecstatic saying" (*shath*) which--along with many other related acts and public teachings--eventually led to the celebrated voluntary martyrdom of al-Hallâj. (See the exhaustive four-volume study by L. Massignon [trans. H. Mason], *The Passion of al-Hallâj*, Princeton/Bollingen, 1982.)

replied: "I have eaten a plant, but from the meadows of Reality!" "You've eaten bliss and you've eaten well," he declared, "so come sit on the prayer-carpet and preserve that (through prayer)!"

Later Zâhid asked me: "What you said concerning Mansûr (al-Hallâj), that it was because of his (spiritual) imperfection that he didn't run away and was crucified--what is your reason for saying that?" "My reason," I replied, "is that if a rider who claims to know horsemanship [p. 260] doesn't let go of the reins when he gallops his horse; or if, when he does drop the reins, he's still able to restrain the horse, then such a person is rightfully called a skillful rider. But if he's not able to stop his horse, then he's said to be imperfect in horsemanship." After I'd said that, Zâhid agreed with me. "You spoke correctly," he said: "I've never seen anyone more perspicacious than you."

Balyânî also said: "They told me that one of the companions of Shaykh Shihâb al-Dîn [Abû Hafs °Umar] Suhrawardî¹⁴--May God sanctify his spirit--called Shaykh Najîb al-Dîn Buzghush¹⁵ had come to Shiraz. I was very happy at that, because I had already attained all of the (spiritual) stations and states of the Sufis about which I'd learned, and I was seeking (to discover) something more. Indeed my own father used to say: "Whatever I requested from God I gave to (my son) °Abdallâh; what (God) opened up for me like a little peephole, He opened up for (my son) like a wide-open gate." So I got up and traveled to Shiraz in order to meet Shaykh Najîb al-Dîn.

I told him quite a few things about my own spiritual states and stations and extraordinary experiences. He listened to everything very politely and didn't say anything in response. I sat there for an hour and then went outside, but suddenly I felt absolutely compelled to return. "Let's go back and see Shaykh Najîb al-Dîn," I thought to myself, "to find out what he says."

When I reached the door of his house, they told me: "He's in the inner (private) rooms. Go on in and sit down in that outer room where the shaykh usually sits (in public audience) until

¹⁴This celebrated and politically influential master (d. 632/1234; nephew of the Abû Najîb Suhrawardî mentioned at n. 10 above) was the author of the famous Sufi "handbook", °*Awârif al-Ma°arif*, and played a key role in spreading the chivalrous "*futuwwa*" movement initiated by one of the last Abbasid caliphs, al-Nâsir. (See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 244ff.) His biography is on p. 472 of the *Nafahât*.

he comes back." Now when I sat down there, I noticed that just in front of his prayer-carpet was (a paper with) everything that I'd just told him written down on it. "Aha!" I thought to myself, "so the shaykh needed that so much he even wrote it down! Now I know what sort of fellow he is and to what lengths he'll go!" I immediately got up and went outside. But when I reached Kâzarûn¹⁶ I reproached myself, and I found a certain (spiritual) ambition (had returned) within me. I began a spiritual retreat (*khalvat*), and during that retreat God gave me whatever I asked Him for in (only) five days.

One day when he was in Shiraz, he went into the khânegâh of Shaykh Saʿdî.¹⁷ Shaykh Saʿdî took a handful of pennies and set them next to (Balyânî). "Say (a prayer over these)," he said, "so that we can give this blessed offering (to buy) a meal for the dervishes."¹⁸ "O Saʿdî," he replied, "(instead of) bringing out those pennies, go take that jar with the 62 silver coins you put in it, and use that for the dervishes' supper!" Shaykh Saʿdî immediately went and brought back the jar, just as [p. 261] he had said (and found the money in it).¹⁹ Then he sent it out and had a wonderful meal prepared for the dervishes.

The Shaykh had a disciple who was a cook; he sold soup in the bazaar. Whenever the Shaykh passed by that disciple's shop he would take a bowl of his soup and eat it right there,

¹⁵According to Jâmi's notice (pp. 473-474), this devoted disciple of Suhrâwardî returned to his native Shiraz (in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions?), established a flourishing khanegah there, and died in 678/1279.

¹⁶An important trading city about 70 miles west of Shiraz, on the traditional route to the gulf port of Bushahr, home of the important Kazaruni ("Murshidî", "Ishâqî") Sufi order founded in the early 11th century. (See the related articles in *EP*, vol. IV, 850-51, which mentions an Amîn al-Dîn Balyânî as "reviver" of that order in the 7th-8th/13th-14th century.)

¹⁷Presumably the celebrated Shirazi poet (d. 1292) and author of the *Gulistân* and *Bûstân*. However, it should be added that modern historians have tended to question the authenticity of many of the later stories about Saʿdî's life and travels drawn from his works, including Jâmi's own brief notice later in the *Nafahât*.

¹⁸It is not entirely clear from the context whether Saʿdî is simply asking Balyânî for his additional blessing on the money to be used for buying the meal, or whether instead it is understood--as in a similar anecdote told about a poor but respected saint by Ibn ʿArabî in his *Sufis of Andalusia*--that the pennies blessed by a famous saint will actually fetch a much higher price because of their protective, talismanic value.

¹⁹Again it is not clear whether the "miracle" (*karâma*) intended by the story is simply that Balyânî was supernaturally aware of the exact amount and location of money Saʿdî had once put away (and then forgotten?), or whether he was actually able to materialize that particular sum in that location. (Both sorts of supernatural phenomena are frequently mentioned in hagiographic works.)

standing up. One day he had a bowl of soup in his hands when a (would-be) dervish came up with great ceremony, dressed in a multi-colored Sufi robe,²⁰ and greeted him. "I would like for you," he said, "to point out for me the way to God. Please tell me what would be helpful for me to do so that I can act according to (your instructions)." The Shaykh handed him the bowl of soup he was holding in his hands and said: "Part of the foundation of your work is to take this and eat it." So the dervish took the soup and ate it, and when he was finished eating the Shaykh told him: "Now wipe off the soup that spilled on your hand on your Sufi robe, and do the same thing whenever you eat something." "But master," he said, "I can't do that! Can't you suggest something else for me to do!" "Since you aren't even able to do this much," the Shaykh said, "you wouldn't be able to do anything else I'd tell you to do either. Run along; you aren't cut out for this work!"

One of the Shaykh's disciples had sought out a secluded place on the mountain, when a poisonous snake came along. He tried to pick up the snake, but it bit him and his limbs became inflamed and swollen. The news of this reached the Shaykh and he sent a group of people to bring back the disciple. "Why did you pick up that snake," he asked the disciple, "so that he could bite you?" "But my master," the disciple replied, "*you yourself always said that there's nothing other than God!* I didn't view that snake as being other than God, and that's why I bravely picked it up." The Shaykh declared: "Whenever you see God in a terrifying form (*libâs-i qahr*), run away and don't go near Him! For if you don't act like that, He'll do exactly what happened to you just now!" After that he put his hand under the disciple's head and helped him to sit up and said: "From now on don't do anything so rash until you *know* that He²¹ is good." Then he said a prayer and blew on the disciple, and the swelling went away and he was cured.

²⁰By the 13th century, with the international spread of both organized Sufi orders (*tariqa*, pl. *turuq*) and wandering, mendicant dervishes throughout the Islamic world, their adherents in many regions had developed special robes, headgear and other distinctive apparatus (e.g., the *kashkûl* or beggar's bowl; different forms of prayer beads; the *tabarzîn* or two-headed hatchet; etc.) to distinguish their particular status and affiliation.

The *khirqâ hizâr-mikhî* ("thousand-nailed" *khirqâ*) mentioned here was no longer the poor beggar's cast-off rags, but a splendid, artistically sewn patchwork of hundreds of tiny strips of multi-colored material--an ostentatious sign of wealth and social pretense rather than of inner or outward poverty.

