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WESTERN STUDIES ON IBN AL-FĀRIḌ'S SUFI POETRY

by

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INTRODUCTION: ABOUT IBN AL-FĀRID

“Pass by the cemetery at the foot of al-Āriḍ,
And say: Peace upon you, Ibn al-Fāriḍ!

You have shown in your *Nazm al-sulūk* marvels
And have revealed a deep, well-guarded mystery.

You have drunk from the cup of love and friendship,
And have quaffed from a bounteous, unlimited Ocean”.¹

These verses can be read on the shrine (*darīh*) of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the well-known Egyptian Sufi poet, located at the foot of the mountain called al-Muqaṭṭam, east of Cairo. The shrine continues to be a centre of attraction for his devotees, particularly on his feast day (*mawlid*).² The verses quoted above, written by his grandson 'Alī *sibt* Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. ca. 735/1334), point to 'a deep, well-guarded mystery' (*sirr*) that surrounded Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience both during his lifetime and after his death. Such a mystery still lingers in the beautiful verses of his poems, attracting many readers and scholars in their efforts to unravel the enigma of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience.

An initial difficulty one encounters in approaching Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry is the shortage of trustworthy data found in his biographical sources. His full name, as reported in the said sources, was Sharaf al-Dīn (*laqab*, title, honorific name) Abū al-Qāsim or Abū Ḥafṣ (*kunya*, agnomen, surname) 'Umar (*ism 'alam*, proper name) b. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī (*nasab*, patronymic, kinship name; 'Umar is usually called Ibn

1. SCATTOLIN, Giuseppe (ed.), *The Diwān of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, a critical edition, (Cairo: IFAO, 2004) 9 (Arabic text). *Nazm al-sulūk* (*The Order of the Way*) is one of the names of his great ode, usually known as *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*, because of its rhyme in *tā'*. Reference will be made to this edition as *Dīwān*.
2. For more biographical data on Ibn al-Fāriḍ, see below in the section dealing with new research on his biography. A good description of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *mawlid* is given in LUIZARD, Pierre-Jean, "Un mawlid particulier", *Egypte/Monde Arabe*, 14 (2e trimestre 1993) 79-102.

al-Fāriḍ after his father's *laqab* 'al-Fāriḍ') b. al-Murshid b. 'Alī al-Ḥamawī al-Miṣrī (relational names of place, *nisba*). Ibn al-Fāriḍ was born in Cairo on the 4th of Dhū al-Qa'da 576 / 22nd of March 1181, and he died in Cairo on the 2nd of Jumādā al-Ūlā 632 / 23rd of January 1235. He thus spent most of his life in Cairo, except for a period in which, according to an accepted Sufi custom, he went to Mecca where he stayed for some years, probably between 613/1216 and 628/1231. After his return from Mecca, the poet lived in Cairo, near the al-Azhar mosque, enjoying a life of seclusion, away from public attention. It seems that it was during the last four years of his life that Ibn al-Fāriḍ dictated his *Dīwān*, i.e. the collection of his poems that consists of about twenty-four odes and some epigrams, in total about 1659 verses, some of which may be unauthentic.³

A century later, 'Alī, the poet's grandson through his daughter (called *sibt*), (d. ca. 735/1334), edited his grandfather's *Dīwān*, prefacing it with a biographical introduction (called *dībāja*) on his grandfather's life. 'Alī *sibt* Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *dībāja* is full of hagiographical material, so much so that a critical approach to it was needed in order to establish the most trustworthy data concerning the poet's life.⁴ No other written document about the poet has come down to us, and we know little concerning his teachers and Sufi acquaintances that could help in understanding his Sufi poetry. This is almost all that we know about his life. Nonetheless, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān* has always been held in high esteem as one of the greatest Sufi poems, not only in Arabic but also in Islamic Sufi literature in general. Quite a number of commentaries on his Sufi poetry have been produced, particularly by Sufis belonging to Ibn al-'Arabī's school. In fact, these commentators resorted on the whole to Akbarian Sufi philosophy in order to unravel the profound meaning of Fāriḍian Sufi poetry. The validity of such a method will be discussed below.

In the modern age, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān* has likewise been the object of many scholarly works, including translations and commentaries in different European languages. In the present study we shall review some of the most important of these works, especially those concerning his great mystical poem *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*, in which the poet has given full expression of his mystical experience. Thus, the primary studies of the Egyptian Sufi poet done in modern times in the West will be presented here.⁵ From such an investigation one can see the different ways Ibn al-Fāriḍ has been

3. On this question, see our English introduction: *Dīwān*, 1-14 (English text).

4. The text of 'Alī *sibt* Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *dībāja* is to be found at the beginning of many editions of the *Dīwān*. We refer to the text of our critical edition: *Dīwān* 1-34 (Arabic text). Studies on this *dībāja* will be indicated below.

5. In future we hope to do the same with modern Eastern studies on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry.

received, understood and interpreted, and the great contribution western orientalists have made to a deeper understanding of 'Umar b. al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry. The results of such studies should represent a starting point for a new approach.

I. XVII-XIX C.: FIRST APPROACHES TO IBN AL-FĀRIḌ'S MYSTICAL POETRY

Ibn al-Fāriḍ appears among the first Arab authors to have been translated into a modern European language. In the XVII c., Europe was emerging from a long period of political and cultural weakness that had lasted for centuries, i.e., from the end of the Roman Empire in the V c. AD, and the rise of Islamic power in the VII c. AD that dominated the Mediterranean region up to the XVII c AD. With the decline of the Ottoman Empire on the one hand, especially after its defeat in the siege of Vienna in 1683, and the ongoing expansion of European societies during the Renaissance on the other, a new era in East-West relationships began. European powers started expanding eastward, and, as a consequence, a new approach to Eastern peoples began to develop.

Interest in Eastern civilizations near and far grew steadily in the following centuries, and the first translations of Eastern texts into European languages appeared. Western scholars, with the help of modern science, started to refashion the traditional image they had inherited from the past about the Islamic Near East, and beyond it about Far Eastern countries and civilizations, such as India, China and Japan. One should not forget that the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (d. 1832) published his famous *West-östlicher Diwan* (*West-Eastern Divan*) in 1819, i.e. at the beginning of the XIX c, in which he gathered a number of poems inspired by oriental traditions, and Sufi ones in particular.⁶ In these compositions, Goethe tried to reconcile the two worlds, West and East, looking to the East in a romantic disposition as the source of spiritual light and purity. His *Diwan* had a large influence in Europe and opened new dimensions in the continent. In Goethe's wake, interest in Eastern cultures greatly increased in the West, becoming a general movement oriented towards the discovery of the East.

6. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German writer and politician. He had an encyclopedic mind and wrote about almost every topic, from poetry, novels, theater, to treatises on the natural sciences. Goethe was an early participant in the *Sturm und Drang* literary movement, and managed to blend both classical and romantic trends. In 1819, he published *West-östlicher Diwan*, a collection of poetry of oriental character. He derived his inspiration from the Persian poet Hafiz (1320-89), whose verse he read in June 1814 in a translation by J. von Hammer-Purgstall (for more information about this orientalist see below).

Interestingly enough, among those first attempts at the translation of Arabic texts into European languages, some texts of the Egyptian Sufi poet, 'Umar b. Ibn al-Fāriḍ are found. Western studies about this Sufi poet are a concrete demonstration of the way oriental studies developed in the West from the first approaches up to our present day.

1.1. 1638: Johannes Fabricius' *Specimen Arabicum*

Johannes Fabricius (1608-1653) was a Dutch scholar, born in Danzig, who lived in Rostock where he taught philosophy. He was a pupil of the well-known professor of Arabic Jacob Golius⁷ who encouraged him to publish an anthology of Arabic literature translated into Latin, one of the first to be published in the West.⁸ In his anthology, Fabricius translated a short poem by Ibn al-Fāriḍ beginning with the verses:⁹

antum furūdī wa-naflī - antum ḥadīthī wa-shughlī... (Dīwān, 230)

(You are my religious duty and my voluntary devotion,
You are the matter of my talk and my occupation)

This first translation signals the beginning of a long list of works that were make Ibn al-Fāriḍ ever better known in the West. After Fabricius, many European scholars continued translating other poems from Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*.

1.2. 1774: Sir William Jones' *Poeseos Asiaticae*

Sir William Jones (1746-1794) is considered a pioneer of British Orientalism. He was an English philologist and a scholar of ancient India, particularly known for being the first to discover the relationships existing among Indo-European languages. He was also the founder of the *British Asiatic Society*.

7. Jacob Golius (born Jacob van Gool) (1596-1667) was a Dutch orientalist and mathematician. His most important work is the *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum*, (Leiden, 1653) which was based on the *Ṣiḥāḥ* of al-Jawharī, and was only superseded by the work of the German orientalist G. W. Friedrich Freytag (d. 1861), *Lexicon arabico-latinum* (Halle, 1830-1837).

8. FABRICIUS, Johan, *Specimen Arabicum quo exhibentur aliquot scripta Arabica partim in prosa, partim ligata oratione composita. Jam primum in Germania edita, versione Latina donata, analysi grammatica expedita, notisque necessariis illustrata. Quibus accessit judicium de soluto dicendi genere Arabum proprio. Ut et coronis de poesi Arabica hactenus a nemine in Germania tradita. Adjectus in fine est index Latinus verborum, nominum et particularum locupletissimus, qui instar lexici esse potest*, (Rostock: Heirs of Johann Richel, 1638).

9. *Ibid.*, 151.

A well known polyglot, he was also a pioneer in translating numerous texts from Oriental literatures (Hindu, Chinese, Persian, Arabic etc.) into English. Among such texts he translated a poem of Ibn al-Fāriḍ beginning with the verse:¹⁰

“*a barqun badā. fī jānibi l-Ghawrī lāmī‘u...*” (*Dīwān*, 219-222)

(Has a lightning appeared shining at the side of al-Ghawr...)

1.3. 1806: Silvestre De Sacy's *Chrestomathie arabe*

Silvestre De Sacy (1758-1838) is considered the founder of French Orientalism. In 1795, he became professor of Arabic at the newly founded *École spéciale des langues orientales vivantes* (*School of Living Eastern languages*).

He published many studies on Arabic language and edited a number of translations of Arabic texts, among them his famous *Chrestomathie arabe* (3 vols., 1806), an anthology of Arabic texts composed for his students.¹¹ In this collection he translated a poem of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, beginning with the verse:¹²

“*šaddun ḥamā zama‘ī li-māka li-madā...*” (*Dīwān*, 50-54)

(Has a hindrance denied my thirst to access thy water, Why?...)

1.4. 1820: Garangeret De Lagrange's *Anthologie arabe*

Garangeret De Lagrange (1790-1859) was a disciple of Silvestre De Sacy, and can be counted among the first outstanding French orientalist. He too edited and translated a large selection of Arabic texts, among them some poems by Ibn al-Fāriḍ:¹³

“*a wamīdu barqin bi-l-ubayriqi lāḥā...*” (*Anthologie*, 25) (*Dīwān*, 149-151)

(Is it a flash of lightning that shone over the mottled mountain...)

“*khaffifi l-sayra wa-ṭṭa'id yā ḥadī...*” (*Anthologie*, 28) (*Dīwān*, 154-155)

(Slow down the pace of thy walking, and relax, o camel-driver...)

“*mā bayna muṭaraki l-aḥdāqi wa-l-muhaji...*” (*Anthologie*, 32) (*Dīwān*, 162-165)

(In the midst of the battlefield of enchanting glances and amorous hearts....)

