READING THE MYSTICAL SIGNS IN THE SONGS OF ABŪ AL-ḤASAN AL-SHUSHTARĪ

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Although Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240) is remembered as the first Sufi to use strophic forms for devotional poetry, it is a mystic born nearly half a century later, the thirteenth-century Andalusī poet Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī (1212-69), who achieved renown as a master of the *muwashshaḥ* and the *zajal*.[1] Shushtarī was especially successful in appropriating the colloquial informality of these Andalusian forms and recasting it as an essential element in his Sufi songs. His continued appeal is manifest in the dozens of extant manuscripts of his poetry, manuscripts copied and lovingly preserved over the course of centuries by Sufi brotherhoods in North Africa and the Levant. Today Shushtarī remains very much a local hero among Moroccan Sufis – many of whom fancy that his Andalusian colloquial sounded quite a lot like their *dārija*; his verses are still recited and sung at mystical gatherings throughout North Africa, recorded in a range of performance styles and even regularly broadcast on a popular Sufi radio show heard through much of the Maghreb.[2]

As a prolific and well-known *washshāḥ* Shushtarī has interested scholars of strophic poetry as well as scholars of medieval Sufism. Yet approaching this mystic poet presents a series of challenges which go beyond metrical and formal issues. First, there is a host of questions attending the evolution of the increasingly detailed biographies that mediate the interpretation of his poetry. Second, there is abundant uncertainty surrounding Shushtarī's use of the Andalusian vernacular, clouding efforts to derive sound linguistic data from this large body of texts; the complex manuscript tradition, the relative lateness of our sources and the problem of spurious attribution only add to the problems. Yet these issues should not diminish our appreciation of the poems themselves. Richly allusive, Shushtarī's songs bring the imaginary of secular Hispano-Arabic poetry into a religious context, constantly calling on the listener to look beyond the illusions and deceptions of this world and perceive the divine in all of its manifestations. The apparent simplicity of these poems is itself but an illusion, as they often move from stock tropes and poetic conventions to explicitly foregrounding the challenge of reading, deciphering and communicating mystical signs, as in this refrain:

tarjamtu ḥarfan lā yuqrā man lī bifāhim yafhamnī?

I translated an illegible letter. Will anyone understand me?[3]

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Like so many other prominent Sufis, Shushtarī, the author, has become much more than a historical person; over the centuries stories about him have accumulated, lending a narrative structure to his works (and even some works that are probably not his), explaining the circumstances of their composition and, most crucially, providing a social context that guides mystical communities towards interpreting their meaning. Two major themes animate many of these biographies and commentaries. The first question, that of Shushtarī's orthodoxy and his relationship with his controversial teacher Ibn Sab'īn, is much too complex to treat at length here.[4] Shushtarī's earliest biographer, al-Ghubrīnī (d. 1304), indicates that many students (*kathīr min al-ṭalaba*) favoured him over his master, yet he adds that Shushtarī would say that this was due to their lack of familiarity with the master.[5] Both Shushtarī and Ibn Sab'īn would be strongly condemned by jurists such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr.[6] Later commentators, most influentially al-Nābulusī (1641-1731)[7] and Ibn 'Ajība (d. 1809),[8] refute the accusations of heresy levelled against him and read him and his poetry as residing within the "mainstream" of Sufi thought.[9]

The second biographical question, which closely relates to the issue of Shushtarī's approach to poetry, is more pointed: why would a well-bred man with an excellent literary and religious education compose songs in vulgar Arabic, and indeed, make a practice of performing them in the market? Many writers explain this as a spiritual discipline imposed on the future poet by Ibn Sab'īn, who was known for his extreme practice of poverty. In a modern account (based upon centuries of tradition) the Moroccan Sufi leader and scholar 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn al-Ṣiddīq writes that the master told Shushtarī to take a *bandīr* (a sort of tambourine) and sing among the lowly and the scorned in the souks. For three days he recited as instructed: "*badaytu bi-dhikr al-ḥabīb*", that is "I began with the invocation of the beloved". Finally, the rest of the now well-known song poured out: "*wahimtu wa'ayshi yaṭīb / wabuḥtu bisirrin 'ajīb...*" ["I fell head over heels / life became sweet, a wondrous mystery revealed."][10] This narrative offers an interesting twist on the frequent trope of illiterate or semi-literate rural mystics who achieve unfathomable wisdom through God's grace.[11] Here the child of privilege renounces the material world – another familiar trope – and finds prodigious mystical and poetic inspiration (and the earthy sensibility of the rural mystic) through song. Given the lively debate about the propriety of Sufi *dhikr* and *sama'* – many Sufis held that they should be reserved for those who had already undergone some spiritual discipline – the story serves the purposes of those who hold that music and dance are legitimate ways to entice adepts to the mystical path.

