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Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Sufis

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Abū Madyan

1126–1198

Although Ibn al-ʿArabī never met Abū Madyan, Shuʿayb ibn al-Ḥusayn,[1] and gained all his knowledge of the latter's mystical practice and ideas from Abū Madyan's disciples, he regarded him as his master (*shaykh*). That this was the case proves his spiritual connection with Abū Madyan.[2] The following notes aim at showing Ibn al-ʿArabī's knowledge of and attitude toward him. As Claude Addas rightly points out, all the historians who report on Abū Madyan refer to external aspects of his life, ignoring his spiritual rank and personality. Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings fill this gap.[3]

Abū Madyan had a special status not only *vis-à-vis* Ibn al-ʿArabī, but equally if not more so in comparison to all other mystics. Ibn al-ʿArabī mentions him along with al-Tirmidhī as one of the Poles (*quṭb*, pl. *aqṭāb*), that is, one of the four persons who are responsible for the existence of the world.[4] Abū Madyan used to say that his *sūra* is *sūrat al-mulk* (Quran 67), whose first verse reads: 'Blessed be He in Whose hand is the Kingdom (*mulk*), and He can do everything.'[5] Ibn al-ʿArabī also places him, together with al-Tustarī, al-Bisṭāmī and Ibn al-ʿArīf, among the Verifiers (*al-muḥaqqiqūn*).[6]

1. Vincent Cornell wonders why Ibn al-ʿArabī did not meet Abū Madyan in 1194, for he was not staying far from Abū Madyan's residence at that time. VJ. Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, p.16, n.35.

2. *SPK*, p.404, n.19. G. Marçais, 'Abū Madyan', in *EI*. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Al-Tadbīrāt*, p.126.

3. C. Addas, 'Abu Madyan and Ibn 'Arabī', in S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan (eds.), *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi*, p.169.

4. On the meaning of the term 'Pole', see *Fut.*I:279; *FM.*I:184, ll.3–11; *Quest*, pp.172, 178.

5. *Fut.*I:279; *FM.*I:184, ll.3–4. *Al-Tadbīrāt*, pp.158f.

6. *Fut.*III:478; *FM.*II:318, l.31; *SPK*, p.149. In *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (pp.15f.) Abū Madyan and al-Bisṭāmī are mentioned as saints who renounced the powers of control (*taṣrīf*) conferred on them by God.

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