10. JONES, William, *Poeseos Asiaticae Commentarii*, in *Works*, Lord Teignmouth, (London: Lord Teignmouth, 1774; Leipzig: Weidmanni et Reichum, 1777), vol. IV, 174.

11. DE SACY, Silvestre, *Chrestomathie arabe*, (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale; 1806), vol. III, 143-174.

12. DE SACY, *Chrestomathie*, vol. III, 143-174.

13. DE LAGRANGE, Garangeret, “Extraits du diwan du cheïkh Omar ben Fâredh”, in *Anthologie arabe*, Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1820, 25-46 (traduction) – 44-91 (textes arabes), reproduite dans MACHUEL, L., *Pages choisies des grands écrivains: les auteurs arabes*, (Paris: A. Colin, 1912), 253-256. De Lagrange translated two of them in «Poèmes extraits du diwan d'Omar ibn al-Fâredh», in *Extraits du Journal Asiatique*, (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, Père et Fils, 1823), tome III, 228-243.

“*adir dhikra man ahwā wa-law bi-malāmī...*” (*Anthologie*, 37) (*Dīwān*, 173-176)

(Pass around the remembrance of the one I love, even by reproaching me....)

“*sharibna ‘alā dhikri l-ḥabībi mudāmatan.....*” (*Anthologie*, 41) (*Dīwān*, 154-161)

(We have quaffed upon the remembrance of the Beloved a very old wine....).

1.5. 1850: Georg August Wallin (1811-1852): *Carmen Elegiacum*

Georg August Wallin was born in Finland and became a renowned traveler and geographer. He traveled extensively in the East, and was among the few who was able to visit the sacred terrain of Mekka and other Islamic holy sites. For this purpose he adopted an Islamic name, ‘Abd al-Walī. He left an interesting description of his journeys in his *Notes taken during a Journey through part of Northern Arabia*.¹⁴

Wallin returned home after many years of traveling. In 1850, he defended his doctoral dissertation on a poem by Ibn al-Fāriḍ and was later appointed Professor of Oriental Literature at the University of Helsinki. In his study, Wallin edited and translated a short poem by Ibn al-Fāriḍ (actually four verses) composed in praise of Egypt against the beauty of Damascus, with commentary by ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731). Wallin thus demonstrated that he was acquainted with the mystical meaning of the text of this poem that begins with the verse:¹⁵

“*jillaqu jannatu man tāha wa-bāhā...* (*Dīwān*, 195)

(*Jillaq* [an Arabic name of the town of Damascus] is the paradise for the one who is proud and arrogant...).

Remark

It should be evident that the abovementioned translations of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *Dīwān* were among the first attempts by Western scholars to translate Arabic literature into European languages in order to make it known in the West, and there is little wonder that they still appear quite tentative. It has also been remarked on occasion that Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poems were understood by these early scholars in the first instance according to their literal meaning, i.e. as love-erotic poems in the line of Arabic love poetry. In fact, these poems are among the short odes of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *Dīwān*, in

14. WALLIN, Georg August, “Notes Taken during a Journey through Part of Northern Arabia, in 1848”, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Volume 20. 1851.

15. *Carmen Elegiacum Ibnu-l-Faridi cum commentario Abdu-l-Ghanyī l e duobus codicibus Londinensi et Petropolitano in lucem edidit et Venia Ampl. Facult. Philos. ad Imp. Alex. in Fennia Universitatem p. p. Georgius Augustus Wallin, Linguarum Orientalium Docens, in Auditorio Philosophico die 19 Octobris 1850, Helsingforsiae: Frenckell; Halsinfurs: Fräns Līfanda al-Aswīdī, 1850 (Helsinki: Frenckell, 1850).*

which such erotic elements are clearly prominent; their symbolic meaning seems to have been absent. Such statements, however, are not entirely accurate. The mystical symbolism of these poems was surely available to some of the said scholars, especially of Garangeret De Lagrange and Georg August Wallin, although it was not yet fully explored. In any event, these scholars demonstrate that they had access to some Arabic commentaries on the poems in question, such as that of al-Nābulusī, in which their mystical meaning was clearly indicated. Nevertheless, a great deal of work still had to be done in order to enter into depths of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical world.

1.6. 1854: Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's translation of *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*

By the middle of the XIXth century, many of the great Oriental associations in the West were already functioning, and research into Eastern civilizations was being pursued in a more systematic way. The great Oriental libraries had also been founded, in which many of the treasures of the world's civilizations were collected, protected and studied. Numerous magazines, books, and studies on the different human civilizations were produced, spreading the new orientalist science throughout Europe. Recently, a great deal of criticism has been leveled against such orientalist enterprises. Of particular renown in this regards was the book *Orientalism* (1978), written by Edward Said (d. 2003). Edward Said accused Western Orientalism in general of being nothing more than an expression of Western political and colonial intellectualism in search of self-affirmation on the back of Eastern peoples it considered inferior. In his view, the studies of Western scholarship on non-Western civilizations were not unbiased and objective, but always vitiated by a basic Western self-central attitude. Said's ideas launched a broad and extended debate among scholars, East and West. One cannot deny that many orientalists were connected with European cultural and political imperialism. At the same time, however, one must also add that this was not always the case.

In fact, in reviewing Western studies on Ibn al-Fāriḍ, it appears quite clear that most Orientalist scholars pursued the idea of genuine scientific research in the field of ancient civilizations, East and West, applying to them the scholarly methods of research developed by modern science. New perspectives came to light, especially through the application of historic-critical methods. In this way, a great many past events and cultural data were situated in a more accurate historical context and better understood in their true meaning. A new critical approach was developed, concerning not only far Eastern civilizations (India, China, Japan, etc), but also and in the first instance Western civilization itself, both classical and modern. Thus, new understandings of past cultural heritages, Western included, came to light, changing the

traditional picture that had been handed down by ancient authors. Of course, nobody claims infallibility and perfection. Science has always been 'in the making', and Oriental studies likewise has always been under constant revision, through a continuous endeavor to be self-critical, rooted in scientific rather than ideological foundations. Western studies on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry are a good example of such constant scientific effort in approaching past cultural heritage, establishing a truer picture of the author, his life and his mystical experience.

It is within the context of such scientific fervor to produce studies of Eastern civilizations that the work of the Austrian orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856) must be situated. He traveled a great deal in the East, acquiring a vast and deep knowledge of the countries he visited. When he returned from his travels, he dedicated himself to the organization of Oriental studies in his home country. Hammer-Purgstall supported the foundation of the *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Austrian Academy of Sciences) in Vienna, of which he became the first president (1847-1849). He had an extensive knowledge of Oriental literatures (Arabic, Persian, Turkish), and translated a number of works from oriental languages into German. He did the same work for Germany that Sir William Jones had done for England and Silvestre de Sacy for France.

Hammer-Purgstall was the first to edit and translate Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great mystical poem *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā* in 1854, based on a manuscript written in beautiful *nasta'liq* reproduced in the printed edition, using the font available at the Imperial Habsburg Hofdruckerei.¹⁶ He was a very knowledgeable scholar of Arabic literature in general, and also of Sufi works and Eastern mysticism. He clearly understood the mystical character of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem, as is evident from his introduction and the notes accompanying his work, in which he refers to a number of the commentaries he was able to read. Hammer-Purgstall points out that the main themes of the poem are divine love and knowledge, adding that such themes were unknown to Greek and Roman authors, but not to the Hindu and Biblical traditions. The ultimate goal of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi experience, as he understands it, is that the Sufi tries to become one with God, and in this way, he says: "The mystic, having become one with God, is all in all".¹⁷

Scholars have acknowledged that Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall deserves merit for being the first to undertake the work of editing and translating such a difficult text as that of *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*. His translation, however, proved not only to be far

16. VON HAMMER-PURGSTALL, Joseph, *Das arabische hohe Lied der Liebe, das ist Ibnol Fāriḍ's Tā'iyya*, in Text und Übersetzung zum ersten Male, (Wien: Kaiserl. und Königl. Hof-und-Staatdruckerei, 1854), pp. xxiv (intr.): 1-70 (trans. and notes), 1-53 (Arabic text).

17. VON HAMMER-PURGSTALL, *Das arabische hohe Lied der Liebe*, p. XVIII.

from satisfactory, it also turned out to be inaccurate in many instances. As a result he became the target of severe criticism on the part of many later scholars. The Italian orientalist Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872-1938), for example, states that Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall not only misunderstood or wrongly rendered an infinite number of points of the Arabic text — which he admits is beyond doubt a very difficult one — but also did not understand “...the organic structure of the whole, the logical connection of the different parts of the poem as well as the very nature of the doctrines expounded by Ibn al-Fāriḍ in it”.¹⁸ After him, the British orientalist Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868-1945) remarked that “To transcribe is one thing, to translate is another; and as ‘translation’ of a literary work usually implies that some attempt has been made to understand it,...”.¹⁹ Finally, Nicholson’s disciple Arthur John Arberry (1905-1973) laconically approved his master’s remarks saying that it was: “...a fair verdict on a brave failure”.²⁰

1.7. 1874: Pietro Valerga’s Italian Translation of the *Minor Poems*

From the second half of the XIXth century to the beginning of the XXth century further attempts were made to translate Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poems. Among the most remarkable works carried out at that time on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poems was that of the Florentine orientalist Pietro Valerga (1821-1903). Pietro Valerga was a Carmelite friar and the librarian of the Medici Library (Biblioteca Medicea Laurentiana) in Florence, from which he amassed a vast knowledge of Oriental texts. He was the first to translate the ‘minor poems’ of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *Dīwān*, i.e. all the poems except the great *Tā’iyya*, into Italian in 1874.²¹ Pietro Valerga based his translation on a number of editions of the Arabic text that were being published at that time, the most remarkable among which was the text of the minor odes of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *Dīwān* published by sheikh Rushayd Daḥdāḥ (d. 1889) in Marseille in 1853.²²

18. NALLINO, Carlo Alfonso, “Il poema mistico di Ibn al-Fāriḍ in una recente traduzione italiana”, *La rivista degli studi orientali*, VIII (1919-1920): 1-106; in *Raccolta di scritti editi ed inediti*, (Roma: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1940), vol. II, 192.

19. NICHOLSON, Reynold A., “The Odes of Ibnu’l-Fariḍ”, translated and annotated, in *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 188-189.

20. ARBERRY, Arthur John, *The Poem of the Way*, translated and annotated, (London: E. Walker, 1952), 7.

21. VALERGA, Pietro, *Il divano di ‘Omar Ben-al-Fare’d*, tradotto e paragonato col canzoniere del Petrarca coi tipi di M. Cellini e C. (Firenze 1874); Francesco Gabrieli (d. 1996) wrote a review of the work, demonstrating that Valerga completely misunderstood the difference between the Arab mystic and the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca; see Francesco Gabrieli, ‘Petrarca e gli arabi’, in *Testimonianze arabe e europee*, (Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 1976), 41-48.

22. AL-DAHDĀH, Rushayd Ghālib (ed.), *Sharḥ dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, (Marseille: Maṭba‘at Arnūd, 1853). This edition contains the minor poems of the *Dīwān* with the commentary of al-Ḥasan al-Būrīnī

Valerga introduces his work with a strange story, intended to surprise the reader. He says that the Italian love poet Francesco Petrarca (d. 1374), who lived more than a century after the Egyptian poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ, was actually the re-incarnation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's spirit. Valerga supports his statement by quoting and comparing several passages from both poets in which the same ideas, images and expressions of sensuous love are evident, which for him serve as evidence for his startling contention. It is clear, nonetheless, that Valerga did not mean his story to be taken as actually true. He only wanted to point to an old and much debated question, i.e. the influence of Arabic poetry on the beginnings of European literature, an influence that reached its climax during the reign of the Emperor Frederick II von Hohenstaufen (1194–1250) in Sicily. In fact, Valerga concludes, "...because after all, the priority of the origins, and particularly that of poetry, has been always recognized in the Orient".²³

Strangely enough, it seems that no one who later commented on Pietro Valerga paid attention to his last statement, in which he reveals the real intention of his strange story. Most commentators understood it to imply that Valerga did in fact believe in the re-incarnation of the spirit of the Egyptian Sufi in the Florentine poet.

