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## The Occultist Encyclopedism of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī

In modern scholarship, the Antiochene *muḥaddith*, occultist, and *littérateur* ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454) is better known to Ottomanists than Mamlukists, thanks to the influence his voluminous writings exerted in Ottoman courtly milieux during and after his lifetime.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, however, he is discussed mainly in a Mamluk context, with regard to an account he penned of his education and initiation into the occult “science of letters and names” (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmā’*) as a young man traveling in Cairo, Alexandria, and Damascus and environs during the first decades of the ninth/fifteenth century; and with reference to his book on that science entitled *Shams al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*. It is argued that *Shams al-āfāq* is an “encyclopedic” work similar in spirit to much Mamluk-era literary production, and was an effort to make the forbiddingly

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<sup>1</sup>The major scholarship on al-Biṣṭāmī includes İhsan Fazlıoğlu, “İlk Dönem Osmanlı İlim ve Kültür Hayatında İhvanu’s Safâ ve Abdurrahman Biṣṭâmî,” *Divân İlmî Araştırmalar Dergisi* (1996): 229–40; Denis Gril, “Ésotérisme contre hérésie: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, un représentant de la science des lettres à Bursa dans la première moitié du XVe siècle,” in *Syncretismes et hérésies dans l’Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe–XVIIIe siècle): Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001* (Paris, 2005), 183–95; Cornell Fleischer, “Shadow of Shadows: Prophecy in Politics in 1530s Istanbul,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (2007): 51–62; idem, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Falnama: The Book of Omens*, ed. M. Farhad and S. Bağcı (Washington, D.C., 2009), 231–44; İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf Al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamic Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, 2016), 104–14. See also Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Şā’in Al-Dīn Turka İsfahānī (1369–1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2012), 240–47; Jean-Charles Coulon, “Building al-Būnī’s Legend: The Figure of al-Būnī through ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī’s *Shams al-āfāq*,” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–26; and Noah Gardiner, “Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production, Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Aḥmad Al-Būnī,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012): 114ff.



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esoteric science of letters more accessible to the cosmopolitan learned classes and political elites of the period. Its occult content, however, imposed special requirements on the author regarding his qualifications to synthesize such knowledge—requirements he attempted to satisfy through an account of his occult training that combines attention to formal book-transmission practices and descriptions of various visionary encounters with the Prophet and other spiritual figures. More broadly, it is argued that al-Biṣṭāmī’s writings indicate that the Mamluk cities of the late eighth/fourteenth and early ninth/fifteenth centuries were home to a thriving occult scene that recently was being transformed by elite patronage and increased interest among cosmopolitan intellectuals, and that his account of his own readerly initiation into lettrism reflected the new, decidedly bookish occultism that had been taking root in the learned culture of the period. The conclusion discusses the importance of these developments in relation to other trends in the late-Mamluk intellectual scene, particularly with regard to manuscript culture, and to the longer history of the occult sciences in Islam.

The place of the occult sciences in Mamluk-era thought and culture has been explored only a little in recent decades. Writing in the 1950s, the Belgian Orientalist Armand Abel argued that a widespread embrace of occultism by Mamluk-era learned elites—particularly of the works of the controversial Ifriqiyan *cum* Cairene Sufi Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225 or 630/1232–33)—was symptomatic of a general intellectual decline in the period, an assessment typical of the dim view of the occult sciences taken by many mid-century scholars.<sup>2</sup> The field of Mamluk intellectual history has since largely moved on from the narrative of “postclassical” Islamic decline that underpinned Abel’s thesis, but his observations on the prominence of learned occultism in the period seem to have been abandoned along with it. On the rare occasions Mamluk occultism has been addressed since, it is usually relegated to the ill-defined realm of “popular” culture—astrologers casting horoscopes for women in city *sūqs*, unscrupulous Sufis dealing in talismans, etc.<sup>3</sup>—and, *contra* Abel, it is often implied that critiques of occultism by figures such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Khaldūn, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah were representative of the majority view on such matters among edu-

<sup>2</sup>Armand Abel, “La place des sciences occultes dans la décadence,” in *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l’histoire de l’islam* (Paris, 1957), 291–318. The dim view of occultism among twentieth-century scholars has been the topic of a number of recent scholarly works, among the most important of which are Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2004), and Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology: Annotated Translations of Three Fatwas,” in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. E. Savage-Smith (Aldershot, 2004), 279ff; Stefan Wild, “Jugglers and Fraudulent Sufis,” in *Proceedings of the VIth Congress of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Visby 13–16 August, Stockholm 17–19 August, 1972*, ed. Frithiof Rundgren (Stockholm, 1975), 58–63.



cated Muslims of the time.<sup>4</sup> George Saliba, for example, in his influential study of the social status of astrologers in the medieval Muslim world, repeats as fact Ibn Khaldūn's tendentious assertion that, in his time, "[o]ne could study [astrology] only in 'a secluded corner of his house.'"<sup>5</sup> Similarly, John Livingston proffers Ibn Taymiyah disciple Ibn Qayyim's attacks on astrology and alchemy as evidence contrary to Abel's assertion that religious scholars of the era largely approved of occultism, though he limits his observation of anti-occult sentiments to the Hanbali ulama rather than extending it to scholars generally.<sup>6</sup> Historians of science such as David King and Abdelhamid Sabra routinely reassert the notion that "religious scholars" of the period were opposed to astrology. King's assessment of celestial sciences in the Mamluk period posits a growing distinction between mathematical astronomy and astrology in the period, the former being put to the service of "religious" concerns such as the calculation of prayer times while the latter languished, particularly as it was "frowned upon" by "religious scholars" such as, once again, Ibn Qayyim.<sup>7</sup> Sabra builds on this dichotomy in putting forward his influential notion of the late-medieval rise of the "jurist-scientist" over the "philosopher-scientist" of previous periods, with the implication that this entailed a rejection of the "foreign" elements of the rational sciences, including occultism, in favor of placing science and mathematics in the service of more "religious" concerns.<sup>8</sup> Some recent work by Ottomanist and Timuridist scholars has strongly countered this tendency to marginalize occultism's role in learned society. Cornell Fleischer, İ. Evrim Binbaş, and Matthew Melvin-Koushki have noted that the Mamluk cities were important centers of occult learning in which figures such as al-Biṣṭāmī, the Timurid philosopher Ṣā'ib al-Dīn Turkah (d. 835/1432), and the Timurid historian and poet Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī (d. 858/1454) studied occult subjects.<sup>9</sup> While their efforts have been directed primarily at the careers of those figures in their Timurid or Ottoman contexts, the present paper maintains a focus on the Mamluk intellectual scene, with special attention to the intersection of occultism and Mamluk manuscript culture.

<sup>4</sup>See Livingston citation below. Cf. Mushegh Asatrian, "Ibn Khaldun on Magic and the Occult," *Iran and the Caucasus* 7 (2003): 73–123; Michot, "Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology," 279ff.

<sup>5</sup>George Saliba, "The Role of the Astrologer in Medieval Islamic Society," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 44 (1992): 51; the quote is from Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York, 1958), III/263.

<sup>6</sup>John Livingston, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: A Fourteenth-Century Defense against Astrological Divination and Alchemical Transmutation," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91 (1971): 96–103.

