TERESA OF JESUS AND ISLAM: THE SIMILE OF THE SEVEN CONCENTRIC CASTLES OF THE SOUL

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Saint Teresa of Jesus, one of the most illustrious contemplatives of the Spanish Renaissance, faces an overwhelming aphasia when confronted with the painful task of having to communicate, somehow, her ecstatic trance. But she is in obedience, and she knows that she must instruct her nuns about the interior path they have to follow in order to attain union with that Love which, for Dante, moved "the sun and the other stars".[1] She knows well that her task is not only difficult, but—in itself—impossible: in these intimate operations of the soul, one accedes to the secret "language of God"; and with this "language of God" (as her spiritual master, Saint John of the Cross, had said), it is necessary "to understand it for oneself, and enjoy it and feel it, and for the one who has it to keep silent".[2] But it was important for the nuns whom the Mother Reformer directed with so much vigilance to accede in some way to the highest mastery of their spiritual director. Saint Teresa asks God for inspiration, and feels that she finds it:

> Today [I was] begging our Lord to speak for me—because I found neither thing to say nor how to begin to comply with this obedience [to write the book of the *Interior Castle*] with some foundation, which is to consider our soul like a castle, all of diamond or very clear crystal, where there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwellings.[3]

Saint Teresa's inspiration finds expression in a simile of strange beauty and imaginative complexity. The soul shows itself to her in the form

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[1] "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" (Dante Alighieri, *Comedia: Paraíso*, bilingual edition, trans. and ed. Ángel Crespo [Barcelona, 2004], p. 398).

[2] "[E]ntenderlo para sí, y gozarlo y sentirlo, y callarlo el que lo tiene" (Saint John of the Cross, *Llama de amor viva* 2.21, in Luce López-Baralt and Eulogio Pacho, eds, *San Juan de la Cruz: obra completa* [Madrid, 1991], 2: 284).

[3] "Estando hoy suplicando a nuestro Señor hablase por mí—porque yo no atinava cosa que decir ni cómo comenzar a cumplir con esta obediencia [escribir el libro del *Castillo interior*] con algún fundamento, que es considerar a nuestra alma como un castillo todo de diamante o muy claro cristal, adonde hay muchos aposentos, ansí como en el cielo hay muchas moradas" (Saint Teresa of Ávila, *Moradas del castillo interior* 1, in *Obras completas* [Madrid, 1970], p. 365).

of seven castles or concentric globes made of fine crystal or diamond; the saint perceives that her interior soul is made of the uncreated light in which all authentic mystics feel themselves to be in some way immersed. In the last resplendent castle is God, with whom the soul unites, leaving behind the demon who—in the form of different poisonous animals—wants to penetrate the castles which mark the progressive dwellings of the mystical path. The symbolic scheme would appear to be original, due to an important additional consideration: it has been impossible to document, in all its details and constitutive elements, in European mysticism preceding the Reformer. And the saint, who usually had such a hard time remembering her sources, does not help us with the project of tracing the possible origins of her luminous symbol.

Today we approach mystical symbols inspired with more modern theoretical tools. Even if the visions which gave rise to the saint's writings were authentic, Barbara Kurtz warns that "the language of the mystics cannot transcribe an experience without interpreting it and mediating it, no matter how much the mystic fights against the limits of human language, incapable of approaching transcendence".[4] It is impossible to express a pure experience in literary form without some kind of verbal mediation. The mystical experience takes shape, then, from elements related to the cultural coordinates which the mystic brings to the experience, and which undeniably even influence the form of the experience itself. Mystics use—indeed, cannot help but use (and now I cite Stephen Katz)—"the available symbols of their cultural and religious surroundings".[5] If we accept Katz's suggestion (and his words are, in all lights, persuasive), Saint Teresa of Jesus presents us with a historical-literary problem of the first magnitude: her strange concentric castles would not appear to be the descendants of Western Christian tradition. It is precisely to contribute to the elucidation of this ancient literary enigma that I direct the present pages.

The Teresian symbol of the interior soul's dwellings has given rise, in effect, to one of the most interesting philological problems of Spanish literature. The simile of these seven-times concentric castles, as I

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[4] Barbara Kurtz, "The Small Castle of the Soul: Mysticism and Metaphor in the European Middle Ages," *Studia mystica* 15 (1992): 28–35, at p. 32. The translations from Arabic are mine in all cases.

[5] Stephen Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Stephen Katz (Oxford, 1978), p. 24.

have said, does not form a part of the European cultural legacy; and because of this, scholars have devoted themselves feverishly to the search for literary sources of these elusive fortresses of the soul. To make an inventory of source studies—as long as it is deceptive—is a job I have already done elsewhere;[6] therefore I shall limit myself here to recalling only the most representative cases.

The findings of scholars such as Morel Fatio, Gaston Etchegoyen, Menéndez Pidal and R. Hoornaert attenuate, to some degree, our surprise at this simile because they document the equivalence of the soul with a castle in authors writing before the saint. It seems fair, nonetheless, to point out that Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade also highlight the universality of this image. In his studies of alchemy, Jung reproduces an engraving of a fortified castle with 16 towers and an interior moat. This scheme coincides with the Oriental mandalas which describe the Tao or the search for deep consciousness, but it was drawn by none other than one of his patients.[7] I myself a few years ago walked around Borobudur's temple in Java, a large tower surrounded by a spiral staircase which led slowly to its symbolic interior. The fortifications, which it is necessary to pass over in stages, are evidently a commonplace simile for describing access to the soul's interiority.

But these antecedents—the archetypal castle drawn by Jung's patient, the Oriental edifices built in the manner of stone mandalas, and the literary texts hunted down by illustrious European critics, which I shall go on to examine in the pages that follow—end up being of little use for our project of tracing Teresian sources: in none of them do we find the soul's mystical advance clearly structured according to seven dwellings (or castles), successively more interior. Gaston Etchegoyen, one of the critics who has studied most in depth the philogenetic problem of the castles in his *L'amour divin: essai sur les sources de Sainte-Thérèse* (1923),[8] proposes as Teresa's principal sources Bernardino de Laredo and Francisco de Osuna. Both authors, so often read by the

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[6] Cf. above all Luce López-Baralt, "El símbolo de los siete castillos concéntricos del alma en Santa Teresa y en el Islam," in *Huellas del Islam en la literatura española: de Juan Ruiz a Juan Goytisolo* (Madrid, 1985–89), pp. 73–97. The English version of the book was published by Brill in Leiden in 1992 under the title *Islam in Spanish Scholarship: From the Middle Ages to the Present*. A preliminary version of this essay, which I have updated for the current volume, appears on pp. 91–142.

[7] *Psicología y alquimia*, trans. A. L. Bixio (Buenos Aires, 1957); see also C. G. Jung, *Obras completas*, 4 vols (Madrid, 1999–2001).

