BOOK REVIEWS


Al-Risālah of Abū'l Qāsim al-Qushayrī (376/986–465/1072) is widely regarded as one of the four fundamental works on ṭasāwwuf, the four gospels, as it were, of the Bible of Sufism (the other three being Kītāb al-Luma' of Abū Nasr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/980), al-Ta'ārruğ li Madhhab Ahl al-Ṭasāwwuf of al-Kalābdhī (d. 395/995 or 391/1000), and 'Awārif al-Ma'ārif of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (539–632), written in 428/1038). The Risālah, written in 437, a few years before Hujvīrī’s Kashf al-Mahjūb (the oldest treatise on ṭasāwwuf in Persian), was regarded as the foremost treatise on ṭasāwwuf before Kītāb al-Luma’ came to light. Al-Qushayrī calls it an open letter addressed to the Sufi fraternity in the entire Muslim world (al-Risālah, p. 2). The Risālah went through several editions in Egypt. For example, the edition published by Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Halabī (Cairo 1359/1940) (with selections from the commentary of Abū Yahyā Zakariyyā al-Anṣāri); a critical edition by ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Muḥammad ibn al-Shārīf (Cairo, 1966). The prestige and popularity which this treatise enjoyed with Sufis and scholars may be attributed to its authenticity and clarity. No wonder several eminent people felt motivated to write commentaries on this book (See Hamid Algar’s learned ‘Introduction’ to the work under review (p. xiii).) Quite a few translations of this celebrated work also appeared in three major Islamic languages viz. Persian, Turkish and Urdu (see ‘Introduction’). A second edition of the Urdu version by Pir Muhammad Hasan (not Husayn, as mentioned by Algar), with useful indices and quite extensively annotated, appeared, appeared in 1984. Later writers on ṭasāwwuf (including al-Hujvīrī, al-Ghazālī and ‘Attār) drew heavily on al-Qushayrī’s basic work.

Illustrations of its influence on Sufic literature are indeed ‘too numerous’ to be shown ‘even by an extended listing of specific titles’ (‘Introduction’, p. xiv). Apart from translation into French and German, and an
English translation of the biographical section of the *Risālah* by W. M. Hume presented in 1935 as a doctoral dissertation to the Hartford (Connecticut) Seminary, no significant translation into English, of a portion or the whole text of the *Risālah*, has hitherto appeared, as Hamid Algar points out in the Introduction to the present work (p. xv).

The translation under review was completed when the translator, B.R. Von Schlegell, was a doctoral candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where she wrote her dissertation on ‘Abd al-Ghānī ibn Ismā‘īl al-Nābulusī (1050/1143–1641/1731), a well-known Qādirī-Naqshbandī Sufi scholar of his times.

The present work does not cover the complete text. In the translator's words, it is a 'selection of the *Risāla* which 'forms the core of al-Qushayri's compendium of Sufi practice and knowledge' (p. xviii). Hamid Algar explicates:

> The sections chosen for translation relate to the stations and states of the Sufi path: 43 chapters beginning with repentance (*tawba*) and ending with longing (*shawq*). This represents half the complete text.

Sufism is a discipline notoriously difficult to define, but given the perennial centrality to sufism of the topics discussed in the translation, the title *Principles of Sufism* seems justified. (Introduction, p. xv)

This assertion is repeated on the flap in the following words:

> *Principles of Sufism* includes all sections of the *Risāla* concerning the fundamental principles of Sufism; it omits only the biographical notices at the beginning of the work and various highly technical matters at its end.

Despite these affirmations, the title (i.e. *Principles of Sufism*) given to the translation of selections from the *Risālah* does not seem to be entirely justified. The preliminary section beginning with the origin of *tasawwuf* and containing concise biographical accounts of early Sufis (over thirty pages in the original Arabic text — Cairo, 1359/1940) is as integral to a clear understanding of the nature, background and principles of Sufism as the later part which expounds the principles and salient features of *tasawwuf* and covers 170 pages of the Arabic text, whereof 105 pages (pp. 49–142 and 154–64) have been presented in English in the present version. On the other hand, the first forty-eight pages provide the real foundation for a meaningful perception of the spiritual reality that is *tasawwuf*, explaining as they do the basic phenomena of Sufism, as illustrated by early sufis from Ibrāhīm ibn Adham to Ibn ‘Aṭā‘, including such celebrated names as Dhūl-Nūn, Fuḍayl, Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, al-Ḥārith al-Muhāsibī, Dā‘ūd al-Ṭā‘ī, Shaqīq al-Balkhī, Abū Yazīd al-Bištāmī, Ḥātim al-Asamm, al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (*Shaykh al-Ṭā‘ifah*) and others, through
their words and deeds. Equally indispensable and invaluable for a student of Sufism is the part dealing with the explanation of technical terms like al-maqam, al-hal, al-baqā’, al-fanā’, al-wajd, al-tawājud, al-ṣahw, al-sukr, etc. (pp. 33-48). The later part among the omitted sections (pp. 154-203) also contains discourses on such important and oft-debated subjects as sama’, karāmāt (miracles), the inadmissibility of belief in ‘ismat al-masha‘īkh (infallibility of Sufi masters), ādāb al-muridīn (rules of conduct for Sufi novices), etc.

