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Axa prioritară 1 *Educația și formarea profesională în sprijinul creșterii economice și dezvoltării societății bazate pe cunoaștere*

Domeniul major de intervenție 1.5 *Programe doctorale și postdoctorale în sprijinul cercetării*

Titlul proiectului: *Științele socio-umaniste în contextul evoluției globalizate – dezvoltarea și implementarea programului de studii și cercetare postdoctorală*

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Beneficiar: Academia Română

Dr. Silviu-Dan LUPAȘCU

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GNOSTICISM, CHRISTIANITY AND SUFISM UNDER THE ABBASID DYNASTY (750-1258)

1. The scientific importance of the topic according to the current level of knowledge in the field of comparative studies about the Abrahamic religions.

The comparative history of the Abrahamic religions emphasize an important issue concerning the hermeneutics of sacred texts and mystical theology: to what extent the arguments founded on Gnostic (IIIrd – IVth centuries), Christian (IInd – VIIIth centuries) and *Sūfi* (VIIIth – XIIIth centuries) primary sources are able to reconstitute the creative syncretism owing to which a series of religious ideas (redemption through theandrical language and knowledge) characteristic to the religious systems of the Greek-Roman realm have been assimilated, re-written and developed inside the realm of *Sūfi* theology, under the Abbasid dynasty (750-1258). The penetration of these key-terms in the Moslem theosophical thinking indicates a subjacent tendency which accompanies the programmatic conquest and conversion to Islam of Northern Africa, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. Through this syncretistic proceeding, the intellectual elite of primary and medieval Islam managed to enrich the initially universal vocation of the Moslem religious space with the theosophical patrimony of Late Antiquity. Inside the religious space of Islam, this patrimony was destined to undergo an exquisite deconstruction, through a long and fertile process of selection, creative re-writing, homogeneity and subordination with regard to the textual-theocratic ideal of the *Qur'ān*, as well as in respect

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of the reality revealed during the theandrical experiences – mystical union of the human being with the Divine Being – harboured by the *Sūfī* schools and communities.

The *Nag Hammadi Library* – the most important collection of Gnostic manuscripts indited in Coptic after the original versions in Greek were lost – was discovered in 1945 near the village of Al-Qasr, in Upper Egypt. The *Nag Hammadi Codex* includes fifty-two treatises, allotted in thirteen books. In the same historical context, the mystical theology of Hermeticism, of the hermetic gnosis, reaches its climax through the experience of regeneration, *paliggenesía*. André-Jean Festugière (1898-1982) built a detailed exegesis of the writings included in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, focused on the relationship regeneration-enlightenment, *paliggenesía-photismós*¹. The theandrical regeneration defines itself as a “new birth” or as the birth of the “new man”. It reveals itself as the ontological re-identification of the human being with *dunámeis* (the divine Powers), *Lógos* (the divine Verb), *Ogdoada*, with *Nous*, the Spirit constituted of the substance of the Supreme Divinity, the “Whole in Whole”.

The approach to the relationship between Christianity and Islam, under the Abbasid Dynasty, has to deal with the analysis of the legend about Sergius Bahīrā, the Arab-Nestorian monk from Bahrain, concerning whom Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad Ibn Ishāq Ibn Yasār Ibn Khyār (*ca.* 704-*ca.* 767-768)², Muhammad Ibn Sa’d Ibn Manī‘ Al-Basrī (784-845)³, Abū ‘Abd Al-Mālik Ibn Hishām (d. *ca.* 834)⁴ and Muhammad Ibn Jarīr Ibn Yazīd Abū Ja’far At-Tabarī (839-923)⁵ declared that he foretold the prophetic vocation of Muhammad and his religious destiny as the founder of Islam. At the same time, Sergius Bahīrā supposedly indited parts of the *Qur’ān*⁶. The “Apocalypse of Bahīrā” was also attributed to him⁷. Through the expression “the strayed sheep that was exiled by My Church in the wilderness”, Sergius Bahīrā is mentioned in

¹ Cf. André-Jean Festugière, *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, I-IV, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006, IV – *Le Dieu inconnu et la gnose*, p. 200-267.

² Cf. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad Ibn Ishāq Ibn Yasār Ibn Khyār, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* or the *Biography of Allāh’s Messenger* (a lost work, preserved in the re-writings of Ibn Hishām and At-Tabarī).

³ Cf. Muhammad Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb at-tabaqāt al-kabīr* or the *Book of the Upper-Classes*.

⁴ Cf. Abū ‘Abd Al-Mālik Ibn Hishām, *Sīra rasūl Allāh Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd Allāh* or the *Biography of Allāh’s Messenger, Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd Allāh*, a work also known under the title *As-sīra an-nabawīya* or the *Biography of the Prophet*.

⁵ Cf. Muhammad Ibn Jarīr Ibn Yazīd Abū Ja’far At-Tabarī, *Ta’rīch al-rusul wa-’l-mulūk wa-’l-chulafā’* or the *History of the Prophets, Kings and Caliphs*.

