The tomb of Ibn 'Arabi continues to live its paradoxical history. It incarnates the popular and spiritual Islam of a district and also a mystical, intellectual, and universal Islam.

The tomb of a saint, as a high-ranking place of Islam, only lets us see, at first glance, the sacred function of the place: the intercession and baraka. But it also shows in its own way the life and death of the saint as well as the position that the collective imagination gives to him. It is a living testimonial, in the same way that hagiographical books are. The mausoleums and the domes are, in Islamic lands, hagiographies of stone on which are written the history of saintliness.

Translated from the French by Cecilia Twince

The Hidden Secret Concerning the Shrine of Ibn 'Arabi
A Treatise by 'Abd al-Ghani an-Nabulusi
Translated by Paul B. Fenton

‘When the Qa’d will be embraced by the Shin, then will appear the shrine of Muhdy-Din.’

Introduction
The present treatise, as-Sir al-mukhtab fi jari' ibn al-'arabi, The Hidden Secret concerning the Shrine of Ibn 'Arabi', translated here into English for the very first time, was written in the year 1678 by the celebrated Syrian mystic 'Abd al-Ghani b. Isma'il an-Nabulusi (1641–1731). As indicated by its title, this as yet unpublished treatise is devoted to an esoteric description of the last resting place of Muhdy d-Din Ibn 'Arabi. As such it is not only a tribute to the Great Shaykh, but also an interesting testimony to the manner in which the Sufis envisaged the visit to the shrine of a master. Ibn 'Arabi departed this world on the 22 rabi’ II 638/1240 in Damascus.

1. My personal translation on a theme in the Shajara an-nu'maniyya. Here the Qa'd stands for as-Sir (Jerusalem) and the Shin for ash-Sham (Damascus). The Arabic root SHQ has the connotation of brotherhood. May the Shaykh al-A'kar intercede towards bringing these two letters together in the spirit of the concluding prayer to this epistle ‘unite our hearts and guide us to the paths of peace’.

where he was buried in the family vault of the Ibn Zaki, a dynasty of illustrious qādīs who had become his protectors during his stay in the Syrian capital. There, in the Sālihiyya district, his tomb is still to be found and is a place of pilgrimage for numerous visitors.

Besides the ascension of this work to an-Nabulusi in the present text, his authorship is further confirmed by the fact that he refers to it in his al-Hadda al-unṣūṣya fi r-iḥlā ḥ al-ṣiddiya, an account of his journey from Damascus to Jerusalem in 1690. As is known, an-Nabulusi belonged to the Qādīrī and Naqshabandi Sufi orders and was a fervent, spiritual disciple of Ibn Ṭab'ī. His biographers recount that he remained a recluse in his house for seven years while studying the writings of the Shaykh al-Ḳarī, he being so absorbed therein that he neglected to cut his hair and nails. He commented on Ibn Ṭab’ī’s Fadā’il, and Prayers (al-salāt al-fayḍiyah) and wrote a defence of his doctrines. Moreover, an-Nabulusi lived out his last years in the Sālihiyya district, where he died and was interred in the vicinity of Ibn Ṭab’ī’s tomb.

THE TOMB

At the time of the Ayyubid cultural flowering, Damascus had become a haven for Ibn Ṭab’ī’s adepts. Later, however, the winds changed and prior to the Ottoman conquest the figure

of Ibn Ṭab’ī, accused by the theologians of holding the heretical doctrines of ḥulūl (incarnation) and ittiḥād (union with the Divine), had fallen into disrepute in Damascus. This attitude was reflected in the manner in which his tomb was treated in former times. Indeed the historian Shāh ad-Dīn as-Safāḍī observes as early as the fourteenth century that it was used as a waste-dump, and was the object of other desecrations. 3

3. 'Allī ben Maymūn al-Fāsī (d. 1311) a Moroccan Sufi who undertook a journey to the East, provides us with a precise description of the state of the tomb in his unpublished Tanūr al-ṣīdāqī 'an waṣf as-sīdāqī ('Cleaning of the Friend from the Accusation of Heresy'), and confirms these violations. None would dare mention Ibn Ṭab’ī’s name, and even less indicate the whereabouts of his tomb, for fear of reprisals.

