

# The Spread of the Illuminationist School of Suhrawardi

by  
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After the early period of Islamic history during which the major intellectual and religious perspectives were crystallized and delineated, there is no figure in Islamic intellectual life who has left as much influence upon the later theosophical and philosophical schools of Islam as Suhrawardi, except for Ibn `Arabi, who was almost his contemporary and whose influence in the eastern lands of Islam was often concurrent with that of Shaykh al-ishraq (the "Master of Ishraq"). Yahya ibn Habash Amirak Suhrawardi, known in Persia as Shaykh al-ishraq, lived but 38 years, having been born in Suhraward near Zanzan in 549/1155, and martyred in Aleppo in 587/1191. With the account of this short but meteoric career we are not concerned here<sup>1</sup> nor do we propose to analyse the tenets of the new "Theosophy of the Orient of Light" (*hikmat al-ishraq*) established by him.<sup>2</sup> Our task is to survey the manner in which his ideas spread and the effect they had upon subsequent phases of intellectual life primarily in the East but also in the West.

Of the immediate students and disciples of Suhrawardi there remains no trace save for reference to the names of one or two men who were his followers.<sup>3</sup> His first real

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning the life of Suhrawardi see H. Corbin's two prolegomena to Suhrawardi, *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*, vol. I, Istanbul, 1945 and vol. II, Tehran-Paris, 1951; S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1964, Chapter II; S. H. Nasr, "Suhrawardi" in M. M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. I, Wiesbaden, 1963, pp. 372-398.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the doctrines of Suhrawardi and his school see the above mentioned works as well as Corbin, *Les motifs Zoroastriens dans la philosophie Sohrawardi*, Tehran, 1325 (A. H. solâr).

<sup>3</sup> In the *Bustan al-jami'* (ed. by C. Cahen), *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales* vol. VII-VIII, Damascus, 1938,

disciple was Shams al-Din Muhammad Shahrazuri,<sup>4</sup> who lived in the seventh/thirteenth century and wrote commentaries upon his works as well as a moving account of his life in the *Nuzhat al-arwah wa rawdat al-afrah*.<sup>5</sup> The dates of the life of Shahazuri make it most unlikely that he could have been a direct disciple of Suhrawardi, but the intimate manner in which he speaks of *ishraqi* doctrines and the Shaykh al-ishraq himself leave no doubt that he belonged directly to Suhrawardi's school, being perhaps a disciple of one of his disciples. In any case one can state with certainty that he received the oral transmission which in Islamic philosophy is a necessary complement to the written text and a condition *sine qua non* for a full understanding of traditional doctrines. Shahrazuri was the great propagator and commentator of Suhrawardi's teachings, playing a role that is in many ways analogous to that of Sadr al-Din al-Qunyawi *vis-a-vis* Ibn 'Arabi. Shahrazuri wrote a commentary upon the *Talwihat* of Suhrawardi in 680/1281,<sup>6</sup> and the first commentary upon the *Hikmat al-ishraq*, upon which all later commentaries have relied in one way or other.<sup>7</sup>

The seventh/thirteenth century witnessed a wide general interest in the writings of Suhrawardi and in fact it was during this century that *ishraqi* doctrines penetrated into the intellectual centers of Persia and also Anatolia and Syria. Besides the commentary of Shahrazuri upon the *Talwihat*, at nearly the same time two other commentaries were also written upon this important work, that of Ibn Kammunah, written in 667/1269, and that

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p. 150, the name of one Shams al-Din is mentioned as his student but the identity of this figure is not known.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning Shahrazuri see *Kanz al-hikmah*' by D. Durri, which is a Persian translation of the *Nuzhat al-arwah*, Tehran, 1316 (A. H. solar), p. 11. Durri argues from a treatise on the creation of the world (*huduth*) by Mulla Shamsa in which it is stated that Qutb al-Din Shirazi has cited Shahrazuri that Shahrazuri lived in the seventh/thirteenth century. Other indications substantiate the fact that Shahrazuri, whose biography is unknown to us, was still alive during the last decades of the seventh/thirteenth century. See also Sachau, *Chronologie Orientalischer Volker von Albiruni, Leipzig*, 1878, introduction, p.p L-LI.