²¹Or "it": it is unclear whether the reference is to the manifestations of God--and especially the well-known distinction between the divine theophanies of Beauty (*jamâl*) and Majesty (*jalâl*)--or to the more mundane distinction between poisonous and harmless snakes.

He once said: "Being a real dervish²² isn't ritual prayer and fasting, and it isn't spending the night in prayerful vigil. All those things are (just) the accouterments of servanthood, while being a real dervish means suffering offense and affliction.²³ If you really attain that, you've arrived."

He also said: "Know God--but if you don't know God, then don't know yourself either! Because when you don't know yourself, *then* you come to know God."

Then he said: "I say that there's something even better than that [i.e., than knowing God]: *Be* God! But if you aren't God, then don't be yourself--because if you aren't yourself, then you are God."

One day he had gone on pilgrimage²⁴ to (the tomb-shrine of) Shaykh Rûzbihân Baqlî²⁵--May God bless his innermost self--and Shaykh Sadr al-Dîn Rûzbihân [p. 262] was seated at the head of his father's tomb. When Shaykh ʿAbdallâh (Balyânî) stood in front of Rûzbihân's tomb, Shaykh Sadr al-Dîn stood up out of respect for him, remained standing for a while, and then sat down. And again he stood up and remained standing for a while, but Shaykh ʿAbdallâh didn't even notice him! When (Balyânî) had finished his 'visit', Sadr al-Dîn said to him: "I've been standing up (in respect for you) all this time, and you didn't even notice me!" "Shaykh Rûzbihân had handed me a pomegranate," he replied, "and I was busy eating it with him."

²²Or simply "(spiritual) poverty": *darvîshî*, the Persian equivalent of the Arabic term *al-faqr*, glorified as the epitome of Muhammad's own spiritual path in the celebrated hadîth "Poverty is my pride", *al-faqr fakhrî*.

²³The Persian term here (*ranjîdan*) is probably used as an equivalent of the Arabic Sufi technical term *malâma*, or intentionally "drawing blame" upon oneself in order to avoid the forms of hypocrisy often accompanying the reputation of piety and the spiritual "insincerity" (and insecurity) often underlying an unusual reliance on acts of piety and devotion. From a very early period, the true *malâmâtîya*--accomplished mystics who carefully concealed their powers and accomplishments--were often considered the highest rank among the Sufis: see the references and discussion in A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 86-88, and R. Deladrière's recent translation of Sulamî's influential *R. al-Malâmâtîya, La Lucidité Implacable: Épître des Hommes du Blâme*, Paris, arléa, 1991.

²⁴*Ziyârat*, literally "visit": the technical term in many Islamic languages for the pilgrimages to the tombs or shrines of saints, Imams, prophets and the family and Companions of Muhammad which are a central feature of religious life in every part of the Islamic world.

²⁵One of the most celebrated of the many saints of Shiraz (d. 606/1209), whose works have been edited and translated by a number of modern Western scholars: see Jâmî, *Nafahât*, pp. 255-258, and A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, index s.v.

Among his poems is the following:

We're totally God, most absolutely:
 We're not from fire, wind, water and earth!

We've become forever naked with regard to being
 or not-being; our clothing is torn.

The Truth: you can't see any other than God,
 for no doubt both worlds aren't other than Him!

We don't say the world is Him; nor (do we say)
 that it's wrong to make that connection:

He isn't the world, nor is the world Him:
 to see *all* as Him in this way is not mistaken.

And this quatrain:

Until I saw *Haqq* with my own two eyes every instant
 I never stopped seeking with each breath.

They say God can't be seen with our own two eyes: so
 they're like that, and I'm like *this* at every instant.

He passed away on the day of ʿAshûrâ,²⁶ in the year 686 [March 4, 1287]

²⁶The tenth day of the lunar month of Muharram; for Shiites the final day of mourning commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn (grandson of Muhammad and son of Alî and Fâtima) at Kerbala.

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The Continuing Relevance of Qaysari’s Thought: Divine Imagination and the Foundations of Natural Spirituality

...And were it not for God’s defending some of the people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which the Name of God is often remembered would surely have been destroyed. Certainly God helps whoever helps Him... (22:40)

The question I would like to speak about today is simple and straightforward. Why should people today, who are not specialists in the history of Islamic philosophy and theology, continue to be interested in the writings of Da’ud al-Qaysari (and by extension, in the Shaykh al-Akbar, Ibn ‘Arabi, who was his central subject and inspiration)? In a way, this is a question we are obliged to ask about any significant thinker, artist or religious thinker. And as I tell my own students whenever they are discovering such creators and thinkers for the first time, the real test of understanding the work and deeper intentions of such creative thinkers is “What would that person be doing or creating—that is, how would they be *communicating*—here and now, today, in our own culture and civilization?” After true understanding comes communication and transmission: anything less than that is idolatry and passing illusion.

My own experience with Da’ud al-Qaysari began in Iran more than two decades ago, working with Toshihiko Izutsu and Jalaloddin Ashtiyani, where I first encountered his remarkable accomplishments as a pedagogue and the foremost commentator of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Fusus al-Hikam. I quickly discovered that his was the most useful and exacting of the classical commentaries on the mysteries of the Fusus, and his famous Introduction (*Muqaddima*) to that

commentary was a masterful philosophic summary and persuasive elucidation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s spiritual insights and often poetic allusions. What was also clear in those celebrated works of Qaysari was the centrality of his personal creative focus on the divine/cosmic Imagination (*khayal*)—even if the deeper reasons for that emphasis of his were not so apparent to me at the time. Today, however, returning to view Qaysari in light of this international Symposium and its focus on him as an important historical actor and creator in his own right, I am struck by his wider significance as an activist, politically engaged and creative Islamic philosopher-theologian in a way that recalls the tradition of such classical Muslim philosophers as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and Nasiruddin Tusi—even if the philosophic and theological positions Qaysari was “defending” (to recall the Qur’anic verse with which we began) were often radically different from the more worldly theses of those “Peripatetic” thinkers.

In short, it is my impression that the deeper, unifying reasons underlying Da’ud al-Qaysari’s writing and teaching are not really that different today than in his own time: that is, to defend and explain the common philosophic grounds of what the Qur’an repeatedly calls *Din al-Haqq*, *Din Allah*, or *ad-Din al-Qayyim*—the central Qur’anic postulate of a natural, universal human spirituality, and all the wide-ranging practical and political conclusions flowing from that—against a series of perennial limitations and dangerous misunderstandings. In terms drawn from within later Islamic tradition, we would say that the *‘irfan-e nazari* (the “theoretical spirituality”) of Qaysari and his fellows can best be understood as a prologue to—and a necessary defense and explanation of—the much wider realm of *‘irfan-e ‘amali*, of the multitudinous practical spiritual forms of the later Islamic humanities in all their creative richness and diversity. Qaysari’s writing, like his practical teaching and institution-building, was directed at the intellectual and religious elite of his day, at students who—having already

integrated the traditional Arabic religious sciences of Islam—would soon be called upon to guide, direct and arbitrate the many competing and often conflicting paths, methods and institutions that had come to flourish by that point in Islamic history. Against that practical and historical background, his philosophic work—building on Ibn ‘Arabi’s--can be seen to provide a comprehensive, over-arching “meta-theology” of Islamic faith and practice whose particular virtue was to leave some positive, even indispensable spiritual role for the full diversity of human spiritual types, and by extension for the full range of religious institutions, methods and practices which corresponded to that spectrum of unique needs and (potential) contributions. Although I do not have sufficient historical knowledge of that period to judge Qaysari’s indirect influence, through the ongoing work of his own students and disciples, one can at least hypothesize that such a remarkable breadth of vision and understanding, when translated into ongoing historical practice, had at least some part to play in the remarkable endurance and ongoing religious diversity of the Ottoman empire in subsequent centuries.

