
(C. EDMUND BOSWORTH)

EBN AMÂJûR. See BANû AMÂJûR.

EBN 'ÂMER. See 'ABBâD-ALLâH B. 'ÂMER.

EBN AL-'ÂMîD, cognomen of two famous viziers of the 4th/10th century: Abu'l-Fazl and his son Abu'l-Fath. The father of the first was called Hoseyn. Tawhîd claims that this Hoseyn was of humble origin, a naqâkâl (wheat-sifter) in the grain market of Qom (Aqlâq al-wâṣirayn, p. 82). This, however, is probably not true. After occupying major administrative posts, Hoseyn was appointed chief of the chancery (dîwân al-râşâ'îl) at the court of the Sâmînîm amir Nûh b. Naṣr in Khorasan and was given two honorific titles: “Ammîd” (chief; doyen) and "Shaikh." Not much is known about Hoseyn’s son, Abu'l-Fazl, before he became the vizier of Rokn- al-Dawla, the Buyid sultan who ruled a district which included Ray, Hamadân, and Isfahan; but the fact that he occupied such a post indicates that he took the same line as his father. His early education combined Arabic poetry and Greek sciences and philosophy. His fame as a vizier spread far and wide, and many poets and men of letters were attracted to his court. The poet Motaâbâbîn in one of his panegyrics speaks of him as one who had met Aristotle, Alexander, and Ptolemy. Meskawayh and Tawhîd both confirm his interest in philosophy, but the latter admits that Abu'l-Fazl did not hesitate to kill his adversaries—a trait not quite becoming a philosopher. During his vizirate, Abu'l-Fazl won several honorific titles: "Râts," "Ostdât," “the second Jâhekh,” etc.

Apart from a collection of epistles and some poetry, Abu'l-Fazl left no books. Tawhîd copied some wise sayings and proverbs from a book by him entitled al-Kalq wa'l-sâlq, but this book remained in draft form (Aqlâq al-wâṣirayn, p. 328; al-Bağîr er Vi, p. 165). In his style, he was not at fond of saj’ (rhymed prose) as his contemporary Shâheb b. Abbâd was. He admired Jâhekh’s style a great deal, but could not emulate it well. This was due, according to Tawhîd, to the fact that Abu'l-Fazl lacked several of the natural and circumstantial qualities which Jâhekh possessed (Emât, l. p. 66).

When Abu'l-Fazl died in 360/971, he was succeeded in the vizirate by his son of twenty-two years, Abu'l-Fath, who served two Buyid sultans: Rokn- al-Dawla and his son Mo'ayyad al-Dawla. Abu'l-Fath was a good prose writer, in the manner of the secretaries of the dîwân (q.v.), and was highly respected by the military. For this reason, he was given the title "Du'l-kfîyayn," that is, master of both the pen and the sword. Six years into his vizirate, in 366/977, he was killed after having fallen out of favor with the powerful Buyid sultan 'Azod al-Dawla; he had also indulged excessively in pleasures, to the point of being oblivious to the intrigues being concocted around him. According to Shâfi', however, his violent end was due to two factors: a) Rokn- al-Dawla’s lenient treatment of him, and b) the fact that he had inherited rather than earned the vizirate (l'ašîbî, Yazîma II, p. 217).


(IHSAN ARABAS)

EBN AL-'ARABI, Mâ'âhî-AL-DIN Abu 'Abd-Allâh Moḥammad Ṭe'rî Hâter (b. 17 Ramaḍân 560/28 July 1165; d: 22 Rabi’i II 638/10 November 1240), the most influential Sufi author of later Islamic history, known to his supporters as al-Sâyy al-akbar, “the Greatest Master.” Although the form “Ebn al-‘Arabi,” with the definite article, is found in his autographs and in the writings of his immediate followers, many later authors referred to him as “Ebn ‘Arabi,” without the article, to differentiate him from Qâzî Abû Bakr Ebn al-‘Arabî (d. 543/1148).

Life, views, terminology.

