

The tomb of Ibn 'Arabī 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 Twinch

The Hidden Secret Concerning the Shrine of Ibn 'Arabī

A Treatise by 'Abd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī

Translated by Paul B. Fenton

'When the Qāf will be embraced by the Shīn,
then will appear the shrine of Muḥyi-Dīn.'¹

Introduction

The present treatise, *as-Sirr al-mukhtabī fī darīh ibn al-'arabī*, 'The Hidden Secret concerning the Shrine of Ibn 'Arabī', translated here into English for the very first time, was written in the year 1678 by the celebrated Syrian mystic 'Abd al-Ghanī b. Isma'il an-Nābulusī (1641–1731).² As indicated by its title, this as yet unpublished treatise is devoted to an esoteric description of the last resting place of Muḥyi d-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī. 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 'Arabī departed this world on the 22 rabi' II 638/1240 in Damascus,

1. My personal variation on a theme in the *Shajara an-nu'māniyya*. Here the *Qāf* stands for *al-Quds* (Jerusalem) and the *Shīn* for *ash-Sham* (Damascus). The Arabic root *SHQQ* has the connotation of brotherhood. May the Shaykh al-Akbar 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'.

2. On this author, see C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte des Arabischen Literatur*, Leiden, 1945–49, vol. II, pp. 454–8.

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

Besides the ascription of this work to an-Nābulusī in the present text, his authorship is further confirmed by the fact that he refers to it in his *al-Ḥadira al-unsīyya fi r-riḥla al-qudsiyya*, an account of his journey from Damascus to Jerusalem in 1690.³ As is known, an-Nābulusī belonged to the Qādirī and Naqshabandī Sufi orders and was a fervent, spiritual disciple of Ibn ‘Arabī. His biographers recount that he remained a recluse in his house for seven years while studying the writings of the Shaykh al-Akbar, he being so absorbed therein that he neglected to cut his hair and nails. He commented on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ*, and Prayers (*aṣ-ṣalāt al-fayḍiyya*) and wrote a defence of his doctrines.⁴ Moreover, an-Nābulusī lived out his last years in the Šālihiyya district, where he died and was interred in the vicinity of Ibn ‘Arabī’s tomb.

THE TOMB

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

3. Cambridge University Library Ms. Qq 300, introduction. See R. Nicholson, *Descriptive Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts in the Collection of E.G. Browne*, Cambridge, 1932, pp. 257–9. On this work, see J. Gildemeister, ‘Des ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi Reise von Damaskus nach Jerusalem’, *ZDMG*, XXXVI (1882), 385–400, and also E. Sirriyah, ‘The Journeys of ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nābulusī in Palestine (1101/1690) and 1105/1693’, *JSS*, XXIV (1979), 55–69.

4. See O. Yahya, *Histoire et classification de l’œuvre d’Ibn ‘Arabī*, Damascus, 1964, vol. I, p. 251, vol. II, pp. 471 and 535. Defences of Ibn ‘Arabī: *Hatk al-astār fi ‘ilm al-asrār* and the *Radd al-matin ‘alā muntaqāṣ al-‘arīf muḥyiddin*.

of Ibn ‘Arabī, accused by the theologians of holding the heretical doctrines of *ḥulūl* (incarnation) and *ittiḥād* (union with the Divine), had fallen into discredit in Damascus. This attitude was reflected in the manner in which his tomb was treated in former times. Indeed the historian Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn aṣ-Ṣafadī observes as early as the fourteenth century that it was used as a waste-dump, and was the object of other desecrations.⁵

‘Ali ben Maymūn al-Fāsī (d. 1511) 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 *Tanzih aṣ-ṣiddīq ‘an waṣf az-zindīq* (‘Cleansing of the Friend from the Accusation of Heresy’), and confirms these violations. None would dare mention Ibn ‘Arabī’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 wretched 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 ‘Abdallah Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, aṭ-Ṭa’ī al-Maghribī al-Andalusī (. . .). 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 Ṣafadī,⁶ whose acquaintance I had made in Safed during the month of Sha’bān 904/1498 and who, while

5. Khalīl aṣ-Ṣafadī (attributed to), *Sharḥ ash-shaḡara an-nu’ māniyya*, Ms. Damascus, 4398, fol. 113. See also Muḥammad Raḡab Hilmī, *al-Burhān al-azhar fi manāqib ash-shaykh al-akbar*, Cairo, 1326H, p. 37.

6. ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Habīb, who died in Safed in 1509. On this notable spiritual disciple of Ibn ‘Arabī and his relationship with Ibn Maymūn, see M. Winter, ‘Sheikh ‘Ali ibn Maymūn and Syrian Sufism in the Sixteenth Century’, *Israel Oriental Studies*, VII (1977), 281–308. Al-Ṣafadī suffered from the same disrepute as Ibn ‘Arabī 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 Aḥmad b. Bitris resided in Safed where he died in 1520,

discussing Ibn 'Arabī, apprised me of the location of his shrine which is situated in the suburb of Ṣāliḥiyya 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 *fuqahā'*). I 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 subterfuge, 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 behoves. No, in fact I acted in the most unseemly manner. Propriety would have required me to remain standing outside of the shrine in the manner of him who implores intercession. I committed a sin and ask forgiveness of Allah (. . .). Thereupon I read the epitaph which adorned his tomb and which bore the Qur'ānic verse: 'Call to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly 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.⁷

shortly before the great flowering of the Cabbala in that city. On him see al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawākib as-sā'ira*, vol. I, Beirut, 1945, pp. 132–3.

7. *Tanzih*, Ms. Damascus 7511, fols. 1b–2a. A French version of this text is quoted by R. Atlagh in his article devoted to Ibn 'Arabī's tomb: 'Paradoxes d'un mausolée' in *Lieux d'islam*, Autrement Collection Monde, n° 91–2, Paris, 1996, pp. 136–7. See C. Twinch's English translation of this article in the present number of this journal. The *Tanzih* is part of a considerable corpus of polemical epistles exchanged by numerous scholars on the question of Ibn 'Arabī's orthodoxy.

The disrepute described by al-Fāsi endured for a few more years, as later illustrated by the fierce opposition encountered by a certain Aḥmad Ibn as-Sumaydi (d. 1504) when he expressed the desire to build a mausoleum (*turba*) over the Master's tomb, which, until then, had had no distinguishing feature.⁸

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-akbarian *ash-Shajara an-nu'māniyya*, claims that Ibn 'Arabī 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 Selīm 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 bear the name Takkiyya Selimiyya, 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 Tulūn (d. 1546), a noted chronicler of the period, and who, having lived most of his life in the Ṣāliḥiyya quarter, was also appointed as the first imām 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.⁹ Selīm endeavoured to popularize Ibn 'Arabī by exempting the residents of Ṣāliḥiyya 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

8. Cf. al-Hiškafi, *Mut' at al-adhān*, n° 119, Ms. quoted by E. Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme en Egypte et en Syrie*, Damascus, 1995, pp. 459–60.

9. Ibn Tulun, *Mufōkhāt al-khillān fi ḥawādith az-zamān*, t. II, Cairo, 1962–4, pp. 72–7.

governor of Bursa left instructions to be buried beside the tomb. Henceforth, Ibn 'Arabī – together with Shaykh Arslān – became the patron saint of Damascus. His shrine was soon to receive the mortal remains of Muḥammad al-Balkhashi, an Anatolian Sufi who lived in Damascus, and many years later, in 1883, the Emir 'Abd al-Qādir, whom the French had exiled from Algeria, was laid to rest alongside the Shaykh al-Akbar beneath the cupola. The remains of this valiant warrior, who had been the first editor of Ibn 'Arabī's main work, the *Illuminations of Mecca*, were later transferred to the Martyr's Cemetery in Algiers after the Independence of Algeria.

