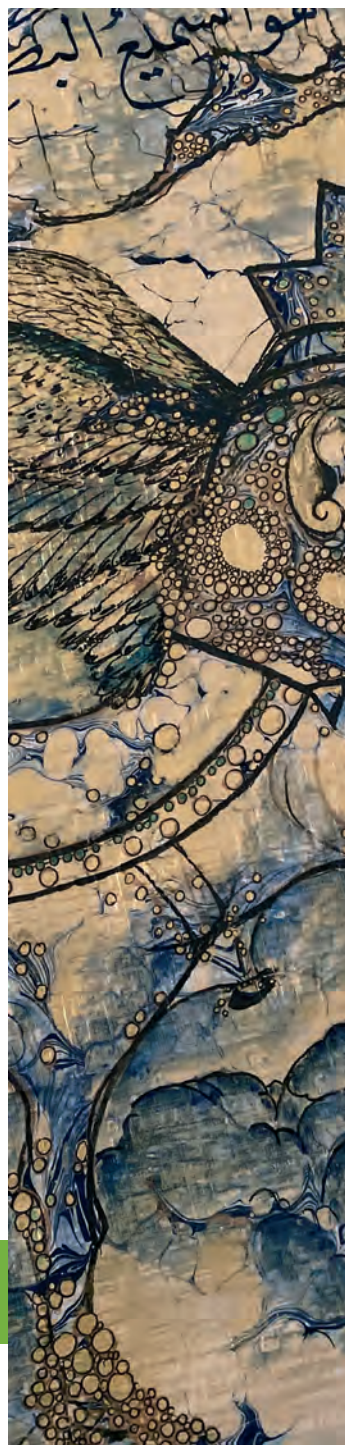


JOURNAL OF THE
MUHYIDDIN IBN
‘ARABI SOCIETY

VOLUME 69, 2021



Published by the
Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society CIO
PO Box 892, Oxford OX2 7XL, UK

mias.uk@ibnarabisociety.org
www.ibnarabisociety.org

© 2021 Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society CIO and the contributors

ISSN 0266-2183 (Print)
ISSN 2398 7049 (e-Journal)

The Society

The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society (MIAS) was founded in 1977 to promote a greater understanding of the work of Ibn 'Arabi and his followers. It is an international association with its headquarters in Oxford, UK, and a branch in California, USA. The Society is funded by the annual subscriptions of its members. It collaborates with affiliated societies in Spain (MIAS Latina) and Australia (MIAS AP). The Society has organised conferences in the UK and the USA since 1984. Podcasts and videos of more than 100 talks from Society events, and details of its archive project, are available on the website.

The Society has published a Journal since 1982, which is now peer-reviewed and appears twice a year.

For details of membership, go to:
<https://ibnarabisociety.org/s-membership-uk/>

The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society is a Charitable Incorporated
Organisation (CIO), registered charity number 1179324

Contents

About the Contributors	iv
A Hayati Poem by Ibn ‘Arabī <i>Translated by Denis McAuley</i>	v
Seeing with Two Eyes: Ibn ‘Arabī on Ecstatic Utterances (<i>Shataḥāt</i>) in the Context of His Sufi Metaphysics <i>Nariman Aavani</i>	1
Visionary Perceptions through Cosmographical Diagrams: Mystical Knowledge from Ḥaydar Āmulī’s <i>Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ</i> <i>fī sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam</i> <i>Eliza Tasbihi</i>	31
Niyāzī Miṣrī on Poverty (<i>faqr</i>) <i>Omneya Ayad</i>	83
Book Reviews	
<i>Les chatons des sagesses et les demeures des paroles</i>	115
<i>Ibn ‘Arabī Gnoséologie et manifestation de l’être</i>	119
<i>Knowing God: Ibn ‘Arabī and ‘Abd al-Razzāq</i> <i>al-Qāshānī’s Metaphysics of the Divine</i>	122
Society Notices and Notes for Prospective Contributors	127

Book Reviews

Ibn 'Arabī. *Les chatons des sagesse et les demeures des paroles. Fusus al-Hikam*. Translation and presentation by Paul Ballanfat. Combas: L'éclat, 2020, 317 pp.

A new French translation of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* has been much needed, since the pioneering works of Titus Burckhardt (1955)¹ and Charles-André Gilis (1998).² The first was a partial translation of selected chapters of the *Fuṣūṣ*, rendered in a very clear language using the most common philosophical terminology, which has allowed the book to become a long-lasting publishing success with the general public, up to today. However, Burckhardt had to resort very often to paraphrases, and sometimes took great liberty with the original Arabic formulation, in order to produce a text immediately accessible to every reader with minimal background in Sufism and metaphysics. Gilis' version is more faithful to the original formulations. It presents a complete translation of the text and is interspersed with commentaries on every chapter. But this voluminous work is not always as clear as Burckhardt's translation, because it mainly relies on the metaphysical vocabulary elaborated by René Guénon (d.1951) and his followers. The main quality of Gilis' translation is probably his use of the classical commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* in the Akbarian tradition, among which those of Nābulusī (d.1731), Jāmī (d.1492), and Bālī Zādeh (d.1553) are often quoted in the notes to justify choices of translation.

