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AHMAD PAKATCHI
Tr. MUSHEGH ASATRYAN

Corbin, Henry (14 April 1903–7 October 1978), French philosopher, historian of religions and Islamologist, a major proponent of Shi'i thought.

The structure of this article is as follows:

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2. Works

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- ii) *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*
- iii) *L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*
- iv) *Corps spirituel et terre céleste: de l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shī'ite*
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4. Corbin's Influence and Legacy

1. LIFE

Henry Corbin was the son of a business executive Henri Arthur Corbin and Emilie Jeanne Eugénie née Fournier, who died ten days after giving birth to her only child in April 1903. He was brought up by his father's elder sister Amélie Petithenry and her husband Emile Petithenry.

Protestant by birth, Corbin was educated in the Catholic tradition: he attended the

La Rochefoucauld primary school from 1908 to 1915, then went to the abbey school of Saint Maur and the Catholic seminary of Saint-Sulpice at Issy-les-Moulineaux, from which he graduated in 1922. In 1923–1925 he studied Latin Avicennism of the Middle Ages with Étienne Gilson, as well as Neoplatonism, at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Section des Sciences Religieuses), receiving a degree in philosophy (licence de philosophie) in 1925. At approximately the same time he began studying Sanskrit and Arabic at the École des Langues Orientales. In 1928 Corbin received his doctorate from the École Pratique des Hautes Études for his dissertation on Stoicism and Augustinianism in the thought of the 16th-century Spanish poet Luis de León (for which he was also awarded the Luis de León prize by the University of Salamanca).

In the summer of 1928, he received a degree in Arabic, Persian and Turkish from the École des Langues Orientales, then travelled to Spain, spending two months at the library of El Escorial. The same year he met the Swedish Iranologist Henrik Samuel Nyberg and the German Islamologist Helmut Ritter.

In October 1928, Corbin received a gift from Louis Massignon—a copy of the lithographic edition of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī's (549–587/1154–1191) *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* with the commentary by Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the glosses of Mullā Ṣadrā. In many ways, Corbin's acquaintance with Suhrawardī's Illuminationist doctrine determined his career as an Islamologist and historian of religions.

In November 1928, Corbin became an adjunct at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. A few months later, in April 1929, he joined the editorial team of the general catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale. However it appears that in the pre-war period his scholarly interests were focussed predominantly on German philosophical thought: thus by 1929 he had translated into French some fragments from Martin Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Lindenberg,

172). In July 1930, he made his first (three-month long) trip to Germany (Frankfurt-am-Main and Marburg), meeting, among others, Rudolf Otto, Rabindranath Tagore, Friedrich Heiler (1892–1967) the preacher of non-confessional Christianity, and Heidegger's student Karl Löwith (1897–1973). During this trip, he began a systematic study the works of Heidegger. In 1930, Corbin also attended the classes of Henri-Charles Puech on early Christianity.

In January 1931, Corbin met Alexandre Kojève (1902–1968, originally Kojevnikoff, the French philosopher of Russian origin, who integrated Hegelian concepts into continental philosophy). He also attended Jean Baruzi's (1881–1953) seminars on Luther's interpretation of St Paul at the Collège de France, where he discovered early Lutheran thought, and on the teachings of such Protestant mystics as Sebastian Franck (1499–1542), Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489 or 1490–1561), Valentin Weigel (1533–1588), Johann Arndt (1555–1621), Jacob Böhme (1575–1624) and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782). This acquaintance revealed to Corbin the 'phenomenon of the Sacred Book' and the meaning of the hermeneutical approach (Fakhoury, 'Hermeneutics', 347). In the same year, together with his friends Denis de Rougement, Roland de Pury, Albert-Marie Schmidt and Roger Jezéquel (Roger Breuil), Corbin founded the journal *Hic et Nunc*, which aimed to promote Karl Barth's proposed reform of Protestant theology (eleven issues of the journal appeared between November 1932 and January 1936). In addition, in 1931–1934, Corbin served as the assistant secretary of the *Revue critique*.

In 1932, Corbin met the Swiss theologian Karl Barth and published his own French translation of the latter's *Die Not der evangelischen Kirche*. He also travelled to Sweden, where he met the comparative philologist Georges Dumézil (1898–1986) (then teaching at Uppsala) and (for the second time) the Swedish Islamologist and Iranologist Henrik Samuel Nyberg (1889–1974). During his stay in Germany, he met in Hamburg Ernst

Cassirer, the philosopher of symbolic forms, through whom he became acquainted with the Cambridge Platonists (Fakhoury, 'Hermeneutics', 347). Around this time, Corbin also met the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), who had a significant impact on his thought: following Berdyaev, Corbin rejected historicism, inheriting from him an eschatological understanding of Christianity 'aimed toward the fulfilment of an *ecclesia spiritualis*' (Fakhoury, 'Hermeneutics', 348).

In 1933, he founded another pro-Barthian journal, named *Le Semeur*, and published his first translation of one of Suhrawardī's works (*Mu'nis al-'ushshāq* or *Le familier des amants*). In the same year, he married Stella Leenhardt (1910–2003), the daughter of a French missionary and ethnographer Maurice Leenhardt (1878–1954).

In 1935, in collaboration with Paul Kraus, Corbin published the French translation of another of Suhrawardī's mystical treatises, *Āwāz-i par-i Jibra'īl* (Suhrawardī, 'Bruissement'); and in collaboration with Alexandre Kojève, he translated the Belgian socialist theoretician Henri de Man's (1885–1953) *L'Idée socialiste*.