Now if we translate what was just said into contemporary terms, one could say that Qaysari is articulating a “*meta-philosophy of religions,*” an integrative, comprehensive understanding of the multiple dimensions of reality and of human nature which clearly recognizes both the common, universal aspects and the necessary diversity and specificities of each of the revealed world religions—a complex understanding which again remains grounded in a profound acquaintance with the realities and “ever-renewed creation” of actual spiritual life. Allowing for the change of historical circumstances, it is not difficult to extend the field of Qaysari’s thought from the competing Islamic sects, schools and tariqas of his own day, to their cognate forms of spiritual life in our own time. Indeed, for those historians who know how incredibly diverse and creative the Islamic humanities were in the centuries immediately

preceding Qaysari's work, one may even wonder whether the spectrum of religious and spiritual activity in our own time is actually any greater than it was in the Dar al-Islam of those earlier centuries.

In any event, the cornerstone of Qaysari's religious and philosophic thought is his articulation and defense of the key metaphysical and spiritual role of *Imagination* (*khayal*)—at once divine, cosmic, and as experienced by each human being—and the resulting necessary *individuality* of each and every soul's relation with the Divine. The practical, political implications of that insight highlight the indispensable spiritual role of each individual's inalienable *freedom* and *responsibility*, and of the far-reaching *diversity* and *creativity*—in every area of human activity--which are the natural consequences of acknowledging and supporting those dimensions of human being. In a word, the world of Imagination is ineluctably and profoundly *democratic*. In the universe of ever-renewed, always unique theophanies (*mazahir*), “Signs” (*ayat*), and divine “Presences,” that is elaborated in Qaysari's metaphysics, no phenomenon can be excluded or eliminated as somehow “other-than-God”: the very possibility of *tawhid*, of the One underlying all existence, demands this comprehensiveness. Within that context, the ongoing movement of each human soul from its initial basharic state to its realization and ultimate fulfillment as the theomorphic *Insan*, the polished mirror of all the divine Attributes and names—the path of spiritual perfection leading to true responsibility and “co-creativity” with God—requires the constant *freedom* to learn the inner reality of God's infinite creative Compassion (*rahma*, and all of the divine Attributes contained within that Name) through our own countless mistakes and through experiencing daily, on every plane, the educational consequences of our own mistakes.

From this perspective, as the Qur'an repeatedly insists, it is only through the recurrent, universal yet necessarily individual experience of spiritual *trials* or "tests" that human beings individually rediscover the central spiritual virtues of Islam and all the revealed religions: *'iman, taqwa, sabr, tawakkul, shukr* and all the other virtues epitomized in the lives of the prophets and the Friends of God (the *awliya'*). And as Qaysari has so clearly and comprehensively explained, the theater for all those trials—as for all the spiritual virtues and other inspirations that we only discover through them—is none other than the Imagination. For when one looks at the individual spiritual learning process of trial and purification more closely, it is readily apparent that it is necessarily and intrinsically universal for all human beings, not limited to any particular religion, culture or historical setting ; secondly, that this process is artfully and masterfully controlled and articulated by God—hence the central Qur'anic themes of Destiny, Providence, Grace and acknowledgment of the divine Lordship—in all-pervasive, transcendent ways that (at first appearance) relentlessly dwarf all our human efforts of manipulation and control, until we learn to sail with the Spirit's wind; and finally, that this process takes place on the stage of soul and spirit, in that infinite expanse Qaysari and his fellows called the divine "Imagination" (*khayal*)....

Now at this point those who are not philosophers or metaphysicians by training might understandably—and truthfully--object that these central concerns of Qaysari's thought do not seem all that original or controversial, that they are simply rephrasing and elaborating insights and assumptions that are at the very heart of the Qur'an and other revealed teachings. I would certainly agree. But what such an objection does highlight is in fact the essentially political and theological nature of Qaysari's work, as one sort of necessary "defense" of the spiritual life and its political preconditions alluded to in the famous Qur'anic verse with which we began. Those

wider political dimensions of Qaysari's work only appear clearly when they are contrasted with the perennial use (or abuse) of religious symbols—all over the world, and at every time that we know of—as vehicles for various political and social ends, for the construction of ethical and communal orders, where those symbols quickly become reduced to expressions of the basharic passions of anger, fear, resentment, envy and despair. There should be no need here to catalogue the recurrent forms and destructive consequences of this perennial reduction of religion to limited political and passionate ends, in Qaysari's day or in our own time.

Against that background, we can perhaps see more clearly that the practical consequence of Qaysari's focus on the realm of Imagination and its central, inalienable role in spiritual life was to highlight the existence of a truly *universal common ground* for spiritual growth and understanding and creativity: a common ground rooted in the most intimate individual domains of experience, trials, mysteries and revelations--in what the Irish poet W.B. Yeats called "the rag-and-bone shop of the Heart." The essential political consequence of that emphasis—among the most educated and influential 'ulama' of Qaysari's day—was to *defend* the diverse aesthetic, social, religious and political expressions of that insight in the Islamic civilization of his time, from the masterpieces of the Islamic humanities developed by poets like Rumi and Yunus Emre, to the multitude of spiritual paths and methods pioneered by saints both celebrated and unknown—and beyond all of those visible historical forms, to turn his readers' attention toward the multitude of deeper, invisible forms of spiritual influence and attraction that continue to work on and through each of our souls. In even broader terms, all of Qaysari's thought can be seen as a vision of that universal Reality the Qur'an calls the "Religion of Truth" (*Din al-Haqq/al-Din al-Qayyim*) as the common ground of reality and experience underlying all the historically created and structured "religions of man."

It is precisely at the level of this comprehensive vision, I would suggest, that Qaysari's thought continues to be a compelling and valuable contribution for people all over the world today. For in the rapidly shrinking world we all inhabit, more and more "ordinary people"—not just a handful of philosophers and theologians—are daily forced to grapple with the perennial practical and political dilemmas of religious diversity and self-conscious spiritual direction. The media and their manipulators, from every direction, are only too happy to highlight the all too prominent signs of religious confusion, division, deception and strife—or to publicize "solutions" that are even more short-lived and illusory. Against that background, Qaysari's vision of the divine Imagination and its infinite human reflections—if we choose to put that vision into practice—can lead us toward an understanding of ever-deeper levels of awareness and unity, toward an awareness of the diversity of religious symbols *as symbols* (*amthal/ayat*) growing out of different life-worlds and cultural and historical traditions, but pointing to deeper underlying realities and divine intentions. If we take his vision seriously, we discover that human beings are profoundly united—beyond all the separations of time and space and culture—by the common tasks of (co-) creation and *com*-munication, and by the common political and social challenges of developing the conditions that will make that creation and communication possible.

In other words, if we take seriously the centrality of Imagination as articulated in Qaysari's thought, then we can see also see happening everywhere around us the compelling and heartening vision described in Sura 110:

“...When there comes the victorious-support of God and the Opening, and you see the people entering into the Religion of God in waves, then sing forth the praise of your Protecting-Lord and seek His forgiveness: surely He is ever-Returning.”

La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne: Le retour à Dieu (ma'âd) et l'imagination. By JEAN MICHOT. Pp. xlvii + 237. Louvain: PEETERS. 1987.

