From the online library at www.worldwisdom.com

Islamic Science

In Moorish Spain, traditional science had reached such a peak that its influence was felt not only in the Maghrib, but also throughout Latin Christendom. Christian scholars in their writings explicitly referred to their Arab predecessors, and the Benedictine monk Adelhard of Bath, at the beginning of the 12th century, wrote as follows:

> Lest it be thought that one as ignorant as I have fashioned these thoughts for myself, I do declare that they derive from my studies of the Arabs. I do not wish—should anything I say displease certain limited minds—to be the one who displeases them, for I know full well what the truly wise must expect from the common run of men. Therefore I take care not to speak for myself; I speak only for the Arabs.

By the time the Christian kings reconquered Toledo, and later Córdoba, the highpoint of Moorish culture had already been passed. Nevertheless, the booty, in the form of books, which they appropriated, decisively influenced the formation of the medieval Schools. No less was the treasure that was taken to the already existing centers of culture in North Africa by the Moors who sought refuge there. Nevertheless, in the view of Ibn Khaldûn, who himself came from a family of scholars and diplomats that had fled from Seville to the Maghrib, and who was called by the Merinids from Tunis to Fez, the treasury of knowledge that was saved was small in comparison with what was lost.

> The principal centers of sedentary culture in the (Islamic) west were Kairuan in the Maghrib and Córdoba in Spain. When these two centers declined, the teaching of the sciences came to a halt. A portion of it remained alive in Marrakesh under the Almohads. But because of the nomadic origin of the Almohads and the brevity of their rule, sedentary culture did not develop deep roots there. . . . As a result, after the destruction of the scientific tradition in Córdoba and Kairuan, Fez and the other cities of the Maghrib remained without sound instruction. . . . (Ibn Khaldûn: *Muqaddima*, 6:7)

In contradiction to this, a scholar named Abû'l Hasan 'Alî ibn Maimûn, towards the end of the 15th century, wrote about Fez as follows:

> In my whole life, I have never seen its equal nor have I seen any other scholars who have so perfectly preserved the sacred law in word and deed (as well as the writings of its formulator, Imâm

> Mâlik), and who have so perfectly mastered the other sciences, such as jurisprudence, Koranic exegesis, and expertise in *ahadîth* (plural of *hadîth*, the sayings of the Prophet). In Fez one finds masters of all branches of intellectuality, such as grammar, law of inheritance, mathematics, chronometry, geometry, metaphysics, logic, rhetoric, music, etc., and these masters know all the relevant texts by heart. Whoever does not know by heart the basic text relating to the science about which he speaks, and who cannot, on any question, quote it verbatim, will receive no attention; as a scholar, he will not be taken seriously. Since I left the city—it was in the year 901 (that is, 1495 A.D.)—I have seen nothing that can be compared with Fez and its scholars, either in the other cities of the Maghrib such as Tlemsen, Bujâya, or Tunis, or in any part of Syria or the Hejaz. (Al-Kattâni, *Salwât al-Anfâs*)

The apparent contradiction between the two opinions cited is explained by the fact that the Aristotelian philosophy and natural sciences which had flourished in the old Andalusia found virtually no continuation in the Maghrib; it was Latin Christendom that was destined to inherit these. The Maghrib on the other hand appropriated to itself the Islamic sciences and, with the instinct for the essential characteristic of the North African genius, it traced this highly ramified science back to its principal divisions, finally giving pride of place to Koranic legal science (*al-fiqh*). Thus many blossoms fell from the tree of the sciences; but its branches and its trunk, which had their roots in Koranic doctrine, remained firm. In a modern world in which science has been pulverized into thousands of specialties, each subject to hypotheses and constantly changing experiments, traditional science (the medieval *scientia*) stands out like a harmonious and perfect work of art.