When in 1499 Allah willed that I make a halt in Damascus, I happened to hear certain wasted individuals, steeped in passion and error, who claimed to be scholars, levelling contemptful criticism against the master gnostic, unequalled in the perfection of his knowledge of the Divine sciences, Abū 'Abdallāh Muhammad Ibn al-Ṭab’ī, at-Tarī al-Maghribī al-Andalūsī ( ). I knew not where he was interred, but when that year ( ) Allah made known to me the place of his grave, I made my way there, with the help of the master gnostic 'Abd al-Qādir Saifī, whose acquaintance I had made in Safed during the month of Sha’bān 990/1498 and who, while

5. Khalīl as-Safāḍī (attributed to), Shārḥ ẓahīrāt amr na’ma māniyya, Ms. Damascus, 4398, fol. 113. See also Muhammad Rājī Hilī, al-Būtīn al-ʿaṣārī fī mansūḥāt ẓahīr ṭab’ī al-ṣelībi, Cairo, 1326h, p. 37.
6. 'Abd al-Qādir Ibn Ḥabīb, who died in Safed in 1509. On this notable spiritual disciple of Ibn Ṭab’ī and his relationship with Ibn Maymūn, see M. Winter, 'Sheikh 'Allī Ibn Maymūn and Syrian Sufism in the Sixteenth Century', Israel Oriental Studies, vii (1997), 281-308. Al-Safāḍī suffered from the same disrepute as Ibn Ṭab’ī and could only visit Damascus in the absence of the local orthodox theologians. It is noteworthy that Safed continued to be a centre of Sufi activity. The mystic master Khaled b. Bīrīs resided in Safed where he died in 1520,
discussing Ibn 'Arabi, apprised me of the location of his shrine which is situated in the suburb of Salhiyya to the North of Damascus, at a distance of slightly more than a mile from the city (…). When I arrived at Damascus I found none to direct me, for all were frightened of the tyranny of the wretched clergy (follows a lengthy curse against the fujudal)1. Then enquired about this blessed mausoleum and it was pointed out to me in the distance, saying ‘ask for such and such a place and when you get there, you will find a bath-house, to which the cemetery is adjacent.’ I finally arrived at the bath-house and requested of the keeper to open the door for me so that I could enter the shrine to see the tomb. Using a subringe, he scaled the wall and opened the door for me. I found the shrine to be devoid of any trace of visitors. The grass had withered, thus proving that none had frequented the place. In reality, this neglect was a sign of distinction, for in these corrupt times Allah had not allowed this site to become a place of pilgrimage (for saint worship). Thus He had preserved the saint, both in life and death, from humiliation (…). I then sat at his blessed feet, as it behaves. No, in fact I acted in the most unseemly manner. Piety would have required me to remain standing outside of the shrine in the manner of that who implores intercession. I committed a sin and ask forgiveness of Allah (…). Thereupon I read the epigraph adorning his tomb and which bore the Qur’anic verse: ‘Call to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and gently exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner; thy Lord best knows those who go astray and those that follow His path’ (Q. 16:125). Upon reading this verse, the light of my belief in the saintliness of the master waxed stronger.2


The disseute described by al-Fasi endured for a few more years, as later illustrated by the fierce opposition encountered by a certain Ahmad Ibn as-Sumaydi (d. 1504) when he expressed the desire to build a mausoleum (tahb) over the Master’s tomb, which, until then, had had no distinguishing feature.3

The conquest of Damascus by the Ottomans in 923/1517 brought about a profound change of fate in the history of the tomb. Popular tradition, based on the pseudo-aubarian ask-Sajjara an-ta’māniyya, claims that Ibn ‘Arabi had predicted the rise of the Ottomans. No wonder that the Turkish Sultans adopted him as the patron saint of their dynasty. Immediately after the fall of Damascus, Sultan Selim I Yavuz (‘the Grim’, reg. 1512-20) purchased the tomb and its surroundings in order to build a mosque and a takkiyya, which was to be the name Takkiyya Selimiy, and where he would pray on Fridays.

