

BOOK REVIEW

al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah

Edited by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (Yemen: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa Jumhūriyya al-Yamīniyya, 2010).

‘What did we do before this edition?’ That might be the sentiment of scholars of Ibn ‘Arabī after working with the critical edition of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (from Yemen), first printing 2010 (1431 AH). The edition represents eleven years of his work on numerous manuscripts that he studied in libraries in Turkey, Egypt, the Emirates, and elsewhere. The outcome is the first complete, accurate, and thoroughly documented edition of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*.

Poetry is an important part of Ibn ‘Arabī’s work, and the vocalization of the poetic passages is welcome. In addition, the editor provides citations for the poetry Ibn ‘Arabī quotes, usually with the line before and after to situate the quote. When there are obscure usages in the prose passages, the editor often vocalizes the relevant words.

The editor’s Introduction covers Ibn ‘Arabī’s name and birth, childhood, parents, wives, children, study, spiritual quest, great opening, journeys from West to East, teachers, friends, connections with scholars of the time, miraculous events, authorship, death, and legacy. The first ‘draft’ of Ibn ‘Arabī’s magnum opus was started in 599 AH in Makka and finished in Damascus in 629 AH. In 632, he decided to write a second, final draft, which he finished in 636. Remarkably, the manuscript is in his own hand and its existence even up to today hints at forces beyond the ordinary. The manuscript is 10,544 pages, divided into 37 ‘books’ with 560 chapters—the same number of years as from *hijra* to the birth of the Shaykh al-Akbar. It is in six sections, and the architecture of the work is such that these six headings are based on ‘geometries’ ranging from divine names to human faculties to physical dimensions.

The Shaykh wrote his book with a Western, Andalusian hand. Some features of the writing style are unpointed letters, but with markings made to clarify potentially confusing phrases; the *fā’* is usually pointed below the tail; and the *qāf* usually has one dot above.

Questioning Ibn ‘Arabī’s negative reception in much of contemporary Islamic discourse, the editor points to 10,634 references to the Qur’ān, 3,518 citations of *ḥadīth*, and more than 5,000 blessings on the Prophet. From the Introduction, it is clear that the editor would like to reclaim Ibn ‘Arabī as an ‘orthodox’ Muslim thinker for the contemporary world.

The first printed edition of the book (known as *Būlāq*) came out in 1858, based on the Süleymaniye manuscripts, from the first draft Ibn ‘Arabī produced in the years 599–629. The edition has many errors. In 1910 Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya al-Kubrā in Egypt decreased the number of errors considerably, printing the work

in four volumes. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Manṣūb writes, ‘We found the differences between it and the Qunya edition to be equal to 1 in every 75 words. Considering that the original book has 1,735,000 words, this means no less than 23,000 differences’ (p. 46). He gives eight examples, such as ‘He has *ghalaṭa* [erred] in that, the Messenger of God *ṣalla Allahu ‘alayhi wa salam*, and showed anger at the one who did that’, which is correctly ‘He has *aghlaṣa* [spoken harshly] about that, the Messenger of God *ṣalla Allahu ‘alayhi wa salam*, and showed anger at the one who did that’. There is also an important transposition, where the author of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* is not one of the *abl al-kufr* but one of the *abl al-fikr*.