People had spoken to me of Mulay ʻAlî as one who possessed both "outward" and "inward" science. But no one had been willing to take me to see him, being fully aware that he shunned any contact that could give rise to public curiosity. Many regarded him as the spiritual successor of his grandfather Mulay al-ʻArabî ad-Darqâwî who, at the beginning of the 19th century had revivified Islamic mysticism in its purest form, and of his father, Mulay Tayyib, who had been the grand master of the Darqâwî spiritual order. But since the French protectorate was showing all too much interest in the fate of this order, he himself had declined any office in it, and lived as a simple scholar, teaching Arabic and law at the Koranic university of Al-Qarawiyyîn.

In the spring of 1933, I made up my mind to visit him in his house in Fez. He received me without too many questions, motioned me to sit down on a low cushion in his large bare room, took up an old Arabic book, and began to read to me about the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time. Since I was not sitting directly in front of him, and since he had allowed the hood of his jellaba to slip backwards from his head, I could readily observe his noble and already aged face. It expressed a two-fold nobility: his descent from the Prophet—or at any rate from the peak of Arab aristocracy—showed itself in the clear bold line of forehead and nose and in the fine contours of his temples and cheeks which were sharply illumined by light from the inner courtyard; it made me think of the most noble of the faces in El Greco's painting "The Burial of Count Orgaz". But in addition, his features were marked by a spiritual discipline—the consciously assumed inheritance of his illustrious forefathers, which emphasized their simplicity and sobriety.

As I was marveling at the human frame, the culmination of so much venerable tradition, I had not yet fully awakened to his intellectual alertness, which every now and again would suddenly focus on me in a detached but searching manner, only to change back immediately into a simple goodness.

The text which he read aloud to me and on which he occasionally made brief comments in Moroccan dialect, was a collection of prophecies, partly symbolic and partly literal, which the Prophet and certain of his immediate successors had made with regard to the forthcoming end of the world. Mulay 'Alî had undoubtedly chosen this text in order to show me what Christ meant for him. In fact, he spoke of his Second Coming as if it were immediately imminent, and at one moment he pointed to himself and said: "If our Lord 'Isâ (Jesus) should return to earth before I die, I would immediately rise and follow him!"

Belief in Christ's Second Coming is firmly rooted in Islamic tradition: he will return to earth before the end of time to judge men "with the sword of Mohammed", to kill the antichrist (*ad-dajjâl*), and to lead the elect into a new and better world arising out of the destruction of the old one. Only true believers will be able to withstand Christ's gaze; unbelievers will perish under it. But before Christ comes, the antichrist will appear in order to lead men astray by his false promises and seeming wonders. He will call evil good, and good evil. A stream of water and a stream of fire will accompany

him; whoever should drink the water will taste fire, and whoever should touch the fire, will feel cool water. According to a saying of the Prophet, the antichrist is not simply one man. A whole series of false prophets will arise, which means that one can never be sure which of the various signs prophesied apply to one or the other of them. Only those who live through these events will know exactly what, in these prophecies, is to be taken literally or symbolically.

Before the end of the world takes place, and before the antichrist as such appears, the "rightly-guided one" or *mahdî*, a descendant of Mohammed, will come to gather together the faithful and lead them into battle against the powers of darkness. When before battle, the believers are gathered together for prayer "beside the white minaret of Damascus", Christ will descend from the clouds. Under his reign a new and better age will begin, but this too will end when Gog and Magog, two hideous tribes, break through the wall which Alexander the Great, at God's command, had built against them, and overrun the earth. Christ, with the elect, will retreat to Mount Sinai, until, through his prayers and those of his faithful, the armies of darkness are destroyed, and a flood purifies the earth. Only then, on a rejuvenated earth, will the millennium begin, at the end of which a new degeneration will gradually set in, until the day of the Last Judgement arrives. "But God knows best", added Mulay 'Alî "when and how all this will happen." Then he mentioned the signs which, according to a well-known saying of the Prophet, will herald the end of the present age: "the maid-servant will give birth to her mistress, and bare-footed shepherds will vie with one another in building tall buildings." These things, he said, were already happening, for the words about the maid-servant giving birth to her mistress was a reference to the destruction of the natural social order, and the construction of high buildings "by poor shepherds" was already taking place. The Sufis (the Islamic mystics) interpreted these sayings in yet another, and more inward, sense; but the one interpretation does not exclude the other. All of a sudden Mulay 'Alî looked me straight in the face, surprising me by the severity of his regard, and said emphatically: "The antichrist is already born."

