

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society

Autumn 2009 Issue 26

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Young writer of the Year Award 2009

We are delighted to announce that the winner of the first Young Writer of the Year Award is Jari Kaukua from Finland, for his essay "I in the Eye of God: Ibn 'Arabi on the Divine Human Self". This award is a new venture for the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, and it was a great pleasure to receive seven previously unpublished essays from writers under 35 years of age from all over the world – Finland, Switzerland, Egypt, Kashmir, Pakistan and USA. The standard of the submissions was



Jari Kaukua

extremely high, and they covered a great diversity of subject matter – the poetry of the *Diwan*, Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the *mahdi* and *wilaya*, the role of individuality in his thought, the universality of his remit, and a very interesting comparison between his exposition on real vision and that of Heidegger and Plato. All the essays showed an excellent grasp of the ideas, and the ability to really work with them in a contemporary context. The entrants are to be congratulated on the level of thought and insight exhibited. However, a winner had to be found, and Dr Kaukua's was eventually chosen because of its originality and because it showed such deep engagement with an important aspect of Ibn 'Arabi's thought. In asking the question: "What is human self-awareness and how does Ibn 'Arabi's understanding differ from that of other thinkers?" the essay touches upon a matter of enormous relevance to the modern world, and brings out the unique contribution Ibn 'Arabi makes to our understanding of the very purpose of human existence. The judges especially liked the fact that it acknowledges some of the possible objections to the underlying concept of *wahdat al-wujūd* and answers them coherently, and that it puts Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of self-consciousness into a cultural context by comparing it, for instance, with that of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) – and hence with the whole philosophical tradition inherited from the Greeks. This was an excellent start to this new award, which we hope will run for many years to come.

Jane Clark

New catalogue of Ibn 'Arabi's manuscripts

Since 2001, under the aegis of the Society, Jane Clark and Stephen Hirtenstein have been compiling a database of manuscripts and a digital archive of the best historical copies. Most of the work has been done in Turkish libraries, which hold the largest and earliest collections, especially Istanbul and Konya, but there has also been access to private collections. So far some 2,600 manuscripts have been catalogued, of which approximately 1,560 are verifiably by Ibn 'Arabi. The remaining manuscripts are by well-known disciples (Ibn Sawdakin, Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi, Nabulsi etc), and other authors who appear in the collections (Abu Madyan, Ghazali, Buni etc). The digital archive currently contains nearly 1,100 manuscripts.

In late 2008 a grant from The Islamic Manuscript Association (TIMA) was awarded to complete the initial stage of the cataloguing, and by December 2009 the first catalogue will be produced. It is to consist of two parts. Firstly, a list of works by Ibn 'Arabi, following the basic form of Osman Yahia's bibliography, i.e. retaining the 'RG' numbers which identify them. Each file will include up-to-date bibliographical information and a list of manuscripts inspected with details of their provenance. Secondly, a catalogue of the volumes in which the texts appear, listing all the titles that they contain; i.e. situating a particular work in context. These two catalogues will initially be in a simple printed form, and it is hoped that we will also be able to put a version on the internet.

This catalogue will standardise the work begun by Osman Yahia, resolving duplications and misattributions, clarifying which are the best manuscripts and giving full details, and updating on the basis of current research. In due course, there are plans to publish the main findings of the archive in a research paper and to put the full database on the internet, in a searchable form, as a resource for scholars.

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The Brilliant Star

Ibn 'Arabi: Dhû-l-Nûn the Egyptian
by Cecilia Twinch

Ibn 'Arabi's book on Dhû-l-Nûn's life and teachings, *The Brilliant Star: On the Spiritual Virtues of Dhû-l-Nûn the Egyptian (al-Kawkab al-durrî fî manâqib Dhî-l-Nûn al-Misrî)*, collects together stories and sayings connected with this great Egyptian master. It also provides some insightful, if brief, commentary by Ibn 'Arabi himself.

Dhû-l-Nûn's coming to the spiritual path, his quest for beneficial knowledge in his constant wanderings, the miraculous events he encounters, the rigorous life of the ascetic and the longing of the lover, provide the rich backdrop woven by the mysticism of the time. This is reflected on, several centuries later, by the Andalusian master, Ibn 'Arabi, whose observations and good counsel on compassion, self-knowledge and human completion still have application in bringing together the East and West of today.