The circumstances of the shrine’s construction, completed within the record time of three months, are well known thanks to the account left by Ibn Tulun (d. 1546), a noted chronicler of the period, and who, having lived most of his life in the Salhiyya quarter, was also appointed as the first imam of the tomb’s mosque. In order to avoid provoking the inhabitants, construction work took place under the cover of night, the cupola being completed in 1517 and the minbar the following year.4 Selim endeavoured to popularize Ibn ‘Arabi by exempting the residents of Salhiyya from taxes and by staging religious festivities at the tomb that rivalled those held at the Umayyad mosque. He visited the mausoleum prior to undertaking the conquest of Egypt. Henceforth, the tomb became a place of pilgrimage, especially for the Turks who would make the journey to Damascus for the purpose of visiting it. In 922/1517, the

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The one gives access to the other in a continuous ascension. Gnosis is the path which leads to the Law.

Of the three manuscripts of the treatise known to exist, we have used the Cairo copy, which occupies folios 75a–78a of a collection of Ibn 'Arabi's writings. The colophon specifies that the scribe, Muhammad Sâlih, finished this copy on Friday afternoon, the 4th of Safar 1226/27 February 1811.

Translation

[Cairo, National Library, Ms. 128, fol. 75b]

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE COMPASSIONATE

Praise be to Allah, Master of the Worlds, Who knoweth that which is within the breast, Who guideth His servants on the day of Judgement and Resurrection, from within the bowels of the wilderness till the peaks of mountains. Prayer and peace upon our Lord Muhammad to whom Allah revealed: ‘Surely Allah makes whom He pleases hear, and those cannot not make those hear who are in the grave’ (Q. 37: 22). May the pleasure of Allah be upon his people through His lights and upon his companions through truth and mysteries, and upon his followers with grace, as long as the generations follow on and night succeeds day.

Now, 'Abd al-Ghani an-Nabulusi, may Allah envelop him with His supernal gifts, and embrace him with blessings in His exalted Presence, sayeth this is a perfume from the gardens of the occult and a breath uplifted from the nostrils of

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those suffering from the cold of doubt, in which I have exposed a portion of that which Allah has revealed to me in the degree of inspiration, where dwell all allusion nor expression. This came upon me all of a sudden through my thirst for this subject, being an inhabitant of Damascus.

The tomb of Muhayy d-Din is among the most exalted, a fire for the unknowing, though (in truth) a light. Whomsoever visits is exalted and intoxicated, Conversing with Truth with sorts of presence. Sayest not 'Fire', for fire is but self, Depart from interpretation of appearances. Its upper part - a sanctuary, a garden beneath, with a river of the brightest streams. He dwells in the intervening presence, below, yet in the highest of palaces. Within the path is poverty and humility, Around which all orbits. Hence, meditate the knowledge we have bestowed upon thee, it is both a birth and a return.

Perfect Shaykh and active sage, Sovereign of the accomplished and Ensign of the unified, Allah’s proof among all gnosis at all times and moments until the Day of Judgement. Mighty ocean, gift of the Generous Bestower, Muhayy d-Din Ibn ‘Ali ‘l-‘Arabi al-Hatim, at-Ta‘ili, may Allah sanctify his spirit and illuminate his sepulchre.

