

Ibn ‘Arabī: *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries and the Rising of the Divine Lights*, translated by Cecilia Twinch and Pablo Beneito. Oxford, Anqa Publishing, 2001. viii + 128 pages.

This carefully annotated translation of the core sections of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Mashāhid al-asrār al-qudsiyya wa matāli‘ al-anwār al-ilāhiyya* (together with summaries of its preface and long ‘epilogue’), based on the earlier bilingual Arabic edition and Spanish translation by Su‘ād al-Hakīm and Pablo Beneito (Murcia, 1994),¹ makes available to English readers for the first time one of the key works of Ibn ‘Arabī’s earlier Andalusian period. One of the most valuable features of the translators’ annotation is their provision of key selections from the extensive commentaries by Ibn ‘Arabī’s own student Ibn Sawdakīn (in a ms. in his own handwriting, dated 646/1258, claiming to represent Ibn ‘Arabī’s personal oral explanations of the symbolism in question) and by the famous Baghdadi woman Sufī Sitt al-‘Ajam bint al-Nafīs (ms. dated 686/1287, just before her death), which provide an extraordinary window on the historical processes of assimilation and transmission of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings in the period immediately after his death. Ibn Sawdakīn’s remarks clearly mirror the type of complex philosophical-metaphysical approach (the system of divine ‘Presences’ and *tajalliyyāt*) associated with the commentary tradition of Qūnawī and his successors, while the selections from Sitt al-‘Ajam already appear more deeply reflective of the experiential, personal emphases of later practical Sufī traditions. The authors’ helpful Introduction—especially the section on ‘The Style and symbolism of the *Contemplations*’—also provides some invaluable keys, inspired by those earlier commentators, for appreciating the overall structure and organisation of this work.

The distinctive literary structure, style and poetic approach of this remarkable text have clear, indeed explicit, affinities with Niffarī’s *Mawāqif* and his *Mukhātabāt*, familiar to most western audiences today through the pioneering edition and translations of A. J. Arberry. That is, each of the successive fourteen ‘places of witnessing’ that structure this work—stretching from the place of the human spirit’s first ‘existentiation’ and emergence from God to our place of ultimate judgement and metaphysical ‘return’—is phrased in terms of an intimate, dramatic dialogue with God that always begins with a series of consistently paradoxical divine ‘addresses’ to a mysterious ‘servant/worshipper’ (at once Ibn ‘Arabī himself and, at least by implication,

every human soul as potentially the cosmic ‘Complete Human Being’ [*insān kāmil*]), followed by the equally paradoxical, but always instructive responses of that enlightened human addressee. However, in this case the interplay of divine instruction and human response is far more explicitly ‘pedagogical’, consistently intellectual and overtly symbolic in structure and tone than in the more palpably experiential, directly expressive work of Niffarī (or even in Ibn ‘Arabī’s own more openly and mysteriously autobiographical *K. al-Isrā’*).

What the reader does encounter constantly here, as throughout the wider group of Ibn ‘Arabī’s youthful writings discussed below, is the same profound, seemingly all-encompassing mastery of an infinitely detailed web of symbolic understanding of Islamic scriptures (both Qur’an and hadith, with particular emphasis on the ‘science of (Arabic) letters’ and their numerological equivalents), which is at once deeply personal-experiential and elaborately cosmological and metaphysical.² The ‘contents’ of that symbolism here, as so often in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, defy any attempt at summarisation, but are clearly coherent with all his other known compositions of that same period. And even beginning students of Ibn ‘Arabī will recognise certain central, recurrent themes: for example, (1) the inescapability of ‘paradox’ (from any intellectual perspective) in attempting to describe or reflect on the highest states of spiritual realisation; and (2) the practical necessity of following the paths of actual spiritual realisation (as opposed both to *taqlīd* and to all the intellectual or external-historicist approaches to revelation), (3) through adherence in detail to the actual unique prescriptions of the prophets, together with (4) the indispensable guidance and elaborations of their inspired spiritual ‘heirs’ (the *awliyā’*). These latter three points, in particular, are clearly elaborated in Ibn ‘Arabī’s preface and especially in his long ‘epilogue’, only briefly summarised here, which particularly highlight these fundamental practical lessons of all his lifelong writing and teaching.

¹ The translators also refer (p. 117) to a recent bilingual edition (based on a different manuscript with commentary by S. Qūnawī) and French translation by Stephane Ruspoli (Actes Sud, 1999), which we hope to review in a future issue.

² This peculiarly condensed and abstruse style often literally demands a more extensive commentary on every line of the translation. In a remarkable appendix (pp. 121-126, for the third *mashhad*), the two translators have provided a beautiful sample of the sort of indispensable commentary that is practically required—although it would inevitably be far longer than the original—for revealing the coherence and inner connections of each section of this work.

The translation of this work into English (after earlier Spanish and French versions) only highlights the dramatic emergence and new-found accessibility of a whole ‘family’ of Ibn ‘Arabī’s earlier Andalusian/Maghrebi works composed in a similar style—i.e., an impenetrably hyper-intellectual, poetic, and systematically detailed scriptural symbolism, along with similar thematic content, and their inseparable focus on the inseparability of the author’s (and potentially, each reader’s) direct spiritual illumination and the complex expression of that enlightened understanding in terms of the interplay of corresponding metaphysical levels of cosmogony and eschatological realisation. The first—and for long, virtually the only—accessible representatives of this distinctive family of early writings were the texts edited and translated (in German) by Nyberg almost a century ago; but in the past two decades they have suddenly been joined by editions and translations (in French, English and Spanish) of intimately related texts by Su‘ād al-Hakīm (especially the key *K. al-Isrā’*), D. Gril, G. Elmore, P. Beneito, and P. Fenton and M. Gloton. Indeed, given the actual *symbolic inseparability*—and initial impenetrability!—of each of these early poetic writings, serious students and readers of Ibn ‘Arabī, whatever their background and linguistic preparedness, can only plead for the publishers involved (despite the obvious economic costs) to recognise the fundamental need of serious students in each case for reliable, complete indexes of key symbols and scriptural references from the Qur’an and hadith.

As many readers will notice, the extreme difficulty and complex symbolic allusiveness of these ‘*Contemplations*’ and so many related writings from Ibn ‘Arabī’s youth dramatically highlights the relative clarity and far more open and revealing ‘phenomenological’, directly experiential depth and breadth of the author’s later, ‘Eastern’ period. For his more explicitly detailed writings of that mature period, such as the *Meccan Illuminations* in particular, are practically indispensable for any serious effort at interpreting and understanding otherwise ‘sealed’ earlier texts like these *mashāhid*. There can be little doubt that Ibn ‘Arabī’s autobiographical reference to his receiving a decisive divine instruction, eventually marking out the second half of his active life, to undertake the *nasīha* (practical public spiritual ‘counseling’) of all Muslims and their rulers—not just the spiritual elite—helps to explain this pedagogically key turning towards more discursive prose and more comprehensible, relatively explicit explanations (especially more detailed discussion of earlier spiritual writers and teachers, beyond the Qur’an and selected hadith), an approach which is so sharply contrasted with this

purposefully obscure, albeit sometimes extraordinarily poetic, personal style of his earlier writings.³ Incidentally, there is so far little evidence that the actual meanings or overall ‘contents’ of his teachings actually changed significantly in the course of that profound pedagogical shifting of style and exposition, even if certain modern interpreters (usually motivated by contemporary religious polemics) have occasionally attempted to make such arguments by emphasising only narrowly selected passages of specific works.

Finally, one may hope that the key opening and concluding sections of this text (summarised here on pp. 111-120)⁴ will soon be translated and published in full, as they so richly deserve. Ibn ‘Arabī’s detailed, coherent and extremely explicit arguments there for the indispensable ongoing role—for both individual human beings and the communities which they guide and form—of spiritual insight and illumination, based on and flowing from the proper application and practice of the prophetic revelations and the ongoing guidance and living example of the ‘Friends of God’, are infinitely more than just another scriptural Islamic ‘apology’ for his own personal inspirations or the approaches of long-ago ‘Sufis’. In our present historical circumstances, one would suppose that the unavoidable relevance for every human being—and by no means simply historical or cultural ‘Muslims’—of the immediately practical lessons (and warnings) contained in those poignant and impassioned remarks would be strikingly apparent to every thoughtful reader and student of Ibn ‘Arabī’s work.