Unlike Ibn al-Fāriḍ, whose ornate verse bespeaks an intentional composition, Shushtarī is revered for his direct and plainspoken manner.[12] The

unstudied "feel" of his compositions, the imperfections in his metre and *'irāb* are read by critics such as Ibn al-Ṣiddīq as a badge of spiritual authenticity, a kind of naïve truthfulness. We see Shushtarī's common touch in many aspects of his work. Take for example the seemingly unrelated matter of Sufi dress. The mystic devotes a prose treatise, the *Risāla al-Baghdādiyya*, to refuting anti-Sufis (perhaps in this case the Baghdad-based Ibn al-Jawzī or one of his students) who questioned the rigorous practice of poverty of some Sufis and mocked their use of distinctive clothing.[13] Shushtari's riposte to the critics is by turns legalistic – citing *hadīth* after *hadīth* which showed the Prophet's humble or even patched attire – and mordant – observing how most people seem to think of their own practice as *sunna* and that of all others as *bida'*. Shushtarī makes it clear that, for him, *faqr* (poverty) is not some sort of abstract "spiritual poverty" enacted while dressed in fine clothes and amassing earthly possessions (as some Sufis of the time were wont to do). He rejects the critique that the patched frock was an ostentation of piousness, concluding that clothing is a sign which ultimately can only be read by God, who knows whether the garment reflects the inner state of its wearer, for "*laysa li-aḥadin an yataḥakkam alā bāṭinin ghayrihi*" [no one should judge the outward appearance of another]. Shushtarī's signs – whether sartorial or poetic – may speak in the language of the common man, yet *all* signs continually point to a deeper meaning, never fully revealed.

The contest between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, spirit and legalism, mystic and jurist, commoner and elite, is rehearsed in a great number of Shushtarī's compositions. In the short monorhymed poem "*Ṭāba shurbu al-mudāmi*" ["How sweet to drink wine"], the poetic "I" asks the *faqīh* for a *fatwā*, that is, to pronounce legal judgment upon his *khamr*, his wine, which he describes not as forbidden, but rather forbidden to abandon. The *faqīh*'s negative verdict is not surprising, for it is a product of his failure to understand the true nature of that wine. The poet-narrator's reply evinces sadness for the gulf that separates them: "*Akhin, yā dhā al-faqīhu, law dhuqta minhā, wa sama'ta al-alhāna fī al-khalwāti / la-tarakta dunya wa mā anta fīhi, wa ta'sh hā'imān li-yawmi-l-mamāti.*" ["My brother, *faqīh*, if you would but taste it / and listen to the melodies in the Sufi gatherings,/ you would give up this world and everything in it / and live love-crazed until the day you die."] While there is no doubt that the confrontation between Sufi and *faqīh* is indeed a *leitmotif* in Shushtarī's work, it is still fair to ask whether that theme has been over-stressed due to the fact of its resonance with the *persona* of a boldly defiant and populist poet. Indeed, because "*Ṭāba shurbu*" appears only in Western recensions of the *dīwān* (which appear to be inflated with poems of dubious attribution), one may suspect that it encapsulates the ethos of confrontation too neatly, conforms too precisely to type (to be authentic).

Uncertainties abound. Efforts to establish a reliable *dīwān* face many

problems: interpolations, emendations and copyist errors offer multiple versions of the same poem. Moreover, many of the poems included in the Nashshār edition are almost certainly spurious. Though the manuscript tradition is complex, Shushtarī's *dawāwīn* can be roughly categorised into three groups: an Eastern tradition with manuscripts dating back to the mid-16th century, a popular or performance-oriented tradition with manuscripts dating to the 18th century, and the Moroccan tradition, which offers the largest number of poems, including many not found elsewhere.