Allah exalted him to reside [ed. 76a] in Damascus of Syria after he had roamed the world and frequented its servants. This by reason of a mystery which he understood from the saying of the Prophet, peace be upon him, ‘You must proceed to Syria’,11 which the vulgar are incapable of grasping, and by reason of an esoteric allusion in the words of the Prophet, prayers of Allah upon him. According to the latter, A’al as of Mary, prayers of Allah upon him, will descend from the White Minaret to the East of Damascus in order to slay the Antichrist (dajjal), as is written in the hadith, well-known amongst the people of Islam.

Moreover, Ibn ‘Arabi, may Allah be pleased with him and illuminate his couch, expired and was transported to Allah’s nearness.

By Allah, my inspiration was aroused in this exalted subject:

I neighboured my adversaries and his Master was neighbour. What a distance between his proximity and mine. Moreover, by reason of Divine Wisdom and sacred mysteries, Ibn ‘Arabi was interred at the foot of Mount Sultiy,12 where his tomb is at present well known and visited. What a noble sepulchre it is indeed, filled with knowledge and secrets! It is a revitalizing (muhyiyiyya) treasure house, the splendid city of science, whose portal is open to the masters of spiritual conquest.

Hearken, O thou believer in the sacred mystery (ghayb) in the darkest of nights, for I shall explain to you the configuration of his noble tomb and inform you that it leads astray men of deviance among those that have not relinquished their lives to Allah, the Expert, the Gentle.

He is buried in a tomb partly on the slope of Mount Qaysiyin,13 for it is situated in the heart of this blessed mountain. And is not knowledge in the heart and not in thought?

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12. An allusion to the tradition reported in the hadith (Muslim, Sahih, Ibn trad. 110, ed. Cairo, vol. 8, p. 198) according to which Jesus will be resurrected at the end of days and will descend at the White Minaret to the East of Damascus in order to defeat the Dajjal. According to the commentators of the famous Shaikus al-nu’maniy (Genealogy of Nu’man) attributed to Ibn ‘Arabi, the latter, in his capacity of the Seal of Sanctity, was to take part in this battle.
13. The precinct of Saints', a suburb, formerly outside the city, to the northwest of Damascus, so called because of its numerous religious buildings and spiritual retreats.
14. Mountain to the northwest of Damascus which overlooks the Sultiy quarter.
May Allah have mercy upon the Ottoman Sultan Selim Khan, may Allah preserve him from the trials of men of certitude and denial. It is he who built a Blessed Madrasa of Higher Learning and there allocated constant charity for the mystics at the time he entered Damascus of Syria and took the city from the hands of the Mongol Sultan with the permission of the omniscient King. The Divine secret and supernal wisdom exacted that the tomb of the Shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him and illuminate his couche, be built in the midst of the mosque, to which the visitor gains access by descending seven steps below the level of the mosque, unlike what is usual in cemeteries and sanctuaries.

If one enters from the lane outside the mosque, one keeps to the right-hand side, and arrives at a verdant graveyard (rawad), whose midst is crossed by a stream of propitious water. Then, upon entering this garden, thou wilt find the tomb of the Shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him and illuminate his couche, to be the most elevated edifice, contrary to that which you would have encountered, were you to have entered by way of the protected mosque. [60, 76b] And in this wondrous state there is a hidden marvel. Consider it with the eye of contemplation if thou art indeed possessed with vision. This sealed secret is but the presence of Absolute Beauty, which leads astray the ignorant and guides the gnostics, who wield the pen but cannot record. For those who enter the mosque and then penetrate into the prayer niche (mihrab), know not this secret which is concealed on account of their own inferiority and withheld behind the door.

The visitor entering thus will see the tomb of the Great Shaykh below him, whereas, in fact, this is the state of his own wretched soul, which appears to him in a brilliant light. On account of this he will misconstrue of the truthful word in the presence of saintliness. He will imagine that the darkness of thoughts and souls is due to the luminous presence of the bride. Hence, not being a member of the household, he will be expelled from the house, for each being reverts to its element. The knowledge of the manner of required action is not the knowledge of desired action. O dejected servant, be not neglectful of the truth of the flat (kun). Allah hath said: 'The most part of them do not believe in Allah except that they set up others with Him' (Q. 12: 106), as it is written: 'Let us see how you act' (Q. 10: 14).