From 1954 on, Dr. ‘Uthmān Yaḥyā (Osman Yahia) from the Sorbonne with UNESCO and the Cultural Ministry of Egypt undertook to improve the Egyptian editions. He used three original manuscripts: Qunya, based on the second draft; another manuscript based on the first found in the Beyazid Library, Turkey, and the Cairo edition printed 1329 AH. He worked eighteen years in preliminary work to produce in 1972 the first volume. The last volume, the fourteenth, came out in 1992. With his death, there were still twenty-three more volumes left.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Manṣūb acknowledges the value of this edition, but makes four criticisms. First, much of the critical apparatus is consumed by stylistic differences in orthography. He says, ‘He perhaps could have saved some time by not repeating each difference, such as *malā’ikat malā’ikah mala’ikat mala’ikah*’ (p. 48). I used to study New Testament texts, where seemingly insignificant variations can be important clues to a manuscript’s history. But in this case, we are dealing simply with regional and stylistic variations. If the four-volume editions are hard to read because of their dense blocking on the page, Osman Yahia’s edition suffers from an overly heavy critical apparatus. The four-volume editions can have over 750 words on a page, with no paragraphing and little punctuation, making the reading more difficult than it possibly needs to be. Osman Yahia’s edition may have only 140 words on a page, with generous spacing of paragraphs and sections, but it also has ten lines of critical apparatus for fifteen lines of text detailing three manuscripts showing, for example, *nasha’*, *nashā’*, and *nashā’h*. The 2010 edition has 4–500 words per page and usually only a few lines below the text.

Second, in Osman Yahia’s comments, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Manṣūb detects an Isma‘ili bias. Third, he takes issue with the use of exclamation marks when referring to the divine, e.g., (*tā’ālā* !) or the messenger, e.g., (– ‘*alayhi al-salām* ! –). This reviewer also notices an overuse of exclamations in the Osman Yahia edition. Although the extensive punctuation may be helpful at times, it means that there is another opening to error. The 2010 edition is lightly punctuated, and after having worked carefully on translating the first volume over the last six months, I have found the punctuation to be helpful and accurate. Fourth, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Manṣūb says that there have been omissions ‘of many expressions and words from the verified edition, and the advent of words added without indicating that’ (p. 49).

Although ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Manṣūb does not mention the printed edition by Dar al-Kotob (1999), this writer has found numerous errors there, averaging six a page over a hundred pages. The errors are usually clumsy attempts to correct

what did not need correcting. Ironically, the Dar al-Kotob edition may be the easiest to visually search, neither too dense (as with the four volumes) nor too spaced (as with Osman Yahia), and so still has a place on my shelf.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Manṣūb welcomes digital editions but has found them to be full of errors. He supplies a long list of the significant errors.

The 2010 edition has indexes for the Qur’ān citations, *ḥadīth*, poems, eyewitness testimonials (to the manuscript’s authenticity), Sufi terms (fully six pages for the first 170 pages of text, including entries such as *al-umm*, *al-ghawth*, and *wārid*), people, places, book titles mentioned, and sects. The indexes of the Dar al-Kotob edition, however, seem to be easier to work with and more extensive (although the entry ‘Muhammad’, found on nearly every page, could have been omitted).

The edition in twelve volumes is bound well and the pages are easy to read. The font is open and light and readable. The work answers the deficiencies of past editions and provides access to this greatest of works by the *akbar* of shaykhs.

Close work with the three editions (Būlāq, Osman Yahia, and 2010) shows this critical edition to be very well conceived. In 600 pages I found only one verse number error in the apparatus. In the same volume, the dozen or so times that textual variants were important were fully documented. The 2010 edition also notes Qur’ānic variants (Ḥafṣ and Warsh) used in the text. The Osman Yahia edition over the same portion of the work had perhaps thirty annotations in the critical apparatus that were very helpful and would have improved this critical edition: e.g., references to ideas explored by Henry Corbin, explicit connections made to Greek thought, and theological-philosophical terminologies. What this critical edition has that the Osman Yahia edition does not is the depth of poetry annotations and the frequent use of *Lisān al-‘arab* for classical word usages that are unfamiliar to modern Arabic speakers. From the comparison of the critical apparatus in the two editions, the reader will recognize Osman Yahia’s erudition in modern philosophical thought, especially through the French language, and al-Mansoub’s thoroughly Arabic vantage point, where it is the Arabic that opens up the *Futūḥāt*. From the Introduction to the Qur’ānic citations by *sūra* name (not number), it is clear that this critical edition is placing the work in its fully Arabic Muslim context and as such provides an important counter to a ‘philosophical’ and ‘universalist’ vision of the Shaykh al-Akbar.

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