What I am calling the Eastern tradition is well-attested – at least ten copies, all in an Eastern *naskhī* script, are catalogued in research libraries.[14] These manuscripts reflect an essentially fixed *dīwān* of just over 120 poems, with around 100 strophic compositions and 20 monorhyme *qaṣā'iḍ* of up to 32 lines, presented in each manuscript in nearly identical order. Vernacular elements are common here: *dhā* for *hadhā*, *nūn* as the marker for the first person imperfect, the interrogative *'īsh*, *huwa* reduced to *hu*, and frequent use of diminutives.[15]

The second group of manuscripts is the major source for what Nashshār calls the minor *dīwān* (*dīwān saghīr*). They represent a more heterogeneous and fluid tradition, which, while still recording some poems (often significantly shortened) from the more fixed and perhaps more "learned" tradition, introduces many new poems, mostly in praise of the Prophet. These Muḥammad-focused poems stand in stark contrast to those of the learned tradition, which only occasionally mention the Prophet, focusing instead on a phenomenology of the divine. As a whole, the poems of the minor *dīwān* also lack the poetic self-consciousness so common in the other group: absent are the references to "my art", or boasts about the beauty of "my *zajal*". However these collections tell us much about the evolving traditions associated with Shushtarī: one early 19th century manuscript organises the material by *nawbas*, that is, according to musical performance style. Some compositions are modified with the addition of extra syllables ("*Allāh, Allāh*"), apparently for musical effect; others string together particularly striking lines from other poems, thereby creating medleys. Three Moroccan manuscripts (written in Maghribī script) represent the most expansive vision of Shushtarī's work, transmitting the poems of the Eastern tradition, adding another 11 *qaṣā'id*, including the famous *nūniyya* commented by both Zarrūq and Ibn 'Ajība, as well as dozens of additional *muwashshaḥāt* and *azjāl*.

Thus far the manuscript evidence allows us only tentative conclusions. The Eastern tradition, perhaps collected in Shushtarī's *ribāṭ* in Damietta, is the most certain. These poems are marked by thematic and poetic complexities lying beneath a veneer of simplicity. Much of the so-called minor *dīwān* represents Shushtarī's work after substantial alteration through oral or musical transmission. Yet many questions remain, most vexingly about the

poems found only in Western recensions. Do these (or some of these) represent his earlier work, before he travelled East? Or were some of these poems suppressed from the source for the Eastern manuscripts? What to make of the absence from the Eastern tradition of what is arguably his most important poetic statement on his philosophical and mystical predecessors, the *nūniyya*?

While many aspects of Shushtarī's thought and legacy await further study, this should not diminish our interest in what is a lively body of work which is representative of a broader movement in thirteenth-century mysticism towards the adoption and recording of vernacular poetic forms.[16] The *muwash-shaḥ* "*Ḥabībī ma lahu thānī*" [see Appendix below] offers an interesting example of how Shushtarī weaves together references or allusions to popular themes of Hispano-Arabic poetry and then elevates them to another plane as the poem moves between different semantic registers. As is not unusual in Shushtarī, the dialectal features in this *muwashshaḥ* are not limited to the *kharja*, but are rather found throughout the poem. Note the use of the *nūn* as the first-person prefix marking the imperfect indicative. The internal rhyme present throughout the poem (both *taḍmīn* and *tazfīr*) increases the popular, non-classical feel of the composition.

The informal diction of the opening hemistich "*Ḥabībī mā lahu thānī*" tempts me to translate it as "Ain't No One But My Baby" or "Ain't No One Like My Baby". And here a serious question is at issue: how does one capture in a translation the spirit of a poem which depends on its relation to a popular form, and uses a colloquial diction to express an unguarded intimacy and to establish a special bond with the listener? To translate the poem into "standard" English diction, English unmarked by dialectal particularities, is, I fear, to rob the poem of an important level of meaning. Yet I worry that rendering the poem in one of the many Western popular idioms runs the risk of seeming disrespectful, or worse, reducing the poem to kitsch.[17] The local accent may be irrevocably lost in translation – indeed, much of it was no doubt lost from the moment the poems were first committed to paper.

