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## Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition

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## Şadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ishāk b. Muḥammad b. Yūnus al-Ḳūnawī<sup>(2,255)</sup>

words)

[Chittick, W.C.](#)

(b. 605/1207, d. 16 Muḥarram 673/22 July 1274), disciple of Ibn al-‘Arabī [q.v.] and author of influential works on theoretical Ṣūfism.

Ibn al-‘Arabī met Maḍjd al-Dīn Ishāk al-Rūmī, Ḳūnawī’s father, in Mecca in 600/1203 and subsequently travelled with him to Anatolia. A source from the late 7th/13th century tells us that after Maḍjd al-Dīn’s death, Ibn al-‘Arabī married his widow and adopted his son Şadr al-Dīn (B. Furūzānfar, *Manāḳib-i Awḥad al-Dīn . . . Kirmānī*, Tehran 1347/1968, 84); the fact that Ḳūnawī himself never mentions this is not surprising, given his extreme reticence concerning personal matters. The same source (85) tells us that Ibn al-‘Arabī entrusted Şadr al-Dīn for a time to the guidance of his friend Shaykh Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 635/1238), and this is confirmed by a manuscript letter in which Ḳūnawī says that he was Kirmānī’s companion for two years, travelling with him as far as Shīrāz (Chittick, *Faith and practice of Islam*, Albany 1992, 261). By the time he was twenty, Ḳūnawī appears among the listeners to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works in a *samā’* dated 626/1229 (O. Yahia, *Histoire et classification de l’œuvre d’Ibn Arabī*, Damascus 1964, 141). He seems to have remained with his *shaykh* until the latter’s death in 638/1240; his name is recorded in many *samā’*’s deriving from this period. Presumably, the *fath kullī*, or total unveiling of the invisible world, that he mentions as occurring in Damascus (*al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhiyya*, 12) occurred at this time.

Ḳūnawī was teaching, probably in Konya, by the year 643/1245-6, when he led a group of scholars to Cairo and taught Ibn al-Fārīd’s *Tā’iyya* on the way [see SA’ID AL-DĪN FARGHĀNĪ]. Little can be gleaned about his life from his works other than occasional references to instances in which he gained visionary knowledge. Thus, for example, on the night of 17 Shawwāl 653/19 November 1255, Ibn al-‘Arabī appeared to him and confirmed that he was his preeminent disciple, even greater than his son Sa’d al-Dīn (*al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhiyya*, 152-3; partial Persian tr. in Djamī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, ed. Tawḥīdīpūr, Tehran 1336/1957, 556-7). Ḳūnawī reports that he did not receive oral explanation from Ibn al-‘Arabī concerning most of his works, but instead gained knowledge of them through God’s effusion (*al-Fukūk*, ed. Ḳh<sup>w</sup>ādjawī, 240). In his *Manāḳib al-ārīfīn* (ed. T. Yazıcı, Ankara 1959), Aflākī recounts several anecdotes showing that Ḳūnawī had a highly favourable view of Rūmī, and he contrasts Rūmī’s simplicity with the sumptuous scholarly trappings of Ḳūnawī’s circle (e.g. 95-6). Among Ḳūnawī’s important students were ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irākī, Sa’id al-Dīn Farghānī [q.vv.], and Mu’ayyid al-Dīn Djamī (d. ca. 700/1300), author of the most influential commentary on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Farghānī is especially important because his *Mashāriḳ al-darārī* represents summaries of Ḳūnawī’s teachings far more detailed than any of Ḳūnawī’s own works. The scientist and philosopher Ḳuṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī [q.v.] studied parts of *Djamī’ al-uṣūl fī aḥādīth al-rasūl* by Maḍjd al-Dīn Ibn al-Aṭhīr with him in the year 673 (H. Ritter, *Autographs in Turkish libraries, in Oriens*, vi [1953], 63-90).

The works ascribed to Ḳūnawī can be divided into those that are unquestionably authentic and those concerning which some doubts remain. The most important works in the first category are the following:

1. *Iḍjāz al-bayān fi tafsīr umm al-ḳur'ān* or *Tafsīr al-fātiḥa* (published as *Iḍjāz al-bayān*, Ḥaydarābād-Deccan 1949; and as *al-Tafsīr al-ṣūfi li 'l-Ḳur'ān*, ed. 'A. Aḥmad 'Aṭā', Cairo 1969). Both printed editions leave out the author's rather extensive marginal notes. This is Ḳūnawī's longest and perhaps most important work.

2. *Sharḥ al-ḥadīth al-arba'īn* (ed. H.K. Yılmaz, *Tasavvufi hadīs şerhleri ve Konevînin kırk hadīs şerhi*, Istanbul 1990). Ḳūnawī died after commenting on only 29 *ḥadīths*. The commentary on *ḥadīths* nos. 21-2 is extensive and provides important elucidations of Ḳūnawī's teachings on imagination and other matters.

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3. *Sharḥ al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*. A relatively concise explanation of the ninety-nine names of God and their traces on the human level.