Understand firstly, O devotee, that to which this architecture alludes and verify in thy soul how thou must act in accordance with it. The mosque and the prayer-niche will disappear from before thee, whilst beneath them is to be found the Shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him and illuminate his couche, though in a state of superiority and proximity, and not one of inferiority and veiling. Humble thyself in this exalted sanctuary and take to the right side of the mosque in the northern corner and enter from the direction of the right side of the mountain (of Qarsyn) into the blessed spot of the bush of Moses. Partake of what is offered to you and be grateful to the truthful presence, the revitalizing one. Drink of that sweet stream and if thou dost not into knowledge which distorts from the Master, thou wilt find, God willing, the tomb of the Shaykh amongst the highest tombs, and his degree amongst the most glorious. Inhale within the garden the favourable breeze and fear not the vain words of the jealous and deluded. For the blind do not know the light. What merit hast thou if thou imitatest all men in

15. This stream, probably a derivative of the nearby Nahar Ya'qub, no longer exists.
16. I.e. this impression is real for him who does not believe in the saintliness of Ibn 'Arabi. The latter affectionately refers to the Sufis as the 'bridesgroom of Allah'.
17. This preliminary observation sets the tone for an-Nahluid's explanation. Since Allah alone is real being, only He can utter the flat 'Bai'. The individual is a 'coming-to-be', thus to act as though he were the author of his own actuality is tantamount to polytheism.
18. Allusion to Q. 28: 29. The 'bush' or 'tree' (Ashqar) is a symbol of the Perfect Man in Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine.
19. Mubayyis, allusion to Ibn 'Arabi.
praise and blame? For the ast bears different loads and distinguishes not between a burden of rubbish and one of coral.
In Allah is assistance to be found.
Whosoever enters (the tomb) through the (mosque's) portal of devotion and prayer, is inattentive of the vision of his Master and the traces of his intellect (fol. 77a) and senses. He is a polytheist devoid of knowledge. How may he ascend to the highest palace while in a state of error with what concerns men of God? However, whosoever entereth by way of the portal of devotion and prayer, by the right path, will humble himself before his Master, and then descend the natural slope (as a sign of humility). Indeed, the people of the mosque will not drink of the water except from that garden by means of the well. As for the people of the garden they have no need of the water of the mosque and the prayer-niche. (fol.) into the mosque enter both the believer (initiate) and the sceptic (innovator) whereas into the garden enters only the believer. I recited on this occasion the following verses:

O uniter of evil and good, sanctuary of self and otherwise.
Its waters issue from its garden, in motion and in stillness.
Its Muezzin resounds within, where is his bird-strain?
Its garden has but profit, while the mosque, profit and pain.

Know that the exoteric law is composed of beliefs, sayings and actions. It is incumbent upon every adept to be passively qualified by them, not to actively wield effect upon them, for Allah does not command polytheism. Allah said: 'Allah doth not enjoin indecency' (Q.7:28), and there is no greater indecency and evil than polytheism.

Veiled to be qualified by (beliefs, sayings and actions) is an acquired gain (from Allah) as He said concerning them: '(Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability) for it is the benefit of what it has earned, and upon it (the evil of) what it has acquired' (Q.2:286). Similarly, Allah ordained that the inextricable things come into being through His command "Ba'th" ('Ba'th'). He did not ordain those beings to bring existence into effect within themselves, but rather He commanded them to be passively receptive to (coming-to-be), while He is the one who enfŠrues them with it. Their success of receiving that qualification (i.e. of coming-to-be) depends upon the extent of their ability to correctly realize their relationship (to God) in what they perform. Now many people consider that Allah, exalted be He, commanded them to actualize the prescribed devotional and ritual precepts, whereas, by so doing, they are in fact edifying their acts upon latent polytheism on account of their insufficient understanding and this indeed is a futile thing. Thus hath Allah declared: 'Let us see how you act' (Q.10:14), to wit according to which manner you will perform your duties, whether through yourselves effecting them and bringing them into being, or rather through the manner of becoming qualified and receiving (being) in relation to the actions which We create for you. The latter being in harmony with what Allah hath declared: 'Allah hath created you and what you perform' (Q.37:96), which signifies that He created you and that which you perform, i.e. your actions.