It is certainly no exaggeration to say that the writings of Avicenna (d. 428/1037) have played a central role, for almost a thousand years, in virtually all subsequent schools and currents of Islamic thought--a role quite comparable, in the diversity and extent of their influence, to that of the works of Plato and Aristotle in the West.¹ Thus such outwardly disparate (and usually conflicting) intellectual traditions as post-Ghazalian kalam and its logical auxiliaries (typified by Fakhr al-Din Razi); the various attempts to formulate a speculative or "theoretical" framework for Islamic mysticism (e.g., Suhrawardi, Ibn Sab'in, the "Avicennizing" commentators of Ibn 'Arabi, and Mulla Sadra Shirazi); and the self-styled "Peripatetic" school developed by Nasir al-Din Tusi and others all drew much of their conceptual apparatus and systematic expression--if not always their more original inspiration and distinctive intentions--from the works of the "leading Master" (al-Shaykh al-Ra'is).² In addition, Avicenna's cosmological, psychological and metaphysical notions, in their more widespread popular adaptations, offered a coherent and systematic world-view which provided a convenient "scientific" (and at the same time religiously orthodox) background and persuasive explanation for many less intellectual forms of mysticism and popular devotion, so that Sufi poetry and literature of the time, in Persian and other languages, are seldom entirely comprehensible without some reference to those conceptions. Yet if scholarly students of these traditions have long been aware of these facts, even the broadest historical outlines of these centuries of Islamic philosophic thought have not yet been adequately reflected in the secondary and synthetic accounts available in the West.

In this context, Prof. Michot's long-awaited study, quite apart from its more specialized contributions, should provide a greatly needed comprehensive introduction to the Avicennan features of all those later Islamic traditions--and more particularly, to the more popular

¹If something similar could also be said of the historical influences of Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi, one must likewise take into account the substantial, although seldom explicitly acknowledged, role of "Avicennan" themes and perspectives throughout the writings of both of those later thinkers.

²The scathing and systematic critiques of Avicennan conceptions by both Averroes and Ibn Taymiya, which clearly delimit the opposing intellectual boundaries of his influence, only serve to underline the widespread degree of respect for his work (however understood) in their respective milieus;

theological and mystical uses of his work--as well as indispensable background for interested students (whether of philosophy, history or literature) lacking more direct access to the sources in question.³ The wider accessibility and usefulness of this book for that purpose are greatly enhanced, to begin with, by the author's inclusion, in some 700 notes (roughly a third of the volume), of lengthy translations (usually in French, but occasionally in Latin and Italian) of most of the key passages under discussion, as well as his long, carefully annotated bibliography (35 pp.) covering the dozens of Avicennan texts and translations cited here.⁴ Secondly, the approach adopted here provides the uninitiated reader with a clear and detailed idea of the full interdependence of each of the elements (ontology, cosmology, epistemology, psychology, celestial physics, etc.) in Avicenna's philosophic system--essential interconnections which are often dealt with only tangentially in those related classic studies of more specific elements of his thought (by Pines, Gardet, Corbin, Rahman, Goichon, etc.) which are integrated and recapitulated here. This particular aspect of Prof. Michot's approach is especially helpful in bringing out the potential--if not always unambiguous!--systematic importance of Islamic theological issues and "heavenly" elements (i.e., in the conception of celestial souls, intellects, etc. and their relations to the sublunar world) that modern readers or those approaching Avicenna

and it is worth noting that the tendencies represented by both those critics remained a distinctly minority view (at least in intellectual circles) until a relatively recent time.

³For this purpose, Prof. Michot's book is perfectly complemented by the almost simultaneous publication, in a single massive volume (nearly 700 pages), of Henry Corbin's translations of the metaphysical section of Suhrawardi's mystical and Neoplatonic *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (6th/12th century), the more "Peripatetic" commentary of Qutb al-Din Shirazi (7th/13th c.), and the super-commentary (actually a relatively independent work constituting a sort of dialectical history of earlier Islamic and Greek philosophy) by Mulla Sadra (11th/17th c.)--a volume whose contents are almost entirely devoted to the same issues and historical developments. [SOHRAVARDI. *Le livre de la sagesse orientale*. Paris: VERDIER. 1987. Ed. C. Jambet.] Taken together, these two volumes offer a remarkable in-depth introduction to many of the central issues--and competing philosophic tendencies--in several major traditions of later Islamic thought.

⁴Even scholars with ready access to the standard, but somewhat outdated bibliographical studies by Anawati and Mahdavi will be grateful for the updated list of the many newer Avicennan editions (especially in Iran, Egypt and the *Avicenna Latinus* of S. Van Riet at Louvain), as well as for the author's prudent and well-founded observations concerning the chronology, authenticity and interrelations of a number of titles. Unfortunately for students more at home in English, the list of Avicennan translations--including almost a dozen of the author's own recent translations (often with accompanying editions) of lesser-known short treatises and chapters from Avicenna--and of secondary studies is limited to those works (especially in French) actually cited in the notes to this volume, and therefore leaves out some useful and accessible corresponding studies and translations (by Hourani, Morewedge, Nasr, Wolfson and others) available in English.

from a more modestly empiricist point of view would otherwise naturally tend to overlook or minimize.

Finally, Prof. Michot has placed Avicenna squarely in his original Islamic historical context, not only through his continuous provision of careful citations from dozens of the philosopher's own writings, but also by his repeated references to several historically influential students and commentators (especially Ghazali, F. Razi, N. Tusi, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra) and to the topics and approaches they found most interesting and fruitful. The result--most obviously with the eschatological question that provides the structural framework for the book as a whole--is to suggest philosophic perspectives (especially with regard to religious and kalam topics) and possibilities often substantially different from those raised in earlier works that have focused on Avicenna's relations to Aristotle and his later Greek commentators, or on the contrast with Averroes and their reception in medieval Europe. Whatever one's judgment of the philosophic and scientific value of those perspectives (or of their importance for understanding Avicenna's own original intentions), they do faithfully represent the ways his work--and with it, "philosophy" as a whole--was frequently understood and interpreted by a great many of his later Islamic interpreters.⁵

The starting point and guiding theme of this work (ch. I) is the problem posed by Avicenna's hypothesis--which he openly invokes only very briefly, and usually (as with his

⁵The available European-language accounts of Islamic philosophy, with their natural focus on the Arabic "transmission" and subsequent Western adaptation of Hellenistic thought, rarely even mention the extraordinary extent to which Avicenna's works rapidly and for the most part definitively supplanted the independent study and commentary of translations of Aristotle (and other Greek philosophic writers) throughout the Eastern Islamic world. (The resulting widespread perception of Avicenna's metaphysical and psychological writing--especially in terms of the more religious or theological understanding reflected in Dr. Michot's study--as virtually synonymous with "philosophy" and the conclusions of unaided "reason" was especially marked in broader intellectual circles outside the handful of genuine specialists in philosophic or scientific studies.)

Avicenna's role as the prism through which subsequent Islamic thinkers largely viewed the earlier philosophic tradition (despite the honoring of Aristotle and Farabi as the "First" and "Second Teachers") was further enhanced, at some unknown but early date, by the widely accepted attribution to Farabi of a work of Avicenna's known (in its "Farabian" guise) as the *K. Fusus al-Hikam*. The almost universal acceptance of that attribution, to the extent that the *Fusus* was more widely studied than the genuine works of Farabi, seems to have obscured any wider awareness of his radically different teachings in most of the Islamic world, apart from their well-known adaptations in Andalusia and the Maghreb by thinkers (Averroes, Ibn Bajja, Ibn Tufayl, Maimonides, etc.) whose perspectives had relatively little immediate echo in the world of Avicenna's Eastern heirs and interpreters.