Dhû-l-Nûn travelled extensively during his lifetime, from Egypt to the Maghreb, Antioch, Yemen and Baghdad – not to mention his being transported to Mecca through the rolling up of time and space (*tayy al-ard*). Since his death in 860 CE (245H), his fame continued to spread throughout the Islamic world. Ibn 'Arabi retells stories about him which he had already heard in Andalusia and North Africa, long before his own journey to the East, passing through the land where Dhû-l-Nûn was born. Ibn 'Arabi carefully collected the stories and sayings of Dhû-l-Nûn and the saintly people he met, and verified them through texts and through the oral tradition, meticulously recording the chains of transmission. The reason why he did this, he tells us, is because:

"When God's righteous servants (al-sâlihûn) are mentioned, compassion descends."

*When God's righteous servants
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the mention of the righteous forms part of the mention of God. The heart is touched by hearing about the lives of such people who have devoted themselves exclusively to God and whose noble souls have detached themselves from this world (*al-dunyâ*).

In all the hagiographical works Ibn 'Arabi possessed for his own use and in all his other sources, whether personal or reported orally by his teachers, "no one had accomplished more pious peregrinations (*siyâha*) and been in the presence of more friends of God than Dhû-l-Nûn, may God be satisfied with him." Therefore, in speaking of Dhû-l-Nûn, Ibn 'Arabi says, "We are also speaking

of a great number of saintly people, both men and women, whose blessing we may hope to receive."

When asked one day in a gathering how he turned to the spiritual path, Dhû-l-Nûn, whose real name is Abû-l-Fayd, related how Sâlim the Maghrebian came to him in one of his sessions and asked, "O Abû-l-Fayd, how did you turn (to God) (*tawba*)?" Dhû-l-Nûn replied:

"It's so extraordinary you won't believe it." Sâlim insisted, so Dhû-l-Nûn continued, "I was on my way out of Cairo to visit a village and on the way I slept in the desert. When I opened my eyes I saw a lark which was blind and had fallen from its nest onto the ground. Then the earth split open and two bowls emerged from it, one of gold and one of silver. In one there was sesame seed and in the other water. The lark started to eat and drink. Then I cried, 'That's enough for me!' I turned (to God) and I clung to (His) door until He received me."

Ibn 'Arabi comments on this in the following way:

"In this story, Dhû-l-Nûn lets us know that he was given the good news of his acceptance (by God) (*qabûl*) and, as far as we are concerned, this cannot be withdrawn. Reason allows it and the Revelation mentions it when God the High said 'Those who believe and who fear God have good news (*bushra*) in this life.'" (Q. 10:63-4).

Fittingly for Dhû-l-Nûn, this is from the Qu-ranic text from the sura of Yunus. Yunus or Jonah was, of course, referred to as Dhû-l-Nûn, which means "the man of the fish". However, the name Dhû-l-Nûn can also allude to "the possessor of the inkwell" which contains all the letters from which the pen draws its ink. In his book on the letters *mîm*, *wâw* and *nûn*, Ibn Arabi writes: "the *nûn* is an immense secret which is the door of generosity and compassion."

Ibn 'Arabi continues commenting on the story of the lark by saying that he had heard this story recounted one day in Tunis in the presence of Muhammad al-Mahdawî who observed that the lark was Dhû-l-Nûn's own soul and that it represented the condition he was in: "This lark was himself in the image (*sûra*) of his state."

The nourishment of sesame and the refreshment of water provided for the lark, also herald the intertwined strands of Dhû-l-Nûn's life: his constant travelling in search of beneficial, life-giving knowledge.

In the chapter on God's Vast Earth in his *Futuhât*, Ibn 'Arabi relates Dhû-l-Nûn's account of the marvels he encountered in the Earth of sesame. He also relates several other miraculous stories (*karamât*) about Dhû-l-Nûn in *The Brilliant Star (Kawkab)*. For example:

"Dhû-l-Nûn said, 'A woman came to me and cried, 'A crocodile has carried away my son.' I saw her agony so I went into the Nile and I prayed, 'O God, make the crocodile appear.' Then it came out towards me and I ripped open its belly and took out her son alive and well.'" Ibn 'Arabi then comments, "This is an inheritance from Jesus (*wirâtha*

'isawiyya) in bringing the dead to life."

When Dhû-l-Nûn himself died, Ibn 'Arabî tells us that green birds followed his coffin. He continues his commentary by saying that,

"it is by virtue of this relationship and inheritance [from Jesus] that the bats which alighted on Dhû-l-Nûn's funerary bier [described elsewhere as green birds of an unknown kind] were the birds which Jesus created with his hand and he blew the spirit into them, all by the permission of his Lord."