³ The often puzzling poetic preludes to each chapter of the *Futūhāt*, along with many passages of later works, are striking reminders that Ibn ‘Arabī certainly did not give up writing, from time to time, in the same difficult style of these youthful works!

⁴ As the authors point out, that conclusion was often circulated as a separate Arabic work, recently edited by H. Taher in *Alif* (Cairo, A.U.C.), 1985, pp. 7-38.

Ibn ‘Arabi: Le dévoilement des effets du voyage. Texte arabe édité, traduit et présenté par Denis Gril. Combas [France], éditions de l’éclat, 1994. [Introduction (pp. i-xxxiii), translation (pp. 1-77), facing Arabic edition and notes (pp. 1-85), and indexes of Qur’anic verses and proper names.]

This new edition and pioneering translation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s K. al-Isfâr ‘an Natâ’ij al-Asfâr--previously accessible only in the defective Hyderabad version of his Rasâ’il--is a fresh reminder of the extraordinary riches still to be discovered among the Shaykh’s dozens of shorter treatises, most of which are not yet available in critical editions. At the same time, this book is the latest landmark in a long series of editions and studies by Professor Gril which--along with recent works by S. al-Hakîm, C. Addas, G. Elmore, and others--are gradually illuminating in much greater detail the historical development and contexts of Ibn ‘Arabi’s many writings, with regard to both form and content. The present work dates from the earlier, Maghrebi period of Ibn ‘Arabi’s life, and Prof. Gril’s translation admirably conveys the richly allusive and poetic style of writing characteristic of that period, a style in which the mystic’s inspiration and experience is typically expressed in the form of a symbolic, mysterious “personal commentary” on certain verses and stories of the Qur’an. Fortunately, the translator’s notes and introductory explanations, based on years of study of Ibn ‘Arabi’s understanding of the Qur’an (especially in the Futûhât), help to elucidate the manifold allusions of this challenging, compressed and highly personal text.

The structure of this work follows a series of meditations--at first theological and cosmological, then increasingly personal and mystical--based on the Qur’anic descriptions of the “journeys” of Muhammad (the *mi’râj*), Adam (the Fall), Idris/Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob and Joseph, and Moses, whose trials inspire the last third of the entire book. Its remarkably personal form and intention are well summarized in the following passage, which also suggests the characteristic compression, intensity and scope of this outwardly “brief” treatise:

Now this is a sample of *our* share in Lot’s journey. Indeed every journey about which I am speaking is like that: I only speak of it in regard to *my* essence/self; I’m not trying to give an exegesis of their actual story (in the Qur’an). *For these journeys are only bridges and passageways set up so that we can cross over them* (or “interpret” them) *into our own essences/selves and our own particular states.* They are beneficial to

us because God has set them up as a place of passage for us: ***“Everything that We recount to you of the stories of the messengers is so that We might strengthen your heart through that. For through this there has come to you the Truth and an admonishment, and a Reminder to all the worlds”*** (11:120). And how eloquent is His saying that ***“there has come to you through this the Truth”*** and ***“a Reminder”*** of what is within you and in your possession that you have forgotten, so that these stories I’ve recounted to you will remind you of what is within you and what I’ve pointed out to you! For then you will know that you *are* every thing, in every thing, and from every thing.

As this passage should suggest, this is not the sort of treatise whose contents could really be “summarized” in any short review. In fact, as Prof. Gril points out, many passages and allusions of this work are later developed at much greater length, and usually in more accessible language, in various chapters of the Meccan Illuminations.

However, one of the fascinating features of this work (shared by his other writings from the same early period) is its consistently personal tone and the corresponding revelation, from time to time, of Ibn 'Arabî's own distinctively *personal* perceptions and insights. One striking example, at the very beginning (pp. 9-11), is his explanation--based on a famous hadith about the special spiritual rewards of those who will continue to strive for God in the corrupted circumstances of the “latter days”--of the way that the inner realities of the spiritual world (*barzakh*) will become more and more manifest and accessible, at least to the saints and friends of God, as the Hour approaches. Such revealing passages illuminate Ibn 'Arabî's own personality and self-conception, while they can also provide indispensable “keys” for deciphering other more cryptic allusions, in later works, to his deeper understanding of Islamic eschatology, the Mahdi and the “manifestation” (*zuhûr*) of the messianic age.

The bilingual presentation of this translation, with facing Arabi text, will be greatly appreciated by all readers able to benefit from both languages, and the careful scientific edition (based on early manuscripts used by Qûnawî and Fanârî, among others) is complemented by abundant notes, including necessary explanations of hadith and Qur'an allusions, and cross-references to parallel developments in the Futûhât and other later works. As the above remarks indicate, the translation and edition alike presuppose a fairly thorough acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabî's work and its wider Islamic background; an eventual English version for a wider public might require more extensive notes and explanations. However, the bilingual publication of this

remarkable text, like the comparable Arabic-Spanish edition of Ibn 'Arabî's Mashâhid al-Asrâr (by S. Hakîm and P. Beneito) appearing in the same year, is another encouraging sign of the development of an increasingly sophisticated and well-informed international audience already familiar with the broad outlines of the Shaykh's thought, and ready to move on to a deeper appreciation of its depths and perennial significance.

The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination. By WILLIAM C. CHITTICK. Albany, NY: STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS, 1989. Pp. xxii + 478. \$24.50 paper; \$74.50 cloth.

This new book is the first English introduction to Ibn 'Arabî's truly magnum opus, the Meccan Illuminations, and the first introduction designed to prepare non-specialist readers to explore that famous mystic's writings on their own. (That a work of almost 500 double-column pages can still be termed an introduction is a reflection at once of the breadth of Ibn 'Arabî's own ambitions, the very length of the *Futûhât* itself--a text as prolix as his more widely read *Fusûs al-Hikam* is condensed--and the ongoing "volume" of that writer's influence in later Islamic civilization.) Previous scholarly works on Ibn 'Arabî, including the classical studies by Nyberg, Asin-Palacios, Corbin and Izutsu, have typically sought to present what those authors believed to be most relevant or interesting to their own diverse modern audiences. Whatever the merits of those different approaches, only readers already well acquainted with the Arabic texts can judge how adequately they have succeeded and to what extent their interpretations (as is almost inevitable) have taken on a creative life and direction of their own. Thus the specific focus on Ibn 'Arabî's own aims in this most recent study is not simply a function of the anthologizing method--which could easily have been applied to generate yet another "system," as with the earlier Islamic commentators on whom Prof. Chittick has written in the past. More importantly, it also reflects an ongoing, collective scholarly effort that has done much in recent years to bring into clearer focus the particular intellectual and social historical contexts of Ibn 'Arabî's (and many other Sufis') writing and teaching, thereby freeing the study of his creative personal contributions and often highly original perspectives from centuries of later philosophic and poetic reworkings and religious polemics that came to be associated with his name. (Those efforts have been summarized especially in recent major biographical studies by M. Chodkiewicz and C. Addas, soon to be available in English translation.)

The overall presentation and order of subjects in this volume is that adopted by Ibn 'Arabî himself (following earlier Kalam) in the doctrinal sections within his own Introduction to the *Futûhât*: it begins with the cosmic theological and ontological context of human action (Parts 1-3 here), and then continues with the processes and pitfalls of spiritual realization (the "Return", Parts 4-7), which for this mystic involve above all the indispensable role of the symbolic imagination (hence the subtitle of this work). But while this division might suggest the sort of

systematic, abstract philosophic approach so typical of subsequent Muslim commentators, from Qûnawî on down to Mullâ Sadrâ and Sabzawârî, readers will find that Prof. Chittick's careful reliance on Ibn ʿArabî's own words, through nearly 700 translated passages selected from the entire *Futûhât*, happily gives a very different and much more readable picture. In fact the second, epistemological part of this work actually conveys the human, experiential "inside" (the bâtin) of what was first presented in far more abstract terms in such a way that students familiar with cognate religious literature from different religious traditions will quickly grasp the common principles and concerns expressed here in a complex symbolic vocabulary grounded in the Qur'an and hadîth.