<sup>5</sup> O. Spies has given the Arabic text of this biographical account in his edition of Suhrawardi, *Three Treatises on Mysticism*, Stuttgart, pp. 90-121; in our recent edition of Suhrawardi's Persian works, *Oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, vol. II, II, Tehran-Paris, 1970, Persian introduction, pp. 13-30, we have also given a new edited version of Shahrazuri's biographical account of Suhrawardi as well as its Persian translation by the tenth/sixteenth century scholar Maqsud 'Mi Tabrizi.

<sup>6</sup> See M.T. Danehpazhuh, *Fihrist-i kitabkhanay-i ihda'i-yi Aqa-Sayyid Muhammad Mishkat bi kitabkhanay-i Danish-gah-i Tihran*, vol. III, part I, Tehran, 1332, p. 212.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 455. On the commentaries upon the *Hikmat al-ishraq* see Corbin, prolegomena to vol. II of Suhrawardi, *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*, pp. 59-64.

of Allamah Hilli, completed sometimes before 693/1293. Hilli's own master, Nasir al-Din Tusi, although the reviver of Ibn Sina's philosophy and known most of all for his contributions to Peripatetic (*mashsha'i*) philosophy through his *Sharh alisharat wa' I-tanbihat*, was not only acquainted with Suhrawardi but also influenced by him, especially in the question of God's knowledge of the world. The influence of Suhrawardi upon Nasir al-Din in fact did not go unnoticed by later Islamic philosophers themselves, so that for example Mulla Sadra mentions it in his commentary upon Abhari's *al-Hidayah*.<sup>8</sup> Athir al-Din Abhari himself, although known mostly for his Peripatetic *al-Hidayah*, was deeply influenced by Suhrawardi and in his *Kashf al-haqa'iq fi tahrir al-daqa'iq* follows the master of Ishraq completely.<sup>9</sup> Also during the seventh/thirteenth century another of Nasir al-Din's students and himself one of the foremost *hakims* of Persia, Qutb al-Din Shirazi, composed the second major commentary upon the *Hikmat al-ishraq*, which although based on that of Shahrazuri became much better known than Shahrazuri's work. The first printed lithographed edition of the *Hikmat al-ishraq*, which appeared in Tehran in 1315 (A.H. solar), contains the commentary of Qutb al-Din, and for the past seven centuries nearly all students of *ishraqi* theosophy have seen Suhrawardi through the eyes of Qutb al-Din.

By the beginning of the eight/fourteenth century the *ishraqi* school had become definitely established in Persia and henceforth it remained as an important element of the intellectual life of not only Persia but also the eastern lands of Islam where the Persian Islamic culture has been dominant. In order to study the propagation of Suhrawardi's teachings it would be necessary to follow their spread stage by stage in four different regions: in Persia itself, in the Ottoman world, in the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent and finally in the West where the whole question of whether Suhrawardi was ever known or not must be examined.

Let us begin with the Ottoman world. The proximity of Aleppo to Anatolia and the spread of gnostic teachings mostly from Qunya in the seventh/thirteenth century in the

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<sup>8</sup> See Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Sharh al-hidayat al-athiriyyah*, Tehran, 1313, (A.H. lunar), pp. 366-367.

<sup>9</sup> See Corbin, prolegomena to vol. I of *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*, p. XXI, note 29.

Turkish speaking areas of the region made the teachings of the *ishraqi* school both easily accessible and intellectually attractive in the region that was later to become the heartland of the Ottoman empire. Unfortunately, as far as we have been able to discover, no systematic study of Islamic philosophy in the Turkish speaking parts of the Ottoman empire has been made save for the domain that touches upon the gnostic school of Ibn 'Arabi. But the large number of manuscripts of Suhrawardi found in Turkish libraries especially in Istanbul, often copied by Turkish scribes, the presence of commentaries and marginal notes upon these works in Arabic and Persian as well as in Turkish by scholars of that region and the presence of many ideas of an "*ishraqi* color" in the writings of later Turkish Sufis of the school of Ibn 'Arabi all indicate the extent of the influence of Suhrawardi in a part of the Islamic world where much remains to be discovered through the study of manuscript material that has not received the attention it deserves until now.