Between 1 October 1935 and 30 June 1936, Corbin was a scholar in residence at the Institut Français in Berlin; during this period he visited Heidegger (whom he had already met in 1934) several times and completed the translation of his *Was ist Metaphysik?* Corbin believed that Heidegger provided him with 'a hermeneutical key' to the teachings of Muslim philosophers (Corbin, 'De Heidegger', 24; cf. Fakhoury, 'Hermeneutics', 349–350; Fakhoury, *Henry Corbin and Russian*, 13), although it can also be argued that Corbin's proficiency in classical Islamic philosophy came about, first and foremost, as a result of his acquaintance with the thought of the mediaeval Latin scholastics.

In 1937, Corbin substituted for Alexandre Koyré (1892–1964) at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, teaching courses on the Lutheran theologian Johann Georg Hamann

(1730–1788) and Lutheran hermeneutics, the lectures of which were published in 1985 (Corbin, *Hamann*).

In 1939, Corbin published his first detailed study on Suhrawardī (Corbin, *Suhrawardī d'Alep*). In autumn 1939, he went to Istanbul to obtain microfilms of the manuscripts of Suhrawardī's works held in Istanbul libraries. Corbin was planning to stay there for three (or, according to other sources, six) months (Proulx, 35), but due to the outbreak of the Second World War he was unable to return to France, and remained in Istanbul as the custodian of the Institut français d'archéologie for six years (until 1945). He spent this time working in the libraries of Istanbul and preparing the edition of the works of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, the first volume of which was published in 1945 (Suhrawardī, *Opera*, vol. 1).

On 6 September 1945, upon the arrival of his replacement at the Institut français, Corbin left Istanbul for Tehran, arriving there on 14 September. He remained in the Iranian capital until July 1946. In November 1945, he gave a lecture at the Museum of Archaeology on Zoroastrian motifs in Suhrawardī's philosophy and, a few months later, in 1946, he published a small book based on the lecture (Corbin, *Les motifs*). During his trip, among other notables, he met the translator of the Avesta into modern Persian, Ibrāhīm Pūrdāwūd (Ebrahim Pourdavoud, 1885–1968) and the linguist Muḥammad Mu'in (Mohammad Moin, 1914–1971). In July 1946, Corbin returned to Paris after an absence of seven years.

In 1947, he was appointed the Director of the Department of Iranology of the recently founded Institut franco-iranien de Téhéran, a position which he held until 1973. The most important result of his directorship was the series *Bibliothèque iranienne*, of which twenty-two volumes of critical editions of previously unedited philosophical and mystical texts (many of them prepared by Corbin himself and previously unavailable even in lithograph editions) were published during his lifetime. As Landolt

remarks, 'these editions with detailed analytical introductions and sometimes translations... certainly reflect Corbin's concept of Irano-Islamic philosophy in a most direct and concrete way' (Landolt, 'Corbin Orientalist', 486).

In 1949, Corbin was invited by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (1881–1962), the founder of the *Eranos* circle (active since 1933, for its first three decades at least it focused on the study of symbols and archetypes, and was greatly influenced by the teachings of the Swiss analytical psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, 1875–1961) to give a talk at the annual meeting of the circle in Ascona (Switzerland). Corbin became a regular participant at the Eranos meetings which, according to Hakl, 'led to a holistic spiritual freedom from every form of ecclesiastical or academic orthodoxy' (Hakl, 165). He attended the Eranos meetings until 1977 and gave 24 papers in total (Proulx, 37). Among the people he met in Ascona were Carl Jung (1875–1961), Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), Gerhard van der Leeuw (1890–1950) the Dutch historian and philosopher of religion, James Hillman (1926–2011) the American psychologist, Viktor Zuckerkandl (1896–1965) the Austrian musicologist, Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1894–1966) the Japanese expert on Buddhism, and Ernst Benz (1907–1978) the German theologian and historian of religion. Of these, Jung certainly had the greatest influence on Corbin: evident traces of Jungian theories can be found in many of Corbin's works (on this, see e.g. Proulx, 69–70). As De Smet justly remarks, Corbin's doctrine of the *mundus imaginalis*, central to his thought, although apparently initially inspired by Suhrawardī, was to a considerable degree shaped by Jungian psychology (De Smet, 'Cités', 150). Some researchers (see e.g. Proulx, 37–38) have argued that most of Corbin's philosophical theories were developed in the milieu of the Eranos Circle and hence should be considered in the context of the general history of the circle.

In 1954, following the publication of his *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire* (an anno-

tated French translation and study of two of Ibn Sinā's mystical treatises, *Qiṣṣat Hayy ibn Yaqzān* and *Risāla fī al-ṭayr*), and upon the recommendation of Massignon, Corbin succeeded the latter as the Chair of Islamic Studies and the Pre-Islamic Religions of Arabia ('Directeur d'études pour l'Islamisme et les religions de l'Arabie') at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (V^e section) on 15 October 1954 (Annuaire 63 (1955–1956), 36), holding this position until his retirement in 1974. In addition, he divided his time between Paris and Tehran for the period 1955–1973, and every autumn he taught the history of Islamic theology and philosophy at the Faculty of Literature of Tehran University. In this way, from the mid-1950s, he typically spent autumn in Tehran, winter in Paris and spring in Ascona.

In 1958, after the publication of *L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*—a major study on the mystical thought of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī—Corbin was elected doctor *honoris causa* by Tehran University. From 1958 for about a decade, during his stay in Tehran, he held regular meetings with 'Allāma Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1892–1981), a major Twelver Imāmī scholar.