After Valerga's translation one finds a number of translations of some verses from Ibn al-Fāriḍ's minor poems into French, as parts of anthologies of Arabic literature, such as those of V. Jamati, Ferdinand De Martino, Bichara Fracaire, and Louis Machuel (1848-1922).²⁴

Remark

It is obvious that by the end of the XIXth c. knowledge of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience was still very tentative. Little by little the translation of several poems from his *Dīwān* was carried out, but their true meaning was not yet fully explored. As a result, scholars were still far removed from a deep, scientific knowledge of his text, language and mystical experience. A great deal of work thus lay ahead.

(d. 1024/1615) and *excerpta* from that of 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731). Many printings of Daḥdāḥ's edition have been made since the first.

23. Valerga, "...chè al postutto la priorità delle origini e in ispecial modo della poesia fu sempre riconosciuto all'Oriente", *Il divano*, 39.
24. V. Jamati, in *Le monde poétique*, 1886; DE MARTINO, Ferdinand & SAROIT, Abdel Khalek Bey, *Anthologie de l'amour arabe*, (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1902), 259-264; Bichara Fracaire, *Umar ben al-Fāriḍ, ou œuvre poétique du très célèbre cheik Umar ben al-Fāriḍ; poète soufi ou mystique*, traduit en français, (Paris, Ch. Carrington, 1908); Louis Machuel, *Les auteurs arabes. Pages choisies des grands écrivains*, avec une introduction de L. Machuel, (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1912).

2. STUDIES ON IBN AL-FĀRIḌ'S SUFI POETRY IN THE XXTH CENTURY.

The twentieth century witnessed further developments in the oriental sciences. The Arabic and Islamic world was extensively studied in every domain. A number of scholars began to produce the first great manuals in which Sufism was presented according to the new orientalist science, contradicting in many instances images from the past concerning the East and the West. Many of these scholars dedicated much of their energy to the study of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*.

2.1. 1917: Di Matteo's Study and Translation of the Great *Tā'iyya*

One has to wait the beginning of the XXth century to find another serious attempt to translate Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great *Tā'iyya* into a European language. This attempt was carried out by the Italian orientalist Ignazio Di Matteo (1872-1948), who published a learned translation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great *Tā'iyya* in 1917.²⁵ Di Matteo was a Catholic priest and had already produced some positively received research on the religious controversies between Christian and Muslim scholars in Spain and Baghdad.

Di Matteo introduces his translation with a long exposition on Islamic mysticism (pp. 1-105). His basic idea is that in Islam there are two fundamental types of mysticism.

The first, which he calls 'orthodox' mysticism (corresponding to what is known as Sunni Sufism), was inspired in his view by Christian monasticism. This type of mysticism is nothing more than a kind of ascetic life, common to many religions. Such asceticism remains within the limits of the revealed law, accepting at most a kind of 'vision of God', but it sharply excludes any idea of union with God.

The second type of mysticism, which Di Matteo calls 'heterodox', was inspired in his view by Neo-platonic and Hindu philosophies, as well as by similar Christian mystical trends. The basic idea of such mysticism is that there is only One Supreme Being called God, or whatever alternatives are used in different languages. All the multitude of beings that we see in the universe have no real existence in themselves; they are mere manifestations or pure *phenomena* of that One, Supreme Being. The purpose of mysticism is to make the plurality of beings return to Unity. Consequently, human beings, who are the most perfect image of God, must likewise return, merge and disappear in the original Unity: the One and All of Neo-platonic philosophy. Di Matteo sees in Ibn al-'Arabī's monistic philosophy the most perfect expression of such a monistic vision in Islam. His mysticism is known in Arabic as the Sufism of

25. DI MATTEO, Ignazio (transl.), *Ibn al-Fāriḍ. Il gran poema mistico noto col nome di At-Tā'iyyah al-kubrā*, [tradotto e commentato, autograph], Roma, 1917.

'unity of being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Moreover, he affirms that Ibn al-Fāriḍ not only took his mystical ideas from Ibn al-'Arabī's monistic philosophy, dressing them in a brilliant poetical form, but he was actually a disciple of the Andalusian sufi master. With this understanding of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's sufism, and with the help of some Arabic commentaries, such as that of al-Kāshānī (d. 730/1330), who belonged to Ibn al-'Arabī's school, Di Matteo translated and interpreted Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Tā'iyya*.

His translation triggered a heated controversy with another famous Italian orientalist, Carlo Alfonso Nallino. On the basis of his extensive acquaintance with Arabic literature and civilization, Nallino sharply criticized Di Matteo's translation and interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem on many points, supporting his view by a highly scholarly analysis of a great number of verses. Di Matteo answered back, defending his own interpretation in an article that was the last thing he wrote on this subject.²⁶

In spite of the quite evident limits of Di Matteo's work, appropriately highlighted by Nallino's critical remarks, one has to grant his work the merit of having been the first serious attempt to understand Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience based on a more complete approach to his text and sources, in an effort to offer a more faithful translation of his verses. Di Matteo has also the merit of having renewed the interest within Western scholarship for the great Egyptian Sufi poet and for having clarified many aspects of his mysticism. Di Matteo must also be credited with the first attempt to draw up a sort of critical edition of the Fāriḍian text, based on a comparison between its different editions. In a word, his edition was the first attempt to present a critical edition of the Fāriḍian text. He also developed an accurate system of transcription of Arabic letters into Latin script, using diacritical signs that were later to be adopted by many other orientalists.

2.2. 1919-1920: Nallino's Critical Essays and Translation

Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872-1938), one of the most renowned Italian orientalists in the first half of the XXth century, wrote on Ibn al-Fāriḍ on two occasions. The first was in the years 1919-1920, when he published two articles in the controversy with Di Matteo.²⁷ Later on, he himself started to translate Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great *Tā'iyya*, but

26. Id., "Sulla mia interpretazione del poema di Ibn al-Fāriḍ", *La rivista degli studi orientali* VIII (1919-1920): 479-500.

27. NALLINO, Carlo Alfonso, "Il poema mistico di Ibn al-Fāriḍ in una recente traduzione italiana", *La rivista degli studi orientali*, VIII, (1919-1920): 1-106, in *Raccolta di scritti editi ed inediti*, (Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1940), vol.II, 191-287; Id., "Ancora su Ibn al-Fāriḍ e la mistica musulmana", in *La rivista degli studi orientali*, VIII (1919-1920): 501-562, in *Raccolta di scritti editi ed inediti*, (Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1940), vol.II, 289-343.

unfortunately he was unable to finish his work (he translated up to v. 404). His partial translation was posthumously published by his daughter, Maria Nallino.²⁸

Carlo Alfonso Nallino studied and explored many aspects of Arabic and Islamic civilization, especially in the field of history. He was invited with other Western orientologists (such as Louis Massignon) to teach in Cairo University, newly founded in 1908, and his lectures were much appreciated for their scientific and objective approach. In his controversy with Di Matteo, Nallino introduced a vast scholarship and profound knowledge of many fields of Arabic language and literature, and Islamic civilization. For this reason, it is all the more regrettable that he could not complete his translation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great *Tā'iyya*, which would surely have been a significant contribution to Ibn al-Fāriḍ studies.

Nallino criticizes many points of Di Matteo's approach. First of all, he remarks that Di Matteo neglected the substantial differences existing between Ibn al-Fāriḍ's sufism and Plotinus' philosophy. The idea of God present in both is quite different: God is personal in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's vision, derived from his Islamic faith; while in Plotinus' philosophy, God is impersonal, as the Absolute One beyond all qualification. Besides, there is no trace in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses of Plotinus' emanation system. In addition, the mystical experience of the two is also quite different: intellectual and rational in Plotinus, emotional and sentimental in Ibn al-Fāriḍ.

As to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's relationship with his contemporary Sufi Ibn al-'Arabī, Nallino points to the many and important differences existing between the two Muslim Sufis. Ibn al-'Arabī offers a highly sophisticated philosophical speculation, imbued with complicated cosmological and psychological speculations, nothing of which can be found in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem. Besides, no historical evidence can be found proving that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was an actual disciple of Ibn al-'Arabī.²⁹ As to the similarities found between the two Sufis, they can be easily explained, in Nallino's view, by referring to the common Sufi background of ideas and speculations that had already developed and spread in Sufi circles of their time, i.e. the first half of the VIIth/XIIIth c.

Finally, Nallino sharply criticizes Di Matteo's rigid pantheistic interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem. He remarks, first of all, that Di Matteo did not pay attention to

28. Id., "Frammento di traduzione dell'*at-Tā'iyyah al-kubrā* di Ibn al-Fāriḍ (vv.1-404)", in *Raccolta di scritti editi ed inediti*, (Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1940), 1940, vol. II, 344-385.

29. Carlo Alfonso Nallino claims to have direct information from one of the best scholars of Ibn al-'Arabī, the Spanish Asin Palacios, who confirmed that Ibn al-'Arabī never mentions Ibn al-Fāriḍ in his works: see NALLINO, Carlo Alfonso, "Ancora su Ibn al-Fāriḍ", 505-506; in *Raccolta*, 292-293. However, one cannot exclude in principle that Ibn al-Fāriḍ might have heard of Ibn al-'Arabī, since latter had become quite a renowned Sufi in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's time. Nevertheless, no clear allusion to Ibn al-'Arabī can be found in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems. On the contrary, some important differences of language can be found between the two. This fact seems to exclude that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was a direct disciple of Ibn al-'Arabī.

the language difference between the two Sufis: that of Ibn al-Fāriḍ poetical, and that of Ibn al-'Arabī rather philosophical. One cannot possibly identify the two languages, explaining the first through the second, as Di Matteo does. Besides, Di Matteo did not consider the peculiar language used by mystics of all religions when they reach the highest state of their mystical experience, i.e. that of union and ecstasy. In such a state, mystics lose awareness of their individual 'self' and speak in a state of 'unity with God', uttering expressions that may sound heretical to our common understanding. This type of language had already been known and studied in Islamic mysticism before Ibn al-Fāriḍ, in Sufis such as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874–5) and al-Ḥusayn Ibn Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). They became famous for their *shataḥāt* (theopathic locutions), thus designated because the Sufi utters words in them on God's behalf, i.e. as if God were the only real speaker in and through him. Thus, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems should be understood, in Nallino's view, as a kind of long ecstatic *shataḥāt*. The pantheistic expressions contained therein should be understood as merely 'verbal' and not as 'real' pantheism.

Turning to Di Matteo's translation, Nallino points out the many misunderstandings of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses he found in it. Here, Nallino was able to use his profound knowledge of Arabic language and literature to the full.

One may disagree on many points with Nallino's remarks. Nevertheless, one has to recognize that he has provided a substantial contribution, both at linguistic and theoretical level, towards a better understanding of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience. This is what later scholars such as Nicholson and Arberry have always accredited to him. However, on one particular point we do disagree with Nallino's view, i.e. his statement that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's entire poem should be considered as a sort of Sufi *shataḥāt*. Based on the semantic-linguistic analysis we carried out on the poem, it seems quite clear that it is an extremely elaborate poetical composition, accomplished with consummate skill at both the linguistic and conceptual levels. This is not the case with respect to the Sufi *shataḥāt*, which are usually short, disconnected, and many times shocking utterances that are difficult to interpret.