[8] Gaston Etchegoyen, *L'amour divin: essai sur les sources de Sainte-Thérèse* (1923).

saint, conceive of the interior soul like a castle; but their outlines are not sufficient to explain to us the details of the Reformer's symbol. Osuna limits himself to an outline too tied to medieval allegories, in which the traditional enemies (the flesh, the world and the devil) try to penetrate the soul's castle. Osuna says:

> the heart should be guarded with all diligence, as is guarded a castle which is surrounded, placing against the three attackers three lamps: against the flesh, which surrounds us with delights, place chastity; against the world, which surrounds us with riches, place generosity and alms; against the devil, which pursues us with rancor and envy, place charity.[9]

Laredo's simile is more intriguing and complex, but fundamentally more distant than Teresa's: the understanding is like a *civitas sancta* seated in a quadratic field, with a foundation of crystal and walls of precious stones, with a Paschal candle in the center which symbolizes Christ. For Bernard of Clairvaux the soul's castle is founded on the allusion, undoubtedly more utilitarian and prosaic, of the castle of Clairvaux's order. Robert Grosseteste, for his part, opts to equate his interior castle with the Virgin Mary's womb receiving Christ. He does this in his *Château d'amour*, an Anglo-French treatise written in the 13th century. He is echoed by Master Eckhart, who reinforces the equivalence by making use of a passage from Luke's gospel (10:38): *Intravit Jesus in quodam castellum*. It certainly did not occur to Saint Teresa to utilize this useful biblical reinforcement; her image undoubtedly went in other directions.

The Portuguese were obsessed with the simile of the spiritual castle, although they developed it with the same limitations as their European correligionists. For Saint Anthony of Lisbon (or Padua) the *castellum* whose towers and walls he describes so carefully in his *Sermones et evangelia dominicarum* symbolizes the Virgen Mary; his compatriot Fra Paio de Coimbra concurs. More interesting perhaps is Dom Duarte, who in his *Leal conselheiro* speaks to us of the "five houses of our heart", progressively more interior. The most inner room is the

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[9] "[Q]ue se guarde el corazón con toda diligencia, como se guarda el castillo que está cercado, poniendo contra los tres cercadores tres lámparas: contra la carne, que nos cerca con deleites, poned la castidad; contra el mundo, que nos rodea con riquezas, poned la liberalidad y limosna; contra el demonio, que nos persigue con rencores y envidia, poned la caridad" (Francisco de Osuna, *Tercer abecedario espiritual* [Madrid, 1971], p. 198).

"oratory", and Mario Martins is right when he sees a certain familial relationship between this Portuguese writer and Saint Teresa: "they pertain to the same tribe, although of more humble family".[10]

Faced with the difficulty of finding the seed of this simile, Ramón Menéndez Pidal proposes as antecedent the romances of chivalry—those best-sellers of the Spanish Renaissance—which the saint read with such juvenile passion. But when we examine closely the enchanted castles of Amadís, of the *Baladro del sabio Merlín*, of the *Peregrinación de la vida del hombre* (by Pedro Hernández de Villalumbrales), among so many other similar books, we find ourselves forced to conclude that they do not deliver to us the key to the symbol of the imaginative nun of Ávila. In them we see resplendent palaces of gold or silver, embellished with jewels; but they are never seven-times concentric, nor do they celebrate theopathic union in their interior recess.

In what would almost appear to be an act of critical desperation, on the other hand, some scholars have opted for an extra-literary solution to explain the sudden inspiration of the Reformer. Miguel de Unamuno proposed around 1909 that the walled city of Ávila was the one which served as a model for *Las moradas*, and Robert Ricard, in 1965, chose to give credence to Unamuno.[11] In 1970, Trueman Dicken proposed as a philogenetic solution not Ávila, but the Mota castle in Medina del Campo, which he hastened to compare minutely (and, it appears to me, without much success) with the castle of the seven dwellings of Saint Teresa's mysterious simile.[12] None of these structures (as is obvious to all, since we can still visit them) consists of seven castles, progressively more interior.

E. Allison Peers summarizes the overall disappointment of Western scholars faced with the impossibility of finding precedents for Teresa's symbolic scheme in Christian spirituality with these solemn words: "there never was a writer whose sources it was less profitable to study".[13]

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[10] "[P]ertenecen a la misma tribu, aunque de familia más humilde" (Mario Martins, *Alegorias, símbolos e exemplos morais da literatura medieval portuguesa* [Lisbon, 1975], p. 233).

[11] Unamuno appears to have played with the idea many years ago, since he mentions it in a letter to Francisco Giner de los Ríos in 1899. See R. Ricard, "La symbolisme du 'Château intérieur' chez Sainte-Thérèse," *Bulletin hispanique* 67.9 (1965): 27–41.

[12] Trueman Dicken, "The Imagery of the Interior Castle and its Implications," *Ephemerides Carmeliticae* 21 (1970): 198–218.

[13] E. Allison Peers, *Study of the Spanish Mystics* (New York, 1951), 1: 17.

Nor do other attempts to contextualize the simile within a spiritual cosmogony of Aristotelian origin succeed in explaining its principal details. It is evident that Saint Teresa, on speaking to us of her soul in the form of seven circles or concentric castles, alludes obliquely to the seven planetary spheres. In this she coincides, in broad brush strokes, with spiritual writers of diverse religious persuasions who have done the same. The Reformer visualizes her soul as a microcosmic symbol of the celestial macrocosmos: she equates her spiritual dwellings not only with castles but with heavenly spheres. In her treatise *Las moradas* she alludes in passing to the "divine heaven", that is to say, to the celestial counterpart which is her soul or most recondite castle in a state of perfect unity. Saint John of the Cross also alludes, certainly, to these seven dwellings which constitute his concentric soul. In doing this, both mystics echo a venerable cosmological tradition which reached (as is well known) as much to the East as it did to the West.

In his *De caelo*, Aristotle imagines a universe in the form of concentric spheres revolving in circular motion; and this cosmic scheme, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr reminds us, "transformed itself into a symbol which provided the background for the spiritual path of the human being".[14] The neo-Platonic, Hellenic, Pythagorean, Gnostic and hermetic traditions adapt the universal symbolic structure to personal spirituality: in texts so divergent as the Koran (23:17 and 65:12) and the spiritual treatises of Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite, we will see the concentric simile repeated. All these traditions, so dissimilar in themselves, propose that primordial man, whose nature (of divine origin) has remained trapped in a mortal body, should ascend symbolically the concentric orbits of the universe until he attains reunion with the Divinity. The *Miʿrāŷ* (translated in Europe as the prophet Mohammad's *The Book of the Ladder*) is, perhaps, the clearest example of Islamic elaboration of the ancient cosmic leitmotif, while Book 3 of Enoch or the *Book of the Hejalots* represents a Hebrew rewriting of the same venerable tradition.[15] The *Divine Comedy* of Dante (so much in debt, as Miguel Asín demonstrated, to Muslim eschatalogical

[14] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Studies: Essays on Law and Society, the Sciences, and Philosophy and Sufism* (Beirut, 1967), pp. 50–51.

[15] In my cited essay "El símbolo de los siete castillos concéntricos," I refer extensively to the Hebrew tradition of the *Hejalot*, which I contrast with the fortified Islamic and Teresian castles.

legends)[16] is the best literary demonstration of the Christianization of this symbolic spiritual path by way of the spheres. But it is not the only one: Francisco Rico as well as Aurora Egido add an abundant number of Western spiritual writers who reformulate the image of the soul as a "little heaven".[17] Henry Corbin[18] and Michael Sells[19] add another one in the case of Islamic mysticism: numerous Sufis ascend by concentric spheres, symbolic of the soul, in search of the state of *fanāʾ*, or ultimate spiritual union. Let us remember in this sense the seven organs or subtle centers (*laṭīfa*) of Simnānī, the seven interior heavens of Naŷm al-Dīn al-Kubrà, and the seven orifices of God's throne, which constituted the counterpart of man's soul according to the spiritual cosmogony of Ruzbehān of Shiraz. It is precisely to these mystical orbits—micro- and macrocosmic—that a Sufi lesson of great plastic beauty makes allusion: man is a recipient of clay which, nevertheless, contains within itself all the spheres of the universe.

