



Shibli: His Life and Thought in the Sufi Tradition

Kenneth Avery

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Considers what is known of acclaimed early Sufi master Abū Bakr al-Shibli and how he was characterized in various times and places.

Early Sufi master Abū Bakr al-Shibli (d. 946) is both famous and unknown. One of the pioneers of Islamic mysticism, he left no writings, but his legacy was passed down orally, and he has been acclaimed from his own time to the present. Accounts of Shibli present a fascinating figure: an eccentric with a showy red beard, a lover of poetry and wit, an ascetic who embraced altered states of consciousness, and, for a time, a disturbed man confined to an insane asylum. Kenneth Avery offers a contemporary interpretation of Shibli's thought and his importance in the history of Sufism. This book surveys the major sources for Shibli's life and work from both Arabic and Persian traditions, detailing the main facets of his biography and teachings and documenting the evolving figure of a Sufi saint. Shibli's relationships with his more famous colleague Junayd and his infamous colleague al-Jayjani are discussed, along with his Qur'anic spirituality, his poetry, and the question of his periodic insanity.

“A very fine contribution to the history of Sufism.” — John Renard, editor of *Fighting Words: Religion, Violence, and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts*

Kenneth Avery received his PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of Melbourne in Australia. His books include *Fifty Poems of 'Abū Bakr al-Shibli* and *A Psychology of Early Sufi Samsa': Listening and Altered States*.

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