Despite these miraculous stories, Ibn 'Arabî concentrates on the valuable spiritual advice passed on by Dhû-l-Nûn. Further on in the *The Brilliant Star (Kawkab)*, Ibn 'Arabî again refers to Dhû-l-Nûn's acceptance by God:

"The most valuable and significant of his spiritual graces (*karamât*) is the good news of his acceptance by God... when he said 'I clung to His door until He received me'. Is there any greater or more sublime spiritual grace than divine acceptance? May God give us the same good news which He gave to His friends."

There is at this time no English translation of this work by Ibn 'Arabî, however there is a translation into French by Roger Deladrière, under the title "La vie merveilleuse de Dhû-l-Nûn l'Égyptien", Paris 1988.



The headstone of Dhû-l-Nûn al-Misrî, Cairo.

"Ibn 'Arabi in Egypt

The conference in December 2008

The International Congress "Ibn 'Arabi in Egypt – Crossroads of East and West" was held in Cairo from 13th to 16th December 2008. It was organised by the Dar al-Kotob (National Library and Archives of Egypt), Al-Azhar University, and the Spanish Embassy. The contributors included some of the world's most eminent scholars in this field, also writers and artists. The aim was to bring diverse cultures together through Shaykh Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi's heritage. Papers were presented in Arabic, Spanish, French, and English. There were documentary films, an artistic exhibition, and a tour of historical sites in Ancient Cairo associated with Ibn 'Arabi. Two of his great works, the *Futuhat* and the *Diwan al-Kabir*, were republished by the Dar al-Kotob, together with an Arabic translation of A. Affifi's study, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi*. The conference was extensively reported in the media. The response to the final recommendations of the conference was very interesting. Though widely welcomed, they occasioned an objection from a conservative member of the People's Assembly, who submitted a complaint to the Minister of Culture. Finally a decisive report on the remarkable impact of Ibn 'Arabi and Islamic Mysticism as a whole settled the matter. The support of the Shaykh Al-Azhar and Al-Mufti of Egypt was very important in giving religious legality to mysticism and, of course, to the conference.

Professor Mustafa Labib

An enduring effect

The Ibn 'Arabi congress, celebrated in December 2008 in Cairo, Egypt, continues to arouse great interest in Egypt and some other Arab countries. That is because of the wide publicity given to the event by the media, especially the TV channels (10 TV stations) and the newspapers. People ask me in the street and by telephone how to know more about mysticism and Ibn 'Arabi. I find the same pre-occupation among my undergraduate students at Cairo University. While this proves the importance of the media in the diffusion of ideas, it is very interesting to discover that mysticism represents a real need for Muslim society, as appears in the comments of many people: that it is the essential spirit of Islam which we need to know and practice. Intellectuals in Egypt and the other Arab countries, especially poets and novelists, have been inspired by mysticism in their works for more than three decades. This made them take an active interest in the conference, and study the materials presented to it, considering them as a gate which could open for them a new vision of Ibn 'Arabi and his spiritual world. They see it as a world full of creative ideas and the foundation of a new religious tolerance, as well as a deep knowledge of life, art, language, literature and philosophical wisdom.

Professor Soliman Elattar



The language of things Ibn al-'Arabî in Egypt, by Denis Gril

On arriving in Cairo, Ibn al-'Arabî rediscovered in Fustât (Misr) an Andalusian spiritual milieu. In particular, he met up with two former fellow students from al-Andalus, Abû 'Abdallah al-Khayyât and his brother Abû 'Abbâs al-Harîrî (or al-Harrâr), both of whom are mentioned in the *Rûh al-quds* and *al-Durrat al-fâkhira*. In the *Futûhât*, he recounts an anecdote which al-Harîrî had witnessed and related to him in 603/1206, during Ibn al-'Arabî's second visit to Cairo.

Al-Harîrî was walking along a street in Fustât with another Andalusian, Abû 'Abdallah al-Qarabâqî, who bought a little chamber pot (*qasriyya*) for his young son. They were both invited into a house where there were other men of the Way. The assembled company decided to share some food and to buy some syrup to go with the bread. Having no container, they decided to use the

chamber pot which was new and therefore clean. After the meal, they parted and Abû 'Abdallah, chamber pot in hand, left with Abû l-'Abbâs. They then heard with their own ears the chamber pot say to them, "After the saints of God have eaten from me, should I be a receptacle for unclean things? By God, that will never be!" With these words, the pot slipped from the hands of its owner and broke on the ground. "A spiritual state overcame us when we heard these words," added al-Harîrî.