Such was my first meeting with this venerable elder who, contrary to my expectation, declared himself ready to teach me the fundaments of traditional Arab science (*scientia*).

Every morning Mulay 'Alî would walk down from the high-lying district in which he lived to the Qarawiyyîn university, carefully gath-

ering up his immaculately white garments as he made his way through the tumult of beasts of burden trotting uphill covered with sweat, and the swarms of porters imperiously demanding right of way. Over his jellaba and turban he wore a wide burnous, but without anything that might indicate his rank. And yet it often happened that some peasant from out of town, who was bringing his wares to the market, would timidly approach him in order to kiss his hand or the hem of his garment. At midday he made the return journey uphill on a mule with a red saddle which a servant held ready for him at the door of the Qarawiyyîn.

The Qarawiyyîn mosque and university consists of wide halls supported by many pillars, ranged around a lengthy courtyard where fountains sparkle in the sun. The light shines from the courtyard into the halls, pours onto the woven mats covering the floors, and reaches as far as the arches joining the many pillars. Each man of learning has the custom of sitting by one particular pillar, and, as he leans against it, his students squat on the mats, and form a semicircle facing him. Men of the people and peasants from the countryside who visited the mosque would often sit down, at a respectful distance from him, in order to hear something of the sacred science. Instruction was in the form of a conversation; one of the students would read from a classical work, and the teacher would occasionally interrupt him, in order to give explanations. Sometimes students would put questions or make objections, to which the master would reply. Sometimes this didactic conversation would become rapid and lively like an altercation. In this it would resemble what in the Middle Ages was called a *disputatio*. Nevertheless Mulay ʻAlî was against any overdue haste. He did not permit an author to be referred to hastily or without the student wishing him God's grace, nor did he allow anyone to anticipate the proper logical development of a thought. Each brick in the edifice of a doctrine had first to be sharply cut and polished before the next one was added to it. And although the young men who listened to him may have been afflicted with an inner disquiet and secretly longed for the seductions and excitements of the modern science that had come from Europe, they nonetheless paid full attention, under his strict surveillance, to the measured and prudent teachings of their master.

When his listeners had departed, he would sometimes remain for a while facing the direction of Mecca. Then he was a picture of inwardness; his skin became as smooth and clear as wax; the con-

tours of his cheek bones turned even sharper. As if enlarged by a hidden fire, his eyes looked into the distance. He was visibly closer to the next world than to this one. He sat upright, almost motionlessly; only a scarcely visible rapid swaying of his body seemed to suggest the invisible flowing of grace between him and Heaven.

From time to time Mulay 'Alî received me in a friend's orchard, in order to read Arabic texts with me. He chose these texts so that they might not only be useful to me linguistically, but would also demonstrate some aspect or other of tradition. Often, when I arrived at the orchard, which lay within the city walls encircled by high hedges of bamboo, and crossed over a narrow dyke that facilitated the irrigation of the low-lying beds of mint and melons, he would already be sitting there, under an old fig-tree, on a red mat that he always carried with him.

According to a famous saying of the Prophet, the Islamic tradition rests on three fundamental principles, namely: resignation to the Divine Will (*islâm),* faith (*imân*), and spiritual virtue (*ihsân*). The Divine Will makes itself known in the revealed religious law *(sharî'a)* and in destiny. The object of faith is the doctrine of the unity and omnipotence of God, of the divine mission of all prophets—including Jesus—up to Mohammed, and of life after death. As for spiritual virtue—or sincerity—it is by means of this that ordinary faith becomes inward certainty, and that outward conformity to the law becomes total abandonment to the will of God. Spiritual virtue was defined by the Prophet as follows: "It is that thou shouldst worship God as if thou sawest Him; for if thou seest Him not, He nevertheless seeth thee."

