Ancient mosque an endangered monument

The Al-Azhar mosque in Fez is one of the few places we can point to which has a definite association with Ibn ‘Arabi. In the Futuhat Ibn ‘Arabi describes how, while leading the prayer here in 1196/593, he reached the Station of Light.

In 2005 a section of wall fell from a neighbouring property through the roof of the mosque. The risk of this happening had long been obvious, but remedial action had been slow in coming. Tragically, ten people were killed during prayers in the collapse.

The Regional Council of Tourism of Fez has succeeded in having the mosque included in a list of one hundred highly-threatened sites known as World Monuments Watch 2008. It has also requested 219,831 Euros of funding from the World Monuments Fund.

David Hornsby writes: On a recent trip to Fez I visited the Al-Azhar mosque, also known as the Ain el Khail after the area in which it lies. The king was very angry about the damage it had suffered, and much wooden scaffolding has since appeared throughout the old medina.

The event has focused the authorities’ mind on the need to prop up the walls and secure many of the medina’s ancient and rickety precarious properties so as to avoid further mishaps.

Continued on Page 7

Earliest known Ibn ‘Arabi manuscript

The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (the Berlin State Library) houses one of the most important collections of oriental manuscripts in Europe.

During a recent stay in Berlin Stephen Hirtenstein had the opportunity to spend several days going through the manuscripts relating to Ibn ‘Arabi and Sadruddin al-Qunawi. In general these are well-known works copied in 9th-13th century Hijra, i.e. at least 200 years after Ibn ‘Arabi’s lifetime, and therefore of less primary interest than some of the manuscripts which have been digitised from Turkish libraries. However, there are also some jewels of the kind that may appear in unexpected places. In the end 19 works were digitised for the Society archive.

Among these was the exceptional text which Gerald Elmore alerted us to in Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time (pp.197-99). It is a precious copy of the ‘Anqa’ Mughrib, in a beautiful Maghribi hand, apparently written in Fez in 597/1201 when Ibn ‘Arabi was staying in the city. The work itself was composed approximately two years earlier. It is, as Elmore notes, “a truly remarkable document... not only the earliest known text of the ‘Anqa’ Mughrib but as far as I am aware, the oldest existing copy of any work by Ibn al-‘Arabi.”

Stephen Hirtenstein writes: I can confirm his findings, and add that the remains of the cover page (only the right-hand bottom corner survives)
A major symposium to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Rumi's birth was held in Istanbul and Konya in May 2007, organized by Dr Mahmud Kiliç for the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Seyyed Hossein Nasr was a keynote speaker. A report by Qaiser Shahzad has been posted on the Symposium page of the Society web site.

Among the books related to this anniversary has been Alan Williams' translation of Book I of the *Masnavi*, published by Penguin. A foretaste of his translation of Book II appears opposite.

There is a conjunction between Rumi and Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi which, even if it cannot be exactly defined, is special.

Each of these great men speaks with a unique and completely original voice. What each of them wrote would stand out in any age. Born far apart, they ended up living within journeying distance of each other, like two wandering Mount Everests come to a halt side by side. There is no proof that they ever met, but there are indirect connections between them. Rumi knew Sadruddin Qunawi, the foremost student and heir of Ibn ‘Arabi. It is probable that Shamsi Tabrizi, the focal point of so much of Rumi's expression, met Ibn ‘Arabi in Damascus.

What each of them wrote exposes and invites to the highest possibility of being human. Given what they have in common, it is no surprise if those attracted to the meaning that Ibn ‘Arabi points to also delight in the writings and presence of Jelaluddin Rumi.

Martin Notcutt

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**Frithiof Rundgren**

The Society learned with sadness of the death of Professor Frithiof Rundgren on September 16th, 2006. Formerly Professor of Semitic Languages at Uppsala University, and Director of the Institute for Afro-Asiatic Languages, he was for 20 years an Honorary Fellow of the Society, and a kindly friend. His paper, “On the Dignity of Man – Some Aspects of the Unity of Being in Ibn ‘Arabi”, can be found on the Society web site.