But Ibn al-'Arabî said to him: "The way in which the chamber pot admonished you has escaped you. It is not as you maintain it to be. How many times have better people than you eaten out of chamber pots which were subsequently used to contain impurities. In fact, brothers, what the pot really said to you is: 'After God has made your hearts containers of His knowledge and His theophany, it is not fitting that you should make it a container for other things; but He has not forbidden your hearts to be a container for Him. Then it broke: that's to say: Be like that with God.'" (*Futûhât*, 1329 H.I 410/ ed. O. Yahya VI 196-7). Here, Ibn al-'Arabî is alluding to the tradition, in the form of a *hadîth qudsî*: "I am with those whose hearts are broken because of Me" (*ana ma'a l-munkasirati qulûbuhum min ajli*).

This anecdote, and especially its interpretation by Ibn al-'Arabî, illustrates the fact that the "people of unveiling and experience of Being" (*ahl al-kashf wa l-wujûd*) are addressed by all the beings in the world who "make them know their reality". These beings, whether animal, vegetable or mineral, address them audibly since "for them there is no being in existence which is not speaking". Hearing the beings of the world constitutes one of the stages in the practice of *dhikr* in *khalwa*, as specified in the *Risâlat al-anwâr*. The principle of this audi-

tion goes back to hearing the primordial *fiat (kun)*, as explained in chapter 182 of the *Futûhât (maqâm al-samâ')*. The actualization of this hearing in oneself is called by the Shaykh "absolute" or "divine" hearing. It consists of "the listening of everything, in everything, by everything, since the whole of existence is for them the inexhaustible words of God. In order to understand these words, they have an endless ability to listen which brings about such hearing in the depths of their being, by the coming into existence of these words."

The speech of the chamber pot, when it is understood as a piece of spiritual advice, emphasizes the relationship between listening to the Qur'an and listening to the world, since for Ibn al-'Arabî the correspondence between the Qur'an and the world, between the revelation of the one and the theophany of the other, is total. Similarly human-kind, being endowed with language, is in relationship with both. What is true of speech is above all true of being; there are not two Beings, it is just that the being of God is eternal and that of creation is adventitious or has "come into existence".

So it is with the language of things. A chamber pot can be the interpreter of a divine saying, "I am with those whose hearts are broken because of Me," for the one who is able to understand it. The heart of God's servant breaks from realizing that the possible being will never be united with the necessary Being, but God mends (*jabr*) his broken heart by bringing him back, through Himself, to his necessary Being only to break his heart again by sending him back to his condition of servitude, simultaneously mending the break by His proximity.

Thus the language of things, as understood by Ibn al-'Arabî in the capital of Egypt, just like the Qur'an, never stops transporting the person for whom everything is speaking from one face of the Being to another, between eternity and contingency.

This article is taken from the summary of a paper by Denis Gril, presented at the International Congress "Ibn 'Arabi in Egypt – Crossroads of East and West" in Cairo in December 2008. Translated by Cecilia Twinch.

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*"I am with those
whose hearts are broken
because of Me."*

The colours of the heart

Art and a Sufi account of Light

Ana Crespo is a working artist, and has been a teacher for more than 20 years in the School of Arts of Talavera (Toledo). Her book *Los bellos Colores del Corazon* was published in 2008.

This is the first volume of a three-part study, the fruit of work which she began in 1992. It was part of a search for answers to questions about art and the meaning of human being. These questions took a definite form when she found a way to approach the writings of Sufism through questions of art and form. This took its starting point from the Quranic verse in the *Surah of The Bee*:

And the things on this earth which he has multiplied in varying colours: truly in this is a sign for men who remember Him. [16:13]

What she found was that colour plays an important role in Sufism. The theme of colour is taken up by the Bektashi, Yasawi, Naqshibandi and Kubravi tariqas, especially the last. However, as can

be seen in the book, once you pick out a thread like this, it can be found running through the sayings that have come down from God's friends in many traditions. What results is a study of colour and the function of art and the artist, set in the context of a traditional Sufi account of Light.

It opens with a brief account of the descent of the soul from the realms of light to an exile of forgetfulness in the world. The journey of return begins with a call, which stirs a longing in the heart to be re-united with its origin. It is at this point that Ana Crespo situates her discussion of art, by which is meant primarily the visual arts. The contemplation of forms involved, whether through observation or imagination, is a journey through an interior landscape, and can be related to the process by which a person recomposes the fragments of their own mirror.