In Persia itself, upon the solid foundations established during the seventh/thirteenth century, a long chain of *ishraqi hakims* appeared on the scene culminating with the Safavid sages such as Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra, who were deeply impregnated with the teachings of the Master of Ishraq. Nearly all the Persian philosophers and *hakims* between the seventh/thirteenth and tenth/sixteenth centuries, such as Qutb al-Din Razi, Ibn Turkah Isfahani, Jalal al-Din Dawani, the two Dashtakis and Sayyid Sharif Jurjani, were influenced by Suhrawardi, and many wrote commentaries upon his works, the writings of Dawani being particularly important in this respect. Dawani and Ghiyath al-Din Mansur Dashtaki wrote commentaries upon the *Hayakil al-Nur* and Wadud Tabrizi on *al-Alwah al-'imadiyyah* as well as glosses upon Qutb al-Din's commentary upon the *Hikmat al-ishraq*.

Meanwhile both the Sufis of the school of Ibn 'Arabi and Shi'ite theologians became interested in and impregnated by Suhrawardi's teachings during this period of general rapprochement between the different Islamic intellectual perspectives in Persia.<sup>10</sup> Such masters of gnosis as 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani and Da'ud Qaysari were well aware of

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<sup>10</sup> We have dealt with this question in several of our works, including *Three Muslim Sages*, pp. 79-82 and also *Islamic Studies*. Beirut, 1966, pp. 113-114.

*ishraqi* teachings while Ibn Turkah sought consciously to combine the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi and Suhrawardi. We must also remember that Qutb al-Din Shirazi himself was not only the great expositor of *ishraqi* teachings but also a Sufi and student of Sadr al-Din al-Qunyawi. The nature of *ishraqi* teachings is such as to provide a bridge between philosophy based on ratiocination and pure gnosis. It therefore became inextricably bound up with certain of the later schools of Sufism especially that of Ibn 'Arabi, and the source of *ishraq* for the *ishraqi hakims* remained always the light of Islamic esotericism contained usually in Sufism and occasionally in other forms which Islamic esotericism has taken in Shi'ism.<sup>11</sup>

The integration of *ishraqi* teachings into Shi'ism was for this and other complex reasons, which we cannot delve into on this occasion, rapid and profound, with the result that during later centuries most of the *ishraqis* have been Shi'ite. During the period pre-dating the Safavids, such Shi'ite theologians as Sayyid Haydar Amuli and especially Ibn Abi Jumhur prepared the ground for the integration of *ishraqi* wisdom into the perspective of Shi'ism. The basic work of Ibn Abi Jumhur, *Kitab al-mujli*, contains major theses of *ishraqi* theosophy.

The above tendencies culminated in the great renaissance of the Islamic sciences and especially theosophy or *hikmat-i ilahi* during the Safavid period. Nearly all the major figures of this era, such as Mir Damad, Mir Findiriski, Mulla Sadra, Sayyid Ahmad 'Alawi, Mulla Shamsa Gilani, Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani, 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji and Qadi Sa'id Qummi, not to speak of the later traditional philosophers who have carried this tradition to the present day in Persia, were influenced by Suhrawardi. In fact the whole intellectual effort of the Safavid period is unimaginable without the figure of Suhrawardi, even if Mulla Sadra did found a new intellectual perspective based upon the "principality of existence" (*asalat al-wujud*) opposed to Suhrawardi "principality of quiddity" (*asalat al-mahiyyah*). Despite this difference his vision of the Universe

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<sup>11</sup> One must remember that although *ishraqi* usually refers to the school of Suhrawardi, because of the universality of the symbolism of light certain Sufis, especially of the Shadhiliyyah Order, have been called *ishraqi* without this term referring specifically to Suhrawardi and his school. See for example the *Illumination in Islamic Mysticism* of 'Abd al-Mawahib al-Shadhili, translated by E. Jurji, Prince-ton, 1938.

remains organically bound to that of Suhrawardi.<sup>12</sup>

The Safavid period, more particularly the eleventh/seventeenth century, witnessed two translations of the *Hikmat al-ishraq* into Persian, one made by Makmud Sharif ibn Harawi in 1008/1599 and the other by the Zoroastrian Farzanah Bahram ibn Farshad, a disciple of Adhar Kaywan who was still alive in 1048/1638. This period was also witness to the commentary of Najm al-Din Hajji Mahmud Tabrizi upon the *Hikmat al-ishraq* and the masterful glosses (*ta'liqat*) of Mulla Sadra upon the same work, the latter being one of the most important writings in the tradition of Islamic theosophy and philosophy on eschatology.<sup>13</sup> But more than these commentaries, the influence of Suhrawardi is seen during this period in the works of the *hakims* of the age, whose writings are replete with references to the teachings of Suhrawardi. In fact one of the most outstanding of them, Mir Damad, even chose as his penname Ishraq to demonstrate his close association with the spiritual universe of Suhrawardi.