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**Society Contact Information**

UK Secretary: Caroline Notcutt
PO Box 892, Oxford OX2 7XL, UK.
Tel: 01865 511963
e-mail: mias.uk@ibnarabisociety.org

US Secretary: John Mercer
PO Box 45, Berkeley, CA 94701-0045, USA
e-mail: mias.usa@ibnarabisociety.org

Newsletter Editor this edition: Martin Notcutt
e-mail: newsletter@ibnarabisociety.org
Website: http://www.ibnarabisociety.org
**The beauty of His state cannot be told**

A translation from Rumi’s *Masnavi*
by Alan Williams

Dr Alan Williams is Reader in Iranian Studies and Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester. His translation of Book I of the Masnavi was recently published by Penguin. This passage is from his work in progress on Book II.

The passage I have chosen to present here (*Masnavi, Book II, lines 157-193, ed. Este’lami*) sums up so much of Rumi’s teaching, and will be immediately recognisable to readers of Muhyiddin Ibn al-’Arabi’s works. Inimitably, and without the use of metaphysics or philosophical language, in the thinly-veiled guise of a story which he begins and abandons after two and a half couplets, Rumi goes to the very heart of Sufi teaching: it is a flight through imagery, metaphor and thought to the ecstatic utterance of certain knowledge in line 191. The passage ends in Rumi’s own self-silencing of lines 192-3. Readers are invited to experience for themselves this example of Rumi’s consummate poetic art, in the operation of what I have elsewhere referred to as his ‘open-heart surgery’ (see further the Introduction to the translation of the first book of the *Masnavi, Rumi Spiritual Verses*, Penguin Classics, 2006).

A Sufi wandered round the world’s horizons till one night he resided in a lodge. He had a beast, and tied it in the stable; he took the honoured seat with his companions, and then he joined his friends in contemplation: friends’ presence is a book, and even more. The Sufi’s book’s not written in black ink: it’s nothing but a heart as white as snow. The scholar’s sustenance is found in penmarks; it’s nothing but a heart as white as snow.

For some time he will make do with the deer tracks, he sees the deer tracks and he’s on the trail. He’s like a hunter who is after game: so what sustains the Sufi? Marks of footprints.

To go one stage upon the scent of musk-gland is better than five score by tracks and traipsing. That heart which is the rising place of moonbeams is where the doors are opened for the wise. To go one stage upon the scent of musk-gland is better than five score by tracks and traipsing.

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And while the angels were opposing that, they clapped their hands at them in secret, jeering. They were informed of every form that is, before the Universal Soul was fettered. Before the heavens were made they witnessed Saturn; they saw the bread before the seeds existed. Without a brain and heart, they’re filled with thought; without an army and a war, they won. For them that contemplation is their thought, and yet to those far off it’s intuition. Thought is about things past and things to come: when it escapes these two, the problem’s solved.

[The spirit’s seen the wine within the grape, the spirit sees the thing in non-existence.]

Conditioned things were seen as unconditioned, before the mine true coin and fake distinguished. And long before creation of the grapes they tasted wine and felt its ecstasies.

And long before creation of the grapes they tasted wine and felt its ecstasies. They see December in a hot July, and in the sunlight’s beams they see the shadows. Inside the grape’s heart they have seen the wine: in pure fanâ they’ve seen phenomena. The sky drinks deeply from their circling cup, the sun is swathed in gold by their abundance.

When you see two of these meet as companions, they are both one and they’re six hundred thousand. They can be likened to the waves in number: they’ll have been put in numbers by the wind.

The sun, which is the souls, is all divided reflected in the windows of the bodies. If you look at its disk, indeed it’s one, but he who’s veiled by bodies is in doubt. Disunion is within the animal soul: in human souls the One Self is residing.

Since God ‘has sprinkled over them His light’ His light has never truly been divided. Give up fatigue one moment, fellow traveller, that I may picture one mole of His beauty. The beauty of His state cannot be told. Both worlds — what are they? Just His mole’s reflection.

If I should breathe a word of His fair mole, my speech is going to tear apart my body. I’m happy as an ant inside a grain store to bear a weight much greater than myself. ©Alan Williams 2007

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1 This couplet is not in Este’lami’s edition and may be a later interpolation.
Unveiling from the Effects of the Voyages
An introduction by Angela Jaffray to the *Kitâb al-Isfâr*, and a translation

Having recently published her translation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Ittiḥâd al-kawni*, “The Universal Tree and the Four Birds”, Angela Jaffray is now working on a translation of his *Kitâb al-Isfâr* ‘an natâ’ij al-asfâr – “Unveiling from the Effects of the Voyages”. She has kindly given us a sample of that translation, and an introduction to the great theme of the *Isfâr*.