The instruction that is provided in the Koranic universities relates to the first two principles just mentioned, namely to the contents of the faith, which are enshrined in the dogmas, and to the law which, on the one hand, determines divine worship (the rites) and, on the other hand, determines the social order. The exact knowledge of the third principle, spiritual virtue, exceeds the bounds of scholastic instruction, which has been called "the science of the outward". It is the prerogative of the contemplative sage or mystic, the Sufi, who alone has access to "the science of the inward". In the Islamic world mysticism is regarded as a science, which is handed down from master to disciple just like jurisprudence, with this difference, that from the disciple a special qualification, or more exactly, an inward vocation, is required. In addition, theoretical learning must go hand in hand with spiritual practice, which alone

is capable of disclosing the content of the propositions and the symbols that are taught.

Most of the students at the Qarawiyyîn are preparing themselves for the profession of advocate or judge. The law is dependent upon the Koran. Since the language of the Koran has many levels of meaning and therefore cannot be perfectly translated, a knowledge of classical Arabic is the foundation of all studies. Even more, it is the key to a whole intellectual and spiritual world. According to an Arab proverb: "Wisdom reveals herself in the dialectic of the Greeks, the craftsmanship of the Chinese, and the language of the Arabs." In fact, classical Arabic combines a rigorously logical, almost algebraic structure, with a well-nigh unlimited capacity to form words. Almost all Arabic words can be reduced to simple tri-consonantal roots, from which, by means of reduplication, sound-shifting, and addition—all according to a system of rules—a whole tree of semantically-related verbs, nouns, and adjectives can be derived. "The Arabic language," said a European philologist, "would be of an amazing intellectual transparency, if the choice of phonetic roots, from which hundreds of words derive, did not seem to be so completely arbitrary." According to Sufi tradition, however, if the meaning of these roots is not rationally explicable, it is nevertheless intuitively intelligible.

It has recently been discovered that amongst all living Semitic languages, Arabic possesses the richest and therefore the most ancient vocabulary. It is closely related to the language of Hammurabi, and therefore to the language of Abraham. That an ancient language should possess such a subtle gradation of meaning is not strange, for the younger a language is, the more its forms are simplified. What surprises scholars, however, is that a language which was first committed to writing so recently (namely in the 7th century), has preserved so much of its early inheritance. The explanation lies in the timeless manner of thinking of the nomads, and also in the fact that the nomad jealously protects and cultivates his language as his only inalienable possession. The Arabian desert also contributed to the preservation of this ancient Semitic language. And this is strong testimony to the spiritual richness of nomadism, which possesses no visible or outward sign, no image, no building, no script, and no craftsmanship.

The simplest form of the Arabic word, its root form, is the verb (*verbum*—word), and therein lies a profound meaning, an indication that every phenomenon is nothing other than a happening, a man-

ifestation developing in time, so that language transposes everything into a phonetic happening. One day Mulay ʻAlî with an other-worldly expression on his face, looked straight at me—or rather straight through me—and said: "All things other than God are ephemeral in themselves. I do not say that they are transient because one day they will no longer exist, I say that they are ephemeral now and always, and have never been anything other than ephemeral!"

According to Islamic tradition, it is the duty of every believer, to the limit of his intellectual capacity, to think out the contents of his faith to the end. "Seek ye knowledge" (*ʻilm*), said the Prophet, "even if it be in China." And on another occasion he said : "One hour of reflection is worth more than two years of religious service." Thought, however, has an upper limit: "Reflect on the Divine Qualities and Acts, and not on the Divine Essence."

