The Diffusion of Akbarian Teaching in Iran during the 13th and 14th Centuries*

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SADR AL-DĪN AL-QŪNAWĪ (BORN 22 JUMĀDA II 605 / 1 JANUARY 1209 – DIED 13 MUHARRAM 673 / 19 JULY 1274)

His full name is Sadr al-Dīn Muhammad b. Ishāq b. Muhammad b. Yūsuf b. ʿAli al-Shāfiʿī,[1] and his *Kunya* is Abū-l-Maʿālī. Safadī (d. 764/1362) gives him the *Kunya* of Abū ʿAbdullāh.[2]

He was probably born in Konya, which the Seljukids of Asia Minor had just chosen as their capital instead of Malatya, in 605 of the Hegira era, corresponding to the year 1209 of the Common or Christian era, a date mentioned in only one source[3] – in addition to the source given by C. Huart mentioned below – but which better corresponds to the expectations of researchers who are unhappy with certain later dates which give rise to chronological inconsistencies. The date 608 can be deduced from the document whose text was reproduced by Ibn Bībī,[4] in which the Seljukid Sultan ʿIzz al-Dīn Kaykāvus first entrusted Shaykh Majd al-Dīn with the mission of initiating

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1. *L'Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, new edition, includes an article about Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, in volume VIII, pp. 775–7, by W. Chittick. In the old edition, his name is mentioned in the Konya supplement, where the graves of both he and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī are mentioned.

2. Safadī, Salāh al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aibak, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, Sven Dedering edition, Istanbul, 1949, Vol. II, p. 200, notice 572.

3. Al-Aqsarāʾī, Karīm al-Dīn Mahmūd ibn Muhammad, *Musāmarat al-abrār wa musāyarat al-akhyār*, in Persian, Osman Turan edition, Ankara, 1944.

4. Ibn Bībī, Husayn b. Muhammad, *al-Awāmir al-ʿalāʾiyya . . .*, Ankara, 1956, pp. 91–3 and 155–8.

into the *futuwwa* those whom he thought worthy of such teaching, presaging the passing on of this responsibility to his son Muhammad, that is to say, Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī.

Another source allows us to adopt the 605 date: the *Musāmarat al-akhbār wa musāyarat al-akhyār*, a Persian work by Mahmūd b. Muhammad, better known by the nickname ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Aqsarā'ī, or Karīm al-Dīn Mahmūd, an author of the 8th century of the Hegira (14th century of the Christian era).

While mentioning the deaths of eminent people of the year 672, Al-Aqsarā'ī begins with that of the famous Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī: "The Shaykh al-Islām (Qūnawī) led the burial service (of Rūmī) even though he was himself suffering". Then he goes on to say:

> Eight months later, the Shaykh, in his turn, died – May God forgive him – . . . The great Shaykh Sadr al-Dīn Muhammad, the Shaykh al-Islām who was the lord (*Seyyed*) of men, the leader of the Sufi masters, (*mashāyekh*) and the guide of the *ulemas* of his time, the Abū Hanīfa[5] (*Nuʿmān-e-thānī*) of his age, the wonder of his epoch in the sciences of Hadith and the secrets of treasures and subtleties, and who was nicknamed in the Sultans' Courts, the Caliph of the Arabs and non-Arabs. He was born in 605 and died in 673. When his influence disappeared, the minds of the *ulemas* that were enlightened by him, paled . . . and all the virtuous, noble and famous men who used to gather around him dispersed."[6]

It is in this book that what is presently the oldest evidence of the title of *Shaykh al-kabīr*, the great master, appears; contrast this with the title of his master: *Shaykh al-akbar*. The title is also attributed to him by Safadī and one of Safadī's younger contemporaries, Haydar Amolī.

Assuming that Mawlānā Rūmī died in Jumāda II of the year 672 as reported by Jāmī,[7] Qūnawī's death, eight months later, would have occurred at the beginning of the year 673, during the month of Muharram. Fortunately, this is also the date

5. It concerns one of the main doctors of the Sunni law, Abū Hanīfa.

6. *Musāmarat* p. 119.

7. Jāmī, ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-, *Nafahāt al-uns min hadarāt al-quds*, in Persian, new edition with an introduction and notes by Mahmūd Abedi, Teheran, AH 1373, p. 459.

found in C. Huart's book, published in 1897 and entitled *Konya, la ville des derviches tourneurs*. Huart writes on page 171: "Sadr-Eddīn, who was born in the night preceding Thursday 22 Jumāda II 605 (1 January 1209), died on 13 Moharram 673 (19 July 1274), aged 68 lunar years. I found this information, which the (tomb) inscription does not provide, in a manuscript album which forms part of my library." Unfortunately, we have been unable to identify the album in question, but it does give us a confirmation of the dates of the birth and death of our Shaykh.

