



The Influence of René Guénon in the Islamic World

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Although the impact of the teachings of René Guénon upon the Occident has not been studied fully, at least there exist a number of studies concerning the far-reaching influence of his seminal writings in a number of European countries. Such is unfortunately not the case when one turns to the Islamic world. In fact there are practically no studies which deal with the subject as far as the whole Islamic world is concerned and many in fact believe that he is a hardly known in Islamic countries and has had no influence in that part of the world. This conclusion is, however, totally false. Guénon has exercised profound influence in certain significant circles in a number of Islamic countries and his influence is very much on the rise. In this first attempt to gauge the extent and significance of his influence, we shall deal, not with the whole of the Islamic world, but with certain countries and areas where we believe his influence to have been of particular significance.

The influence of Guénon has reached the Islamic world through three channels. The first is his works themselves, read by Muslims in the original French, translations into other European languages such as English, or renditions into various languages of the Islamic world. The second is the writings, in either their original language or translation, of other major traditionalist authors who have shared basic principles with Guénon and who have alluded to his works and teachings. Among this group the most important is Frithjof Schuon, followed by Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings and Gai Eaton and also A. K. Coomaraswamy especially for the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent and Iran. The third is the works of Muslim born authors such as Muhammad Hasan

Askari and S. H. Nasr who have either written directly on Guénon or have discussed some of his basic expositions of metaphysics, the traditional sciences, criticism of the modern world, etc. in their own writings. Such figures with various degrees of influence are to be found in many Islamic countries from Malaysia to the Arab world.

Turning to specific regions of the Islamic world, it is logical to start with the Arab countries and especially the Arab East because of the significance of Arabic throughout the Islamic world and also since Guénon lived the last twenty years of his life in Cairo, where he is buried. Paradoxically, however, his influence in the Arab East has not been as great since his death as it has been in Persia, Turkey, Pakistan, Bosnia and Southeast Asia for reasons having to do with the extensive change of climate of the intellectual life of many Arabs in the second half of the 20th century. Guénon's influence in Egypt itself can in fact be divided into two distinct and very different phases: the first during his lifetime and the second after his death.

When Guénon arrived in Cairo in 1931, he first lived quietly near the mausoleum of Sayyidunâ al-Husayn and al-Azhar University, that is, at the center of both the religious and intellectual life of Cairo. It was only in 1937 that he moved to a villa in Duqqî near the banks of Nile where he lived until his death in 1951 and where his library of over 1000 books remains intact today as it was on the day he left this earthly plane.¹ Known by his Muslim name as Shaykh 'Abd al-Wâhid Yahyâ, he had contact with many important Islamic intellectual and spiritual circles of the day. Several people have attested to the fact that he became the disciple of Salâmah ibn Hasan al-Radî (1284/1867-1358-1939), the founder of the Hâmidiyyah branch of the Shâdhiliyyah Sufi Order into which he had become initiated much earlier in France.

During his stay in Cairo, Guénon was visited by many people from near and far in quest of authentic knowledge or for personal contact with the sage. Some of these visitors were

from the West and others from the Islamic world and ranged from Frithjof Schuon to Najmuddin Bammate. As far as his influence in Egypt is concerned, however, none of these contacts were as significant as his association with Shaykh 'Abd al-Halîm Mahmûd, an authority in both the Divine Law and the Sufi path, who later became the Shaykh al-Azhar. He wrote a small booklet entitled *Al-Faylsuf al-Muslim: 'Abd al-Wâhid Yahyâ iaw René Guénon* immediately after the death of Guénon and later on authored a major book in Arabic² in which a long section the size of an independent monograph was devoted to Guénon and the significance of his teachings for the preservation of the Islamic tradition. This widely read book made the traditional Islamic intelligentsia of Egypt aware of Guénon and the significance of his message. Shaykh 'Abd al-Halîm Mahmûd edited several of the classical Sufi texts and while introducing the text to his readers he drew much of his material from Guénon's works.

Moreover, while residing in Cairo Guénon not only wrote essays in French which were published in Paris and also read by a few francophone Arabs; he also wrote a number of essays in Arabic in the Egyptian journal *al-Ma'rifah*³ and participated in important intellectual discourses with a number of Egyptians. His criticism of the errors of the modern world, coming from a Western and not a traditional Muslim scholar, attracted the attention of a number of notable Egyptian intellectual figures. Yet, with his death and the Nasserite Revolution in Egypt, marked by the rise of nationalism and socialism, the milieu in which his influence was most felt became marginalized and to some extent destroyed. Few Egyptians realize today how significant the message of this remarkable Muslim and French expatriate is for the present day intellectual crisis in their midst.