As for the sub-continent, the main thrust of Islamic philosophy into that region can be almost identified with the spread of the *ishraqi* school in that land. Although from the Ghaznavid period a certain amount of knowledge of Islamic philosophy existed in some of the western regions of the sub-continent, mostly in Isma'ili circles, it was with the Tughrul kings of Delhi such as Sultan Muhammad and Firuz Shah and especially the Moguls that Islamic philosophy really found a home in the sub-continent and began to gain a notable following. The key figure perhaps in the spread of Islamic philosophy at this time was Fathallah Shirazi, himself a student of Ghiyath al-Din Mansur Dashtaki,<sup>14</sup> who was thoroughly acquainted with *ishraqi* theosophy and taught its tenets in the subcontinent. Nearly all later Muslim philosophers of the region, who were in fact closely associated with the "School of Ispahan" and the writings of Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra, were also closely associated with the universe of discourse of *ishraqi*

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<sup>12</sup> Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Le Livre des penetrations metaphysiques*, Tehran-Paris, 1964, the introduction of H. Corbin, chapters IV and V.

<sup>13</sup> See H. Corbin, "La theme de la resurrection chez Molla Sadra Shirazi (0150.1640) commentateur de Sohrawardi (587.1191)", *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to Gershom G. Scholem*, Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 71-115.

<sup>14</sup> See M.A. Alvi and A. Rahman, *Fathullah Shirazi, A Sixteenth Century Indian Scientist*, New Delhi, 1968.

theosophy and many of them were *ishraqis*. The fame of the *Hikmat al-ishraq* and *Hayakil al nur* in Muslim circles of the sub continent has been hardly less than in Persia itself. Moreover, it must be re-membered that the two translations of the *Hikmat al-ishraq* into Persian, which at that time was the common cultural language of Persia and India, are closely connected with the intellectual world of the sub-continent. Mahmud ibn Harawi's translation contains references to Sufism as it developed in the sub-continent and Bahram ibn Farshad's translation belongs to an interesting but as yet little studied aspect of a religious movement that began in Shiraz but played its most important role in Akbar's court. Moreover, the translator was met by the author of *Dabistan al-madhahib* in Lahore and the translation itself may have been made in the sub-continent.

Bahram ibn Farshad belonged to the circle of the Zoroastrian priest, Adhar Kaywan, who had left Shiraz with his followers to settle in India. Adhar Kaywan and his disciples were deeply influenced by the teachings of Suhrawardi and considered themselves to be *ishraqis*. The *Dabistan al-madhahib* in fact mentions several figures of this school by name as being *ishraqis*.<sup>15</sup> The spread of the teachings of Suhrawardi, which had already integrated the angelology of Zoroastrianism into the gnostic dimension of Islam, into Zoroastrian circles that had lived already for centuries within the bosom of the Islamic world, is yet another startling facet of the ramifications of Suhrawardi's doctrines in the later spiritual history of the East. His role in fact in the religious life of Akbar's court and the different attempts to create a bridge between Islam and Hinduism has as yet to be made clear. There is no doubt, however, that through several channels such as Fathallah Shirazi, certain currents of Sufism, the school of Dara Shukuh and the movement of Adhar Kaywan his ideas played a major role in the intellectual and spiritual life of the sub-continent at that time and during subsequent centuries up to the Khayrabadi school and Iqbal himself. Even Hindu circles were to become acquainted with Suhrawardi and some of his writings came to be known by Hindu scholars and sages.

In glancing over the spread of Suhrawardi's teachings in the East one is startled by the degree that it influenced even the titles of philosophical and theosophical writings.

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<sup>15</sup> See Corbin, prolegomena to vol. I of Suhrawardi, *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*, p. LVII.

