Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī

Notes on his Life, Influence and Reflections on the Muḥammadan Reality*

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Dāwūd b. Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Qayṣarī was most likely born in the central Anatolian town of Qayṣariyya,¹ which is the Arabicized version of the Roman Caesarea.² Although the date of Qayṣarī’s birth is surmised by one scholar to have been around 1260 CE,³ the exact date of his birth is not known.⁴ However, the authorities are unanimous that he died in the year 751/1350⁵ or 751/1351.⁶ Contrary to what one would expect, the influential

* I would like to record my thanks to Todd Lawson for introducing me to Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī and for his useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank Atif Khalil for his helpful remarks on an earlier version of the article.

4. Mehmet Bayrakdar, La Philosophie Mystique chez Dawud de Kayseri, p. 11.
6. James Morris, “Ibn ʿArabī and His Interpreters, Part II: Influences and
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fifteenth-century Persian scholar, saint and devotee of the school of Ibn 'Arabi, 'Abd al-Ra'îmân Jâmî (d.898/1492), does not have an entry on Dâwûd al-Qaṣârî in his Nafâhât al-uns. But we do find an entry on Qaṣârî in Zayn al-Dîn Muḥâammad 'Abd al-Ra'îf al-Munâwî's (d.1031/1621) Irghâm awliyâ' al-shayṭân bi dhikr manâqib awliyâ' al-Ra'îmân (also known as the Ṭabaqât al-ṣuĥrâ), which is a summary of his well-known biographical compendium al-Kawâkib al-durriyya fi tarâjim al-sâdât al-șuĥîyya. Munâwî's note reads as follows:

[Dâwûd al-Qaṣârî was] the scholar given to religious devotion (al-šâlim al-șâbid), the ascetic Sufî who used to partake in spiritual struggle (al-zâhid al-șâfī al-mujâhid). He studied the religious sciences in his home town and then went to Egypt and studied the three religious sciences with the scholars versed in them. He studied intensely and became accomplished in the intellectual sciences (wa bara'a fi'l-funûn al-șuĥîyyah). Then he occupied himself with Sufism, excelling in and mastering it and devoting himself to writing about it. He commented upon the Fuṣûṣ and attached an introduction to it in which he finely explains the principles of Sufism. Sultân Awrkhân b. 'Uthmân [Orhan Ghâzi] built a religious school for him in the town of Iznik, which was the first one built in the Ottoman empire. He died in the eighth century [AH].

This biographical account, while accurate, has nothing to say about Qaṣârî's intellectual activities in Iznik upon his return from Egypt. Turning to Mehmet Bayrakdar's monograph devoted to Qaṣârî, we notice that he divides Qaṣârî's life into three phases, which correspond to three important political periods in the history of Anatolia: (1) his childhood, which was spent in

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Anatolia under the Rum Seljuks, whose power by this point had seriously waned, signalling their demise; (2) his adult life under the Anatolian Turkish dynasties; and (3) his old age under the nascent Ottoman empire. It was in this final phase of his life that Qaṣṣārī’s most advanced works on Sufi metaphysical doctrines were written and it was therefore also during this period that he emerged as a key figure in disseminating the teachings of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī in Anatolia.

Munāwī does state that Qaṣṣārī wrote a commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fūṣūs* with a very important introduction, but he does not mention the fact that this commentary of his belonged to a wider tradition of *Fūṣūs* commentaries, mostly written in Arabic. The first member of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī to have written a commentary on the *Fūṣūs* was ‘Affī al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d.690/1291), who, upon Ibn ‘Arabī’s death, became the student of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnāwī (d.673/1274), Ibn ‘Arabī’s step-son and foremost disciple. Dāwūd al-Qaṣṣārī’s own teacher, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kashānī (d.c.730/1330), had also written a commentary on the *Fūṣūs* al-