Setting those issues aside, and for now using a relatively conservative translation, we can examine some of the complexities in what is – on the surface – an uncomplicated poem. The narrator begins with his boast that his is "a lover like no other", literally "who has no second [to him]". He is beyond the gaze of the *raqīb*, the spy; literally, "no spy is over him". This line and the one that follows, in which he evokes the visit of the lover and the fullness of his presence, are not overtly marked as religious, yet when read through such a lens they reveal an intricate play of signs. The beloved is described through a grammatical negation, as the "one with no second", just as in the *shahāda* "*Lā ilāha illā Allāh*" ["there is no god but God"]; the boast is thus also a powerful declaration of *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God). In the next strophe the language moves closer towards a religious register. The first

phrase, "*raḍaytu billadhī yaṣna'*" ["I am pleased by the One who creates"] that is, the Creator, answers the injunction in Qur'ānic verse 89:27: "*Irji'ī ilā rabbiki rāḍiyatan marḍiyatan*". [Return to your Lord well pleased and well pleasing.][18] The idea of the mutuality of delight between the Creator and His creation is frequently repeated in the Qur'ān, such as in the penultimate verse from *Sūrat al-mā'ida*: "*raḍiya Allah 'anhum waraḍū 'anhu*" [God is pleased with them and they with Him] (5:119). The choice of the verb *ṣana'* – used only once in the Qur'ān to refer to God's act of creation – rather than the more usual *khalaka* (used more than 150 times in that sense) or *bara'a* (less frequent, but said exclusively of God) is noteworthy for several reasons. On a musical level, "*yaṣna'*" plays with "*asnadtu*" in the following hemistich; such considerations are seen throughout the poem. Furthermore *yaṣna'*, conjugated here in the present imperfect, stresses the perpetual and ongoing nature of creation, a common theme of Sufi writers, whereas in the Qur'ān the preponderance of references to creation are in the perfect tense, referring to an action completed in the past.

The insistent repetition of "*bih*" in the next few lines: *bih naṣil, bih naqṭa', wa bih nuthnī 'alayh* [In Him I am joined, in Him I am separated, in Him I praise Him] intensifies the rhythm and creates a dramatic poetic effect, while at the same time underlining the completeness of the narrator's dependence on the beloved: all actions are through Him, in Him, even, paradoxically, in separation from Him. He finds joy and sweetness in the beloved "in that marvellous mystery" (*bi dhā al-sirri al-'ajīb*). The tremendously polysemic word *sirr* is related to *sarra,* to make happy or gladden, but here it also gestures to questions of knowledge, secrets, mysteries – by definition always incompletely understood – or the innermost consciousness. The mystery invites endless interpretation, a perpetual search for a fuller knowledge of the divine and it is the reading of those *asrār* which lies at the heart of the poem. The secret is marvellous (*'ajīb*) in all of the meanings of the term: something tremendously good, but also something amazing, astonishing, never before seen.

The knowledge of the divine cannot be expressed in human language. The Sufis speak using *ishārāt,* a term frequently translated as signs, allusions or symbolic expression; on a very concrete level it refers to the act of pointing towards something. Yet the term itself refers not only to the manner in which knowledge is conveyed, but also, as Nwyia explains,

> the content of an experience which can only be evoked by this method. *Ishāra* is in this sense the opposite of *'ibāra*, not in the way that symbolical language is opposed to "realistic" language or in the way that a parable cannot be translated into abstract language, but in the way that something incommunicable is opposed to something communicable.[19]

The narrator declares that his *ishārāt* are *li-maḥbūbī,* which I have translated

as "to my beloved", underlining the idea of the poem as pointing (the listener) towards the divine. Yet the preposition *li-* also means "for", as well as "belonging to", and I believe that all of these connotations are simultaneously in play here. The *ishārāt* are from God, to God, and of God, and it is God who understands the poet's *ramz* or symbolic language; as expressed in *Sūrat al-mā'ida*: "*inna Allāha 'alīmun bidhāti al-ṣudūri*". ["God has full knowledge of the secrets of the heart."] (5:7) The reader or listener, however, discerns a poem characterised by an endless play of signs.