Saint Teresa closes ranks with all these contemplatives, heirs of the ancient Greek cosmogonies, and describes in her *Moradas* a path of spiritual descent toward the ultimate apex of her soul by way of seven stages or successive dwellings which resemble concentric heavens. But she imposes upon herself a *caveat*: the saint visualizes her dwellings or spheres as symbolic castles, and would appear with that to have introduced a most singular variant to the venerable cosmic scheme of planetary orbits which she inherited, in the final analysis, from Aristotle. It would appear, then, that the warning of E. Allison Peers continues to go unheeded: "there never was a writer whose sources it was less profitable to study".

Miguel Asín nonetheless broke the critical impasse when he announced the existence of an anonymous text called the *Nawādir*, a "curious compilation of accounts and religious thoughts […] redacted at the end of the 16th century".[20] Asín succeeded in finding the

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[16] Miguel Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana de la "Divina Comedia"* (Madrid, 1961).

[17] Cf. F. Rico, *El pequeño mundo del hombre: varia fortuna de una idea en las letras españolas* (Madrid, 1970); and A. Egido, "La configuración alegórica del *Castillo interior*," *Boletín del Museo e Instituto "Camón Aznar"* 10 (1982): 69–93.

[18] Henry Corbin, *L'homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien* (Paris, 1961).

[19] Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York, 1996).

[20] "[C]uriosa compilación de relatos y pensamientos religiosos […] redactada a fines del siglo XVI" (Miguel Asín, "El símil de los siete castillos del alma en la mística islámica y en santa Teresa," *Al-Andalus* 2 [1946]: 267–68). The essay is included in a posthumous book by Miguel Asín which I edited with an introductory study:

schematic, but precise, germ of the Teresian castles and describes his finding in a brilliant essay which saw the light posthumously in 1946: "El símil de los castillos y moradas en santa Teresa y en el Islam" ("The simile of the castles and dwellings in Saint Teresa and Islam"). Although we do not find in the *Nawādir* the exhaustive mystical elaboration which Saint Teresa brings to fruition, nonetheless there are present here the principal elements of the image which the Reformer believed to be the exclusive product of God's inspiration:

> God placed for every son of Adam seven castles, inside of which is Himself and outside of which is Satan barking like a dog. When man allows a breach to be opened in one of them, Satan enters through it. It is to be advised, then, that he guard and keep watch over them with all care, particularly the first castle; for while their foundations remain healthy and while they are still standing, there is no evil to fear. The first of the castles, which is of white pearl, is the mortification of the sensitive soul. Inside it there is a castle of emerald, which is purity and sincerity of intention. Within it there is a castle of brilliant marble, which is obedience to God's commands, positive and negative. Within it there is a castle of stone, which is gratitude for divine benefits and conformity with the divine will. Inside it there is a castle of iron, which is leaving oneself in the hands of God. Inside it there is a castle of silver, which is mystical faith. Inside it there is a castle of gold, which is the contemplation of God—may He be glorified and honored!—. Already God said (may He be praised!) [Koran 16:101]: "Satan has no power over those who believe and put their confidence in God".[21]

But the problem of the Islamic affiliation of Teresa's concentric castle was not completely resolved by Asín, because the documentary evi-

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Miguel Asín Palacios, *Šaḍilíes y alumbrados*, ed. Luce López-Baralt (Madrid, 1990), pp. 349–450.

[21] "Puso Dios para todo hijo de Adán siete castillos, dentro de los cuales está Él y fuera de los cuales está Satanás ladrando como el perro. Cuando el hombre deja que se abra brecha en uno de ellos, entra por él Satanás. Conviene, por tanto, que los vigile y guarde con todo cuidado, particularmente el primer castillo, pues mientras permanezcan incólumes y en pie sus cimientos no hay mal que temer. El primero de los castillos, que es de cándida perla, es la mortificación del alma sensitiva. Dentro de él hay un castillo de esmeralda, que es la pureza y sinceridad de intención. Dentro de él hay un castillo de brillante losa, que es el cumplimiento de los mandamientos de Dios positivos y negativos. Dentro de él hay un castillo de piedra, que es la gratitud a los beneficios divinos y la conformidad con el divino beneplácito. Dentro de él hay un castillo de hierro, que es el dejamiento en las manos de Dios. Dentro de él hay un castillo de plata que es la fe mística. Dentro de él hay un castillo de oro, que es la contemplación de Dios—¡glorificado y honrado sea!—. Ya dijo Dios, ¡ensalzado sea! [Alcorán 16:101]: 'Satanás no tiene poder sobre los que creen y ponen en Dios su confianza' " (Asín Palacios, *Šaḍilíes y alumbrados*, pp. 267–68).

dence he possessed was that of a text from the end of the 16th century—contemporary or posterior, therefore, to the saint of Ávila. Asín believed that the simile would have been perfected in the Islam of that day, since Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (brother of the celebrated philosopher) outlines in his *Kitāb al Taŷrīd* the scheme of the soul in terms of concentric circles. In this the master was wrong, as I would have to discover many years later.

In 1981[22] I announced my good fortune of success in resolving Asín's principal doubts regarding the symbol's origin, since I had obtained documentary evidence of which the master was unaware at the time when he wrote his essay in 1944. This document was found inserted in the *Maqāmāt al-qulūb* or *Stations of the Hearts* of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī of Baghdad, which I have published in a Spanish version.[23] It then appeared plausible to me, in light of the discovery of Nūrī's work, that we were in the presence of a recurrent symbolic motif in Islamic mysticism. Nūrī repeats, with variants of little importance, the symbolic scheme of the seven concentric castles of the *Nawādir* in the eighth vignette of his treatise. The two examples which Asín and I had been able to document—with so many centuries of difference between the texts, from the 9th century to the 16th century—pointed toward the probability of a recurring tradition in Sufi literature.

Many years after having made the initial announcement of my discovery, it gives me pleasure to point out that we are no longer in speculative territory: I have been able to document the symbol of the seven concentric castles not only in the *Stations* of Nūrī of Baghdad, but also in other, additional Islamic authors. The principal—though not the only—ones are Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiḏī, who contrived the simile in the 9th century (but before Nūrī in his *Gawr al-umūr* or *Book Concerning the Profundity of Things*); and Muḥammad b. Mūsa al-Damīrī (died 808/1405), author of the extensive *Dictionary of Natural History*, known in Arabic by the title of *Kitāb ḥayāt al-ḥayawān*. Damīrī

[22] Luce López-Baralt, "Simbología mística musulmana en San Juan de la Cruz y en Santa Teresa de Jesús," *Nueva revista de filología hispánica* 30 (1981): 21–91. I have mentioned this particular finding in other contexts, above all in the preliminary study to my cited edition of Asín Palacios's last book, *Šaḏilies y alumbrados*, pp. ix–lxvii. I returned to the topic again in *The Sufi 'Trobar Clus' and Spanish Mysticism: A Shared Symbolism* (Lahore, Pakistan, 2000).