In cooperation with S. H. Nasr and O. Yahya, in 1964 Corbin published the first volume of his *Histoire de la philosophie islamique, des origines jusqu'à la mort d'Averroès* (1968). In the same year, at a conference on symbolism, he gave a lecture 'Mundus imaginalis ou l'imaginaire et l'imaginal', in which he summarised his famous doctrine. Remarkably, around the same time, he established friendly relations with the philosopher and anthropologist (later the founder of the *Centre de recherche sur l'imaginaire*, also known as L'École de Grenoble) Gilbert Durand (1921–2012), who became one of his closest intellectual allies.

In 1970, Corbin travelled to Mashhad, to meet the philosopher Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (1304–1384 Sh./1925–2005), then professor at Mashhad University, in order to organise the publication of the *Anthologie*

des philosophes iraniens depuis le XVII^e siècle jusqu'à nos jours (the first of which volumes appeared in 1972; in total, four volumes of the planned seven were published).

In 1971, he published the first two volumes of his most significant work, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, and an important monograph on Iranian Sufism, *L'Homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien*.

In 1972, perhaps influenced by Gilbert Durand, Corbin joined the Masonic lodge *Les Compagnons du Temple du Saint-Jean* (see Clergue, 2/244, where Corbin's membership card is reproduced, and 247). Corbin's activities in Masonic circles (as well as the subsequent founding in 1974 of L'Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem), may be viewed in the context of his growing concern about the crisis of modern civilisation and science, which, in his opinion, threatened to destroy humanity, due to the loss of spiritual values and esotericism. At this stage of his life, he had arrived at the conclusion that the antidote to this crisis should be sought in the resources of the West itself (and not in those of the East, as the French intellectual René Guénon (1886–1951) had posited). Therefore, he attempted to establish an institution that would facilitate the restoration of the esoteric sciences developed by the monotheistic religions (Fenton, *Heschel*, 104).

In 1973, Corbin was elected as a member of the recently founded Iranian Imperial Academy of Philosophy (his fellow-esotericist, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, being appointed its first president). In the same year, he published volumes 3 and 4 of his *En Islam iranien*.

In the following year (1974), after twenty years of service, Corbin retired from the École Pratique des Hautes Études. In the same year, together with a group of like-minded French intellectuals, Robert de Châteaubriant, Gilbert Durand, Antoine Faivre, Richard Stauffer and several others, he founded the *Centre international de recherche spirituelle comparée*, better known as the Université de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem (USJJ). It held five annual meetings during

Corbin's lifetime, remaining active until 1987 (when Stella Corbin, who had become the license holder after her husband's death, decided to close the Centre, claiming that its objectives, as established by her husband, had been achieved) and published fourteen volumes of proceedings. It was succeeded by the *Groupe d'Études Spirituelles Comparées*, founded by Antoine Faivre and Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, which was active until around 2008.

The University of St John of Jerusalem stood under the aegis of the order of St John of the Hospital at Jerusalem and had its seat at the Abbey of Vaucelles, where the French priory of the order was also domiciled (Hakl, 275). However, it was both legally and conceptually independent of the order.

The USJJ was 'a project that marked the summit of [Corbin's] scientific work, at the same time being the fruition of the dream of his youth' (Corbin, 'Post-Scriptum', 52). Corbin claimed that its spirit was that of spiritual chivalry, as defined in the 14th century by the German mystic and former Strasbourg merchant Rulman Merswin (ca. 1307–1382), the leader of the fraternity of the Friends of God (on whom, see Jundt, *Les amis and Rulman Merswin*, and Gorceix), as being 'neither ecclesiastical, nor mundane', since 'the times of the cloisters had passed'. The ultimate goal of the institution, in Corbin's words, was 'to create, in the spiritual city of Jerusalem, a common home... for the study and spiritual fructification of the three great Abrahamic religions' (Corbin, 'Post-Scriptum', 53). According to Corbin's friend and co-founder of the university, Robert de Châteaubriant, the University of St John was founded 'by the initiative of a group of knights from the priory of France (prieuré de la Langue de France)', aspiring to travel the path of spiritual chivalry (Robert de Châteaubriant, 13). The university also intended to dedicate itself to the study of the traditional spirituality of the Occident (Robert de Châteaubriant, 22).

That same year, 1974, Corbin published the second volume of his *Histoire de la*

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philosophie islamique (covering the period from the death of Ibn Rushd to the end of the 19th century).

Corbin's membership of the Iranian Academy of Philosophy enabled him to continue his regular travels to Iran after his retirement. In 1975, together with S. J. Āshtiyānī, he published the second volume of the *Anthologie des philosophes iraniens depuis le XVII^e siècle jusqu'à nos jours*. In 1977, he published two important works, *Philosophie iranienne et philosophie comparée* and *L'Evangile de Barnabé et la prophétologie islamique* (in the latter article, he discussed in detail his theory of the *Verus Propheta* and also argues that early Islam was greatly influenced by the teachings of the Judeo-Christian sect of Ebionites).

Corbin died in Paris on 7 October 1978 after several months of illness. He was buried at the cemetery of Champeaux in Montmorency, Val d'Oise (which has now become one of the northern suburbs of Paris).

2. WORKS

In total, Corbin authored around 300 works, including more than ten monographs of different size and around fifteen critical editions of major philosophical and mystical texts (some of which he also translated into French).

His first important publication on Islamic culture and thought, which, remarkably, was devoted to Suhrawardī (Corbin, 'Pour l'anthropologie'), appeared in 1933 in *Recherches philosophiques*, a journal described by a modern French researcher as 'an organ of the philosophical avant-garde oriented towards the phenomenologico-existential Germany' (Lindenberg, 172). However, most of his publications of the 1930s represent either translations of the works of German philosophers and theologians, or articles about them: during the pre-war period he translated and published the works of Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, Johann Georg Hamann and Abraham Heschel.