If we accept the premise of Ibn al-Ṣiddīq's story, that Shushtarī's popular verse served to attract the denizens of the souks, we understand the potential for misunderstanding that arises in speaking of mysteries, in proclaiming this boundless love in public to the uninitiated who are unfamiliar with the deeper meaning of the signs. When the poet speaks of the lover, the spy, the garden, and later, my drink, he is invoking the familiar *topoi* of secular *muwashshaḥāt* and coding them with a new transcendent meaning. He enjoins his followers to teach those who don't understand, those who are simply ignorant, but to guard the secret from the others (*al-ghayr*), from those who are not seeking mystical knowledge.

The mystery of love, that mutual adoration of Creator and creature, brings a transcendent state in which the poet escapes the bounds of *wujūd*, the sensory world. Line 13 brings us deeper into the issues of *ta'wīl* or mystical interpretation, what Shushtarī calls here "reading the secret". The narrator speaks of deciphering the particular secrets in *Sūrat 'Uqūd* or the *Sūra* of the Covenant.[20] While there is no Qur'ānic *sūra* by that name, we can easily identify the allusion because the word '*uqūd* appears once in the Qur'ān, in the first line of *Sūrat al-mā'ida* [literally *The Table*, but much more appropriately translated by Abdel Haleem as *The Feast*]. As we have already seen, the vocabulary of the poem echoes that of the opening and closing verses of the *sūra*, further announcing the poem as a sort of meditation upon its deeper meaning. *Sūrat al-mā'ida*, especially the early section, concerns itself with matters of purity, in washing before prayer, in the discrimination between licit and illicit foods and in the rites of pilgrimage. Shushtarī stresses that the *sūra* is not to be read simply as a catalogue of regulations and proscriptions, as a source of *sharī'a*; the more important message is: "*al-yawm uḥilla lakumu al-ṭayyibātu.*" ["Today the good things are permitted you."] (5:5) This is the message: "In Him my drink is licit, in Him I gather roses." This secret allows the poet to find that transcendent union, to see the face of the divine, radiant like the new moon.

As the poem moves towards its close, the poet gestures back to the original conventional scene of lovers meeting clandestinely in a moonlit garden that has now been recast as a mystical meditation, thus completing the process of redefinition, of perfecting the gaze to perceive the divine. The

garden can now be read as that promised at the end of *Sūrat al-mā'ida*: "*Lahum jannatun tajrī min tahtihā al-anhāru khālidīna fīhā abadan.*" ["They will have gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain for ever."] (5:119) The *ḥabīb* is now explicitly referred to using a Qurānic term for God "*dhū al-jallāl*" ["the master of glory"] (55:27), and yet is also described in the conventional language of erotic poetry as having a countenance like the new moon. But the encounter with this lover will not end in tears over an abandoned encampment; repentance will open the way to a permanent dwelling in the welcoming abode of the beloved. The narrator urges poets to boast, as he himself does, of that lover like no other.

These final lines play with the trope of *madīḥ*, of praise poetry: "*madīḥan kaddurar*" [literally "in praise like pearls"], meaning praise that flows like pearls (thus my rendering, "praise upon praise"), but perhaps alluding to the pearls that the poet might hope to receive as recompense for exalting a patron. Here, however, the praise is directed to God and the reward for the composition is not money, but rather divine mercy and favour on the Day of Reckoning. Indeed, Shushtarī's call to poets to continue boasting of the master of glory was certainly answered. Not only were his poems admired by prominent Sufis such as Ibn 'Abbād of Ronda, al-Nābulusī and Ibn 'Ajība, but they were imitated by well-known *washshāḥs* such as Ibn al-Khaṭīb and al-Ḥarrāq and the nameless poets whose verses ended up being attributed to the great Andalusian master of the form.