Now (on the exoteric level), whosoever indulges firstly in the mosque and its prayer-niche and conforms with ritual prescriptions before gaining knowledge of how to perform them in accordance to that which Allah hath enjoined (fol. 77b), is to be reckoned, from the point of view of his actions, amongst the losers whose labour is lost in this world's life, whereas he considers that he is acting well (Q.18:104).

20. i.e. to/thr is equated with shik. The actuality of the possibilities received from Allah by the individual cannot be claimed as his own, since any actuality other than that which is the self-gift of Allah would be a second beside Him.

21. Allah alone is, and we merely become, so there can be no reason other than Allah Himself to induce Him to say the creative word 'Ba'th'.

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He who stubbornly and wrongfully denies the Great Shaykh is the most prideful in prayer on account of his knowledge. Thus he is most sinful and detestable.

As for action on the esoteric level, it is knowledge of a thing according to its reality. Therefore perform what which has been commanded of thee while knowing how to act, so that the duty is not forced upon thee, either by way of a burden or a compulsory act, but as Divinely generated capacity, will, choice, opinions, words, and acts. These the Truth alone hath brought into being in the servant, the latter having received the qualification of them, whereas their actuality proceeds from Allah alone, there being absolutely no independent effectiveness on the part of the servant. Despite being on the part of the servant, absolutely no actuality, for the latter belongs solely to Allah, the servant is not coerced in his acts, for the fact that his capacity, will and choice are created anew, exclude his being subject to determinism.21

On the other hand, since his capacity, will and choice are Divinely generated, (the servant is) not effecting anything independently, for actuality is a condition of capacity, will and choice. Hast thou not seen that are aught proceeded from Allah's preexistent capacity, will and choice, they did not outwardly exercise their effectiveness on any entity? Yet nonetheless His is a capacity which precludes necessity of choice and determinism in relation to Him.

Whoever enters the mosque of the exotic law (shari'a) prior to the garden of gnostic truth hath suffered a manifest loss, for he will discover the Great Shaykh's tomb, may Allah be pleased with him and illuminate his couch, in the lowest level. He will turn aside, deny, criticize and become contemptuous. That is when his state as contemplated in the Shaykh's mirror. Despite this he is in need of the water of life, which he must extract by means of the well of thought situated in that garden so that his presence be perfect and his humility consummate.

However, whoever enters the garden of esoteric truth having completed his state through the performance of the legal prescriptions, will experience the felicity of both worlds and will discover the tomb of the Great Shaykh, the Crimson Sulphur, may Allah sanctify his spirit, and illuminate his sepulchre, in the highest summit, and will behold the stream of life eternal and gain the fruits of happiness everlasting.

How great is the Shaykh's presence and show his knowledge, how considerable his position, and vast his notions! His state has precipitated men of the elite and vulgar into perplexity [fol. 78a]. His exalted and magnified status is unique and minds are at a loss to fathom the meaning of his compositions. Hearts are bewilder in the understanding of the chapters of his discourses and writings. Mortals are at a loss to [comprehend] his essence, so diversified are the opinions of the elite and vulgar concerning it. Indeed, even the matter of his tomb is abstruse through its loitering and lowliness. He who spoke in the highest summit, did so on account of the Garden of truth containing the flowing, verdant stream. But he who spoke from the bottommost pit, did so on account of he who gathers the Law solely from the people of stagnant waters in cisterns.