In the short account of Qūnawī in his *Silsilat al-awliyā*, Nūrbakhsh Quhistānī informs us that he died in his native town.[8]

According to an autograph published in the *Oriens*[9] magazine by H. Ritter, the famous Iranian polygraph Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī allegedly studied the *jāmiʿ al-usūl* – a collection of prophetic traditions compiled by Muhammad b. al-Athīr, who died in 606/1210 – with Qūnawī during the year 672, the period of study ending at the beginning of the month Dhū-l-qiʿda, the eleventh month of the Arab lunar year. This shows us, at least, that during the month of Dhu-l-qiʿda 672, Qūnawī was still teaching. In the same article (page 78), Ritter affirms the existence of another copy of *jāmiʿ al-usūl* that was read in the presence of Qūnawī (and commented on by him), which confirms our Shaykh's competence as a *muhaddith*. Qūnawī had himself studied it with a direct student of the author, a certain Emir Sharaf al-Dīn Yaʿqūb al-Hudhbānī,[10] who was a Shafiʿite from Irbil, east of Mossoul, in Iraq, and who died in 653/1255. It is therefore very likely that Qūnawī spent some time in that region of Iraq where Ibn ʿArabī's wanderings have left their mark.[11]

When he was about seven or eight years old, Sadr al-Dīn lost his father. He was left in Ibn ʿArabī's care. Jāmī (d. 898/1492) wrote in his *Nafahāt al-Uns*: "After the birth of Qūnawī and the death of his father (who was still alive in 611/1214), Ibn ʿArabī

8. *Silsilat al-awliyā'*, in *Melanges offerts à Henry Corbin*, ed. S. Hossein Nasr, Tehran, 1977, notice 63, p. 20.

9. Helmut Ritter, *Autographs in Turkish Libraries*, in *Oriens*, 1953, No. 1, pp. 63–90.

10. Safadi, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, Vol. II, p. 200, notice 572.

11. For the peregrinations of Ibn ʿArabi, refer to the work of Claude Addas.

married the mother of Qūnawī and (the boy) was brought up in the service of and in the company of the shaykh." The anonymous *Manāqib-e-Awhad ed-dīn-e Kermānī* and Jāmī were the only known early sources testifying to this remarriage, but a recently found reading certificate of the *Tajaliyyāt ilāhiyya* of Ibn ʿArabī,[12] published as a supplement to that work, presents our Shaykh as a stepson of the Shaykh al-Akbar. We would have liked the Seljukid historiographic sources to account for it, because marrying the widow of a man eulogised with expressions such as those found in *El-Evāmir ul-ʿalāiyya* of Ibn Bībī seems to be a fact worthy of note. The *Musāmarat al-akhbār*,[13] written in 723/1326, indicates only that the Shaykh Sadr al-Dīn grew up with Shaykh Muhyi al-Dīn (Ibn ʿArabī) from his early childhood because his father, Majd al-Dīn Ishāq had been a companion of Ibn ʿArabī's.

Then Qūnawī was entrusted to Shaykh Kirmānī who took care of his education until he rejoined the Shaykh al-Akbar to receive his teaching and the permission to transmit it. Qūnawī was given this teaching[14] between 627 and 631 (1229–34), that is, between the ages of 22 and 27.

There are still considerable gaps in the biographical data concerning Shaykh Sadr al-Dīn. He is becoming better known,[15] but certain points will probably never be clarified. For example, how did he acquire his deep knowledge of the Arabic language, the perfect command of which is evident in his works? His style, more particularly in his epistolary writings, bears witness to his belonging to the elite. We know little of the years of his youth, and especially of his philosophical formation. For if the special relationship and his "years of companionship" with Ibn

12. We now have a source which confirms this remarriage: a reading certificate of the *Kitāb al-tajalliyāt al-ilāhiyya* in which Qūnawī is referred to as Ibn ʿArabi's stepson; Teheran edition by O. Yahya, 1988, p. 84.

13. *Musāmarat al-akhbār wa musāyarat al-akhyār*, p. 90.

14. See "Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's study – list of books by Ibn al ʿArabi", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, No. 3, 1997, pp. 161–81.

15. The last two decades have seen the publication of a great number of works of our Shaykh in Iran, Turkey, Lebanon and elsewhere, as well as works of his followers.

ʿArabī can explain wholly or partly his immense and deep spiritual, theological and religious knowledge, we remain puzzled as to the origin of his knowledge of Avicennian philosophy. Given that we know nothing about his teachers in this subject, we can merely point it out as a gap in our knowledge. His correspondence with Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, recently edited,[16] reveals the breadth of his understanding, particularly as it might be considered to form part of Qūnawī's earliest writings. In order to make his correspondence more consistent and substantial, Qūnawī addresses to Tūsī a questionnaire, extensively annotated by him to make his intention clear, and, if this were not enough, encloses three opuscules, two of which are of a highly "philosophical" nature. In none of these opuscules does he mention any of his previous compositions, contrary to his practice in nearly all his other works, which is why they may be his first writings. He confesses to Tūsī that the questions he raises had greatly preoccupied him when he was young, at the beginning of his training, and how he wished that a man of philosophical outlook would bring him a satisfactory answer.[17] This suggests that Qūnawī passed through a period of philosophical bewilderment.

THE ACCOUNT IN JĀMĪ'S *NAFAHĀT AL-UNS*

We naturally feel somewhat embarrassed in attempting to comment on Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī and his role in the destiny of the Akbarian doctrine. He is a man whose life and work were so closely related to Ibn ʿArabī's that we are tempted to say that he was himself a work of Ibn ʿArabī. By the time he was 27, he had already received a licence to teach almost the whole of Ibn ʿArabī's work, and one would not dare to accuse Ibn ʿArabī of

16. Schubert Gudrun, *Al-murāsalāt bayn Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī wa Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī*, Beyrouth, 1416/1995.