[23] Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī, *Moradas de los corazones*, trans. Luce López-Baralt (Madrid, 1999). Miguel Asín had nonetheless broken the critical impasse when he announced the existence of an anonymous text called the *Nawādir*.

repeats the simile in the 14th century; undoubtedly he borrows it from earlier sources. We have, then, documented the Teresian scheme of the seven concentric castles in the 9th century (two cases), in the 14th century, and in the 16th century: we are already, without room for doubt, faced with a recurrent image in Islam, just as Asín and I had suspected from the beginning. Other Sufi spiritual writers allude to it, as we shall have occasion to see, such as Ŷalāluddīn Rūmī in the 13th century and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirazī (known as Mullā Sadrā) in the 16th.

To the numerous authors who make use of the simile of the interior castles, and whom I have been citing, José Antonio Antón Pacheco[24] adds the case of the Persian Suhrawardī. The celebrated contemplative of the 12th century makes use of the image, in turn, in his *Kitāb hayākil an-nūr* (*The Book of the Temples of Lights*), and considers that each one of his seven *hayākil* ("temples" or "palaces") corresponds to distinct moments of the process of mystical and metaphysical interiorization. Like many other authors, Suhrawardī interiorizes the symbolic journey across the seven planetary orbits, converting the journey *ad extra* into a journey *ad intra*. Although Antón Pacheco thinks—with Louis Massignon and Henri Corbin—that these coincidences of Islamic with Teresian mysticism are not due to influences or literary borrowings, but instead that they are the fruit of "an originary spiritual experience",[25] in my own view I would see no problem with adding the case of Suhrawardī to the long chain of Islamic authors who boast of the seven concentric castles or palaces of the mystical path. This chain of authors is too long and too consistent to be mere coincidence: everything appears to indicate that we are dealing with a commonplace of Sufism.

The poet and Orientalist Clara Janés, for her part, also makes reference to the theme and adds new points of contact between Saint Teresa and the Sufis in her acceptance speech for the tenth Premio Nacional de las Letras Teresa de Ávila (2007).[26] It is not difficult to think that new research will bring to light additional examples of the

[24] José Antonio Antón Pacheco, "El símbolo del castillo interior en Suhrawardī y en Santa Teresa," in *Mujeres de luz: la mística femenina, lo femenino en la mística*, ed. Pablo Beneito (Madrid, 2001), pp. 7–24.

[25] "[U]na experiencia espiritual originaria" (Antón Pacheco, "El símbolo del castillo interior," p. 23).

[26] I am grateful to the author, who provided me with a copy of her lecture. It is still unpublished as I write these pages.

simile of the seven-times concentric interior castle in Islamic literature. The studies which have been done up until now keep confirming the pioneering intuition of Miguel Asín.

Saint Teresa would not appear, then, to have "invented" the beautiful plastic image of the interior castles, no matter how unusual it may have appeared to Western sensibilities: she simply elaborated it in ingenious detail, Christianized it and adapted it for her own ends. The origins of the symbol, as E. Allison Peers feared, are not then so "useless" to study. They are only uncovered with a great deal of effort: obviously, it has been necessary for me to carry out this prolonged study not in the West, but in the East; and that fact speaks for itself. Before passing on to an explanation of the symbol of the concentric castles in Islam and exploring its resonances and variants with Teresa's dwellings, I think it is worth giving an account of the multiple dwellings—more than seven, undoubtedly—which I have had to inhabit in the course of pursuing this concentric symbol of the soul, whose first trace Miguel Asín discovered with such good fortune.

The attempt to clarify the origin of the simile of the castles turned me into an itinerant, *causa sophiae*—in search of wisdom, as those medieval schoolboys (who travelled laboriously in search of codices and masters) used to say. A comparatist, as my friend Claudio Guillén once said, is "a person who bothers his friends frequently". Even more so, a Hispano-Arabist who writes from the *ínsulas extrañas* or "strange isles" of which Saint John of the Cross sang in the 16th century.[27]

My first investigations began in 1971, during my period of study at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. Everything happened, as is usually the case, fortuitously. Fortune bequeathed me a friendship with a nun who was a native of Malta, Sister Mary Busutil, with whom I shared an interest in spiritual topics. One afternoon she invited me to study with her in the convent where she lived in the Beirut of that time, now lost forever. On the modest shelf of her cell I encountered the book of Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, which had just been published recently.[28] Upon flipping through its pages anxiously, I surrendered to the surprise—a sensation I still feel vividly—of discovering that a remote Baghdad visionary of the 9th century named Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī conceived of his ecstatic heart

[27] "Cántico espiritual," version A, stanza 13.
[28] The book was published in Beirut (1970).

beneath the symbol of seven castles or concentric dwellings (*maqāmāt al-qulūb*), in the deepest interior center of which occurred the miracle of union with God. This discovery was a priceless gift for a reader of Saint Teresa of Jesus. The professor Iḥsān ʿAbbās initiated me then into the theories of Asín Palacios concerning the possible Islamic root of Saint Teresa's simile (I should admit that I was a young beginner at the time and had not yet read Asín's celebrated essay). Upon reading it, I noticed that neither Miguel Asín nor Louis Massignon had been aware of Nūrī, a spiritual writer of the 9th century who belonged to Baghdad's school of the "inebriated mystics". He was a pioneer in the codification of Islamic mysticism, to whom were attributed numerous charisms and a spirituality which bordered on the heroic. His pious teachings, his sharp spiritual perception and, above all, his inner illumination earned him the epithets of Nūrī or "luminous" and "Prince of Hearts". Ŷunayd, in spite of the differences in interpretation of the mystical path which at times separated him from Nūrī in life, mourned the death of his companion with these solemn words: "[h]alf of Sufism just disappeared with him".[29] My first translation from Arabic, as tentative as it was joyous, was precisely of these *Maqāmāt al-qulūb* or *Stations of the Hearts*.

I was on my way. Years later, with the first draft of my translation of the *Maqāmāt al-qulūb* under my arm, I met at Harvard University Kāmil al-Sheibī, the great Iraqi scholar of Nūrī. Supported with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, I went to Baghdad to study with Sheibī the work of this enigmatic contemplative which had preceded the symbol of the Teresian castles by seven long centuries. At that time Sheibī was preparing his edition of the complete works of Nūrī, based on the unedited manuscripts of his work, which he had succeeded in reuniting over the course of many years. He generously shared with me some of these codices. It will remain forever etched in my memory, that scene of the Tigris bordered with date trees in front of which we worked, the setting for so many miraculous anecdotes attributed to the pious contemplative who was the motive of my studious vigils. Sheibī and I continued our investigations by correspondence until, years later, the trace of my gener-

[29] Cf. A. Schimmel, "Abū'l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī: 'Qibla of the Lights'", in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn (London, 1993), p. 64.

ous colleague disappeared. It was not until 2007 that I learned of his death, which occurred in a Baghdad already torn apart by war. The Al-Awqaf Library, which housed the unedited codices of Nūrī, went up in flames: perhaps the Sufi mystic had the mysterious misfortune of dying twice in Baghdad, 11 centuries apart. I trust the future will contradict my dark suspicions as a scholar, but to this day I do not know whether my colleague Sheibī succeeded in publishing his edition of the complete works of Nūrī.