But the very difficult opening theological and philosophic discussions do provide the common language (primarily Qur'anic) and conceptual framework that is assumed throughout Ibn ʿArabî's writings; and this is certainly the aspect of his work most unfamiliar to virtually all modern readers. (The translator, as explained on p. xxi, has prudently put off for a separate, later volume a promised survey of the mystic's cosmology, cosmogony and influential theories concerning the macro- and micro-cosmic "Perfect Man".) The remaining two-thirds of the work, however, are devoted to the more practical side of Ibn ʿArabî's writing, a careful "spiritual phenomenology" of the intimate dialectic between scriptural sources and guidelines, rational considerations, and personal spiritual experience (the *naql*, *ʿaql* and *kashf* of so many generations of later commentators), deeply rooted in earlier Sufism and Islamic spirituality, which is the central leitmotif of all of Ibn ʿArabî's teaching. Throughout the work, both in notes to the translation and his own explanatory passages, Prof. Chittick has especially emphasized and carefully identified the Islamic scriptural framework and inspiration of all of Ibn ʿArabî's writing (sometimes neglected in earlier presentations). As a result, the extensive (and reliable) indexes of Qur'anic verses, hadîth sources and technical terms will no doubt provide a helpful working tool for students of both earlier and later Sufi traditions. (Indeed this volume now provides perhaps the best available English example of a coherent, comprehensive commentary on the entire Qur'an.)

Finally, a word of praise--and a simultaneous caution--is required concerning the method of translation and broader pedagogical approach adopted here. Students of Ibn ʿArabî, beginning with the earliest commentators, have always had to wrestle with his incredibly creative, multi-leveled use of Arabic language and scriptural symbolism; and interpreters for a modern audience

(above all given the immense scope of the *Futûhât*), are faced with the additional problem of explaining detailed scriptural references and technical vocabularies in the vast range of Islamic disciplines that were relatively familiar in the original context. Throughout these faithful and close translations, Prof. Chittick has typically selected a single English word to translate the corresponding Arabic term, and has carefully introduced the many complementary meanings of those key terms (often using Ibn ʿArabî's own explanations) at their first occurrence. This has the obvious--indeed indispensable--advantage of obliging readers to enter into the mystic's own resonant semantic and symbolic universe, but could lead to grave misunderstandings for those who might happen to skip over (over eventually forget) the full original explanations.

The same careful pedagogical aims are expressed throughout the organization and selection of translations in the book as a whole. This is not in any way the sort of anthology or popular sourcebook that one could pick up to discover "Ibn ʿArabî's views" on a particular question, or that is designed to outline his "mystical philosophy". It is designed and organized as a whole in such a way that the topics and translations in each section integrally build on and presuppose material first presented in earlier chapters: thus it is essential, for students not already intimately familiar with these texts, to read this book through carefully from the very beginning. The result of that approach, for those who can devote the requisite attention to this study, is that they will truly be prepared to appreciate the profound inseparability of form from the "content" and operative intentions of Ibn ʿArabî's own writings, whose distinctive rhetoric was never really imitated even within later Islamic tradition. Like other classics in that tradition, but with its own unique style, the *Futûhât* was meant to mirror each reader's state while gradually drawing them into an intimate process of discovery involving the whole being: readers of this volume will be able to see how that is so, and continue their explorations.

Ibn ʿArabî. *La vie merveilleuse de Dhû-l-Nûn l'Égyptien*. Translated by Roger Deladrière. Paris, éditions de Sindbad, 1988. 404 pages; 230 Fr.

The images that come to mind when one speaks of "hagiography" or "lives of the saints" say a great deal about the particular religious history that has helped shape our own language and culture. So it should not be surprising if the English language, even in scholarly discourse, still lacks so many of the basic distinctions that would be needed to do justice to a religion whose learned disciplines are almost entirely grounded in the "hagiographic" records of hadîth and Sîra, and whose extraordinarily diverse popular manifestations have always been rooted in the living examples (and subsequent veneration) of thousands of awliyâ', or "Friends of God". Recent scholarship has only begun to reveal the fundamental role of the multi-faceted conceptions of sainthood (walâya) in Ibn ʿArabî's own understanding of Islam--and the profound relevance of those perspectives for illuminating the ongoing relations between the learned and "popular" forms of Islam. Now Prof. Deladrière's discovery and translation of Ibn ʿArabî's lengthy treatment of this famous early Muslim saint (ca. 155/771-246/861) provides a remarkable concrete illustration of spiritual phenomena and teachings that are discussed--often in more abstract theological terms--throughout his immense "Meccan Revelations" (*al-Futûhât al-Makkîya*). This particular book was written after the *Futûhât*, relatively late in Ibn ʿArabî's life, which may account for the rarity of manuscripts and its absence from the author's own *Fihrist* and subsequent bio-bibliographical studies.

Ibn ʿArabî's explanation of his own aims in composing this work (in the Prologue, pp. 47-53) is highly reminiscent of the autobiographical hagiographic materials familiar to many readers from the Sufis of Andalusia (transl. R. Austin). Like the anecdotes of Ibn ʿArabî's own masters and companions in the *Rûh al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fâkhira*, these stories, poems, prayers and concise sayings of Dhû-l-Nûn are brought together here in order to awaken and intensify his readers' own spiritual desire (himma) to emulate these examples of the spiritual life, and to avoid the recurrent dangers that they also so clearly highlight. But although these sayings are all handed down from earlier disciples and hagiographic collections--usually, Ibn ʿArabî insists, by direct oral transmission (as with hadîth of the Prophet)--the cumulative effect of this personal collection is radically different from a literary "anthology" or more historical account. In fact, careful readers should have a vivid sense of actually participating in a majlis, of watching Ibn ʿArabî's own method of oral spiritual teaching as he repeatedly interjects his own explanations

and personal anecdotes, explaining or corroborating the actual relevance of Dhû-l-Nûn's words in regard to both doctrine and practice.

The book itself--following Prof. Deladrière's thorough and indispensable Introduction (pp. 11-45)--is divided into four main sections. Part I outlines the few known historical "facts" about Dhû-l-Nûn's life (including his early training in hadîth and later persecution in Egypt and brief imprisonment by the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil at the end of his life), and gives a representative sampling of his teachings, his prayers and special spiritual accomplishments (karamât). Part II is an extremely dense compilation of the walî's sayings and aphorisms regarding some sixty different spiritual virtues and related problems of discipline and practice, constituting an elaborate "spiritual psychology". (Prof. Deladrière's corresponding "Index de la spiritualité", pp. 386-391, includes hundreds of Arabic technical terms drawn from the Qur'ân, hadîth and early Sufî tradition.) Part III is divided between Dhû-l-Nûn's poetic allusions to members or ranks of the ever-present "spiritual hierarchy" of the *awliyâ'*--a central concern of Ibn ʿArabî throughout the *Futûhât*--and some forty edifying tales of Dhû-l-Nûn's own dramatic encounters with a fascinating array of ascetics, solitary worshippers, pilgrims and "fools of God" who variously teach, inspire or caution him during the years of his own spiritual wanderings (siyâha) in a quest that extended from the Maghreb to Syria, Yemen and perhaps even Khorasan. Finally, Part IV includes many further illustrations of each of these genres of Sufî writing, drawn from an earlier hagiographic compilation by Ibn Bâkûya. These dramatic descriptions of Dhû-l-Nûn's spiritual encounters are no doubt the most interesting and approachable genre for non-specialist readers, and it is especially striking that in many of these stories (at least 18) the famous protagonist is depicted as being instructed by women saints and ascetics from virtually all parts of that early Islamic world, including the woman saint (walîya) who is specifically cited as his "master", the famous Fâtima of Nishapur (also known for her connections with the early Persian mystic, Abû Yazîd al-Bastâmî).

Apart from these very accessible stories, some of them familiar from the anecdotes of Dhû-l-Nûn continually retold by later Sufî writers, the particular rhetorical form of Arabic "rhymed prose" (*sajʿ*) in which the rest of his prayers and teachings are usually cast presents almost insuperable obstacles for any translator into an Indo-European language. (One is reminded of the remarkable absence of any readable Western translation of the *Nahj al-Balâgha*, the even more famous and influential collected sayings of ʿAlî ibn Abî Tâlib, a compilation

which resembles the form and content of these teachings of Dhû-l-Nûn in so many fundamental respects.) Prof. Deladrière is to be commended for his truly remarkable efforts to transmute these masterpieces of that peculiar Arabic form into comprehensible French: Dhû-l-Nûn's meanings here are almost always clear, even if the aesthetic appeal of the underlying Arabic (its rhyme, concision, allusiveness, mnemonic power, and the like) is inevitably lost in translation. At the very least every reader, even those encountering Dhû-l-Nûn for the first time, will come away with a strong sense of this saint's distinctive "spiritual personality," with its especially marked ascetic, other-worldly tendencies.