<sup>7</sup>David King, "The Astronomy of the Mamluks," *Isis* 74 (1983): 551.

<sup>8</sup>Abdelhamid Sabra, "The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement," *History of Science* 25, no. 3 (1987): 240–42.

<sup>9</sup>See footnote 1, *supra*.



### ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī

‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad—*al-Hanafī madhhab*<sup>an</sup> *al-Biṣṭāmī mashrab*<sup>an</sup>, as he often styled himself—was a child of Antioch who sought an education in the cities of Bilād al-Shām and Egypt, beginning in Aleppo. As a young man he joined the *ṭarīqah Biṣṭāmīyah*, less a formal Sufi order than a network of Sufi shaykhs and urban (largely Aleppan) intellectuals from notable families,<sup>10</sup> and it is from this association that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān took the *nisbah* by which he is best known. Al-Biṣṭāmī claims to have begun his occult education under the tutelage of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥalabī al-Aṭ‘ānī (d. 807/1405), a leader of the group, and occultism may have been a regular topic of interest to members.<sup>11</sup> In addition to acquiring much in the way of hadith, theology, Sufism, Hanafi *fiqh*, and mathematics, al-Biṣṭāmī vigorously pursued further knowledge of the occult sciences, particularly from teachers in and around Damascus, Alexandria, and Cairo during the first part of the ninth/fifteenth century, as discussed below.

In the second decade of the ninth century *hijrī*, al-Biṣṭāmī answered the invitation of fellow Hanafi scholars to live and teach in the Ottoman principalities of Anatolia as the relatively young Ottoman state was regrouping in the wake of Timūr’s depredations. He would reside there in one city or another for most of the rest of his life, though he also traveled regularly in the Mamluk territories until at least the late 820s, and was an important link between Anatolian and Syro-Egyptian learned and courtly societies.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, al-Biṣṭāmī was a key participant in a translocal network of intellectuals with shared interest in lettrism and related topics who sometimes referred to themselves as the *ikhwān al-ṣafā’ wa-khillān al-wafā’* (brethren of purity and friends of sincerity), a reference to the fourth/tenth-century intellectual provocateurs whose *Rasā’il* are an important source on “classical” Islamic occultism, as well as one of the major examples of pre-Mamluk encyclopedism. As has been most extensively discussed by Binbaş, this network also included such notables as the aforementioned Ṣā’in al-Dīn Turkah Iṣfahānī and Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, as well as the Ottoman judge and rebel Badr al-Dīn al-Simāwī (d. 818/1416), each of whom had significant impacts on succeeding generations of thinkers across Ottoman and Timurid *cum* Safavid territories.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Biṣṭāmī was a prolific author. Ismail Paşa credits him with forty-three works, and Brockelmann with thirty-six,<sup>14</sup> but in his *Durrat tāj al-rasā’il wa-*

<sup>10</sup>Binbaş, “The Aṭ‘ānī-Biṣṭāmī Network of Syria and Late Medieval Intellectual Networks,” unpublished (2016).

<sup>11</sup>Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 3b.

<sup>12</sup>Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom,” 232.

<sup>13</sup>Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, passim.

<sup>14</sup>Fazioğlu, “İlk dönem Osmanlı ilim,” 230.



*ghurraṭ minhāj al-wasā'il*—an intellectual autobiography al-Biṣṭāmī penned in 845/1441–42—he claims to have authored more than 180 texts.<sup>15</sup> Several of these must have been short treatises, though some of his surviving works are quite lengthy. No doubt all were written in the intensely florid, *saj'*-dominated Arabic interspersed with verse for which he was well known and admired. While he wrote on topics ranging from hadith, to poetry, to mathematics, to the *manāqib* of various Sufi figures, to medicine and the Black Death,<sup>16</sup> he was best known during and after his lifetime for his works on the science of letters and names, eschatological predictions, and calendrics and historical cycles—topics that were deeply interrelated in the minds of al-Biṣṭāmī and many of his contemporaries. As Fleischer has demonstrated, his writings on the latter topics would prove influential in Ottoman milieux well into the tenth/sixteenth century, particularly regarding attempts to ideologically position the Ottoman sultan Süleyman the Lawgiver (r. 926–74/1520–66) as a millennial sovereign destined to rule the world at the end of time.<sup>17</sup>

### *Shams al-Āfāq fī 'Ilm al-Ḥurūf wa-al-Awfāq* as an “Encyclopedic” Work

Several of al-Biṣṭāmī's works survive in manuscript, though a full survey of the manuscript corpus has yet to be done. That he sometimes promulgated variant versions of the same title will inevitably complicate this task when it is undertaken. The work with which the present article is primarily concerned, *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*, itself has a slightly complicated textual history. The initial recension of the text is likely best represented by Süleymaniye MS Hekimoğlu 533, an authorial holograph completed near the end of Rabī' II 826/1423; it also contains an *ijāzah* written by al-Biṣṭāmī in Shawwāl of 837/1434.<sup>18</sup> Al-Biṣṭāmī records in *Durraṭ tāj al-rasā'il* that he completed *Shams al-āfāq* in 826 in the Anatolian town of Larende (now Karaman), south of Konya, and Hekimoğlu 533 may be the fair copy of the recension to which he is referring.<sup>19</sup> A second re-

<sup>15</sup>This figure is based on the sixth *bāb* of *Tāj al-rasā'il*, in which al-Biṣṭāmī provides a roughly year-by-year account of his activities as an author and as a transmitter of works written by others; “*Durraṭ tāj al-rasā'il wa-ghurraṭ minhāj al-wasā'il*,” Süleymaniye MS Nuruosmaniye 4905, fol. 21bff, but particularly 24b–37b. At present, the Süleymaniye MS is the only known copy of this work. Cornell Fleischer is preparing an annotated facsimile of it, to be published with Brill.

<sup>16</sup>An edition of al-Biṣṭāmī's plague tractate, *Kitāb wasf al-dawā' fī kashf āfāt al-wabā'*, is currently under preparation by Jean-Charles Coulon of Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, Paris.

<sup>17</sup>Fleischer, “Mahdī and Millennium” and “Ancient Wisdom,” both *passim*.

<sup>18</sup>For the colophon and the *ijāzah* see Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 151b.

<sup>19</sup>Al-Biṣṭāmī, “*Durraṭ tāj al-rasā'il*,” fol. 31a–b.





cension is also extant, as found, for example, in Chester Beatty MS 5076 (copied in Rabī II 844/1440 by one ‘Alī ibn Muḥannā al-‘Aṭṭār al-Atharī). Much of this recension overlaps with the earlier one, but the introduction (*muqaddimah*) has been significantly expanded, as has the list of occult works al-Biṣṭāmī claims to have read and synthesized (see Appendix). In *Durrat tāj al-rasā’il*, al-Biṣṭāmī also refers to a second work titled *Shams al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq* that he composed in Bursa in 830/1426–27, which he states “is not the book that I completed in Larende which was mentioned previously” (*wa hadhā al-kitāb huwa ḡhayr al-kitāb alladhī faraghtu minhu fī Lārandaḥ alladhī taqaddama dhikruhu*).<sup>20</sup> It is possible that he is referring here to the recension represented by CB 5076, assuming he considered the expansions therein substantial enough to justify calling it a different book than the Larende recension; however, he provides no further details that confirm or falsify this hypothesis. For reasons discussed below, it is certain that the second recension was penned sometime after Dhū al-Ḥijjah 826/1423, which is to say at least eight months after the initial version. It is with the expanded introduction to the second recension that this article is primarily concerned.