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11. The first Persian *Fūṣūs* commentary was most likely written by Dāwūd al-Qaṣṣārī’s student, Rūkn al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d.769/1367). See William Chittick, “The School of Ibn ‘Arabī”, p. 518. This commentary has been published under the title, *Nuṣūs al-khūṣūs fi tarjamat al-fūṣūs* (Tehran, 1980).

which was preceded by the commentary of his teacher and student of Qūnawī, Mu‘ayyid al-Dīn Jandī (d.700/1300). The Fuṣūṣ commentary tradition has continued up to our times, and is still very much alive in certain intellectual circles in Turkey, Iran and, in some instances, Damascus. One of the most noteworthy Fuṣūṣ commentaries written in the twentieth century was penned by none other than Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini was an heir to the tradition of Fuṣūṣ commentaries which had filtered into Shi‘ī intellectual circles through such figures as the Shi‘ī philosopher and mystic Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d.787/1385).

Where Dāwūd al-Qayṣārī fits into the equation of the Fuṣūṣ commentary tradition, then, is in his role in helping popularize


13. The most noteworthy contemporary commentator on the Fuṣūṣ in the Arab world is the Damascene scholar, Maḥmūd Ghorāb, who has devoted a number of studies to Ibn ‘Arabī in Arabic. See his Sharh fuṣūṣ al-hikam (Damascus, 1985), as well as Michel Chodkiewicz’s review of this book in Studia Islamica, 63 (1986), pp. 179–82.

and disseminate some of the more difficult teachings of the *Fuṣūṣ* commentators who preceded him. As William Chittick notes, of all the *Fuṣūṣ* commentaries, Qaṣṣārī’s commentary seems to have been the most influential in the eastern lands of Islam from the fourteenth century onwards. Indeed, a cursory reading of the commentaries by Qaṣṣārī and Jandī, for example, reveals that the commentary of the former, although often synthesizing or summarizing what the latter has to say in his commentary, is in fact more accessible in both its style and terminology. Therefore, what Qaṣṣārī’s *Fuṣūṣ* commentary was able to do was explain Ibn ʿArabi’s teachings – albeit in keeping with the increased tendency by this period to speak philosophically about mysticism – in such a way as to render Akbarian ideas more accessible to the Turkish, Persian and Indian ʿulamāʾ. Qaṣṣārī’s work had also been influential on certain of the Arab ʿulamāʾ, as is evidenced in the work of the important defender of Akbarian doctrines, ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d.1143/1730). What also makes Qaṣṣārī an


Elizabeth Sirriyeh, author of the excellent study, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: the Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond, 1999), has recently published a monograph on al-Nābulusī entitled *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: Abd Al-Ghanī Al-Nābulusī (1641–1731)* (Abingdon and New York, 2005). This study on al-Nābulusī looks at his mystical travel writings, his ties with the Naqšbandiyyah and Qādiriyyah, highlights some of the major conflicts which arose between him and the Turkish ʿulamāʾ, and devotes a good deal of attention to his writings on
important figure in the history of Islamic philosophy and mysticism is the aforementioned introduction to his commentary of the *Fusūṣ al-Ḥikam*, known as the *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena). This text summarizes Akbarian teachings with the utmost precision and clarity. The *Muqaddimah* was often studied as a separate treatise and has been the subject of numerous commentaries as well, the most recent of which being the commentary in Persian by the late Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn ʿĀshīṭyānī.  

dream interpretation. This work does not, however, attempt to establish al-Nābulusī’s role vis-à-vis the school of Ibn ʿArabī and the *Fusūṣ* commentary tradition. But it does discuss some of al-Nābulusī’s mystical and theological views. Pp. 30–31 clearly show Ibn ʿArabī’s influence upon al-Nābulusī’s thought, but it also demonstrates how it is that al-Nābulusī attempted to Ash’arize or theologize Ibn ʿArabī’s teachings (witness his assigning actual ontological reality to the Divine Names, which runs contrary to Ibn ʿArabī’s position on this issue).  