SACRED ARCHITECTURE

In his treatise, an-Nābulusī, as a preliminary to the pilgrimage to the shrine, proposes a mystical interpretation of its structure. Originally the mausoleum consisted of a courtyard, containing in its midst a fountain, opposite which, to the south, was a mosque with a *miḥrāb* facing Mecca. On the left, stairs along the wall of the prayer-hall led to a room below the dome in which Ibn 'Arabī's shrine is to be found. In his treatise, an-Nābulusī asks the question: should one initially enter by the mosque and accomplish the ritual prescriptions attached to the daily prayers, or should one first descend the stairs in order to visit the saint? In reply, the author begins by observing that it is most unusual to find a mausoleum beneath the mosque to which it is attached. This 'inferiority' is only apparent, he says, to one who does not believe in the sainthood of its occupant, thus revealing, in reality, the baseness of his own soul. The mosque is a symbol of the *sharī'a*, the formal, exoteric law, whereas the tomb symbolizes the *ḥaqīqa*, the inner, esoteric Truth. To first enter the mosque is an act of pretentiousness, for the believer has no capacity to actualize and effect power (*ta'thīr*) through his devotional acts. He must first realize the esoteric acceptance and passive receptivity of 'becoming' and of qualification (*ittisāf*), which are conferred by the preliminary acknowledgement of *ḥaqīqa*.

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 'Arabī's writings.¹⁰ The colophon specifies that the scribe, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, 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 quickeneth 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 Muḥammad to whom Allah revealed: 'Surely Allah makes whom he pleases hear, and thou canst 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-Ghanī an-Nābulusī, 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

10. Cf. Brockelmann, *GAL*, vol. I, p. 456. *Fihrist al-kutub al-'arabiyya al-mahfūza bil-kutubkhānah al-khadwiyya al-miṣriyya*, vol. II, n° 128, Cairo, 1306H. A second manuscript is to be found in Alexandria *Funūn* 90.9. A third manuscript in Damascus, brought to my attention by Aladdin Bakri, was not made available to me.

those suffering from the cold of doubt, in which I have expounded a portion of that which Allah has revealed to me in the degree of inspiration, where dwell no 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 Muḥyi d-Dīn is among the most exalted,
 A fire for the unknowing, though (in truth) a light.
 Whomsoever visits is elated and intoxicated,
 Conversing with Truth with sorts of presence.
 Sayest not 'Fire', for fire is but self,
 Depart from interpretation of appearances.
 Its upperpart – 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 gnostics at all times and moments until the Day of Judgement. Mighty ocean, gift of the Generous Bestower, Muḥyi d-Dīn Ibn 'Alī 'l-'Arabī al-Ḥātimī, aṭ-Ṭā'ī, may Allah sanctify his spirit and illuminate his sepulchre.

Allah exalted inspired him to reside [fol. 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 esoterical allusion in the words of the Prophet, prayers of Allah upon him. According to the

11. *Ḥadīth* quoted by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, II, ed. Beirut, 1969, 99 and 119.

latter, 'Īsā son of Mary, prayers of Allah upon him, will descend from the White minaret to the East of Damascus in order to slay the Antichrist (*dajjāl*), as is written in the *ḥadīth*, well-known amongst the people of Islam.¹²

Moreover, Ibn 'Arabī, may Allah be pleased with him and illumine 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 'Arabī was interred at the foot of Mount Ṣāliḥiyya,¹³ 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 (*muḥyawīyya*) 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 Qāsiyūn,¹⁴ for it is situated in the heart of this blessed mountain. And is not knowledge in the heart and not in thought?

12. An allusion to the tradition reported in the *ḥadīth* (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *fitan* 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 *Shajara an-nu'māniyya* (Genealogy of Nu'mān) attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, the latter, in his capacity of the Seal of Sainthood, 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 Ṣāliḥiyya quarter.

May Allah have mercy upon the Ottoman Sultan Selim Khān, 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 illumine his couch, 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 (*rawḍa*), whose midst is crossed by a stream of propitious water.¹⁵

Then, upon entering this garden, thou wilt find the tomb of the Shaykh, may Allah be pleased with him and illumine his couch, 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. [fol. 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 (*mihṛāb*), 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

15. This stream, probably a derivative of the nearby Nahr Yazid, no longer exists.

presence of the bride.¹⁶ 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 deluded servant, be not neglectful of the truth of the fiat (*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).¹⁷

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 illumine his couch, 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 Qāsiyūn) into the blessed spot of the bush of Moses.¹⁸ Partake of what is offered to you and be grateful to the truthful presence, the revitalizing one.¹⁹ Drink of that sweet stream and if thou delvest not into knowledge which distracts 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

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 'bride(groom)s of Allah'.