Although there are references to Ibn 'Arabi throughout the book, it is not specifically a study of what he has to say about light. It draws on many sources; indeed, it is almost a compendium of quotations on the subject.

The second volume, not yet published, is concerned with the colours Red, Green, Black and White. A third volume in preparation concerns the links and convergences between Sufism and modern art.

Muhyiddin
Ibn 'Arabi Society



Los bellos Colores del Corazon, by Ana Crespo, Mandala Ediciones, Madrid, 2008.

A vocabulary of colour and light

Colour

The Arabic word for "colour" is *lawn*. The dictionary definition of *lawwana* (root *l-w-n*) is "to become coloured, to make colourful, to variegate, to illuminate; take on the colour of ripeness, to mature."

Ana Crespo expands on this by referring to Ibn 'Arabi's *Istilahat al-sufiyya* (*Technical Terms of Sufism*):

talwin (*colouring, variegation*) = the passing (*tanaqqul*) of the servant through his states. According to most people [of God] it is an incomplete station, while according to us it is the most perfect of the stations. The state of the servant in it is the state [referred to in] His Word: "Every day He is at work." (Q.55.29)

tamkin (*stability*) = according to us it is being stabilized in (or having mastery over) variegation. It is called 'the state of those who have arrived'

Light

To explain the rich Sufi vocabulary of light Ana Crespo again turns to the *Istilahat al-sufiyya*:

nur (*light*): every divine inspiration that drives away the world from the heart.

diya': (brightness) seeing others with the eye of the Real.
lawâ'ih: (glimmerings) those essential lights [of Exaltedness] which appear to the eye when it is not restricted by physicality.

tawali': (dawnings) the lights of *tawhid* which come suddenly upon the hearts extinguishing all other lights.

lawami': (flashes) when the lights of revelation are established for as much as two moments.

zulma: (darkness) sometimes designates knowledge of the Essence, since nothing other than It is unveiled along with It.

zill: (shade) the experience of repose behind the veil.

New publications

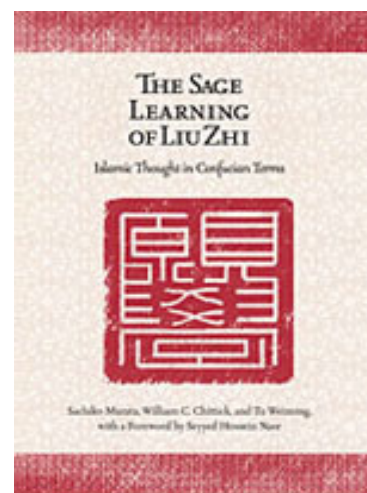
The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi: Islamic Thought

in *Confucian Terms*, by Sachiko Murata, William C. Chittick, Weiming Tu, (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, Asia Center), March 2009.

Liu Zhi was perhaps the single most important Muslim scholar to write in Chinese, and translated the *Lawâ'ih* of Jâmi into Chinese. From the middle of the 17th to the end of the 19th century, the school of Ibn 'Arabi had a significant presence in the Chinese language.

Letters of a Sufi Scholar – The Correspondence of 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (1641-1731), by Samer Akkach, Brill, October 2009.

This book follows on Akkach's 2007 work, *Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi: Islam and the Enlightenment*. At a time of high anti-mystical fervour this great interpreter of Ibn 'Arabi's thought engaged with many issues of the time in which he lived.



Young Writers of 2009

We invited all the authors who submitted essays to the Young Writer of the Year Competition to tell us something about themselves and what Ibn 'Arabi means to them

In 2008 the Society invited submission for the first "Young Writer of the Year" award, for an original essay of up to 9000 words, in English. It attracted seven entries of high quality. The writer of the essay chosen by the judges was awarded \$1,000. See the front page for the announcement of the winner, and the judges' comments.

Issam Eido is a PhD candidate at Damascus University, Islamic Studies College, specialized in the history of Islamic texts in particular (*al-Hadith*), and the director of Dalalah Institute teaching Islamic studies to western researchers who are specialized in Middle East studies.