The flexibility inherent in a mystical hermeneutic allows for multiple readings of the poem. While it is readable simply as a religious appropriation of the themes and vocabulary of the secular *muwashshaḥāt*, for the listener steeped in the Qur'ān and, moreover, open to *ta'wīl*, the poem becomes deeply and powerfully resonant, a meditation on a key Qur'ānic *sūra*, expressed in the idiom of Andalusian popular song. It is the brilliance of this combination that has made Shushtarī's poetic corpus one of the most vibrant and enduring elements of the legacy of Islamic Spain. While as scholars we may bemoan the possibly insurmountable difficulty of apprehending the "real" Shushtarī, stripped of the accretions and distortions that have come from his role as a standard-bearer for the mystical use of the *muwashshaḥ* and *zajal*, as fans of these hauntingly beautiful songs we cannot but celebrate the enduring challenge of reading that they pose for us.

NOTES

1. The most complete account of Shushtarī's life and reception is in Nashshār's introduction to his edition of the poet's *dīwān*, 'Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār, ed., *Dīwān Abī al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī* (Alexandria: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960). Federico Corriente published a "pre-edition" of the poet's *dīwān* in Roman transliteration with Spanish translation, with a detailed study of the metrics and linguistic features of the poems, *Poesía estrófica: cejeles y/o muwaššaḥāt* (Madrid: CSIC, 1988). See also my "The

Mystical Language of Daily Life: Vernacular Sufi Poetry and the Songs of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī", *Exemplaria* 17:1 (2005) 1-32.

2. Noteworthy examples include: Amina Alaoui with Ahmad Piro and orchestra, *Gharnati* (Auvidis France), 1995; Cofradia al-Shushtari and Omar Metioui, *Dhikr Y Samá': Canto religioso de la Cofradía Sufi-Andalusí al-Shushtari* (Pneuma, 1999); Omar Metioui and Cofradia al-Harraqiyya, *Misticismo: Música sufi andalusí, cantos místicos de la Cofradía Al-Harraqiyya* (Pneuma, 2000); and Omar Metioui and Mohamed Mehdi Temsamani, *Ritual sufi-andalusí* (Sony Spain, 1998). The show "*al-Mūsīqā wa-l-Samā' al-Ṣūfī 'abra al-'ālam*" ["Sufi music and *samā'* around the world"] is broadcast on Medi 1 which can be heard throughout Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, parts of Libya and southern Europe. Complete audio archives of the program are available on the Internet at http://www.medi1.com/musique/soufi.php.

3. Nashshār p. 278. The transliteration reflects the vernacular vowelling found in the earliest manuscripts. The English translation here and throughout is mine.

4. On Ibn Sab'īn, see V.J. Cornell, "The way of the axial intellect: the Islamic hermeticism of Ibn Sab'īn", *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* (1997); Abū al-Wafā al-Ghunaymī al-Taftāzānī, *Ibn Sab'īn wa falsafatuhu al-Ṣūfī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1973).

5. Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad al-Ghubrīnī, '*Unwān al-dirāyah* (Beirut: Lajnat al-tālīf wa al-tarjama, 1969), 239.

6. Louis Massignon, "Ibn Sab'īn et la conspiration anti-hallagienne en Andalousie et en Orient du XIIIe siècle", in *Études d'orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962) 666-8.

7. 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, "Radd al-Muftarī 'an al-ṭa'an fī al-Shushtarī", *al-Mashriq* 54 (1960). For a partial translation of this text see Dominique and Marie Thérèse Urvoy, "Les thèmes chrétiens chez Ibn Sab'īn et la question de la spécificité de sa pensée", *Studia Islamica* XLIV (1976).

8. See Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība, "Sharḥ li-nūniyya al-imām al-Shushtarī", in *Silsilāt Nūrāniyya Farīda* (n.p.: Maktaba al-Rashād, 1997).

9. Of course what is "mainstream" in Sufi thought is constantly subject to redefinition as communities of mystics reinterpret key texts. See Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999) for a discussion of the evolving reception (and growing acceptance and prominence) of Ibn 'Arabī. By contrast, Ibn Sab'īn's reputation for heterodoxy increased over time.