The passage of years returned me to Harvard, this time to the Center for Near Eastern Studies, where I finished a first revision of the rough draft of my translation. I did not edit it then because in order to have a more complete picture of Islamic mystical symbology and its possible relation to Saint Teresa's concentric castles, it was imperative for me to obtain an additional text which Paul Nwyia mentioned in passing in a footnote to his already-cited *Exégèse coranique*: the *Gawr al-umūr*, or *Book of the Profundity of Things*, by Al-Ḥakim al-Tirmiḏī (9th century). I knew that the manuscript used by Father Nwyia was catalogued as "Esat Efendi 1312" in the Suleymaniye Cami Library of Istanbul, because the Lebanese researcher had said in his brief note that Tirmiḏī had preceded Nūrī in his conception of the seven concentric castles of the soul. He had done so precisely in that codex. Nwyia even gave the specific folios containing the passage from the *Gawr al-umūr* which interested me so much. I began the investigation immediately, now from Yale University, where I was teaching at the moment. My colleagues in the Near Eastern Department there moved heaven and earth to convince the Suleymaniye Cami Library of Istanbul to send us a copy of the manuscript. But alas, all their efforts were in vain.

It would take me 12 long years to gain access at last to the *Gawr al-umūr*, but sometimes obstacles bear fruit unexpectedly. When at last I had a chance to organize a research trip to Turkey—another *itinerarium causa sophiae*—my Tunisian colleague Abdeljelil Temimi came to my aid and persuaded Doctor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, director of the Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture in Istanbul, to provide me with a microfilm of the codex which I could pick up in person while I was there.

In Turkey I had the good fortune to coincide with the Arabist Pablo Beneito, with whom I reviewed, during various October afternoons facing the Bosphorus, the final version of my translation of the *Maqāmāt al-qulūb*. My colleague Beneito provided me, furthermore,

with access to the manuscript reading room of the Suleymaniye Cami Library, where I was able to examine the codex in person. The reader will pardon this personal note, since it has to do with an investigation which has taken too many decades: that manuscript room, intimate and welcoming, through the window grating of which one could catch a glimpse of a rose garden, would have delighted Jorge Luis Borges, with whom I share the notion of paradise as one gigantic library.

Upon reviewing the Turkish codex I was able to corroborate that, in effect, Tirmiḏī had preceded the scheme of Teresa's castles which I had been able to document in the work of Nūrī of Baghdad. But still another surprise awaited me. Soon I discovered that Tirmiḏī was not alone in his formulation of the celebrated "Teresian" simile: the scholar Geneviève Gobillot, editor of Tirmiḏī, announced in her *Livre de la profondeur des choses*—once more, in a brief footnote—the existence of the work of another Muslim author who conceived of the soul as seven concentric castles. It was the *Kitāb ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* or *Dictionary of Natural History* of Mūsa al-Damīrī (d. 808/1405). This time, fortunately, the Arabic original was easier to obtain, since Geneviève Gobillot herself, whom I had met in Tunisia, sent it to me from France to Puerto Rico (for which I have always remained grateful).

Once I had translated from Arabic the pertinent passages from Tirmiḏī and Al-Damīrī, I was able to demonstrate that, in effect, the symbol of the seven-times concentric dwellings or castles which had first brought me to the study of Nūrī of Baghdad was—as Miguel Asín Palacios and I had always suspected—an often-reiterated symbol in Islamic spirituality. I was able to confirm this once more in Tehran, on the occasion of an international conference on the Persian mystic Mullā Ṣadrā, celebrated in May of 1999. This meeting of scholars led me to discover, as I shall explain, that the Persians Rūmī and Mullā Ṣadrā also made use of the simile of the seven castles or dwellings of the soul. I also found out, on the other hand, that if the systematic study of this simile has not been done in the West—which we already knew—then neither has it been done in the East.

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that Asín and I had stumbled upon an authentic commonplace (I would even say cliché) of Muslim mystical literature. From a different angle, even my Moroccan colleague Ouakil Sebbana confirms this: in his religion classes in elementary school in Rabat, it was explained to the schoolboys that the soul was constituted symbolically after the manner of seven fortified

citadels or castles that it was necessary to save until arriving at the last one, which signified attainment of the most authentic spiritual life. The symbol of the concentric castles only seems strange when we take it out of its natural context, which is Islamic. That is to say: Saint Teresa rewrites it in Spanish and Christianizes it in her *Moradas*, to the astonishment of Western erudition, which had not sought to explore it outside of the European literary framework.

It is important, thus, for us to follow in Asín's illustrious footsteps by continuing the project laid out in his posthumous essay, in which, for the first time, he located the genesis of Teresa's simile in Sufi spirituality. I will pass now to exploring more closely the ancient Arabic texts which celebrate the soul in the form of seven dwellings or castles, progressively more interior. I already stated that the first author who captured my attention was the 9th-century Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī of Baghdad; but we cannot trace the origin of the beautiful plastic image to Nūrī because Tirmiḏī precedes him. Perhaps he was not the first either to originate the symbol of the seven concentric castles in Islamic literature.

Nūrī elaborates, in the eighth vignette of his *Moradas*, the motif of the "castles of the believer's heart" by following the same fundamental scheme as the *Nawādir*. He uses the word *ḥiṣn* to refer to the soul's fortified castle, just like the anonymous Muslim author of the 16th century discovered by Asín, and also like Saint Teresa.[30] Satan attacks above all the first castles, built of fragile materials, while the believer who succeeds in taking refuge in the final fortresses by then has nothing to fear. Nūrī and his Sufi correligionists associate the soul's demonic enemy with a dog who barks threateningly, gaining access to the castles, while Saint Teresa imagines spiritual evil appearing in the form of reptiles or insects and poisonous animals. But both images are perfectly equivalent, since the dog is considered an impure animal in Islam and thus may be associated with the little beasts with which the Saint of Ávila metaphorizes spiritual impurities or the devil himself. Let us look at the Baghdad contemplative's version:

[30] The term *ḥiṣn* could not fail to be significant, since in Arabic it alludes to a castle whose center or interior tower becomes unassailable thanks to various structures or protective fences, progressively more interior, which surround it. In this way it is distinguished from the citadel or fortress (*qal'a*), which does not have these concentric protections and which is thus more easily accessible.

The castles of the believer's heart

You must know that God—may He be exalted—has created in the heart of the believer seven[31] castles (*ḥuṣūn*)[32] with fences and walls around. He ordered the believer to remain within these castles, while He permitted Satan to remain outside, from whence he calls and barks like a dog. The first walled castle is made of corundum (*yāqūt*),[33] and it is the mystical knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of God—may He be exalted—; and around it is a

[31] As with so many other religions, Islam attributes to the number seven the ultimate perfection. Peter Chelkowski explains: "In Islam seven is considered the perfect number. The seven seas and the seven climates are a combination of the numbers three and four. Each climate has its own astral light. These colors are also expressed geometrically. The triangle symbolizes the body, the spirit and the soul. The four remaining colors—red, yellow, green and blue—constitute a square and represent the active qualities of nature, such as heat, cold, dryness and humidity; the four directions; the four seasons of the year; and the cycle of life, from infancy to death" (Peter Chelkowski, *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Kamseh of Nezami* [New York, 1975], p. 113).

Nwyia argues, for his part, that "the number seven is Koranic. There are seven heavens (2:29), seven doors of access to hell (15:44), seven aleyas [verses of the Koran] (*maṭānī*), seven oceans (31:27), etc." (Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, p. 332). The number seven is, in effect, so sacred to Islam that ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Ḥamadānī dedicates an entire treatise to this number.

Christianity also considers the number seven to be a sacred figure. For Saint Gregory the septenary number implied consummate perfection because it is composed of a first pair and of a first non-pair, and of a pair that can be divided and of the first non-pair that cannot be divided. To this is added that sacred Scripture takes it to be a number of perfection, and that on the seventh day God rested. Saint Augustine calls the figure the number of the law of grace. It is formed by four and three: four symbolizes the earth, formed of four elements; while three, on the other hand, is the paradigm of the Trinity. For the mystics seven represents, then, the union of the terrestrial and the divine, in addition to the mystery of redemption.