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Apart from successfully meeting the challenge of translation, Prof. Deladrière has also undertaken a painstaking effort to uncover the relevant historical background and to compare the original and intermediary sources for these teachings of Dhû-l-Nûn with parallel or later Islamic uses of the same materials (e.g., by Attâr, Suyûfî, etc.)--including Ibn ʿArabî's use of them in other works, especially the *Futûhât* (where the "wise counsels" in his concluding chapter 560 include dozens of Dhû-l-Nûn's sayings also recorded here) and his as yet untranslated *Muhâdarât al-Abrâr*. These demanding scholarly explorations--which are equally evident in Prof. Deladrière's Introduction, lengthy notes and appendices (pp. 349-391), and his alternative versions of many stories and sayings--should be a great help both to specialized students of Ibn ʿArabî and to cultural and social historians of the Islamic world during the centuries between Dhû-l-Nûn and the Shaykh al-Akbar. Simply comparing these 300 pages of translations (by no means exhaustive of the earlier surviving sources) with the few paragraphs on Dhû-l-Nûn in any of the major Islamic encyclopedias and reference works on Sufism should suggest the magnitude of investigations as yet hardly begun. Similarly extensive bodies of hagiographic material exist for other key formative figures in what later came to be "Sufi" tradition (as we know from the pioneering studies of Hallâj, Muhâsibî, and Sahl al-Tustarî), but the detailed comparative study of the origins and literary transformations of that vast material has scarcely begun.

The period of Dhû-l-Nûn's own long life was one in which virtually all the "religious sciences" and institutional forms of teaching and guidance that came to typify later Islamic religious culture suddenly seem to spring up--judging by the surviving literary and historical evidence--in remarkably differentiated and sophisticated form. In this case, the contrast between

Dhû-l-Nûn's early studies of hadîth (with Mâlik and others) and his subsequent critical attitude toward the worldly corruption of hadîth scholars and legalists (and his resulting imprisonment) is symptomatic of wider, historically decisive transformations. And the complex development of his technical terminology for "spiritual phenomenology", including the transmutation of secular Arabic love poetry, proverbs and storytelling for spiritual purposes, is an even more important illustration of these formative developments of Islamic tradition. Prof. Deladrière's exploration of the many earlier sources for these sayings and stories should help Islamic historians to begin to work out to what degree those critical developments were actually due to a "historical" Dhû-l-Nûn (and hence no doubt to earlier, anonymous figures) and how much they represent the gradual, cumulative creation of later mystical and literary traditions. But for Ibn ʿArabî and later Muslim readers, of course, the only Dhû-l-Nûn who mattered is the "friend of God" (*walî Allâh*) whose life and teachings are so vividly and copiously revealed in this book.

Ibn ʿArabi. *Traité de l'Amour*. Translated by Maurice Gloton. Paris: Albin Michel, 1986. 320 pages.

The importance of Ibn ʿArabi's extensive discussion of divine and human love in chapter 178 of the *Futūhāt* was already recognized by Asin-Palacios and Henry Corbin, both of whom had translated substantial excerpts in their pioneering studies of the Shaykh al-Akbar. (Indeed the whole of Corbin's *Creative Imagination...* can be seen as an extended meditation on the central theme of *khayāl* in this chapter.) Now, however, a much wider audience can appreciate the full richness and complexity of this remarkable work thanks to this new translation of the entire chapter. And many readers will surely agree with the Mr. Gloton's description of this text as a "masterpiece", since it is difficult to think of any other translated work of Ibn ʿArabi that does such justice to all the key dimensions of his thought and teaching: his metaphysical doctrines, religious and scriptural concerns, and practical spiritual outlook are continually interwoven here in a way that constantly reminds each reader of the relevance of each of those perspectives to his own innermost experience and conceptions of the world.

The structure of this largely self-contained treatise is relatively straightforward. As in each chapter of the *Futuhat*, Ibn ʿArabi begins with a poetic introduction summarizing all the major themes taken up in the later discussion as they have been realized and transmuted in his own experience. That is followed by what is at once a phenomenological evocation of the full range of aspects of the experience of love and an initial outline of the essential vocabulary and symbolism--drawn from both the remarkably subtle language and imagery of Arabic love-poetry and the equally rich scriptural indications in the Koran and hadith--that provides the basis for Ibn ʿArabi's subsequent analyses of the inner reality of love. The following chapters (pp. 67-134) then develop, still in fairly abstract or highly symbolic terms, his complex understanding (as usual, both ontological and theological) of the ultimate reality of divine Love and its human manifestations in spiritual and "natural/physical" love. And the remainder of the discussion (pp. 135-262) turns to the practical means of fully realizing and integrating that divine reality as they have been described and manifested by the prophets and saints.

What makes Ibn ʿArabi's discussions here so consistently alive and fascinating is his artful combination of abstract metaphysical analysis and scriptural allusion with striking

anecdotes and accounts of his own spiritual experiences and those of other Sufis (here especially of women mystics, including some of his own early Andalusian teachers). Since that "experiential" side begins with detailed discussions of romantic love and attachment (drawing mainly on the language of earlier Arabic poetry) in terms recognizable to virtually everyone, each reader--including those with no consciously spiritual or "religious" interest in this subject--is artfully drawn into Ibn ʿArabi's dialectic, and only gradually brought face-to-face with the full practical implications of his contrast between the integrative wholeness of "divine love" and more familiar human experiences of dissociation, incompleteness, illusion.... As such, this work is itself a beautiful illustration of that providential divine "ruse" (*makar*) by which, as he points out (p. 139), "*God treats those who love Him [i.e., all His creatures], bringing them back to Him by their own will or by force.*"

Now of course the central role of Love (not just man's awakening love of God, but the very Ground of all being) was also celebrated endlessly, and often incomparably, in the famous mystical poets of the Eastern Islamic world. And the full richness and density of this work--as well as the particular emphases and characteristic intentions of Ibn ʿArabi's teaching--will emerge most clearly for readers who are able to make that comparison. As always, one of those most striking characteristics is his continual insistence on the perspectives evoked here as being in fact the central, all-encompassing aim of the prophetic Message, and on the practical consequences of that insistence, a focus that continually forces his attentive reader to reconsider apparently familiar aspects of the Qur'an and hadith.

Mr. Gloton deserves special thanks for his generally reliable translation of an often extraordinarily difficult text, especially where the complex linguistic distinctions of Arabic love poetry are concerned. His notes help to explain the numerous allusions to hadith and Qur'an, as well as Ibn ʿArabi's frequent use of Arabic etymologies, and the index of Qur'anic citations and index/glossary of Arabic technical terms will be especially useful to students comparing this with the Shaykh's other writings. Given the importance of this text, one may hope that his contribution will one day inspire a full English translation (from the original Arabic) and commentary, which would be a great service not only to those interested in Ibn ʿArabi or Sufism, but to students of Islam more generally.

IBN 'ARABI: *La Niche des lumières: 101 saintes paroles prophétiques*, introduction and translation by Muhammad Valsan, Paris, Editions de l'Oeuvre, 1983; and *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in early Islam*, by William A. Graham, Paris/the Hague, Mouton, 1977.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the fundamental importance of hadith--the vast body of traditional reports concerning the sayings and actions of the Prophet--not only for the constitution and elaboration of Islamic law and theology (which are the uses of hadith most often emphasized by modern scholars), but also for Islamic piety and spirituality more generally, whether in their popular or more learned manifestations. This focus on the spiritual dimension of hadith, important as it is in Sufi literature in general, no doubt finds its most elaborate and rigorous expression in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi; it is especially evident in the *Futuhat*, where the Shaykh's interpretation of those Prophetic sayings (on the most diverse subjects) provides the essential framework for dozens of chapters, being at least as important as--and indeed inseparable from--his understanding of the Qur'an itself.

Hence this new French translation, with facing Arabic text, of the *Mishkat al-Anwar*, Ibn 'Arabi's own personal selection of 101 hadith (or parts thereof), offers an invaluable aid for all serious students of his work, especially those without Arabic. For the particular hadith included in this selection recur constantly throughout his writings (including the *Fusus*), like so many leitmotifs or themes around which his thought is constructed; yet those recurrent allusions (which are far more frequent than the cases of detailed exegesis) are rarely identified as such in most available translations. The near-scriptural importance of these particular hadith, as indicated by the Arabic title of the collection ("The Niche of Lights Concerning the Reports Which Are Transmitted From God"), also flows from the fact that they are all "divine" or "holy sayings" (*hadith ilahi* or *qudsi*), i.e., ones in which Muhammad (or in some cases an earlier prophet) reports God's own words, either directly or as transmitted by Gabriel. Their contents, accordingly, are primarily centered on spiritual, ethical and eschatological questions, often reminiscent of Biblical passages; but their Islamic sources are in fact most often to be found in the respected "Six Books" or canonical collections of Sunni hadith.