The subject of *Shams al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq* is the science of letters and names, or “lettrism,” as scholars recently have come to call it. Similar in ways to Jewish Kabbalah, lettrism was a cosmologically-oriented discourse on the powers of the Arabic alphabet and the names of God that, in certain iterations, including al-Biṣṭāmī’s, also encompassed occult practices such as divination and the making of talismans. Though descended from the theological speculation of early Shi‘i “exaggerators” (*ghulāḥ*) and Isma‘ili Neoplatonist thinkers, the lettrism al-Biṣṭāmī was working with largely had taken shape at the hands of Sunni Sufis in the Islamic West between the fourth/tenth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, and was most famously promulgated by figures such as al-Būnī and the great Andalusian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), who helped introduce it to the central Islamic lands as they migrated eastward at the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> In both recensions, the text of *Shams al-āfāq* is divided into an introduction followed by five chapters (*fuṣūl*). The five chapters of the main body of the work discuss a range of topics concerning the occult qualities of the letters, the making of talismans based on mathematical “magic” squares, and the description of a quasi-Neoplatonic cosmology in which the letters, understood as the continuous flow of God’s creative speech, are implicated in the revolutions of the celestial spheres and thus in the ongoing production of the manifest world.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., fol. 32a.

<sup>21</sup>For recent scholarship on the relationship between the Shi‘i and Sufi iterations of lettrism, see Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn Al-‘Arabī and Ismā‘ilī Tradition* (Leiden, Boston, 2014).



These elements are familiar from earlier lettrist writings, particularly al-Būnī's, on which al-Biṣṭāmī draws heavily.<sup>22</sup>

Much as in Kabbalah, esotericism had been central to the Western-Sufi lettrism of Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Būnī's generation as both a *bāṭinī* hermeneutics and a social practice, and both those masters had stressed the need for utmost discretion in transmitting what they viewed as initiated understandings of scripture and powerful praxes for spiritual achievement and transformation of the manifest world that would be destructive in the hands of the *vulgus*.<sup>23</sup> The present author has argued elsewhere that, in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām, early readers of al-Būnī's works—which were far more explicit than Ibn al-ʿArabī's with regard to occult-practical aspects of lettrism such as talismans—heeded al-Būnī's wishes by mostly restricting the circulation of his texts to secretive circles of Sufi adepts for roughly a century after his death, such that only in the eighth/fourteenth century did his writings begin to become available to other communities of readers, becoming increasingly popular through the ninth/fifteenth.<sup>24</sup> The writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, in which lettrism is a persistent theme, of course became immensely popular and influential during the same period.<sup>25</sup> This gradual emergence of lettrism from the confines of esotericist Sufi reading communities was an important condition of possibility for the creation of *Shams al-āfāq*, and indeed for al-Biṣṭāmī's career as a courtier-occultist. It cleared the way for him to undertake the project of reframing lettrism for the cosmopolitan learned and courtly classes of the later Mamluk period, a project that entailed realignments of both the epistemic and social bases of lettrism.

That the proliferation of lettrist texts in the Mamluk cities in the lead-up to al-Biṣṭāmī's time was not limited to al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings is clear from a major list of books on lettrism that al-Biṣṭāmī includes in the introduction to *Shams al-āfāq*. The list includes 238 titles of books he claims to have read on the science of letters and names or matters related thereto (see Appendix).<sup>26</sup> It comprises numerous works by figures al-Biṣṭāmī cites frequently throughout *Shams al-āfāq*, such as al-Būnī and the turn-of-the-ninth/fifteenth-century shaykh

<sup>22</sup>On elements of al-Būnī's lettrist cosmology, see the present author's "Stars and saints: The esotericist astrology of the Sufi occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī," forthcoming in 2017 in the journal *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ritual*.

<sup>23</sup>Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Le Livre du mim, du waw, et du nun*, trans. Charles-Andre Gilis (Beirut, 2002), 56ff.

<sup>24</sup>Noah Gardiner, "Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī's Works," in *Islamicate Occultism: New Perspectives*, ed. Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Noah Gardiner, special issue of *Arabica* 64, nos. 3–4 (2017): 405–41.

<sup>25</sup>Alexander Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, 1999), 49–140.

<sup>26</sup>Al-Biṣṭāmī, "Shams al-āfāq," Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 1a. *Wa-qad waqaftu ʿalā kutub kathīrah jalīlat al-burhān fī hadhā al-shān qalīlat al-wujūd fī hadhā al-zamān*.



Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Kūmī al-Tūnīsī (about whom more below); famous works on magic such as *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm (Picatrix)* and the book of Tum-Tum al-Hindī;<sup>27</sup> pseudo-Aristotelian hermetica like *Kitāb al-Iṣṭimāṭīs* and *Kitāb al-Istimākḥīs*;<sup>28</sup> works attributed to luminaries of the early Islamic period such as Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq and Thābit ibn Qurrah, and of the Hellenistic past such as Plato, Alexander the Great, *et alia*; several books (*asfār*) attributed to prophets, e.g., *Sifr Ādam*, *Sifr Idrīs*, *Sifr Nūḥ*, etc.; and scores of other titles. These works were “little to be found” at the time, al-Biṣṭāmī asserts, but however rare the individual volumes, their sheer number suggests that there was already a considerable audience in the Mamluk cities for occult-scientific literature.

The list is invaluable as a bibliography of late-medieval lettrism. It is also an important indicator of the “encyclopedic” nature of al-Biṣṭāmī’s work, which, though not massive in size, seeks to distill, organize, and otherwise make accessible to learned readers the large, messy, and difficult body of lettrist teachings the list represents. Modern scholarship has long recognized the Mamluk period as one in which an encyclopedist ethos held sway, giving rise to such massive works as al-Nuwayrī’s (d. 733/1333) *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, al-Qalqashandī’s (d. 821/1418) *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shá*, and al-‘Umarī’s (d. 749/1349) *Masālik al-absār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, as well as “a wide range of compilatory texts—including biographical dictionaries, literary anthologies, universal and specialised lexicons, and professional manuals—all dependent upon the fundamental processes of collecting and ordering knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> Some twentieth-century scholars, such as Charles Pellat, held that this surge of compilatory and synthetic activity was a fearful response to the threat posed by the Mongols to the intellectual and belletristic patrimony of Islamic civilization, and furthermore that the seemingly derivative nature of Mamluk literature was a symptom of intellectual lassitude and postclassical decline.<sup>30</sup> Elias Muhanna argues convincingly, however, that the encyclopedism of the period is better conceived as the product of a cosmopolitan, universalist out-

<sup>27</sup>On *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* see Maribel Fierro, “Bāṭinism in al-Andalus: Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), Author of the *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm* and the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm (Picatrix)*,” *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996): 87–112. The book of Tum-Tum al-Hindī is briefly mentioned as a well-known book on magic by Ibn Khaldūn in *al-Muqaddimah*, in the section on “The sciences of sorcery and talismans.”