A. MAJOR ORIGINAL WORKS

i) Corbin's *magnum opus* is his four-volume *En islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, the first two volumes of which came out in 1971, and the remaining two in 1973. It consists of seven books: 1) Aspects of Twelver Shi'ism; 2) Suhrawardī and the Platonists of Persia; 3) Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī and the Sufism of the *Fidèles d'amour*; 4) Shi'ism and Sufism; 5) the School of Iṣfahān; 6) the School of the *Shaykhiyya*; 7) the Twelfth Imam and Spiritual Chivalry. Each of the books, in turn, is divided into several chapters. Most of the material represents revised versions of some earlier published articles, chapters or introductions. Brought together and updated, it gives us a more or less comprehensive view of the principal aspects of Corbin's research on Twelver Shi'ism and Sufism; his works on Ismailism, however, remain largely scattered.

The first book, 'Aspects of Twelver Shi'ism', deals with such issues as the relationship between Shi'ism and Iran, the notion of Twelver Shi'ism, the spiritual battle of Shi'ism, the phenomenon of the Holy Book, esotericism and hermeneutics, prophetology and imamology, and the place of the Imam in Shi'i spirituality.

The second book, 'Suhrawardī and the Platonists of Persia', discusses the life and works of Suhrawardī, the emergence of the School of Illumination (*Ishrāq*), the notion of 'Oriental' wisdom (or the wisdom of Illumination), the Light of Glory as the source of Illumination (and the Holy Grail as one of the forms of its manifestation). In addition, it includes two chapters that provide an in-depth analysis of two of Suhrawardī's mystical or 'initiatory' tales, '*Aql-i surkh*' (lit. 'The Red Intellect', translated by Corbin into French as 'L'Archange empourpré') and '*Qiṣṣat al-ghurbat al-gharbiyya*' ('The Tale of the Occidental Exile'). The book concludes with a chapter devoted to the later *Ishrāqī* tradition in Iran and India.

The third book is devoted to Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī (522–606/1128–1209), whom

Val-d'Oise

Corbin views as one of the most eminent representatives of the so-called 'school of love' (*madhhab-i 'ishq*) in Iranian Sufism, and as a mystic who focused his attention on the theophanies of beauty, describing God as the 'pre-eternal witness' (*shāhid-i qidam*).

The fourth book deals with the relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism, which is discussed in the context of an analysis of the teachings of four great Iranian mystics of the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries: Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (720–after 787/1320–after 1385), Sā'in al-Dīn 'Alī Turka Iṣfahānī (d. 830/1427), 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī (q.v., 659–736/1261–1336) and the anonymous author of the treatise on the seven levels of meaning of the Qur'ān (*Risāla-yi 'sanā barqihī*', see Corbin, *En islam*, 3/215, n. 49., the title being a reference to the phrase at Q 24: 43).

The fifth book is devoted to the school of Iṣfahān, which represents the acme of the intellectual history of Ṣafawid Iran, with separate chapters on the three most eminent figures of the school, namely Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1051/1640) and Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī (d. 1103/1691).

The sixth book deals with the school of the *Shaykhīyya*. After the discussion of the life and works of the founder of the school Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (q.v., 1166–1241/1753–1826) and his successor Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (1212–1259/1798–1843) and the Kirmānī branch of the school established by Shaykh Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm-Khān Kirmānī (1225–1288/1809–1870), Corbin devotes a separate chapter to a discussion of the main doctrinal points of the school, in particular the subtle 'body of the Hūrqalyā' (*al-jism al-hūrqalyawī*) and 'the fourth pillar' (*al-rukn al-rābi'*).

The seventh and final book is devoted to the Twelfth Shi'i Imam, his occultation and expected advent, and spiritual chivalry (*futuwwa* or *jawānmardī*) together with its Western analogues.

ii) Corbin's second most important original work is probably his *Histoire de*

la philosophie islamique. It consists of two parts: the first, written in collaboration with Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Osman Yahya, was published in 1964, while the second part appeared in 1974. This work, which is mostly based on lecture notes, emphasises the crucial role of Shi'ism and esoteric hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) in the inception and development of Islamic philosophy. The work is composed in a polemical vein: by writing it Corbin tries to refute the widespread opinion that Islamic philosophy declined after the death of Ibn Rushd in 595/1198, producing no doctrines of major interest and wasting its energy on composing commentaries and glosses on previously written works, in which philosophers quarrelled about peripheral issues. The work still provides much useful information, although many details have become outdated. It was translated into English by Philip Sherrard and published by the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London in 1993.

iii) *L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*. This work, which appeared in 1958, develops the theory of creative imagination, and constitutes a landmark in western scholarship on Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (560–638/1165–1240), probably the most important authority on Sufi metaphysical doctrine.

iv) The first edition of another important monograph, *Corps spirituel et terre céleste: de l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shī'ite*, appeared in 1961. In this work, Corbin, for the first time, discusses in detail his doctrine on the intermediate world of imaginal forms (*mundus imaginalis*). It consists of two parts, the first of which represents Corbin's own discussion on the spiritual body and celestial earth—the phenomena that, in his opinion, pertain to the world of the imaginal, whereas the second part is a selection of philosophical and mystical texts (in Corbin's own translation), related to the issue. The second edition, which came out in 1979, includes an important preface 'Pour une charte de l'Imaginal' ('sketching out a chart of the imaginal').

v) In 1971, Corbin published *L'Homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien*, the principal theme of which is the phenomena of light and colour (photisms) which accompany the mystic during his journey, indicating his changing spiritual situation. The discussion is mainly based on the texts of the Sufi shaykhs of the Kubrawī order, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (540–617/1145–1220), Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāya (573–654/1177–1256) and 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī. Corbin argues that this experience should be treated as a series of encounters with one's 'heavenly twin'.

B. EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Corbin edited and published a number of important philosophical, theological and mystical texts in Arabic and Persian and translated some of them, fully or partially, into French.

i) Philosophical Texts

Corbin's first edition of a philosophical text was a volume of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī's early works, which includes *al-Talwīhāt al-lawḥiyya wa al-'arshiyya*, *al-Mashārī' wa al-muṭārāhāt* and *al-Muqāwamāt* (Suhrawardī, *Opera I*). In 1952, this was followed by the edition of Suhrawardī's main work, *Hikmat al-ishrāq* (Suhrawardī, *Opera II*), which he later also translated into French (Sohrawardī, *Sagesse*). In 1976, Corbin published his annotated French translation of fifteen of Suhrawardī's treatises (most of which can be described as mystical or initiatory).

Corbin also published the critical edition of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī's (Mullā Ṣadrā's) *al-Mashā'ir*, together with a detailed introductory essay and an annotated French translation. In addition, he edited and translated two of Ibn Sīnā's allegorical treatises, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and *Risālat al-ṭayr* (Corbin, *Avicenne*).

ii) Sufi Texts

Corbin edited two texts by the twelfth-century Sufi, Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī. The

first is *Abhar al-āshiqīn* which he undertook together with Muḥammad Mu'īn (Rūzbehān, 1958) and the second, *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥiyyāt*, a sympathetic explanation of the ecstatic sayings of the early Sufis (Rūzbehān, 1966).

iii) Ismaili and Twelver Imāmī Texts

Corbin published five important Ismaili texts: Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Jāmi' al-hikmatayn*, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's *Kitāb al-yanābī* and (the Persian translation of) al-Sijistānī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī's *al-Mabda' wa al-ma'ād*, and the anonymous (partial) commentary on Maḥmūd Shabistarī's *Gulshan-i rāz* (Corbin, *Trilogie*; Sejestānī).

In cooperation with Osman Yahya, Corbin edited two significant Twelver Imāmī texts, composed by Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, the *Jāmi' al-asrār* (Āmolī, 1969) and *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ* (Āmolī, 1975). He also translated Rajab Bursī's *Mashāriq al-anwār* (Borsī).

3. VIEWS AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

A. CORBIN AS PHILOSOPHER

Henry Corbin's two principal philosophical theories are those of the imaginal world (*mundus imaginis* or *'ālam al-mithāl*) and prophetic philosophy. Along with these, his teachings on the Temple and spiritual chivalry, which he developed during the latter years of his life, must also be discussed.

i) *Mundus imaginis*. The claim of the existence of the intermediate world, situated between the world of the intellect and that of the senses—usually described as the world of the soul—is endorsed by all branches of Platonism. Corbin's contribution consists of ascribing a crucial importance to this intermediary, which, as he emphasises, was omitted by Ibn Rushd and the Latin Averroists, who claimed to have restored Aristotle's original teachings (following Corbin, Jambet has argued that, in the case of the Latin Averroists, this

omission was a logical consequence of the emergence of the theology of incarnation (Jambet, *Logique*, 224)). The initial source of Corbin's theory may have been Suhrawardī's short discussion on the world of suspended images (*'ālam al-muthul al-mu'allaqa*), found in his *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (Suhrawardī, 148–149). Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching on the creative role of aspiration (*himma*) as the ability to externalise imaginal forms (Ibn al-'Arabī, 1/88–89; see also al-Ḥakīm, *himma*, passim), also clearly influenced his thought. In addition, as De Smet points out, Corbin was significantly inspired by the works of Jung (in particular, his *Die Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Alchemie, Einige Bemerkungen zu den Visionen des Zosimos und Psychologie und Alchemie* (De Smet, 'Cités', 150, n. 48)).

As Corbin explains, the *mundus imaginalis* is identical with the Orient, taken in the true (i.e. esoteric) meaning of the word: 'The "Orient" to which the esotericists of the three great Abrahamic religions refer is the spiritual universe—in brief, the world of the Angel' (Corbin, 'Allocution d'ouverture', 10).

On the other hand, the *mundus imaginalis* is the realm of the creative imagination, an imagination which is theophanic in nature. The human being can only perceive God as He reveals Himself in the *mundus imaginalis*, through a theophany and/or via the intermediacy of a theophanic figure, which acts as his personal guide or Imam (on the Imam as a theophanic figure, see Corbin, *En islam*, 4/428).

But the theophany can never be identified with its source and principle, which is infinitely more powerful and infinitely more perfect. Corbin's theory of the *mundus imaginalis*, instead of the journey from creation to the Creator, presupposes a journey through theophanies of a different kind and intensity, because direct access to their source—the world of the intellect, which Corbin apparently equates with the Godhead proper—is impossible. Corbin argues that this journey should be viewed as a spiritual transmutation. However, since

it does not lead to the direct perception of the noetic realities of things, it remains a journey in the imaginal realm, not entering the realm of the intellect proper. As Fenton explains, this is probably because Corbin questioned the idea of 'an impersonal metaphysical knowledge through pure intellect . . ., insisting on the necessity of personal experience' (Fenton, *Heschel*, 104), which presupposes the presence of the imaginal.