The importance of the left-out material for scholars and researchers may be gauged from two examples, chosen at random. R.A. Nicholson refers to al-Qushayrī twice in his The Mystics of Islam (Lahore, Islamic Book Service, 1979 (rep.), pp. 126, 130). In both cases relevant material can be traced in the portion omitted from the present translation. Martin Lings in his popular work entitled, What is Sufism? (George Allen & Unwin, 1975; subsequent paperback edition. Berkley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1977), quotes al-Qushayrī’s al-Risalah at five places, of which four extracts (pp. 93, 101, 106, 108) belong to the portion excluded from the present English version. Same is the case with the quotation on ‘the states’ and ‘the stations’ given by the translator herself in her prefatory note (p. xviii). Therefore, it leads one to the assumption that the translator’s selection of the chapters was perhaps an option of convenience or a decision forced by time-constraint.

Regarding the quality of translation, it may be said that the text has been rendered into fluent English generally faithful to the original, yet quite readable and even enjoyable for the lay reader, to whom it can be recommended as a fairly good introduction to Sufism, not comprehensive enough, yet quite informative without being cumbersome. For the scholar, a translation can never be an adequate substitute for the original. Nevertheless, a good translation is a welcome convenience. The present volume, however, besides being incomplete, omitting as it does about half of the original text, suffers from some other shortcomings. Al-Qushayrī was not only a great Sufi, but was also a respectable traditionist (muḥaddith) in his own right. He had pursued Hadith studies under seventeen shuyūkh and transmitted Hadith to no less than sixty-six students of this discipline (Algar’s Introduction, p. iii). Naturally he acquired and adopted the methodology of quoting the line of transmission (iṣnād) in reporting the sayings and anecdotes of Sufi masters. As noted in the ‘Introduction’ (p. xv), the chain of transmitters has been omitted in the translation, retaining only the name of the last reporter from whom the report emanates. Thus the name of al-Qushayrī’s immediate authority is also omitted, which deprives the reader from getting acquainted with al-Qushayrī’s shuyūkh. Sometimes this information is of considerable significance. For example, al-Qushayrī’s direct authority for the hadith (“Contentment is an inexhaustible treasure” (p. 109)), related on the authority of Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh was Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulāmī (d. 412), himself an eminent Sufi, to whom the first tafsir written in the Sufi
tradition is attributed. With this Sufi scholar, al-Qushayri associated after the death of his revered Shaykh Abū ‘Ali al-Daqqāq.

There are fairly copious instances of somewhat indifferent rendering into English. On the very first page, the last sentence, "The inner meaning of repentance in Arabic is 'return'”, does not make much sense. A somewhat better rendering may be: "The original meaning of the Arabic word tawbah is 'to return’”. What follows here does not constitute an exhaustive list of errors of translation, but is to be regarded as illustrative of what this reviewer considers as deficient or erroneous understanding of the text.

p. 256, line 31, and p. 257, line 5
The correct translation of gharim (which means both a creditor and a debtor) in this context is debtor, not creditor.

p. 252, lines 13–16
The following seems to be a more appropriate rendering of the verse: "If I take the recompense for what I give, it is enough to soil the gift."

p. 133, lines 15–16
A more proper translation of Abū Bakr al-Warrāq's statement (shukr al-ni'mah musahadat al-ni'mah wa hifż al-hurmah) would be "Thankfulness for blessings is to observe the blessing and to guard against violating the inviolable" (not 'to bear witness', but to see with one's eyes as it were: and not 'to observe respect', but to express one's gratitude by protecting the inviolability of inviolable things).

p. 311, line 28
The phrase ijtināb al-riyab in the fourth hemistitch of the couplet should mean "shunning situations of suspicion and blame" (riyab being the plural of ribah), rather than 'shunning corrupt people'.

