

Foreword

Titus Burckhardt is without doubt one of the central figures of what has come to be known as the School of Tradition. He is at once a master of metaphysics and cosmology; an expert on the traditional arts of East and West; a pioneering expositor and translator of major Sufi texts; the keenest observer the West has produced of the traditional art, life, and thought of the Islamic Maghrib, particularly Morocco; and a master expositor of traditional patterns of social life. Burckhardt has left behind a precious legacy of works written in German and French, of which many have been translated into several European languages, especially English, as well as into Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu. Burckhardt was blessed with a remarkable power of intellectual penetration combined with visual intelligence. He was both metaphysician and artist and, above all, a saintly person in whom the truth had become realized in all aspects of his being, in his thoughts and words as well as in his actions and deeds. He was not only a person who wrote of the wedding of the soul with the spirit and the turning of the lead of the soul into gold, but one in whose being that alchemical transmutation had taken place in an operative manner. His works complement in many ways those of his close friend Frithjof Schuon and, in the domain of art, those of A. K. Coomaraswamy.

Burckhardt wrote about metaphysics with the greatest clarity and produced books and articles of unparalleled depth concerning the traditional sciences, particularly alchemy, on which he wrote what is probably the most outstanding work of the 20th century. His criticisms of the modern world, following in the wake of René Guénon's pioneering works, penetrated into the most contentious questions and brought out with exceptional clarity the errors of such modern deviations as Darwinian evolution and modern psychoanalysis. It was, however, especially in the field of art that he produced a legacy of unrivaled value. Not only did he reveal the metaphysical truths of various traditional civilizations as expressed through the language of sacred art, but he also composed a number of illuminating works on Christian art, such as *Chartres and the Origin of the Cathedral*, both in relation to the total vision of Christianity and to the traditional sciences which made the production of Christian sacred art as revealed in the medieval cathedral possible.

It was particularly in the domain of Islamic art that Burckhardt was a veritable pioneer. What Coomaraswamy achieved for Hindu and Buddhist art in unveiling their symbols and expounding their inner meaning, Burckhardt accomplished for Islamic art in a number of seminal essays as well as in his masterpieces *The Art of Islam* and *Fez, City of Islam*. It was he who for the first time in the West brought out the inner meaning of Islamic art and its relation to the inner teachings of the Islamic religion.

Burckhardt was also a pioneer in unlocking the meaning of the major doctrinal works of Sufism through the translation of the central work of Islamic gnosis, the *Fusus al-Hikam* of Ibn 'Arabi, as well as *Al-Insan al-Kamil* of 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili, while in his metaphysical masterpiece, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, he expounded the quintessence of Islamic gnosis (*al-ma'rifah*) in his own words. The extensive interest in Ibn 'Arabi manifested in the West during the past half century owes much to his works.

The influence of Burckhardt has been extensive not only in the West but also in the Islamic world. In Morocco, where he played a major role in the preservation of the city of Fez and in the revival of the traditional arts and crafts, he is widely known and respected to this day, and he is still referred to by the older generation as "wonderful Sidi Ibrahim" who first came to Morocco in the 1930s, embraced Islam, learned Arabic and made Morocco his second home.

We had the great blessing of having been closely associated with Burckhardt from 1957 until his death and of having been in his company in Europe as well as in the Islamic world, in the Alps as well as by the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. In all different circumstances he displayed a keenness of vision, both intellectual and artistic, and a remarkable state of collectedness and humanity. How wonderful it was to circumambulate the Ka'bah in Mecca with him or to sit in silent meditation by his side at the tomb of Ibn 'Arabi in Damascus! All who knew Burckhardt well were deeply impressed by the combination of extraordinary intelligence and exceptional virtue that were molded together in inseparable unity in this truly exceptional being.

Although he knew English well, Burckhardt wrote primarily in his mother tongue, German, as well as in French. It is fortunate that most of his works have been rendered into English by competent translators, of whom the most important is William Stoddart, the editor of this volume. Thoroughly versed in Burckhardt's writings

and also his friend of many years, Stoddart was the most qualified person to present to the English reader an anthology of the works of this great master of traditional doctrines. World Wisdom must be congratulated in having chosen Stoddart to edit the present volume, which through carefully selected pieces makes available an anthology that is exceptional in both depth and breadth. The present work reveals nearly every major aspect of the Burckhardian *oeuvre* and, in addition, is adorned with photos of objects of sacred art which were of special concern to Burckhardt as well as including several of his own sketches that reveal his gifts as an artist. Moreover, the editor has added a very useful bibliography of the works of Burckhardt in European languages (but not including translations into Islamic languages). One therefore hopes that the anthology will not only provide a door into the mansion of the multifarious works of Burckhardt, but will also lead the reader to discover with the help of the bibliography the original works from which the selections of the anthology have been drawn.

Both World Wisdom and William Stoddart are to be congratulated for making available this most precious anthology of one of the most important and enduring bodies of writings produced in the 20th century on metaphysics, religion, the traditional arts and sciences, and the study of traditional societies, a body of work whose message is as urgently needed now as when it was first written, for it deals with perennial truths which transcend the accidents of time and space and remain always timely because they are timeless.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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