In his later works, Corbin addresses the issue from a different aspect. In order to 'overcome the dualism of Creator and creation' (Corbin, 'Le combat', 11), he argues, there must be a mediator between them that transforms them into each other. This mediator is the Soul of the World, which ensures the divine presence in the world or, rather, embodies in itself this presence (Corbin, 'Le combat', 12, 14). Considered as such embodiment, it is identical with Sophia or Shekhinah (Divine wisdom as it appears in relation to the world) (Corbin, 'Le combat', 12).

The Aristotelian Agent Intellect is interpreted by Corbin as the initiating Angel and the Perfect Nature, which acts as man's personal guide or Imam, 'which is a theophany that corresponds to his own being and constitutes his *homme de lumière*' (Corbin, *En islam*, 4/418). In other words, the intellect becomes part of the *mundus imaginalis*, revealing itself to the man as his Angel and personal guide; consequently, the unification with the intellect is the unification with one's personal guide or, rather, with one's higher self. Corbin claims that such mystical union (with the Intellect-Angel-Imam-Anthropos céleste-Verus Propheta-True Adam) 'defines the chivalrous service of the philosopher as a divine sage' (Corbin, *En islam*, 4/418).

ii) Prophetic Philosophy and the Hermeneutics of the Book

Corbin believed that Shi'ism had produced a synthetic divine wisdom (*al-hikma al-ilāhiyya*), which harmoniously combines

revelation and reason, providing an antidote to the theory of the double truth which dominated Latin Averroism. He argued that this philosophy was a narrative one, because it described the history of *malakūt* (the angelic world). Hence, it necessitated angelology and refuted the incarnation of God in history. Last but not least, it presupposed *walāya* in the specifically Shi'i sense of 'friendship [with God]' (Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, XII; cf. Shayegan, 108).

Corbin emphasised the intimate entanglement of hermeneutics and philosophy in Islam and argued that the teachings of Islamic philosophy were incomprehensible if considered without relation to the hermeneutics of the Book and recognised exegetic practices (Jambet, 'Henry Corbin et l'histoire', 13). As Jambet shows, Corbin saw in the successive systems of Islamic philosophy not the effects of an exterior social causality, but the modifications and cyclical repetitions of a tale, which had its origin in the prophetic word (Jambet, 'Henry Corbin', 17).

The doctrine of prophetic philosophy presupposed the inseparability of philosophy and prophecy owing to their common source (the Holy Spirit, identified with the Agent Intellect of the Peripatetic philosophers) (Corbin, 'Prelude', XVIII).

Corbin believed that in the religions of the Scripture (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), the Holy Book occupied the place of the pole, whereas all other writings (i.e. the works on theology, mysticism and philosophy) were to be treated as mirrors, situated around this pole, at different distances from it. Hence, philosophy, theology and mysticism did not have to be viewed as independent or autonomous sciences or paths to knowledge, instead they should be considered different kinds and modalities of *ta'wīl* (esoteric or symbolic interpretation) (Jambet, *Logique*, 222–223), the function of which is to take a thing (phenomenon) back to its source, namely to establish its transcendental archetypal meaning.

However, the phenomenon of the Book and its esoteric interpretation does not

apply exclusively to the scriptures of the revealed monotheistic religions. In theory, any text can be treated as a 'holy book' or 'scripture' if its symbolic meaning is actualised in the soul of the reader. This is particularly true in the case of the so-called mystical or initiatory recitals (e.g. Suhrawardī's *Qisṣat al-ghurbat al-gharbiyya*) (Corbin, *En islam*, 2/191; cf. Fakhoury, 'Hermeneutics', 368).

Hence it is possible to conclude that Corbin views hermeneutics as the path of personal spiritual realisation, where the *ta'wīl* of the text presupposes the *ta'wīl* of the soul, ultimately leading to its new birth (Fakhoury, 'Hermeneutics', 360; cf. Shayegan, 113). Thus hermeneutics is expected to reveal hidden and spiritual esoteric meanings that correspond to different levels of the hermeneut's conscience. In Corbin's opinion, the hierarchy of the world, which rests on the corporealisation of spiritual affairs and the spiritualisation of corporeal ones, represents 'a fundamental structure of hierarchical correspondences', in which the exoteric aspect of every higher level coincides with the esoteric aspect of the subsequent lower one. In this way, the lower level is the locus of the manifestation (*maẓhar*) of the higher one (Corbin, *En islam iranien*, 1/48, 202, 3/225; cf. Fakhoury, 'Hermeneutics', 355). Therefore, in order correctly to interpret the meaning of the lower level, the *ẓāhir*, one has to ascend to the higher level, the *bāṭin*.

Corbin viewed such 'exegesis of the soul' (Corbin, *Histoire*, 245) as the precursor of phenomenology and analytical psychology (Corbin, *Trilogie*, 15–16; cf. Rousse-Lacordaire, 271; Fakhoury, 'Hermeneutics', 360). He believed that the study of hermeneutic modalities employed by spiritual traditions based on revealed religion 'could yield their common spiritual denominators' (Fenton, *Heschel*, 104).

It seems that Corbin's theory of prophetic philosophy was inspired by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), the author of the doctrine of Transcendent Philosophy (*al-hikma al-muta'aliya*), in particular by certain remarks in the latter's commentary

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on al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi* (e.g. the comparison of the intellect and the religious law with a sound eye and the sun, respectively) (Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ al-Kāfi*, 5/4–5; cf. also Mīr Dāmād's teaching on *al-ḥikma al-yamanīyya*).

iii) The Image of the Temple and Spiritual Chivalry

The principal themes of the later Corbin were those of the image of the Temple and spiritual chivalry. He claimed that the vision of the Angel, and thence of the image of the Temple (*Imago Templi*), descended from a level of a 'positively differentiated supra-consciousness' (Corbin, *Temple*, 266, all references are to the English translation). In order to explain his point, Corbin referred to Ezekiel's prophecy about the New Temple (Ezekiel, chapters 40–48) as a cosmic restoration (Corbin, *Temple*, 284).