4. *Fukūk* or *Fakk al-khutūm* (ed. M. Ḳh<sup>w</sup>ādjawī, Tehran 1413/1992; printed on the margin of Kāshānī, *Sharḥ manāzil al-sā'irīn*, Tehran 1315/1897-8). A short commentary on the essential themes of Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, focusing on the implications of the chapter headings.

5. *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* (published on the margin of Muḥammad al-Fanārī, *Miṣbāḥ al-ins bayn al-ma'kūl wa 'l-mankūl fi sharḥ miftāḥ ghayb al-djam wa 'l-wudjūd*, Tehran 1323/1905; partial ed. and French tr. S. Ruspoli, *La clé du monde suprasensible*, diss., Paris IV 1978). This has always been considered Ḳūnawī's key work; it was taught in Persian *madrasa*s after students had mastered the most difficult texts in philosophy. At least nine commentaries have been written on it, mostly in Turkey. One of the more interesting is by 'Abd Allāh Mullā Ilāhī, written in Persian at the command of Meḥmed II Fātiḥ; the author makes several asides to the ruler in the midst of the text, indicating that he was expecting him to read it (see Chittick, *Sultan Burhān al-Dīn's Sufi correspondence*, in *WZKM*, lxxiii [1981], 37-8).

6. *al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhiyya* (Tehran 1316/1898), a series of about fifty "inspired breaths", along with other miscellaneous texts including at least 17 letters written to various friends and disciples. Many of the passages refer to Ḳūnawī's visionary experiences.

7. *al-Nuṣūs* (ed. S.Dj. Āshdiyānī, Tehran 1362/1983; appended to Kāshānī, *Sharḥ manāzil al-sā'irīn*, ed. cit.; and appended to Ibn Turka, *Tamhīd al-ḳawā'id*, Tehran 1315/1897-8). A collection of 21 texts that pertain exclusively to the "station of perfection"; the longest (no. 20), which is taken from the first section of *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, is perhaps Ḳūnawī's most comprehensive exposition of the doctrine that later came to be known as *waḥdat al-wudjūd*.

8-9. *al-Mufāwāḍāt* (forthcoming critical ed. by Gudrun Schubert). A correspondence initiated by Ḳūnawī with Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī [q.v.]. Ḳūnawī's first treatise, *al-Mufṣiḥa 'an muntahā 'l-afkār wa-sabab ikhtilāf al-umam*, addresses the weakness of human reason and poses a series of questions for Ṭūsī; a good portion of the introductory material is drawn from the beginning of *Iḍjāz al-bayān*. His second treatise, *al-Hādiya*, responds to Ṭūsī's replies (for details on the contents, see Chittick, *Mysticism vs. philosophy in earlier Islamic history: the al-Ṭūsī, al-Qūnawī correspondence*, in *Religious Studies*, xvii [1981], 87-104).

Minor works include the following: 10. *al-Ilmā' bi-ba'ḍ kulliyāt asrār al-samā'*. A long letter to 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī describing how, when Ḳūnawī was circumambulating the Ka'ba, the meaning of certain verses he had heard suddenly became clear to him. 11. *Nafḥat al-maṣdūr wa-tuḥfat al-shakūr*, or *Rashḥ al-bāl bi-sharḥ al-hāl*, containing about 50 pages of intimate mystical prayers. This work was sent by mistake to Ṭūsī along with work no. 8, and he offered polite criticism of it in his response. 12. *al-Risāla al-hādiya al-murshidiyya*, also called *al-Risāla al-tawādjdjuhiyya* and *Risālat al-tawādjdjuh al-atamm*. This short work, of which a Persian translation was prepared during Ḳūnawī's lifetime, provides practical instructions concerning the remembrance of God (French tr. M. Valsan, *L' épître sur l'orientation parfaite*, in *Études traditionnelles*, lxxvii [1966], 241-68). 13. *Waṣīyya*. A short last will, which mentions among other things Ḳūnawī's close relationship with Ibn al-'Arabī and Aḥmad al-Dīn Kirmānī. Ḳūnawī advises his disciples to avoid theoretical issues and concentrate on the ¶ practical instructions provided in work no. 12. His books on philosophy should be sold and the remaining books made into an endowment, and his own writings should be given to 'Afīf al-Dīn. A second version adds the names of four people to whom money should be given and tells his daughter Sakīna that she should be careful to observe her ritual obligations (tr. of the first version in Chittick, *The Last Will and Testament of Ibn 'Arabī's foremost disciple and some notes on its author*, in *Sophia Perennis*, iv/1 [1978], 43-58; text of second in Ergin, *Sadraddīn al-Qunawi ve eserleri*, 82-3). Several letters and brief Persian treatises are also extant.