The French reader was therefore left between an incomplete translation rendered in a fairly universal – yet sometimes vague – language, and a complete and erudite translation that required an acquaintance with the precise – yet sometimes very peculiar – terminology of Guénon's works. The most famous, and to some controversial, work of Ibn 'Arabī was thus still waiting for a standard translation that would make it accessible in its entirety to the French audience.

1. Muḥyī-d-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī. *La Sagesse des Prophètes (Fuṣūṣ al-hikam)*. Translation, notes and introduction by Titus Burckhardt. Foreword by Jean Herbert. Paris: Albin Michel, 1955, 223 pp. (Reprinted in 1974, 1989 and 2008, 256 pp.)

2. Ibn 'Arabī. *Le Livres des châtions des sagesse*. Translation, notes and commentary by Charles-André Gilis. 2 vols. Beirut: Albouraq, 1998, 726 pp.

Despite its numerous qualities, the new translation provided by Paul Ballanfat will probably fail to become such a reference book, for it is a radical, very dense and demanding approach to the text of the *Fuṣūṣ*, and the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī in general. The work produced by Paul Ballanfat is a remarkable philosophical ‘interpretation’, rather than a conventional ‘translation’, and could be best described as a contemporary commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*.

Paul Ballanfat is a renowned French specialist of Persian and Ottoman Sufism. He has published, among other things, several seminal French translations of Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī (d. 1209)³ and Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 1221),⁴ a presentation and translation of the poetic works of Ūftāde (d. 1580)⁵ and Niyāzī Miṣrī (d. 1694),⁶ and more recently two works dedicated to Yūnus Emre (d. 1320).⁷ It was therefore particularly intriguing to see how he would use his expertise to deal with Ibn ‘Arabī and renew the approach to the *Fuṣūṣ*. A first remarkable aspect of his translation is that it is based on the recent Turkish edition and facsimile of the famous Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī manuscript, published by Mahmud Erol Kılıç and Abdurrahim Alkış in 2016.⁸

As he usually proceeds with his other translations, Paul Ballanfat provides the reader with a very long introduction to the text

3. Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī. *Le Dévoilement des secrets et les Apparitions des lumières: Journal spirituel du Maître de Shīrāz*. Paris: Seuil, 1996, 317 pp. *L'ennuagement du cœur: Suivi de Les éclosions de lumière de l'affirmation de l'unicité*. Paris: Seuil (Points), 1998, 330 pp. *L'itinéraire des esprits suivi du Traité de la sainteté*. Paris: Les Deux Océans, 2001, 281 pp.

4. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā. *Les éclosions de la beauté et les parfums de la majesté*. Combas: L'éclat, 2001, 244 pp. *La pratique du soufisme: Quatorze petits traités*. Combas: L'éclat, 2002, 375 pp. (Reprinted in 2020.)

5. Hazret-i Pir-i Ūftāde. *Le Dīvān*. Paris: Les deux oceans, 2002, 149 pp. This work has been translated into English and published by Anqa as *The Nightingale in the Garden of Love: The Poems of Ūftade*. Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2005, 192 pp.

6. *Messianisme et sainteté: Les poèmes du mystique ottoman Niyāzī Miṣrī (1618–1694)*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012, 498 pp.

7. Yūnus Emre, *L'amour de la poésie: Les poèmes spirituels de Yūnus Emre (1240–1320)*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020, 356 pp. *Poésie en ruines: La pensée et la poétique de Yūnus Emre*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020, 612 pp.

8. Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī. *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (facsimile of oldest copy (dated 630 H, TIEM 1933) and critical edition). Istanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2016, 30 pp. + 221 pp. + 82 pp.

(pp. 7–60). The perspective is clearly – and radically – ‘philosophical’, corresponding to a certain trend in phenomenology, as is shown for example by his recurrent use of the term ‘*illéité*’, coined by the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (d.1995). Paul Ballanfat does not hesitate to affirm that Ibn ‘Arabī was actually himself very well acquainted with Greek philosophy (pp. 15–16). A claim unfortunately made without the support of any reference or demonstrative argument.