21. Ibn 'Arabi touches upon this problem in his answers to the question posed by 'Isa ibn Muhammad Alaw raw in the Kitab Al-Madhahib, ed. M. Puleh, Feiburg, 1973, pp. 6-8. In the fifth question Ibn 'Arabi explains that the actualisation in the individual of qualification through corruption necessarily, without being subject to servitude or taint, is tantamount to polytheism. The remedy is to exercise receptive humility. The specific paragraph dealing with this theme was translated by S. Hengsten in the Spring 1997 issue of Mutawaddi Ibn 'Arabi Society Newsletter, p. 1. However, he erroneously translates as 'annihilation', whereas it should be rendered by 'actualisation'. Furthermore, mundari is here practically synonymous with compulsion, and refers to the soul's being vanquished by 'seduction' or 'delusion'; argumentation is inappropriate.
On this occasion I composed the following poem:

Surely Muhly d-Din is the guide of the brave he is twixt finger and thumb,
A fang of Truth pointing to creatures, of which he bore the Seal.
An entire enigma – science, self and shrine – defying understanding.
Likened to Truth, in which some have strayed, while others have been rightly guided.
Thus are the messengers, shedding light unto some, darkness unto others.
Consider then, O brother, the light, and act justly,
Meditate, when fancy prevails,
how only thou shalt behold this his tomb within thee,
and shall consider how thou art a shroud for him;
Thy person in which thou art is a shroud for him,
These words its balm.
Were they to become eyes, they would be as mirrors,
Reflecting within the goal.
But if they become dim, then every life is death amongst mankind – peace.

This is the intended conclusion and the desired end. We ask of God to obtain acceptance. Praise unto God alone. Prayer and peace unto him after whom there shall be no prophet. O God make good that which is between us. Unite our hearts and guide us to the paths of peace. Deliver us from darkness towards light through the refuge of Muhammad, prayer and peace upon him. Preserve us from disgrace, both manifest and hidden.

The composition of this epistle was concluded on Tuesday on the last days of Rabih's 11, in the year 1089.

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The Way of the Axial Intellect

The Islamic Hermetism of Ibn Sab'In

Vincent J. Cornell

In the history of Sufism, 'Abd al-Haqq ibn Sab'In al-Ghâfiqî (d. 669/1270) is often portrayed as Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi's alter ego. Born, like Ibn al-'Arabi himself, in the city of Murcia in southeastern Spain, this enigmatic mystic is seen to represent the darker, more heterodox side of Islamic esoterism. His alleged errors are even used to criticise the Shaykh al-Akbar's doctrines, although the latter was born a full generation before Ibn Sab'in and apparently had no direct influence on his thought. To cite but one example: it seems to have been Ibn Sab'in, and not Ibn al-'Arabi, who first coined the term 'cessation of existence' (wujūd al-wujūd). However, it is Ibn al-'Arabi, and not Ibn Sab'in, who is made to take the blame for this concept.

The tendency of Islamic scholars to conflate the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabi and Ibn Sab'il can be seen in Ibn Khaldun's (d. 808/1406) Fatâwâ on Sufism, Shifât al-skîl li-tahdhib al-masâ'il (Cure for the Questioner in Elucidating the Issues), where the two shaykhs are depicted as travellers on the same errant path. In this fatwâ, the eminent historian and jurist implies that Ibn al-'Arabi's more Qur'ânic-oriented doctrines are but a smokescreen for the radical monism that Ibn

1. This was not the case for Ibn Sab'in's son-in-law 'Abd al-Jâ'în al-Tilmûndî, however, who met Ibn al-'Arabi in Damascus and was a disciple of Sadr al-Dîn al-Qâinawî. See Claude Addas, Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabi, Peter Kingsley, trans., Cambridge, 1993, pp. 257–8.
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