17. In a text whose translation has been published by W. Chittick, Qūnawī evokes in another context the "philosophical" questions which he was concerned about. See "The circle of spiritual ascent according to Qūnawī", in *Neoplatonism and Islamic thought*, ed. P. Morewedge, New York, 1992, p.192. The text by Qūnawī is an extract from *Miftāh al-ghayb*.

complacency in this matter. He knew quite well what he was doing – he whose every action was inspired, and who said one day to his student that even before embarking from Andalusia for the East: "I knew your states, your sciences, your experiences, your stations, the unveilings and the theophanies and everything that God would grant you."[18] On another occasion, he declared to Awhad al-Dīn Kirmānī : "Sadr al-Dīn is more than a son to me, . . . I have adorned his outer being with knowledge and virtue; and as for his inner being – that is to say the secrets of reality and the way of following the Path – this is without any doubt achieved thanks to guidance and proper direction."[19] That is why, if his work explains and comments on Ibn ʿArabī's, we might just as well say that it can itself be explained through the work of the latter. The works of both constitute a whole and Qūnawī's life is almost an extension of Ibn ʿArabī's.

I imagine ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī felt the same when he began to write his account of Qūnawī in his *Nafahāt al-uns*. Jāmī is not like other hagiographers. At least, when faced with the Akbarians who have enriched his biographical dictionary, he has a special feeling, since these men are also his masters. He has read their works, commented on them, and studied them to the point of becoming one of them. While alive, he was nicknamed the *wujūdī*, the existentialist, in reference, of course, to his position in favour of the *wahdat al-wujūd*. Moreover, the very fact of reading these men provided him with the necessary material for several additional entries which he included in his dictionary. It is thanks to Ibn ʿArabī that Jāmī became acquainted with Abū Madyan and Abū-l-ʿAbbās ibn ʿArīf, to mention only two, and included them in his work. And perhaps it is thanks to the mention of Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī in the *Futūhāt al-makkiyya* that the latter owes his appearance in the dictionary.

Anyhow, Jāmī writes his entry, and it is quite interesting to see how he carries out his task. In the new edition of the *Nafahāt al-uns*, published in Teheran, the notice is numbered 544 and

18. C. Addas, *Ibn ʿArabī ou la quête du soufre rouge*, Paris, 1989, p. 140.
19. *Ibn ʿArabī ou la quête du soufre rouge*, p. 271.

appears on pages 554 to 556. It follows Ibn ʿArabī's and precedes his follower's, Mu'ayyad al-Dīn al-Jandī. For Jāmī, it is a question of saying the minimum, what is essential, while conveying between the lines his general feeling on the subject of the entry, which the experienced reader should perceive. I am not going to translate the entry, but I will summarise it, keeping in mind that in other entries in the *Nafahāt al-uns*, Jāmī includes other information about our Shaykh.

1. Qūnawī combined two knowledges, the exoteric and the esoteric, the rational and the traditional.

2. Letters were exchanged between him and Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī. Qūnawī's most famous followers include: Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, Mu'ayyad al-Dīn Jandī, Sham al-Dīn Ikī, Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī, Saʿīd al-Dīn Farghānī. Qūnawī was a great friend of the kubrawī Saʿd al-Dīn Hamūya.

3. The Shaykh al-Akbar, while still in the Maghreb, had a vision of Qūnawī and the other subsequent followers, their spiritual states etc.

4. When he arrived in Konya, Ibn ʿArabī married the mother of Qūnāwī, who was still a child.

5. Then comes an important passage that has been translated into French by Claude Addas: "The Shaykh (al-Akbar)'s intention as regards the question of *wahdat al-wujūd* cannot be grasped in a way that conforms to reason and the law except through the study of the works of Sadr al-Dīn, and if these are properly understood."

6. The titles of some of Qūnawī's compositions are listed.

7. An extract from *Nafahāt ilāhiyya* preceded by a clear opinion: "If anybody wishes to be informed of the perfection of Qūnawī in this path, tell him to read his *Nafahāt ilāhiyya*, because he has recorded there many of his states, his ecstasies (*adwāq*), his unveilings and his revelations."

8. His relationship with Mawlāna Rūmī, illustrated by two anecdotes.

9. To end the entry, Jāmī curiously resorts to giving the text of a question asked of Qūnawī by a certain Sharaf al-Dīn Qūnawī

and the impromptu answer that our Shaykh gave him. "Where (do we come from) and where (are we going)? What happens in between?" Shaykh Qūnawī answered: "(We come) from the (divine) Science to the Essence, and what happens in between is the renewing of a relationship which gathers together the two extremes and which appears with the two statutes."

How should one judge such an entry? Is it completely disjointed or does it comply with an unexpressed intention?