17. This preliminary observation sets the tone for an-Nābulusi's explanation. Since Allah alone is real Being, only He can utter the fiat: 'Be!'. 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' (*shajara*) is a symbol of the Perfect Man in Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine.

19. Muḥyawiyya, allusion to Ibn 'Arabi.

praise and blame? For the ass bears different loads and distinguisheth not between a burden of rubbish and one of corals. 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, (for) into the mosque enter both the believer (initiate) and the sceptic (uninitiate) 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 otherness.
 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.²⁰ Allah said: 'Allah doth not enjoin indecency' (Q.7: 28). And there is no greater indecency and evil than polytheism.

20. I.e. *ta'thir* is equated with *shirk*. 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.

Verily 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 in-existent things come into being through His command '*kun*' ('Be!'). 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 enthuses them with it.²¹ 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 has 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).

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 'Be'.

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 that which hath 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 there 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.²²

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 ere aught proceeded from Allah's preexistent capacity, will and choice, they did not outwardly exercise their effectiveness on any entity? Yet

22. Ibn 'Arabi touches upon this problem in his answers to the questions posed by Isma'il Sawdakin in the *Kitāb al-wasā'il*, ed. M. Profitlich, Freiburg, 1973, pp. 6–8. In the fifth question Ibn 'Arabi explains that the actualisation in the individual of qualification through compulsion necessarily brings about an abandonment of the state of servanthood, which is a violation of Q.51: 56: 'I have only created mankind to serve me' and tantamount to polytheism. The remedy is to exercise receptive humility. The specific paragraph dealing with this theme was translated by S. Hirtenstein in the Spring 1997 issue of *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society Newsletter*, p. 1. However, he erroneously translates *kawn* as 'immanence', whereas it should be rendered by 'actualisation'. Furthermore, *munāza'a* is here practically synonymous with compulsion, and refers to the soul's being vanquished by 'seduction' or 'delusion'; 'argumentation' is inappropriate.

nonetheless His is a capacity which precludes necessity of choice and determinism in relation to Him.

Whoever enters the mosque of the exoteric 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 be contemptful. That is then 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 illumine 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 dear 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 bewildered 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 loftiness 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.

On this occasion I composed the following poem:

Surely Muḥyi d-Dīn is the guide of the brave he is twixt
 finger and thumb,
 A finger 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 wast a shrine;
 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 Muḥammad, 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 Rabi'a II, in the year 1089.

The Way of the Axial Intellect

The Islamic Hermetism of Ibn Sab'in

Vincent J. Cornell

In the history of Sufism, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Sab'in al-Ghāfiqī (d. 669 / 1270) is often portrayed as Muḥyiddīn ibn al-'Arabī's alter ego. Born, like Ibn al-'Arabī himself, in the city of Murcia in southeastern Spain, this enigmatic mystic is seen to represent the darker, more heterodox side of Islamic esotericism. His alleged errors are even used to criticize 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.¹ To cite but one example: it seems to have been Ibn Sab'in, and not Ibn al-'Arabī, who first coined the term 'oneness of existence' (*waḥdāt al-wujūd*).² However, it is Ibn al-'Arabī, 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-'Arabī and Ibn Sab'in can be seen in Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 808 / 1406) *fatwā* on Sufism, *Shifā' al-sā'il li-tahdhīb al-masā'il* (Cure for the Questioner in Elucidating the Issues), where the two shaykhs are depicted as travellers on the same errant path. In this *fatwā*, the eminent historian and jurist implies that Ibn al-'Arabī's more Qur'ānically-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 'Afif al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, however, who met Ibn al-'Arabī in Damascus and was a disciple of Saḍr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī. See Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī*, Peter Kingsley, trans., Cambridge, 1993, pp. 257–8.

2. See William C. Chittick, 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*', in Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh, eds., *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 82–3.

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