2.3. 1921: Nicholson's Translation and Commentary

After Nallino, the British orientalist Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868-1945),³⁰ considered one of the leading scholars in the field of Oriental sciences, produced the first

30. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868-1945) was an eminent English orientalist, a scholar of both Islamic literature and Islamic mysticism, and was widely regarded as one of the greatest Rumi scholars and translators in the English language. Nicholson became a lecturer in the Persian language (1902–26) and Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge (1926–1933). He is considered a leading

English translation of some poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ and of almost two thirds of his *Tā'iyya*. Nicholson also had access to some of the most important Arabic commentaries on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem, namely those of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d.730/1330), al-Ḥasan al-Būrīnī (d.1024/1615), and 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1730). There is no doubt that Nicholson's work offered an extremely important contribution to our understanding of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufism.³¹

Nicholson also disagrees with the commonly accepted view held by Arab commentators and some orientalists, and agrees with Nallino's position in denying any direct influence of Ibn al-'Arabī's mystical philosophy on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetical Sufism. No direct meeting or acquaintance between the two Sufis can be historically demonstrated; thus, he laconically concludes: "...the two seem never to have met".³²

Moreover, and as Nallino did before him, Nicholson points out that the terminologies of the two Sufis are quite different: "Unlike Jílí, Ibnu 'l-Fāriḍ shows no sign of acquaintance with Ibnú 'l-'Arabī's philosophical terminology or, as far as I have observed, of being directly influenced by him in any considerable degree".³³ Therefore, one cannot read in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetical verses the complicated ontological, cosmological and psychological concepts and terminology of Ibn al-'Arabī, as has been done by many ancient commentators and modern scholars.

As to the question whether Ibn al-Fāriḍ was a true pantheist or not, Nicholson is very careful in his answer. Firstly, he points to the difficulty of translating poetical language into philosophical language. Secondly, he admits that in his own translation he has followed al-Kashānī's commentary for the most part, remarking: "...nevertheless I consider his [al-Kashānī's] interpretation as representing a point of view which is alien to Ibnú 'l-Fāriḍ. Logically, the mystical doctrine of *ittiḥād* (*Einswerden*) leads to the pantheistic monism of Ibnú 'l-'Arabī; but those who find in the *Tā'iyya* a poetical version of that system are confusing mysticism with philosophy".³⁴ In spite of such a clear statement, Nicholson admits that he followed al-Kashānī's commentary in his translation, stating: "I consider therefore that al-Kashānī's interpretation,

scholar in Islamic literature and Islamic mysticism who exercised a lasting influence on Islamic studies. Id., *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, edited from the oldest manuscripts available, with critical notes, translation and commentary by Reynold A. Nicholson, in 8 volumes, (London: Messrs Luzac & Co., 1925-1940). This edition contains the text of the text of the *Mathnawí* in Persian with the first complete translation into English.

31. NICHOLSON, Reynold Alleyne, "The Odes of Ibnú 'l-Fāriḍ", 162-266.

32. NICHOLSON, *Studies*, 164.

33. *Ibid.*, 193, note 2.

34. *Ibid.*, 193.

false to the spirit of the poem, places it [the poem] in a medium intelligible to us and conveys its meaning in a relatively adequate form".³⁵

Then, in response to the basic question of whether Ibn al-Fāriḍ was a pantheist or not, Nicholson explains: "I do not think so. But in the permanent unitive state which he describes himself as having attained, he cannot speak otherwise than pantheistically: he is so merged in the Oneness that he identifies himself now with Mohammed (the Islamic Logos), now with God, whose attributes he assumes and makes his own".³⁶ On this same point Nicholson agrees with Nallino, considering Ibn al-Fāriḍ's pantheism to be verbal rather than real, and thus contradicting a long tradition of commentators and scholars who have read Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses in complete accord with Ibn al-'Arabī's monistic philosophy.

Finally, Nicholson explains that the basic idea underlying Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience is that of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*). This idea finds its highest expression in the theory of the spiritual "Pole" (*quṭb*), i.e. the Islamic Logos, whom Ibn al-Fāriḍ distinguishes from the terrestrial "Pole" (the head of the Sufi hierarchy). The state of the spiritual "Pole" is in Nicholson's words: "...a pure consciousness of being one with the Spirit, who as the perfect image of God, encompasses all things with his knowledge, power and glory".³⁷

There is no doubt that Nicholson's work remains a milestone among the studies of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mysticism. However, some critical remarks can be made with respect to his method. First of all, and as he himself admits, he closely follows al-Kashānī's commentary, although he theoretically disagrees with him. However, taking al-Kashānī's 'pantheistic' expressions as an elucidation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's 'difficult' language, Nicholson is actually translating Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetical language into a real pantheistic language. In fact, one finds that in his translation he usually renders Arabic terms such as *wujūd*, *dhāt*, *nafs*, *rūḥ* with terms like 'One Real Being, the Divine Essence, the Universal Spirit, the Universal Soule etc. These terms are actually taken from Neoplatonic philosophy, were widely used by Ibn al-'Arabī in his writings, and sound, no doubt, quite 'pantheistic'. In this way, however, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetical language becomes completely merged with that of Ibn al-'Arabī's monistic philosophy, being totally absorbed by the latter to the point that the two appear to have the same ideas. This is, as we have seen, one of the most disputed points of the interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry. According to Nicholson's view, it seems that there is no alternative but to read Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem 'pantheistically', as he states. For our part,

35. Ibid., 194.

36. Ibid., 194.

37. Ibid., 195.

we have tried to move beyond this dilemma through a different approach to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses i.e., through the semantic analysis of his language, as will be explained below. Such an analysis has demonstrated the possibility of understanding the terms of the poem, especially key-terms such as *wujūd*, *dhāt*, *nafs*, *rūḥ* very differently from Nicholson's translation, and closer to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's text.

Another point on which we part company with Nicholson's position is his acceptance of the story reported by Ibn al-Fāriḍ's grandson 'Alī *sibt* Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. ca. 735/1335). The story relates that the poet used to dictate his poem when awakening from discontinuous moments of deep ecstasy or trance (*wajd*).³⁸ Also Nallino affirmed that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses are to be considered as a kind of Sufi *shataḥāt*. On the contrary, our semantic analysis of the text has shown that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem is very well constructed and connected both at the linguistic and conceptual levels, and thus cannot possibly be the fruit of erratic and discontinuous moments of *trance*.

2.4. 1931: Émile Dermenghem's Translation of the *Khamriyya*

In 1931, ten years after Nicholson's work, the French scholar Émile Dermenghem (1892-1971) translated Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem, the *Khamriyya* into French, with the commentary of al-Nābulusī.³⁹

Émile Dermenghem introduces his translation with a lengthy exposition on Islamic Sufism in general, and that of Ibn al-Fāriḍ in particular (p. 9-103). On the whole, he follows the vision of Sufism presented by Louis Massignon (d. 1962) in his renowned treatise: *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (1922).⁴⁰ Dermenghem tries to find equivalences among the mystical experiences of all religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., to the point that differences seem to be reduced to only names. He highlights Ibn al-'Arabī's vision of the unity of religions (*waḥdat al-adyān*) (p. 53-57): God is a Reality beyond all limited forms of creeds, and the true religion is the religion of love.

38. Ibid., 167.

39. Émile Dermenghem (1892-1971) was a French orientalist and for a time director of the Algerian Library. He studied and translated many texts of Arabic literature and Sufism, and did a great deal of research into the traditions and folklore of Sufi brotherhoods in the Islamic Maghreb. He published an important study on the latter: *Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). He translated and commented Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Khamriyya*: Émile Dermenghem, *L'éloge du vin (al khamriyya), poème mystique de 'Omar Ibn al Faridh et son commentaire par 'Abdalghani an Nabolosi, traduits de l'arabe* (Paris: Les Éditions Vega, 1931).

40. MASSIGNON, Louis, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris: Geunther, 1922).

He presents and explains Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry, highlighting the latter's aesthetic inclination: "He (Ibn al-Fāriḍ) uses all the resources of erotic and Bacchic symbolism that had been well developed in Arabic poetry".⁴¹ He concludes by saying that the apex of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience is to see 'God in all and all in God'. Following Nicholson, he calls this experience 'panentheism' (i.e. to see God in all, equivalent to the classical 'unity of vision', i.e., *waḥdat al-shubūḍ*, to be distinguished from the 'philosophical pantheism' (i.e. God is really all, equivalent to the classical 'unity of being, i.e. *waḥdat al-wujūd*).

His bibliographical list reveals that he was well acquainted with everything produced in the East and the West on Islam and Islamic civilization.

One of the most impressive pages of Dermenghem's introduction is a realistic description of a Sufi *dhikr*, which he reports from a Sufi friend. In this description one can sense the profound influence of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry, even on the ordinary people of the Sufi brotherhoods, and how it can create an atmosphere of emotion and excitement to the point of ecstasy or trance. It is also well-known that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was a great supporter of such *ḍikr* sessions, against many jurists, in particular Taqiyy al-Dīn b. Taymiyya (d. 738/1338), who fought against it as an innovation, and therefore a heresy to be condemned and eradicated.

Here we quote a part of the text in its original language:

«Quand le nombre des faqirs est assez important, le *muqaddam* prend la *Risāla d'al-Qushayrī* (le 'livre-mère', ainsi qu'on l'appelle) ou un autre ouvrage du même genre et lit d'une voix très douce quelques passages en les commentant. Les faqirs posent des questions et discutent avec le *muqaddam* ou entre eux, mais avec beaucoup d'ordre et de calme. L'âme nourrie par cette lecture et ces discussions, on forme un cercle et le *dzikr* s'improvise sur la cadence d'un beau chant.

Le chanteur prend la précaution de ne pas moduler dès le début les vers d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ, le *Sultan des Amoureux*, de peur d'exciter trop brusquement l'extase des faqirs. D'autres poètes, comme Maqdisi, Chtouri, Baghdadi et al-Harraḡ, sont psalmodiés sur un rythme très lent; les assistants font un mouvement de va-et-vient d'avant en arrière, accompagnant le chant en répétant '*La ilah illa Llah*'. Les joues se colorent, les yeux se ferment chez les uns, chez les autres au contraire il s'écarquillent, le rythme s'accroît: on se lève d'un seul coup et '*La ilaha illa Llah*' est réduit à 'Llah' tout court.

On est debout. On écoute maintenant des vers d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ, mais seulement ceux d'un mysticisme peu accentué. Les faqirs s'excitent; ils commencent à danser. C'est alors que le chanteur passe insensiblement à des poèmes du *Sultān al-āshiqīn* d'un mysticisme de plus en plus profond.

Des '*huwā*', '*huwā*' déchirants partent de tous les côtés. Il n'est pas rare de voir un *musammi*' (chanteur), envahi par le souffle mystique que fait courir un vers d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ et pris par le '*ḥāl*', se mettre à danser. Les faqirs, assis hors du cercle et qui ne dansent pas pour une raison quelconque, accompagnent de mouvements modérés la cadence du

41. DERMENGHEM, *L'éloge*, 62.

dzikr. Souvent aussi, pénétrés par le sens d'un vers, il leur arrive de bondir précipitamment en poussant un cri de joie et de se mêler à la danse.

