I t is commonly known that during the Ottoman period Islamic thought in the Arab lands was in a state of stagnation. Little original writing was done, though numerous commentaries, compendia and manuals were produced\(^1\). One of the names that stands out in the period is that of ʿAbd al-Ḡani ibn ʿIsmāʿīl al-Nābulusī (1050/1641-1143/1731), the mystic, theologian, poet, traveler, and prolific writer\(^2\). The subject of the present article is a short treatise by al-Nābulusī, available in a manuscript form only. This risāla is worthy of review because it is representative of the thought of this important writer. Although al-Nābulusī relies on earlier works, which he readily acknowledges, the synthesis, presentation, and style are definitely his own. His work can also be regarded as an expression of the scholarly movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which, in the words of H. A. R. Gibb, «strove to restore the bases of Islamic theology in a manner which broke away from the formalism of the orthodox manuals and laid new stress upon the psychological and ethical elements in religion»\(^3\).

Moreover, the treatise is an attack against an anonymous Turk, a Rūmī (in the early Ottoman period the Turks were often called Rūm or Arwām by the Arabs). The polemical character of the work adds a shrill and angry tone to the writing and reveals the anti-Turkish feelings and pro-Arab sentiments prevalent in the Arab countries even before the emergence of nationalism.


*Arabica*, Tome xxxv, 1988
The manuscript is located in the Special Collections Department at the University of California, Los Angeles, and is catalogued as Collection 898, Box 99, no. 576. It consists of 38 folios with an average of 22 lines on each page written in a clear Neskhī hand. The rough draft of the work was completed on Dū 'l-Ḥiǧga 26, 1103 (September 8, 1692)⁴, and the final copy was finished on Rabī’ II 8, 1104 (December 17, 1692)⁵. The UCLA manuscript, which I have studied, has been copied from the author’s autograph⁶. The title of the present treatise does not appear in Brockelmann’s Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur and must be the only manuscript copy that has been preserved, although it may be similar to or identical with another work by al-Nābuluṣī al-Radd ʿala-l-ṭāʿin fi l-ʿArab wa fī faḍl al-ʿArab⁷.

ʿAbd al-Ḡani al-Nābuluṣī’s treatise is a polemical reply to a tractate written in Arabic by an unnamed Turkish writer, who criticized al-Nābuluṣī’s commentary on a passage from al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya by the famous mystical writer Muḥyī l-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240)⁸. Like many Sufi writers before him⁹, al-Nābuluṣī was an exponent and defender of the ideas of this difficult and controversial mystic, whose theory of wahdat al-wujūd (the Unity of Being, or monism) was repeatedly attacked by orthodox Muslim theologians¹⁰. The main dispute was about one sentence in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s passage, upon which al-Nābuluṣī elaborated. Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Nābuluṣī, who follows him with understanding, stated that the People of the Books, i.e., the Jews and Christians, by paying the prescribed ǧīza (poll-tax) gain happiness (sāʿāda). The Turkish writer believes that this opinion contradicts the theological notion of waʿīd (God’s threats that the infidels be cast in Hell fire, to be distinguished from God’s promise of Paradise to the just), and accuses both Ibn al-ʿArabī and his commentator of

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⁴ The manuscript will be cited as Qawl. Qawl, fol. 38b.
⁵ Qawl, fol. 1a.
⁶ Qawl, fol. 1a and see the end of the bound manuscript, which consists of our treatise and another one entitled ʿidāb al-maqṣūd min maʿāni wahdat al-wujūd.
⁷ See GAL, SII, p. 475, no. 96.
⁹ See, for example, M. Winter, Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt; Studies in the Writings of ʿAbd al-Wahḥāb al-Shaʿrānī (New Brunswick, N. J., 1982), ʿIbn al-ʿArabī” by the index.
¹⁰ Ibn al-ʿArabī’s best known critic was Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328).