ARTICLES

Al-Ghazzālī’s Tahāfut: Is it Really a Rejection of Ibn Sīnā’s Philosophy?
Jules Janssens

Ibn Sīnā’s ‘Burhān al-Siddīqīn’
Toby Mayer

The Shi’ī Construction of Taqlīd
L. Clarke

BOOK REVIEWS

1. John Kalnins: ISHMAEL INSTRUCTS ISAAC: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE QUR’ĀN FOR BIBLE READERS. By Mustansir Mir.


original language. However, the present issue of the book does not take any account of the last two decades of scholarship on Suhrawardi. Over that period, several books and more than fifty articles have been published on Suhrawardi, many of them dealing with his Persian narratives. This reprint is just that, a new impression or reissue, rather than a new edition. It has not allowed for any modification or improvement. The introduction could have been expanded to include mention of some of the scholarship on Suhrawardi, or a few pages of bibliography added on. Also over the last several years, there has been a debate about how Suhrawardi should be interpreted. Was he a Peripatetic whose several hundred pages of Sufi narratives should be regarded as ‘a footnote to his philosophy’, as some have claimed, or was he a Sufi who accorded to Peripatetic philosophy a much lower status than Sufism, as clearly indicated by his own classification in the beginning of his major work Hitmat al-Ishraf? The present work could have addressed the place of Suhrawardi’s Persian writings within the context of this ongoing debate and shed some light on it. Finally, an index to the book would have been extremely helpful.

Despite the missed opportunity to improve, and update the work, it remains an excellent introduction to Suhrawardi’s mystical writings and a valuable source for students.

Mehdi Aminrazavi
Mary Washington College

The Heritage of Sufism. Volume III: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501–1750)

This is the third and last volume of a short series on some aspects of the vast universe that is the traditional domain of Sufism within the cultural boundaries of Persia and the Persianate world. It comprises twenty-four essays by as many specialists from all around the globe presented at a conference, held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 19–21 May 1997, and entitled ‘Sufism in Persianate culture during the Safavid and Mughal period’. The conference’s focus on India and Persia during the period of Mughal (1526–1720) and Safavid (1501–1722) rule respectively, leaves out the cultural sphere of the contemporary Ottoman Empire, then at the height of its splendour and whose political boundaries embraced almost the entire Arab world and large parts of south-east Europe. This focus is clearly meant to reflect the close and intensive cultural links between Central Asia and Persia proper on one side and the Indian subcontinent on the other, the latter’s Islamic religious culture then being strongly influenced by the influx of scholars and ideas from the Persian world.
degrees of Divine Presences in the Universe (harât al-khamsa) theorized in descending order by Ibn al-'Arabi, from the five possible ways of interiorizing the Sufi practice of dhikr to the subtle secrets contained in the letters of the Arabic alphabet that culminate in the impenetrable mystery of the lâm-alif, the author emphasizes the final resolution of that multiplicity (eight sections of five levels each adds up to forty terms) in the unique and undefined point of convergence at the centre of the schema. Shaykh Mahmûd thereby anticipates by more than a century the better known efforts of, say, a Shah Wall Allah Dihlawi (d. 1762), to harmonize the sometimes apparently disparate ways of explaining the fundamental tenets of Sufi doctrine.

Section V, entitled 'Esoteric Movements & Contemplative Disciplines', in fact continues the concerns of the preceding section, albeit over a slightly later time frame. It offers, among others, essays by Marcia K. Hermansen on the 'pivotal role of Shah Wall Allah in the transition from pre-modern to modern ways of thinking and writing in Muslim religious literature' (320), and Carl W. Ernst on prevalent aspects of Chishti methodology as taught in the early eighteenth century (344–57).

Section VI contains three essays on the marked influence of Persianate thought on Sufism in different parts of the world, including an interesting analysis by Sachiko Murata of Sufi texts translated from Persian into Chinese and widely studied by disciples in contemporary China.