"Oriental Wisdom" more generally) through oblique reference to certain unidentified spokesmen--of an "imaginal," sensible afterlife (apparently corresponding to the corporeal rewards and punishments promised in the prophetic scriptures), in conjunction with the heavenly bodies (or their angelic souls), for that vast majority of humanity who have not achieved man's ultimate, purely intellectual or noetic perfection. The rest of the book, after a brief summary of the framework of this problem as posed by Avicenna's theory of the twofold functions of prophecy and revelation and his underlying "anthropological dualism" (i.e., the contrast between the purely intellectual and infra-rational dimensions of man's being), carefully examines the possible theoretical justifications for this imaginal eschatology in every relevant area of Avicenna's philosophic system. Prof. Michot's method, in each chapter, involves three closely interrelated levels of interpretation: 1) the elaborate, textually buttressed presentation of Avicennan doctrines or tendencies that would justify this particular theory; 2) summary reference to supporting interpretations from a wide range of later commentators or thinkers who openly adopted this "Avicennan" theory (F. Razi, N. Tusi, Suhrawardi, and especially the two Madnun's attributed to Ghazali); and 3) the author's own more independent suggestions of philosophic possibilities implicitly contained in certain key Avicennan concepts⁶--an approach in which he closely follows the tendencies (and often the conclusions) of later Islamic "commentators," especially Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra.⁷

While the problem of an imaginal eschatology, taken by itself, might at first appear to be of relatively minor or tangential importance in the larger context of Avicenna's philosophy (whether or not one accepts the author's many substantial arguments in its favor), the wider and lasting value of this work, as we have already indicated, lies in the richness of its documentation

⁶In particular, Prof. Michot's original comments (especially in ch. III) concerning the "intelligible" nature and moral (and even potentially aesthetic) functions of practical reason, in terms of man's relation with the angelic souls of the spheres, develop dimensions of Avicenna's concepts which received relatively little attention among subsequent Islamic commentators in any tradition.

⁷In particular, readers familiar with the philosophy of these latter two Islamic thinkers [see n. 3 above] will surely be struck by the way Prof. Michot's original development (in chapter II) of the more "spiritualized" and Neoplatonic possibilities in Avicenna's metaphysics is expressed in terms--e.g., of the "intensity" or "density" of being; "mental being"; and a universe of manifold "epiphanic mirrors" and "creative epiphanies"--which almost literally recall the technical terminology and metaphysical perspectives that are the creative focus of both those later figures. (However, it is significant that both those thoroughly Platonic philosophers also felt themselves to be rebelling against the prevalent "Peripatetic," scholastic understanding of Avicenna in their own time.)

and Dr. Michot's careful and insightful presentation of all the related areas of Avicenna's systematic thought--especially those metaphysical and epistemological questions, usually presented in an overtly theological or religious language, which eventually came to dominate much subsequent consideration of Avicenna's work in the Islamic world. This systematic and dense, but impressively clear analysis of the relevant areas of Avicenna's thought begins by setting forth the Neoplatonic, "spiritualist" tendencies in his metaphysics and ontology (ch. II); goes on to outline the corresponding epistemological possibilities (especially the key role of the "angelic" intellects and souls of the heavenly spheres) in Avicenna's understanding of the relations of sensation, imagination and practical reason; continues with a suggestive discussion of his "idealism of sensation" (and imagination) and the possibilities (openly evoked in his *Mubahathat* and commentary on the *Theology of 'Aristotle'*) of the actual mode of "survival" of the mass of unenlightened souls in connection with the heavenly spheres; and concludes (ch. V) by stressing the considerable problems (eschatological and otherwise) and limitations still posed by Avicenna's rigorous "intellectualism," as highlighted by the contrasting approaches of Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi. Not surprisingly, given his chosen theme, the author consistently and almost exclusively emphasizes the Neoplatonic, "spiritualist" and ethical and religious potentialities in each area of Avicenna's thought. This guiding interpretive tendency has both advantages and certain dangers for those unacquainted with the wider range of Avicenna's writing and other alternative interpretations--although fortunately those dangers are often balanced, for reflective readers, by this work's carefully literal approach and provision of so many supporting texts.

In short, this study beautifully illustrates four fundamental (and each almost equally problematic) characteristic features of all of Avicenna's writing that help account for the tremendous variety of interpretations and uses to which it was put in later Islamic thought--and which are also no doubt responsible for some of the perspectives and limitations shared by those otherwise conflicting traditions. First, there is Avicenna's clearly intentional, but almost always highly ambiguous use of "religious" rhetoric and vocabulary (as well as his no less frequent implicit references to prominent issues in earlier *kalam* and Ismaili theology), a stylistic feature which was one of his more noticeable departures from the philosophic writing of Farabi and his later interpreters in the Islamic West. Like Prof. Michot, subsequent Islamic interpreters--especially those defending *kalam* positions or various forms of Islamic mysticism--frequently tended to take Avicenna's apparent "eschatology," "prophetology," "angelology," treatment of

"miracles," etc. (understood in an explicitly Islamic frame of reference) to be the primary focus of his remarks concerning those subjects, as though his philosophic discussions were ultimately intended as (or at any rate turned out to be) a justification for a broader set of more popular beliefs in those areas, and as though unexamined assumptions concerning those religious topics could in turn be used to amplify or interpret the corresponding domains of Avicenna's philosophic thought.⁸ However, in most cases the same remarks could also be construed more sceptically and rationalistically--i.e., in precisely the opposite direction--as suggesting alternative critical philosophic perspectives for judging, interpreting or transforming those same sets of religious beliefs. Secondly, there is Avicenna's notoriously problematic combination of what (following the author), we may term "Neoplatonic" and "Peripatetic" concepts and philosophic tendencies, a pervasive characteristic that has been noted by virtually every subsequent commentator on his thought. These conceptual ambiguities or unresolved questions are not simply recondite matters of scholastic "doctrine": their inescapable interrelations with fundamental practical issues concerning the aims and presuppositions of man's philosophic (and religious) life are strikingly exemplified in the radically opposing tendencies of later Islamic "Avicennan" traditions.⁹ Again, this study repeatedly illustrates the historically close systematic relations between this feature of Avicenna's writing and the problems arising from his use of religious language, since there has almost invariably been a significant correlation between the degree of emphasis interpreters give to the "Neoplatonic" or spiritual tendencies in Avicenna's

⁸We have already mentioned Averroes' and Ibn Taymiya's convergent remarks (from very different starting points) concerning this aspect of Avicenna's writing and his later influence. In all fairness, it should be added that Prof. Michot vigorously denies any "fideist" tendency in Avicenna's thought and stresses, both at the beginning and in his conclusions, the thoroughly "intellectualist" and self-confident character of his philosophic approach to religion.

⁹Thus, for example, both defenders of a more "Peripatetic" understanding of Avicenna's work, such as Nasir al-Din Tusi, and more mystical and spiritually oriented critics (like Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra) were careful to point out the close concordance between Avicenna's often vehement theoretical attacks on earlier Neoplatonic ideas and authors and his main practical life-orientations and activities (politics and administration, medicine, personal ethical behavior, etc.), which cast a somewhat sceptical light on his already ambiguous and hesitant use of religious and "other-worldly" rhetoric. Similarly, Tusi's famous polemic against Fakhr al-Razi (with its ensuing echoes on both sides down through the centuries of *muhakamat*) is only comprehensible in terms of the radically different practical implications and presuppositions (both personal and socio-political) of those two typically opposing interpretations of Avicenna's thought.

philosophy elements and the importance they grant to the role of religious concerns and insights in the elaboration of his thought.¹⁰

A third characteristic feature of Avicenna's philosophy, again frequently overlapping with the two preceding points, is the considerable degree of vagueness or inadequate resolution in many of his most fundamental notions, an indeterminacy which could often be developed in radically different directions. Some of these areas--such as his conception of the relative roles of material (or intellectual) "preparedness" (*isti'dad*) and "illumination" or "emanation" from above; the ambiguities in his "formalism" (both ontological and epistemological) between "intellectualist" or far more wide-ranging "spiritualist" interpretations; the exact nature and extent of the "contents" (spiritual, ethical, legal, etc.) of the forms and particulars known and "revealed" by the angelic souls and intellects; the uncertainties surrounding his treatment of the "practical intellect"--are thoroughly illustrated in this book. And similar cases, such as Avicenna's conception of the relations between existence and essence, or between his "general" metaphysics and theology, were equally important in the development of different later traditions of Islamic thought. Finally, there is the related problem of the considerable restrictions (and sometimes surprising philosophic opportunities) posed by the systematic and even apparently "deductive" character (or at least expression) of Avicenna's thinking, a feature which--as Averroes and other critics did not hesitate to point out--often closely resembles the procedures and results of earlier *kalam* theology. One obvious danger, given such a logically and metaphysically coherent (and theologically persuasive) structure, is that it is very hard to liberate one's thinking and expression, even when beginning with radically different insights or presuppositions, from the inner constraints of that system. And more often than not, that thinking itself can easily be dictated by the inner logic of possibilities and difficulties inherent in