I would now like to turn my attention to an important part of Qayṣarī’s commentary upon chapter XXVII of the *Fuṣūṣ*, dealing, as it does, with the Prophet Muḥammad, who, for Ibn ‘Arabī and his school, as well as every other Muslim, is the physical manifestation of the culmination of the spiritual life in Islam. For the remaining part of this paper I will discuss Qayṣarī’s statements concerning the cosmological function of the Muḥammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah*) in the context of his comments upon Ibn ‘Arabī’s profound discussions in this chapter. It is hoped that the findings below will help contribute to our understanding of how an important *Fuṣūṣ* commentator belonging to the school of Ibn ‘Arabī is not only able to exposit the teachings of this school, but how he also reveals himself to be a highly original thinker in the process.

**QAYṢARĪ ON THE MUḤAMMADAN REALITY**

Ibn ‘Arabī begins chapter XXVII of the *Fuṣūṣ* by saying that the Prophet possesses the wisdom of singularity since he is the most perfect being in existence. It is through the Prophet that the matter of creation began and ended. We are here reminded of the famous *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says that he was a Prophet while Adam was still between clay and water:

His is the wisdom of singularity because he is the most perfect existent of this human species, which is why the matter begins

dissertation looks at the development of ontology in Islamic thought (up to and including Qayṣarī). Dagli has recently published what I consider to be the best available translation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-hikam* (*The Ringstones of Wisdom* [Chicago, 2004]). This translation comes with useful annotations, many of which draw upon Qayṣarī’s commentary, and, to a lesser extent, that of Kāshānī’s as well.

20. On pp. 188–99 of *The Tao of Islam* (cited in n.19) Sachiko Murata translates and analyzes a number of passages from Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī’s commentary, along with Jandī and Kāshānī’s commentaries on this same chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*, paying particular attention to the themes related to gender cosmology.
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and ends with him, for he was a Prophet while Adam was between clay and water. Then, in his elemental form, he became the Seal of Prophets.\textsuperscript{21}

Qaṣṣarī’s comments before this passage are important, since he provides an explanation as to why the Prophet is the bezel pre-disposed to receiving this wisdom of singularity:

It is the wisdom of singularity because of his singularity in the station of Divine Comprehensiveness, above which is nothing except the level of the Essence of Exclusive Oneness (\textit{al-dhāt al-a¢adiyyah}). This is because it [the station of Divine Comprehensiveness] is the locus of the Name Allāh, which is the greatest, All-Comprehensive Name amongst all the Names and qualities.\textsuperscript{22}

In the station of Divine Comprehensiveness, as Qaṣṣarī calls it, the Prophet is the receptacle for all the Divine Names, since he receives the Name Allāh, which is the Name which brings all the other Names together. Thus, the Prophet possesses the


\textsuperscript{22} Dāwūd al-Qaṣṣarī, \textit{Sharḥ al-fuṣūs al-hikam}, lithographed edition (Tehran(?), 1984), p. 471:1 (p. 471, col. 1). Compare this to Jandī’s comments on these same lines by Ibn ‘Arabī, “He (may God be pleased with him) points to the fact that solitariness belongs to him [the Prophet], because of his being the most perfect type of human perfection, for solitariness is, as we have mentioned, specific to the Perfect Man. And there is none more perfect than Muhammad (God bless him and grant him peace). So to him belongs the aforementioned solitary reality of the unseen entity (\textit{al-fardiyyah al-¢aq¨qiyyah al-¢ayniyya}) with respect to [both] his meaning and reality. [He was the] first in the world of meanings (‘\textit{alam al-ma’ān¨}). Then, by his spiritual makeup, he was a Prophet sent to the rest of the Prophetic spirits, and by his elemental makeup, he was the Seal of Prophets”, Jandī, \textit{Sharḥ fuṣūs al-¢ikam}, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtīyānī (Mashhad, 1982), p. 671. For Kāshānī’s comments on this same passage, see Toshihiko Izutsu’s \textit{Sufism and Taoism} (Berkeley, 1984), p. 237. It should be noted that apart from the lithographed editions of Qaṣṣarī’s \textit{Fuṣūs} commentary there are two modern editions as well (neither of which I was able to obtain for this study), \textit{Maṭla’ khusūs al-kilam fī ma’ānī fuṣūs al-hikam}, ed. Muḥammad Hasan Sa’īdī (Tehran(?), 1995) and Āshtīyānī’s \textit{Sharḥ-i fuṣūs al-hikam} (Tehran, 1996).
wisdom of singularity because he is the being who best embodies the Name Allāh – which is at once the All-Comprehensive Name (al-ism al-jāmi‘) and the Solitary Name (al-ism al-mufrad) – but also because, in the descent of Being, he stands alone at the very top of the cosmic hierarchy of God’s Self-Disclosures. In order to illustrate this point further, Qayṣarī goes on to quote a well-known hadith in which the Prophet is reported to have said, “The first thing God created was my light.” Qayṣarī employs this hadith to explain Ibn ‘Arabī’s point about the Prophet’s being the first thing created by God:

The first thing that came about by the most holy effusion from amongst the entities was his immutable entity and the first thing that came to exist through the holy effusion in its outward aspect from amongst the existent things was his sanctified spirit, just as he said, “The first thing God created was my light.” So he came about through the Exclusive Essence, the Divine level and his immutable entity [which was] the first singularity.

Here, Qayṣarī identifies the singularity which brought about the Prophet’s existence with the Prophet’s immutable entity. So the Prophet’s singularity came about in the Divine level, which is where his immutable entity was brought into existence. And, since the Prophets are the loci of manifestation of a Universal Name (ism kulli), all of which are subsumed under the Divine Name for which the Prophet Muḥammad is the locus of manifestation, Qayṣarī goes on to conclude that the Prophet is the most perfect solitary being, which is why he says that it was the

23. I have not been able to locate this tradition. Gerhard Böwering’s, The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: the Qur’anic hermeneutics of the Šūṭi Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 283/896) (Berlin, 1980), pp.149–57 is a very good resource for early Sufi discussions on the primal Muḥammadan light. There is another famous version of this tradition in which the Prophet says, “The first thing God created was the Intellect.” At pp.483:2–484:1 of his commentary Qayṣarī cites a version of this tradition and relates it to the primal light tradition (see n.28 below). For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of this tradition in his monumental al-Futiḥāt al-makkiyyah, see William Chittick’s The Self-Disclosure of God (Albany, 1998), p.273.

spirit of the Prophet which became existentiated, which then later came to exist as the Seal of Prophets in the person of the Prophet. Of course, this is none other than the Muḥammadan Reality which runs across the generations of all the Prophets and Saints, a point which Ibn ʿArabi is very adamant about, as is shown by his writings. The Prophet is the prototype of God’s own Self reflection in the phenomenal world with respect to His Names. It is his reality which manifests itself in every Prophet and becomes actualized in the physical person of the Prophet himself. The Muhammadan Reality marks the beginning of existence and is brought to its completion and its totality in the Prophet, who is the best example of the Perfect Man. It is for this reason that Ibn ʿArabi states that “the matter begins and ends with him”. This is why the Prophet is both singular with respect to his being one of the three solitaries, and is also characterized by triplicity, since through him multiplicity arises. Qaysari also states that the first singularity is “the Reality of the Muhammadan Spirit (al-ḥaqīqah al-rūḥāniyyah al-Muḥammadiyyah), referred to as the First Intellect (al-ʿaql al-awwal).” As is seen elsewhere in Islamic thought both before Ibn ʿArabi and after him, the Muhammadan Reality is directly identified with the First Intellect. This is indeed a significant point, because the First Intellect in Neoplatonic Islamic philosophy, as articulated by Muslim philosophers such as Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, is the first existentiated entity from the Godhead, allowing for the world of multiplicity to come about (albeit through a string of emanations, each producing an intellect