I think that Ibn 'Arabi's writings are very important, because they derive from the fact that they represent a case of the extension of Sunni thought outside of the confines of orthodox jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and towards a mystical understanding. In later hadith scholars (*muhadithon*) we find only the official view of Islam, meaning that the richness which characterized early Islamic thought evolved through their work into the narrower, authoritative Sunni view established after the third hijri century when the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil abandoned the Muatazilite policy of the created Qur'an. The Sufi position emerged by breaking out of this established orthodoxy to seek wider meaning beyond the literal interpretation of texts and evidentiary method that the hadith scholars depended on. Accordingly, Sufism moves toward the broader sphere of mystical discovery, which is linked to textual expression by means of symbol and allusion. One arrives at this mystical discovery by observing the world. "As for the seal of Muhammadan Sainthood," Ibn Arabi says, "of all the creatures he is the one who knows God best. There is no one in his own time, nor after his time, who better knows God and the details of His Judgment. For he and the Qur'an are brothers." *al-Futûhât al-Makkiya*, vol. iii, p. 321

Jari Kaukua: I'm a post-doctoral research fellow at the department of philosophy and social sciences in the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, though currently located at the department of philosophy in Uppsala University, Sweden. My main focus at present is on the discussion of self-awareness in post-Avicennian Islamic philosophy. My interest in Ibn 'Arabi is partly related to that general focus, in that I'm investigating how and to what extent Ibn 'Arabi's concept of all being, including that of the perceiving human subject, as God's manifestation, paves the way for Mulla Sadra's metaphysics, in which the knowing subject's self-awareness and its awareness of its object are inseparably intertwined. However, there is also a more personal interest, for I feel that the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* gives us the conceptual means to grant to the world about us a fundamental value from the point of view of religious experience and attitude. I am rather optimistic about the fecundity of this idea for attempts in contemporary philosophy of religion to articulate concepts of God and creation that provide an alternative for traditional theism.

Zachary Markwith is currently a doctoral student in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where he has researched Ibn 'Arabi, his texts and influence on Persian Sufi poetry and the schools of theoretical gnosis in Iran under the direction of Professors Hamid Algar and Wali Ahmadi. He also earned an M.A. in comparative religion from The George Washington University in 2007, where he wrote his thesis "Jesus in Sufism" under the direction of Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr based upon Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of prophetic sanctity and the spiritual inheritance that some Sufis take from Jesus. In addition to his academic training in Islamic studies, he has also traveled throughout the Middle East, including to the cities of Amman, Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem. While in Damascus in 2007, he visited the mosque and tomb of the Shaykh al-akbar. He is particularly interested in Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the doctrine of Divine Unity, autology, sanctity, and love, and to what extent his teachings and diverse perspectives can help facilitate intrafaith (Sunni-Shi'i) and interfaith understanding and dialogue in the modern world.

Denis McAuley, New York. While studying for a degree in Arabic and Persian at Oxford University, I became interested in Sufi poets such as Ibn al-Fârid, primarily because of their word-play and technical skill. My recently completed doctoral thesis, also at Oxford, focused on Ibn 'Arabi's enigmatic and neglected *Diwân* (collected poems). Ibn 'Arabi takes poetic form very seriously. Like other medieval authors, he sets great store by metre and rhyme, which he sees as reflecting the order of the cosmos. What has struck me, as a reader of literature, is the way in which he plays on unusual forms – whether by using the same rhyme-word throughout a poem, or copying an obscure Andalusian acrostic model, or writing an indignant, if perhaps disingenuous, reply to the pre-Islamic poet Imru' al-Qays:

*I am not one of those whose heart confines love
to Layla or Lubna, or Dakhul and Ma'sal.
My love is of absolute being, and appears
in the form of the one my imagination loves.
I have nothing to confine Him with
except for what I saw when He appeared,
as when the bringer of good news appeared to Mary
as a visible form and a husband.*

Urs Schellenberg, Switzerland: The first time I really came into contact with Ibn 'Arabi's writing was at a symposium of the Ibn 'Arabi Society which I attended while I was studying religion and philosophy at the University of Zürich. His thoughts were always very challenging to me and that's what kept my interest in his teachings. After my thesis on Ibn 'Arabi's anthropology in his view on creation, I started to work at an international NGO.

The Young Writer Award was a wonderful opportunity for me to go back to Ibn 'Arabi's teachings and to pick up some traces which I couldn't

Systematic description of works of Ibn 'Arabi

follow during my studies. Again, I was fascinated by the thought that everything is He and not He. In the rare moments when I realise this thought, the world becomes animate again and reminds me of Thomas Berry's expression that the world should no longer be seen as a collection of objects but as a communion of subjects.

I'm sure it is crucial to our time to give the whole creation back its true liveliness, and Muhyiddin, the revivifier, can certainly play a guiding role in that.