During the last decade, however, new attention has been cast upon Guénon's message in the Arab world as can be seen by the translation into Arabic of his *Crisis of the Modern World*⁴ and a collection of his essays⁵ dealing mostly with esoterism in general and Sufism in particular. Although no major Arab scholar has appeared upon the scene during past few decades who could be called a traditionalist in the Guénonian sense

and whose writings are as widely known in the Arab world as one finds in Persia, Turkey and Pakistan, there are a number of Arab writers who now refer to him here and there. Moreover, the attention paid in recent years in Egypt, Jordan and certain other Arab countries to the works of Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings and ourselves have also caused the teachings of Guénon to become better known.

The latter channel of influence is especially evident in Morocco and Algeria. In these lands the works of Schuon and Burckhardt are well known as is the famous biography of Shaykh al-'Alawî by Martin Lings.⁶ Moreover, the long presence of Burckhardt in Morocco and his practical efforts to save Moroccan arts and crafts and the traditional character of the city of Fez made him a well-known figure in that land to the extent that a major conference was devoted to his works in Marrakesh in 1998, the proceedings of which were published in Arabic, French and English.⁷ Considering the close nexus between Burckhardt and Guénon, it is not surprising that many people have become interested in the latter through works of the former. Even in traditional Sufi circles in both Morocco and Algeria many have come to know of Guénon and been able to read his works through either personal contact with Schuon, Burckhardt and others, or through their works which, since they are mostly in French, have been readily accessible to the educated public of the Maghrib.

As a result of the introduction of modern ideologies, especially nationalism and socialism, into the Arab world and the eclipse of the more metaphysical and philosophical dimensions of the Islamic tradition in traditional circles of learning, the Arab world has not shown the same degree of receptivity to the metaphysical doctrines expounded by Guénon as we find in Persia and a few other Islamic countries. That certainly does not mean, however, that the influence of Guénon in Egypt or the rest of the Arab world came completely to an end with his death. On the contrary, after becoming limited to a few individuals here and there, it has been growing during the past few years despite the dearth of good translations of his work into Arabic.

As far as Persia is concerned, Guénon was totally unknown there until our return from America to that country in 1958, when almost immediately we began to speak and write about traditional authors, particularly Guénon, Schuon, Coomaraswamy, Burckhardt and Lings. It took a few years for the general intellectual milieu to become aware of the "school of tradition". We even had to coin a Persian term for the French word *tradition* as Guénon understood it, the term being *sunnat-garâ'î* which has gained wide acceptance in Persian although it is sometimes used in the wrong sense. From the mid-1960's onwards the teachings of traditional authors became part of the general intellectual discourse. In the late 1960's we commissioned the translation of two of his works, *La Crise du monde moderne* and *La Règne de la quantité* into Persian.⁸

After the dust of the Revolution of 1979 in Persia settled down, interest in Guénon and other traditional authors began to manifest itself again in an even wider circle than before. Nowadays, a number of traditional Islamic scholars especially in Qom and Tehran have begun to show serious interest in them. One of the major Islamic institutions of learning in Qom, Mufid University, devoted two issues of its highly respected journal in 1998 and 1999 to the traditional perspective and a number of essays appeared in them dealing either with Guénon or containing translations of some of his essays.⁹ More recently, *Le Symbolisme de la croix* and *Aperçus sur l'ésotérisme islamique et le taoïsme* have been translated into Persian.¹⁰ Moreover, the keen interest in present day Persia in tradition in general and Guénon in particular can be seen in the fact that early in 2002 a major conference was held in Tehran on tradition and modernism, a section of which was devoted specifically to Guénon. A book entitled *Hikmat-i jâwîdân* ("Perennial Wisdom") has appeared containing both studies on Guénon's works rendered into Persian and his biography.¹¹

The wide influence of Guénon, Schuon and other major traditional authors in Persia did not, however, come so much from the translation of their writings as from works written by Persian authors who shared their perspective and alluded

to their texts. In fact it was this type of writing that led many people to the study of Guénon, and Schuon's own works. We started this genre of writing in Persian in the late 1950's and only in the 1960's did we turn to the translation of some of the works of Schuon and Burckhardt and directed others to translate Guénon. Also gradually in the 1970's a number of Persian scholars, some our own direct students, adopted the traditional perspective and began to write about it. The Iranian Academy of Philosophy, which was founded in 1973 and of which we were the founder and first president, was devoted openly to the presentation, study and propagation of the perennial philosophy and traditional wisdom, and its journal, *Sophia perennis*, which continued until 1979, contained articles by such masters of traditional doctrines as Schuon.