The book of Ezekiel describes four phases in the history of the Temple: 1) the ruin of the Temple, which is deserted by the Shekhinah (the symbol of God's presence); 2) God himself as the Temple (in the land of exile); 3) the return of the Shekhinah; 4) the new Temple (a supra-terrestrial divine image, the unprofanable dwelling of the Sacred) (see Fujita, 15–42). The final Temple, built in the middle of the 'eternal planting of justice', will be the centre of the new world (Corbin, *Temple*, 297).

The imaginal form of the Temple, according to Corbin, refers to the pact of alliance between God and men (Corbin, *Temple*, 297). The high priest of the cosmic temple is the first creation, the divine Logos; in turn, the high priest of the temple of the soul is man himself (man in the true sense) (Corbin, *Temple*, 306).

The spirituality of the Temple was perceived by Corbin as the spirituality of the esoteric Abrahamic gnosis, whose task was to face the global phenomenon of desacralisation (Corbin, 'Allocution d'ouverture', 9). In his opinion, this spirituality was cultivated by the community of mystics and theosophers who formed the inner church of the three Abrahamic religions, which was

the seat of spiritual chivalry (Corbin, 'Allocution d'ouverture', 9).

Corbin argued that the true meaning of salvation consisted of deliverance from the perils of history. Just as the daughter of Pharaoh saved Moses from the waters of the Nile, he claimed that the image of the Temple will save man from the waters of desacralised (and hence meaningless) history (Corbin, *Temple*, 340). Thus, the virtue of the image of the Temple consists in delivering human beings from two dangers—those of sociology and subjectivity (Corbin, *Temple*, 388).

The Temple becomes manifest only at the meeting-place of the two seas (*majma' al-baḥrayn*, Q 18:60), or in the 'intermediary Orient': it cannot appear in the physical world. From this 'intermediary Orient', the Temple is then transferred to the 'metaphysical Orient' (Corbin, *Temple*, 367).

The community of believers, considered as the Temple, is the living sanctuary, and the 'centre of the earth', which marks the boundary between the sacred and the profane; it is the fortress which the sons of Light must defend through incessant combat against the attacks of the sons of Darkness. This eschatological combat is fought jointly by believers and angels (Corbin, *Temple*, 321).

The central figure of the community of the believers which constitutes the Temple is the sage-knight (*ḥakīm-fatā* or *ḥakīm-jawānmard*), who possesses both knowledge and aspiration, and for whom spiritual and intellectual inquiry are not separated from each other (Corbin, 'Science', 48).

The motif of the image of the Temple is closely related to the motif of the Green Island, a utopian island on which the community of the spiritual knights dwells (Corbin, *En islam*, 4/414). The Shi'i legend found in al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār* tells us that by their exemplary personal life these 'friends of God' prepare for the advent of the Imam, the manifestation of the Perfect Man as the divine epiphany. These spiritual knights, from generation to generation, form around the Imam the *silsilat al-'irfān*, an uninterrupted line of gnosis (Corbin, *En islam*, 4/417).

B. CORBIN AS A HISTORIAN OF RELIGIONS AND ISLAMIC THOUGHT

Corbin describes his method of research as phenomenological but does not attach it to any particular school of phenomenology, and defines the object of his research as 'a religious object, such as it shows itself to those to whom it shows itself' (Corbin, *En islam*, 1/XXVII–XXVIII). This object, to Corbin, is the primary phenomenon, or *Ur-Phaenomenon*, that cannot be reduced to anything else. Corbin's phenomenological approach to the history of religion (and to Islamic studies in particular) meant that he believed that the historical context of the experienced or perceived thing or event could not explain its true nature; rather, in his opinion, the latter was rooted in the consciousness of its experiencer and perceiver (Proulx, 71).

i) The Esoteric Aspect

Corbin believed that the essence and true reality of the thing consisted in its esoteric aspect (*bāṭin*), and that, in the case of Islam, this esoteric aspect was represented by Shi'ism (see e.g. Corbin, *Histoire*, 66–69, cf. *ibid.*, 51–52, 54). Interestingly, Corbin viewed Sufism as a form of Shi'ism unaware of its own roots, and treated Sunni Sufi *shaykhs* (although making exceptions for some of them, e.g. Rūzbihān Baqlī and Najm al-Dīn Kubrā) as usurpers of the role of the hidden Imam (Corbin, *Histoire*, 57; cf. Algar, 87). In short, he viewed Shi'ism as the essence of Islam (Corbin, *En islam*, 1/16).