Muhammad Maroof Shah, Kashmir: My interest in Ibn 'Arabi is an offshoot of my interest in Sufism. Having been an informal student of comparative philosophy and comparative religion I found in him one of the most imposing and accommodating perspectives, one that is capable of sustaining the (post)modern challenge to religion, philosophy and ethics.

The painful tone of modern literature – most movingly seen in absurdist writings – shows that modern man is desperate without transcendence, and seeks to find it, though he locates it in places where only a faint image of it is present.

It cries for the need of such thinkers as Ibn 'Arabî, who can bring back the joyous revelations of the Being that key modern thinkers find either absent or hidden (Heidegger), inaccessible (Kafka) or inhuman, or even irrelevant (Sartre and Camus). It is not the philosopher, but the poet and the sage who can point the way to the holy, to the sacred mystery of Being, to the treasures of Spirit, and Ibn 'Arabî as a "poet of Divine Realities" is sorely needed.

Hebatallah Mohamed Youssry: I am a 24 year old Egyptian woman, currently working as the admissions officer in Manor House International Schools in Egypt. It was only in February 2009 that I attained my MA in Arabic Studies, specializing in Arabic Language and Literature, from the American University in Cairo.

I was lucky enough to be introduced to the writings of Ibn 'Arabi during my undergraduate years in AUC. The first book I read was *The Unveiling of the Effects of Voyaging*.

Ibn 'Arabi's writings violently invaded my carapace and presumed knowledge of myself, shattered the solipsistic universe I dwelt in, and dragged me naked to face true existence. I believe that Ibn 'Arabi's greatest gift to the world is the force that is imparted through his words, the power that is very much present and alive, one that hasn't wilted with the passing years.

Ibn 'Arabi has also played a major role in my life recently, since I lost my father some months ago. Whenever I long for his embrace I remember a sentence Al Sheikh Al Akbar once said: "Life is like the dream, one shouldn't be too concerned if increase or decrease has occurred". My beloved father's death is a decrease, nevertheless Ibn 'Arabi's teachings instructed that *Mahw* and *Ithbat* are only two faces of the same coin.

A comprehensive description of the works of Ibn 'Arabi is to be published in Spanish in September 2009. This is the first attempt to do this since Osman Yahya produced the groundbreaking *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi* in 1964. Drawing on four decades of research since then, it represents a major step forward. It is not only an advance in scholarship, but will make this information available to a much wider audience than the *Histoire et classification* ever reached.

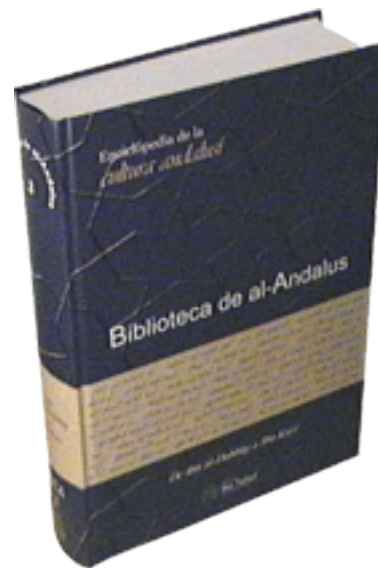
This description of Ibn 'Arabi's works makes up a substantial part of the second volume of the *Biblioteca de al-Andalus*. This volume covers some 163 authors from Ibn Adhà to Ibn Bushrà'. The section on Ibn 'Arabi takes up roughly 200 pages, a third of the whole book. The *Biblioteca de al-Andalus* is a reference work which will be seven volumes when completed. It systematically catalogues and describes the rich cultural product of the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsular who used Arabic in their writings over more than seven centuries.

The section on Ibn al-'Arabi is divided into two parts: his biography, and a comprehensive list of works (including those of doubtful attribution), each one described according to the best current information. Scholars who have contributed to the section on Ibn 'Arabi include Bakri Aladdin, Pablo Beneito, Stephen Hirtenstein, Jorge Lirola, Gracia López, Estela Navarro and Salvador Peña. Naturally, some entries are long and very detailed, such as those on the *Futûhât al-Makkiya* and *Fusûs al-Hikam*, while others remain very short.

The *Biblioteca de al-Andalus* is edited by Jorge Lirola, and financed by the Ibn Tufayl Foundation for Arabic Studies, the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, and the Junta of Andalusia. The book will be available through the Foundation's website (www.ibntufayl.org). Although it is written in Spanish, the clear structure of entries will help people who don't speak the language to make use of it. There are no plans to make its contents available on the internet at this point.

This volume will take its place beside Osman Yahya's *Histoire et Classification* as a first point of reference for those who need information about the works of Ibn 'Arabi. It is very welcome.