Today in Persia there are a number of well-known scholars and thinkers who are defenders of tradition and linked closely with the teachings of Guénon. They include Hâdî Sharîfî, Ghûlam Ridâ A'wânî, Mahmûd Bînâ Mutlaq, Mustâfâ Malikiân,¹² and a number of younger scholars including many connected with the field of traditional art. There is probably no Islamic country except for Bosnia where the influence of Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt and other traditional authors is as perceptible as Persia where the traditional point of view plays a notable role in the intellectual life of many people among both the modern educated intelligentsia associated with various universities and those trained in the traditional religious schools or *madrasahs*.

In Turkey, interest in Guénon began somewhat later than it did in Persia, although there were a few solitary figures such as Nuri Yarlasez who had discovered the traditional writings many years before the appearance of traditional works in Turkish. By the early 1980's, a number of Turkish thinkers became attracted to both our works and those of Guénon and the first translations of a book by us and a work of Guénon into Turkish appeared almost together soon thereafter. Since then interest in traditional writings has grown remarkably as a numbers of Turks with a Western-oriented education have

become even more disillusioned with the advent of modernism and seek to understand the essence of their own religion as well as the real nature of modernism viewed from the perspective of traditional wisdom. Since the mid-80's besides some twenty of our own works all based on the traditional perspective, many books of Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings and Eaton have been rendered into Turkish. There are today, besides a number of articles, twelve books of Guénon available in Turkish¹³ while many articles have been written about him and other traditional authors or on various subjects from a traditional point of view.

The struggle between tradition and modernism is of course to be found everywhere in the non-Western world including the Islamic world, and is not unique to a particular country. But because of the extreme form of secularization which Ataturk tried to impose upon Turkey, the tension between tradition and modernism is especially acute and felt in nearly every aspect of social and intellectual life in that country. Until two decades ago there were two types of thinkers in Turkey as in other Islamic countries: the traditional scholars deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition but unaware of the real nature of the modern world, and modernized scholars uprooted from their own tradition with little serious interest in Islam, especially its intellectual and spiritual dimensions. Today there is a third group, that is, those who follow traditional teachings, a group that is rooted in the Islamic tradition usually with a universalist perspective, and who are at the same time certainly as knowledgeable about the modern world as are the modernists.

Like Persia, Turkey has now a class of gifted intellectual figures with a traditional perspective, a class that is bound to play a crucial role in the future of the country as far as religion and tradition are concerned. Such a group also exists to a lesser extent in a number of other Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Jordan and particularly Bosnia to which we shall soon turn. Now, in Turkey as elsewhere in the Islamic world, the formation of this group to which Guénon referred as *l'élite intellectuel* owes a very great deal to the works of Guénon along with those of other traditional

authorities. Moreover, in Turkey as in several other Islamic countries this "elite" plays a more central role than do those influenced by Guénon in the West.

When we turn to Pakistan, we have to consider both works in Urdu concerning Guénon and publication of English translations of his books in that country since the educated public there has a much greater knowledge of English than Arabs, Persians or Turks in general have of a European language. As far as the availability of his work in English in Pakistan is concerned, the role of the Suhail Academy, founded by Muhammad Aslam Suhail and directed by Muhammad Suheyl Umar, who is himself a leading Pakistani scholar with a traditional perspective, is paramount. Since 1983 the Academy has brought out a number of Guénon's work in local editions, some in several printings.¹⁴ It is remarkable how widely disseminated the works of Guénon and other traditionalist authors have become in Pakistan thanks to the work of the Suhail Academy. Furthermore, chapters of *East and West* were published over a period in *Iqbal Review* and a number of his essays appeared in *Studies in Tradition*.¹⁵ The English works of Suheyl Umar himself as well as such well-known Pakistani authors as A.K. Brohi, Muhammad Ajmal, Siraj Munir and others, all of whom have referred often to Guénon's teachings, have also played an important role in disseminating knowledge of Guénon in Pakistan and to some extent in India.

As far as the Urdu language is concerned, no figure is as significant in making Guénon known as is Muhammad Hasan Askari. A report concerning his works in Urdu as well as those of later figures was sent to us specifically for this essay by Muhammad Suheyl Umar and we can do no better than to quote it in full:

The name and words of René Guénon came to the notice of the Urdu readership in the late sixties through the writings of late professor Muhammad Hasan Askari. Askari was a versatile genius, combining in his person the talents of a short story writer, literary

critic, translator, educator, philosopher and religious thinker. Apart from his native Urdu, in which he was the leading author of his times, Askari had mastered the English language and literature and was well versed in French as well as Persian and Arabic. His connections with Michel Valsan and his circle introduced him to the works of René Guénon which brought about a total change in his previous views. A new Askari was born who, having rediscovered the Tradition for himself, devoted the rest of his life to its exposition (Askari died in 1978). One can discern four aspects or channels of his contribution that were important in influencing the Urdu readership, especially the literary and religious circles: translations/adaptations; correspondence with his contemporaries; debates; and applications.

