

Appendix:

A MUWASHSHAḤ BY IBN AL-‘ARABI OF MURCIA

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Among the very many volumes of his writings, Ibn al-‘Arabi of Murcia (1165-1240) found the time to write 27 *muwashshahāt*. They are religious poems, and are likely to have been based on popular songs of his day. They exhibit notable variations of style, in terms of line lengths, metre, numbers of strophes, whether or not they have headers etc.

For the SOAS conference we produced a trilingual edition of these poems, comprising the Arabic text, a transliteration into Roman characters, and translations into both English and Castilian.* We have selected one poem for inclusion in this volume, and have prefaced it with an editorial note by FC, as follows:

Interpretation

True Sufism is not compatible with orthodox Islam, in the same way that genuine mysticism is incompatible with Christianity, Judaism or any monotheistic belief that builds itself on notions such as the unity of God, creation, sin as a personal responsibility, retribution, prophecy and the renunciation of reason in favour of faith.

The early Sufis soon clashed with the watchful orthodox leaders of Islamic thought. They suffered casualties, and in the process learned how to downplay or disguise their more conflictual views by using metaphor, most often drawn from the holy book of the *Qur‘an* or from the traditions of the Prophet (*Sunnah*), and introducing bridging concepts. These included seemingly substituting God’s love and the mystic’s wish to attain union with Him for the conviction of being already One with Him; the portrayal of Muhammad as the most important link in the chain of Sufis, beginning with Adam, identifying him as the “handful of light” which started the creation and the enlightenment of created beings; and frequent appeals to the attributes of God which are most clearly proclaimed in the Holy Book, such as his mercy, justice and omnipotence.

Ibn al-‘Arabi’s life and works bear conspicuous witness to that circumstance, as he managed to turn the genuine Sufi teachings, reserved to the thoroughly initiated, into a “wide path” (*mahayana* in Buddhism) for people who only sought to obtain a measure of enlivened faith, together with

the intercession of the holy men, religious ceremony and a feeling of belonging to a privileged group within the followers of the true faith.

The vision which he sees is God's inspiration, i.e. the *Qur'an*, which commands his heart to be active in attitude and in words. This can be read at two levels: it can be interpreted simply as an injunction to lead a virtuous life of work, only uttering useful words, or as an injunction to preach Sufism and practice reflection, i.e. using the "active intelligence" of philosophers in dealing with metaphysical issues, which was a characteristic of the founding fathers of Sufism, but was virtually sinful in terms of orthodox Islam.

Next, driven into action by the love he feels for God, the mystic is seen in the role of one of the preferred prophets of Islam, Jonah, whose sin was passed over on account of his loyalty and repentance. After this the poet assumes the personality of Muhammad himself, and undertakes a night voyage, the *isra'* or *mi'raj*, through which he obtains the jewel of a well-guarded secret – in other words gnosis (*'irfan*) – but this is not openly declared. Enemies of God's envoies are punished, prophecy wins the prize (a crown of dazzling beauty), and those who had seen the Prophet (= Muhammad = the mystic) poorly clad in the darkness recognise him now as victor and proclaim that God's clemency reaches into every corner of the world, to the point of removing the otherness of His creatures and accepting them all as deserving to be at His right side, i.e. in Heaven. This last idea is typically mystical and unorthodox, since it does away with the difference between virtue and sin. However it is cleverly expressed in ambiguous terms: orthodoxy may not dispute that God Almighty and Merciful could suppress the people's otherness, if this implied freeing them from guilt, which allowed them to come in throngs over to "the right side".

POEM No. 14 – Arabic text

(مطلع)

رأيت عند السحر رؤيا من الوحي المبين انزالا
على قلب أوسر حالا وقولا ان يكون فعلا

(دور)

لما دعاه الهوى الى الذى ذكرته
او هن منى القوى ذاك الذى سمعته
من ساكنى نينوى وذوقهم قد ذقتهم
فى نومه قد فسر كمثل ذى النون الامين ادغالا
لم يدر عين الخبر فظن ظننا واليقين مازالا

(دور)

