CHAPTER 2

Qūnawī’s Works

1 Qūnawī’s Corpus

The pages that follow are intended to provide a brief description of Qūnawī’s major works, as well as the odd lesser-known treatise to which he himself attached a certain importance. The works thus selected – numbering some twelve titles in all – form the doctrinal and quantitative core of his corpus; and it is on these writings primarily that our analysis of his thought has been based. In fact, a critical examination of the many titles ascribed to Qūnawī suggests that he authored probably no more than twenty works in total. Like his master, then, Ṣadr al-Dīn has often been credited by default, as it were, with authorship of treatises composed by lesser-known (or unknown) members of the Akbarian school. Fortunately, through scrutiny of the relevant manuscripts or as many as possible at any rate – we have been able to identify a number of mistaken attributions.

While we have endeavoured to list the titles below in the order in which they were written, it should be stressed that, for all but the final three, this chronology can be no more than an approximation, since, in view of the absence of any manuscripts dating earlier than three years before his death, it has been arrived at chiefly on the basis of Ṣadr al-Dīn’s own incidental references. At the same time, it should be said that this question of chronology is perhaps not quite as relevant in the case of our author’s works as it can be for others; for even if they are read in the order in which they appear below, one gains no real sense of any evolution either of doctrine or style. Rather, the overall impression is one of a fully mature and homogeneous body of teachings.

It would seem, therefore, that the most instructive conclusion to be drawn from such efforts at determining the order of his works is that, as already suggested, they were probably all composed within a relatively short space of time, namely the last ten years or so of his life.

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1 See Appendix 1.
2 These include, most notably, al-Lumʿāt al-nūrānīya fī ḥall mushkilāt al-Shajarat al-nuʿmānīya, the Kitāb marātib al-taqwā, the Mirāt al-ʿārifīn fī multamas Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, the Kitāb shuʿāb al-īmān, and the Tabṣīrat al-mubtadī wa tadhkīrat al-muntahī. See Appendix 1.
3 When reconstructing Qūnawī’s thought we have therefore, on occasions, deemed it appropriate to illustrate a line of argument with passages from different works or with non-consecutive passages from the same text.
This, however, is not to say that Qūnawī’s teachings had not been formulated prior to that, since we know from his own testimony that he had been expounding the esoteric meaning of the *Naẓm al-sulūk* to “a group of outstanding initiates and eminent men” as early as 643/1245, when he would have been in his late thirties. Moreover, judging by Farghānī’s commentary on this *qaṣīda* – which, as we have seen, may be deemed a record of Qūnawī’s lectures – it would seem that the doctrines expressed in his oral teachings were essentially the same as those he would eventually set down in his written works. One may conclude, therefore, that for the greater part of his career his influence was imparted to his contemporaries through his study-circles, initially in Egypt and then in Anatolia, and that his written works were undertaken towards the end of his life, often at the request of his disciples, in order to preserve his teachings for posterity.

2  Qūnawī’s Methodology

From Ṣadr al-Dīn’s comments regarding his approach to writing, two affirmations emerge with more or less equal prominence: first, in contrast to the works of rationalist thinkers, his expositions, so he tells us, are the product, not of thought and deliberation, but of inspiration; and second, he is not in the habit of quoting or referring to the works of others, “not even those of the Shaykh”. The first claim, of course, eludes verification. The second would appear to be generally accurate. Although he occasionally mentions Plato, Ibn Sīnā and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ in his correspondence with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, his works are, on the whole, noticeably free of references to earlier Sufi masters, including Ibn ‘Arabī. In Qūnawī’s eyes, moreover, this feature of his writings is, to an extent, an expression of his own spiritual distinction (*ikhtiṣāṣ*) and the unique intuitions that derive from the latter. Hence, in the *Risālat al-nuṣūṣ*, a treatise consisting of a series of metaphysical texts, we are told that the doctrines expounded therein “derive from the spiritual tastes imbued with the particularity (*khusūṣ*) of the station of perfection itself”. And in order

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4 See supra, p. 20.

5 Nevertheless, although he saw himself as no more than the vessel of this inspiration (*see *Ijāz*, p. 359), Qūnawī did not claim that the latter flowed without hindrance into the very letter of the text itself. Any deficiencies that the reader might find in his expositions should thus be attributed, not to the inspiration itself, but to the “smudge of contingency” that must inevitably remain on the “mortal vessel” into which it flows. (See *Ijāz*, p. 10).

6 *Ijāz*, p. 139.

7 *Nuṣūṣ*, p. 13.