

IN MEMORIAM: MICHEL CHODKIEWICZ
(May 13, 1929 – March 31, 2020)



'Akbarian Scholar and Embodiment of Spiritual Virtue'

Michel Chodkiewicz was the Director of Studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. His teaching, research, translations, and writing focused on Sufism, particularly on the important figures of Ibn 'Arabi and others influenced by him, notably Amir 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri.

His publications include:

Émir 'Abd el-Kader; Écrits Spirituels, présentation, traduction et notes, (Seuil, 1982, translated as *The Spiritual Writings of Amir 'Abd al-Kader*, SUNY, 1982).

Un Océan sans rivage. Ibn 'Arabî, le Livre et la Loi, Seuil, (Seuil, 1992, translated into English by David Streight and published in 1993 by SUNY as *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn Arabi, the Book, and the Law*).

Le Sceau des Saints, Prophétie et Sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn 'Arabî, (Gallimard, 1986; translated into English by Liadain Sherrard and published in 1993 by Islamic Texts Society as *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn Arabi*).

He was also the editor of *The Meccan Revelations, vols. 1 and 2*. Ibn 'Arabî, *Les Illuminations de La Mecque*, textes choisis des *al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* (avec la collaboration de W.C. Chittick, C. Chodkiewicz, D. Gril et J.W. Morris), Sindbad, 1988.

Remembering Michel Chodkiewicz

By Stephen Hirtenstein

Michel Chodkiewicz, who died on 31 March 2020 at his home in Candé in Anjou, France, may be regarded as one of the foremost transmitters of Ibn 'Arabi's teachings and legacy in the 20th century. As one of my French friends once remarked, if the students of Ibn 'Arabi were to come together as a football team (Akbar United?), Michel Chodkiewicz would probably have been named its captain: his intellectual study and spiritual understanding of Ibn 'Arabi and indeed the whole of Sufi literature was remarkably comprehensive, and I, like many others, would often find myself taking him as the first port of call for a response to questions like 'where in the *Futubat* can one find...?' or 'have you ever come across a manuscript of ...?'. He was a mine of information, ever generous in his responses, and almost frighteningly prompt to reply to letters (in those now far-off days when we lived without computers, mobile phones and email). He was particularly kind to me in encouraging the establishment of the *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, and our work on manuscripts. His support for the Society, of which he was an active Honorary Fellow from 1988 onwards, was unstinting.

Most of his major writings, both books and articles originally written in French, have been translated into English, and are now accessible to a broad audience. His *Le Sceau des saints* (*Seal of the Saints*) appeared in 1986 in French, and remains a milestone in Ibn 'Arabi studies. One of the most memorable occasions was a talk he gave at a conference in London in 1990 (on the legacy of Persian Sufism, if I remember well), on the relationship between one section of the *Futubat* and the *suras* of the Quran (a topic he developed in one of the chapters of his *Un Océan sans rive* or *Ocean without Shore*) - it was an electrifying talk and one that will live long in the memory of those privileged enough

to be present. One of my own favourite personal recollections is when he came to Oxford to speak at the 3-day MIAS Symposium in March 1990 (the 750th anniversary of Ibn 'Arabi's death) in the Holywell Music Room in Wadham College. We were sitting next to each other during a plenary discussion over how best to study Ibn 'Arabi: some said that you could not study his work without being a Muslim; others maintained that you had to know Arabic intimately; and others again insisted that the only way to really understand Ibn 'Arabi was to be a mystic. At one point in what was threatening to become an increasingly heated exchange, he turned to me and said softly: 'but I do not understand the problem - Ibn 'Arabi was an Arab, and a Muslim, and a mystic...' His gentle, profound clarity and insight will be sorely missed, but he has left behind a great heritage of writing and former students for future generations to benefit from.