<sup>28</sup>On *Kitāb al-Iṣṭimāṭīs* see Charles Burnett, “Hermann of Carinthia and *Kitāb al-istamāṭīs*: Further Evidence for the Transmission of Hermetic Magic,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981): 167–69. On *Kitāb al-Istimākḥīs* see idem, “Arabic, Greek and Latin Works on Astrological Magic attributed to Aristotle,” in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jill Kraye, W. F. Ryan, and C. B. Schmitt (London, 1986), 84–96.

<sup>29</sup>Elias Muhanna, “Why Was the Fourteenth Century a Century of Arabic Encyclopaedism?,” in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Jason König and Greg Woolf (Cambridge, 2013), 347.

<sup>30</sup>Charles Pellat, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Mawsū‘a.”





look fostered by “[t]he stability and security provided by a rapidly consolidating imperial [Mamluk] state,” where previously there had been “several centuries of fractiousness and political turmoil.”<sup>31</sup> Encyclopedic works were never direct outcomes of state initiatives, however, but rather were products both of and for the “professionalized and bureaucratized” scholarly class—the “*adab*-ized” ulama, as Thomas Bauer would have it<sup>32</sup>—that was taking shape in the increasingly diverse and literate Mamluk cities, and that demanded news ways to organize and consume the massive bodies of learning available to them.<sup>33</sup> Contrary to the notion that such works are evidence of an intellectual decline, recent scholarship has come to recognize these acts of compilation, classification, abridgement, etc. as considerable and highly original intellectual accomplishments in their own right, as al-Biṣṭāmī’s certainly was.

Lettrism had not been entirely overlooked by encyclopedist writers prior to al-Biṣṭāmī, thanks in large part to the growing availability of al-Būnī’s works. Ibn Manẓūr briefly praises al-Būnī in the introduction to *Lisān al-‘arab*, and even claims to have successfully experimented with lettrist procedures. Writing within esotericist restraints, however, he refrains from going into detail, on the grounds that the secrets of the letters are too dangerous for those whose minds are not prepared.<sup>34</sup> Al-Nuwayrī includes in *Nihāyat al-arab* some brief excerpts from al-Būnī’s major lettrist opus *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwīyāt*, though he relegates them to the final subsection of the fourth out of five books that comprise his work. The primary topic of the fourth book is plants, and the excerpts from al-Būnī appear as part of a subchapter on “What can be done using occult properties” (*fīmā yuf‘al bi-al-khāṣīyah*).<sup>35</sup> The Bunian material—instructions for a few simple talismans—is entirely denatured, divorced from the elaborate Sufi cosmology that it grows out of in the original, and is treated as little more than a curiosity. Al-Būnī is also mentioned by al-Biṣṭāmī’s older contemporary al-Qalqashandī, in a subchapter of *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā* on “The knowledge of book collections and the types of sciences” (*ma‘rifah bi-khazā’in al-kutub wa-anwā’ al-‘ulūm*), and under the further subheadings of “The sciences current among the learned, the best-known books regarding them, and their authors” (*dhikr al-‘ulūm al-mutadawwalah bayna al-‘ulamā’ wa-mashhūr al-kutub al-muṣannaḥah fihā wa-mu‘allifuhā*), “the natural

<sup>31</sup>Muhanna, “A Century of Arabic Encyclopaedism,” 348.

<sup>32</sup>Thomas Bauer, “Ayna Hādhā min al-Mutanabbī’?: Toward an Aesthetics of Mamluk Literature,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 5–22.

<sup>33</sup>On these macro developments in Mamluk culture and reading practices see the aforementioned Bauer article; also Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2012).

<sup>34</sup>Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab* (Beirut, 1990), 1:14ff.

<sup>35</sup>Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (Cairo, 1935), 12:217ff.



science” (*al-‘ilm al-ṭabī‘ī*), and “the science of sorcery and the science of the letter and magic squares” (*‘ilm al-siḥr wa-‘ilm al-ḥarf wa-al-awfāq*). He names three of al-Būnī’s works alongside Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s *Al-Sirr al-maktūm*, the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, a *Kitāb al-ḥamharah* attributed to one al-Khawārazmī, and the *Timaeus* (which he attributes to Aristotle rather than Plato).<sup>36</sup> That al-Qalqashandī associates lettrism so closely with sorcery (*siḥr*)—typically a term of severe disapprobation in Sunni discourse—suggests that he may have had a rather low opinion of the topic.

Al-Nuwayrī and al-Qalqashandī’s mentions of lettrism via al-Būnī can be seen as attempts to discipline a potentially disruptive discourse by subsuming it within their own conceptions of the hierarchy of the sciences (*taṣnīf al-‘ulūm*) and otherwise assigning it relatively little importance in the grand scheme of things that their massive works sought to encompass and order. Al-Biṣṭāmī’s approach to the topic in *Shams al-āfāq* shares the encyclopedic prerogatives of synthesizing and ordering a large body of material from past authorities. It could hardly be more different, however, with regard to the status he assigns lettrism, which he positions as the veritable queen of the sciences. In describing the sources from which the knowledge of lettrism conveyed in *Shams al-āfāq* is taken, he avows:

From the books of the prophets I took it. From the speech of the saints I gathered it. From the scrolls of the select I set it down. From the records of the God-fearing I recorded it. From the treasures of the listeners I extracted it. From the riddles of the philosophers I solved it. From original thought I devised it. Among the secrets of the pious ones I discovered upon it. From the epistles of the people of mysteries I deduced it. And by the lamps of the people of lights I sought it.<sup>37</sup>

And regarding the excellence of the science of letters, and of his own book, he asserts:

It [*Shams al-āfāq*] is among the most outstanding of books in its utility and the greatest of them with reference to the compilation of that which is most excellent and dearly sought in one precious location. For in it is the greatest science of God, His most luminous mystery, His most radiant law, and His most magnificent

<sup>36</sup>Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā* (Cairo, 1908–19), 1:465. Incidentally, the *Kitāb al-ḥamharah* is no. 198 on al-Biṣṭāmī’s list of books on lettrism. He does not list the other works al-Qalqashandī mentions, though no. 20, *Al-Sirr al-manzūm fī al-Sirr al-maktūm*, is likely a commentary on al-Rāzī’s work.

<sup>37</sup>Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 2b.



name—and these are but a drop of its superabundant sea, a dribblet from the raincloud.<sup>38</sup>

Taken on its own terms, the lettrism al-Biṣṭāmī reveals in *Shams al-āfāq* is indeed the greatest of the sciences and a powerful body of techniques as well, the “red sulfur” (*al-kibrīt al-aḥmar*) through which the highest spiritual visions and states are realized, but also the “magnificent antidote” (*al-tiryāq al-abhar*) to all life’s ills, from plague to poverty to the pangs of unrequited love. All this is presented not as a mere collection of magical recipes, but as material theorized within a quasi-Neoplatonic cosmological framework built on the ideas of Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Būnī, and others, combining Sufi theosophical concepts such as the pre-existent Muḥammadan light (*nūr muḥammadi*) and the invisible hierarchy of Sufi saints with discourses on astrology, humoral medicine, the physics of the four elements, and the “occult properties” (*khawāṣṣ*) of stones, plants, the planets, etc.