Translations/adaptations: Askari translated very few of Guénon's works into Urdu directly though he did translate some into English that were all published in various periodicals.¹⁶ However, one can find direct adaptations, translations of passages from Guénon and abridgements of his view spread over all that Askari wrote from 1969 till his death in 1978.¹⁷ The most important work that Askari produced in this regard was a brief but concise book entitled *Jadidiyat ya Maghribi Gumrahiiyyon ka Khaka* ("Modernism: An Outline of the Errors of the West"). Relying primarily on two of Guénon's works,¹⁸ Askari prepared a document in his inimitable Urdu prose that outlined the basic intellectual fallacies of the West in a lucid and concise manner. This document was first used as a manual of instruction for the students of one of the leading *madrasahs* of Pakistan and it later appeared in print.¹⁹

Correspondence with his contemporaries: Askari maintained an extensive correspondence and he was an untiring exponent of the traditional point of view. Several collections of his letters have appeared after

his death and all of these testify to the fact that he introduced, influenced and convinced many of his contemporaries of the traditional point of view, some of whom later on emerged as excellent scholars in their own right.²⁰

Debates: An important channel through which the works and views of René Guénon reached the Urdu readers was found in the debates that he carried out with his contemporaries and the interviews/dialogues in which he was engaged.²¹ One can also include in this category the close associates and students of Askari whom he introduced to the works of Guénon and trained in their respective fields so that they could carry on the task of spreading the traditional point of view.

Applications: By far the most important contribution of Askari, the one that was to become the most widely read and assimilated by Urdu readers, came in the form of those of his writings where he applied the point of view/information derived from the works of Guénon to art, metaphysics, symbolism, literature, religion and contemporary issues, etc.

Translations of Works of Guénon / Articles on Guénon: In 1979 a full section appeared in the leading Urdu journal *Ma'asir*, under the title "Al-Shaikh 'Abd al-Wâhid Yahyâ (René Guénon)" introducing Guénon and his works. It contained: Muhammad Suheyl Umar, "Shaikh ki Tasanif" ("Life and Works of Guénon"), Urdu;²² and 'Abd al-Halîm Mahmûd/Muhammad Suheyl Umar (tr.) "René Guénon —Life and Thought", Urdu.²³ Muhammad Suheyl Umar/A. Rauf (trs.), "Infiradiyat Parasti", Urdu;²⁴ a translation of chapter five of Guénon's famous work *The Crisis of the Modern World*.

In 1983 the first issue of *Riwayat* appeared. It was an Urdu journal devoted to metaphysics, symbolism, tradition, religion and philosophy. It contained:

Tehsin Firaqi, "René Guénon—Exponent of Tradition" (Urdu translation of the part of Gai Eaton's book *The Richest Vein* that deals with René Guénon),²⁵ and Jamal Panipati (tr.) "Mashriqi Maba'dat Tabi'iyat",²⁶ (Urdu translation of Guénon's *Oriental Metaphysics*); Ikram Chagatai (tr.) 'Irfan i Dhat"²⁷ (Urdu translation of Guénon's "Connais-toi toi-même" ("Know Thyself")); and Muhammad Suheyl Umar (tr.), "Qadim Aqwam ke darmiyan Rawabit",²⁸ (Urdu translation of part of Guénon's *An Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*).

In 1985 the second issue of *Riwayat* appeared. It contained: Jamal Panipati (tr.), "Kaljug"²⁹ (Urdu translation of Guénon's "Kali Yuga", a chapter from Guénon's *The Crisis of the Modern World*); "Dunya i Jadid ka Buhran"; Review article on *The Crisis of the Modern World*;³⁰ and "Kammiyat ki Saltanat"; an article on *The Reign of Quantity*.³¹

Debates: In the wake of all this activity many debates took place addressing the issues of tradition and modernity, science and religion, metaphysics and philosophy, etc. that reverberated for a long time in the literary, intellectual and religious circles of Pakistan and India.³²

It is clear from this long quotation from Muhammad Suhayl Umar how extensive the influence of Guénon and other traditionalist writers has been in Pakistan. Moreover, through both the Urdu works on Guénon and the English translations of his writings, he influenced a number of important Muslims figures in India as well. As in Persia and Turkey so in Pakistan an "intellectual elite" in the Guénonian sense has formed during the past few decades which is fully versed in the writings of Guénon, Schuon and other master expositors of traditional doctrines while being deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition itself.