Works of questionable attribution include the following (for others of less likely authenticity, see Brockelmann, *G I*<sup>2</sup>, 585-6, *S I*, 807-8): 1. *Mir'āt al-ārifīn fi multamas Zayn al-Ābidīn*. A relatively short discussion of cosmology in Ḳūnawī's characteristic style. Text and English tr. in S.H. Askari, *Reflection of the awakened*, London 1981. 2. *Taḥrīr al-bayān fi taḥrīr shu'ab al-īmān*. This and the following work, both relatively short, are attributed to Ḳūnawī in some manuscripts and reflect his style and concerns. 3. *Marātīb al-taḳwā*. 4. *Kitāb al-Lum'ā al-nūrāniyya fi ḥall mushkilāt al-shadjarat al-nu'māniyya*. Commentary on a diagram that Ibn al-'Arabī is said to have drawn up to illustrate the general direction of future events in

Egypt [see [MALHAMA](#)]. 5. *Tabṣirat al-mubtadī wa-taḍḥkirat al-mutahī*. A Persian work that is most likely by one Naṣīr or Naṣīr al-Dīn (tr. in [Chittick](#), *Faith and practice of Islam*, Albany 1992; discussion of authorship at 255-62).

In contrast to Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ḳūnawī focuses on a relatively small number of issues, thereby singling them out as the most essential teachings of his master. His mode of exposition is in no way indebted to Ibn al-ʿArabī or to anyone else (a point he sometimes stresses e.g. *Iḍjāz*, 147; *Nuṣūṣ*, 22). His major themes are perhaps best summarised in the last section of *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, in which he proposes a series of questions that he then sets out to answer (282-3): What is the reality of the human being? From what, in what, and how did he come into existence? Who brought him into existence and why? What is the goal of his existence? Briefly, Ḳūnawī answers these questions by describing the modes in which *wuḍjūd* may and may not be known, the manner in which existent things are differentiated within *wuḍjūd* through the influence of the divine names, and the way in which the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*) brings *wuḍjūd* to full fruition. His essential point is that only the perfect human being manifests all divine names in perfect balance and equilibrium, thereby standing at the centre point of the circle of *wuḍjūd* and not coming under the influence of any specific attributes. Every other created thing manifests specific names of God and is dominated by either oneness or manyness. Although this theme is also found in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, it is not so clearly presented as the key doctrine. Ibn al-ʿArabī roots his teachings in the Ḳurʿān and the *Ḥadīth*, but Ḳūnawī employs a more abstract vocabulary that is much more reminiscent of texts on philosophy, and he highlights a number of technical terms that play no special role in Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings, even though they become basic points of discussion in later works. These include *al-ḥaḍarā al-ilāhiyya al-khams*, *kamāl al-djalāʾ wa ʾl-istiḍlāʾ*, *iʿtidāl*, and *taʿayyun* (for an outline of Ḳūnawī's teachings, see the introduction to [Chittick](#) and P.L. Wilson, *Fakhrudīn Irāqī : Divine flashes*, New York 1982). The key term *waḥdat al-wuḍjūd*, although found in at least one passage of Ḳūnawī's works, has no special technical significance for him. In the works of Farghānī based ¶ on Ḳūnawī's lectures, the term is used in a way that is not picked up by later authors (see [Chittick](#), *Rūmī and waḥdat al-wujūd*, in *The heritage of Rumi*, ed. A. Banani and G. Sabagh, Cambridge, forthcoming).

Ḳūnawī's importance needs to be understood in light of Ibn al-ʿArabī's pervasive influence on the schools of theoretical Ṣūfism, philosophy and *kalām*. Ḍjāmī had already recognised that Ḳūnawī was the primary interpreter of Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings (*Nafaḥāt al-uns*, 556). In effect, the later intellectual tradition read Ibn al-ʿArabī's works according to the interpretation of Ḳūnawī and his immediate disciples. His role is symbolised by the correspondence he initiated with Ṭūsī. In the Persian letter that accompanies *al-Hādiya*, Ḳūnawī explains that he initiated the correspondence in order to combine the rational approach of the philosophers with the "unveiling" (*kaṣḥf*) of the Verifiers. In the correspondence, Ḳūnawī reveals himself as thoroughly familiar with Avicenna's writings and with Ṭūsī's commentary on Avicenna's *al-Ishārāt wa ʾl-tanbīhāt*; his philosophical bent, in any case, is already obvious in other writings. Far more than Ibn al-ʿArabī, he employs clear and reasoned argumentation to demonstrate his conclusions, even if he also depends explicitly upon mystical intuition. Largely because of the themes that Ḳūnawī establishes in *al-Fukūk* and in the oral teachings that are reflected in the works of his students, the mainstream of Ibn al-ʿArabī's school of thought came to stress certain dimensions of the master's teachings that are not necessarily central to his own writings. This explains Michel Chodkiewicz's remark that Ḳūnawī "a donné à la doctrine de son maître une formulation philosophique sans doute nécessaire mais dont le systématisme a engendré bien des malentendus" (*Épître sur l'Unicité Absolue*, Paris 1982, 26).

(W.C. [Chittick](#))

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