L'excitation s'accroît; on est en sueur, les turbans se dénouent, les têtes se renversent et les yeux hagards se dirigent vers le ciel, éblouis par la vision d'une lumière ineffable... Chose difficile, que dis-je, impossible à expliquer... La *Khamriyya* d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ a enivré les âmes. 'Huwa', 'Huwa'... Le souffle devient plus fort et plus précipité. Tout cela dans un ordre parfait et parfaitement rythmé. Le muqaddam, ou un autre faqir vénérable, au milieu du cercle, dirige le *dzikr*. S'il constate un relâchement chez les uns, il lance lui-même un vers sublime d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ, suivant la même mesure que le chanteur. Le distrait revient à lui, le harassé reprend courage. 'Huwa', 'huwa'... On n'entend plus maintenant que le souffle de la poitrine qui diminue de plus en plus. La faible créature s'anéantit devant Lui. Les *musammī'ūn* ne chantent plus ensemble. Chacun, à tour de rôle, chante un *mawāl*, d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ bien entendu. Qui peut se passer d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ? Les 'huwa' revivifient les cœurs. La sueur coule le long des visages. Les bouches s'ouvrent. Le chanteur lance alors: 'S'il s'absent de la prunelle de mon œil, Il est en moi! Il est en moi! Il est en moi! Huwa, huwa!' Un sourire embellit tous les visages: 'Il est en moi! Il est en moi! Huwa, huwa!'. C'est le *fanā'* complet. On n'existe plus. Ce 'Il est en moi!' fait frémir tout le monde, même ceux qui ne chantent pas ou qui passent par hasard dans la ruelle où se trouve la modeste *zāwiya*. Les jambes chancellent. On s'assoit enfin. Encore quelques beaux vers, notamment: 'Ah Si cela pouvait durer éternellement pour moi!'. 'On se salue de nouveau. On est heureux. On se sent l'âme plus légère...'»⁴².

2.5. 1952-1956: Arberry's edition and translation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*

In the 1950s, Arthur John Arberry (1905-1969), another outstanding British orientalist and a disciple of Nicholson, continued his master's work by editing, translating and commenting Ibn al-Fāriḍ's entire *Dīwān*.⁴³

As he himself reports, he had two reasons for engaging in this endeavor. The first was that during a trip to the East he had by chance come across the commentary of Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Farḡhānī (d. 699/1300), the oldest and more thorough commentary of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great *Tā'iyya*. The second was that he found what at that time was considered the oldest manuscript of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān* in the Chester Beatty Collection (Dublin) (Chester Beatty Collection, Arabic MS 3643).

42. DERMENGHEM, *L'éloge* 65-67; quoted by Robert Caspar, *Cours* 133.

43. Arthur John Arberry (1905-1969) was a prolific scholar of Arabic, Persian, and Islamic studies. For a time, he was head of the Department of Classics at Cairo University in Egypt, after which he returned home to become the Assistant Librarian at the Library of the India Office. Arberry was later appointed to the Chair of Persian at the School of Oriental and African Studies SOAS, University of London (1944-47). Subsequently, he became the Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University and a Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, his alma mater, from 1947 until his death in 1969. For his work on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān* see: Id., *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, edited in transcription from the oldest extant manuscript in the Chester Beatty Collection, Chester Beatty Monographs No. 4, (London: E. Walker, 1952); Id., *The Poem of the Way*, translated into English verse from the Arabic of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, in Chester Beatty Monographs No. 5, (London: Emery Walker, 1952); Id., *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, translated and annotated, in Chester Beatty Monographs No. 6, (Dublin: Emery Walker, 1956).

In a dense page at the beginning of his translation, Arberry summarizes what he thinks to be the main lines of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical vision.⁴⁴ At the center of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi vision there is the pre-eternal covenant (*mīthāq*) between God and human souls, mentioned in the Koran (7, 171). Human beings in that primal state have witnessed to God as their only Lord and have committed themselves to Him, denying all other masters and loyalties.

Thereafter, God created the Idea of Muḥammad, which corresponds to the Logos of the Greek and Christian philosophers, and: "Out of the Idea of Muḥammad, the Reality of Realities, the entire material universe was created; in that Idea, all things external to God have their being".⁴⁵

In his quest, the Sufi tries to realize in the present limited world and life his identity with the Spirit of Muḥammad, because only in him does the Sufi: "...attain full recognition of the Unity and Unicity of God".⁴⁶ In this way, the Sufi returns to his first origin, the pre-eternal covenant with God, to 'that state in which he was before he was' (according to al-Junayd's famous expression). But in order to return to that state of unity, the Sufi must undergo a complete annihilation (*fanā'*) of his individuality so as to exist (*baqā'*) only in and through God, i.e. in his attributes. This state is called in Sufi language 'union with God' (*wahdat, ittihād*).

However, Arberry continues, such a state of union does not last in this present life, but: "...it is a brief moment of glory, a sudden glimpse of celestial bliss won in ecstasy". Afterwards, "...the lover is separated a second time from his Beloved, and all the rest of his days he is yearning passionately for renewed, eternal union".⁴⁷ This, in Arberry's view, is the conceptual background against which Ibn al-Fāriḍ built his mystical experience and thus the key to understanding his poetical expressions.

Arberry had a vast knowledge of Arabic and Islamic literatures in almost every field, and through he was able to enrich his notes with learned comments and deep insights, which offer considerable assistance in understanding and appreciating Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry. Also for Arberry the central idea in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi experience is the union with the Idea of Muḥammad and through it with God and the whole creation. This ideological background is the same idea of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) proposed by Nicholson.

In our view, however, Arberry's statement on the Sufi union as just a momentary state of bliss seems to contradict what Ibn al-Fāriḍ himself says about the state of union. Such a union is rendered in the poem with a variety of terms, the highest

44. ARBERRY, *The Poem*, 75.

45. *Ibid.*, 75.

46. *Ibid.*, 75.

47. *Ibid.*, 75.

being *jam'*, described as a permanent state beyond all contradictions, variations and limits of time and space. Consequently, it is not a transitory state, bound to some particular circumstances. It must also be remarked that Arberry's translation and notes make extensive use of 'pantheistic' vocabulary, without saying that it is real. In any case, as was observed with respect to Nicholson's translation, such 'pantheistic' terminology does not help very much in a true understanding of the poem's contents. In our semantic analysis, in fact, we have indicated several passages in which we think Arberry has somehow misunderstood Ibn al-Fāriḍ's text.

It is worth noting that Arberry made a first comprehensive attempt at editing a critical edition of the poem's text, comparing different traditions, on the basis of the manuscript he discovered in the Chester Beatty Collection, which he considered to be the most ancient. His work has been very useful for our critical edition of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*, as will be demonstrated below.

2.6. 1953-1960: Louis Gardet on mysticism

Louis Gardet (1904-1986) dealt with Ibn al-Fāriḍ in three articles, the most important being the one published in his *Expériences mystiques en terres non-chrétiennes*.⁴⁸

Gardet starts with a short introduction on Islamic Sufism, remarking that it had already developed after al-Ḥallāj, and in particular in the VIIth/XIIIth c., in a trend of 'existential monism' (called in Arabic *waḥdat al-wujūd*), that had become dominant in Sufi circles of the time. He continues by saying that such 'existential monism' has many characteristics that make it near to the experience of *brahman-âtman* of Vedantic Indian philosophy. He states, moreover: "There is in it an already quite suitable terminology, very near to that of the Vedantic *brahman-âtman*, that, in the monistic Islamic ambience, will offer itself to the experience of Self".⁴⁹

In Gardet's view, Ibn al-Fāriḍ is clearly in the line of 'existential monism', and this is the substance of the state of union he describes: "So, Ibn al-Fāriḍ describes

48. Louis Gardet (1904-1986) was a French Roman Catholic religious brother and historian. He was an expert in Islamic culture and sociology, and developed a sympathetic view of Islam as a religion. In philosophical terms he was neo-Thomist, and a follower of the French philosopher Jacques Maritain (d. 1973), in Islamic studies he was a follower of Louis Massignon, and in religious life a follower of Charles de Foucauld (d. 1916). He focused his research on theology, Sufism and philosophy (Ibn Sīnā et al-Ghazālī), and was a life-long collaborator with the Dominican scholar Georges Shehata Anawati (d. 1994). His works on Sufism include: *Expériences mystiques en terres non-chrétiennes* (Paris: Alsatia, 1953); Id. and ANAWATI, Georges Shehata, *Mistica islamica*, (Torino: SEI, 1960); Id. & LACOMBE, Olivier, *L'expérience du Soi* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1981).

49. «Il y a là une formulation toute prête, assez proche du brahman-âtman vedantin, et qui va s'offrir, en climat monothéiste musulman, à l'expérience du Soi», GARDET, *Expériences*, 141.

this state as the suppression of all duality, as an identification (*ittihād*) in which the human personality is completely volatilized, to make room, ontologically, only for the divine Personality".⁵⁰ It is in this way that Gardet reads v. 162 of the *Tā'iyya*:

I was without doubt the One (masculine in Gardet, feminine in the *Tā'iyya*) I loved,
Therefore my 'I' was referring to my-self.

This verse is proof, in Gardet's view, that in the union Ibn al-Fāriḍ describes his own "I" is referring back to him-self, as if in an eternal circle. Gardet remarks that in al-Ḥallāj, on the contrary, the human "I" always remains open to the Divine "Thou", because he lives in a love relationship with Him, and not a self-reference of the his-self to the his-self. In a monistic vision, in fact, God is the only real being, and all other beings are but transitory modalities of the Divine Self. In the end: "God puts his Divine "I" in the place of the human "I"... and the identification goes on to the point at which the 'my-self' is indistinguishable from the Being called God".⁵¹ The empirical "self" is completely obliterated.

Gardet reads in this formulation the monistic language of the Vedantic formula: "The Self is Brahman": "In fact, in Ibn al-Fāriḍ, identification with God includes identification with the Spirit and the soul of all. There is a substitution of the universal 'I' in the place of the empirical one, and the poet describes with utmost pleasure the consequences of such an experience sought after and reached".⁵²

As we have seen in Nallino and Nicholson's studies, there are many passages in which Ibn al-Fāriḍ does use such monistic language, especially when he describes him-self as the "Pole" of the universe. Gardet adds that these verses are more than an explicit profession of panentheism, rather: "... they are a hyperbolic transcription of a state in which self-isolation strives for a completeness and a lived totality".⁵³

In his understanding, such mystical expressions re-echo similar formulations of Vedantic mysticism in which *ātman* (the hyper-conscious "I", or the Self) becomes omnipresent, immutable, omniscient, not-born and the unique real. But such a unifying experience is explained by Gardet as "... as an empowering of "Self" unified

50. «Or, Ibn al-Fāriḍ décrit cet état comme la suppression de toute dualité, comme une identification (*ittihād*) où la personnalité humaine est volatilisée, pour faire place, ontologiquement, à la Personnalité divine», *ibid.* 142.

51. «Dieu substitue son «Je» divin au «je» humain... l'identification va s'opérer jusqu'au point où le «moi» est indistinguishable de l'Être appelé Dieu», *ibid.* 144.

52. «De fait, chez Ibn al-Fāriḍ, l'identification avec Dieu englobe l'identification avec l'Esprit et l'âme du tout. Il y a substitution d'un «je» universel au moi empirique. Et le poète décrit avec une complaisance extrême les conséquences de l'identification recherchée et atteinte», *ib.* 145.