Mr. Valsan's very readable translation is limited strictly to Ibn 'Arabi's own prefatory remarks and the divine sayings themselves, with virtually no explanatory annotation or references to their uses and interpretations in Ibn 'Arabi's other works. (Only the first reporter [and eventual literary source] of the *isnād*, or long chain of oral transmitters, has been translated

in most cases; but the complete text is included in the fully voweled Arabic version on facing pages.) However, the translator's compact introduction (pp. 7-14) does provide some essential background: he points out the lifelong nature of Ibn 'Arabi's interest in hadith, mentioning the teachers and transmitters with whom he studied in many parts of the Islamic world; he cites the Shaykh's dozen or more other selections or studies of hadith (largely taken from the canonical collections), most of which are now lost and known only by their titles; he briefly alludes to his distinctive Sufi position (outlined in several passages of the *Futuhāt* and other works) concerning the spiritual "authenticity" of hadith, as contrasted with the traditional Islamic methods of *isnad*-criticism; and finally, he summarizes Ibn 'Arabi's own indications concerning the structure and sources of this particular selection.

The *Mishkat* itself is divided into three parts: two sets of 40 hadith--thereby fulfilling the famous Prophetic injunction concerning the special merit of those who preserve and transmit 40 of his sayings--and an additional 21, for a total of 101 (because, according to still another hadith [p. 104], "God loves the uneven number"). The first 40 hadith are given with the complete *isnad* from Ibn 'Arabi's own teachers back to the Prophet, while for the others he cites only his literary sources (and their chain of sources).

Since the traditional corpus of "divine sayings" poses certain obvious problems concerning their nature and status in relation to both the Koran and the other Prophetic hadith, Mr. Valsan has also included as an appendix a brief translation of a fascinating discussion of this question by two later Sufis (of the 17th/18th century). Apparently he was unaware of the far more elaborate examination of the Islamic literature on these questions--and of the *hadith qudsi* in its broader relations to the Koran and the other hadith--in Wm. Graham's *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*. If we mention that pioneering work here, however, it is because Professor Graham has actually provided detailed analyses and carefully annotated English translations (again with full Arabic texts and canonical or other 'sources') of roughly half the hadith from the *Mishkat al-Anwar* in the latter half of his work (pp. 111-244), which is devoted to the many "divine sayings" found in the classical hadith collections. Through it, even readers without French or Arabic can still discover many of these key sources of Ibn 'Arabi's reflection. Prof. Graham clearly identifies those canonical hadith from his sample which are included in some form in the *Mishkat*, but the usefulness of his work is not limited to supplying those translations. As a result of his careful comparison of the often quite different versions of a given

saying in those early sources, readers interested in the literary or rhetorical composition of the Shaykh's works can more easily explore the often intriguing process by which he chose among those alternative versions. For although his citations are indeed literal, for the most part, it should not be surprising if what he leaves out or refrains from mentioning is sometimes as revealing as the text he actually chooses to quote.

In conclusion, these two complementary studies offer a fascinating insight into one of the most important (if still virtually unstudied) "sources" of the thought of Ibn 'Arabi, and ultimately of Sufism and Islamic spirituality in the broadest sense.

Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran. By Henry Corbin (translated by N. Pearson). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977 (pb. reprint, 1989); Bollingen Series XCI:2. xviii + 374 pp.

While this classic study, first published in 1960, is surely familiar to specialists in Islamic philosophy, mysticism and Shiite thought, this paperback re-edition of the Bollingen translation now makes available to a wider audience, at a price affordable for classroom use, what is probably still the best available English anthology of later Islamic thought and a marvelous introduction to the "spiritual aesthetics" of poetry and the visual arts (and the religious perception of nature), in both Sunni and Shiite Islam. This volume actually includes two very different books: the lyrical, highly personal Eranos lecture aptly described by the title (pp. 3-105, originally published in the Eranos-Jahrbuch for 1953); and a carefully selected, easily readable and pedagogically more useful selection of key texts focusing on the "metaphysics of the imagination" in four major schools of later Islamic thought. While longer works by a few of those thinkers (notably Mulla Sadra and Ibn ʿArabî) have since become available in complete English translations, in this case the broad range of sources, combined with the careful focus on a single major topic and extensive annotation, still make the translations in this volume an ideal pedagogical tool for survey or introductory courses in Islamic (or Persian) religion, civilization, arts, etc.

The long translation section (pp. 107-end) includes key passages on the common theme of the epistemology (and metaphysics) of spiritual perception--often phrased in terms of eschatological symbolism from the Qur'an and hadîth--drawn from representative works by Suhrâwardî, Ibn ʿArabî, Mulla Sadra and Shaykh Ahmad Ahsâ'î. In each case Corbin has joined short excerpts from these seminal thinkers with commentaries or further illustrations of their insights by their students or later disciples (e.g., Qaysarî and ʿAbd al-Karîm Jîlî for Ibn ʿArabî; Shahrâzûrî, Ibn Kammûna and Qutb al-Dîn Shîrâzî for Suhrâwardî), in a way that beautifully conveys the usual forms of writing and teaching within those Islamic intellectual traditions. And although Corbin's personal interest is clearly focused on the later (Safavid and Qajar) Shiite authors, who were still virtually unknown outside Iran at the time this book was written, in fact half of the 14 texts translated here are by Sunni writers from the traditions of Suhrâwardî and especially of Ibn ʿArabî, which were so widely influential in the intellectual and artistic

expressions of religious life throughout the Eastern Islamic world (including the Ottoman and Mughal realms and Malay literature, as well as Shiite Iran) at least until the colonial era.

The wider pedagogical interest of these selections, beyond their obvious significance for students of Islamic philosophy, Sufism and Shiite esotericism, has to do with the way they so clearly communicate two fundamental dimensions of Islamic religious (and artistic) life that are often largely absent from introductory or survey materials on Islam: i.e., the spiritual perception of the world of nature, and the inner experience of artistic and religious symbols. That effectiveness should not really be too surprising: the profound historical influence of these metaphysics of "theophanies" for several centuries in such a wide range of Muslim religious and cultural settings already reflected the way such works were felt to express (as well as justify) the otherwise inarticulate depths of aesthetic and religious realization and creativity.

Yet at the same time the broader philosophic framework of many of these Islamic classics is so clearly spelled out that thoughtful readers can hardly avoid noticing their applicability to our interpretation (and experience) of religious and aesthetic symbolism in many other, non-Islamic contexts. The intensely personal opening essay is perhaps Corbin's most lyrical and poetic attempt to suggest those wider perspectives: with its multiple levels of allusion to Goethe and earlier German mystics, musical resonances, and phenomenological "parallels" in Jungian psychology, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish and gnostic mystical traditions, it is difficult enough to follow in the original; much has inevitably been lost in translation. Behind those thought-provoking meditations, however, stands the broader historical problem suggested by the title: the complex transformation of Zoroastrian and gnostic elements (among so many others) in the gradual formation of Islamic religion and culture, a process by no means limited to the particularly striking cases (of Suhrawardî and the early Shiite hadith elaborated by the Shaykhis) that are the author's special focus here. Compared with analogous research in the areas of formative Judaism and Christianity, it is remarkable how relatively little Iranian studies have advanced, in this particular area, in the almost four decades since this Eranos lecture was originally delivered.

As for the ongoing relevance of these so insistently other-worldly Islamic philosophers and mystics, ironically enough, the arguments advanced in this volume have recently been echoed by an undoubtedly "authoritative" Shiite source: Khomeini's famous letter to Gorbachev

recommending the study of these very same subjects and authors (Suhrâwardî, Ibn ʿArabî and Mullâ Sadrâ). Were anyone to heed that advice, they could well begin with these translations.

Stephen Hirtenstein: The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn ‘Arabi✕.
Oxford, Anqa Publishing, 1999; pp. 289.

The Spanish mystic and philosopher Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240) was arguably the most influential Islamic thinker of the last millenium, while more recently his ideas on spirituality and the transcendent unity of religions have been widely adapted by leading contemporary authorities on comparative religion. Hirtenstein’s new book is the first study of his life (and popular introduction to his teachings) designed directly for the English-speaking audience: the result is an absorbing, impressively comprehensive overview which is accessible to the first-time reader while offering new rewards for those already familiar with his work.