The only explicit opinions of Jāmī not reported by any transmitter or drawn from Qūnawī's work are No. 5 and the recommendation accompanying No. 7. All other information is apparently given as it is (that is, as fact), and this is surely the case as regards the remarriage of Qūnawī's mother to Ibn ʿArabī (No. 4), even if it already implies familial intimacy between the two men, in addition to the master–follower relationship. It is the same for No. 6, although here we have, thanks to Jāmī, a list of works written by Qūnawī which contains only titles accurately attributed to him.

On the other hand, the information in No. 2 is surely given to illustrate Qūnawī's intellectual level – his universal competence (No. 1) in all sciences – by placing him side by side with a celebrity such as Tūsī. Like him, the other followers mentioned by Jāmī are all Iranians or Persian-speakers. If we add to these Rūmī, mentioned in particular in No. 8, we can see that Qūnawī's field of action and influence is clearly defined. Qūnawī wrote principally in Arabic, the language most used by literate Iranians, but we know that he spoke Persian (the oral commentary on the *Tā'iyya* of Ibn al-Fārid; the correspondence with Tūsī; the Persian opuscules attributed to him: *Resāla dar ʿarsh* etc.; and Persian words that he mentions in the *Nafahāt ilāhiyya*) even if we are more likely to think that he was a Seljukid Turk. Persian was the language of the Seljukid court.

It is the same in No. 8, where we are informed of the great friendship and, above all, the great mutual respect that existed between Rūmī and Qūnawī. We are also informed that when Rūmī was expressing his last wishes on his death bed, he considered Qūnawī to be the most appropriate man to lead the burial service.

The information that Jāmī supplies most implicitly appears in No.7. The extract referred to pinpoints the moment when Qūnawī reached a *maqām*, a much-coveted spiritual station, which had been bestowed on him through the supernatural intervention of the Shaykh al-Akbar. In this way, Jamī indicates to his reader that Qūnawī's station is both exceptional and rare.

No.5, which is of particular interest, consists of Jāmī's opinion of Qūnawī. It arises from an individual who, let us again remember, speaks whilst mindful of the whole chain of commentators on the Akbarian work, of whom he, Jāmī, is the last link, on both the *Fusūs al-hikam* and the commentary that the Shaykh al-Akbar himself made on that book and which is entitled *Naqsh al-Fusūs*. The commentary on the latter has been the object of a critical edition by W. Chittick.[20] As a matter of fact, Jāmī's assessment summarises two centuries of intensive study of the work, the most important ones corresponding to a particularly rich period of Muslim thought. Imagine if what we have observed during recent years with regard to the increasing interest in the work and school of the Shaykh al-Akbar were to continue at the same rate for two centuries without respite! Jāmī's opinion is therefore to be considered as *the* judgement on Qūnawī: he is the touchstone, the criterion of Akbarian orthodoxy. Jāmī not only does not blame Qūnawī for having systematised the teaching of his master, but he also claims that without Qūnawī we would not clearly and properly understand this teaching. This is not a value judgement, it is the observation of a man whose study covers two centuries of history throughout which reference to Qūnawī was continuously imperative.

The opinions of others, not to quote anyone in particular, are the evaluations of adversaries, and to attribute to Qūnawī a negative role in organising the spreading of the teaching of the greatest master, or in its interpretation, could only arise from a misinformed mind that has not looked into the written work, or has done it just for the sake of seeking discord. Besides, who pays the least attention to the writings of Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries?

20. *Naqd al-nusūs fī Sharh naqsh al-Fusūs*, Teheran, 1977.

It is undoubtedly to counteract such an idea that Jāmī brings the evidence drawn from (No. 7) the *Nafahāt ilāhiyya*: Qūnawī received from his master not only all the *ijāza* and all the teachings that can be received from a master dispensing a professorial teaching, but also all the *baraka* from his master even after the latter's death. He had a spiritual relationship with him up to the last moment of his life, and when his soul left this world, it was only to bring him closer to him. I do not think that Qūnawī himself imparted this kind of confidence, which Jāmī reveals to us again, without meaning to. Besides, the actual text of the extract quoted by Jāmī specifies that the *maqām* bestowed by the Shaykh al-Akbar is a *maqām* which requires the renouncing of life in order to obtain it. And Jāmī informs his reader about the importance of the extract, which he proposes to meditate upon. Elsewhere in the *Nafahāt ilāhiyya*, Qūnawī informs us that, all his life, he took the Shaykh al-Akbar's criteria as his own. For example, while speaking of a particularly significant vision that he had had, he informs us that Ibn ʿArabī had been through the same spiritual experience when he was the same age as Qūnawī and that it happened in the same town of Konya. In a letter to Imād al-Dīn, the son of Ibn ʿArabī, he confesses to him that he regrets very much not having known the true merit of the Shaykh al-Akbar.

THE INFLUENCE OF IBN ʿARABĪ

In attempting, in our turn, to evaluate his impact, we shall start our overview with two remarks:

1. Ibn ʿArabī has been widely read and commented on in the geographical and cultural area of Iran.

2. The establishment of his teaching has not occurred by means of a Sufi Order of which he is the founder.

Consequently, the study of its transmission does not fall within the province of hagiography and its methods, but simply within the history of ideas, or even simply history. Importance is very rarely attached to Ibn ʿArabī as a saintly figure, or to his spiritual charisma. Therefore we are concerned

here with the history of written works and spiritual teaching, rather than a holy figure. We should add that Ibn ʿArabī, the main protagonist of this research, fortunately has the advantage of being well-known in the West. There is the extensively documented biography by Claude Addas,[21] and a newly published study by Stephen Hirtenstein.[22]

The thought of an author is usually made known by his works, followers and his correspondence. We have just recalled with Jāmī some of his direct followers and relations, and will now focus on the impact that his teaching has had. Even during his lifetime Qūnawī was considered an authority on the work of Ibn ʿArabī, a fact confirmed by many reliable sources.