بالله يامن دعا قلبى اليه ليرى
امرا اليه سعى يطلبه عند السرى
فكان نعم الرعا لما اليه قد سرى
علاه دون البشر بحلية السر المصون ان جالا
هو القضا والقدر كانه الصبيح المبين جوالا

(دور)

المورشان حكما عليهما النار التي
تفنيهما اذ هما ضدان فانظر حكمتى
سيلهما قد ظما وناره من جملتى
ما ان لها من شرر قد امتت منها الغصون اشعالا
وفى مجارى العبر ان لها من اليمين ادلالا

(دور)

لما اتى طالبها يبغى الازار والردا
ولى به هاربا رب التندى والتندا
فجاءه غالبا تاج على الراس بدا
تاج حشاه الدرر يلوح من فوق الجبين هلالا
بذهب نور البصر سناه يعطى كل حين اشكالا

(دور)

بحر العمى فى عمى بدرى بذاك المرتدى
وجساء مستفهما فيما به الوحى بدى
اوضحت ما ابهما فى ناشد أو منشد
اذ الاله نشر رحمته فى العالمين ارسالا
أزال حكم الغير وجاء اصحاب اليمين ارسالا

POEM No. 14 – Transliteration

Metrical Structure:

mustaf'ilun fa'ilun / mustaf'ilun mustaf'ilun (maf'ulun) (sari')

Stanzaic Structure: **abcabc dedede** x5

ra'áytu 'inda+ ssaHár / rú'ya mina+ lwaHyi+ lmubin / inzála
'ala qulábyin amár / Hálan waqáwlan an yakún / fa'ála.

lámma da'áhu+ lhawá / ila+ lladhí dhakártuhú,
áwhana mínni+ lquwá / dháka+ lladhí samí'tuhú
mín sákini ninawá, / wadháwquhum qad dhúqtuhú;
fi náwmihí qad fasár, / kamíthli dhinnúni+ l'amín, / idghála
lam yádrí 'ayna+ lkhábár, / faZánna Zánnan walyaqín / ma qála.

biIláhi, ya man da'á / qálbi iláyhi liyará
amran iláyhi sa'á / yáTlubuhu 'inda+ ssurá,
fakána ní'ma+ lwi'á / lima iláyhi qad sará,
Halláhu dúna+ lbashár / biHilyati+ ssírri+ lmaSún, / in jála:
huwa+ lqaDá walqadár / ka'ánnahu+ SSúbHu+ lmubín / jawwála.

almurisháni Húkkima / 'aláyhima+ nnáru+ llatí
tufnihima idh humá / Diddáni, fanZúr Hikmatí:
sáyluhuma qad Tamá / wanáruhu min júmlatí;
ma in lahá min sharár, / qad áminat mínha+ lghuSún / ish'ála,
wafí majári+ l'ibár / áнна lahá mina+ lyamín / idlála.

lámma atá Táliba, / yabghá+ l'izára warridá,
wallá bihi háriba / rábbu+ nnadá wannidá,
fajá'ahu gháliba / tájun 'ala+ rrási badá;
tájun Hasháhu+ durar, / yalúHu min fáwqi+ ljabín / hilála,
yúdhhibu núra+ lbaSár, / sanáhu yú'Ti kúlla Hín / ashkála.

báHru+ l'amá fi 'amá / yadri bidháka+ lmurtadí,
wajá'a mustafhimá / fíma bihi+ lwáHyu budí:
awDáHta ma ábhamá / fi náshidin aw múnshidí.
idh al'iláhu nashár / ráHmatahu fi+ lHalamín / irsála
azála Húkma+ lghiyár / wajá'a aSHábu+ lyamín / arsála.

POEM No. 14 – Translation

0. I saw, at dawn, // a vision of clear inspiration, // revealed
To a little heart, // which it commanded, in attitude and in words, to be //
active.

A muwashshah by Ibn al-'Arabi

1. When love called it // to that which I have mentioned,
It weakened my strength, // that which I had heard
About the inhabitants of Nineveh, // and I had the same taste as they did.