When a waystation appears to you, and you say: “This is the goal,” another road opens up before you. You supply yourself with provisions for the road and take off. There is no waystation that you survey but that you say: “This is my goal.” Then when you reach it, it is not long before you set out once more on the journey.

In the *Futâhât*’s Chapter on the Voyage, Ibn ‘Arabi describes a poignant exchange between God and the gnostic voyager who, through repeated unveilings at numerous spiritual and conceptual waystations, has come to see God in everything. The voyager wants nothing more than to throw down his traveler’s staff and find rest in his goal. But God informs him that this is impossible: voyaging has no end, either in this life or the hereafter. In a pastage echoed in the *mīrâj* narrative, he devotes six chapters of the *Futâhât* merely to explaining the difference between words relating to transference from place to place. Voyaging (*safar*), for example, must be distinguished from wayfaring (*sâlîk*) and wandering (*siyâha*). The wayfarer wanders freely on the highways and byways of this life, while the voyager has a destination.

All of these come together in Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Isfâr* ‘an natâ’ij al-asfâr – Unveiling from the Effects of the Voyages – which traces the trajectory of a number of voyages: existential, metaphoric, and textual. Like all of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings, the *Isfâr* is sui generis. Part cosmology, part Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsîr*) and stories of the prophets (*qisas al-anbiyâ’*), part spiritual vademecum, its seventeen chapters deny categorization. Alongside the major themes of the book, gracefully summarized by the Shaykh in his Prologue, are myriad allusions to grammar, alchemy, astrology, and apocalypse. After an initial chapter discussing “the three voyages” – to God, from God, and with God – subsequent chapters are given titles characterizing the specific voyage dealt with therein: The lordly voyage of the All-Merciful from the Cloud to the Throne; the voyage of creation and command, or the voyage of origination; the voyage of the Qur’an; the voyage of the vision in the signs and the esoteric significations (Muhammad’s *mîrâj*); Adam’s voyage of trial; Idris’ voyage of might and elevation in place and rank; Noah’s voyage of salvation; Abraham’s voyage of guidance; Lot’s voyage of approach with no return; the voyage of ruse and trial involving Jacob and Joseph; and Moses’ voyages of the divine tryst, satisfaction; anger and return; striving for one’s family; fear; and a final chapter on precaution.

This excerpt, “The voyage of approach and no return, which is the voyage of Lot toward Abraham the Intimate Friend, Peace be upon him,” may provide some sense of the work.

There can be no doubt that the theme of the voyage was central to Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought, perhaps not surprising for a man who spent nearly half of his life on the road. Aside from a number of spiritual *mīrâj* narratives, he devotes six chapters of the *Futâhât* merely to explaining the difference between words relating to transference from place to place.

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1. "This is the goal," another road opens up before you. You supply yourself with provisions for the road and take off. There is no waystation that you survey but that you say: “This is my goal.” Then when you reach it, it is not long before you set out once more on the journey.

2. In the *Futâhât*’s Chapter on the Voyage, Ibn ‘Arabi describes a poignant exchange between God and the gnostic voyager who, through repeated unveilings at numerous spiritual and conceptual waystations, has come to see God in everything. The voyager wants nothing more than to throw down his traveler’s staff and find rest in his goal. But God informs him that this is impossible: voyaging has no end, either in this life or the hereafter. In a pastage echoed in the *mīrâj* narrative, he devotes six chapters of the *Futâhât* merely to explaining the difference between words relating to transference from place to place.

3. Voyaging (*safar*), for example, must be distinguished from wayfaring (*sâlîk*) and wandering (*siyâha*). The wayfarer wanders freely on the highways and byways of this life, while the voyager has a destination.