The text of the introduction presents a very dense philosophical meditation on some of the major themes found in the *Fuṣūṣ* and other texts of Ibn ‘Arabī such as the *Futūḥāt* or the *K. Mashāhid al-asrār*. It is articulated around correlated definitions of a series of technical terms in Ibn ‘Arabī’s vocabulary, sometimes translated in an unusual and puzzling way: *sens* (= ‘meaning’, which is usually used for *ma‘nā*) for *ḥaqq* (p. 8); *semblance* (which Ballanfat borrows from Descartes, p. 18) for *ṣūra* (which usually corresponds to the classical notion of ‘form’); *essance* (written with an *a* instead of the French ‘*essence*’, which recalls Jacques Derrida’s (d.2004) famous concept of ‘*différance*’) for ‘*ayn*’ (p. 19). These changes in the conventional vocabulary can bring a true added value to the analysis, as in the profound meditation on *semblance* that runs throughout the introduction, but it sometimes creates an unnecessary complexity, as when Ballanfat’s use of *sens* leads him to affirm that ‘*L’univers n’est pas réel. Il fait sens*’ (= ‘The universe is not real. It makes sense’, p. 44). It is actually not clear why ‘real’ and ‘making sense’ should be considered as mutually exclusive here, even less when we consider Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of the term *ḥaqq*, for example in the *faṣṣ* of Yūsuf where Ibn ‘Arabī explains that even though the world is ‘imagined’ (*mutawahham*) it does not imply that it is ‘apart from the real’ (*khārijan ‘an al-ḥaqq*, a passage that Paul Ballanfat reads as *à l’extérieur de Dieu* (= ‘outside of God’), p. 137). Despite its packed intricacy, Paul Ballanfat’s introduction offers some luminous reflections on the unity in which appears inter-subjectivity (pp. 20–5), on the correlation between vision and time (pp. 32–6), and on the nature of prophecy and the famous notion of the ‘seal of sainthood’ (pp. 47–60). The text is tensed and rhythmic, in the pure style of the French school of phenomenology, and at times actually more poetic than analytical (p. 27).

The translation of the text of the *Fuṣūṣ* itself follows the tone of the introduction. The reading is very demanding, as shown by the first sentence of the *faṣṣ* of Adam that goes uninterrupted for eighteen lines (p. 65). Some editorial choices are not quite evident, as in the fact that the poems are rendered without any punctuation, whereas the Qur'anic verses fortunately are (pp. 74–5). The whole translation is scarcely annotated: only eighty-one notes for the whole text of the *Fuṣūṣ*, most concerning verses of the Qur'an and hadiths, and very few commentaries on the text itself. The absence of notes concerning the reference text of Qūnawī's manuscript is very regrettable, for it would have been useful to point the reader precisely to those places where it offers readings that may differ from the classical editions, and therefore implies differences in translation.

As with any translation, the choices made by Paul Ballanfat in his readings and his renditions of Ibn 'Arabī's vocabulary can be discussed at length. To name a few illustrative examples, we could say that some are inspired and illuminating – as his use of *délicatesse* for *adab* (p. 68); some consist in rephrasing in order to explain the term in detail – as his *abstraction apophatique* for *tanzīh* (p. 89); and some could be misleading – as the translation of the four *arkān* as *soutiens* (= 'supports'), which is actually literally correct if it were not clearly designating here the four 'basic qualities' (i.e. hot, cold, wet, dry), as the context of the passage clearly indicates by their direct link with the four humours (*akhlāt*) of the body (p. 293). One might also be surprised by his translation of the famous verse 42:11 (*laysa ka mithlihi shay'* = 'nothing is like Him' or 'nothing is as His likeness'), repeatedly quoted and commented upon by Ibn 'Arabī. Ballanfat renders it as '*Il n'est pas une chose semblable à sa ressemblance*' (p. 92), quite unexpected after his repeated use of *semblance* for the term *ṣūra*, and which clearly belongs to a totally different semantic register. Despite such debatable choices, the translation is very elegant, and the writing style of Paul Ballanfat, with his rare refinement, adds to the charm of the reading.

The best reason why one should bear with the occasional abstruseness of the text resides in the bridges it builds between the Western philosophical tradition and the thought of Ibn 'Arabī, and Sufism in general: '*Le syllogisme n'a été proprement pensé ni par*

Aristote ni par ses successeurs. La démonstration n'est pas seulement la norme que se prescrit la pensée, mais le mode essentiel de l'être, la venue de la pensée à l'être ('Syllogism has not been properly thought about by Aristotle, nor by his successors. Demonstration is not only the norm that the thought prescribes to itself, but rather the essential modality of being, the coming into being of thought', p. 29). Readers trained in philosophy may appreciate this unique and original approach to the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Others will probably have difficulty getting their bearings in a very challenging text, although the quality of the style makes it very enjoyable reading.

Because of the radical approach taken by Paul Ballanfat, his translation can hardly be considered as an introductory reading to Ibn 'Arabī's thought. It nevertheless has a lot to offer to the reader already familiar with the text of the *Fuṣūṣ*, and will definitely constitute a precious doorway to Sufi and Islamic thought for readers of philosophy, and especially for those versed in phenomenology. As for French readers looking for a complete and accessible rendering of the text, they will still have to wait for a translation that will hopefully synthesise the qualities of the three works that are now available.

Gregory Vandamme
Université catholique de Louvain