He was born in Murcia in Spain, and his family moved to Seville when he was eight. He experienced an extraordinary mystical “unveiling” (kaft) or “opening” (forâhî) at about the age of fifteen; this is mentioned in his famous account of his meeting with Averroes (Addas, pp. 53-58; Chittick, 1989, pp. xiii-xiv). Only after this original divine “attraction” (jadba) did he begin disciplined Sufi practice (solkh), perhaps at the age of twenty (Addas, p. 53; Chittick, 1989, pp. 383-84). He studied the traditional sciences, Hadîth in particular, with many masters; he mentions knowledge of ninety of these in an autobiographical note (Badawi). In 597/1200 he left Spain for good, with the intention of making the kaft. The following year in Mecca he began writing his monumental al-Forâhî al-makâlîya; the title, “The Meccan Openings,” alludes to the inspired nature of the book. In 601/1204 he set off from Mecca on his way to Anatolia with Majd-al-Dîn Bâbâq, whose son Shâd-al-Dîn Qânâwî (606-73/1210-74) would be his
most influential disciple. After moving about for several years in the central Islamic lands, never going as far as Persia, he settled in Damascus in 620/1223. There he taught and wrote until his death.

Ebn al-'Arabi was an extraordinarily prolific author. Osman Yahia counts 850 works attributed to him, of which 700 are extant and over 450 probably genuine. The second edition of the Futuḥāt (Cairo, 1329/1911) covers 2,580 pages, while Yahia's new critical edition is projected to include thirty-seven volumes of about five hundred pages each (vol. 14, Cairo, 1992). By comparison, his most famous work, Foğūs al-ḥekam (Bezels of wisdom), is less than 180 pages long. Scores of his books and treatises have been published, mostly in uncritical editions; several have been translated into European languages.

Although Ebn al-'Arabi claims that the Futuḥāt is derived from divine "openings"—mystical unveilings—and that the Foğūs was handed to him in a vision by the Prophet, he would certainly admit that he expressed his visions in the language of his intellectual milieu. He cites the Koran and hadith constantly; it would be no exaggeration to say that most of his works are commentaries on these two sources of the tradition. He sometimes quotes aphorisms from earlier Sufis, but never long passages. There is no evidence that he quotes without ascription, in the accepted style, from other authors. He was thoroughly familiar with the Islamic sciences, especially tafsir, fiqh, and kalām. He does not seem to have studied the works of the philosophers, though many of his ideas are prefigured in the works of such authors as the El-khān-al-Ṣafī (q.v.; Rosenthal; Takeshita). He mentions on several occasions having read the Ehyā' of Ğazālī, and he sometimes refers to such well known Sufi authors as Ḥaṣṣaṣīyī.

In short, Ebn al-'Arabi was firmly grounded in the mainstream of the Islamic tradition; the starting points of his discussions would have been familiar to the 'ulama' in his environment. At the same time he was enormously original, and he was fully aware of the newness of what he was doing. Most earlier Sufis had spoken about theoretical issues (as opposed to practical teachings) in a brief or allusive fashion. Ebn al-'Arabi breaks the dam with a torrent of exposition on every sort of theoretical issue related to the "divine things" (elāhīyāt). He maintains a uniformly high level of discourse and, in spite of going over the same basic themes constantly, he offers a different perspective in each fresh look at a question. For example, in the Foğūs al-ḥekam, each of twenty-seven chapters deals with the divine wisdom revealed to a specific divine word—a particular prophet. In each case, the wisdom is associated with a different divine attribute. Hence, each prophet represents a different mode of knowing and experiencing the reality of God. Most of the 560 chapters of the Futuḥāt are rooted in similar principles. Each chapter represents a "standpoint" or "station" (maqṣūm) from which reality, or a specific dimension of reality, can be surveyed and brought into the overarching perspective of the "oneness of all things" (tonhib).

Ebn al-'Arabi assumed and then verified through his own personal experience the validity of the revelation that was given primarily in the Koran and secondarily in the Hadith. He objected to the linking approaches of kalām and philosophy, which tied all understanding to reason (aql), as well as to the approach of those Sufis who appealed only to unveiling (kaṣf). It may be fair to say that his major methodological contribution was to reject the stance of the kalām authorities, for whom ta'lb (demonstrating God similar to creation) was a heresy, and to make ta'lb (the necessary complement of ta'lbīth (declaring God incomparable with creation). This perspective leads to an epistemology that harmonizes reason and unveiling.

For Ebn al-'Arabi, reason functions through differentiation and discernment; it knows inately that God is absent from all things—ta'lbīth. In contrast, unveiling functions through imagination, which perceives identity and sameness rather than difference; hence unveiling sees God's presence rather than his absence—ta'lbīth. To maintain that God is either absent or present is, in his terms, to see with only one eye. Perfect knowledge of God involves seeing with both eyes, the eye of reason and the eye of unveiling (or imagination). This is the wisdom of the prophets; it is falsified by those theologians, philosophers, and Sufis who stress either ta'lbīth or ta'lbīth at the expense of the other.