The work is itself two-sided. On the one hand there are books, or if we want one book, the *Fusūs al-hikam*, on which the others throw light and facilitate comprehension. On the other hand there are his students, that is to say those who have received regular teaching from the master. Both books and students act in conjunction to make known the ideas put forward in the work, but without any political or other purpose, as far as the analyst of today can see, nor any interest in creating a new Sufi Order or of giving it a social basis. The work seems to be its own objective. One seeks understanding and that is the only point. Such was the aim assigned to the *Fusūs al-hikam* by the Prophet when he gave it to Ibn ʿArabī in a dream: "Make it known to men, so that they may benefit by it."

That is why the transmitters of the Akbarian teaching are not all, far from it, followers in the sense of students and *murīds*, but are for the most part partisans as well, men who identify themselves with the teaching in question.

Therefore they also act "in complicity" with the Shaykh al-Akbar's students. They also come again and again from afar and from all horizons. Kirmānī, a fellow student of the famous Shams Tabrīzī, is one of the first to join Ibn ʿArabī. Hamūya is a *kubrawī* orphan adopted by Ibn ʿArabī's circle of followers. ʿIrāqī is one of the numerous, maybe thousands, of qalandars

21. *Ibn ʿArabī ou la quête du soufre rouge*.

22. *The unlimited mercifier: the spiritual life and thought of Ibn ʿArabī*, Oxford, 1999.

(wandering dervishes) who were not discouraged by the long journeys, and who travelled throughout the territories of Muslim Asia in search of ecstasy. Seyyed Mīr Husayn, one of ʿIrāqī's fellow students with Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Zakariyya in Multan, later addressed a questionnaire to another young scholar from the west, Mahmūd Shabestarī, also a native of Tabrīz, who composed the famous *Golshan-e rāz* in response. Palāsī-Shīrāzī is also a man who left his native country of Shīrāz in search of knowledge wherever Sufi rumour told him it could be found. These men were not only linked by the same passion, they were also establishing familial relations through marriages. Thus, Mahmūd Shabestarī's master is reportedly the grand-son of Kirmānī through the daughter of the latter.

As regards these qalandars, one will certainly have to one day assess the activity of Shaykh Awhād al-Dīn Kirmānī, himself a great ecstatic, because we find his traces in the qalandari literature of that time, particularly in relation to the movement of the Akhīs of Anatolia in the 13th century.[23] It is probably through him that the Shaykh al-Akbar met Shams Tabrīzī, Rūmī's master, who was a fellow student of Rukn al-Dīn al-Sujāsī's.

Sometimes these men seem somewhat eccentric and asocial. But it would be quite wrong to talk of their heterodoxy. As *malāmatī*, spiritual knights, exclusively in the service of the Beloved, they neglect their reputation in the eyes of others, but this is not at all a reason to disqualify them with reference to the Law.

Thus, the transmission of the Akbarian works and teaching has been achieved with the cooperation and the complicity of all these spiritual men, of all tendencies.

That is why it is imperative to study this diffusion in the light of different testimonies and the prevailing atmosphere both within Sufism and in society in general. The instigators of this diffusion are not solely a succession of masters and followers: there is a permanent dialogue with men, and sometimes silences which are no less eloquent, all this according to

23. For a first evaluation and a bibliography on the subject, see Seyh Evhadü 'd-Din Hāmid el-Kirmānī ve Evhadiyye Tarikati, by M. Bayram, Konya, 1993.

the reactions of those who receive the Akbarian ideas. That is why we have sometimes reported in our thesis the testimony of Sufi authors and personalities who, although contemporary with the periods we are studying, seem to have been unaware of the authors we present. A society is not always conscious of the intellectual movements within it.

A doctrine can be studied and understood as much from its subsequent developments, from what it has become, as from the one who elaborated it in the first place. It goes without saying that the one who conceived it originally will not speak the same language as the one who takes up a pen to make it known and to defend it. Kāshānī is not Ibn ʿArabī, and does not necessarily show the same consideration towards his readers.

The authors who transmit the Akbarian doctrine, or more simply the *wahdat al-wujūd*, and its partisans, are generally individuals who would readily be classified today among thinkers or intellectuals rather than among the Sufi masters and the spirituals. Although they were generally members of a *tarīqa* and had one or more spiritual masters, the tradition did not generally give them a role as leaders of *tarīqas* with their own charisma and followers. Kāshānī, like Abū Hāmid Turka Isfahānī before him, admits that he only came to study the *Fusūs* after having tried the philosophical method for years. He was a man who had been disappointed by *falsafa*, and who found his happiness in Akbarian thought. We have here a case which clearly contradicts the Corbinian idea of a kind of coalescence between Avicennism and Akbarian Sufism.