The earlier works of Islamic philosophy such as those of Ibn Sina have names often associated with knowledge or the cure of ignorance such as the *Najat*, *Shifa* and *al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat* or simply referring to the contents of the book such as most of the treatises of al-Kindi, Farabi and Muhammad ibn Zakariyya' Razi. Under the influence of *ishraqi* theosophy many titles began to appear after the seventh/thirteenth century which were in one way or another connected with the symbolism of light. The appearance of such titles is not only contemporary with Suhrawardi and the spread of *ishraqi* wisdom but definitely caused by this spread. Those who are acquainted with the gnostic, theosophical and philosophical literature of Persia and the Indian sub-continent during the past seven centuries will readily recall such titles as the *Lama'at* of 'Iraqi, the *Kitab al-mujli* of Ibn Abi Jumhur, the *Ashi''at al- Lama'at* of Jami, the *Jadhawat* of Mir Damad, the *Shawariq* and the *Mashriq al-ilham* of Lahiji, all written in Persian and the *al-Shams al-bazighah* of Mulla Mahmud Junpuri, one of the most famous works of *hikmat* in India. Even the Shi'ite theological encyclopedia of Majlisi, the *Bihar al-anwar*, has an *ishraqi* title. The title of the famous *al-Mabahith al-mashriqiyyah* of Fakhr al-Din Razi, the contemporary of Suhrawardi, may also be recalled, but in this case the title is not connected with the *ishraqi* school. The above-mentioned works and many others of this period which mark a definite departure from the title of works of the earlier period of Islamic history can be partially explained by the influence of the "Oriental philosophy" (*al-hikmat al-mashriqiyyah*) of Ibn Sina and the *Mishkat al-anwar* of Ghazzali, not to speak of Ibn Arabi who already possessed a definite "*ishraqi* dimension" in addition to his purely gnostic (*'irfani*) aspect and whose influence is particularly important in the case of 'Iraqi and Jami. But the major reason for this change of tone and color in the later works of *hikmat* and the noticeable change in their titles is Suhrawardi and his *ishraqi* school.

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When we turn to the question of the spread of the school of Illumination in the West we must distinguish between the general doctrine of illumination and the doctrines specifically associated with the school of Suhrawardi. Before the Aristotelianization of

Christian theology in the thirteenth century the Western theologians shared for the most part the view of St. Augustine that "the mind knows the truth in the same way that the physical eye sees a body" (*menti hoc est itelligere, quod sensui ridere*)<sup>16</sup> According to St. Augustine the angels are not the instruments of illumination but only prepare the soul for the illumination that comes from God. Herein lies the major difference between the Augustinian theory of knowledge and that of Suhrawardi. Nevertheless, the belief in illumination in Augustinian theology made this theology more akin to the *ishraqi* doctrines that were to sweep the Islamic world nearly at the same time that Augustinian theology was to be replaced by Thomism in the West. Even an exact contemporary of Suhrawardi, the Cistercian monk Isaac of Stella could write, "Just as, although the eye of the flesh has from nature the faculty of seeing, and the ear that of hearing, the eye never attains vision through itself, or the ear hearing, without the aid of the outer light or sound; so also the rational spirit, being by the gift of creation capable of knowing the true and loving the good, never attains the actuality of wisdom or charity except when flooded with the radiance and inflamed with the heat of the inner light."<sup>17</sup>

Strangely enough Suhrawardi was never translated directly into Latin and was never able to help fortify and sustain this tradition. His name was never officially known to the West because he appeared on the scene at the very moment when the first major period of translation in Spain was drawing to a close. During this era the earlier Muslim Peripatetics had been translated and these translations were in turn interpreted in such a way as to make the atmosphere in Western intellectual circles ever less conducive to the reception of *ishraqi* doctrines. Even Ibn Sina was only half studied, his "Oriental philosophy" having been officially completely neglected.<sup>18</sup> It seems that at this crucial moment of the parting of the ways between Islam and the West, the Islamic world was becoming ever more fully conscious of itself as an "Orient" (*mashriq*) in both a

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<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine, *De Ordine*, II, 3, 10. This view is also confirmed in his *Soliloquies* and explained by E. Gilson in his *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, trans. by L. E. M. Lynch, New York, 1960; pp. 77-88.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by G. B. Burch in his *Early Medieval Philosophy*, New York, 1951, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> This has been fully treated by H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. by W. Trask, New York, 1960, pp. 101-122, and S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, pp. 45-51.