There are other Muslims countries especially Malaysia and Indonesia in which a whole new generation of younger scholars have discussed the writings of Guénon and other traditionalists and some like Osman Bakar of Malaysia have already become well known scholars. But we shall forgo dealing with these countries in detail here and conclude with an Islamic society at the heart of Europe, that is, Bosnia. Before the break up of Yugoslavia there was already keen interest among a group of Muslims, Orthodox Serbs and some Catholics in Guénon, Schuon and other traditionalist authors. Many in Bosnia believed that only the traditional perspective, based on respect for all traditional forms and what Schuon has called "the transcendent unity of religions," could provide the intellectual and spiritual matrix in which a multi-religious society could live in peace. The horrendous tragedies of 1992 to 1995 which led to the death of nearly a quarter million Muslim Bosnians and forced the migration of numerous people under the name of ethnic cleansing has not diminished this hope in the hearts and minds of many leading Bosnian intellectuals. In fact one could say that today there is no other place in the world where the reality of tradition and the perennial philosophy as understood by Guénon is so evident even in the public domain and where an attempt is being made to create a framework for the peaceful coexistence of Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics and Jews on the basis of the unity of the inner meaning of traditional doctrines and practices. A number of works by and about Guénon have appeared in Serbo-Croatian and Bosnian since the 1970's and since Bosnian Muslims scholars read Serbo-Croatian as easily as Bosnian (they are in fact practically the same language written in different alphabets) mention must be made of works in both languages.³³

It is remarkable how alive works of traditionalist authors are in Bosnia, much more so than in other European countries. Many significant Bosnian Muslim thinkers consider Bosnia to be a bridge between the Islamic world and the West and they find in these writings the perfect expression of that truth which belongs to both East and West and yet transcends all geographic determinations and limitations. While older

scholars such as Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, Enes Karic and Resid Hafizovic, who are all well known in Bosnia, continue to write important works on the basis of traditional teachings, younger scholars such as Hafiz Nevad Kahteran are beginning to arrive upon the scene. When one thinks of the influence of Guénon upon the Islamic world, one usually does not think of Bosnia, but it is here that the corpus of traditional writings has found some of its most staunch and intelligent admirers and defenders who are also having a notable influence upon the general intellectual and spiritual life of the country.

One can hardly overemphasize the significance of the influence of Guénon and other traditionalist figures upon the contemporary Islamic world and yet no thorough study has been made of this subject to this day. The influence of Guénon and other traditionalists can be seen in several domains. First of all these writings have provided the traditional Islamic intelligentsia with an in-depth and thorough critique of the modern world and its hidden and manifest errors and deviations from the norm. Secondly, these writings have been a major source for authentic knowledge of the Western tradition including religion, philosophy, science and the arts. Most Muslims do not possess a deep knowledge of the West. As for the modernists who do have some knowledge of the West, their knowledge is usually limited to the modern period. Traditional writings have led many a Muslim to an understanding of a St. Bernard, a Dante or a St. Thomas and have made them aware of the significance of the European Middle Ages which Muslim modernists have called the "Dark Ages" following their Western models and counterparts whom they seek to emulate in everything. Thirdly, these writings, which are themselves a continuation and reformulation of the metaphysics of religious diversity as expounded by such masters of old as Ibn 'Arabî and Rûmî, have provided in the contemporary context the framework necessary for the carrying out of religious dialogue in depth while making other religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, better known in traditional Muslim circles. Fourthly, these writings have

enabled those who are the guardians of Islamic esoteric teachings and gnosis to express these teachings in a contemporary language not only for Westerners but also for modern educated Muslims themselves and to be able to defend such teachings before the onslaught of secularist modernism.

Finally, the writings of Guénon, Schuon and other traditional masters have aided traditional Islam to reformulate its teachings in a contemporary language. After the first shock of the intrusion of the modern world into the heartland of Islam with the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, several reactions were created including puritanical "fundamentalism", Messianism and modernism. Traditional Muslims who constituted the vast majority of Islamic society of the 19th century opposed modernism but did not react by a reformulation of traditional teachings in response to specific challenges presented to Muslims at that time. Great Sufi masters and religious scholars continued their teachings, intuitively aware of the deviations from the spiritual norm inherent in the militarily more powerful forces which were invading, colonizing or influencing the Islamic world. But rarely did they seek to answer on the intellectual level the challenges of modernism and few had an in-depth knowledge of the modern world.

