CHAPTER FIVE

THE LEGACY OF ‘AYN AL-QUDĀT

The first modern scholars who took note of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt lived, just as he had, at a critical juncture in history. Their epoch was scorched by catastrophic world wars and the rise of Fascism among the most sophisticated European nations, Italy and Germany. Evil was rampant and the promise of rationality seemed to have been a deception. ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and the others in his milieu, made sense to the Franco-Arab intellectuals who were searching for spiritual certainty among the ruins of their collapsing civilization. At the turn of the twentieth-century, two major European scholars, Louis Massignon and Henry Corbin, opened the field of Islamic studies to the West. They joined their Indo-Iranian colleagues to advance a complex project aimed at retrieving and canonizing the mystical heritage of Islam. ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and Aḥmad Ghazzālī were especially important in this project because they were among the first Iranian authors of mystical prose literature who produced works in Persian. They were original thinkers who dared to write about a God who could be loved and could in fact be known in the sensual intimacies among humans. They wrote about a God who could be seen in the beautiful face of young men. And, similar to Ḥallāj, they propagated a stark view of Satan as an angel, be it a fallen one. For them, Satan was a possessive lover who still held a special relationship with the beloved. He was the intimate chamberlain of the beloved and was allotted the task of baring others from approaching His presence. The God that these mystics described, was not a tyrant who sat in judgement over the souls of the dead on the day of judgement. The day of judgement was at hand; death was a quotidian visionary reality, as mundane as the living; and God was a merciful and benevolent presence who was as close to man as the throbbing of his jugular vein. These ideas were appealing to the hybrid European Islamists of the Massignon era whose research was focused on themes that stood in sharp contrast to the conventional Euro-centric reception of Islam up to that point.

Jean Mohammed ben Abd el-Jalil (1904-79), a Franco-Moroccan Muslim convert to Catholicism, and ‘Affīf ʿUsayrān (1919-88), a
Lebanese shī‘ī who also converted to Catholicism, were the first in their generation to make significant contributions to the scholarship on ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. ‘Usayrān completed his dissertation in philosophy and Persian literature at the University of Tehran. The dissertation consisted of the edited manuscripts of the *Tamhidāt* and his critical introduction to the text. In the acknowledgments, ‘Usayrān paid homage to his Iranian mentors, Dhabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā and Muḥammad Mu‘īn, and also Henry Corbin, specifically, for teaching him how to read and edit manuscripts. Abd el-Jalil in the 1930s edited and published *Shakwā al-Gharīb ‘an al-Awṭān ilā ‘Ulamā‘ al-Buldān* (The Complaint of a Stranger Exiled from Home to the Scholars of the Lands). He also provided a French translation of the text. He soon turned his attention to other aspects of Islam whereas ‘Usayrān dedicated most of his life to retrieving and editing the unpublished manuscripts of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. He and his Iranian colleague, ‘Alīnaqī Munzavī, established the fulcrum upon which further study of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was built. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was a logical choice for these scholars considering that Massignon had selected the martyred Ḥallāj as the subject of his *magnum opus*, and Henry Corbin had dedicated a significant part of his work to another martyr, Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl. All three had been executed for the crime of pushing the boundaries of knowledge and rational thought far beyond the sanctified limits of the *shari‘a*.

The reception of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in his own time, is a more complex matter. His horrific execution was meant to be a hunting spectacle for others to learn from. After he was gone, no one dared to openly associate with his name and memory. Unlike the often discussed Ḥallāj who lived and died in a different epoch, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was a contemporary and his case was too sensitive to be brought up in the writing of his time. He was readily identified as a brilliant but reckless thinker who vexed the state authorities and brought destruction upon himself and some of his friends. Another reason for his oblivion was that he died young and did not enjoy the renown of his older colleagues who were deemed more significant and were discussed at length in the medieval canons. Moreover, his complex writing style was difficult to understand. For these reasons he did not receive sufficient attention in the mystical literature of the medieval period except marginally and often parenthetically as the student of Āḥmad Ghazzālī. For example, *Sharḥ-i Shatḥiyāyāt*, the encyclopedic compilation of Rūzbihān Baqlī on Islamic mysticism, did not include ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt even though the