Akbarian teaching progressed homogeneously, impregnating all levels of society more or less rapidly. Ibn ʿArabī is immediately perceived as a man who brings something that will help to restructure intelligence in every field. He does not only interest the *khāneqāhs*. He is not himself a Sufi master in the classical sense, who intends to widen his circle of *murīds* by classical ties of obedience.

His teaching sticks to the reality of thought and Muslim society as a whole. He does not preach retreat, renunciation and asceticism for the sake of asceticism. He teaches and preaches the necessity of acquiring knowledge.

In the beginning, and for a long time afterwards, some Sufis ignored or feigned to ignore him. These Sufis can be qualified as "small shaykhs", because their audience as well as their practice, remained classical. For example, Isfarā'inī (d. 717/1317) is a "small shaykh", without any pejorative sense, because the resonance of his action was slow, and did not have the same strength and rhythm as Ibn ʿArabī's. Some sources lead us to think that he was in a defensive position, in a state of uncertainty, or even distrust towards Ibn ʿArabī. Simnānī was in a more difficult position still when he had to face the growth of the intellectual movement generated by Ibn ʿArabī.

From the philosophical point of view, a man such as Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī was invited by Qūnawī to cross swords with him, so to speak, to measure himself against him. If Tūsī does not leave us any opinion on Ibn ʿArabī's value in his eyes, many other *hukamas* were to join the new positions defended by the partisans of the Andalusian master. The best example is given by Qūnawī's contemporary(?), Abū Hāmd Muhammad Turka Isfahānī, made famous by H. Corbin, who gave up philosophy (including and above all Avicenna) to defend the arguments of *wahdat al-wujūd*.

In my doctoral thesis, after having eliminated the false reasons that could be cited to explain the spreading of Akbarian teaching in lands where Persian is spoken, I attempted to provide evidence that could be used to evaluate its impact. Some is indeed of an objective, statistical nature, whilst the rest is of a subjective, qualitative nature. That of a statistical nature can be reduced, for example, to a list of the principal agents of the transmission of this teaching. We have collected about 60, according to our criteria, during the first two centuries after the Shaykh al-Akbar's death. Some are known and we have brought new light to bear on them, others are less known, and others not at all.

We have shown that, qualitatively speaking, this teaching was diffused through all available channels, both those offered by the nascent Orders, the Kubrawiyya and the Suhrawardiyya which quickly rallied the *Akbariyya*, as well as those provided by the friendships and the relationships between the different transmitters. Here, it is necessary to say that Qūnawī and his

followers used and developed "the infrastructure" set up by Ibn ʿArabī and Kirmānī. In fact, it must be pointed out that the process of diffusion had started even during the lifetime of these two masters. In the reading certificates for the *Futūhāt al-makkiyya* we find many Persian-sounding names. The presence of those whose names have been communicated to us does not include the simply curious, or visiting students. We become more and more convinced that many of them were key Sufi personalities of the time. We have shown that one of them was probably Shaykh Muhammad Al-Siddīq al-Kojojī, master of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mawsīlī al-Shīrāzī (and maybe al-Qūnawī), who was part of Qūnawī's circle. The latter could be the author of the question that Jāmī reported in the above-mentioned No. 9. Another regular student of the *Futūhāt al-makkiyya* readings was Shaykh Abū Bakr Muhammad Balkhī, from Transoxiane, who was probably the successor of the qalandar Jamal al-Dīn Sāveji.[24] We really feel that these actors worked in unison, like an organisation conscious of its goal.

The transmitters of the Akbarian teaching were not simply book readers. They often had personal relationships and sometimes reinforced these relationships by marriage, which has probably never been emphasised before. The fact that all adepts of *turuq* rally round the Akbarian teaching, over and above their respective ties with their Orders, shows that Ibn ʿArabī was perceived as a cohesive element, rather than as a possible competitor of his own shaykh. It also indicates that Ibn ʿArabī naturally found his place. The earliest mention of the title of Shaykh al-Akbar to refer to Ibn ʿArabī appears in the *Manāqib-e Awhad al-Dīn-e Kirmānī*, which was written in Persian, during the years following the death of the latter (632/1235) and which is a biography of this famous companion of Ibn ʿArabī and the second master of Qūnawī. We have every reason to believe that this title was used even during Ibn ʿArabī's lifetime.

Akbarian teaching spread just as journalistic information does – like news that everybody is eager to know. This communication was carried out through "parallel networks" which were

24. See the recent thesis of Christiane Tortel at the EPHE, Paris,1999.

sometimes completely unaware of each other, at least to begin with. Sometimes it also happens in informal scholarly circles which do not solely gather initiated persons of the same Order, nor even only people affiliated to one or several Orders, as was the case in Tabrīz in the beginning of the Ilkanid era. But most of the time, it is through the Order that this transmission takes place, on the orders or recommendation of the shaykh, or simply through having learnt that the shaykh thought highly of the *Fusūs al-hikam* and its author. However, the Order is only the formal means and not the cause of this diffusion. We know through Simnānī's testimony, that when Nūr al-Dīn Isfarā'inī came upon his *murīds* as they were studying the *Fusūs*, he snatched the copy from their hands and tore it up.