After the Second World War, and especially during the past few decades, a new set of responses has come from the Islamic world in reaction to the situation in which it has found itself as it seeks to reassert its independence. New forms of what is now widely known as "fundamentalism", as well as modernism (including post-modernism) and Messianism have appeared on the scene and created currents which continue to this day, but in contrast to the early reactions of the 19th century, there now appeared another reality, that of traditional Islam fully aware of the nature of the modern world and capable of explaining that world to Muslims themselves as well as expounding in a contemporary language the teachings of Islam in both its exoteric and esoteric aspects to the West. This newly formed group acts as the means for the older classes of traditional scholars to better understand the modern world. This group is also perfectly prepared and capable of defending

the teachings of traditional Islam from the attacks of modernist and "fundamentalist" critics from both within and without. Certain members of this group have also succeeded in reformulating the principles and teachings of traditional Islamic philosophy, the sciences, and the arts and enabling a whole younger generation of Muslims to study their own intellectual and spiritual tradition from within the traditional Islamic worldview. Now, all of these and certain other realities of great significance for the contemporary Islamic world owe a great deal to the works of Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt and other traditional figures without whom the formation of this "traditional elite" in the Islamic world would not have been possible.

Of course above and beyond all these intellectual activities, there stands the central importance of traditional teachings in providing intellectual protection for the mind from deviations which take the mind and soul away from the path to God, from what constitutes the goal of human existence, and in making available expressions of the greatest lucidity of traditional metaphysics, the perennial philosophy and sapiential esoterism. Many a soul in the Islamic world, as in the West, has been brought back to the world of faith and received preparation to follow of path of spiritual realization, which is still a living possibility in the Islamic world, through the works of Guénon and his illustrious company of traditional authors, especially Schuon.

The story of the influence of Guénon in the Islamic world is a long one that needs more extensive study. What is certain is that today the traditional writings continue to play an important role in many Islamic circles and are bound to have an even greater influence as the shortcomings and deviations of both modernism and "fundamentalism" become even more evident and it becomes even clearer to men and women of good faith and intelligence that the only abiding truth is to be found in the perennial wisdom residing at the heart of all the authentic religions, a wisdom manifested as light amidst the intellectual and spiritual eclipse and darkness of early 20th century Europe, through the remarkable works of René Guénon, who not only expressed the truths of tradition, but

also in his own life while in Egypt acted as a bridge between Islam and the Western tradition. He sought to create mutual understanding between various religions and traditions so much needed today. Those influenced by him in the Islamic world are at the forefront in the task of seeking to further this mutual understanding upon which the human future depends. They are also most aware of the importance of preserving the truth at a time when subversion and perversion of perennial wisdom is to be seen everywhere. In this task they are aided, as are their counterparts in the West, by the teachings of Guénon and other traditionalists, teachings which are as alive and pertinent today as when they were written, being rooted as they are in the timeless reality of the Spirit.

Notes:

1. On the life of Guénon in Cairo see Xavier Accart, *L'Ermitte de Dugqi: René Guénon en marge des milieux francophones égyptiens* (Milan: Archè, 2001).
2. Entitled *al-Madrasat al-shâdhiliyyat al-hadîthah wa imâmuhâ Abû'l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî* (Cairo: Dâr al-Kutub al-Hadîthah, n.d.). Pages 229-341 are devoted to Guénon, his views of metaphysics, philosophy and Sufism, his criticism of modern pseudo-spiritual movements and responses to Western misunderstandings of Islam.
3. These essays include, "Know thy soul through thy soul," vol. 1, no. 1 (1931), pp. 61-71; "The Influence of Islamic Culture upon the West," vol. 1, no. 2 (1931), pp. 177-182; and a number of essays on the errors of modern "spiritism" in vol. 1, no. 3 (1931), pp. 355-360; vol. 1, no. 5 (1931), pp. 593-597; and vol. 1, no. 7 (1931), pp. 813-816.
4. See *Azmat al-'alam al-mu'asir*, trans. with introduction by Sâmî Muhammad 'Abd al-Hamîd (Cairo: al-Nahâr, n.d.).
5. *Maqâlât min Riniâ Jînû-al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Wâhid Yahyâ*, trans. with introduction by Zajnab 'Abd al-'Azîz (Cairo: Dâr al-Ansâr, 1996).
6. See *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1972).