The universal consecration received by the number seven is evident. Judaic mysticism did not ignore it either in its tradition of spiritual discourses, if we remember treatises such as the *Seven Hekhalot* or the *Seven Palaces*, which the Israelite visionary passed through symbolically until he reached the throne of God.

[32] I translate *ḥuṣūn* as "castles", understanding the term in its original sense of "fortress" or "fortified citadel". As was to be expected, Nūrī refers in his treatise to a fortified castle, with which he symbolizes the self-defense of the soul against the attacks of the devil.

[33] Our treatise writer constructs a very beautiful plastic image in which the metals would appear to embellish the precious stone of the *yāqūt* (ruby, which is how some translate from the Arabic the gem of corundum). Being crystallized aluminum, the stone—it is important to remember—can have distinct colors, including white or diamond. Ithamar Gruenwald (*Apocalyptic and Merkabah Mysticism* [Leiden, 1980]) and Catherine Swietlicki (*Spanish Christian Cabala: The Works of Luis de León, Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz* [Columbia, Missouri, 1986]) remind us that the kabbalistic tradition, for its part, used corundum or transparent sapphire for the construction of its symbolic palaces. We must be encountering a consistent and shared tradition.

> castle[34] of gold, which is faith in God—may He be exalted—; and around it is a castle of silver, which is purity of intention in words and action; and around it is a castle of iron, which is conformity with the divine will; and around it is a castle of bronze, which is the execution of God's prescriptions (*farā'id*)[35]—may He be exalted—; and around it is a castle of alum, which is the obedience of God's commands, positive and negative; and around it is a castle of baked clay, which is the education of the sensitive soul (*nafs*) in all action.
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> As God's word says—may He be exalted—"Against my servants you will have no power" (Koran 15:42).[36] The believer is, then, in the interior of these castles; and he who is in the castle of corundum, Satan has no way to get to him, as long as he obeys the rules of conduct for the soul. But if he stops obeying them and says "it is not necessary", then Satan obtains from him this castle, which is of baked clay, and covets the next one. When the believer becomes negligent in the obedience of God's commandments, positive and negative, he obtains from Satan the castle of alum, and covets the third. When the faithful one abandons his conformity to the will of God—may He be exalted—, Satan takes from him the castle of copper and envies the fourth; and thus, successively, until the last castle.[37]

Both the anonymous author of the *Nawādir* (discovered by Asín) and Nūrī in his *Stations of the Hearts*, as well as Al-Damīrī in his *Kitāb ḥayāt al-ḥayawān*, construct their castles using materials filled with brilliant color; and in this they seem to differ from the translucent diamond castles of Saint Teresa. The gradation among the luxurious (gold, silver, precious stones) and prosaic materials (alum, baked clay) establishes, nonetheless, an ascendant mystical path (or better, an internalizing one) which is not far from the interior path described by the Reformer in her *Moradas*.

Let us look briefly at the symbolic scheme of Al-Damīrī. The author attributes the spiritual lesson of the concentric circles to "one of

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[34] All the castles are found to be defended by fences and walls that surround them, although we must admit that Nūrī's exposition is a little ambiguous on this passage. I translate it simply as "castle" to make the meaning clearer.

[35] The author refers to the five principal obligations of the believing Muslim.

[36] For this and subsequent references, I cite Juan Vernet's Spanish version of the Koran (Barcelona, 1967).

[37] The Spanish version of Vignette 8 of the *Moradas de los corazones* forms a part of my translation of the entire Arab text (Madrid, 1999). I have utilized the edition of Paul Nwyia, which is based upon four manuscripts in Istanbul, as a base text. Cf. Paul Nwyia, "Textes mystiques inédites d'Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī (*Maqāmāt al-qulūb*)," *Mélange de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 44 (1968): 119–54, as well as his already-cited *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique.*

the wise (*ʿulamāʾ*) practitioners",[38] not mentioning, lamentably, his true literary source. It is important to remember that we are already in the 14th century: probably the symbolic leitmotif, of evident mnemonic nature, was so well known in Islam that it could easily pass as anonymous.

Al-Damīrī employs, on the other hand, the same term used by Nūrī for his fortified castles (*ḥiṣn*), by means of which, once more, the Muslims coincide with Saint Teresa. (Or, more accurately, she with them: I insist on this point because elsewhere[39] I have made extensive reference to the tradition of the ancient Hebrew *Hekhalot*, by means of which one ascends to God's throne by way of seven successive palaces, not seven fortified castles.) Al-Damīrī's text is the most extensive of all, but I shall limit myself here to the most relevant passages:

> You must know that God created seven castles in the heart of man. The first castle is of gold, which is the knowledge of God. Around it is a castle of silver, which is faith in Him; around it is a castle of iron, which is trust in Him; around it is a castle of stone, which consists of gratitude and conformity to the divine will; around it is a castle of baked clay, which is obedience to God's commands, both negative and positive; and around it is a castle of emerald, which is truth and sincerity toward God; and around it is a castle of brilliant pearls,[40] which consists of the discipline of the sensitive soul in all action. The believer is in the interior of these castles and the demon (*Iblīs*) is outside, barking like a dog. But the believer has nothing to fear, for he is defended inside these fortresses. It is necessary [nonetheless] that the believer not ever abandon the discipline of the soul under any circumstance.
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> […] [B]ut at times Satan succeeds in obtaining some of these castles, and makes the believer return to the state of sin and disbelief […] [B]ut while the castles of faith and trust are healthy, Satan cannot conquer the believer, because as God said: "This one [Satan] lacks power over those who believe and trust in their Lord" (Koran 16:101).[41]

Here we see how Al-Damīrī begins his description of the interior castle, which in the case of Nūrī is made of corundum and, in that of Al-Damīrī, of gold. The anonymous author of the *Nawādir*, for his

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[38] The author distinguishes between the wise contemplative, who generally retreats from the world, and the "practical" wise man, who teaches spiritually in the context of the world.

[39] See López-Baralt, "El símbolo de los siete castillos concéntricos," which forms a part of the book *Huellas del Islam en la literatura española*.

[40] Literally, "moist"; that is to say, recently drawn out of the sea.

[41] Al-Damīrī, *Kitāb ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* (Cairo, 1906), 1: 210–12.

part, inverts the scheme (as we saw) and describes in the first place the exterior castle of pearl, where even the sensitive soul mortifies itself. The spiritual sense of the three treatises is the same: in the first castles even the low spiritual impulses are mortified, and in the last castles is obtained union with God. We are, obviously, in Teresian territory.