Islamic theology is a rational science which does not lose sight of the fact that its object, Divine Reality, cannot be grasped mentally; and this implies no contradiction: when reason recognizes its own limits, it transcends them, in a certain sense; it behaves rather like the surveyor who, from various locations, takes a sighting on a point which is inaccessible to him. This perspective makes it possible, without any illogic, on the one hand, to deny all limits, characteristics, and forms with regard to God and, on the other, to refer back to Him all the perfect aspects of existence such as beauty, goodness and power. The same also applies to apparently contradictory propositions, for example, that man possesses free choice, and that man can do nothing that God has not already foreseen and predetermined for him. That necessity and freedom are both present in God may not be graspable by the reason, but it is so by the intellect, just as is the simultaneous presence in God of past, present, and future.

The situation is similar in the case of the idea of Divine Unity (*tauhid*), which is the keystone of the whole doctrinal edifice. The highest meaning of unity cannot be exhausted mentally; it opens onto the Infinite; and yet one can understand unity at all levels of spiritual insight. That God is One is in principle apparent to all, and this is the basis of the unshakable cohesion of Islamic thought.

Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) concerns on the one hand the prescriptions with regard to divine worship—profession of faith, ritual ablution, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage—and on the other hand the social institutions, from questions of inheritance to the regulations for buying and selling.

The two pillars of jurisprudence are tradition and the logical principles by means of which the laws mentioned in the Koran may be applied to individual cases.

What in the Koran itself is mentioned only briefly and in a general manner, is completed by the transmission, originally oral but later written, of the sayings (*ahadîth*) and the practice (*sunna*) of the Prophet. The testing of each individual tradition with regard to authenticity, bearing in mind the greater or lesser reliability of the transmitters, is a widely diversified science that makes great demands on the memory, requiring not only a knowledge of all the attested sayings of the Prophet—and there are thousands of them—but also of the chain of transmitters for each individual saying.

In Sunni Islam there are four classical schools of law, which differ from one another, firstly, as regards the extent to which they follow the Prophet's practice as it was maintained in Medina during the first Islamic centuries, and, secondly, as regards the extent to which they make use of decision by analogy (*ijtihâd*), in order to make the proper transition from a known case to an unknown one. The people of the Maghrib belong to the legal school of Mâlik ibn Anas who, more than any of the other three founders, holds fast to the practice of Medina. Since it is not possible today to find any testimonies which the founders of the four schools did not already know, any innovation can only be a deviation from the general tradition, and that is why the representatives of traditional jurisprudence defend themselves strongly against all "reforms" proposed by Arab nationalists.

For the European, whose imagination as to what a holy book is has been fashioned by the Bible or perhaps by Oriental scriptures such as the Bhagavad-Gîtâ or the Sayings of the Buddha, the Koran is at first sight disappointing. For the Koran is neither a narrative, like the Gospels, in which the Divine appears in a humanly graspable form, nor a lucidly constructed metaphysical doctrine. Its form seems to be arbitrary, and is in fact a collection of individual revelations, providing answers to the questions and needs of the first Muslim community, and exhibiting sudden changes of content, so that one can find side by side references to Divine things and to very human things. Finally, the Biblical stories which the Koran retells, are presented in an unexpected, abbreviated and dry manner that seems strange to the Christian. They are deprived of their epic character and are inserted as didactic examples of an infinitely various praise of God.

It is only when one considers individual Koranic verses and begins to be aware of their many levels of meaning, that one can assess the powerful spiritual effect which this book has been able to exert, and realize why it has become the daily nourishment of thousands of contemplatively inclined people.

For the Muslim who reads the Gospel for the first time, the disappointment and surprise are scarcely less. On one occasion I brought Mulay ʻAlî, who knew Christianity only from the Islamic point of view and on the basis of those orally transmitted sayings of Christ that eventually found their way into Arabic books, a recent Arabic translation of the four Gospels. He was visibly disappointed that the Gospels, unlike the Koran, did not take the form of Divine speech, but consisted of reports on Christ's life. In the Koran, God speaks in the first person. He describes Himself and makes known His laws. The Muslim is therefore inclined to consider each individual sentence of the holy Book as a separate revelation and to experience the words themselves, and even their very sound, as a means of grace. Mulay ʻAlî was put off both by the easygoing style of the translation and by the fact that the meaning lay more in the event described than in this or that verbal formula. He looked for verses that described God's qualities, His majesty, His omnipotence, and scarcely found any. I had to explain to him that the Gospels could only be completely understood against the background of the Old Testament.