geographical and symbolical sense, thus turning ever more away from the rationalism of the earlier Peripatetic philosophy to the illumination and ecstasy of *ishraq* and *'irfan*. The West which had been in many ways an "Orient" in the *ishraqi* sense of the term and had possessed a traditional civilization which more than in any other period of its known history resembled the great Oriental civilizations, was now becoming an Occident, not only geographically but also in the *ishraqi* sense of concerning itself with the domain of ratiocination that is cut off from the illumination of the Divine Intellect. The migration of Ibn 'Arabi from Andalusia to Syria and the lack of receptivity in the West to the *ishraqi* doctrines of Suhrawardi are symptoms of this event and in fact symbolic of the parting of ways between two worlds which until now had been treading a similar course. Needless to say men like Dante and Eckhart were yet to appear but the tendency had already begun in the West in the direction of the "Occident" or *maghrib* of the intellectual world, in the direction of rationalism which finally with the razor of Ockham was to put an end to the life of scholastic theology, at least as the main intellectual force in the West.

On the margin of this movement, however, the mystical and illuminative tendencies continued to assert themselves and in this domain there may have been contacts with the teachings of Suhrawardi, although this will not be fully known until all the manuscripts are studied. This influence is most likely in the Oxford school of the thirteenth century and such figures as Roger Bacon and even Robert Grossteste. The latter has been credited by Crombie as being the founder of the experimental method,<sup>19</sup> so that some may think him to stand at the antipode of illuminative theosophy. But both in Islam and medieval and even Renaissance Europe interest in the observation of nature and experiment often went hand in hand with gnostic and illuminationist tendencies rather than with rationalism, for the mystic and not rationalist sought after the "vision" of things in their essential reality and tried to remove the mental image which separates the subject from the object. Many *ishraqis* in the East also, foremost among them Qutb al-Din Shirazi, were well-known physicists and observers of nature.<sup>20</sup> Be that as it may, we

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<sup>19</sup> See A. C. Crombie, *Robert Grossteste and the Origins of Experimental Science 1100-1700*, Oxford, 1953.

<sup>20</sup> This question has been dealt with in our *Science and Civilization in Islam*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1968, in

know of the interest of the Oxford school in illumination and that Roger Bacon even wore the dress of the *ishraqis* and lectured upon them. Whether this "*ishraqi*" interest of Bacon refers to the "Oriental philosophy" of Ibn Sina or to Suhrawardi himself remains to be discovered. No definite conclusion can be reached until many more Latin manuscripts, especially those of this school, are studied.

The possibility of acquaintance with Suhrawardi in Spain during the seventh/thirteenth century certainly existed because already Ibn Sab'in of Andalusia who lived at this time in the Maghrib refers to the *Talwihat* in his *al-Risalat al-faqiriyyah*, and this fact testifies to the widespread acquaintance with Suhrawardi throughout the Islamic world of that time. Whether a man like Roger Bacon, who could read Arabic, could have gained access to one of Suhrawardi's actual works is a question which as mentioned above cannot be answered at the present moment. Also components and elements that formed part of the synthesis that Suhrawardi achieved in his *Hikmat al-ishraq*, such as Hermeticism, reached the West independently during the eleventh and twelfth centuries so that some of the alchemical and Hermetical writings bear much resemblance to Suhrawardi in certain aspects of their teachings.

The example of Raymond Lull comes particularly to mind in this connection.

Notwithstanding these possible lines of contact and influence it can be said that *ishraqi* theosophy did not penetrate into the mainstream of Western intellectual life. Rather, with the triumph of Aristotelianism and the weakening of the more intellectual currents of Christian mysticism illumination became more and more relegated to a marginal place until it became completely divorced from the official theology of the main religious authority in the West, namely the Church. In the general development of European philosophy also, despite the appearance of the Cambridge Platonists and a few less influential German philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries like Schelling and Franz van Badder, there was no possibility of an *ishraqi* type of wisdom, seeing that this philosophy had become divorced from both religion and true mysticism and therefore any possible and legitimate source of illumination. The greatest paradox can be seen in the fact that the age which had completely forgotten illumination in the

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several different chapters.

sense that Suhrawardi gives to it and had moved to the very extremities of the "Occident" of the *ishraqi* theosophers is called in some of the Latin languages such as Italian the age of "illumination" (*illuminismo*).