7. See Ja'far Kansusi (ed.), *Sagesse et splendeur des arts islamiques: Hommage à Titus Burckhardt* (Marrakesh: Al-Quobba Zarqua, 2000).
8. *La Crise* . . . was translated by Diâ'al-Dîn Dihshîrî as *Buhrân-i dunyâ-yi mutajaddid* (Tehran: Mu'assasi-yi Mutâlâ'ât wa Tahqîqât-i Ijtîmâ'î, 1970) (and other editions); and *Le Règne* . . . as *Saytara-yi kammiyat wa'alâ'im-i zamân*, trans. by 'Alî Muhammad Kârdân (Tehran: Sharif Technical University Press, 1982) (and other editions). *La Crise* . . . was the first book by Guénon to be translated into Persian. We, therefore, wrote an introduction to the Persian translation to introduce his whole corpus of writings and his significance to the Persian speaking world.
9. These included the Persian translation of the essay of Martin Lings on Guénon, trans. M. Hidâyâtî, *Naqd wa Nazar* (Vol. IV, no. 3 and 4, Summer and Fall, no. 15-16, 1377, pp. 68-79); "Faqr" by Guénon, trans. by M. Malikian (pp. 88-95); "Shell and Kernel" by Guénon, trans. F. Râsikhî (*op. cit.*, no. 19-20, 1999, pp. 396-397); M. Binâ Mutlaq, "René Guénon and the Real Meaning of Tradition" (in Persian), (*op. cit.*, no. 15-16, pp. 80-87).
10. As *Ma'ânî-yi ramz-i salîb*, trans. Bâbak 'Alikhânî (Tehran: Surûsh Press, 1995); and *Islâm wa tâ'u'ism*, trans. Dilârâ Qahriman (Tehran: Abî Press, 2000).
11. Edited by Husayn Khandaqâbâdî (Tehran: Tawsi'a-yi dânish wa pajûhish-i Irân, 2002); see especially pp. 12-17.
12. Occasionally discussions and debates are held between such figures and opponents of the traditional perspective even on public television and radio or in various journals. See for example the long essay, "Tradition" (in Persian) in *Naqd wa Nazar*, no. 15-16, pp. 6-67, much of which deals directly with the view of Guénon.
13. The list of translations into Turkish of the works of Guénon, which has been prepared for this essay by Ibrahim Kalin is as follows:
 - *Dogu dusuncesi* ("Introduction à l'étude des doctrines hindoues"), cev. Fevzi Topacoglu (Istanbul: Iz Yayincilik, 1997).
 - *Dogu ve bati* ("East and West"), tr. Fahrettin Arslan (Istanbul: Agac Yayincilik, 1991).
 - *Islam maneviyati ve taoculuga toplu bakis* ("Aperçus de l'ésotérisme islamique et le taoïsme"), tr. Mahmut Kanik (Istanbul: İnsan Yayinlari, 1989).
 - *Maddi iktidar, manevi otorite*, cev. Birscl Uzma (Istanbul: Iz Yayincilik, 1997).

- *Modern dunyanın bunalımı*, tr. Mahmut Kanik (Istanbul: Risale Yayınları, 1986).
- *Niceliğin egemenliği ve çağın alametleri* ("La Crise du monde moderne"), tr. Mahmut Kanik (Istanbul: Risale Yayınları, 1986).
- *Niceliğin egemenliği ve çağın alametleri* ("Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps"), tr. Mahmut Kanik (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1990).
- *Ruhcu yanlış* (L'Erreur spirite), tr. Fevzi Topacoglu (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1996).
- *Geleneksel formlar ve kozmik devirler* ("Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmiques"), cev. Fevzi Topacoglu (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1997).
- *Metatron dünya krallığı: kıyamet isçileri ülkesi Ağarta'nın oykusu* ("Le Roi du monde"), cev. Haluk Özden (Istanbul: Ruh ve Madde Yayınları, 1992).
- *Kadim bilimler ve bazı modern yanlışlar*, cev. Fevzi Topacoglu (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2000).
- *Savaş metafiziği ve sembolik siyahlar*, Julius Evola, René Guénon, cev. Atilla Ataman, Mustafa Tahrallı, İsmail Taspınar (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2000).
- *Yatay ve dikey boyutların sembolizmi* ("Le symbolisme de la croix"), cev. Fevzi Topacoglu (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2001).
- 14. *The Reign of Quantity and The Crisis of the Modern World* were brought out first, followed by *The Multiple States of Being and Fundamental Symbols of Sacred Science*.
- 15. See vol. 2, no. 1-4, 1993. This important journal devoted to the exposition of traditional teachings ceased publication after a few issues.
- 16. Later reprinted in the journal *Studies in Tradition*: "Namâ Rupa" in *Studies in Tradition* (Karachi, vol. 1, no. 1, 1992); "Know Thyself" in *Studies in Tradition* (Karachi, vol. 1, no. 2, 1992); "Anguish and Anxiety", in *Studies in Tradition* (Karachi, vol. 1, no. 3, 1992); "Saif ul-Islam" in *Studies in Tradition* (Karachi, vol. 1, no. 4, 1992).
- 17. For example one can cite his numerous articles that he wrote in Urdu that appeared in various periodicals and later in his collected works, *Majmû'ah-i Muhammad Hasan Askari* (Lahore, 1999). Most important of these were "İbn 'Arabî and Kirkegaard", "Bare Amon kâ Bayan ho Jâi", "Waqt ki Râgnî", "Riwâyat kiyâ hae", "Urdû ki Adabî Riwâyat."
- 18. *L'Erreur spirite* and *Etudes sur l'hindouisme*.