53. «...comme la transcription hyperbolique d'un état où l'esseulement tend à la complétude et à la totalité vécue», *ibid.* 146.

it-self, that cannot express it-self but by merging it-self with the All, uttering it-self as the All".⁵⁴

In Gardet's view, such an experience is quite different from that of al-Ḥallāj, in which the human "Self" always remains open to transcendence, to the encounter with God. This means: "Renouncing the isolating plenitude of Self for a dialogue and a union, a Divine inhabitation, that is a pure gift of grace".⁵⁵

Therefore, the mysticism of al-Ḥallāj — and of those similar to him — is a mysticism of transcendence in which the sense of the difference between God and the human being is always upheld, while that of Ibn al-Fāriḍ and of Ibn al-'Arabī and of other monistic mystics is a mysticism of immanence. Such a tendency is, in Gardet's view, a constant and almost intrinsic danger to the various monistic trends in India as well as in Islam. In these trends, the attempt to reach back towards the ontological sources of one's own being stops at the experience of one's own "Self", i.e. at the pure act of existing and its ontological richness. But then the temptation arises to make such an act absolute, and to ask it to extinguish: "... that thirst of union with God, the personal and transcendent, that the believer carries in his heart".⁵⁶

For this reason Gardet sees that in order to escape the danger of immanence one has to transcend one's own self through a supernatural and transcendent act of faith and love: only such an act can lead the mystic to open his "Self" in love to God and his neighbor. This is the basic orientation of Christian mysticism.

It goes without saying that Gardet's reflections on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience and his comparative intuitions with other similar experiences (especially with those from Indian religions) have introduced new insights and new perspectives for a deeper understanding of the Fāriḍian experience.

From our point of view, we can see that there is a certain agreement between Gardet's reflections on the "Self" as the centre of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience, and our linguistic analysis of the text in which the *anā* of the poet appears as the absolute centre of his vocabulary and therefore of his inner world.

However, Gardet's pointed statement on 'existential monism' as the central point of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's and its identification with the *ātman* in the Vedantic tradition should be treated with more caution. Nallino and Nicholson have already warned against taking poetic expressions as philosophical definitions. Poetry is not philosophy, and its interpretation through philosophy can lead to a multitude of misunderstandings.

54. «...comme un ressourcement du soi en lui-même unifié, et que ne peut s'exprimer que se confondant avec le Tout, en se disant le Tout», *ibid.* 146.

55. «Renoncer à la plénitude isolante du Soi, pour un dialogue et une union, une inhabitation divine, qui est un pur don de grâce», *ibid.* 147.

56. «...cette soif d'union au Dieu personnel et transcendant que le croyant porte en son cœur», *ibid.* 148.

Remark

In conclusion, the orientalists of the first part of the XXth c. continued to deepen our understanding of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry. Based on extensive information from classical Arabic and Islamic sources, orientalists studied Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience in light of the broader context of oriental studies. One can see from these studies that Orientalism was not just a fixed set of prejudices (an idea still common among many scholars), but it was a profound study of Oriental civilizations on the basis of ever-new scientific approaches, continually progressing as time went on.

In spite of all this research, however one has to admit that orientalists in general have not gone very far beyond the traditional vision of the poet and his Sufi world. For them, the classical Sufi commentaries, most of which came from Ibn al-'Arabī's school and his monistic philosophy, were still the primary sources of information and for their interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry. It is true to say that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufism has been thoroughly investigated and his poems translated and commented on many times over. Nonetheless, the picture of the poet has not changed much from its traditional profile. A more critical approach has to be developed and applied to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry in order to reach a better understanding of his mystical experience. New aspects had to be explored and new investigation to be done.

3. RECENT STUDIES: END OF THE XXTH AND THE BEGINNING OF THE XXIST CENTURY

At the end of the XXth century and the beginning of the XXIst, new approaches have appeared that renew the traditional picture of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's life and his mystical experience.

3.1. New Biographical Approaches: Issa J. Boullata, Thomas Emil Homerin, Giuseppe Scattolin

A number of scholars started questioning the biographical data of the Sufi poet handed down by the poet's grandson, 'Alī *sibt* Ibn al-Fāriḍ and basically accepted by all.

In 1981, a Canadian scholar of Palestinian origin Issa J. Boullata (1929-) published an article on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's biography in which he adopts a more critical approach to the traditional hagiographical accounts as recorded by the poet's grandson in his *dībāja*, beginning to question their trustworthiness.⁵⁷ Indeed, after a thorough critical

57. BOULLATA, Issa J., "Toward a Biography of Ibn al-Fāriḍ (576-632 AH/1181-1235 AD)", *Arabica* 28/1 (1981): 38-56.

analysis of the latter, Boullata expunged a considerable amount of material he considered apocryphal, written in the style of 'the exaltation of the sheykh' (*ta'zīm al-shayḥ*), a common trait in Sufi literature.

Some years later, in 1994, Thomas Emil Homerin (1955-), professor of Arabic studies at Rochester University (USA), edited the most complete account of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's life, starting from the account's beginning and tracking it through history up to the present day.⁵⁸

Homerin carried out an extensive and thorough inquiry into Ibn al-Fāriḍ's biographical sources using all the available documents, many of which are still in manuscript. He focused in particular on the changing image of Ibn al-Fāriḍ according to various contextual readings. In the early days it appears that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was perceived in the first instance as an outstanding poet. Later on, however, he was considered much more as a venerated saint (*walī*), protector of his country, Egypt, and his shrine played an important role in Egyptian history. In modern Arabic literature Ibn al-Fāriḍ is likewise mentioned as a saint on occasion and also as an inspired poet, as one can see in some of Naguib Mahfuz's novels, such as *The Thief and the Dogs* (اللص والكلاب) (1961).

In a parallel biographical critical study, I added some additional material to Thomas Emil Homerin's work, taken from other biographical sources on Ibn al-Fāriḍ, thus completing the historical picture of the Sufi poet.⁵⁹

As a result, one can say that we have now reached a truer picture of the Egyptian Sufi poet, and managed to put him in a more realistic historical context, far removed from hagiographical exaggerations and fantasies.

3.2. New Translations of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Poems: Jean-Yves l'Hôpital and Thomas Emil Homerin

In line with renewed interest in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poetry, the French scholar Jean-Yves l'Hôpital, published a translation of the minor odes from Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān* in 2001.⁶⁰ L'Hôpital starts with a general introduction to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's life and Sufi poetry and then provides a translation of 26 poems, basing himself on the

58. HOMERIN, Thomas Emil, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Fāriḍ, His Verse and His Shrine*, (Columbia - South Carolina-USA: University of South Carolina Press, 1994, (2nd ed., Cairo - New York: The American University, 2001).

59. SCATTOLIN, Giuseppe, "More on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Biography", *MIDEO* 22 (1995) 197-242.

60. L'HOPITAL, Jean-Yves, *Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ - Poèmes mystiques*, traduits et commentés, (Damas: Institut Français De Damas - IFEAD, 2001); (2nd ed., Damas: Institut français du Proche-Orient - IFPO, 2008).

traditional editions (he says that he had access also to the manuscript of Konya, found in the library Yusufağa Kütüphanesi) and commentaries, especially those of Hasan al-Būrīnī (d. 1024/1615) and of 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731). The explanations he provides are quite useful for a proper understanding of the poems.

In the same year, 2001, Thomas Emil Homerin published a translation of two poems of Ibn al-FāriḌ: *Wine Ode (al-Khamrīya)* and *Poem of the Sufi Way (Ode in T Major, Naẓm al-sulūk / al-Tā'īya al-kubrā)*. His introductions and notes are likewise very useful in offering readers a grasp of the mysteries of Ibn al-FāriḌ's Sufi experience.⁶¹

3.3. A New Edition and Interpretation of Ibn al-FāriḌ's Sufi poetry: Giuseppe Scattolin

a. *A Semantic approach*

For my part, I have dedicated many years to the study of Ibn al-FāriḌ's Sufi poetry. I started by studying his great poem *al-Tā'īyya al-Kubrā* from a semantic point of view in order to determine its inner structure and highlight the textual meaning of its terms, thus trying to achieve a more accurate interpretation of Ibn al-FāriḌ's Sufi experience. As we have seen, such problems have not been adequately resolved in the past, and most scholars, ancient and modern, have resorted to Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi concepts and terms in order to understand Ibn al-FāriḌ's Sufi experience. We have observed that Ibn al-FāriḌ's experience was thus often misinterpreted and absorbed into that of the 'Great Sufi Master' (*al-shaykh al-akbar*).

On the basis of linguistic evidence, I was able to demonstrate that, contrary to this long biographical and commentary tradition, Ibn al-FāriḌ's vocabulary and, therefore, his Sufi experience appear to be quite independent from any direct influence on the part of Ibn al-'Arabī's monistic philosophy. As a consequence of this linguistic approach, I started reviewing some traditional commentaries on the Egyptian poet, starting with that of Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Fargānī (d. 699/ 1299), which is the oldest and one of the most important, in order to outline the difference existing between Ibn al-FāriḌ's language in his *Dīwān* and the interpretations given throughout history, especially by the scholars belonging to Ibn al-'Arabī's school, following the Sufi vision of the 'Great Sufi Master' (*al-shaykh al-akbar*).⁶²

61. HOMERIN, Thomas Emil (ed.), *Umar Ibn al-Farid - Sufi Verse, Saintly Life*, The Classic of Western Spirituality, (New York: Paulist Press, 2001).

62. My researches on Ibn al-FāriḌ's mystical experience are the following: SCATTOLIN, Giuseppe, *L'esperienza mistica di Ibn al-FāriḌ attraverso il suo poema al-Tā'īyyat al-kubrā — Un'analisi semantica del*

b. *A Critical Edition of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Dīwān*

In 1994, I came across the oldest manuscript of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān* by chance in Konya (Turkey), to be dated between 640-673/1242-1274. This manuscript contains the same number of odes existing in the Chester Beatty Collection (Dublin) manuscript, published by Arthur John Arberry in 1952. The text of the *Dīwān* found in these two manuscripts is different from the one transmitted by the poet's grandson, 'Alī *sibṭ* Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. ca. 735/1335), and basically accepted as the true textual tradition thereof. The need to revise the text of the *Dīwān* now became imperative.

I based my edition on the most ancient eight Mss. of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*, starting with that of Konya, and covering the first two centuries of the transmission of the text. They are its first and most reliable witnesses.

I then compared these first witnesses of the text of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān* with thirteen of the most important modern editions, ending with the last critical edition compiled by 'Abd al-Khāliq Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Khāliq (d. 2006), Cairo, 1984.⁶³

The reader is thus offered a fairly comprehensive view of the way the text of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Diwān* has been read, interpreted and transmitted through time. Only on such historically solid foundations, or perhaps better said, on such textual archeology, can a new reading of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Diwān* be possible, based on a careful and intelligent choice from among its 'historical' readings. In conclusion, the critical edition of the text is offered as a starting point for a new and more scientific approach to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Diwān*.

c. *Some Results of the Semantic Analysis of al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*

Through the application of semantics analysis to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Tā'iyya* I believe I have reached a deeper understanding of its vocabulary, and thus of the mystical experience of the poet. This can be summarized as follows.

poema, (Roma: PISAI, 1986), 3 vols., (it is the basic study of his language); summarized in Id., "The Mystical Experience of 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ or the Realization of Self (*Anā*, I), *The Muslim World*, LXXXII/3-4 (July-October, 1992): 275-286; Id., "Realization of 'Self (*Anā*) in Islamic Mysticism: The Mystical Experience of 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ", *Mélanges de l'Université St-Joseph*, Tome IV (1995-1996) 1999: 119-148; Id., "The Experience of the Divine in the Poetry of the Egyptian Sufi Poet 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (576/1181-632/1235)", in *Representations of the Divine in Arabic Poetry*, edited by Gert Borg and Ed de Moor, *Orientalia* 5, (Amsterdam - Atlanta (GA): Edition Rodopi, 2001), 85-118; Id., "Al-Farghānī's Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Mystical Poem *al-Tā'iyyat al-kubrā*", in *MIDEO* 21 (1993), 331-38, (a study of the most ancient commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's great mystical Poem *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*, belonging to a disciple of Ibn al-'Arabī).