¹⁰Most often (both in the past and among modern interpreters) these ambiguities have been resolved by reference to an "evolution" of Avicenna's thinking (and a corresponding chronology of his writings) or to his lost (and supposedly more mystical) "Oriental Wisdom" (*hikma mashriqiya*). Instead Prof. Michot, on the basis of long and close acquaintance with the entire Avicennan corpus, stresses--quite rightly, in our opinion--the "systematic unity" of Avicenna's thinking, which seems to exhibit similar internal tensions at all periods. However, he does point out some solidly documented particular instances, on points of relative detail, where the mature Avicenna seems to have given up more Aristotelean (or Farabian) doctrinal positions he had retained in his youth.

the system itself, rather than by any more profound reflection on the nature of reality.¹¹ Again as with later kalam, the historical outcome of this situation--whenever the claim to ultimate "wisdom" (hikma) was taken literally, replacing any more modest acknowledgement of man's condition of philo-sophia--was frequently, at best, a sort of scholasticization, an internal debate between set positions too often culminating in stagnation and fossilization.

Because of its ambitious scope, thoroughness, and rare combination of clarity and attention to detail in exploring all these basic issues, Dr. Michot's book sheds much new light on the "Islamic Avicenna" and can be expected to quickly become a classic reference in the study of the many related traditions of later Islamic thought.

¹¹Each of the central chapters of Prof. Michot's work offers a number of particularly striking illustrations of such possibilities in Avicenna's systematic thought: e.g., where his metaphysical formulations concerning the nature of the "angels," the structure of divine creation and emanation, or "prophetic" inspiration are themselves taken as starting points for further philosophic developments; this procedure and its assumptions--as the author occasionally admits--are not always easily reconcilable with other apparently more "empiricist" aspects of Avicenna's work.

Le Kitāb al-inbāh 'alā tariq Allāh de 'Abdallāh Badr al-Habashī: un témoignage de l'enseignement spirituel de Muhyī l-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī. Translated and edited by Denis Gril, *Annales Islamologiques* XV (1979), Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, pp. 97-146 (introduction and translation) and 104-170 (Arabic text and indexes).

This short, but remarkably dense and insightful "Book of Awakening to the Path of God" (No. 287 in O. Yahya's classification of Ibn 'Arabi's writings) is truly a hidden treasure. Completed before Badr's death in 618/1219, this selection of some 79 of the Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual "sayings" and directives by one of his closest disciples and lifelong companions (for whom, among others, he composed such major works as the *Futuhāt*, *Insha' al-Dawā'ir*, *Mawaqī' al-Nujūm* and the commentary on his *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq*) offers an invaluable glimpse of his more personal activity and practical teaching as a Sufi master. Because of the more intimate, practical focus of this treatise--which, not surprisingly, reflects both the wider body of traditional Sufi thought and practice, as well as spiritual experiences and temptations familiar to almost every reader--it offers a valuable complement to the emphasis on Ibn 'Arabi's more distinctive metaphysical teachings and formulations (especially in the *Fusus*) that has frequently colored subsequent presentations of his work both in Islamic countries and in the modern West. Not only does the very form of the work, with its juxtaposition of quotations on such apparently diverse topics and levels of experience and understanding, faithfully convey much of the flavor of the living relations between a master and his disciples, but it also reminds us, both explicitly and implicitly, of the many problems posed by the context of oral teaching and spiritual practice in which Ibn 'Arabi's other writings were originally composed.

At the same time, the extraordinary range of this work (stylistically, as well as in its subject matter), combined with its simplicity and economy of expression, would qualify it (given the necessary annotation) as an excellent introduction to the inner dimensions of Islamic spirituality more generally, and even as a fascinating collection of meditations on the spiritual life for readers without any particular background in either Ibn 'Arabi or Sufism. The striking accessibility and universality of these meditations (ranging from gnomic "*hikam*", resembling the celebrated Sufi aphorisms of Ibn 'Ata' Allah, to longer, subtle analyses of spiritual states much like the chapters on the *maqamat* in the *Futuhāt*) flow from Badr's consistent choice of sayings focusing directly on the soul--and formulated with the finesse and subtlety of expression that characterize all of Ibn 'Arabi's writing--, while the theological and metaphysical dimensions of that experience most often appear only in the background. At the same time, the variety of

spiritual states and conditions evoked here defies summarization: the "Path of God", as Badr repeatedly indicates, extends to all the creatures, and the "awakening" Ibn 'Arabi is pointing to takes place on many levels. Clearly his work is by no means intended exclusively for "beginners", and we expect that many readers will eventually find it to be the sort of spiritual classic which takes on renewed depth and meaning at each reading.

More specialized students of Ibn 'Arabi or of Sufism in its historical aspects are likely to find this work equally intriguing for other reasons. To begin with, it points to the still largely unstudied dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's work and subsequent influence as a practicing shaykh and spiritual teacher (as manifested, e.g., in the *khirqā akbariyya*), while at the same time it offers a salutary reminder of the considerable limitations of all literary evidence in this realm. (It is no accident if Badr places his master's pointed advice on how one should approach and benefit from the sayings of the "people of God" at the very center of his book, no.'s 39 and 40.) Secondly (and again like much of the *Futuhat*), this book gives the reader an immediate impression of the concrete, practical context and recurrent spiritual (and mundane) realities underlying the relatively theoretical discussions of metaphysics, Islamic theology or the "stages of the Path" in much of the Sufi literature now available in translation. Thus the student of Ibn 'Arabi will quickly recognize here many of the key themes and characteristic emphases to be found throughout his writings: his insistence on integral respect of the letter of Revelation; the supreme rank of the "Knower through God" (*'alim bi-Allah*) and his "return" to a transformed awareness of the manifest forms of creation; the central ontological and spiritual functions of the imagination; his stress on true "servanthood" (*'ubudiyya* and the related spiritual virtues) as the most effective approach to God; the uses and limitations of the intellect; etc. But here, as Badr (and his master) no doubt intended, the reader is obliged to confront those issues as they arise directly in his own experience.

Prof. Gril is to be commended not only for having brought this work to the attention of a wider public, but also for the quality of his Arabic edition (based on 6 manuscripts, the oldest less than a century after al-Habashi's death), the elaborate index of technical terms (pp. 147-164), and his elegant translation--especially remarkable given the difficulties of these often highly condensed and sometimes technical Arabic expressions. The introduction (pp. 97-103), in addition to discussing the manuscripts, summarizes the references to al-Habashi scattered through Ibn 'Arabi's works (virtually our only biographical sources) and briefly presents a few of

the most characteristic themes of this book. The few footnotes referring to corresponding passages in the *Futuhat* and other works offer essential background for some of the more laconic passages, but the translator--not surprisingly, in a scholarly Arabic journal aimed at specialists in this domain--has not attempted to provide the more extensive annotation and explanation (both of traditional Sufi vocabulary and of Ibn 'Arabi's own ideas) that might be needed by more general readers. In view of the special qualities and potentially broader interest of this book (and the relative inaccessibility of the *Annales*), we may hope that Prof. Gril, who is ideally equipped for the task, will eventually publish a separate, expanded version of his translation, and that the availability of this Arabic edition will soon encourage the preparation of an English translation as well.

La Risâla de Saif al-Dîn Ibn Abî l-Mansûr Ibn Zâfir: Biographies des maîtres spirituels connus par un cheikh égyptien du VII^e/XIII^e siècle. Introduction, édition et traduction par DENIS GRIL. Cairo/Paris, Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire (IFAO), 1986. [257 pp. French; 116 pp. Arabic text and indexes.] FF 380.