4. All of these come together in Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Isfâr* ‘an natâ’ij al-asfâr – Unveiling from the Effects of the Voyages – which traces the trajectory of a number of voyages: existential, metaphoric, and textual. Like all of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings, the *Isfâr* is sui generis. Part cosmology, part Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsîr*) and stories of the prophets (*qisas al-anbiyâ’*), part spiritual vademecum, its seventeen chapters deny categorization. Alongside the major themes of the book, gracefully summarized by the Shaykh in his Prologue, are myriad allusions to grammar, alchemy, astrology, and apocalypse. After an initial chapter discussing “the three voyages” – to God, from God, and with God – subsequent chapters are given titles characterizing the specific voyage dealt with therein: The lordly voyage of the All-Merciful from the Cloud to the Throne; the voyage of creation and command, or the voyage of origination; the voyage of the Qur’an; the voyage of the vision in the signs and the esoteric significations (Muhammad’s *mîrâj*); Adam’s voyage of trial; Idris’ voyage of might and elevation in place and rank; Noah’s voyage of salvation; Abraham’s voyage of guidance; Lot’s voyage of approach with no return; the voyage of ruse and trial involving Jacob and Joseph; and Moses’ voyages of the divine tryst, satisfaction; anger and return; striving for one’s family; fear; and a final chapter on precaution.

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The Voyage of Approach and no Return
which is the voyage of Lot toward Abraham the Intimate Friend

eloquent is the Most High’s saying: “And herein hath come unto thee the Truth,” and His saying: “as a reminder” of that which is in you and with you of that which you have forgotten. What I have narrated to you is to remind you of what is in you and what I have called to your attention, so you will know that you are everything, in everything, and from everything.

I am from everything,
And I am with the Real in everything.
I am a shadow that becomes manifest through Him.
And if I am a shadow, I am an afternoon shadow.
My very fall is my ascent to Him,
With the most auspicious of stars
For every living being,
My right conduct has gone
Beyond every right conduct
And my straying has gone beyond every straying,
Just as He is with every one, dead or living,
So is He in every unfolding and folding.

“And God speaks the truth and He guides on the Path” (Q. 33:14)

Footnotes
1. Isfâr, par. 3. 2. The intermediate world. 3. This Bridge passes through the Fire and leads to the Garden.
4. Arabic: katib al-nu’ay. The Dune is mentioned in Q. 73:14. According to tradition, the Dune of Vision, made of white musk, is situated in the Garden of Eden, the most elevated of the Gardens. It is here that the inhabitants of the Garden will meet to contemplate God. See Fut. I.320; III.442. 5. Isfâr, par. 4. 6. See James W. Morris’ article in Journey of the Heart; revised in The Reflective Heart. 7. Fut. II.382. This difference is reflected in Islamic Law: the wayfarer must complete the full ritual prayer while the voyager curtails it; the wayfarer fasts during Ramadan; the voyager is exempt.
8. See Fut. I, Chapter 27. 9. Arabic: yaqîn. This is also the name of the town to which Lot was reported to have fled.
10. Ibn `Arabi connects the name “Lût” to the word lūta, to cling or adhere to. 11. See Q. 2:260.
12. Arabic: fay’. As Denis Gril (Dévoilement des effets du voyage, p. 50, n. 113), explains, zill is shadow in general, fay’ is the specific kind of shadow that extends with the sun’s declination.
13. Arabic: sa’d al-su’ṣā’d. The twenty-fourth lunar mansion, considered the most favorable of the cluster of stars known as su’ṣā’d.
Brazil, Pontificia Universidade Catolica do Paraná. Sandra Benato, “Tawhid and the heart of itself. Unicity and identity in Ibn ‘Arabi – notes for the study of the essential identity.” Based on Ibn ‘Arabi’s concept of ayn thabitah this study focuses on a deeper understanding of the human identity and subjectivity. As a psychotherapist I have been observing, for the last 18 years, how the essential identity underlies and structures our practising of ‘selfhood’. It is possible to see and develop awareness of the flow of the essence through our behaviour and circumstances of life. So, ‘know thyself, know your Lord’ becomes a daily living out experience.

Egypt, American University in Cairo. Reham Elnory. MA Thesis Title: “Ibn ‘Arabi’s Primacy of Consciousness: Being Found and Finding the Real” The irreducible primaries in any philosophical argument are drawn from a certain metaphysical worldview. Any metaphysical system asks and seeks to answer the questions: Is there a reality? Why is there something rather than nothing? How does it come to be and why is it there? Ibn ‘Arabi’s unique answers to these questions reveals a reality with a clearly articulated origin and telos, a reality where consciousness is prior, for existence “wujud” is nothing but finding, and we come to exist through God’s finding of us, which is ultimately God’s finding of Himself.