As for his own intellectual role in compiling this body of learning, al-Biṣṭāmī claims to have produced his work on this famously difficult and obscure topic:

only after I untangled the knots of its symbols, broke the talismans concealing its treasures, removed through gnostic eloquence the envelope of its meanings, and described with the tongue of clarification the marvels of its keys, so that one who did not understand their [the lettrists’] symbols will understand them, and one who did not grasp their terms of art will grasp them, so that it [the book] will be the guide to achievement among novices and the end-goal among adepts.<sup>39</sup>

The book indeed does strive toward clarity on matters that previous lettrist authors had left obscure. For example, al-Biṣṭāmī explains methods for constructing mathematical magic squares (*awfāq*, sing. *wafq*)—a key element of many of the talismans employed in lettrism—that others, such as al-Būnī, had not divulged.<sup>40</sup> Al-Biṣṭāmī does not take all the credit for these accomplishments, but rather asserts that the Prophet Muḥammad—“in whose hand are the keys to the [divine] commands and upon whom rests the authority of all men of great character and eloquence” (*man bi-yadihi maqālīd al-umūr wa-ilyahi masānīd al-furūd jalīl al-shān jamīl al-bayān*)<sup>41</sup>—helped bestow them through “the tongue of realization” (*lisān*

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 2b–3a.

<sup>40</sup>For al-Būnī’s most explicit discussions of talismans based on mathematical magic squares see his *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwīyāt* (as found in numerous MSS, e.g., BnF MS arabe 2657, BnF MS arabe 2658, Berlin MS or. Fol. 80, and others), passim.

<sup>41</sup>Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 2b.



*al-tahqīq*), which is to say inspired knowledge.<sup>42</sup> As discussed below, he grounds the general claim of Muḥammadan inspiration in a series of specific events and spiritual experiences in the narrative of his initiation into lettrism included in the second recension of the work. The claim is important insofar as it grounds a theme that runs through *Shams al-āfāq* of book-learning and mystical inspiration as the twin pillars of occult knowledge, an innovative notion relative to prior lettrists such as al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī. The prophetic agency that he claims propels the project also points to the eschatological implications of the unveiling of lettrist knowledge that al-Biṣṭāmī aims to achieve in his work.

As mentioned above, lettrists of prior centuries had exercised some degree of caution in disseminating lettrist knowledge, on the grounds that such secrets were too powerful to be subject to the whims of anyone but spiritual elites with the wisdom and self-restraint to wield them. Al-Biṣṭāmī is obviously willing to contravene these restrictions, but he is insistent that doing so is a response to the nearly terminal spiritual immiseration of society. The times in which he lives, he asserts at length, mark a nadir of post-Muḥammadan human relations to the divine:

In this age the remains of the sciences of wisdom and metaphysical gnosis are effaced, the paths of the laws of the prophets are wiped out, the paths of the way of the saints are fallen into oblivion, the relations of mercy have been severed and the lights of wisdom blotted out. Shameful scandals are revealed and the good counsels of the hidden worlds are eclipsed. The abode of honesty is muddied and the garden of salvation is dried up. The star of the babble of the idiots is risen as is that of the lies of the ignorant. And no wonder! For the people have become evil and Islam is become a stranger as it was when it began. The gnostic fundamentals are trickery so far as they're concerned, and the Quranic creed is among them unbelief. [...] Lettrist subtleties are jugglery and numerological insights are heresy. Indeed, they dispense with right action in favor of bootlicking and with wholesome knowledge in favor of polemic and suspicion. Neither do the verses [of the Quran] remind them nor the sermons restrain them, for the mantles of darkness and the radiance of the ego have obscured the lights of true vision and shrouded [men's] innermost beings from witnessing the wonders of the *Malakūt* and the subtleties of the effects of the *Jabarūt*. Even if they were to hear the lordly realities and the merciful dispensations and the luminescent names and the spiritualistic secrets

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.





and the healing invocations and the all-encompassing remedies, it would be as if it were shouted from a distant place and behind a curtain of iron.<sup>43</sup>

This theme of spiritual decline is hardly unfamiliar in medieval Islamic thought; the well-known hadith “The best people are my generation, then those who will follow them, then those who will follow them”<sup>44</sup> was widely understood to imply that the *ummah* only got worse as time went on. As Eerik Dickinson has discussed, some scholars of the late-medieval period were so convinced of the degeneracy of their peers as to despair of meaningful personality criticism (*‘ilm al-rijāl*) in evaluating recent *muḥaddiths*, such that figures such as Abū ‘Amr al-Murābiṭ (d. 752/1351) and al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) disagreed mainly with regard to whether the last transmitters worthy of the task had died by the end of the fourth/tenth century or the fifth/eleventh.<sup>45</sup>

Of course, the age was not exclusively prone to theologies of despair; theories of *mujaddids*—periodic “renewers” of Islam sent by God to restore the vitality of the faith—flourished in the late-medieval period, as did claims to *mahdī*-ship and related millennial reverberations. Al-Biṣṭāmī’s interest in these topics is indicated by his citations in *Shams al-āfāq* of the Damascene scholar, bureaucrat, and apocalyptic seer Ibn Ṭalḥah (d. 652/1254);<sup>46</sup> his discussions of *mujaddids* and methods for divining the date of the eschaton in his work on calendrics and related topics *Nazm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk*, completed in 833/1429–30; and his *Miftāḥ al-jafīr al-jāmi‘ wa-miṣbāḥ al-nūr al-lāmi‘*, completed the year before *Shams al-āfāq* in 825/1421–22, which Fleischer describes as “[a] compendium of apocalypses current during the rule of the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt and Syria... with some materials drawing on Crusade-era traditions... [and] several prophetic works attributed to Ibn Arabi, to which Bistami gave definitive literary form.”<sup>47</sup> It is in the context of this climate of perceived spiritual decline and reciprocal millennial expectation that al-Biṣṭāmī’s project in *Shams al-āfāq*—of reconfiguring lettrism as a science accessible to the learned class rather than just a secretive spiritual elite—should be understood.

<sup>43</sup>Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 7a.

<sup>44</sup>Numerous transmissions and variants of the hadith can be found. See, for example, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, nos. 3650 and 3651 (the second and third entries in *Bāb faḍā’il aṣḥāb al-nabī*).

<sup>45</sup>Eerik Dickinson, “Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ Al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122 (2002): 481–505.

<sup>46</sup>On whom see Mohammad Ahmad Masad, “The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition: Divination, Prophecy and the End of Time in the 13th Century Eastern Mediterranean” (Ph.D. diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 2008).

<sup>47</sup>Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom,” 238.