The core of this remarkable work, originally presented as a doctoral thesis at the Université de Provence in 1983, is the carefully annotated edition (on the basis of a unique surviving manuscript) and translation of a most unusual text: the memoirs of a prominent 13th-century Egyptian Sufî shaykh who, near the very end of his long and active life (595/1198-682/1283), recorded his spiritual encounters, affiliations (both direct and indirect) and experiences with dozens of noted masters and saints of his time, including such famous figures as al-Shâdhilî, Suhrawardî, and Ibn 'Arabî. Quite apart from the specific historical details of this work that have attracted earlier researchers, it is above all a moving, immediately accessible human document that can be read with pleasure (and edification) even by students with little or no specialized background, while providing an indispensable concrete, living complement to the primarily "theoretical" emphases of most traditional Sufî literature now available in translation.

What lends the *Risâla* this broader human dimension--while at the same time distinguishing it from related writings in such more familiar genres as Islamic hagiography (e.g., the well-known works of 'Attâr, Jâmî, the *Hilyat al-Awliyâ'*, etc.) and the various biographical *Tabaqât*--is its thoroughly personal, essentially autobiographical point of view and its relatively informal, almost private mode of expression, unconcerned with the apologetic or didactic aims and diverse stylistic or doctrinal concerns that inevitably colored more formal writings directed toward a larger public. The many brief, cameo-like portraits making up the *Risâla* are structured, for the most part, around deceptively simple anecdotal expressions of the author's own mature religious insight and teaching, in an openly subjective, personal approach that is closer both to the actual methods of individual spiritual practice and instruction (including their manifold interactions with every area of "ordinary" life), and to their common human experiential grounds. For the focus of Safî's interest in these masters and saints is not so much their individual biographical particularities (or historical and literary accomplishments) as it is the more profound spiritual type, insight or distinctive lesson that is exemplified in most cases by a single representative incident or exploit--often involving dream-visions or even more spectacular *karâmât*--connected with each shaykh.

The composite result of all these illustrations is a fascinating historical mosaic that vividly conveys the full living variety of methods, personalities, masters, and intellectual and social structures which--against the background of an incredible ferment of travel (*siyāha*), popular fervor and the creative interactions of many masters and currents of thought--apparently still typified *tasawwuf* in Ayyubid society (and its Islamic neighbors) at this time, just prior to the more rigid institutionalization associated with the later Sufism of the *tarīqas*. Prof. Gril's long introduction (pp. 1-80) and related bio-bibliographical appendices (pp. 205-253), together with his detailed notes to the translation and edition, are largely devoted to filling out this wider historical background and solving the complex puzzles that are posed by Safi's brief references to a host of otherwise little-known shaykhs, saints and disciples whose careers (and related web of initiatic and personal relations) more often than not stretched from Andalusia and Morocco to Syria and Iraq. (Incidentally, the translator frequently notes the many indications--in the *Risāla*, at least--of a more distinct separation, both socially and intellectually, between the Arab shaykhs and saints known to Safi and the Persian-speaking "Sufi" masters and their teachings in the same period, even in cities and regions where the two currents are definitely known to have coexisted.) In addition, the richness and variety of the historical sources (both by Sufis and by authors from other disciplines) that are brought together in these sections likewise help to suggest the potential usefulness of texts like the *Risāla* for historians interested in such related questions as the social and political dimensions of *tasawwuf* and its gradual institutionalization; the conditions underlying the apparent wave of Andalusian and Maghrebi emigration (quite apart from the Hajj) in this period; or even the description of "mentalités" and the popular imagination (with regard to dreams, *karāmât*, types of sainthood, etc.).

But if Prof. Gril often touches on such broader historical topics raised by the *Risāla*--particularly in his concluding chapter on "The Shaykhs in the City" and in his earlier discussion of "The Main Currents of Egyptian Tasawwuf" (dealing with the disciples and influences, in Safi's work, of such key historical figures Abû Madyan, Ibn al-'Arîf, Ahmad al-Rifâ'î, 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Gîlânî, and al-Shâdhilî)--, the focus of his own personal interest is clearly reflected in the most fully developed section of the Introduction, his study of "Tasawwuf in the *Risāla*" (pp. 35-67). There, in highly condensed form, he provides a rich and subtle analysis of the many concrete illustrations, throughout the *Risāla*, of such practically critical matters as the pedagogical relations of master and disciple (or of Sufi "brothers"); the role of different rites and

practices (*dhikr* and Koran recitation, *samâ'*, *khalwa*, etc.); the constant interplay of spiritual knowledge and realization (especially here in relation to the "Reality of Muhammad"); the problem of spiritual types and technical terminology; etc. By discussing these fundamental issues in a constant dialogue with the better-known doctrinal writings of other Sufi authors (especially Ibn 'Arabî's *Futûhât*, which was largely rooted in the same particular historical currents of *tasawwuf*), Prof. Gril is able to bring out the deeper significance and presuppositions of many of the stories and events recounted in the *Risâla*, while underlining the very real limitations of all writing in this domain. And in at least two of these areas--his insistence on the clear distinction between spiritual and ethical "virtues", and his analysis of the primary significance of the *karâmât* (of whatever type) in terms of the disciple's own inner spiritual development--Prof. Gril has offered some of the clearest, most insightful writing we have ever encountered in scholarly discussions of these central aspects of Islamic mysticism.

In short, this thorough, elaborately presented study of an important Sufi text--while whetting the historian's appetite for more such editions and translations--also provides a necessary, vividly detailed reminder of the full range of phenomena and diverse historical contexts underlying what is too often unreflectedly lumped together as "Sufi literature." As such, it could serve a useful role in almost any course on this key aspect of Islamic tradition (as well as in more phenomenological, cross-cultural approaches to these dimensions of spirituality and religious experience). Thus, while acknowledging the beautiful printing and presentation that typify this and other publications of IFAO, one can only hope that in this case Prof. Gril's translation (and introduction) will also eventually become available separately, in a format more accessible to most students and individual scholars.

Manjhan, *Madhumālatī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, translated by Simon Weightman and Aditya Behl, with S.M. Pandey. Oxford, Oxford World's Classics, 2000. Iviii + 258 pages.

Faithful readers of this journal (and students of Sufism more generally) are probably at least vaguely aware of the considerable influence of ideas and teachings of Ibn 'Arabī in the course of the gradual spread of Islam and Perso-Islamic culture throughout India in the centuries following his death, through the related studies—to mention only a few familiar names—of W. Chittick, C. Ernst, A. Schimmel, A. Rizvi and many others. Unfortunately, however, the most familiar images and stereotypes concerning that influence continue to reflect the ongoing modern polemics, rooted more in contemporary politics than in past religious or cultural history, surrounding the controversial views of Sirhindi.

This new, very readable and accessible translation from the courtly Hindavī poem (composed in 1545) by S. Weightman and A. Behl, suggests richer, more creative and lasting strands of Akbarian influence. At the same time, it is also a delightful, unforgettable 'romance' epic of spiritual transformation in its own right. On first encounter, if one were to begin with the translation itself and pass over the remarkably rich and accessible introduction and explanatory notes provided by the translators, those without a serious knowledge of Sufi traditions would probably feel they were reading a highly symbolic Hindu or Sanskrit romance broadly reminiscent, in its combination of rich human drama and complex metaphysical symbolism, of either the *Divine Comedy* or Goethe's *Faust*. However, the highly condensed historical Introduction and Simon Weightman's remarkable Appendix clearly explain the complex roots of this narrative in the Shattārī Sufi lineage and training of the author, who was himself a respected shaykh of that order as well as an influential and accomplished literary artist.