63. On the story of my research, see: SCATTOLIN, Giuseppe, "The Oldest Text of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*. A Manuscript of Yusufaga Kütüphanesi of Konya", *MIDEO* 24 (2000) 81-111; Id., "Towards a Critical Edition of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Diwān*", *Annales islamologiques* 35 (2001) 503-547; and the critical edition of the *Dīwān*: Id., *The Dīwān of Ibn al-Fāriḍ — Readings of Its Text Throughout History*, a critical edition by Giuseppe Scattolin, (Le Caire: IFAO, 2004).

c.1. The Structure of the Poem

Ibn al-Fāriḍ describes his mystical experience as evolving through three main stages, which he explicitly names and describes. These are:

- i. *al-farq*: i.e. the stage of division, in which he experiences separation from his Beloved.
- ii. *al-ittihād*: i.e. the stage of absolute unity with his Beloved expressed through the following formulas: *anā hiya*, and then *anā iyyā-hā* (I am She), *hiya iyyā-ya* (She is I) and *anā iyyā-ya* (I am I, My-self)
- iii. *al-jam'*: i.e. the stage of universal union or synthesis of the One and the Many, the Self (*anā*) and the Whole.

It should be observed that these three stages follow each other and are interwoven throughout the poem in a continuous movement representing the progressive journey of the poet in an ever-deeper discovery of the dimensions of him-self, or of the true identity of his own Self (*anā*). This spiritual journey reaches its climax at the third stage, the stage of universal union (*jam'*) or the 'sea of universal union' (*biḥār al-jam'*), as the poet calls it.

The journey of self-discovery appears to be the true content of the poem and one has to grasp it in the midst of a profusion of images, symbols and allusions, used by a poet well acquainted with all the arts and skills of Arabic poetry.

c.2. Into The Seas of Universal Union (*jam'*)

Ibn al-Fāriḍ has been celebrated in Sufi literature as the 'Prince of Lovers' (*sultān al-āshiqīn*), as if love were the main topic of his mystical experience. But such an interpretation, in my view, is inaccurate. In his mystical journey, the poet says that he has passed far beyond both the stage of love (*ḥubb*) and the stage of absolute self-unity or identity (*ittihād*). His aim is the highest stage of universal union (*jam'*), which is his supreme goal and loftiest aspiration.

Plunged into the 'seas of universal union' (*biḥār al-jam'*), Ibn al-Fāriḍ gives expression to his extraordinary experience in an almost bewildering variety of terms and images, as if soaring in complete freedom into a world not subject to the usual laws of our daily experience. The stage of universal union (*jam'*) is evidently the apex of his mystical experience.

A careful semantic analysis of the terms used by Ibn al-Fāriḍ was all the more necessary in order to point out the specific meaning they have in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem and differentiate them from the meaning they have in Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophical Sufism. A great deal of confusion in this respect has been created both by ancient commentators and modern scholars, as we have seen above. I think that the semantic analysis has shed some new light on the meaning of these terms. I can indicate here only some of them.

Terms such as *wujūd-shuhūd*, *ittihād-jam'*, *nafs-rūḥ-dhāt* prove to have a different meaning in the language of the two Sufis. Ibn al-Fāriḍ's language is more poetical and experiential, while that of Ibn al-'Arabī is more philosophical and speculative. Ibn al-Fāriḍ uses these terms with a remarkable and very profound consistency, echoing their traditional usage in Arabic vocabulary and Sufi tradition. One can observe, in fact, that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's vocabulary in general refers to the traditional Sufi terminology found in some classical Sufi compositions such as the *Writings* of Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910) and in *al-risāla al-qushayriyya* of 'Abd l-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), more than in that of his contemporary Sufi, Ibn al-'Arabī. There is no passage in the *Tā'iyya* in which one could possibly read such Neo-platonic concepts as Divine Essence, Universal Spirit, Universal Soul, One and Absolute Being etc..

The poet eventually finds that all semantic fields are related to his *anā* (I, My-self). His I-Self is not only the source of everything, but is in everything, beyond all limits of space and time. The ultimate source of such an extraordinary and transcendent union is to be found in the reality of *jam'*, of which the poet is now fully conscious, as he declares (vv. 726):

“And I dived into the seas of *jam'* (*biḥār al-jam'*), nay, I plunged into it alone,
and brought out of it many peerless pearls (i.e. its extraordinary effects).

c.3. The experience of *anā* (I, My-self)

In a further step of our analysis, it became clear that the entire vocabulary of the *Tā'iyya* and its semantic fields is completely centered on the term *anā* (I, My-self), the pronoun of the first person, which thus emerges as the veritable focal word of the whole poem and the key to its interpretation. It is precisely on this term what has been called 'the structural genius' of the poem has been based, that is the key structure and mode for the true understanding of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience.

Based on our semantic analysis of the *Tā'iyya*, it seems quite evident that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience was built on his discovery and growing awareness of all the dimensions of his own "Self" (*anā*). This is the central concept and pivotal term on which the entire semantic vocabulary of the poem is centered and its semantic fields are interconnected. The primary traits of the *anā* of the poet, as he becomes all the more aware of its dimensions at the stage of *jam'*, can be summarized as follows:

- i. the poet's *anā* is said to have been present in the pre-eternal bond of friendship (*mīthāq al-walā'*), in which there was perfect identity between the witness and the witnessed one, i.e. the one who asked the question: *a lastu* (Am I not your Lord?), and those who answered: *balā* (Yes, indeed)! (K 7, 172).

- ii. the poet's *anā* is still continuously present as the permanent source of the effusion (*fayḍ, imdād*) of qualities and operations on the whole universe, that appear to be its own manifestations. In fact, in them the *anā* veils itself in order to unveil itself in the act of the true vision and unity (*shuhūd, ittiḥād*), discovering of its own identity (*dhāt*).
- iii. the poet's *anā* is the spirit (*rūḥ*), at work in the history of prophets and saints (*awliyā' - anbiyā'*), and the spirit is the bestower on them of their power of operating miracles and wonders (*karāmāt*). In reality, the poet discovers that it was his own *anā* that was sending and manifesting itself to itself throughout history.
- iv. In the end of the journey, in the stage of universal union (*jam'*), the *anā* of the poet, reaching the full awareness of its identity and dimensions, finds itself in everything and everything in itself. This transcendent experience leads the poet to utter expressions that have shocked many orthodox minds, but for the poet they were the only true and faithful utterance and disclosure of his own mystical state.

It should be observed that the reality of *anā*, central as it is in the poem, is never explicitly defined. The poet describes it in a variety of images and allusions that are never to be taken as philosophical definitions. Only two names are explicitly given to the reality of *anā* in the stage of *jam'*, namely: *al-quṭb* (the Pole) in vv. 500-1, and *mufīḍ al-jam'* (the bestower of union) in v. 751 (which clearly corresponds to *mufīḍ al-asrār*, i.e. the bestower of spiritual powers, explicitly said of Muḥammad in v. 625). No further definitions or explanations are provided for these names. It seems quite clear that Ibn al-Fāriḍ took for granted that such terms were familiar to the Sufi circles he was addressing.

As a matter of fact, the term "Pole" (*quṭb*) had a long history before Ibn al-Fāriḍ. Since the IIIrd/IXth c. of Islam, particularly with al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932), this term had already come to designate the highest degree of sainthood, or better, of friendship (*walāya*) with God, which was thought to have its source in what was designated as the "Muḥammadian Light" (*al-nūr al-muḥammadi*), and also the "Muḥammadian Reality" (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*), i.e. the "Islamic Logos", the eternal principle and goal of the whole creation and the perfect manifestation of the Divine qualities. This Muḥammadan Reality was believed to be operating and manifesting itself in the whole universe, and in particular, in the history of prophets and saints. It seems that Ibn al-Fāriḍ, by using the term "Pole" (*quṭb*) and by the qualifications he attributes to his own *anā*, intended to make an explicit reference to that Reality with which he, in his mystical ascension, had come to identify himself. This Reality, the poet declares, was the original source and the ultimate goal of his mystical quest.

These are just some elements of my work on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Great Tā'iyya*, and on this basis a new interpretation of his mystical experience can be elaborated.

3.4. 2012: Renate Jacobi; the Last Study on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Diwān*

A last attempt to translate and interpret Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience was carried out recently by Renate Jacobi, Professor of Arabic Literature at the Free University of Berlin⁶⁴.

Renate Jacobi's book is divided in two parts. The first contains the translation of fifteen odes from the *Diwān* (pp. 9-126). These poems form the first part of my critical edition of the *Diwān*, and Renate Jacobi is the first to make use thereof. The said fifteen odes appear in the most ancient manuscripts, and they must be considered the most reliable and authentic transmission of the text. In Jacobi's translation the poems of the second part of the *Diwān* are left out, since they appear to be later additions and their authenticity is somehow in doubt. Jacobi locates the two odes, the *Weinlied* — *al-Khamriyya* and *Die Ordnung des Weges* — *Nazm al-sulūk*, at the end of the list of the poems translated, since they represent a particular literary genre.

The second part of Jacobi's book consists of a lengthy commentary (*Kommentar*) on the *Diwān* (pp. 127-356) and is divided into two sections. The first is an Introduction (*Einführung*) to Ibn al-Fāriḍ as poet and mystic (p. 127-260), the second is a detailed comment (*Verskommentar*) on the translated poems (p. 261-356). The whole is followed by glossary, bibliography, and indexes (p. 357-407).

We shall now present a summary of some of the basic points of Jacobi's interpretation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ as poetical and Sufi experience.

a. *The Poetic Tradition*

After a short account of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's life and character, Jacobi describes first of all the influence the Arabic poetic tradition had on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry. The Arabic poetic tradition started in pre-Islamic times, and was continued and developed in later Arabic Islamic literature. Ibn al-Fāriḍ appears to be well acquainted therewith, in particular with the great Arab poet Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965), whom he tried to imitate in some of his poems.⁶⁵ In particular, two genres of Arabic

64. JACOBI, Renate, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ — Der Diwan — Mystische Poesie aus dem 13. Jahrhundert*, übersetzt und herausgegeben, (Berlin: Verlag der Religionen, 2012).

65. Abū al-Ṭayyib Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbī (in Arabic: أبو الطيب أحمد بن الحسين المتنبّي) (303/915–354/965) was an Arab Iraqi poet and is considered to be one of the greatest poets in the Arabic language. Much of his poetry revolves around praising the kings he visited during his lifetime. Al-Mutanabbi had great pride in himself through his poetry in which he deals with topics such as

poetry have been the main source of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetic inspiration: the erotic (called *nasīb*), and wine-song poetry (*khamriyyāt*).