Last means: correspondence. The Sufi masters used to write to their colleagues who were renowned as scholars, to find out their response to *wahdat al-wujūd*, for example, as was the case with the 15 questions that a master from Afghanistan posed to Mahmūd Shabestarī in Tabrīz, who in reply composed the famous *Golshan-e rāz*.

In any case, it is certain that the rapid spreading of Ibn ʿArabī's work is not the result of a simple book-shop success, a spontaneous best-seller. There was a formidable impetus, a promotion that was wanted and that was conducted by the first, and subsequent, followers who sometimes devoted themselves body and soul to defend it and make it known.

The other means of evaluating this influence is by assembling, from the works of different thinkers of the period in question, the occurrences of some ideas and expressions that constitute the arguments or markers of Akbarian thought. Some expressions, in fact, appear remarkably often in the literature of Sufis and intellectuals, and can be dated as a clear mark of Akbarian influence. Here, too, I have supplied in my thesis the terminological foundations which indicate that we are in the presence of ideas dependent on the Shaykh al-Akbar's thought. It is, perhaps, more interesting to discern Ibn ʿArabī's influence in this field. In fact it deeply permeates "Iranian" thought of which it becomes the basic framework and structure. While studying this

period, we can see just how much Iranian thought, I mean Muslim thought in Persian-speaking lands, was then essentially Akbarian, and how certain modern assessments, particularly those of Corbin, were in fact inaccurate and marred by mistakes.

The influence of the greatest masters cannot be measured only by the numbers of their known followers. It lies in the whole matter. That is why it is important to emphasise the presence of this system in subsequent Iranian authors who wrote and thought without necessarily being aware that the vocabulary they employed was itself Akbarian, that the very system they used as a referent or reading grid is borrowed from the Shaykh al-Akbar.

THE OPINION OF PEOPLE OF TODAY

This situation has not failed to influence our appreciation of that time. One must in fact recognise that, although the study of Akbarian thought in its different aspects is being carried out with increasing competence, such growing interest surely also generates dangerous errors that must constantly be identified and corrected. Since the resounding success of H. Corbin's study,[25] considerable progress has been made not only in the presentation of texts by the Andalusian master, but also in the editing of manuscripts of his work. But this development has necessitated the correction of a certain number of errors and tendencies resulting from a partial or biased reading of that immense body of work.

One cannot overemphasise the importance[26] of recent works, by the new Akbarians, which have corrected the extremely tendentious viewpoint of Corbin's work. Corbin, himself a philosopher, was particularly concerned with the importance of the imaginative world in the work of Ibn ʿArabī. This

25. *L'imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn ʿArabi*, Paris, 1958.

26. By underlining the importance of Sufism in the Arab-speaking world, M. Chodkiewicz, and other French orientalists, especially Denis Gril, have shown that the validity of Sufism is not conditioned, far from it, by the ferment of Shiʿism.

intermediary world is significant in his opinion, not for its position in the thought of Ibn ʿArabī, but because it provided him, as philosopher, with the answer to the many questions that he asked himself about the philosophy that has eventually prevailed in the West. This is clearly visible in the first pages of his *Imagination créatrice* where he revolts against Latin Averroism and regrets that it took the rightful place of Avicennism to which he attributes virtues that other contemporary critics do not share. This claim is contradictory in the eyes of an Akbarian; we cannot blame a philosopher for not integrating the imaginative world, without asking him at the same time to renounce philosophy or go beyond it. It is in accordance with this logic that even the Avicennising philosophers renounced *hikma* to follow *wahdat al-wujūd*. Speculative philosophy can go no further than the threshold of the imaginative world.

Corbin shows his legitimate desire to exalt Sohravardī, the Shaykh *al-Ishrāq*, but he fails to say that the expression *ʿālam al-mithāl* is not found in the *Livre de la sagesse orientale*, but first and foremost in Ibn ʿArabī's work. Certainly the idea existed, just as it existed in other authors before Sohravardī, and in the latter it is particularly highlighted, but we cannot deny that it is Ibn ʿArabī's school that developed it and introduced it into the exposition of Islamic metaphysics. Corbin manipulated a huge amount of information and so has a good excuse. It is incontestable that his explanation of Akbarian doctrine is astonishing in its depth and richness. We can only thank him for having provided for the first time, in a Western language and with indisputable competence, such a beautiful expression of Ibn ʿArabī's genius. After finding the object of his search, he was less concerned with establishing accurately and meticulously the genealogical tree of Muslim thought after Ibn ʿArabī. He has not, for example, tried to research the traces of the presence of illuminationist thought in Andalusia and the Maghreb. For him, this may have seemed unthinkable.

Nevertheless, he was often off the mark, especially in his extrapolations, when he left his subject to formulate tempting but over-hasty intuitions that have not undergone analysis.