## Al-Biṣṭāmī on the Mamluk Occult Scene

Al-Biṣṭāmī's efforts were a crucial part of the transitioning of lettrism from the confines of esotericist Sufi reading communities into a broader readership among the Mamluk era's new class of scholar-bureaucrats—who often also were involved in Sufism as well, whether from standpoints of literary curiosity or active involvement in then-consolidating Sufi *ṭarīqahs* such as the Shādhiliyah or Qādirīyah—and even into the courts of ruling military elites. It is important to note, however, that *Shams al-āfāq* represents a culmination of that process rather than its inception. It is clear from al-Nuwayrī and al-Qalqashandī's mentions of al-Būnī and lettrism that the science had already gained a degree of visibility among learned audiences. As for ruling elites, al-Biṣṭāmī himself testifies to the sultan al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq's (r. 784–801/1382–99, with a brief interruption in 791/1389) interest in lettrism, noting that a number of lettrists at the sultan's court had dedicated books on the topic to the sultan, presumably in return for his patronage. In *Nazm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk*, al-Biṣṭāmī states:

A group from among the Sufis and a coterie of the most skillful of the lettrists put down books in his [Barqūq's] name... In them were effective prayers, healing medicines, lordly names, Qurānic secrets, luminescent magical squares, and Solomonic charms of which none have need save kings, nobles, and the leaders of the scholars, the gems [of society]. In them is that regarding the outcomes of actions, the extension of the reigns of kings, and other such things that are made manifest to the people of luminous vision and luminescent inner-selves.<sup>48</sup>

He then briefly discusses three of these luminaries and their works for Barqūq, including two titles that seem to have been specifically concerned with Barqūq and his reign as sultan, and were likely lettrist analyses of his political destiny:

Among them [the books] were *Kitāb al-Kanz al-bāhir fī sharḥ ḥurūf al-Malik al-Zāhir* by our shaykh and imam, the shaykh, the imam, the master of his age and singular one of his time Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī al-Mālikī, may God sanctify his innermost being. *Kitāb Lawāmi' al-burūq fī saltanat al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq* by the shaykh, the imam, the master Abī Muḥammad Makhlūf ibn 'Alī ibn Maymūn al-Ḥintawī(?) al-Jannātī al-Mālikī,<sup>49</sup> may God enlighten his innermost being. And

<sup>48</sup>Al-Biṣṭāmī, "Nazm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk," Topkapı MS 1597, fol. 132a–b.

<sup>49</sup>The vocalization of al-Ḥintawī is uncertain. The present author has been unable thus far to locate this figure in the standard biographical sources, even despite the unusual combination of



the shaykh and great master Sayyid ‘Izz al-Dīn Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī, may God enlighten his innermost being, wrote for him [Barqūq] a comprehensive book [*kitāban jāmi‘an*], though I never examined it with satisfactory care despite the length of my stay in Cairo and my familiarity with many of its exquisite qualities. Among them [Akhlāṭī’s books] were *Kitāb al-Kanz al-makhzūn* and other such among so many that if I mentioned them all the book would grow in length and we would abandon brevity for length and logorrhea.<sup>50</sup>

Al-Biṣṭāmī himself was not present at Barqūq’s court, as he seems to have arrived in Egypt only in 805/1402–3—the earliest date he mentions having been in Egypt in *Durrat tāj al-rasā’il*. The legacy of the lettrist coterie at Barqūq’s court nonetheless must have shaped and helped facilitate his aspirations toward reconfiguring lettrism for the literate upper classes. Certainly, the prestige afforded by Barqūq’s apparent fascination with lettrism would have helped generate wider interest in it, notwithstanding the stern disapproval of the topic on the part of Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), another of Barqūq’s courtiers.<sup>51</sup>

Two of the lettrist authors al-Biṣṭāmī mentions as having been at Barqūq’s court are of particular interest. The first is Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Kūmī (fl. 810/1407<sup>52</sup>), a Sufi lettrist from Tunis a number of whose works are still extant in manuscript.<sup>53</sup> As we will see below, al-Biṣṭāmī is particularly at pains to affiliate himself with al-Kūmī, whom he discusses and praises at length in *Shams al-āfāq*. The second is Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī (d. 799/1397), a physician, alchemist, and lettrist who loomed large in the occult scene of late eighth/fourteenth-century Cairo, but who is not much discussed in *Shams al-āfāq*, and whom al-Biṣṭāmī seems to distance himself from somewhat in the excerpt above from *Durrat tāj al-rasā’il*.

names Makhlūf ibn ‘Alī ibn Maymūn.

<sup>50</sup>Al-Biṣṭāmī, “Naẓm al-sulūk,” fol. 132b.

<sup>51</sup>For Ibn Khaldūn’s discussion of lettrism see *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York, 1958), 3:171ff. For discussions of his views on occultism generally see Mushegh Asatrian, “Ibn Khaldun on Magic and the Occult,” *Iran and the Caucasus: Research Papers from the Caucasian Centre for Iranian Studies*, Yerevan 7 (2003): 73–123; James Morris, “An Arab Machiavelli? Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Politics in Ibn Khaldun’s Critique of Sufism,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 8 (2009): 242–91. The present author is currently preparing a new analysis of Ibn Khaldūn’s anti-occult polemic in the *Muqaddimah* in light of this occultist coterie at Barqūq’s court, and taking into consideration certain codical and textual details of autograph copies of the work. It will appear shortly as part of the *Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg Working Papers* series.

<sup>52</sup>Per Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, S2:358.

<sup>53</sup>See, for example, al-Kūmī’s “Taysīr al-maṭālib wa-rahbat al-ṭālib” (Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1594/1); “Risālat al-Hū” (Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Resid efendi 608/3); “Al-Īmā’ ilā ‘ilm al-asmā’ fī sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusná (Dār al-Kutub MS 1524 Taṣawwuf).



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Al-Akhlāṭī lived in Cairo in the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century, having come to the city at the behest of Barqūq in order to treat (unsuccessfully) the sultan's ailing son. He is dealt with only tersely in the Arabic biographical dictionaries, but is considered at greater length in Persian and Ottoman-Turkish sources, which Binbaş discusses in detail.<sup>54</sup> Nothing is certain regarding al-Akhlāṭī's early life. Ibn Ḥajar states that he was raised in Iran, and Binbaş raises the possibility that he was related to the Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī who attended some audition sessions for Ibn al-'Arabī's *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah* that were presided over by the great shaykh himself in Damascus in 633/1235–36. Ibn Ḥajar reports that after arriving in Cairo al-Akhlāṭī never left his house on the Nile but received many visitors there, including Barqūq himself, who spoke from atop his horse while al-Akhlāṭī responded from his rooftop—a shockingly informal exchange judging by Ibn Ḥajar's tone. He further claims that al-Akhlāṭī was involved in alchemy and associated with Shi'ism (*al-rafḍ*), that he did not attend the Friday prayer, and that some of his followers believed he was the *mahdī*.<sup>55</sup> Among al-Akhlāṭī's disciples in Cairo were such visitors to the city as the aforementioned Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turkah, Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī, and Badr al-Dīn al-Simāwī—the latter of whom he seems to have had a particularly significant impact on. Though al-Biṣṭāmī arrived too late to have studied with al-Akhlāṭī, he certainly would have known of him—and other occultists at Barqūq's court—through his own relationships with al-Akhlāṭī's students, his fellow *ikhwān al-ṣafā'*.