If Ebn al-'Arabi's methodology focuses on harmonizing two modes of knowing, his actual teachings focus more on bringing out the nature of human perfection and the means to achieve it. Although the term al-ensān al-kāmil "the perfect human being" can be found in earlier authors, it is Ebn al-'Arabi who makes it a central theme of Sufism. Briefly, perfect human beings are those who live up to the potential that was placed in Adam when God "taught him all the names" (Koran 2:30). These names designate every perfection found in God and the cosmos (al-īlam, defined as "everything other than God"). Ultimately, the names taught to Adam are identical with the divine attributes, such as life, awareness, desire, power, speech, generosity, and justice. By actualizing the names within themselves, human beings become perfect images of God and achieve God's purpose in creating the universe (Chittick, 1989, especially chap. 20).

Even though all perfect human beings—i.e., the prophets and the "friends" (awlīā) of God—are identical in one respect, each of them manifests God's uniqueness in another respect. In effect, each is dominated by one specific divine attribute—this is the theme of the Foğūs. Moreover, the path to human fulfillment is a never-ending progression whereby people come to embody God's infinite attributes successively and with ever-increasing intensity. Most of Ebn al-'Arabi's writings are devoted to explaining
the nature of the knowledge that is unveiled to those who travel through the ascending stations or standpoints of human perfection. God’s friends are those who inherit their knowledge, stations, and states from the prophet, the last of whom was Muhammad. When Ebn al-‘Arabī claimed to be the “seal of the Moḥammadan friends” (kātām al-awliyā’ al-moḥammadāyya), he was saying that no one after him would inherit fully from the prophet Muhammad. Muslim friends of God would continue to exist until the end of time, but now they would inherit from other prophets inasmuch as those prophets represent certain aspects of Moḥammad’s all-embracing message (Chodkiewicz, 1986).

The most famous idea attributed to Ebn al-‘Arabī is waḥdāt al-wujūd “the oneness of being.” Although he never employs the term, the idea is implicit throughout his writings. In the manner of both theologians and philosophers, Ebn al-‘Arabī employs the term wujūd to refer to God as the Necessary Being. Like them, he also attributes the term to everything other than God, but he insists that wujūd does not belong to the things found in the cosmos in any real sense. Rather, the things borrow wujūd from God, much as the earth borrows light from the sun. The issue is how wujūd can rightfully be attributed to the things, also called “entities” (’ayān). From the perspective of tanzīḥ, Ebn al-‘Arabī declares that wujūd belongs to God alone, and, in his famous phrase, the things “have never smelt a whiff of wujūd.” From the point of view of tasbīḥ, he affirms that all things are wujūd’s self-disclosure (tajallī) or self-manifestation (zohūr). In sum, all things are “He/not He” (hawla lā hawla), which is to say that they are both God and other than God, both wujūd and other than wujūd.

The intermediateness of everything that can be perceived by the senses or the mind brings us back to imagination, a term that Ebn al-‘Arabī applies not only to a mode of understanding that grasps identity rather than difference, but also to the World of Imagination, which is situated between the two fundamental worlds that make up the cosmos—the world of spirits and the world of bodies—and which brings together the qualities of the two sides. In addition, Ebn al-‘Arabī refers to the whole cosmos as imagination, because it combines the attributes of wujūd and utter nonexistence (Chittick, 1989).

Influence on Persian Sufis and Philosophers.

Tracing Ebn al-‘Arabī’s influence in any detail must await an enormous amount of research into both his own writings and the works of later authors. Most modern scholars agree that his influence is obvious in much of the theoretical writing of later Sufism and discernible in works by theologians and philosophers.

Waḥdāt al-wujūd, invariably associated with Ebn al-‘Arabī’s name, is the most famous single theoretical issue in Sufi works of the later period, especially in the area under Persian cultural influence. Not everyone thought it was an appropriate concept, and scholars such as Ebn Tāmīya (d. 728/1328) attacked it vehemently. In fact, Ebn Tāmīya deserves much of the credit for associating this idea with Ebn al-‘Arabī’s name and for making it the criterion, as it were, of judging whether an author was for or against Ebn al-‘Arabī (on this complex issue, see Chittick, forthcoming).