Biblioteca de al-Andalus, vol 2, De Ibn Adhà a Ibn Busrà, Fundacion Ibn Tufayl de Estudios Arabes, Almería, 2009. For information and orders, e-mail fundacion@ibntufayl.org (www.ibntufayl.org).



*Biblioteca de
al-Andalus,
Vol. 2.*

USA Symposium with New York Open Center

The 2009 symposium of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society in the USA will be held in New York on November 6th and 7th at the Riverside Church. It is being organised in collaboration with the New York Open Center. With attendance expected to be more than 200, it will on a different scale from any event the Society has been involved in before.



Riverside Church,
New York

Speakers at the symposium include William Chittick, Sachiko Murata, Stephen Hirtenstein, Mohamed Haj Yousef, and Salman Bashier. Through their research, books, and internet writing, they have already reached tens of thousands of people, even hundreds of thousands, but the face to face encounter is something different. The event is entitled *Islam, Sufism and the Heart of Compassion – A Conference*.

There will also be music and poetry recitals in English and Arabic by Aaron Cass and Taoufiq Ben Amor. Tunisian filmmaker Nacer Khemir will be presenting his highly acclaimed series of films, the Desert Trilogy, of which the most well-known is "Bab'Aziz."

A series of talks on Friday evening and Saturday morning will be followed by afternoon workshops, ending with a plenary session.

The New York Open Center is a non-profit organisation that presents over 500 programs each year, attended by more than 10,000 people. The Society first came into contact with the Open Center in connection with a conference that it organised in Granada, Spain, in 2007.

For more information see the Symposium & Events page of www.ibnarabisociety.org.

Earlier this year

Oxford – May 2009

The Society symposium held in Oxford in May 2009 was entitled "The Wisdom of the Heart". Speakers well known to members of the Society included James Morris, Mohamed Haj Yousef and Stephen Hirtenstein.

Because the theme could be recognized in almost any spiritual tradition, it was an opportunity to invite speakers who did not have a special knowledge of Ibn 'Arabi, but who could address the subject. The Society welcomed Sebastian Brock, an authority on the Syriac spiritual tradition, and Kattia Holmes, a translator of Tibetan Buddhist texts,

Calendar

AGM, Oxford – November 2009

The Annual General Meeting of the Society in the UK will be held at the Friends Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford, at 2.00pm on Saturday 21st November. The guest speaker will be Dr Jari Kaukua. Winner of the Society's first 'Young Writer of the Year Award' 2009, he will present his paper "I in the Eye of God: Ibn 'Arabi on the Divine Human Self".

For further information see the Society website, Events page: www.ibnarabisociety.org/events.html

Symposium, Oxford – May 2010

The 27th Annual Symposium of the Society is to be held at Worcester College, Oxford, over the weekend of May 1-2, 2010 under the title "The Spiritual and the Material".

and interpreter for Kagyu lineage masters. Only five speakers were invited on this occasion, in order to provide more time for speaker-led seminars in the afternoons. A number of the talks can be heard as podcasts on the Society website. Another feature of the symposium was a performance by Vastearth Orchestra on Saturday evening, and on Sunday afternoon there was a showing at a local cinema of the film by Nacer Khemir called "Bab'Aziz" (The Prince who contemplated his soul). The director was present to answer questions at this first showing of the film in the United Kingdom.

Kuala Lumpur – June 2009

A one-day event on "Ibn 'Arabi: The Relevance of his Thought in the Quest for Sustainability" was held in Kuala Lumpur on June 24, 2009. It was jointly organised by the University of Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue and the Cultural Counsellorship, Embassy of Iran, Malaysia. The theme of the conference was the basic philosophy and ideas of Ibn 'Arabi in the context of human development, and there was the intention to look at case-studies of the relevance of Ibn 'Arabi's thoughts today and in the contemporary world.

Baku, Azerbaijan – October 2009

The National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan invited the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society to collaborate in a symposium in Azerbaijan from October 10 to 11, 2009. Entitled "East and West: Common Spiritual Values, Scientific-Cultural Links", it also commemorated the work of Professor Aida Imanguliyeva. Prof. S.H. Nasr was a keynote speaker.

Papers were presented by 44 people, 21 of whom were Azerbaijani scholars. Among the 23 international speakers were many people who have contributed to the Society's symposia in the past, and half a dozen participants from a Russian university background.

More information can be found on the event web site at www.aidaimanguliyeva.com/en/