

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.

# The Living Embodiment of ‘Ihsān’

By James Winston Morris

Like the unique figure of ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri, whose extraordinary book of spiritual teaching (*al-Mawāqif*) he introduced to the francophone and wider academic worlds, Michel Chodkiewicz was a remarkable living embodiment of the culminating spiritual virtue of *ihsān*—of doing what is truly good and beautiful—in every area of life that he touched. So here we may briefly note some of his other active qualities and accomplishments, beyond the literary contributions just mentioned by Stephen Hirstenstein:

During his 40 years as an editor and then manager of one of France’s largest publishing conglomerates, he helped bring to the awareness of francophone and wider international audiences a host of leading literary, historical, and social scientific figures from all regions of the emerging post-colonial world.

The depth of his personal relations with fellow scholars, intellectuals, and former students throughout the Muslim world (literally from North Africa to Indonesia) was such that he was constantly solicited by France’s political, foreign affairs, and journalistic elites for his in-depth, judicious understanding of political crises and developments both near (including France’s own Muslim immigrant communities) and far.

In his graduate seminars at France’s foremost center for the social sciences and area studies (EHESS), frequented by the most promising doctoral students and visiting senior scholars from N. and W. Africa and the Levant, he untiringly formed a whole generation of academic and more public intellectuals whom he continued to inspire and encourage personally throughout the tumult that often overtook their home countries in ensuing years.

The guiding emphasis of his teaching there—which approached Ibn ‘Arabi through the full surrounding context of social, intellectual, and religious histories of the Maghreb, W. Africa, and the eastern Arab world—was on the ongoing, creative communication of the spiritual heritage of the Qur’an and hadith by figures like Ibn ‘Arabi and on the wider social and intellectual movements those figures inspired. Unlike the highly intellectual image of the ‘Shaykh al-Akbar’ throughout the

Eastern Islamic world, Chodkiewicz awakened his students to Ibn 'Arabi's perennial influence on those lasting spiritual dimensions of popular Islamic religious and devotional life that were too often neglected, scorned, or even violently attacked by the dominant political ideologies of the post-colonial era.

Finally, and completely in keeping with Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual advice, Michel Chodkiewicz was 'self-taught.' In practice, that meant he was taught by everyone he met: a lifelong mentor and committed friend to each of his former students and interlocutors, whatever their role and wherever they might be. In short, he was avidly curious about what each friend was learning and researching at the moment, and equally liberal (indeed often insistent) with his own suggestions, insights, and related references, whether in person or through a never-ending stream of correspondence.