Based on years of study of Ibn ‘Arabi’s works and travel to most of the places where he lived and taught, this is certainly the best general introduction to his fascinating life and teachings for readers just discovering him. The author has alternated biographical and historical chapters with sections introducing key aspects of Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought. This primarily biographical (and often dramatically *autobiographical*) focus often throws new light on the decisive interplay of history, spiritual experience, and literary expression in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writing. The author’s artful use of dozens of photos of mosques, shrines and historical sites directly connected with Ibn ‘Arabi’s journeys throughout the Islamic world also provides an invaluable accompaniment to the extensive translations from his writings, helping to bring alive the constant upheavals that marked the Shaykh’s life and eventually spread his teachings from Andalusia to the Eastern world of Rumi, Suhrawardi and other great saints, poets and statesmen of his time. Finally, the careful discussion of Ibn ‘Arabi’s autobiographical accounts of his spiritual illuminations helps bring out the inspired—and often highly controversial—personal dimension of his self-conception and mission in a way which has often been lost in more abstract accounts of his metaphysical teachings.

Claude Addas. Ibn Arabî et le voyage sans retour. Paris, éditions du Seuil, 1996. 140 pages.

Claude Addas' latest book on Ibn 'Arabi is something considerably more ambitious than an abridged and more accessible version of her definitive bio-bibliographical study [Ibn 'Arabi, ou la quête du soufre rouge. Paris, 1989; also available in English translation, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1993.]. It is really the first serious attempt in modern Western languages at a comprehensive, but popular introduction to the life, works and central teachings of this great mystical thinker. The need for such a broad introductory study accessible to college students and others approaching Ibn 'Arabi for the first time has long been evident, and all serious students of the Shaykh al-Akbar will appreciate the many daunting difficulties which the author has confronted in composing this dense and complex volume.

To begin with, this study might well be subtitled “The Seal of (Muhammadan) Sainthood”: while carefully sketching out the eventful historical background of Ibn 'Arabi's life and travels from Andalusia to Anatolia and the eastern borders of the Arab world, the author has focused throughout on those dramatic experiences and visions most central to the mystic's distinctive conception of his own universal and very specific mission, for the most part using the Shaykh's own descriptions. The result of that approach is not only a remarkably sober “spiritual autobiography”—without the familiar tendencies of hagiographic writing one encounters in almost any tradition—but also a detailed exposition of the key “Akbarian” teachings expressed, for the most part, within the framework of those same key autobiographical passages. Thus the reader encounters Ibn 'Arabi's central theme of pure “servanthood” through its concrete expressions in his own lifestyle (avoidance of possessions, etc.); his distinctive understanding of “sainthood” through the fascinating stories of his early Andalusian companions and spiritual teachers; or his conception of the world of Imagination through his own transforming initiation into that realm. Even the fascinating subject of the Shaykh's mysteriously wide-ranging historical influences is introduced, at the conclusion, through the very different personalities and approaches of his own immediate disciples and students.

The pedagogical and aesthetic attractiveness of this personalized, autobiographical approach is especially evident in contrast with the only two chapters (out of 12) where the author sets aside this broader biographical framework and instead provides a straightforward doctrinal exposition—still expressed almost entirely in Ibn 'Arabi's own words—of his characteristic

teachings concerning the “Unicity of Being,” the divine Essence and Names, and the process of divine self-manifestation. While these chapters are masterful summaries of incredibly complex theological and metaphysical concepts, the very requirements of concision and condensation produce a kind of dense philosophical exposition—inevitably very close to centuries of earlier classical Islamic commentaries—which will be intellectually challenging for most uninitiated readers.

An additional virtue of this volume, which clearly sets it apart from the earlier biographical or survey chapters by Corbin, Asin, Nasr, Austin and many others which have had to serve this introductory purpose in the past, is the author’s consistent attempt to draw her readers’ attention to those distinctive features of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writing—especially his diverse *styles* (including the special role of his poetry), his inventive language, and his constant reliance on Qur’an and hadith both in his inspiration and his rhetorical expression--which are such a powerful dimension of his writings’ impact and lasting influence. Although these fundamental aspects of Ibn ‘Arabi’s work cannot readily be conveyed in summary form, the author has rightfully and repeatedly emphasized their importance in a way which should help novice readers to better appreciate those dimensions of his writing when they go on to explore the growing body of translations of his major works.

In short, there can be no question as to the comprehensive scope and scholarly reliability of this work: the author has included all the major themes of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writing, for the most part expressed in his own words, and has placed them carefully in the context of his major writings and both their immediate and their wider historical settings. There is everything an “outsider” would need by way of orientation for undertaking the study of reliable translations. One can only hope that the burgeoning interest in Ibn ‘Arabi and the rapid proliferation of translations of his major works will eventually call forth, in contemporary idiom, the sort of popular, creative transfigurations of his insights that are to be found, as Addas points out, in so many later Persian (and other Islamicate) poets. But even those readers aesthetically drawn to more poetic, personal, and creative re-interpretations of the Shaykh’s writings are likely to find Dr. Addas’s books essential reference works for decades to come.

Claude Addas. *Ibn 'Arabi, ou la quête du soufre rouge*. Paris, Gallimard, 1989. 391 pp.

The lifetime of Ibn ʿArabī (560/1165-638/1240) spans one of the most fascinating periods of Islamic history: an age when the political shrinking of the *Dār al-Islām* (through the Reconquista, Crusades and Mongol invasions) paradoxically coincided with the remarkable creative flourishing of a constellation of saints and mystical writers (Abd al-Qadir Jilani, Attar, Rumi, the two Suhrawardis, Abu Madyan and Najm al-Din Kubra and their disciples) who were to have an extraordinary historical, intellectual and spiritual influence on a much wider Islamic world for centuries to come. So it is all the more ironic that this multi-faceted figure, whose voluminous writings, teachings and disciples brought together and transmitted so many of those influences throughout later Sufism, earning him the honorific title of the "greatest master" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*), is still best known in the English-speaking world, at least, simply as a "mystical philosopher". The present study is not only the first substantial biography of this extraordinary figure: it is also a superb (and remarkably concise) introduction to his thought and spiritual teaching (in its practical and scriptural, as well as its metaphysical dimensions), to its wider Islamic intellectual context, and to the social history of the nascent "Sufi" movements in the many different regions where Ibn ʿArabī traveled and taught.

Paradoxically enough, Dr. Addas is able to do justice to all these wider, outward dimensions of Ibn ʿArabī's historical significance, while at the same time rooting her account in the bountiful autobiographical (and often vividly visionary) evidence scattered throughout his own writings, precisely by taking seriously his own self-image of his special mission as the "Seal of the Muhammadan saints" (*khatm al-awliyā'*). The thread of her narrative follows Ibn ʿArabī's own gradual discovery of this unique spiritual vocation, as it began with his first youthful inspirations, unfolded through his initiatic encounters with many masters, companions and members of the hierarchy of saints in the Maghreb (some of them familiar to readers of his Sufis of Andalusia), and was confirmed in a series of decisive visions (in Fes and Mecca) near the midpoint of his life; and it concludes with the prodigious literary output, teaching, and constant travel through which he sought to fulfill that mission. Without lapsing into hagiography--and indeed with a healthy scepticism about the anecdotes provided by later hagiographers (and

enemies)--the author thereby succeeds in portraying a coherent, convincing portrayal of aspects of the Shaykh's many-sided life and work that most earlier studies have (for understandable reasons) tended to present in isolation: 1) the visions and inspirations which are the avowed source of all his teachings; 2) his constant insistence on the central role of the Koran and hadith (and on spiritual practice explicitly rooted in them) as the essential keys to Islamic spirituality; 3) his own characteristic metaphysical formulations and explanations of those teachings (best known through the *Fusus al-Hikam*); and 4) the full range of historical activity and influence (revealed here through a painstaking study of his later travels, disciples and relations with various rulers and other religious scholars, as well as his actual writings).