It is important to insist, on the other hand, upon the fact that the Saint of Ávila utilizes the term *morada* to describe the successive spaces of the interior path upon which she sets out toward her own soul. Undoubtedly she had in mind the verse of John's gospel (14:2): "In my Father's house there are many mansions", even though she does not cite it directly.[42] Nonetheless, as Asín Palacios has demonstrated in his *Šāḏilíes y alumbrados*, the concept of dwelling or mansion, understood as a permanent station of the soul (as opposed to more ephemeral states like the Islamic *ḥāl*), appears to be derived from the concept—again, Islamic—of *maqām*, which means exactly that: dwelling or permanent station. The technical use of this concept was unknown in medieval European spirituality, but the Sufis employed it centuries before it obtained currency among the Carmelites. The Muslim teachers varied the number of dwellings or *maqāmāt* which constituted their interior path or *safar*, but some of them coincide with Saint Teresa's seven dwellings. That is the case with Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāŷ (d. 378/988), who explored the seven dwellings of his soul in the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* or *Book of Splendors*. The tradition was maintained so consistently that Mullā Ṣadrā repeats the scheme in his *Al-Ḥikma al-muta ʿāliya fī l-asfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arbaʿa* (*Transcendent Philosophy Related to the Four Intellectual Journeys of the Soul*), known generally by the name of *Asfār* or *Journeys*. In this work, Mullā Ṣadrā describes his first spiritual journey, in which the sensitive or carnal soul (*nafs*) finally orients itself toward God.[43] This first journey, as Mullā Ṣadrā and one of his erudite commentators, Muḥammad Riḍa al-Iṣfahānī, explain, consists of different *maqāmāt* or permanent stations. Seyyed Hossein Nasr summarizes the mystical lesson of Ṣadr al-Dīn Šīrāzī in relation to the dwelling of the spirit or intellect (*al-'aql*), which in turn opens onto seven more interior dwellings:

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[42] Biblical quotations are from the Douay version (*The Holy Bible, Translated from the Latin Vulgate*, ed. Richard Challoner [New York, 1941]).

[43] Mullā Ṣadrā, *Al-Ḥikma al-muta ʿāliya fī l-asfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arbaʿa* (*Transcendent Philosophy Related to the Four Intellectual Journeys of the Soul*), ed. Muḥammad Riḍa al-Muẓaffar (Tehran, 1958), 1: 13.

> […] the interior dwellings are turned into seven: the dwellings of the *nafs*, of the *qalb*, of the *ʿaql*, of the *rūḥ*, of the *sirr*, of the *jafi* and of the *ajfā*. These dwellings receive these names because these conditions become permanent for the initiate. If they were not permanent states, they would not be called dwellings (*maqām*). And these are the dwellings of devotion and of the city of love to which the Gnostic referred, perennially alive among us, the Mawlā or Lord of Rūm [Ŷalāl al-Dīn Rūmī]: "ʿAṭṭār has crossed the seven cities of love; / We have hardly turned the first corner". If the initiate renounces himself in the Divinity, the first journey touches his end and his being is transformed into a true Being.[44]

Once again we have encountered the Teresian scheme of the seven dwellings or *maqāmāt*, progressively more interior. Just like Saint Teresa, Ṣadr al-Dīn Šīrāzī places the beginnings of the spiritual life in his first *maqām*: from this dwelling of the *nafs* or sensitive soul, the initiate progresses toward the *qalb* or heart; and from there to the *ʿaql* or intellect; and from there to the *rūḥ* or spirit; to the *sirr* or secret; to the *jafī* or that which is hidden; until finally he reaches the most recondite spiritual life (*al-ajfā*). Thus the believer, the same as in Saint Teresa's last "dwelling" or *maqām*, "arrives at his true Being": that is to say, he is united with the Divinity. I have cited extensively this passage from the *Asfār* not only for the parallel it offers with the seven Teresian dwellings, but also for the reference it makes to Rūmī's poem. Mullā Ṣadrā identifies without ambiguity his scheme of the path toward God as concentric dwellings, progressively more interior, with the "seven citadels" of love which Farīd al-Dīn ʿAttār had succeeded in crossing on his journey or *safar* toward the Divinity. Let us note that Mullā Ṣadrā takes for granted that his readers, without further explanation, will understand that the seven citadels of ʿAttār constitute the dwellings or spheres of his interior mystical path. We are, by all appearances, faced with a simile which had to be common currency in Islam during many centuries.

These Persian spiritual writers, but above all Rūmī, definitely bring us closer, once again, to the recalcitrant Teresian enigma: the saint compares her seven "dwellings" or *maqāmāt* of the interior soul not only with the celestial spheres but also precisely with fortified castles or walled citadels.[45]

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[44] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and His Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran, 1978), p. 58.

[45] As Asín reminds us in his already-cited work *Šaḍilíes y alumbrados*, there are other variants which the Saint of Ávila shares with the Islamic castles: prayer is the

Ironically, the Reformer would appear to be closer to the Persian ʿAṭṭār than to Pseudo-Dionysius. Muslims would understand without surprise the mystical scheme which has occasioned so many headaches in the West.[46] Some passages of Saint John of the Cross permit us to suspect, on the other hand, that he was not unaware of the simile either. When he assures us in the *Cántico espiritual* that his poetic protagonist will pass "the forts and borders", he could well be indicating to us that the soul travels on its *safar* or mystical journey by way of fortified citadels which mark the distinct boundaries of the dwellings through which it passes. Saint John's journey is undoubtedly, like that of Suhrawardī, *ab intra*. Perhaps for this very reason the Spouse of the "Cántico" asks the distractions proper to the sensitive soul, represented by a confusing proliferation of animals, "not to touch the wall / so that the bride will sleep more surely":[47] the soul which finds itself *intramuros*, within the fortresses, is already safe from the assaults of concupiscence and other passions. Once again, we are near the mystical journey of ʿAṭṭār through walled citadels.

But let us return to the case of the Islamic authors who describe the symbol of the concentric fortresses in greater detail. The colors and symbolic materials of the castles of Nūrī and Al-Damīrī recall the similes of other Muslim authors such as Simnānī and Nīẓāmī, whose *maqāmāt* or dwellings of the soul still retain the colors and attributes of the planetary orbits with which they are associated.

But not all symbolic castles are so colorful in Sufi spirituality. I have been able to document some Islamic castles which appear as radiant and shining as the pure diamond castles of that woman of light who was Saint Teresa of Ávila. Al-Ḥakim al-Tirmiḏī describes in the 9th century precisely these resplendent castles in his *Gawr al-umūr*, which is certainly the most ancient treatise on the castles that I have been able to document in Islamic literature. Al-Tirmiḏī equates his progressively more interior dwellings or *maqāmāt* with *medinas* (*madīna*, pl. *mudūn*), which means, naturally, "fortified citadels" like the castle-fortresses of his Sufi correligionists. They also resemble those of his

port of entry to the fortified castle of the soul, which is inhabited, in both cases, by the sentries and guardians of the senses and spiritual powers.

[46] For more details about the case of ʿAṭṭār and Mullā Ṣadrā, I refer the reader to my essay "Spanish Mysticism's Debt to Islam: the Spiritual Symbology of St. Teresa of Ávila," in press, both in Persian and in English, in the proceedings of a conference on Mullā Ṣadrā which took place in Tehran in 1999.