While asleep it discovered // the same thing as the loyal Jonah // in his
imagination,
Unaware of the essence of the matter, // merely guessing, // but telling what
was certain.¹

2. By God, you who called // the attention of my heart to you, so that it
saw
What you had procured, // seeking it on the night voyage,
You were an excellent recipient // of that for which you had travelled,

Which adorned you above all human kind // with the jewel of the well-
guarded secret // that goes around:
Such is destiny and fate, // like the clear morning // going around
everywhere.²

3. The two seditious people³ were sentenced // to fire which
Annihilated them, for being // contrary; look at my wisdom:
Its flood flowed over // while its fire is part of my whole being

Although it has no sparks, // so that branches are safe from being set ablaze
// by fire
And one is set to thinking, // because that fire is partial, // set to the right
side.⁴

4. When he came seeking // and asking for a shawl and a cloak,
The lord of dew and calling // took him away in flight,
And, as a victor, there came // a crown, appearing on his head

A crown full of pearls // gleaming on his forehead // like a crescent,
The brilliance of which bedazzles the eyes // offering at every moment //
facets.⁵

5. The sea of darkness in darkness⁶ // knows the one who wore the cloak;
Who came asking wherein // the revelation commenced,
And you explained what was obscure // with the words of the one who prays
or recites:

"When God unfolds // his clemency over the worlds // and sends it,
He takes away the condition of otherness // and the righteous arrive //
in groups."⁷

Explanatory notes

1. A mystic vision orders the poet's heart to start on his way with words and action, and mystic love incites him to follow it. Hearing the story of Jonah with the people of Nineveh (who obeyed God's command more quickly than that prophet himself) weakened the poet's energy somehow, as it meant, and he had to concede, that even the gift of prophesy does not make a man perfect. But his heart interpreted that dream or vision as Jonah did inside the whale, ignorant of the essence of his case, making only a guess and finally telling the truth.
2. This stanza is in praise of Muhammad, who lets the poet's heart see the mystic treasures obtained in his night journeys to Heaven, never attained by others and containing the divine decrees which must go around and have effect.
3. This passage is enigmatic. Obviously it is God who speaks, but, to begin with, *mūrishān*, as the metre requires an abnormal pause in this word, is not recorded by the dictionaries, although it could presumably be a prosodically necessary variant of *muwarrishāni*, "the two seditious ones". However, there are no characteristic pairs of seditious men in the *Qur'an*, the habitual source of these kinds of stories in mystic poetry. But there are several mentions of the trio consisting of Pharaoh, Hāmān and Qārūn, e.g. in 15:24 and 29:39, where they oppose Moses, being punished by God in terrible ways, with flood, fire and being swallowed by the earth, and it is possible that the dual and the omission of names merely answers to metrical convenience.
4. God's fire has no sparks that might set fire to the surrounding trees; it hits its target with precision. Its coming from the right side appears to be an allusion to *Qur'an* 37:28, where the damned and the devils can no longer help each other on Doomsday, and the former accuse the latter of having deluded them with their approach from the right side, i.e. with a friendly attitude and false promises. But this is puzzling, since the right is characteristically identified with the just, e.g. in *Qur'an* 56:27 and 74:39.
5. This stanza appears to describe Muhammad's night journey, carried into the Heavens by the celestial courser Al-Burāq. While he only wanted a loincloth and a cloak, i.e. ruling his community as a sheikh, he was crowned with the richest of jewels on that occasion.
6. A metaphor for God, explained in Lane p. 2161; the description of God's abode before the Creation.
7. God's mercy on the world makes alterities disappear and causes the just to come to Paradise in crowds.

NOTES

* F. Corriente & E. Emery (eds.) *Twenty-Seven Muwashshahaat and One Zajal by Ibn al-'Arabi of Murcia (1165-1240) in a trilingual edition [Arabic, Transliteration, English and Castilian]*. London and Zaragoza, 2004.

Our presentation to the conference outlined the genesis of our Ibn al-'Arabi project: a commitment to gentle voices of the heart in a time of war; a commitment to celebrating the cultures of both Arabs and Jews; an encouragement to persons of goodwill to learn both Arabic and Hebrew; and a quiet pleasure in the joys of scholarly translation. The Ibn al-'Arabi texts will shortly be accompanied by a companion volume, an English-language translation of the Italian and Hebrew sonnets of Immanuel Romano (Immanuel ha-Romi).