

# Rectifying Pharaoh

Ibn 'Arabī, Dhū'l-Nūn and the Alchemy  
of Red Sulphur

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Part 2<sup>1</sup>

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## 8. SPIRITUAL CHIVALRY: FUTUWWA AND ALCHEMY

Something else, though, is playing into Ibn 'Arabī's redemption of Pharaoh – *futuwwa*, that way of spiritual chivalry derived from the word *fatā* (plural: *fityān*) meaning 'vigorous young man', which spread throughout Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, Syria and Egypt during the 10th to 13th centuries, receiving a particularly strong impulse in the reign of the Abbasid caliph, al-Nāṣir (d. 622/1225), assisted by 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), Grand Master of the Sufis in Baghdad. Interestingly, not only did Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual heir, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), inherit the leadership of the *futuwwa* after his father's death, doing so in the *futuwwa* stronghold of Konya, he also combined *futuwwa* and alchemy in his spiritual path.<sup>2</sup>

Honouring Abraham, the intimate 'friend of God' as its founder, and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib as a revered role model, this chivalric way, founded on valour, courage, love, generosity, circumspect speech and, not least, forgiveness of enemies is, according to Ibn 'Arabī, a 'divine attribute', to which he devotes three chapters in the *Futūḥāt*.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, his definition of alchemy's goal, namely to bring a person to

1. Part 1 of this paper can be found in Vol. 71 of *JMIAS*.

2. For Qūnawī and alchemy, see R. Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's Metaphysical Anthropology*. Leiden, 2014, 63–4. For his connection with *futuwwa*, see C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī*, trans. P. Kingsley. Reprinted paperback edn. Cambridge, 2005, 226.

3. (Chapters 42, 146, 147). See D. Gril, 'Ibn 'Arabī ecrits sur la *futuwwa*: Le fondement divin de la *futuwwa* selon Ibn 'Arabī', in *La Règle d'Abraham 2* (1996), 3–24.

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