26. For detailed discussions on this topic, see Michel Chodkiewicz’s, Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabi, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge, 1993), chapter 3 and passim.
29. See The Tao of Islam, p. 166, where Qūnawi’s student and major figure in the school of Ibn ʿArabi, Saʿīd al-Dīn Farghānī (d.695/1296), identifies the Muhammadan Light or the Muhammadan Soul with the Pen and the Intellect. The Muḥammadan Light, Spirit and Reality are synonymous.
and heavenly body in Fārābī’s dyadic emanative metaphysical scheme, with the added element of a string of emanations of corresponding souls in Ibn Sīnā’s triadic scheme). It is with the emanation of the tenth intellect, the active or agent intellect, that the world of generation and corruption comes about. Needless to say, Qaṭṣarī does not adhere entirely to this Neoplatonic model, not for the least reason that it entails a different anthropology and psychology. But the identification of the First Intellect with the Muḥammadan Reality allows Qaṭṣarī to maintain that creation begins and ends with the Prophet. Indeed, the Divine Essence cannot be diffuse throughout the cosmos, and, in Its manifest aspect, It requires an intermediary of some sorts, who is none other than the Prophet. This is why the Prophet is the primal Perfect Man, since he manifests the Name Allāh, and through whom the Names become diffuse throughout the cosmos to their loci of manifestation. It is with this point in mind that the famous ḥadīth qudsī “If it were not for you, I would not have created the cosmos”, although not cited by Qaṭṣarī, can be understood.

In his commentary on this chapter Qaṭṣarī introduces a discussion in which he attempts to explain how the ranks of Divinity (al-darajat al-ilāhiyyah) bring about the cosmos. The context

30. In his earthly form, Ibn ʿArabī states that the Prophet is the best proof for his Lord because he was given all of the words which were the referents of the names taught to Adam. Commenting on this, Qaṭṣarī states that this is so because the Prophet was given all the Names, which he refers to as “the Mothers of the Divine Realities and the existential totalities in their particularities (ummahāt al-haqqīq al-ilāhiyyah wa ʿl-kawniyah al-jamʿiah li-juzʾiyyāthā).” (Sharḥ, p. 472:1) In other words, since the Prophet is the locus of manifestation of the Name Allāh, and all the other Divine Names are subsumed under this Name, the Prophet therefore actualizes all the Divine Names in his person, which is why Ibn ʿArabī says that the Prophet is the greatest proof for his Lord, since his very being itself points to the name Allāh, accounting for all the Divine Self-Disclosures as mediated by the Divine Names and marking the limit of human knowledge of the manifest aspect of the Divine Essence (pp. 471:2–472:1). Then Qaṭṣarī goes on to say that the Muḥammadan Spirit (al-Rūḥ al-Muḥammadi), which is nothing other than the aforementioned Spiritual Reality or the First Intellect, is a proof for
for these comments is the following statement made by Ibn `Arabi:

He observes the ranks (darajat) which are with the Real when He says, *Exalted in rank, Possessor of the Throne* [40: 15], because of His establishing Himself upon it with the Name the All-Merciful (al-Rahman). So there is no-one under the Throne whom the Divine Mercy shall not reach, which is why He said, *My Mercy encompasses all things* [7: 156]. The Throne encompasses everything, and the One established upon it is the All-Merciful. Through its reality does the cosmos receive the outpouring of mercy (sarayn al-rahmah), as we have elucidated elsewhere, both in this book and in the *Meccan Revelations*.  