[47] Saint John of the Cross, "Cántico espiritual," in López-Baralt and Pacho, eds, *San Juan de la Cruz: obra completa*, 1: 64.

successor Saint Teresa, who clarifies in her *Camino de perfección* that the soul is a "city" that has to be "very well fortified", with which she simply equates both architectonic structures: "this castle or city".[48] Tirmiḏī, like the saint who was a native of the walled city of Ávila, erects resplendent fortresses made of pure light:

> The exterior heart (*fuʿād*) is the first of the *medinas* of light—[in other words], the light has seven *medinas*—. The first *medina* is that of the exterior heart (*fuʿād*); then comes the conscience (*ḍamīr*); then the exterior covering (*gilāf*); then the interior heart (*qalb*); then the interior covering (*šagaf*); then the bottom of the heart (*ḥabba*); and, finally, the quintessence of the heart (*lubāb*). The conscience (*ḍamīr*) is the interior heart (*qalb*) of the exterior heart (*fuʿād*); the exterior covering (*gilāf*) is the interior heart (*qalb*) of the conscience (*ḍamīr*); the interior heart (*qalb*) is the interior heart (*qalb*) of the exterior covering (*gilāf*); the interior covering (*šagaf*) is the interior heart (*qalb*) of the interior heart (*qalb*); and the bottom of the heart (*ḥabba*) is the interior heart (*qalb*) of the interior covering (*šagaf*); and the quintessence of the heart (*lubāb*) is the interior heart (*qalb*) of the bottom of the heart (*ḥabba*), and that is the source of the light. And the totality of this structure is organized like seven *medinas*, one inside the other [i.e. concentric].[49]

Al-Tirmiḏī appears to play here with the endings of the root *q-l-b*, which signifies as much "heart" as "perpetual change" or "inversion", among other meanings, when it inverts every *medina* or "covering" of the heart (*taqallub*) and makes it capable of being a protection (as much exterior as interior) for the deep apex of the soul. Curiously, Saint Teresa was conscious of these "protecting veils" or "shrouds" of the soul, and her castle-dwellings, like those of Tirmiḏī, change precisely into "coverings":

> You do not have to understand these dwellings one behind another like something in a thread; but instead, place your eyes on the center, which is the piece or palace where the king is, and consider it like a palmetto, which to arrive at the part which is good to eat has many coverings.[50]

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[48] "[E]ste castillo o ciudad" (Saint Teresa, *Camino de perfección* 3.2, in *Obras completas*, p. 203).

[49] *Gawr al-umūr*, Ms. Esat Efendi 1312, Suleymaniye Cami Library, Istanbul, Turkey, fol. 121.

[50] "No havéis de entender estas moradas una en pos de otra como cosa en hilado, sino poned los ojos en el centro, que es la pieza o palacio adonde está el rey, y considerad como un palmito, que para llegar a lo que es de comer tiene muchas coberturas" (Saint Teresa, *Moradas del castillo interior* 1.2.8, in *Obras completas*, ed. Efrén de la

A curious image, undoubtedly, in Spanish hands: the castles of the heart suddenly transform themselves into a palmetto with white coverings, progressively more interior. It is nothing strange in Arabic hands, though: one of the senses of the root *q-l-b*, in addition to "heart", "inversion", "fluctuation", and "perpetual change", is precisely "palmetto": *qilb* or *qulb*. Al-Ḥakim al-Tirmiḏī would have known this, without doubt. I admit that I do not know how Teresa of Jesus knew it.[51]

In light of everything I have said, it appears obvious that the Saint of Ávila contracted profound debts to Sufi literature. The Reformer, in all probability, was not conscious of the fact that she was instituting for Christian use a mystical discourse which had been elaborated for centuries in Islamic literature. The fact that Saint Teresa had drunk so deeply at the literary founts of writers she would have considered enemies of the faith does not invalidate either her visions or the divine inspiration she claimed for her mystical experiences. I already pointed to the fact, explored by Stephen Katz, that the cultural context in which the mystic lives colors and even helps to give symbolic form to her transcendent experience, which is by its very nature impossible to articulate in language. The visionary, even when her ecstasy is—as always, by definition—inexpressible, has at hand the similes which constitute common currency in her cultural environment to explain in some manner what has happened to her beyond all space, time, reason, and language. When she succeeds in communicating—albeit obliquely—something of her vision, only then can it be made useful for spiritual instruction of her correligionaries.

In her own case, Saint Teresa confesses with candor that she has had a mysterious mystical experience which she does not know how to express. She asks herself *ex post facto* which image would be most appropriate for communicating her *theopoiesis*. And it is then (and only then) that there presents itself to her imagination the simile of the seven concentric castles of the soul. Except that said simile, as we already know, was not common currency either in Renaissance

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Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 212 [Madrid, 1976], p. 415).

[51] Curiously, Saint John of the Cross also knew about the variants of the three-letter root *q-l-b* ("heart"). He compares his deep heart, seven times concentric, with a "pool". Al-Kubrà had done the same when he equated his concentric soul with a pool of living waters—except that the Sufi master was perfectly conscious that the root *q-l-b* included also the variant *qalīb* or "pool".

Europe or in Renaissance Spain![52] If we echo Katz's hypothesis, we would have to assume that Teresa's literary and religious environment was, in good measure (still in the 16th century, even), strongly Islamicized.[53] It is important to take into account, on the other hand, the fact that the conventual environment promotes oral spiritual exchanges in which technical mystical language is employed; perhaps from these was derived the simile (so useful, pedagogically speaking) of the seven concentric castles.

It certainly does not seem too strange that a simile found so extensively throughout Islamic religion could have been introduced into a popular Spanish tradition of the Golden Age by oral means, particularly after eight centuries of constant cultural interchange between Muslims and Christians. It is a simile of great plastic beauty which is additionally very easy to remember. Michael Gerli[54] and María Mercedes Carrión[55] remind us that many spiritual metaphors—especially architectonic ones[56]—became popular in European spirituality precisely because of their attractive mnemonic character. This was the case with some images of Saint Augustine and Saint Ignatius, which because of their schematic nature were easily remembered. We know that exactly the same thing occurred with the Mother Reformer's concentric simile, for she asked her spiritual daughters to bring it time and again to their memory. Perhaps the simile of the castles was transmitted as a mnemonic device during those silent dialogues between Christians and Muslims which our collective historical memory, just like Cervantes, "does not wish to remember",[57] but which had to have taken place on peninsular soil. Did not Raymond Lull, who died a martyr at the hands of the Muslims, not cite with deep admiration his

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[52] On the iconographical problems of the concentric castle, see Catherine Swietlicki, "The Problematic Iconography of Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*," *Studia mystica* 11.3 (1988): 37–47.

[53] See the important study by María Jesús Rubiera Mata, *La arquitectura en la literatura árabe* (Madrid, 1981).

[54] Michael Gerli, "El *Castillo interior* y el arte de la memoria," *Bulletin hispanique* 86.1–2 (1982): 154–63.

[55] María Mercedes Carrión, *Arquitectura y cuerpo en la figura autorial de Teresa de Jesús* (Barcelona, 1994).

[56] See Kurtz, "The Small Castle of the Soul," p. 33.

[57] The reference is to the famous opening line of Miguel de Cervantes's masterpiece *Don Quijote*, which begins: "En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme" (Miguel de Cervantes, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. Luis Andrés Murillo [Madrid, 1987], 1: 69).

literary teachers ("unes gents qui han nom sufíes") in his *Llibre del amic e amat*?[58]

These Sufis preceded not only Lull, but also Saint Teresa of Jesus, by at least seven centuries. It is moving to think that when Al-Ḥakim al-Tirmiḏī and Nūrī instructed their correligionaries using the mandala of the seven castles of the soul, as much in Khorasan as on the banks of the Tigris, the Spanish with which the Reformer would rewrite their concentric simile so brilliantly had at that point barely been born. Castilian culture, having already reached its full splendor by the 16th century, would remain imbued with a mysterious Islamic perfume, which would make the Teresian *Moradas* one of the most complex spiritual discourses of Western spirituality and, undoubtedly, one of the most richly synthetic.

Translated by Hilaire Kallendorf

[58] Raymond Lull, *Llibre d'amic e amat*, in *Blanquerna: obres originals* (Palma de Mallorca, 1914), p. 378.