10. 'Abd al-Azīz ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Ṣiddiq, *Sharḥ Bada'tu bi-dhikr maqṭa'at al-ḥabīb* (Cairo: Dār al-Shabab lil-Tiba'ah, 1984), 7.

11. The subject of hagiography and the construction of saintly typologies has recently been the subject of several important studies. See Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Daphna Ephrat, "In quest of an ideal type of saint: some observations on the first generation of Moroccan *Awliyā Allāh* in *Kitāb al-tashawwuf*", *Studia Islamica* 94 (2002): 67-84.

12. Emil Homerin has written on the issue of poetic artifice and mystical authenticity in *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Fāriḍ, His Verse, and His Shrine* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1994).

13. Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, "La Risāla Bagdādīya de Šuštarī", *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 28 (1976).

14. The earliest of these, Escorial 278, dates to the first half of the 16th century; however it is missing a number of folios. For details on the manuscripts, see Nashshār pp. 21-30 and 451-7. Yale library holds two copies of the *dīwān* that were unknown to both Nashshār and Massignon. The first of these, Arabic Mss. 21 (1000 AH /1591 CE), is significant because it is the earliest complete manuscript of the Eastern tradition. Yale Landberg 484 (1129 AH/ 1717 CE) is another fine copy from the Eastern tradition.

15. For a detailed examination of linguistic features in Shushtarī's *dīwān*, see Corriente, pp. 19-33.

16. This phenomenon swept far beyond the Islamic world, or even the Mediterranean, finding representatives from Yunus Emre (1238-1320) writing in Turkish, to Rumi (1207-73) writing in Persian (dialect?), to Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) writing in Umbrian and Mechtchild of Magdeburg (1210?-82).

17. A satisfactory exploration of the myriad issues involved in translating this sort of mystical poetry into English (especially if one is to also take into consideration the positionality of the translator given the current international situation) is well beyond the scope of this paper. Lawrence Venuti's essay on translating the vernacular poetry of the 13th-century Umbrian mystic Jacopone da Todi explores some of these issues. See "Translating Jacopone da Todi: archaic poetries and modern audiences", *Translation and Literature* 12 (2003).

18. The English translation of the Qur'ān used here and throughout is that of M. A. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

19. Paul Nwyia, "Ishāra", in *Encyclopedia of Islam. 2nd edition*, (Leiden: Brill, 1954-2002) IV: 113.

20. Both Nashshār and Corriente read the line as *ṣurat al-'uqūd*, that is, with a *ṣād* instead of a *sīn*. Corriente suggests that this is a reference to a hand sign performed as part of prayer. My reading of the line is supported by all five of the manuscripts which I have to hand, including the two earliest manuscripts, Escorial 278 and Yale Arabic MS 21.

Appendix:

The text here is based on that of Escorial 278, ff 70v-71r

حبيبي ما له ثني ولا عليه رقِيبْ
دنا منّى وأدنانى حاضر لا يغيبْ

رضيت بالذى يصنع وأسندت إليه
وبه نصل وبه نقطع وبه نثنى عليه
وبه نرى وبه نسمع ورُوحى بين يديه 5

بنعمتِه يُغَذّينى وعَيشى به يَطِيبْ
أما تَفرَح يا إخوانى بذَا السِّرِّ العَجيبْ

إشاراتى لمحبوبى ورمزى يفهمُوا
ومَن لا يعرف المَعنى ويَجهَل علموا
وسِرُّ الحبِّ والنَّجوى عَن الغَير اكتُمُوا 10

فسرُّ الحُبِّ رَبَّانى ومَعْناهُ عَجيبْ
أنا نهواه ويهوانى نناجيه من قريب

إذا نخلو بمحبوبى يغيب عنى الوُجُودْ
ونقرا سرَّ مكْتوبى فى سورة العقودْ
وبه يحلالى مشروبى وبه نجنِى الورودْ 15

أنا نسرح فى بستانى فى ريحان وطيبْ
وثمَّ تَبرح أشجانى ونَظْفَر بالحبيبْ

تجَلاّلى فأبصرتوا بقلبى ذُو الجلال
ونادانى فلبَّيْتوا وقال ليَّا تعالْ
بمرآتى وعَايَنتُوا مُحيَّاه كالهلال 20