However, for all the author's efforts at placing Ibn ʿArabî in his own historical context, most readers' lasting impressions are likely to be not so much of a "life", of a particular individual's outward story, as of the wider lessons and teachings he sought to convey. The apparent contradiction between the visionary mystic or poet revealed in so many of Ibn ʿArabî's own writings and the far more systematic teacher and thinker portrayed by later interpreters becomes less paradoxical when one begins to recognize how each apparently random "vision" or anecdote is almost always intended to convey certain spiritual lessons--teachings which do become increasingly coherent as one becomes familiar with the vision informing them. Dr. Addas' own portrait, based as it is on an almost unparalleled familiarity with Ibn ʿArabî's edited and unedited works, faithfully conveys her subject's own sense of his life as an ongoing, predestined spiritual mission. And her discussions of later Islamic sources, including both the Shaykh's disciples and defenders and his equally vociferous detractors, are especially revealing in pointing to some of the more universal and less immediately visible (non-literary) dimensions of that influence, whether it be through the initiatic chains of the *khirqa akbariyya* or through his constant insistence on the spiritual dimensions of the Qur'an and hadith as fundamental to the practice and message of Islam--an insistence that has made him an emblematic figure in recurrent conflicts of authority and interpretation in the Islamic world down to our own day, even among parties with little real knowledge of his works.

Virtually all modern treatments of Ibn ʿArabî's life have relied on Asin-Palacios' pioneering efforts, based primarily on the *Futuhat* and the accounts of his earlier Andalusian companions in the *Ruh al-Quds* and *Durrat al-Fakhira*. Dr. Addas' extensive researches are

based on a wealth of additional material, including the autobiographical passages in many of the Shaykh's other works (including many still unedited treatises); the sama' certificates in manuscripts of his writings (building on the bibliographic work of O. Yahya); the oral tradition of teachings later recorded by his disciples (Ibn Sawdakīn and Badr al-Habashī, as well as the better-known Eastern tradition represented by Qunawi and Awhad al-Din al-Kirmani) and their students; recently edited lives of saints and related Sufi documents from the same period; and the widely scattered *tabaqat* references to disciples, teachers and other figures mentioned by Ibn ʿArabī. Unlike many earlier studies, Dr. Addas' treatment reflects a constant sensitivity to the local situations and social contexts in question. One particularly important example is the way contemporary sources indicate Ibn ʿArabī's apparently widespread acceptance and esteem among the 'ulama' and jurists of Damascus during his own lifetime--thereby underlining the apocryphal character of many of the anecdotes supplied by later hagiographers and critics alike, and pointing to the still largely unexplored symbolic role of Ibn ʿArabī (along with al-Ghazali) in the widely scattered later disputes between various Sufi groups and their influential critics.

The more detailed results of the author's research, which should prove invaluable for subsequent students of his writings and their posterity, are summarized in a number of tables given as an appendix, including a detailed chronology of his works (often updating Yahya's *Répertoire générale*) and their autobiographical references, Ibn ʿArabī's own *silasila*'s and those of the later *khirqā akbariya*, and a biographical index of his own teachers (in all the traditional Islamic disciplines) and literary acquaintances. The extensive bibliography will be useful to both specialists and general readers (e.g., for its citation of many lesser-known modern translations from the *Futuhat*).

An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn Arabi, the Book and the Law. By Michel Chodkiewicz (tr. D. Streight), SUNY Press, Albany, NY, 1993, 184 pp.

In most areas of scholarship there are one or two books so uniquely rich in their depth of insight, breadth of understanding, and richness of expression and illustration that even their individual footnotes become, as it were, the seeds of whole volumes of research in later generations. This deceptively short volume, which so ably condenses the fruits of decades of intensive study and reflection on Ibn 'Arabî (as well as his disciples and heirs throughout the Islamic world) is clearly just such a landmark in "Akbarî" studies. Its basic unifying theme--familiar enough to even the novice reader of Ibn 'Arabî today--is the Qur'anic (and Prophetic) inspiration and aims of all the Shaykh's writing. But here Professor Chodkiewicz, referring primarily to the "ocean" of al-Futûhât al-Makkîya as well as a host of other untranslated (and often unedited) texts and commentaries, has systematically developed that theme to a depth that goes far beyond academic philology and amply illustrates the profoundly transforming power of Ibn 'Arabî's own "spiritual hermeneutics" of Islamic scripture. For those interested in the Shaykh's own life, this volume also highlights some of the deeper roots of his own extraordinary personal claims with regard to his "realization" of the Qur'an and the inner dimension of prophecy, themes which are examined in more detail in two other recently translated studies, The Seal of the Saints (by the same author) and Claude Addas' biography, The Quest for the Red Sulphur.

There is no question, then, that this is in many respects an "advanced" work, almost an *agenda* (as well as an indispensable reference work) for future study: indeed very few modern scholars could honestly lay claim to the familiar mastery of Arabic, of the Qur'an and hadith, and of so many different writings of the Shaykh and his disciples which this book often presupposes. On the other hand, serious students of Ibn 'Arabî will recognize many familiar themes from the works that are available in translation, and--while acknowledging how much of this "ocean" still remains uncharted--will surely be challenged to re-read and re-explore those available texts from new perspectives. The author's Introduction (pp. 1-18) is an especially striking illustration of that process. At first reading, the Introduction may seem like nothing more than history: a highly condensed survey of the far-reaching "manifestations" of Ibn 'Arabî's work for centuries throughout the Islamic world, focusing especially on the recent research by the author (as well as

his many colleagues and students from France and the Arab world) that has helped to bring out the actual social bases (tariqas, ethical manuals, etc.) for the popular spread of Ibn 'Arabî's insights, especially in the Ottoman period, far beyond the line of his avowed disciples and commentators. By the time one has completed reading the book, however, it will be quite evident just how and to what extent those same historical data are also meant to illuminate the nature and seriousness of the Shaykh's meta-historical claims concerning the "Seal of the saints" and his special inner relationship with both the Qur'an and the "Reality of Muhammad."

Each of the book's five chapters richly illustrates, at progressively deeper levels of expression and meaning, the full Qur'anic inspiration of all of Ibn 'Arabi's works. Not surprisingly, the first two chapters highlight themes and typical methods of scriptural interpretation--such as Ibn 'Arabî's consistent focus on the "letter" of revelation even in his apparently most original (or outrageous) insights; his stress on the ongoing, "perpetual descent" of the inner meanings of the Qur'an within each purified heart; or the metaphysical "universality" of the Qur'an and the Source of all prophecy--which should be familiar to most students of the Fusûs al-Hikam and other widely available works. The second chapter also includes a very clear and accessible summary of Prof. Chodkiewicz' seminal research on two major topics in the Shaykh's teaching: his discussion of the various types and ranks and functions of the "friends of God" (from chapter 73 of the Futûhât), and his uniquely irenic understanding of the principles of *fiqh*, with its compelling practical and intellectual relevance to the contemporary Islamic world.

The following two chapters, though, explore territory which has until now remained largely uncharted, at least in Western scholarship. Chapter 3 demonstrates in rigorous and convincing detail--focusing on the long *Fasl al-Manâzil* in the Futûhât--the multitude of precise ways in which the order, inner structures, and language and style of the Qur'an underlies the corresponding arrangement and meaning of all the Meccan Illuminations, including literally thousands of passages or allusions that would have remained mysterious and indecipherable without these essential "keys." Chapter 4 extends the same approach to revealing both the internal structure of other major works (such as the early K. al-Isrâ', the K. al-'Abâdila, the K. al-Tajalliyât), and, even more significantly, to suggesting the "networks" or "constellations" of Qur'anic allusion that form fundamental linkages--of both inspiration and cross-referential explanation--between chapters or sections of the Qur'an, the Futûhât, and each of Ibn 'Arabî's shorter works. While scholars and students of these untranslated (and often unedited) works

may have intuitively felt, and even occasionally deciphered, some of these inner connections and allusions, the systematic results of Professor Chodkiewicz' methods and examples here (summarized in 35 pages of dense notes) are rich enough to orient the research of several generations of future scholars. Indeed anyone who has wrestled directly with the constantly recurrent mysteries and opaque passages to be found throughout the Shaykh's writings may well consider these two chapters to constitute a sort of "Rosetta Stone" in the gradual deciphering of Ibn 'Arabî's work.

The final chapter, focusing on the integral relationship between religious *practice* and spiritual realization in all the Shaykh's writings, returns to a topic and illustrations (from the Fusûs al-Hikam and other translated works) familiar to a wider audience. Again the detailed analyses and synopses here--of the interplay between right actions and the attainment of *karamât* in the Mawâqî' al-Nujûm; of the roles of God and the individual soul in prayer in the Tanazzulât Mawsilîya; or of the constant allusions to the inner dimensions of *salât* throughout Tirmidhî's famous "spiritual questionnaire" in chapter 73 of the Futûhât--fully demonstrate both the author's mastery of the entire "Akbarî" corpus and the spiritual richness of these many texts that still await translation in order to reach the wider audience they deserve today.