- 19. Muhammad Hasan Askari, *Jadîdyât* (Rawalpindi, 1979).
- 20. Shams al-Rahmân Farûqî from India was among these people and he later developed a remarkable acumen in literary criticism along traditional lines.
- 21. Published in various journals including *Al-Bilâgh*, *Al-Rahîm*, *Shâh Khân*, *Civil and Military Gazette*, *Oriental College Magazine*.
- 22. 'Arâ' al-Haq Qâsimî and Sirâj Munîr (eds.) *Ma'asir*, no. 1 (Lahore 1979), pp. 621-632.
- 23. *Ibid.*, pp. 633-643.
- 24. *Ibid.*, pp. 644-656.
- 25. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, (ed.) *Riwayat I*, Lahore, 1983, pp. 57-80.
- 26. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-207.
- 27. *Ibid.*, pp. 217-233.
- 28. *Ibid.*, pp. 217-233.
- 29. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-177.
- 30. *Ibid.*, pp. 404-410.
- 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 411-418.
- 32. This section on Urdu works devoted to Guénon is quoted from a private communication from Muhammad Suheyl Umar.
- 33. The following list has been prepared by Hafiz Nehad Kahteran:
The first translations of Guénon's writings were published in Serbia as follows: *Panorama suvremenih ideja* ("Panorama of contemporary ideas") by Gaetan Pikon (n.d.); "Ezoterija," a translation of a chapter from *L'Ésotérisme de Dante* in the journal *Delo*, (Aug.-Sept. 1976); "Beleske o angeologiji arapskog alfabeta" in *Sufizam*, ed. Darko Tanaskovic and Ivan Sop (Belgrade, 1981); *Bilten autora* no. 12 (Lucani, December 1986); "Mracno doba" ("Dark Age"), trans. by Dragos Kalajic, in *Alef*, (Gradac, 1987); *Id.*, "Velika Trijda" ("La Grande Triade"), trans. by Dragos Kalajic (n.d.); *Id.*, "Simbolika Krsta" ("The Symbolism of the Cross"), trans. by Miodrag Markovic (Gradac, 1998).
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina the following have appeared:
Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, "Uciteljstvo René Guénona" (Teaching profession of René Guénon) in *Dijalog* (no. 1, Sarajevo, 1997), pp. 68-84; René Guénon, "Osvrti na tesavuf i tao" ("Aperçus sur l'ésotérisme islamique et le taoïsme"), trans. by Rusmir Mahmutcehajic and Neira Baralic (Sarajevo, 1988); Hafiz Nevad Kahteran, "Utiranje puteva perenijalnoj filozofiji u Bosni i

Hercegovini" ("Paving the ways for perennial philosophy in Bosnia and Herzegovina") (text dedicated to Guénon, Schuon and Nasr) in *Glasnik*, vol. LXIII, no. 9-10 (Sarajevo, 2001), pp. 879-900; Nevad Kahteran, "Philosophia Perennis" in *Znakovi vremena* vol. 4/5, no. 13/14, (Sarajevo, Autumn-Winter 2001-2002), pp. 10-34; Hafiz Nevad Kahteran, *Perennial Philosophy in the Thought of René Guénon, Frithjof of Schuon and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 2002).

Ibn 'Arabî on the Benefit of Knowledge

by William C. Chittick

Ibn 'Arabî (d. 1240) is arguably the most influential Muslim intellectual of the past seven hundred years. Although he founded no formal school, a series of important authors considered themselves his followers, and many more were inspired by him or felt compelled to deal with the issues that he and his followers raised in their writings. The most famous of these issues is "The Oneness of Being" (*wahdat al-wujûd*), though many others could be cited, such as the Perfect Human Being and the Five Divine Presences.¹ At the heart of each lies the question of the nature and significance of knowledge, a question to which Ibn 'Arabî constantly returns.²

In his discussions of knowledge, Ibn 'Arabî typically uses the term *'ilm*, not its near synonym *ma'rifa*, which in the context of Sufi writings is often translated as "gnosis." In general, he considers *'ilm* the broader and higher term, not least because the Quran attributes *'ilm*, but not *ma'rifa*, to God. Nonetheless, he usually follows the general usage of the Sufis in employing the term *'arif* (the "gnostic," the one who possesses *ma'rifa*) to designate the highest ranking knowers. The gnostics are those who have achieved the knowledge designated by the famous *hadîth*, "He who knows [*'arafa*] himself knows [*'arafa*] his Lord."³

According to Ibn 'Arabî, there is no goal beyond knowledge:

There is no level more eminent [*ashraf*] than the level of knowledge. (III 448.7)⁴

There is no eminence higher than the eminence of knowledge, and there is no state above the state of understanding [*fahm*] from God. (IV 129.14)