Although Ebn al-‘Arabī’s name is typically associated with theoretical issues, this should not suggest that his influence reached only learned Sufis. He was the author of many practical works on Sufism, including collections of prayers, and he transmitted a ḍerqa that was born by a number of later shāikhs of various orders. As M. Chodkiewicz (1991) has illustrated, his radiance permeated levels of Sufi life and practice, from the most elite to the most popular, and this has continued down to modern times. Today, indeed, his influence seems to be on the increase, both in the Islamic world and in the West. The Muhbiddin Ebn ‘Arabi Society, which publishes a journal in Oxford, is only one of many signs of a renewed attention to his teachings.

Ebn al-‘Arabī’s first important contact with Persian Islam may have come through one of his teachers, Makīn al-Dīn Ābī Šūfī Zāhīr b. Rostam Esfahānī, whom he met in Mecca in 598/1202 and with whom he studied the Sahīh of Tirmidī. He speaks especially highly of Makīn al-Dīn’s elderly sister, whom he calls Ṣiyādat al-Ḥejāz (“Mistress of Hajj”), Faqr al-Nasīr (“Pride of womankind”) bent Rostam, adding that she was also Faqr al-Rejāl (“Pride of men”) and that he had studied Hadith with her. It was Makīn al-Dīn’s daughter, Ṣa‘īm, who inspired Ebn al-‘Arabī to write his famous collection of poetry, Tarjumān al-awwāq (Nicholson, pp. 3-4; Jahāṅgīrī, pp. 59-62).

In 602/1205 Ebn al-‘Arabī met the well-known Sufi Aḥwād al-Dīn Kermānī (d. 635/1239) in Konya and became his close friend; he mentions him on a number of occasions in the Futūḥāt (Chodkiewicz et al., pp. 288, 563; Addas, pp. 269-73). Aḥwād al-Dīn’s biographer tells us that Ebn al-‘Arabī entrusted his stepson Qināwī to Aḥwād al-Dīn for training (Futūḥāt, pp. 86-87), and Qināwī confirms in a letter that he was Kermānī’s companion for two years, traveling with him as far as Shiraz (Chittick, 1992b, p. 261).

Qināwī is the most important intermediary through which Ebn al-‘Arabī’s teachings passed into the Persian-speaking world: He taught Hadith for many years in Konya and was on good terms with Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, but there is no evidence in Rūmī’s works to support the oft-repeated assertion that he was influenced by the ideas of Ebn al-‘Arabī or Qināwī (Chittick, forthcoming). Nevertheless, Rūmī’s commentators typically interpreted him in terms of Ebn al-‘Arabī’s teachings, which had come to define the Sufi intellectual universe.