⁶ Cf. A. Abel, “Bahīrā”, in H. A. R. Gibb, J. K. Kramers, E. Lévy-Provençal, J. Schacht, B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986, vol. I, p. 922-923.

⁷ Cf. A. Abel, « L’Apocalypse de Bahīrā et la notion islamique du Mehdi », in *Annales de l’Institut de Philologie et et Histoire Orientale*, Bruxelles, No. III, p. 1-12.

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the “Apocalypse of Peter” or the “Book of the Rolls”, an apocrypha indited in *garshuni* (Arabic written with Syriac alphabet), which was dated *ca.* 800 C. E. This same text, intitled *Iktishaf Shim’un* (the “Apocalypse of Simon”) or *Jalayan Butrus* (the “Apocalypse of Peter”), was translated and published in 1931 by A. Mingana in *Woodbrooke Studies*⁸. Subsequently the peaceful or antagonistic relationship between Christianity and Islam was described in the writings of the great *Sūfi* masters from the XIth – XIIIth centuries (‘Ali Ibn Uthmān Al-Jullābī Al-Hujwārī, Muhyī Al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, Jalāl-ud-dīn Rūmī, ‘Azīz-ud-dīn Nasafī).

Two centuries after the *Hijra*, Sufism was established as a theological system within the spiritual milieu of the Schools founded in Basra, Kūfa, Baghdad and Khurāsān. In their writings, the *Sūfi* authors made the distinction between *‘ilm* (“science”, “scientific knowledge”), *hikma* (“wisdom”) and *ma‘rifa* (“gnosis”, “knowledge of God”, “theosophical knowledge”). They give precedence alternatively either to *‘ilm* or to *ma‘rifa*, while *al-hikma* is considered a divine gift, contained in the *Qur’ān*. Although the root *‘arf* is included under various forms in the *Qur’ān*, the word *ma‘rifa* is never mentioned. In this historical-lexicological context, Dhū’l-Nūn Misrī (*ca.* 796-859)⁹ specified the meaning of the word *tafwīd* (“self-abnegation” of the mystic towards God) and defined the concept of *ma‘rifa* (“gnosis”). Of his written and oral teachings only the apophthegms edited by his disciples and admirers from Egypt and Baghdad have survived¹⁰.

Louis Massignon indited the Catalogue of the Arabic-Hermetic literature and mentioned the Moslem authors who stated that Hermes (*Harāmisa*) was a true prophet, susceptible to be identified with *Idrīs* or *Ukhnūkh* (Enoch). The two masters who attempted a conciliation between neo-platonism and the *Sūfi* doctrine, Al-Suhrawardī (1155-1191) and Ibn Sab‘īn (*ca.* 1216-1271), invoked the prophetic authority of *Hermes*. In this respect, Al-Suhrawardī associated *Hermes* to *Agathodémon-Seth*, and Ibn Sab‘īn built a “chain of initiation” (*isnād*), which starts with *Hermes* and ends with Ibn Sab‘īn himself, having as intermediary links Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great (Dhū’l-qarnayn), Al-Hallāj, Shiblī, Niffarī, Habashī, Qadīb Al-Bān, Shūdī (Hallāwi, *qādī* of the city of Sevilla). The eighth link in Ibn Sab‘īn’s *isnād* is Niffarī (Xth century), author of the *Sūfi* writings entitled *Al-Mawāqif* (*The Stations*) and *Al-Muhātabāt* (*The Adresses*). According to the opinion of Paul Nwyia, as a mystical theologian Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdallah Al-Niffarī is the last towering figure of the *Sūfi* School founded by Hasan Basrī (643-728) in the city of Basra and consolidated by Al-Hallāj, in the VIIth – Xth centuries. At the same time, he is one of the “slaves of love” who unveils the

⁸ Cf. A. Mingana (ed., trad.), *Woodbrooke Studies. Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshuni*, vol. III, Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Limited, 1931, p. 93-407.

⁹ Dhū’l-Nūn Misrī was born in Ikhmīm, in Upper Egypt.

¹⁰ Cf. Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Paris: Cerf, 1999, p. 206-213.

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trans-historical connections between *Sūfi* theology and Greco-Egyptian Hermeticism¹¹. In Al-Niffarī's thinking, the theandrical reality is instituted by the language of the union between the "two substances": when the deified man speaks the language of God, God speaks the language of the deified man.

The unifying dynamics of the divine-human language stands as an important common denominator of Christian theology, Hermetic gnosis and *Sūfi* theology, under the Abbasid dynasty. The interdependency of a series of key-terms of Gnosticism, Christianity and Sufism proves that during the Middle Age the communication between the Abrahamic religious spaces was not accomplished only through their historical vicinity which involved theological, liturgical and literary proximity, but also through the communication system constituted out of the secondary or syncretistic religious spaces (Gnosticism, Hermeticism), occulted in the historical background, but vested with the privilege of the bibliographical survival, susceptible to perpetuate itself through the labyrinth of the successive re-writings.