M. Afif Anshori finished his doctoral dissertation in June 2007, entitled “The Sufi Teachings in Shekh Siti Jenar’s Serat”. (Serat is a Javanese word which means literary work or writing). Shekh Siti Jenar was a controversial and legendary figure in Java. The dissertation is an answer to the accusa-

We asked student members of the Society and others who have contacted us from time to time about post-graduate work they might be doing in this field, and were delighted to get such a good response. Even so, we know that this is only a fraction of what is going on round the world, and would be glad to learn more.

Ibn ‘Arabi Society

Miftah Arifin has finished his doctoral dissertation, entitled “Wujudiyah in Nusantara: Exploring the Continuity and Changes of the Doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujûd in Indonesia of the 16th - 19th Centuries.” He is interested in this subject because Wujudiyah, the well-known Malay designation for Wahdat al-Wujud, has been often misunderstood and led to the labels of “heretic”, “apostate”, “misled”, etc. to the doctrine. He demonstrates that Wujudiyah as a concept and school of Sufism in Indonesia had been continuously developed and changed in various new forms.

Mohammad Yusuf has been doing his doctoral dissertation, entitled “The Poetry of Love in Sufi Literature: A Balâghah Study of the Poems of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Tarjumân al-Aswâq.” (Balâghah is an Arabic word which means eloquence; art of good style, art of composition; literature. ‘Iln al-balâghah is an Arabic technical term which means rhetoric.) Yusuf chose this subject because the Tarjumân is a diwân which is very often misunderstood by scholars who accuse Ibn ‘Arabi of producing an erotic work under the pretence that the verses in it were mystical poems. Yusuf wanted to demonstrate that the Tarjumân contains esoteric and symbolic verses expressing its author’s love for the Beloved.

Umdah El Boroh has been doing her magisterial work, “The Feminine Dimensions in Ibn ‘Arabi’s Tarjumân.” She chose this subject because the Tarjumân is a literary, spiritual work which highly appreciates women and strongly emphasizes the feminine dimensions as symbol of divine beauty and love.

Spain, University of Seville. Gracia López Anguita: In 2006 I completed my Masters dissertation on “The Genies in Islam. Translation and commentary of Chapter Nine of Muhiyidin Ibn ‘Arabi’s al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya”. The Sheikh al-Akbar explains the origin of the djinn, their position with regard to human beings and angels, the rebel act of Iblis, and the close relationship between the djinn and one of the central concepts of Ibn Arabi’s thought, the barzakh. I am now preparing my Ph.D. thesis on angels, devils and djinns in the work of Ibn ‘Arabi and other muslim gnostics.

United Kingdom, Cambridge University. Huzayfa Mangera. The tentative title of my M. Phil. dissertation is: “Inspiration: the Futûhât al-Makkiyya and the Rûh al-Quds.” The study
considers some of the repercussions of Ibn ‘Arabi’s frequent claims to ‘inspiration’ for his relationship to the wider Islamic tradition – especially a) the Qur’an and b) the religious jurists of his time (fuqaha’ al-zaman). The discussion concentrates on the Futuḥât al-Makkiyya (together with the interpretive obstacles this work proposes) and how (and whether) these can be resolved within the Rûh al-Quds.

United Kingdom, Glasgow University. David Heath, “The problem of diversity and the imperative of dialogue.” David is writing this masters dissertation to famililarise himself with the English literature on Ibn ‘Arabi with particular focus on how ‘Arabi’s thoughts support an esoteric dialogue between Islam and other religious traditions and through this a basis for defence of religion against the onslaught of the secular west. He hopes to develop this into PhD work.

United Kingdom, Oxford University. Denis McAuley is working on a doctoral dissertation entitled, “An analysis of selected poems from Ibn ‘Arabi’s Diwân.” I am discussing a small number of poems from the Diwân to see how they use formal features such as metre and rhyme, how they fit in a wider literary context, and what they tell us about Ibn ‘Arabi’s understanding of poetry.