Throughout Corbin's academic career, his scholarly interest was focused mainly on Iran, which he believed to be 'not just a nation, or an empire, but a separate spiritual universe, a home of the history of religions' (Corbin, 'Post-Scriptum', 41). As Charles Adams points out, 'Corbin had no concern for the comprehensive, systematic, disinterested presentation of historical Islam... His work rests on a clear value choice, one that deems a certain element of the Islamic

tradition supremely significant and others not to be worthwhile in the same degree' (Adams, 137).

ii) The Judaeo-Christian Origin of Islam

In his late writings, Corbin favoured the hypothesis of the Judaeo-Christian origin of Islam (see e.g. Corbin, 'Harmonia', 8). He also claimed to have reconstructed the image of original, non-trinitarian Christianity, which possessed a permanent place in the cycle of prophetic religions but was strikingly different from the 'historical' image of Christianity (Corbin, 'Post-Scriptum', 46). The central place in this non-trinitarian Christianity was occupied by the image of Christ-Angel (*Christos Angelos*), the celestial 'Son of Man' or *Anthropos*; it ignored the dogma of the hypostatic union of two natures (human and divine) in the Son. Jesus of Nazareth was seen as a *Saddiq* ('Just'), who was adopted and consecrated as Christ during his baptism and transfigured into the celestial visionary figure of the Son of Man, who will manifest himself at his advent, which will constitute the final act of redemption. This fundamental idea of Ebionite christology underlay the prophetology of the *Verus Propheta*, according to which all prophets were manifestations of the archetypal image of the True Prophet.

iii) The True Prophet

At the end of the current prophetic cycle, the True Prophet will manifest himself as the Glorious One or Paraclete (*Perikleitos* / *al-Fāraqlīt*, n.b. the reading *parakleitos* meaning 'interceder', Corbin believes to be erroneous), establishing the realm of pure esotericism. In this aspect, he will coincide with the 12th Imam (Corbin, *En islam*, 4/437), manifesting himself as the Revealer of the hidden meaning of all previous religious laws, but not as the establisher of a new law (Corbin, *En islam*, 4/438).

Corbin's belief in the advent of the era of pure esotericism was probably based on Joachim of Fiore's (ca. 1135–1202) teach-

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ing of the three eras in the history of mankind (those of the Father, the Son and the Spirit). The final period in the development of human society, according to Joachim of Fiore, was the rule of the Paraclete (to which John, 14:16 apparently refers), i.e., the era of the perfect freedom of spirit and love (see Corbin, *En islam*, 4/444).

C. CORBIN AS EDITOR AND TRANSLATOR

Corbin prepared and published the critical editions of about a dozen major (and a number of minor) philosophical and mystical texts in Arabic and Persian. With the exception of the first volume of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī's works, all of them appeared in the series of the *Bibliothèque Iranienne*, published by the *Institut Français de Recherche en Iran (IFRI)*. He translated into French, completely or partially, some of these texts, in particular Ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* and fifteen of his minor treatises, and Mullā Ṣadrā's *al-Mashā'ir*. In general, his editions and translations are very reliable, although occasionally minor mistakes occur. For example, there are a few instances in his edition of the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* where Corbin mistook some expressions from Quṭb al-Dīn's commentary for Suhrawardī's own words, including them in the body of the main text, apparently because in the lithographic edition of the commentary, which Corbin was using, the line drawn over the passages of the text sometimes erroneously extended over the commentary (see Suhrawardī, xxxii–xxxiii, 187–194). Corbin's translations may occasionally become somewhat descriptive (Vieillard-Baron, 'Henry Corbin', 75). The reliability of his editions and translations, and their great importance for the advancement of Islamic studies in the West, are nevertheless recognised by his admirers and detractors alike.

4. CORBIN'S INFLUENCE AND LEGACY

Corbin approached Islamic thought from two aspects: as a philosopher and researcher endowed with a profound scholarly erudition, and as a spiritual wayfarer and 'practising mystic'. He is remarkable for his focusing on the world of the Soul and the creative imagination. This entails a probable conclusion that, during his mature period, it was the thought of Jung (and, more generally, the ideas developed in the pro-Jungian circle of Eranos) which influenced him most profoundly as a researcher and scholar.

However, by making imagination the central concept of his thought, Corbin inevitably marginalised the role of the intellect and hence subordinated metaphysics to psychology. In addition, Corbin's doctrine of the *mundus imaginalis* implies that it is impossible to grasp the realities of things by intellectual intuition ~~only~~, which, in turn, entails impossibility of a direct presential knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*) of oneself and the immaterial lights (intellects) (on which, see Suhrawardī, 80). In this way it rules out the possibility of purely intellectual knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is not mediated by imagination, a possibility which is one of the principal epistemological claims of the philosophers (see e.g. Steel, 'Introduction', 19–22).

Corbin's ideas, in different ways and to various degrees influenced such scholars as the researcher of the anthropological structures of the imaginary Gilbert Durand (1921–2012), the historian of religions Richard Stauffer (1921–1984), the historian of esotericism Antoine Faivre (1934–) and philosopher Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron (1944–). However, the most active propagator of Corbin's teachings for more than three decades has been his former student, the philosopher Christian Jambet (1949–), who has authored an insightful book on Corbin's teaching on imaginal forms (Jambet, *Logique*) and a number of articles on other

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aspects of his thought (e.g. Jambet, 'Henry Corbin et l'histoire'). The American biologist Tom Cheetham has also written four books in which he presents Corbin's teachings to a non-specialist English-speaking audience in an accessible manner (Cheetham, *After Prophecy*, *All the World*, *Green Man*, *The World*). He also runs an internet blog devoted to Corbin (Cheetham, *The Legacy*).

In France, many regard Corbin as one of the pillars of Islamic and Iranian Studies, and, in some circles, his name has become a symbol of the inquisitiveness and insight of French scholarship taken in relation to Islamic culture and civilization (particularly in relation to Iran). However, certain other French intellectuals treat him sceptically. In addition, sometimes contemporary French scholars refuse to consider Shīʿī, and in particular Ismāʿīlī, thought as philosophy, instead associating it with 'theosophy' as described by Corbin. The attitude of Anglo-American scholars to Corbin's teachings is quite reserved (see Algar, *passim*; and Gutas, 15–19), but he is generally accorded due recognition as the first publisher and translator of a number of important philosophical and mystical texts.

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