A few works in Persian by al-Akhlāṭī on lettrism and alchemy survive in manuscript, which Binbaş describes as “rather short and instructive treatises instead of long theoretical pieces.”<sup>56</sup> Among them is *Risālah-yi jafr-i jāmi'ah*, “a short manual on how to write a book of jafr,” a prophetic-divinatory text that would be commissioned of a practitioner by a ruler to enable him to have knowledge of things to come. The crafting of such a powerful book was no small affair. Only a *sayyid* (a descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad) could accomplish it, per al-Akhlāṭī, and doing so required “one thousand and one days in seclusion” and a strict regimen of fasting and writing.<sup>57</sup> The *kitāban jāmi'an* that al-Biṣṭāmī refers to al-Akhlāṭī having written for Barqūq indeed may have been such a book of *jafr*, though perhaps it was merely a rendition of the instructions for making one. In either case it seems strange, at first glance, that al-Biṣṭāmī goes out of his way to mention that he never took the time to truly read this book, despite his lengthy stay(s) in

<sup>54</sup> Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 114–40.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-abnā' al-'umr*, ed. 'Abd al-Mu'īd Khān (Deccan, 1967), 3:336–38.

<sup>56</sup> Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 152.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.





Cairo. The explanation may lie in the fact that al-Akhlāṭī's star pupil, Badr al-Dīn al-Simāwī, who at one time was chief judge for the Ottoman army, was a spiritual leader of a millenarian rebellion against the Ottoman state, resulting in his execution in 818/1416.<sup>58</sup> Fleischer suggests that al-Biṣṭāmī's close association with Badr al-Dīn necessitated that he retreat to the Mamluk territories during these troubles to escape any negative repercussions.<sup>59</sup> A similar sense of caution may have inspired him to de-emphasize his relationship to al-Akhlāṭī, and to instead favor a narrative of himself as an inheritor and interpreter of al-Kūmī and other Sufis' teachings on the science of letters and names.

The best sense of the Mamluk occult scene as al-Biṣṭāmī experienced it is conveyed in his account of his own education and initiation into lettrism. In what amounts to a performance of the theme of book-learning and mystical inspiration as the twin pillars of occult knowledge, this account takes the form of a record of al-Biṣṭāmī's formal readings of various lettrist texts—i.e., of his having read or heard texts in the presence of either their authors or shaykhs in direct lines of transmission from their authors (*qara'a 'alā* or *sami'a 'alā*)—interspersed with his visionary encounters with the Prophet and other spiritual authorities. The implication is that these events are linked, the readings somehow precipitating the visionary experiences. This relationship is made explicit at the climax of the narrative, where a reading of the great Maghribī Sufi master Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī's (d. 656/1258) *Ḥizb al-baḥr* triggers a dream-encounter with the Prophet in which the Prophet bestows complete knowledge of lettrism upon al-Biṣṭāmī.

The section of the introduction to *Shams al-āfāq* in which al-Biṣṭāmī details the chains of transmission (*isnāds*) that vouchsafe his knowledge of lettrism begins with a chain stretching from himself, through al-Kūmī, and back to the Prophet. It is similar to chains—accompanied by brief biographical/hagiographical accounts—he provides later in the text for a number of authorities from earlier generations whom he draws on in the book, including al-Būnī, al-Shādhilī, and Ibn Ṭalḥah, along with the Western Sufi-lettrist Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarālī (d. 638/1240), the illuminationist mystic-philosopher al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (d. 587/1191), the famous Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), the great Sufi martyr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), and others.<sup>60</sup> The vocabulary of transmission employed is familiar from the hadith sciences and other discourses, and implies the oral/aural imparting of knowledge:

<sup>58</sup>For a recent and detailed discussion of these events, see Dimitri Kastritsis, "The Şeyh Bedreddin Uprising in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413," in *Political Initiatives "from the Bottom Up" in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete VII, a Symposium Held in Rethymno 9–11 January 2009*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Rethymno, 2012), 221–38.

<sup>59</sup>Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom," 232.

<sup>60</sup>Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 16bff.



I took [knowledge of] the science of letters and magic squares, through the tongue of wisdom and tastings, from the teacher of the horizons, the shaykh, the imam, the knower of God and sign unto God, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī al-Mālikī, may God give him to drink from the pools of kindness and make him to dwell in the gardens of Paradise. He took from the shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Duhhān. He took from the shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Khāmī [or al-Jāmī], and he took from the shaykh Abū al-‘Azā‘im Mādī. He took from the shaykh, the pole, the helper, the unique one, the gatherer ... Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. He took from the shaykh, the pole, the helper, the unique one, the gatherer Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh al-Ḥasanī al-Nārimī(?). He took from the shaykh Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Madanī. He took from pole after pole to the Imam Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī. He was the first of the poles, and he took from his grandfather the Messenger of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him).<sup>61</sup>

Following this initial statement of al-Kūmī’s credentials, al-Biṣṭāmī then recounts his arrival in Alexandria in 811/1408–9, and three meetings in which he “read” (*qaraʿa ʿalā*) some of al-Kūmī’s works with someone who had read them in the presence of al-Kūmī:

When I arrived on the scene in Alexandria in the year 811 I read the book *Taysīr al-maṭālib* in the presence of the shaykh the imam Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Maghribī, the imam of the al-‘Arabī Mosque there. He read it in the presence of its author the shaykh, the imam, the gnostic, the learned one, the teacher of his age and the tongue of his time Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh [ibn] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī, may God consecrate his innermost being.<sup>62</sup>

The fact that al-Biṣṭāmī places these two different types of transmission statements one after the other—the first involving a line of face-to-face meetings between past masters reaching back to the Prophet, and the second documenting the transmission of books—is important, as it implies the passage of lettrist knowledge from primarily oral/aural transmission into books. The passage is not

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., fol. 9a.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., fol. 9b. Though al-Biṣṭāmī’s use of *akhadhtu* implies face-to-face contact with al-Kūmī, it is possible that his claim to have “taken” from al-Kūmī “through the tongue of wisdom and tastings” implies that their meeting was spiritual rather than physical.



absolute, of course, as al-Biṣṭāmī is still highlighting his participation in book-transmission practices featuring the circulation of texts between human and written media, but it marks a transition from an ancient way of transmitting knowledge to a more recent one, a transition that renders legitimate al-Biṣṭāmī's further acts of appropriation and written synthesis in *Shams al-āfāq*.

