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Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Sufis

Binyamin Abrahamov

MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTA
SONRA GELEN DOKÜMAN

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Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī

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Abū al-Fayḍ Thawabān ibn Ibrāhīm, nicknamed Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī, was called ‘the head of the Sufis’: His mystical ideas are known only through the writings of later Sufis,¹ and he was the first Sufi to introduce the Sufi doctrines of states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*) in a systematic way. He also proposed the true nature of gnosis (*ma‘rifā*).

Ibn al-‘Arabī, however, does not mention him in this context: the term gnosis is absent from the passages in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* in which Dhū al-Nūn appears. Ibn al-‘Arabī speaks about two major issues with regards to Dhū al-Nūn: firstly, his power, piety, miracles and moral behaviour; and, secondly, his philosophical ideas.

Ibn al-‘Arabī devotes an entire book to Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī entitled *Al-Kawkab al-durrī fī manāqib Dhī al-Nūn al-Miṣrī* (*The Illuminating Star Regarding the Virtues of Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī*), composed because Dhū al-Nūn travelled so widely and met so many saints and pious people: in writing about him, says Ibn al-‘Arabī, we mention many Sufis, who, we hope, may bless us.² Ibn al-‘Arabī also apparently appreciated the fact that Dhū al-Nūn learned lessons from the people he met,³ lessons that might benefit all Sufis.

1. *El; Dimensions*, pp. 42–7.

2. Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Kawkab al-durrī fī manāqib Dhī al-Nūn al-Miṣrī*, in *Rasā’il Ibn ‘Arabī*, Vol. III, ed. S. ‘Abd al-Fattāh, pp. 56, 61. In the book’s introduction Ibn al-‘Arabī quotes a tradition that justifies mentioning pious people: ‘When God’s righteous servants (*al-ṣāliḥūn*) are mentioned, compassion descends.’ Ibid. p. 53. C. Twinch, ‘Created for compassion: Ibn ‘Arabī’s work on Dhū-l-Nūn the Egyptian’, *JMLAS*, 47 (2010), p. 110.

3. *Al-Kawkab al-durrī*, pp. 238, 249.

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