The last section covers selected topics within the immense universe of Persianate Sufi poetry that has inspired Annemarie Schimmel (as in the two previous volumes, here too her presence and contribution nicely complete the frame of participants at almost every conference on every aspect of Islamic culture) to extensive studies of work not only in the elegant Persian language, but also in the humbler nevertheless vigorous vernacular traditions, especially of the Indian subcontinent. Heidah Ghomi on the imagery of annihilation (fanât) used by the Safavi poet Sâ'îb Tabrîzî (born ca. 1039/1630) and including fine examples of the so-called 'Indian style' favoured by that poet after a prolonged stay on the subcontinent; Simon Weightman on the various levels of sacred symbolism used in the Shâtât'î Shaykh Manjhan's work Madhumâlî (written in the north-eastern Indian dialect Awadhî); and Christopher Shackle on a Qâdirî poem by the Punjabi master Ghanîmat Kunjahl (second half of the seventeenth century) underline the great variety in style and language that existed in the Persian and Persianate world during the epoch under study.

In conclusion, this extensive excursion into the winding paths of Persianate thought over the centuries provides a stimulating insight into the cultural richness and intellectual vigour in that part of the world. Through the combination of new approaches to already researched topics with fresh glimpses of hitherto unexplored texts, the book leaves us with a clear impression of the extraordinary potential of this field for further research by present and future specialists.

Thomas Dabnhardt
Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society: A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns

More often than not a Festschrift is a collection of papers that somehow hang together but lack a high degree of thematic coherence. Happily, this Festschrift in honour of Professor Anthony Johns belongs in the minority group. Combining papers delivered at a conference with solicited papers, the editors have produced a work that contains some excellent research pieces.

The preliminary matter includes, besides an Introduction and a list of Anthony Johns's publications, Anthony Reid's review of the corporal-turned-scholar Anthony Johns's intellectual career. Reid brings out the unity of approach and sentiment underlying the diversity of Johns's impressive literary output. Part I, which deals mainly with the Islamic scripture, has nine papers. It begins with Anthony Johns's 'On Qur'ânic Exegetes and Exegesis'. According to Johns, 'From the sixteenth century on, there is documentary evidence of the prosecution of the various Islamic disciplines in the Indonesian archipelago, whether in Arabic, or vernacularised into various of the local languages' (4). He examines the nineteenth-century scholar Nawawî al-Bantanî's two-volume commentary on the Qur'ân, Marâb labîd, with special reference to the commentary on sura 38. He shows that Nawawi's main source is al-Râzî's Qur'ân commentary, Mafâtîl al-Ghayb.

Johns shows that Nawawi's work, while it may be called 'a pastiche ... hardly a sentence in the Marâb labîd is his own' (40–1), is not without principles of selection peculiar to Nawawi. Thus Nawawi at times differs with al-Râzî (e.g. on the interpretation of David's lapse [28]). Besides, some of his emphases (e.g., his excursus, in connection with the David story, on political authority [34]) may be interpreted as allusions to the political situation obtaining in Indonesia during his life. Through careful analysis and comparison, Johns convincingly shows that Nawawi's work is 'a chapter in the development of Qur'ânic exegesis in the Malay world' (48). One hopes that Johns would undertake a more detailed study of Nawawi's tafsîr.

David Burrell's short but important paper, 'Islamicist as Interpreter,' presents Anthony Johns as a model Western scholar. Employing the skills of Western literary analysis, Johns studies the Qur'ânic treatment of Biblical stories, 'helping us to follow their logic, without being constrained to move them into our [Western] narrative field' (54); 'what we are invited rather to do is to proceed in a comparative fashion, using our modes of access to biblical texts as leverage into another textual world ... [without employing] our standards as normative' (55).

Peter Riddell in 'The Transmission of Narrative-Based Exegesis in Islam' argues that, like Judaism and Christianity, Islam 'depends heavily upon narrative as a device for transmitting religious messages and morals' (58). To illustrate the Muslim exegetical use of narrative, Riddell studies al-Baghawi's Qur'ân commentary, Ma'âlim al-tanzîl, comparing al-Baghawi's work with...
In this issue

Jules Janssens
Al-Ghazzālī’s Tahāfut: Is it Really a Rejection of Ibn Sīnā’s Philosophy?

Toby Mayer
Ibn Sīnā’s ‘Burhān al-Siddīqīn’

L. Clarke
The Shi‘ī Construction of Taqlīd