This is the case for a number of his opinions on the relationship of the Andalusian master's teaching with Shiʿism, Avicennism, etc. For example, in his *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection*, he has included[27] a text which he attributes to Muhsin Fayd Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680) dealing with the embodying of spirits and the spiritualisation of bodies in the imaginative world, without suspecting that it was in fact a passage in which the latter was simply recopying Qūnawī.[28]

This tendency leads Corbin to neglect the contribution of the great master, and to present him as one of the actors in a large theosophical enterprise whose main roles are played by Sohravardī, Avicenna, Mollā Sadra, and Safavid Shiʿism in general, which he ends up by confusing with Islamic esotericism. Under these circumstances, Ibn ʿArabī is purely and simply pushed into the background.

No, Ibn ʿArabī cannot be reduced to the imaginative world. Certainly, the elaboration of this notion falls to Ibn ʿArabī and not to Sohravardī *al-maqtūl*, but this idea, since it appears even in the work of the commentators and critics, did not present any problem and was not given exaggerated importance, as it inevitably was by Corbin who kept on considering things from a philosophical point of view. For Muslims, even Ibn ʿArabī's adversaries, this matter is so evident that they will not waste their time on it.[29]

27. H. Corbin states his sources on pp. 275–80.

28. This concerns an extract from the commentary on hadith No. 22, dealing with the vision of the Prophet and in which Qūnawī develops the question of the imaginative world. See the edition of *Sharh al-arbaʿīn hadīthan* by Hasan Kamil Yilmaz, Marmara University, Istanbul, 1990, pp.122–50. The passages that have been recopied by Fayd Kāshānī are on pp.143–4. Another more explicit passage exists in the Persian *Matāli' al-īmān*, edited by W. Chittick in *Sophia Perennis*, Vol. IV, n.1, 1978, p.69, in which Qūnawī (?) speaks of the last day "in which bodies will be covered (*gom shavad*) by the spirits, just as today the spirits are covered by the bodies."

29. In his third cycle thesis, held in Paris IV, in 1984, *Les premières polémiques autour d'Ibn ʿArabī: Ibn Tamiyya*, Cyril Chodkiewicz does not mention the imaginative world among the great themes of that polemic.

Other Akbarian ideas occupy their minds, particularly those of *walāya* with all the new ideas connected to it, theophanies, the five divine presences, *wahdat al-wujūd*, *Insān al-kāmil*, *khatm al-nubuwwa* and the role of the respective prophets in a "typology" that Ibn ʿArabī was the first to establish, the Akbarian criticism of speculative theology, etc.

It is an immense paradox with regard to H. Corbin's theses that the coming of Safavid Shiʿism resulted from violence which was the work of a band of individuals whose attested barbarism, even vampirism,[30] behaviours that could not be legitimised either in the eyes of Sunnism or Shiʿism. Whether they acted for esoteric reasons remains to be proved and cannot in any case be justified.

It must be admitted that with the coming of the Safavids, Shiʿism entered its "exoteric" phase. It came to power, or at least it was claimed by the new masters of the country. But here, too, we may legitimately object to Corbin's perception when he speaks of the "Safavid renaissance". Neither Mollā Sadrā nor his masters are the products of this renaissance. Shaykh Bahā'ī and Mīr Dāmād stayed in Mogul India and found more freedom than in Iran. It is better to speak, when referring to them, of a survival of the Akbarian heritage in spite of the reigning Safavism.

It is because he keeps on feeding thought and providing answers to the questions which they ask themselves, that the duodecimans (twelve-imam Shiʿites), like other Muslims, continue to read and meditate on Ibn ʿArabī's work.

Dāwūd al-Qaysarī, the most famous commentator on the *Fusūs*, including in Iran, wrote under the Ottomans. And it was also under the Ottomans, although not thanks to them, that the two last great commentators: Nābulusī (d. 1144/1731) and Bālī Effendī (d. 960/1552–53) wrote. Likewise, it was in Turkey that the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī was commented upon, and also under the Ottomans that Hāfīz was commented on by a

30. See documented article by J. Aubin, "L'avènement des safavides reconsidéré", in *Moyen-Orient & Océan Indien (XVI*ème *– XIX*ème *siècles)*, No. 5, 1988, Société d'Histoire de l'Orient, Paris.

Muslim from Bosnia. All this is to say that we do not think that the coming of the Safavids in itself had a significant intellectual impact. It was a simple political action. And in the interval when Iran was in contact with the rest of the Muslim world, the *Fusūs* continued to be studied, particularly by Sā'in al-Dīn Turka Isfahānī, Shāh Ni'matullah walī and later ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī, the last great Persian writer before Safavism.

It was at the end of my investigation that I made what was, for me, a discovery: the two centuries following the death of our Shaykh appeared to me, if you will excuse my modesty, somewhat as they appeared to Jāmī. I mean the very structure of the *Nafahāt al-uns* was revealed to me. Saintliness appears in it with Ibn ʿArabī as goal, and as spirit, and certainly for Jāmī, as criterion. Jāmī does not just behave like a Naqshbandī, an adept of an Order advertising his *silsila*. The *Nafahāt al-uns* is not a simple dictionary of biographies of saints, classified according to their affiliation or according to a chronological order.

The diffusion of Akbarian teaching continued uniformly in time and space, until the time of Jāmī, who thus becomes like a sort of Ibn Khaldūn of Akbarism. He gives an assessment of it as if he had a feeling that it was going to start a period of decline.

Translated by Zahra Benaïssa and Cecilia Twinch