United Kindom, SOAS, London. Husam Almallak is a Ph.D. student at The School of Oriental and African Studies, department of the Study of Religions. My thesis title is “Post-Secular Islamic Religiosity: Re-reading Ibn ‘Arabi’s Hermeneutics of Nothingness”. In this I explore how Continental Philosophy as espoused by the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger can provide for a ‘bridge’ between secular thought and Islamic religiosity. In essence the thesis postulates that secular thought need not be antithetical to religiosity, rather it can lead to a ‘post-secular’ religiosity. This is fundamentally founded on the hermeneutic philosophy nihilism (as the foundation of secular thought) and the concept of nothingness.”

USA, Yale University. Matthew Warren, tentative Ph.D. Dissertation Topic: “The Interpretation of Ibn al-Farid’s Ta’lîyâh al-Kubra from Farghani to Jami.” Sa’id al-Din Farghani’s (d. 699/1300) influential Persian and Arabic commentaries, the first to be written on that high point of Arabic Suﬁ poetry, the Ta’lîyâh al-Kubra of Ibn al-Farid (d. 632/1235), were praised by Jami some two centuries later as being the most coherent and systematic exposition of the doctrines of the Ibn al-‘Arabi school; as such, they proved of central importance to the development of that school’s thought through several of its interpretive projects.

If you know about somebody doing post-graduated work in this area, please tell the Society about it.

Ancient mosque

Continued from Page 1

The Al-Azhar mosque dates from the twelfth century and is in the Almohad style. Architecturally it is the only octagonal minaret perched on a flying buttress in the entire Maghreb.

In reaching the Station of Light, Ibn ‘Arabi had a vision of himself as one total eye capable of seeing in every direction, and being like a sphere, inheriting from Mohammed this status of being ‘without a nape’.

In The Quest for the Red Sulphur, Claude Addas relates that only those who have reached such a circular vision have the right to perform prayers on horseback, and it is a strange coincidence that the mosque is situated in the district known as the ‘Source of the horse’.

The pool where the horses of the medina still love to come and drink the water is adjacent to the ruined mosque. Plastic rubbish abounds, and yet, apparently, the very large fish which sometimes appears in the pool is still around; we were told that it has been seen quite recently.

Being unable to go inside because of the building’s current highly perilous condition, we made a fairly hair-raising ascent onto its roof via a steep unlit stairwell in a neighbouring house. From there we were able to look through the cracked roof onto the floor of the mosque many feet below, to precisely where Ibn ‘Arabi was leading the prayer when he had his experience. We leaned over an external wall and gazed into the clear pond which the very large fish inhabits.

The application for funding envisages that the restored building will function not only as a mosque but also as a library concentrating on the works of the Shaykh and their translations, and as a place of meditation open to all.

Those who are leading the restoration project would very much like to see the mosque become a centre for the study of Ibn ‘Arabi in Morocco – where his significance, importance and the time he spent in Fez are not well known. They are open to active cooperation with the Society to make use of the restored space, and would very particularly welcome help to establish a library of the Shaykh’s works there.

The Society Library, though limited in size, has relevant works in 18 or more languages. These ones are in Swedish, Russian, Bosnian, German, Czech and Indonesian.
Another dimension of this year’s symposium is that some of the papers have already been broadcast as the Ibn ‘Arabi Society ‘podcasts’ – available free through the Internet (go to podcast section on the MIAS website) These have been recommended on the internet on a number of ‘blogs’:

“Ibn ‘Arabi Society has made available many beautiful and valuable audio talks in its website. They have great spiritual wisdom, inspiration and deeper understanding of reality – a great way to appreciate what the richness of Islamic philosophy has to offer to humanity.”

So far three talks from the recent symposium have been broadcast:

Jane Clark ‘As if you saw Him – vision and best action.’ She is inspired by a recent trip to Fattepur Sikri where the great Mughal Emperor Akbar attempted to establish a universal religion - which failed in its time but is perhaps the precursor to a world of peaceful co-existence.

Elias Amidon, who is well versed in the practicalities of the ‘right and beautiful action’ in the development of the Abraham Path, speaks of ‘Crossing Borders: the Question of Human Belonging and Ibn ‘Arabi’s Theory of perpetual Transformation’.