2. The relevance of the topic against the background of the Program of Post-Doctoral Studies.

The effort to emphasize the historical and religious connections between Gnosticism, Hermeticism and Sufism, as well as the hermeneutical strategy which aims to situate them within the broad context of the comparative history of the Abrahamic religions and the history of mentalities in the Moslem society of the XIth – XIIIth centuries, insert this research project in the Program of Post-doctoral Studies hosted by the Institute for the History of Religions. Due to the new primary and secondary sources which we intend to bring in the scientific exchange of ideas, as well as to the novelty of the research perspective and the interdisciplinary methodology (see *infra*), this project is able to contribute in a substantial manner to the elucidation of the religious dynamics which developed, through successive re-writings, the central themes of the Gnostic and Hermetic theology inside the spiritual treasury of medieval Islam.

3. The originality and novelty of the project are defined along four headings:

(1) the novelty of the topic, which haven't yet been investigated by the Romanian historiography;

(2) the originality of the research perspective, according to which during the medieval history the communication between the Abrahamic religious spaces was not accomplished only

¹¹ Cf. Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, Beyrouth: Dar El-Machreq, 1991, p. 352-354.

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through their historical vicinity which involved theological, liturgical and literary proximity, but also through the dynamics of the secondary or syncretistic religious spaces (Gnosticism, Hermeticism);

(3) the new primary and secondary sources which will be brought within the scientific channels of circulation as a result of the research to be accomplished in libraries situated abroad (France);

(4) the interdisciplinary dimension of the project, which aims to join the research methods defining a series of connected fields: history of religions, history of culture, history of mentalities, history of ideas, philosophy of religion.

4. The goals of the project as compared to the previous achievements.

Through the endeavors involved in this research project we shall reach two major scientific goals:

(1) to identify new sources referring to the comparative history of the Abrahamic religions, which are preserved in the libraries of Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Bibliothèque du Collège de France, Institut de Langues Orientales, Bibliothèque de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études), and to include them within the scientific channels of circulation.

(2) to indite scientific works according to the topic of the project and to disseminate the results of our research through allocutions to be given during conferences and seminars; to publish studies and articles in the magazines and volumes edited by the Institute for the History of Religions, as well as in other academic publications to be published in Romania or abroad; to unite these studies and articles in a volume signed as an author.

5. The methodology of research and the organization of the project.

The methodology of research will cover the main stages of the scientific research acknowledged in the field of humanities:

(1) to gather documentary evidence in libraries and archives from abroad (Paris), with the aim to identify primary sources which are relevant to the history of the Abrahamic religions; to acquire secondary sources (volumes, magazines), in order to reach a much needed synchronicity with the current level of research to be encountered in the Western scientific milieu; to set in order and annotate the sources;

(2) to focus our research on the new sources in particular, with the aim to corroborate the ideas, hypotheses, arguments, reasoning and conclusions of our own research work with the current level of knowledge reached in the field of the history of religions;

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(3) to process and interpret these contributions according to our own scientific endeavors; to systematize the results of the research work according to the content and form of the exposition;

(4) to indite a number of studies and articles, according to the current level of national and international knowledge reached in the field of the history of religions and to disseminate the results of our research according to the schedule.

6. Measurable impact of the project and the dissemination of the research results:

(1) to indite and publish a volume signed as an author, with the aim to insert the results of our own research work within the scientific channels of circulation, at a national and international level;

(2) to indite in French or English at least two articles each year, in order to be published in the magazines and collective volumes edited by the Institute for the History of Religions. These articles will be focused on topics such as: connections between Gnosticism and Islam, under the Abbasid dynasty; connections between Christianity and Islam, under the Abbasid dynasty; the hermeneutics of the Gnostic texts included in *The Nag Hammadi Library*; the hermeneutics of the texts included in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus; the hermeneutics of the major works conceived by a series of *Sūfi* masters, towering figures of medieval Islam (Al-Kalābādhī, Al-Niffarī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Nasafī, Hujwīrī, Rūmī, Al-Hallāj, Al-Suhrawardī).

(3) to participate to at least two international conferences each year, with the aim to disseminate the results of our research.

7. The feasibility and credibility of the project.

This research project had been realistically indited according to three perspectives: *from a conceptual perspective*, it is focused on a topic circumscribed by the field of the comparative history of religions and it is conceived according to a methodology which I successfully used in publishing and research projects I was involved in during the previous years; *from a financial perspective*, the viability of the project consists in the fact that the Post-Doctoral Program covers, through the research trips abroad, all the expenses which are necessary to the accomplishment of the research work; *from a time-wise perspective*, the research goals can be successfully achieved during the year covered by the Post-Doctoral Fellowship. The judicious planning of the research activities and the wise management of time and resources are meant to lead to the optimum unfolding of the project.

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