What surprised him most was that God was called "Father" and Christ "Son"; for between father and son, he said, there was a similarity of nature which the incomparability of God excluded. To this I remarked that the expression "son of God" meant that Jesus had no human father, which the Koran itself teaches, and that furthermore his spirit emanated from God and was of the same essence of God, which the Koran also maintains, when it says that Christ is "Word of God and Spirit of God". Mulay ʻAlî answered that this meaning was indeed acceptable, even if it touched on secrets which human language was more likely to misrepresent than to express.

Through his whole education, Mulay ʻAlî was too much the Islamic man of learning—centered on the doctrinal unequivocalness of his own tradition—to come to terms with the completely different speech and symbolism of a religion that was foreign to him. Therein he differed, as I was later to learn, from many other representatives of the "science of the inward". Thus the Sufi master Ahmad ibn Mustafâ al-ʻAlâwî, who at that time lived in

Mostaghanem in Algeria and had many disciples from Morocco, said to a Catholic priest: "If you accept that expressions like 'God the Father' and 'Son of God' are symbols which can be interpreted metaphysically, then there is nothing that separates us from you."

"Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." These words of Christ have the same ring about them as the Koran, according to which everything in Heaven and earth is a "sign" from God. In order better to understand what the Koran means for the ordinary Muslim, I once observed a group of men who, early in the morning, before the sun had risen, were chanting the Koran in unison in the courtyard of the Qarawiyyîn mosque. The Arabic language is rich in sounds, from the characteristic gutterals to every abrupt or reverberating sound that it is possible for lips and palate to produce; it is as if the whole body were speaking. When all these natural drums and cymbals accommodate themselves to the inimitable rhythm of the Koran, when this rhythm is borne by a triumphant and solemn melody, and when all of this is united with the meaning of the words, there is born that unique effect that overwhelms every Arab listener.

When the chanters reached the verse: "To God belong the Heavens and the earth, and to God the journey returneth. Sawest thou not how God guideth the clouds, gathereth them together, and disposeth of them?", one of the men raised his eyes to the early morning sky as if he perceived the cloud gathering; and at the following words: "then seest thou the rain-drops fall from their midst", his eyes moved downwards from the heavens to the earth. The recitation continued: "From Heaven doth He send down mountains of hail, as a visitation on whomsoever He will"—the man looked round about him—"and which He holdeth back from whomsoever He will. The glare of His lightning almost removeth the sight from men's eyes"—the man looked as if he had been blinded. Finally his face showed repose at the words: "God suffereth the night to follow the day; verily therein dwelleth a sign for those who see."

Mulay 'Alî was of the view that in our age only very few people were capable of understanding Sufi wisdom, and that it was better to remain silent about it than to speak. If he were asked about the inward states that Sufis attain, he would decline to answer, saying: "These are fruits that grow for themselves on the tree of divine service; let us rather speak of how to care for the tree and how to

water it, and not of its fruits, before they are ripe." And to a young man who had asked him to accept him as his disciple on the way of contemplation, he replied: "Dear friend, the relationship between spiritual master and spiritual disciple is something so elevated that we would be very daring if we sought to establish it. Let us rather speak of the things we should be doing." And he gave him the advice that he felt was right for him. His reticence was perhaps also caused by the *wahhâbî* influences, hostile to mysticism, which at that time had gained a certain foothold amongst the students. Nevertheless, he decided on one occasion to make A1-Ghazâlî's famous work "The Revivification of the Religious Sciences" (*Ihyâ 'ulûm ad-Dîn*) the subject of his lectures. This work was recognized by almost all the representatives of the "science of the outward", since the exoteric legitimacy of its standpoint is unassailable. At the same time, however, it contains several chapters which constitute a bridge from exoterism to esoterism or mysticism. At the end of his first lecture the students began to question Mulay 'Alî about Sufism, and one of them said: "We can readily believe that centuries ago there were great mystics who received authentic inspirations and even possessed wonderful powers; but today all those who claim to represent Sufism are nothing but charlatans. In our day and age there are no longer any Sufis." Mulay 'Alî turned to him and said, with a mildness that brooked no contradiction: "My son, how can you set a limit to the omnipotence of God?"