From first genre, erotic poetry, Ibn al-Fāriḍ utilized in particular the genre of the 'pure love', called in Arabic the "udhrite love" (*al-ḥubb al-'udhri*). This had its highest hero in the famous character of Qays Ibn al-Mulawwah, of the tribe of Banū 'Āmir, called "Majnūn Laylā" (the "Mad of Laylā"), because of his absolute love for his beloved Laylā.⁶⁶ Here, Jacobi shows her deep knowledge of Arabic literature, and her explanations are particularly helpful in understanding the genre of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's love poetry. As is well-known, Sufis had already resorted to this genre of erotic poetry before him, and "Majnūn Laylā" had already become for them the highest symbol of the Sufi completely absorbed and annihilated in God, to the point of completely losing self-awareness. It seems too that the famous expression of al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) "*anā al-ḥaqq*" (I am the Absolute Truth), for which he was executed, was coined in accordance with the expression of 'Majnūn Laylā': *anā Laylā*. Ibn al-Fāriḍ's love poetry reveals itself to have been deeply influenced by such Arabic erotic poetry, as Jacobi demonstrates. In this way, a great many Ibn al-Fāriḍ's love expressions are put in a context that makes them more comprehensible. Another literary genre, the wine-songs (*khamriyyāt*), had likewise already been adopted by Sufis, using wine as the symbol of the Divine love by which they were completely intoxicated. From all this, one can observe the literary background through which Ibn al-Fāriḍ conveyed his mystical experience.

In light of this background, one can see that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's expressions always have a double layer of meaning. The first is more proximate, i.e. the literal meaning of his expressions; the second is more distant, i.e. the Sufi symbolic meaning of the same expressions. Ibn al-Fāriḍ reveals himself to be a very skillful master in using all the poetic expertise at his disposal to express his inner Sufi world through the symbols of love and intoxication. In fact, as we have seen above, the first Western scholars read Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems as purely erotic poems, in line with the standards of Arabic erotic literature.

courage, philosophy of life, description of battles, as well as love, beauty and generosity. Many of his poems were and still are widely read in today's Arab world and are considered to be proverbial.

66. Qays ibn al-Mulawwah (قيس بن الملوّح) is a semi-historical character, born in Northern Arabia into the tribe of Banū 'Āmir, in the time of the Umayyads, the 1st/VIIIth c.. Qays becomes insane out of love for a girl of his tribe called Laylā, whom, according to the Bedouin tradition, he could not approach. This was the reason for his madness and for his nickname *Majnūn Laylā* (مجنون, lit. "possessed", so "possessed by Laylā"). A number of love poems are attributed to him that have become very popular in Arabic literature, and have also been used by Sufis to express their absolute love for God, the true and unique Beloved.

b. *The Mystical Tradition*

In Jacobi's view, the other factor that influenced Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry was the mystical tradition of Islam, or Sufism. Jacobi observes that in the history of Sufism there are two basic tendencies: one termed 'sober, rational' and the other 'ecstatic, intoxicated'.

b.1. 'Sober Sufism' (*ṣaḥw*)

In this trend, the Sufi is always in control of himself, trying to find an accord between the ascetic, spiritual experience and the official law (*sharī'a*) of the Islamic community. This serves as the criterion for validity of Sufis' internal experience.

b.2. 'Intoxicated Sufism' (*sukr*)

In this trend, the Sufi is overcome by the experience of union to the point of losing awareness of religious and social bonds, letting himself behave in strange ways, and uttering expressions that are shocking for common believers who think that the Sufi has gone against the accepted faith of the community. A good example of such conflict was al-Hallāj, who was executed after being accused of heresy.

In his great work "The *Revivification of the Religious Sciences*", the famous Muslim scholar Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) tried to reconcile these two aspects of Sufism. The conflict between them however, has continued to the present day.

Of particular importance in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience is the so-called 'pre-eternal covenant' (*mīthāq, 'ahd*), mentioned in a unique *locus* of the Koran (K 7: 172). In a state before time, God made human souls witness to his supreme Lordship, and they witnessed in a dialogue reported by the Koranic text: "Am I not your Lord (*a lastu bi-Rabbikum*)?", they answered "Yes, indeed (*balā*)!". This *mīthāq* is also the starting point of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi path, as well as the origin of his Love for his divine Beloved. The Sufi tries to go back to that original state. But in order to go back to that state the Sufi must pass through complete annihilation (*fanā*) of everything that is not his Beloved, even from his own self.

It is interesting to note that Jacobi also remarks that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's vocabulary basically depends on classical Sufi authors, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910), al-Hallāj, and 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), as we observed above.

b.3. The Sufism of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)

In the VIth/-VIIth/XIIth-XIIIth centuries, another trend of Sufism appeared called "monistic Sufism", or "Sufism of the unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). The best known representative of this type of Sufism is the "Great Sufi Master" (*al-shaykh*

al-akbar), Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), a Sufi contemporary to Ibn al-Fāriḍ. According to this view, the basic separation between the Absolute (God) and the relative (creation) is in a way overcome. God and the universe are basically one being, or better said different aspects (*wujūh*) of the one Being. Unity and multiplicity are not separate, but intimately united: multiplicity comes from Unity, and goes back to it. It seems clear that the basic pattern of this view has been taken from Neo-platonic philosophy and other similar perspectives. God is seen as immanent in the world and manifesting himself through it. This view is open to a new image of the universe and of the human being located in it.

Human beings are thus seen as the synthesis and the mirror of the Divine and created qualities: they are at one and the same time the microcosm and the macrocosm, or better they are the microcosm that reflects and includes the macrocosm. This vision found its highest expression in the idea of the "Perfect Human Being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*), an idea that found its full expression in the notion of the Muḥammadian Light or the Eternal Reality of Muḥammad that correspond to the Logos in Greek philosophy and Christian theology. Such ideas had already been developed in Islamic Sufism before the VIIth/XIIIrd c.

Jacobi rightly observes that although the idea and experience of the "Perfect Human Being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is present in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience, its terminology is not the same as that of Ibn al-'Arabī.

c. *The Mystical Experience of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*

Jacobi remarks that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry must be approached at different levels, not only at the linguistic, but also at the psychological and the aesthetic.

c.1. Mystical Psychology

Modern psychology has analyzed at length the phenomena of mystical life, particularly the experience of mystical union (*unio mystica*), in which the mystic finds himself united with all in a cosmic awareness where all particular distinctions are overcome. Such data should also be taken into account in reading Sufi texts, since they express in the end a similar experience.

In Jacobi's view, the apex of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience is that of becoming aware of being the microcosm-macrocosm, in which all qualities of the universe are united and reconciled. At this point the Sufi enters into complete unity and harmony with all, expressed in the poem through the term "union" (*jam'*). This union is universal, including all dimensions: exterior and interior, immanent and transcendent, etc. The mystic's experience continually moves from multiplicity to unity and vice versa. It is an ever expanding experience.

c.2. Mystical Aesthetic

The aesthetic side is also an important aspect of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience. Beauty is proclaimed by him as the cause of love for his Beloved: She is absolute Beauty, and manifests Herself in the universe in which She is immanent. The Sufi poet thus sees the beauty of his Beloved in every aspect of the universe. This is the source of his cosmic love and his attraction to all. To express these two aspects of Beauty, transcendent and immanent, Ibn al-Fāriḍ uses two Arabic terms: *jamāl*, which means absolute, transcendent Beauty, and *ḥusn*, which means beauty immanent in creatures. It is particularly through the practice of Sufi audition (*samāʿ*) that the poet experiences absolute Beauty as manifested in space and time, and this leads him into ecstasy.

On such methodological premises, Jacobi distinguishes in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience three basic degrees that lead to the absolute Unity.

- i. The first degree is that of separation from his Beloved. At this point the poet experiences the drama of being separated from his Beloved together with a deep desire for union with Her, and he suffers of all the pains lovers suffer in such a state.
- ii. The second degree is that of unity with his Beloved. This unity passes through two phases:
 - ii.a: The first phase: lover and Beloved become one reality, one being. Here the linguistic expressions are full of paradoxes, and the poet feels himself elevated above all things, beyond space and time.
 - ii.b: The second phase: this is the step of universal union, the union above all contradictions, i.e. *coincidentia oppositorum*. The poet experiences here a universal unity among all things; microcosm and macrocosm are included in each other. There are no more limits or separation of space and time. All things appear in their deep unity, beyond all different phenomena (*mazāhir*). All religions are likewise reconciled in such a comprehensive unifying experience. This is the experience of the "Perfect Human Being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*), described by other Sufis, especially Ibn al-'Arabī, in a parallel way. It is interesting to note that the degrees described by Jacobi are quite parallel to what we discovered on the basis of our semantic analysis of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's text.

In the end, one has to acknowledge that Jacobi's work on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry offers new and deep insights, especially at the literary level, which help us better understand of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical experience. Jacobi's work offers a mature and critical approach to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry. We can now claim to have a

more realistic picture of the poet: his life, his poetic style, and his mystical insight. On such solid foundations, one can continue to seek a fuller comprehension of his Sufi experience, and one can compare it with other mystical experiences from other spiritual traditions.

We are convinced, in fact, that Sufism and spirituality should become a solid and important ground for a genuine and profound dialogue between all the spiritual traditions of humankind, going beyond bitter and dramatic controversies from the past.

Remark

One can say that thanks to these new approaches we have a more realistic picture of Ibn al-FāriḌ's mystical poetry. His life has been examined in a more critical way, his language thoroughly analyzed, and his historical context clearly explored. A truer understanding of his mystical experience is open to further research.

4. CONCLUSION

Having surveyed the long history of Western studies and translations of Ibn al-FāriḌ's poems, we can now make some basic assessments.

Western studies of Ibn al-FāriḌ's poems can be divided into three basic phases, which basically correspond to the three phases of development of Western Orientalism.

1. The First Period: XVIIth-XIXth c.

This period starts with the first translation carried out by Johannes Fabricius in his *Specimen Arabicum* (1638), continuing up to the Italian translation of the minor poems from Ibn al-FāriḌ's *Dīwān* made by the Italian orientalist Pietro Valerga (1874). As we observed above, this was still a period of tentative acquaintance of the Egyptian Sufi poet through the translation of some of his poems. The approach here was not systematic and methodological, and our comprehension of Ibn al-FāriḌ's mystical experience was still very limited and imperfect.

2. The Second Period: 1st Half of the XXth century

This period extends from Ignazio Di Matteo's translation of Ibn al-FāriḌ's *Great Tā'īyya* (1917) to the critical edition, translation and commentary of Ibn al-FāriḌ's entire *Dīwān* made by John Arthur Arberry (1952-1956). As we observed, western

Orientalism developed considerably during this period, embracing ever more the various dimensions of Arabic-Islamic civilization. Also the studies of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry were more profound in their approach, based on a better knowledge of his classical sources. All this material was now being read in the light of a new comprehension of Arabic-Islamic civilization, in particular of Sufism, carried out in a more scientific and systematic way. Nevertheless, as we remarked, Western scholars also did not go very far beyond the traditional picture of the Egyptian poet.

3. THE THIRD PERIOD: 2ND HALF OF THE XXTH C. — BEGINNING OF THE XXIST C.

This period offers a new and deeper critical approach to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poetry. New studies have shed new light on his life and character; his language has been better analyzed employing a new reading of his text, i.e. reading the text through the text itself, without projecting foreign concepts onto his verses, as was often the procedure in the past. His Sufi experience is now read through a better knowledge of his cultural and literary background. His *Dīwān* has been edited in a very meticulous critical edition, offering the most reliable text thereof. On the whole we have now reached a better and more complete approach to his mystical experience.

Perhaps the time has come to attempt a more insightful comprehension of his mystical world, trying to compare it with the mystical worlds of other religions, thereby reading it in more open epistemological horizons. It seems clear that now is the time to locate the mystical experience of Sufis in general in the wider and deeper context of the mystical experience of the whole of humanity and throughout history. In this way, we hope that new and important ways of communication will be discovered between human beings, bringing them closer to one another, and providing them with solid foundations for peaceful coexistence and collaboration.