According to Qaysari, from these ranks of Divinity, the First Intellect is brought about and from it, the Universal Soul is existentiated. From the Universal soul comes about all of the rational souls, bodily matter, universal substance and the starless heaven (falak al-atlas), which Qaysari identifies with the Throne (`arsh). Then the Footstool (kursi) is existentiated, followed by the elements from the heavens and the earth. This process therefore accounts for the intermediate world or the world of imagination (malakut) as well as the phenomenal world (mulk). Particularly noteworthy here is what Qaysari has to say about the Throne itself. As Ibn `Arabi stated, the Name the All-Merciful established itself on the Throne. God says in the Qur’an that His mercy encompasses all things, since the Throne itself encompasses all things. As the Occupant on the Throne which encompasses all things, the Name the All-Merciful is therefore responsible for diffusing mercy throughout the cosmos. Qaysari certainly agrees itself because “there is no distinction between him and between His Lord, except from the standpoint of entification” (p. 472:1).

31. *Law lâk mā khalaqtu’l-ālāk*. This hadith is not to be found in the standard sources, although it is frequently cited in the Sufi tradition.

32. Ibid., p. 484:1.


35. Ibid., p. 484:2.
with Ibn ‘Arabi’s description of the Throne and more or less summarizes the Shaykh’s comments in this way:

The Name that presides over the Throne is the name the “All-Merciful”, and the Throne is the locus of manifestation for it, and through it, the effusion effuses to whatever of the existent things are under it. For the Names, insofar as they are relations of the Essence, cannot be a source for the lights effusing from It, except with spiritual and bodily loci of manifestation.36

But Qayṣarī’s understanding of the Throne is slightly more nuanced than this. In the following passage he says that the Throne has two realities: there is the spiritual Throne, and then there is the bodily Throne:

Since the Throne encompasses all of the existent things under it, as has already been discussed, the spiritual Throne, which is the First Intellect, encompasses all the spiritual and corporeal realities, while the bodily Throne encompasses all the bodies.37

Qayṣarī explicitly states that the Throne is the First Intellect in this passage, but we have also noted that he identifies the Throne with the starless heaven. The spiritual Throne is identified with the First Intellect, which Qayṣarī says is the Muḥammadan Spirit. The bodily Throne, identified with the starless heaven, is what distributes mercy to the rest of the cosmos. Ibn ‘Arabi said that the Name the All-Merciful presides over the Throne. But how is the First Intellect or the Muḥammadan Spirit related to the All-Merciful? Fortunately, this question is not left unanswered. Qayṣarī offers his solution in the following passage:

And through the descent to the ranks of matter, the establishment of mercy comes about. So the Muḥammadan Spirit, which is the locus of manifestation of God’s mercy, establishes itself upon the Throne so that His mercy may permeate the worlds, just as He said, And we did not send you, except as a mercy to the worlds [21:107].38

In other words, the Muḥammadan Spirit or the First Intellect,

36. Ibid., p. 485:1.
37. Ibid., p. 484:2.
insofar as it is the first entification from the Divine Level, is the locus of manifestation for all of the Names, one of which is the All-Merciful. As a locus for the name the All-Merciful, the spiritual Throne or the Muḥammadan Reality establishes itself on the bodily Throne so that mercy may be distributed throughout the cosmos. This point is clarified in one more passage where Qaysarī states the following:

And if you want, you can say that, through the reality of the Throne, this permeating [of mercy] exists in the world. And it is the fixed entity through which the All-Merciful (al-Raḥmān) is manifest in the world, just as He is manifest through the First Intellect in the world of spirits and through the outermost sphere in the world of bodies. 39

With the foregoing discussion in mind it becomes clear how Dāwūd al-Qaysarī was able to explain Ibn ʿArabī’s opening statement in this chapter of the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam. It will be recalled that Ibn ʿArabī said that the matter began and ended with the Prophet, drawing upon a very well-known hadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have said that he was a Prophet when Adam was still between clay and water. By placing the Muḥammadan Reality, which is the locus of manifestation for the Name the All-Merciful on the bodily Throne, Qaysarī was able to explicate both how the Muḥammadan Reality is the first entification from the level of Divinity and how it is also responsible for distributing God’s mercy throughout the cosmos.

38. Qaysarī, Sharḥ, p. 484:2.