وحَيَّاتى ولبَّانى وقال ليَّا: أنيب
وانزِلْ يا أخا شانى بمنزلى الرَّحيب

أيا ناظمِ هنيئا صول بمولاك وافتخرْ
وسمَّع مَن لهُ معقول مَديحاً كالدرَرْ
وقُل لكل مَن يَعذل ومَن غاب أو حضرْ 25

أنا عبدُ لسُلطانى إلى يوم العصيبْ
عَسَى مَولاىَ يرْحَمُنِى وقصدِى لا يخيبْ

Transliteration:

Ḥabībī mā lahu thānī wa lā ʻalayh raqīb
danā minnī wa'adnānī ḥādirān lā yaghīb

radaytu billadhī yaṣnaʻ wa'asnadtu ilayh
wa bih naṣil wa bih naqtaʻ wa bih nuthnī ʻalayh
wa bih narā wa bih nasmaʻ wa rūḥī bayn yadayh

bi-niʻmatih yughraddīnī wa ʻayshī bih yaṭīb
amā nafraḥ ya ikhwānī bi dhāssirri al-ʻajīb

ishārātī li-maḥbûbī wa ramzī yafhamū
wa mān lā yaʻrif al-maʻnā wa yajhal, ʻallamū
wa sirr al-ḥubbi wannajwā ʻan al-ghayr, aktamū

fasirru-lḥubb rabbānī wa maʻnāhu gharīb
ana nahwāh wa yakhwānī nunājīh min qarīb

idhā nakhlū bimaḥbūbī yaghīb ʻannī-l-wujūd
wa naqrā sirra maktūbī bisūrati-lʻuqūd
wa bih takhlālī mashrūbī wa bih narjū al-wurūd

ana nasraḥ fī bustānī fī rayhān wa ṭīb
wa thamma tabraḥ-ashjānī wa naẓfar bi-l-ḥabīb

tajallā lī fa'absòartu biqalbī dhū+ljallāl
wa nādānī falabbaytū wa qāl liyyā taʻāl
bimirātī wa ʻāyantū muḥayyā ka+lhillāl

wa ḥayyānī wa labbānī wa qāl liyyā anīb
wa'anzil ya akhā shānī bimanzilī+rraḥīb

ayā nāẓim haniyyan ṣūl bimawlāk wa-ftakhir
wa sammiʻ man lahu maʻqūl madīḥan kaddurar
wa qul li-kulli man yaʻdhil wa man ghāb aw ḥaḍar

ana ʻabdun li-sultānī ilā yawmi+lʻaṣīb
ʻasā mawlāya yarḥamnī wa qaṣdī lā yakhīb

Translation:

There's no one like my lover

There's no one like my lover.
No spy watches over him.
He drew close to me and drew me close to Him,
present, no distance between us.

I am content in the Creator, upon Him I rely.
In Him I am joined, in Him I am separated, in Him I praise Him,
in Him I see, in Him I hear, and my soul is in His hands.

He bestows on me his favour.
My life in Him is sweet.
My brethren, I am happy
in that marvellous mystery.

My allusions are to my beloved, he understands my signs.
Teach the ignorant one who does not understand the meaning.
As for the others, conceal from them the mystery of love and deliverance.

For the secret of love is divine
and its meaning is amazing.
I adore Him and He adores me.
I speak to Him up close.

When I am alone with my beloved, I become absent from creation.
I read the secret written in the *sura* of the covenant:
In Him my drink is licit, in Him I gather roses.

I roam in my garden,
fragrant and delightful.
My sadness departs
and I have my way with my beloved.

He appeared and in my heart I saw Him: the master of glory.
He called me and I answered. He bade me follow.
Mirrored in me – I saw Him – His countenance like the new moon.

He called me and I answered.
He said to me: Repent.
Brother, dwell like me
In my welcoming abode.

Oh poet, take advantage, venture for your Lord's sake and boast!
Make him with discernment hear praise upon praise.
And say to the critic, to those present and absent:

I am the servant of my Lord   until the day of Reckoning.
May my Lord forgive me   and may I not fail in my goal.