But in as much as the need for true illumination could never be completely suppressed illuminationist teachings appeared from time to time under occultist colours ever more opposed to established religious authority, until in the eighteenth century such movements as the "Illuminated of Bavaria" founded by Adam Weishaupt opposed all established religious authority and hierarchy. The outcome was a far cry from the destiny of *ishraqi* theosophy in Persia where by the Safavid period the most revered religious authorities were teaching Suhrawardi in corners of mosques to pious students who never missed a canonical prayer and who saw the *ishraqi* school as a natural growth of one of the branches from the trunk of Islamic intellectual life.

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Although the subject of this paper does not really cover the modern period, we can not but add a few remarks as a postscript concerning the spread of the teachings of Suhrawardi today in both East and West, for the story of the spread of his influence has not yet come to an end. In Persia Suhrawardi continues as a major intellectual force and it is around him and Mulla Sadra that most of the contemporary students of traditional Islamic philosophy rally<sup>21</sup> With the coming of modern nationalism, which has resuscitated pre-Islamic sentiments in the minds of certain modernists, the synthesis of Suhrawardi, who integrated the spiritual legacy of ancient Persia into the intellectual world-view of Islam, appears as particularly precious. And his impeccable and beautiful philosophical prose in Persian is without doubt a stimulus for the rejuvenation of Persian as a language of intellectual discourse in contemporary terms<sup>22</sup> As long as traditional *hikmat* and of course the traditional religious teachings and the spiritual discipline which

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<sup>21</sup> See H. Corbin, "The Force of Traditional Philosophy in Iran Today," *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Winter, 1968, pp. 12-26.

<sup>22</sup> On the significance of the Persian works of Suhrawardi see S. H. Nasr, "The Persian works of Shaykh al-*ishraq* Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi," *The Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. XII, 1968, No. 1-2, pp. 3-8.

underlie the whole structure of *ishraqi* theosophy subsist, the influence of Suhrawardi will continue to shine on the intellectual horizon of Persia and much of the rest of the Islamic world.

Even in the West Suhrawardi is now finally becoming known after centuries of neglect, almost completely due to the indefatigable efforts of H. Corbin. In a West where the post-Renaissance development of philosophy has reached a dead-end and the purely rationalistic and positivistic schools vie with completely anti-rationalistic philosophies, the synthesis of reason and illumination achieved by Suhrawardi appeals to many minds, not to speak of the vast world of symbols and metaphysical doctrines, which has attracted many who have become acquainted with his writings. Even the young who seek "illumination" through drugs think that they are interested in Suhrawardi.<sup>23</sup> Acquaintance with his writings is therefore bound to increase in the future.

But it must be stated clearly for the sake of both the serious student and he who is looking for adventure that the *ishraqi* theosophy of Suhrawardi is a traditional doctrine of a sacred nature that cannot become fully assimilated except by being coupled with the proper spiritual discipline of an orthodox tradition. One can read Suhrawardi and gain an intellectual understanding of him. This is already a great deal and needs an intellectual intuition which is a gift of heaven and does not come easily. But to become an actual *ishraqi*, to receive that illumination which transforms one's whole being and results in that ecstasy or *wajd* described by Suhrawardi at the end of his *Hikmat al-ishraq*, one must follow the way of Suhrawardi himself and practice the methods of Sufism or analogous spiritual techniques. The *ishraqi* theosophy serves most of all the purpose of depicting a Universe in which the necessity of such practices becomes a blinding evidence, a Universe whose very beauty in fact draws those who possess the necessary qualifications to the doorway of the practical spiritual life, inasmuch as the vision itself is the fruit of having lived such a life. In Persia Suhrawardi's teachings have for centuries performed this important spiritual task. Let us hope that as a living expression of perennial metaphysics they will also perform this task for the few in the West who have

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<sup>23</sup> Some time ago the founder of the "cult of LSD" sent me a message asking for a meeting to be arranged between us, saying that since we were both interested in illumination we had much to talk about.

detected the real malady of our age and are seeking after the real cures, those who have come to realize that the reform of the world and of society begins with the reform of oneself.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "The only means of 'reforming' a religion is to reform oneself." F. Schuon, "No Activity Without Truth," *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Autumn, 1969, p. 199.