Any brief account of Prof. Chodkiewicz' book, with its massive illustration of the impact of the Qur'an and (selective) hadith on every dimension of Ibn 'Arabî's writing, almost inevitably suggests a sort of "apologetic" or narrowly sectarian approach and an intention--on the part of either the Shaykh or his modern interpreter--that is in fact almost diametrically opposed to the actual state of affairs. Readers familiar only with the many modern Western studies emphasizing the "universality" of the Shaykh's outlook, in particular, might find this approach somewhat surprising. But this apparent paradox is no mystery to students familiar with Ibn 'Arabî's own writings: as they know from their own experience, it is easily resolvable once one begins to appreciate the "Reality" (to use the Shaykh's own expression) to which Ibn 'Arabî is actually referring. And few secondary studies in this field bring the reader closer to that constantly revelatory, more than intellectual, *experience* of the Qur'an than this remarkable work. It is itself an extraordinary illustration of that "ascension *into* meaning" (*mi'râj al-kalima*, to borrow S. al-Hakîm's apt expression) which so uniquely typifies Ibn 'Arabî's own style and approach to revelation.

The English translation, which includes a substantial index of Qur'anic verses and technical terms (but not, unfortunately, of hadith references), is quite readable on the whole, an especially commendable achievement given that so much of the original French text already consists of translations of Ibn 'Arabî's notoriously difficult language and close study of Arabic linguistic, religious and grammatical expressions.

Le Sceau des saints: prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn Arabī, by MICHEL CHODKIEWICZ, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, 223 pp. + index.

For students of Ibn 'Arabi and his place in Sufism and Islamic thought more generally, this pioneering study is likely to become a classic reference comparable to T. Izutsu's *Sufism and Taoism*, since it represents a radically different but ultimately complementary and indispensable approach to our understanding of the "Shaykh al-Akbar" and many essential (if far too frequently neglected) aspects of his work. However the broader interest and significance of this book--whose title seems deceptively modest until the author begins to reveal the full implications of Ibn 'Arabi's self-conception as "Seal of the (Muhammadan) saints"--is not limited to that particular field. The density and richness of the author's textual and historical materials and references, together with the scope and diversity of the methods and perspectives he brings to bear on this subject, are such that this study should likewise constitute thought-provoking reading for students of Islamic law, theology, history, comparative religion, and all the other fields where Ibn 'Arabi's comprehensive (and often controversial) vision continues to call into question many of the accepted categories through which we ordinarily tend to perceive both the traditional sciences of the Islamic world and cognate phenomena in our own lives. (One typical illustration of this wider relevance, discussed at some length in the introduction, is the way Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of "sainthood" tends to undermine--or transcend--the distinctions between "popular" and "learned" religious tradition frequently taken for granted by classical Muslim critics of Sufism, such as Ibn Taymiya, as well as by more modern observers.)

Most obviously, though, the essential historical contribution of this study is the way it systematically and rigorously re-establishes Ibn 'Arabi (i.e., his work, method and spiritual intentions) in his original Islamic (and practical Sufi) context, above all through hundreds of detailed references to his vast and still largely unstudied *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*. In fact, not only most available Western studies but also the vast majority of subsequent references to the Shaykh even in Islamic and Sufi literature (and on both sides of the still vehement controversies surrounding him) are based almost exclusively on the *Fusus al-Hikam*, focusing primarily on his more universal metaphysical insights (or on certain of its "scandalous" expressions taken out of context), and inevitably tend to suggest that the "Islamic" elements in his work are at best the

symbolic expression of a more personal, idiosyncratic philosophic doctrine (whether that may be viewed positively or negatively). Yet whatever the causes and merits of that approach (and the literature reflecting it), even a cursory survey of the *Futuhāt* will quickly reveal to what extent the available studies and critiques--again both in Islamic and Western languages--have so far failed to convey Ibn 'Arabi's personal situation and manifold contributions in terms of practical Sufism (both method and experience), the central place of the Koran in his thought, his profound mastery of virtually all the traditional religious sciences of his day (*kalam*, *fiqh*, hadith, grammar, etc.), and above all the distinctive method and perspective (radically "sunni" in its presuppositions, as Mr. Chodkiewicz stresses) governing his spiritual and intellectual integration of all of those diverse traditional elements.

Here those fundamental aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's thought and work are amply illustrated in relation to his understanding of *walāya* (at once "closeness" to God and the spiritual "authority" or influence flowing from it)--a notion so fundamental to Sufism that, as the author acknowledges at the very beginning, its implications touch on virtually all the more familiar metaphysical themes of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching. Beginning with an illuminating survey of earlier Sufi allusions to this subject (especially with al-Tirmidhi and Ruzbehan Baqli), each chapter focuses on an essential conceptual facet of this reality as it is developed throughout the Shaykh's writings: *wirātha*, or the distinctive spiritual "heritage" of each of the prophets; *niyāba*, the "substitution" of each *wali* as manifestation (and fulfilment) of an intrinsic aspect of the universal "Muhammadan Reality"; and *qurba*, or the actual realization of his inner proximity to the divine. This core exposition skillfully clarifies a number of disputed (or more often simply misunderstood) problems in Ibn 'Arabi and other Sufi authors--questions such as the nature of the "Muhammadan Reality", the various types of "prophecy" (both *nubuwwa* and the 'scriptural' *risāla*), the relations of different members of the spiritual hierarchy (*Qutb*, Imams, *Awtād*, etc.), the special role for Ibn 'Arabī of the "solitary ones" (*afrād*) and the "*malāmiyya*", or the relation of the "Seals" of universal and Muhammadan sainthood—all while clearly showing their inner coherence and role in the larger context of Ibn 'Arabi's thought.

But the deeper value and extraordinary richness of the author's approach has to do with the additional materials and perspectives that are brought in, at virtually every point, in order to illustrate and explain the broader context (at once historical, personal, and metaphysical) of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of *walāya*, as well as its subsequent fate (creative adaptation, rejection, and

acceptance) among later Muslims, including both Sufis and their critics. Thus the explicitly "doctrinal" subject of each chapter is constantly supplemented by extensive documentation (or appropriate allusions) concerning (1) the scriptural sources of Ibn 'Arabi's understanding and expressions in the Koran and relevant hadith, illustrating his characteristic methods and criteria in using those materials; (2) the historical development of each question in earlier Sufism (or other relevant sciences, such as kalam); (3) related metaphysical themes or principles in Ibn 'Arabi's work; (4) subsequent controversies and criticisms (particularly by Ibn Taymiya); (5) the revealing autobiographical and experiential illustrations of these questions throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writings. The breadth of reading (especially in the *Futuhat*) and reflection evident in these supplementary "notes"--many of them containing the seeds of a monograph or even a whole book--will not escape specialists in the relevant fields; certainly they should ensure the future role of this work as an indispensable reference and starting point for students able to investigate these and related issues and the perspectives at greater length in the *Futuhat* and related Sufi writings.

Finally, if we have emphasized the original historical and scholarly contributions of this book, as the features most likely to interest readers of this journal, we must add that those critical qualities are combined throughout with a rare (if soberly expressed) sensitivity to the "*ma'nā*", the inner meaning and spiritual intentions of Ibn 'Arabi's treatment of this subject, and to its practical presuppositions. That deeper dimension--without which Ibn 'Arabi's thought would be reduced to mere kalām--is brought out most explicitly in the concluding chapter: a revealing synthesis (with extensive translations and commentary from the *R. al-Anwar*, the *K. al-Isra'*, and two autobiographical chapters of the *Futuhat*) of the Shaykh's accounts of his own *mi'raj*, the "twofold path" of spiritual ascension and return, which should offer even the most sceptical reader a more vivid sense of the realities underlying the technical discussions of the preceding chapters. In the end, Mr. Chodkiewicz' careful and rigorous insistence on the full historical context and original religious intentions of Ibn 'Arabi's work does not necessarily contradict the many authors who have emphasized the "universality" of the Shaykh's teachings, but it does bring out more openly the partial and essentially interpretive nature of their remarks, while at the same time suggesting the many crucial facets of his own work (and the larger Islamic traditions in which it is rooted) that still remain to be explored.