Qināwī is the author of about fifteen Arabic works,
and his immediate followers. Most Sufis did not take the
criticisms of these authors too seriously. Typical
are the remarks of Sayyed Araf Jahangir Semnani
(d. probably in 829/1425), who studied with 'Ala'-
al-Dawla Semnani but sided with Kâthînî in his
defense of Ebn al-'Arabi against Semnani's criti-
cisms (see Landolt 1975). After providing the
views of the participants in this debate and those of
a number of observers, Sayyed Araf tells us that
Semnani had not understood what Ebn al-'Arabi was
saying and that he had retracted his criticisms before
the end of his life (Yâsami, Lâdîf-e aîrafi, 1aṭîfâa
28, pp. 139-45; 'Mâyél Heravi, 1367, pp. xxvi-xxx).
In a similar manner, Shah Wali-Allah Dehlawi (d.
1765/1762) wrote a work showing that there was no
fundamental difference between Ebn al-'Arabi's
wâdâdat al-wojâd and Serhendi's wâdâdat al-khîdâ.
From the 8th/14th century onward Ebn al-'Arabi's
influence is clearly present in many works written by
authors known primarily as theologians or philoso-
phers. Among Shi'ites, Sayyed Ha'يدâr Âmoli (d.
787/1385) was especially important in bringing Ebn
al-'Arabi into the mainstream of Shi'ite thought. He
wrote an enormous commentary on the Fûqûs, Naqî
al-naqûs, the 500-page introduction of which has
been published (representing about 10 percent of
the text). Âmoli investigates the meaning of the Fûqûs
on three levels: naqî (the Koran and Hadith, making
special use here of Shi'ite sources), 'aql (meaning
kalam and falsafa), and ka'b (referring both to his
own experience and the writings of major members
of Ebn al-'Arabi's school). Âmoli also wrote several
Arabic works on metaphysics; especially signifi-
cant is Jâme' al-asrâr (ed. Corbin and Yahia, Tehran,
1347/1969; see Morris, 106-08), which was writ-
ten in his youth during his initial movement into Ebn
al-'Arabi's universe.
Shâ'în-al-Dîn 'Ali Torka Esfahânî (d. 835/1432)
completed a commentary on the Fûqûs in 831/1427;
his treatise on wojâd "being," Tanmâd al-qawâlî'ed
(ed. S. J. Âstânî, Tehran, 1396/1976), frequently
paraphrases Jâdî's Fûqûs commentary. A number
of Torka's Persian treatises (Câhûrah râsâ'âl, eds.
S. 'A. Mâsâ'wî Belbâhânî and S. E. Dibbêjî, Tehran,
1351/1972) make explicit or implicit reference to
Ebn al-'Arabi's teachings. Mollâ Sadrî (d. 1050/
1641) frequently quotes at length from the Fûsi'hât
in his Asfâr. His student Mollâ Mo'hâsen Fayz Kâthînî
(d. 1090/1679) wrote an epitome of the Fûsi'hât and
frequently quotes from Ebn al-'Arabi in his works
(Âr V, p. 476). Even Mollâ Mohammad-Baqer
Majlesi (d. 1110/1699), well-known as a critic of
Sufis in general and Ebn al-'Arabi in particular,
quotes on occasion from Ebn al-'Arabi in his monu-
mental Behâr al-amwâr (Beirut, 1983; e.g., ba't al-
a'ma'refâ in vol. 67, p. 339, refers to Ebn al-
'Arabi in the Fûsi'hât, Cairo, 1911, vol. 2, p. 328.15). In
the modern period, Âyat-Allâh Khomeini differentiated
himself from many other influential 'ulamâ' by his
intense interest in Ebn al-'Arabi (Rynsh, 1992b).
EBN 'ARABĪ—EBN ASDAQ


(William C. Chittick)

EBN ‘ARABŠĀH, SEHĀB-AL-DĪN ABŪ‘L-‘ABBĀS ABMĀD b. Muhammad... Hanafi ‘Ajamī (b. Damascus, 791/1389, d. Cairo, 854/1450), literary scholar and biographer of Tumshīm (Timur). According to the autobiography quoted by Ebn Tağriberti, when Timur captured Damascus, in 803/1401, Ebn ‘Arabšāh and his family were transported to Timur’s capital, Samarkand. He spent the next eight years in Transoxiana and Chinese Turkestan, where he learned Persian and Mongolian and studied with Sayyed Šarif Mohammad Jorjānī, Sa‘d-al-Dīn Mas‘ūd Taţfizānī, and Šams-al-Dīn Mohammad Jazārī. Later, in K’ezarām, Sarāy, Astakhan, and the Crimea, he associated with the ruling elite, scholars, and litterateurs. Around 815/1412, he entered the service of the Ottoman sultan Mohammad I, holding the office of confidential secretary (kāteb al-serr). At this time, he translated several religious works from Arabic into Turkish and ‘Awfī’s Jāme‘ al-ḵeleyat va lāme‘ al-rewādīyāt from Persian into Turkish. Ebn ‘Arabšāh returned to Syria and reentered Damascus in 825/1422 after the death of Mohammad I. There he occupied several minor religious posts and completed his celebrated biography of Timur, Ajjeb al-maqūdir fi nawāb‘ Timur (q.v.). Sometime after 841/1438, he settled in Cairo, where he became acquainted with the historians Ebn Tağriberti and Šaḵwōt (Šaḵwōt, II, pp. 128-29, 130-31). He initially secured the favor of the Mamluk sultan Ḵaqqāq and composed several works in his name, including an adaptation of the Marzūbān-nāma entitled Fākehāt al-kolofa‘ wa mafakhahat al-zorafa‘, written in 852/1448. In 854/1450, Ḵaqqāq imprisoned him for a few days as the result of a rival’s complaint. Ebn ‘Arabšāh died twelve years after his release.


(John E. Woods)

EBN ASDAQ, MUḤI‘ AL-MOḤAMMAD (b. Muḥammad 1267/1850; d. Tehran, 1347/1928), prominent Baha‘i missionary. He was given the honorific designation Ebn-ay Aṣṣaqq in certain Bahā‘ī scriptural writings. Toward the end of his life Bahā‘ī-Allah counted him a living martyr and referred to him as Ṣakīd ebn-e