Islamic mysticism was not always banned from the Qarawiyyîn university. As recently as the beginning of the century, Sufi treatises were the subject of lectures, and one of the most important representatives of mysticism in the Maghrib, the Sufi Abû 'Abdallâh Ibn 'Abbâd ar-Rundî, who was born in Ronda in Andalusia in 1331, was preacher and *imâm* there. A contemporary writes of him:

> In Fez I met the saintly scholar Abû 'Abdallâh Muhammad ibn Ibrâhîm ar-Rundî, whose father before him had been a famous preacher. The son Abu 'Abdallâh is distinguished by his composure, his asceticism, and his righteousness. He is the author of the verse: "He attains no nobility who has not first weighed the clay of this earth with eternity." I met him on the Prophet's birthday in the sultan's palace, where he had been invited to hear the spiritual singing. He manifestly did not welcome this. I have never at any other time seen him at any gathering, and whoever might wish to speak with him was obliged to see him alone. Once I requested him to pray for me. He blushed and was embarrassed, but agreed nevertheless. The only luxury he permitted himself was perfumed

oils and incense. He did his own housework. He was unmarried and had no servant. At home he wore a patchwork garment, but when he went out he covered it with a green or a white robe. His disciples were all from the best and most gifted of the community. . . . Today he is imâm and preacher in the Qarawiyyîn mosque at Fez.

Al-Kattânî wrote of him:

He had something about him that won the hearts of children. They swarmed around him, as soon as they saw him, in order to kiss his hand. But kings too sought to gain his friendship. . . .

He studied in Ronda, Fez, and Tlemsen, and in Salé he was the disciple of the Andalusian master Ahmad Ibn 'Âshir. From there he traveled to Tangier where he met the Sufi Abû Marwân 'Abd al-Mâlik, who was perhaps the "unlettered man" of whom Ibn Abbâd said that he alone had been able to open his inward eye. . . .

The Shaikh Abu Mas'ûd al-Harrâs recalls: "I was reciting the Koran aloud in the courtyard of the Qarawiyyîn mosque as the muezzins were making the call for the night-prayer. Suddenly I saw Ibn 'Abbâd, in a sitting position, fly over the door of his house, across the courtyard of the mosque, and disappear into the hall that surrounds the atrium. I went to have a look, and I found him praying close to the *mihrâb*.

It is related that, as he approached death, he laid his head on the lap of one of his disciples, and began to recite the Throne Verse from the Koran. When he reached the words "the Living, the Eternal", he continued repeating "O God! O Living! O Eternal!" Thereupon one of those present addressed him by name and recited the continuation of the verse; but he went on with his invocation. Shortly before he passed on he was heard reciting the verse: "The friends are leaving me, but they will return when I leave them."

Before his death he bequeathed a sum of money which he had buried at the head of his bed. He directed that with it a piece of land should be bought, the revenue from which was to be used for the upkeep of the Qarawiyyîn mosque. When the sum of money was counted—it came to eight hundred and ten gold *mithqal*—it was discovered that it was the exact amount that he had received in salary during his twenty-five years as *imâm* and preacher.

(from *Fez, City of Islam*)

The text above is from the book *The Essential Titus Burckhardt: Reflections on Sacred Art, Faiths, and Civilizations*, edited by William Stoddart. © 2003 World Wisdom Inc.
All Rights Reserved. For Personal Usage Only.
www.worldwisdom.com