Readers interested in Ibn 'Arabī and the deeper Sufi dimensions of this text should turn first to Simon Weightman's masterful Appendix ('The Symmetry of *Madhumālatī*'), which carefully summarises both the practical yogic-Sufi and aesthetic dimensions of the story and especially its elaborate transposition of Qur'anic cosmology and eschatology as understood by Ibn 'Arabī and his later philosophic and Sufi interpreters. Prof. Weightman's thorough analysis of these multiple structural symmetries—whose parallel complexities are certainly familiar to any student of Dante's masterwork, and which he and his students are now fruitfully exploring in the complex narrative structures of Rumi's *Masnavī*—should suggest the almost unimaginably

enormous gaps which still exist in our critical understanding and appreciation of so many of the classics of later Islamic literature (Persian, Ottoman, Urdu, etc.), a phenomenon which is surely not unconnected to today's so commonly impoverished intellectual appreciation of the essential metaphysical dimensions of Qur'anic teaching. In particular, Manjhan's detailed focus, founded on Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters, on the allegorical depiction of the cosmological, 'emanative' dimensions of Qur'anic (and classical Hindu) teaching and its subsequent reflection in the ascending planes of realisation, is an essential aspect of this mystical 'romance' that goes beyond the overt emphasis on the more practical dimensions of spiritual ascent in both Dante and *Faust*.

Much of the translators' Introduction and Notes focuses on the central dimension of 'taste'—at once a shared set of cultural-aesthetic assumptions, and corresponding spiritual realities—unifying and underlying the complex symbolism and inherited rhetorical forms of this extraordinary poem. Those powerful aesthetic dimensions of this text, still quite palpable in this fluent and eminently readable translation, are a convincing reminder that Ibn 'Arabī's classical Muslim interpreters in this and other newly 'islamising' cultures were engaged in something far deeper than a merely random 'syncretism' (understood as sort of sterile 'name-game' reminiscent of today's empty ideological enterprises of 'islamisation') or the strictly philosophical elaboration of a personal theory of the 'transcendent unity of religions'. Instead, what the attentive reader can immediately experience here, even today, is clearly a challenging, powerfully effective *creative* synthesis dictated by the living interaction of actually operative cultural norms, languages, symbols and artistic and spiritual possibilities.

This combination of the careful study of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings (or of Islamic scriptures understood in their light), philosophical acumen, and immensely creative, lastingly influential literary and social invention—the deepest possible realisation of that *ihsān* ('making good and beautiful') which the famous 'hadith of Gabriel' identifies as the ultimate aim of real Religion (*dīn*)—is a constant sign of the genuine assimilation of Ibn 'Arabī's teaching, whether in such earlier key literary figures as 'Irāqī, Ibn al-Fārid, and the great poet-philosopher Jāmī, or with Manjhan here in early Mughal India. Through seminal works like this study, we are only beginning to appreciate how profoundly the inspirations of Ibn 'Arabī continued to inspire similarly creative figures throughout the post-Mongol eastward expansion of Islam into southeast Asia and China, both in literature and in more anonymous, but no less influential, social domains.

Finally, Manjhan's own historical situation is another helpful reminder that the great classics of Islamic civilisation, in every field, were typically forged in rapidly changing, tumultuous and unavoidably multi-cultural situations precisely like our own. Against that backdrop, his creative accomplishment should suggest remarkable parallels to—and potential lessons for—our own time. Ibn 'Arabī's unswerving focus on returning to the actual *realities* underlying all human experience and the superficially warring interpretations of revelation takes us far beyond the sterile gambits (and Protagorean journalistic assumptions) of inter-religious and inter-civilisational 'dialogue'. The central theme of *Madhumālatī*, at every level, is that of ever-renewed 'marriage' (echoing the role of *azwāj* throughout the Qur'an): i.e., of the necessity of creative, challenging re-union of initially conflicting and apparently disparate principles in the deeper cosmic processes of renewal and spiritual perfection. For us, it is another helpful reminder, in remarkably similar historical circumstances, that the attractions of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, like the beauty of each Beloved, are only the very beginning of the story, drawing us into the adventurous necessity of forging new, authentic and effective forms of community and vehicles of realisation.

Mirror of the Intellect: Essays on Traditional Science and Sacred Art. By Titus Burckhardt. Translated and edited by William Stoddart. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. 270 pages.

One could not imagine a better introduction--or more suitable homage--to the life's work of T. Burckhardt (1908-1984) than the 25 essays collected and translated here, together with a short biographical note. Even readers already acquainted with Burckhardt's books on Islamic mysticism or medieval Christian (and Islamic) architecture and religious arts are likely to be surprised by the vast range of subjects and religious traditions covered in these articles, and those encountering his writings for the first time can pursue their particular interests through the complete bibliography of his publications (and subsequent translations in five languages) provided at the end.

The editor has divided these articles (drawn from a wide range of French and German-language publications) into four sections, roughly corresponding to the main subjects and religious traditions dealt with in all of Burckhardt's writings. The opening studies on "Traditional Cosmology and the Modern World" are representative of his lifelong efforts to point out the deeper symbolic and spiritual significance and lasting validity of common cosmological themes and assumptions shared by many of the world religions. (Fortunately for most readers, this is also the only section where the polemic tone and familiar dogmatic assumptions associated with the works of R. Guénon are particularly in evidence.) The following shorter studies on "Christian Themes"--ranging from Dante and Chartres to Russian icons and Swiss folk art--illustrate in a brief space that recurrent concern for bringing out the spiritual meaning and intentions of sacred iconography which is the unifying focus of Burckhardt's many books on the religious art and architecture of medieval Christianity and Islam.

The articles in the following section on "Symbolism and Mythology" turn the same eye for spiritual symbolism to themes that are either more universal (the symbolism of the mirror, water, alchemy or the sacred mask) or tied to less familiar religious traditions ("The Return of Ulysses" and the Crow sun dance). Precisely because these subjects are less bound up with familiar schemas of interpretation, these essays--such as Burckhardt's masterly unfolding of the "Symbolism of Chess"--are likely to give the clearest sense both of his actual spiritual method and of the *autobiographical* dimension,

the particular spiritual and aesthetic sensibility that brought together such outwardly disparate interests.

Finally, the essays on "Islamic Themes" (including translations and commentaries on works of Ghazali and Ibn Mashīsh) point to the area of Burckhardt's work, including his pioneering translations from Ibn 'Arabi and other Islamic mystics, which is probably destined to have the greatest lasting influence. Paradoxically, as can be seen in some of his latest writings here, his original attempts to transmit something of an earlier living Sufi tradition to a European audience have turned out to be of even greater interest to modern Muslims, from many backgrounds, for whom the loss of tradition and the secular disenchantment of the world (especially as promoted in religious "reformist" and "fundamentalist" guise) are far more than speculatively academic and historical questions.

Readers approaching these writings for the first time are likely to be struck not so much by any "school" or "doctrine" as by a sense of the individual, of having encountering someone with an extraordinary aesthetic and spiritual sensitivity--a quality that may not be unrelated to the author's own family background (including the famous historian Jacob Burckhardt). If there is a single unifying principle in these works drawn from such different contexts, it is perhaps best suggested in the brief "letter on spiritual method", summarizing the functions and qualifications of a genuine spiritual master, that the editor has placed at the very end. Just as the classical Sufi poets offered endless tales and images designed to awaken their listeners to the divine reality and presence within all the forms and events of their daily lives, so this writer seems to have been driven to penetrate and transmit the spiritual meanings of whatever "traditional" symbols and rituals he happened to encounter. And if, as Burckhardt often insists, such intentions, in pointing "beyond forms", necessarily follow a different direction from the more familiar historical and analytical approaches of academia, still scholars and amateurs alike, from many fields, will no doubt continue to draw inspiration from the studies (and the often "iconoclastic" perspective) represented here.

Only those familiar with the diversity of Burckhardt's writings and the difficulties of the original French and German texts (often full of transliterations from Arabic,

Sanskrit, etc.) can fully appreciate the editor/translator's efforts, both in organizing and translating this material, and his constant attention to detail. A measure of his true success is that one is rarely aware of reading a translation.