p. 111, lines 4–6
"He who is the most helpful to mankind [people] and the least demanding upon them for sustenance." The later part (wa aqalluhum ma‘ūnah) does not convey the intended meaning correctly; "and of the least inconvenience (or trouble) to them" seems to convey the sense more faithfully.

p. 111, line 9
"Glory in worship, vileness in sin, awe in rising at night" (al-‘izz fi ‘l-tā‘ah wa ‘l-dhull fi ‘l-ma‘sīyah wa ‘l-haybah fi qiyyām al-layl). More akin to the original will be: " Honour lies in obedience [to God], disgrace in disobedience, awesomeness in nocturnal devotions."
p. 111, line 18
*Murā‘ah*, expressing the ideal of knightly virtues is difficult to translate; yet 'honour' may be a better option than 'valour'.

p. 196
The sense of *hayā*’ is expressed much more meaningfully by 'bashfulness' or 'sense of modesty' than 'shame'.

p. 196, line 15
liyadhur al-mawt wa‘l-bilā. A more accurate version is 'let him remember death and decay', not 'death and the trial [of the grave]'; *bilā* means consumption and decay, whereas *bala*’ means trial also.

p. 196, line 17
*Fa man fa‘ala dhālika fa qad istahyā min Allāh haqq al-hayā’. A more appropriate and unambiguous translation of this sentence is: “One who does all this is truly modest before God” (instead of "had shame before God").

p. 108, lines 19–20
The translation of *al-mukhannathin al-ghassalin* as 'washers of the dead known to be catamites' poses a bold question-mark. The words simply mean bisexual or effeminate and washers (washermen) respectively. the anecdote is doubtless intriguing and the ghassalin may perhaps allude to effeminate serving as helpers in public baths (hammāms), but even this will be a mere conjecture. To interpret these two words as 'washers of the dead known to be catamites' is clearly an idea too far-fetched and bizarre to merit any credence. It will be pertinent to mention here that in Islam the nearest relations (e.g. sons) should preferably perform the sacred service of giving the last ritual bath to the dead person. At any rate a person performing such service is expected to be known for his religiosity and piety.

A more serious mistake has been committed in translating the word *mustadrij* (p. 197, line 2). The translator's version is: "One who speaks on shame [*hayā’*] and yet is not ashamed of what he says before God is deceived by degrees." *Istidraj* also means simply 'to deceive'. The simple and straightforward substitute for the italicised part is 'a deceiver' or 'a cheat'. It may be mentioned here that technically a miracle is called *mu‘jizah* if wrought by a true prophet, a *karāmah* if by a saint, a *ma‘ūnah* if by a pious believer, and *istidraj* if worked by an impostor, an unbeliever or a sinful depraved person (see Muhammad ‘Alī al-Thānawi, *Kashshāf Iṣtīlahāt al-Funūn*, vol. I (Π 1317), p. 508, citing Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Dihlawi’s *Madarij al-Nubuwwah*).
To mention some casual errors and omissions, the number of a Qur'anic verse has been printed as 22:88 instead of 22:58 (p. 110, line 17). Some names were apparently overlooked in the preparation of the Index, e.g. 'al-shuniziah', p. 107. Transliteration of names and Arabic terms seems to have been left imperfect deliberately in order, perhaps, to avoid confusing the lay reader with a complicated elaborate system. But at least some device should have been employed to differentiate the long vowel from the short one.

The printing is quite elegant, with a bold type-face 'friendly to the eye'. Printing errors are few and far between. A useful Index, along with Algar's erudite and informative Introduction, add to the value of the work. Supplying a Glossary of technical terms to such works would be of much interest and benefit to scholars as well as common readers, besides contributing to the storehouse of material for compiling comprehensive dictionaries of various disciplines.

In conclusion, let it be hoped that the next edition of this book would be a revised and complete English version of al-Qushayri's Risalah, one of the earliest and most authoritative works on tasawwuf.

S. M. Zaman


The ambitious author, a former nun, has undertaken an onerous task, researching and writing this book, subtitled: "From Abraham to the Present: the 4,000 Year Quest for God". To her credit, in spite of the heavy and vast subject, she has offered her readers a highly readable and informative volume.

What or Who is God? Does He really exist? What are the implications of His existence or non-existence for human beings? These are some of the major questions this book touches on and tries to answer. It does seem that people do not really know the answer. Even in this age, people are not sure whether God exists or not. The last of her eleven chapters is provocatively titled "Has God a Future?", when we are actually asking the opposite question: "Has Man a Future?". I suppose that is the extent of our modern predicament!

In the beginning, human beings created a God who was the First Cause of all things and Ruler of heaven and earth. He was not represented by