Al-Biṣṭāmī's narrative then jumps to 815/1412–13 in Damascus, where he again reads al-Kūmī at one step of remove. This time the transmitter is Musā'id ibn Sārī al-Ḥawārī (d. of the plague 819/1416–17), an ascetic shaykh and *muḥaddith* who spent the last part of his life in a village outside Damascus, where he received many visitors. Ibn Ḥajar notes that he also specialized in *'ilm al-mīqāt*, the science of timekeeping attuned to Islamic ritual needs that Sabra associates especially with the allegedly anti-occult “jurist-scientists” of the period.<sup>63</sup> In this case, notably, the readings precipitate a sighting—perhaps visionary—of “the Pole of the Levant,”<sup>64</sup> as well as dream-sightings of the Prophet:

In the year 815 when I entered the city of Damascus (may God protect it) I heard—from the shaykh, the imam, the gnostic, the jurist, the trustworthy one, the continuator of the scholars, Abū 'Abd Allāh Musā'id ibn Sārī ibn Mas'ūd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Raḥmat al-Ḥawārī al-Ḥīmyarī, in the village of Sha'bā in the southern pastures—the book *Taysīr al-maṭālib* and the book *Al-Īmā' ilā 'ilm al-asmā'* and the book *Sirr al-jamāl* and the book *Al-Kanz al-bāhir fī sharḥ ḥurūf al-Malik al-Zāhir* and the book *Izhār al-rumūz wa-ibdā' al-kunūz* and the treatise *Al-Hū*. He [Musā'id] had read them in the presence of their author the shaykh the imam Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Kūmī. In it [the reading session, the village?] I saw the Pole of the Levant. And I saw the Messenger of God (God's blessings and peace be upon him) in the year 815 in a dream in Damascus: he was standing, combing his beard (God's blessings and peace be upon him). I also saw him a second time that night in a dream.<sup>65</sup>

The coinciding of the readings and visions seems intended to signal that the readings of al-Kūmī, properly conducted under the authority of shaykhs who had

<sup>63</sup>Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr*, 7:248–49. For Sabra see footnote 8 supra.

<sup>64</sup>The hierarchy of the saints, of which the Pole is the living head, is “invisible” in the sense that its members and their rank are unknown to anyone who is not himself or herself high in the hierarchy; according to some theories none but the highest-ranking members are even certain of their own membership. For him to have seen the Pole, then, might indicate either that he recognized him in person as such, or that he had a vision of him.

<sup>65</sup>Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 9b.



studied directly with the author, were instigating a deeper connection between al-Biṣṭāmī, the invisible hierarchy of saints of which the Pole is the living head, and the Prophet.

Al-Biṣṭāmī seemingly gives priority to mentioning his readings of al-Kūmī's works in order to emphasize his closeness to the shaykh. That accomplished, the account then moves back in time to Cairo in 807/1404–5 and two readings he undertook there with the shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Jamā'ah (d. 819/1416–17). One is a work by an author named Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Nadrūmī (d. 807/1404–5).<sup>66</sup> The other is al-Būnī's collection of astrologically-timed *du'a's* for accomplishing a variety of material and spiritual ends, *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah fī awrād al-rabbānīyah*:

When I was in Cairo (may God Most High protect it from His overpowering punishment) in the year 807 I read, in the presence of the shaykh the imam Abū 'Abd Allāh 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Jamā'ah al-Kinānī al-Shāfi'ī al-Dimashqī (may God have mercy on him), the book *Qabs al-anwār wa-jāmi' al-asrār*. He read it in the presence of its author the shaykh the knower of God Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Nadrūmī. I also read, in the presence of the shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn ibn Jamā'ah, the book *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah fī al-awrād al-rabbānīyah* and others like that of the wondrous sciences and strange subtleties.<sup>67</sup>

The identity of the shaykh who presided over the readings is noteworthy. 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Jamā'ah (d. 819/1416–17) was a scion of the Ibn Jamā'ah scholarly dynasty, and his immediate forebears had served for three generations in some of the highest civilian offices of Mamluk Cairo and Jerusalem, and also were known for their devotion to Sufism. 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad's great-grandfather, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 733/1333), served as the Shafi'ī grand qadi of Cairo and *shaykh al-shuyūkh* of the Sufi associations on and off between 690/1291 and 727/1327, and his grandfather, 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 767/1366), and paternal uncle, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (d. 790/1388), had similarly illustrious careers.<sup>68</sup> He was also an important teacher of the noted historian Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852/1449). Although the Ibn Jamā'ah family's power in Cairo waned during 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad's lifetime, the Syrian branch of the family maintained a high standing in Damascus and Jerusalem well into the Ottoman period under

<sup>66</sup>On whom see Ḥājji Khalīfah, *Kashf al-zunūn 'an asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn*, ed. Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn Yāltaqāyā and Rif'at Bilga (Istanbul, 1941–43), no. 1315.

<sup>67</sup>Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 9b.

<sup>68</sup>Kamal Salibi, "The Banū Jamā'a: A Dynasty of Shāfi'ite Jurists in the Mamlūk Period," *Studia Islamica* 9 (1958): 97–103.





the *nisbah* al-Nābulusī. ‘Abd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), one of the great interpreters of both Ibn al-‘Arabī and the mystic poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ, was in fact a distant relation of ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad.<sup>69</sup> Notably, as Knysh has documented, Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘ah once issued an extremely harsh condemnation of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s esotericist masterpiece *Fuṣūs al-ḥikam*, denying the author’s claim that the text was divinely inspired, declaring that Iblīs was its true source, and “advis[ing] the ruler that all copies of the *Fusus* and other writings containing similar statements be destroyed in order to protect the community from a great temptation.”<sup>70</sup> The contrasting attitudes of the two Ibn Jamā‘ahs—over the space of a few generations—is credible evidence of a shift during that time toward the wider acceptance of al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings.

Lest it be assumed that al-Biṣṭāmī was only receiving knowledge and texts during this period, it is important to note that he was also composing and transmitting new works on lettrism, often at the behest of various military and scholarly elites, as is recorded in *Durrat tāj al-rasā’il*. In Cairo in 805/1402–3, for example, he composed what he refers to as “a book on the occult properties of a 100 by 100 square”—which is to say a mathematical magic square with 100 rows and 100 columns—for an *atabeg* by the name of Yashbak.<sup>71</sup> And at the behest of various shaykhs and qadis he presides over a number of readings of the two works that ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘ah licensed him to transmit, al-Būnī’s *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* and al-Nadrūmī’s *Qabs al-anwār wa-jāmi‘ al-asrār*.<sup>72</sup> This role as a lettrist authority making the rounds of various elite households—an authority he constantly supplemented by gaining ever more credentials through participating in further readings—is key to understanding al-Biṣṭāmī’s professional career.

When al-Biṣṭāmī’s account in *Shams al-āfāq* proceeds to 808/1405–6, we find him, presumably still in Cairo, reading four works with the shaykh Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ya‘īsh ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yūsuf ibn Sammāk al-Umawī al-Andalusī, *Kayfīyat al-ittifāq fī tarkīb al-awfāq*, *Lawāmi‘ al-ta‘rīf fī matālī‘ al-taṣrīf*, *Al-Mawahhib al-rabbānīyah fī asrār al-rūḥānīyah*, and *Al-Istinṭāqāt*; he also notes having heard *Kayfīyat al-ittifāq* with Ya‘īsh’s disciple Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad al-Miṣrī. Again marking the transition between oral/aural and book-transmission, he traces the *isnād* from Ya‘īsh back through a classic Iraqī Sufī line that includes such figures as ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī, Junayd, Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and of course the Prophet. Though the Andalusī Ya‘īsh serves as al-Biṣṭāmī’s

<sup>69</sup>Elizabeth Sirriyeh, “Whatever Happened to the Banū Jamā‘a? The Tail of a Scholarly Family in Ottoman Syria,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (2001): 55–64.

<sup>70</sup>Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 123–24.

<sup>71</sup>Al-Biṣṭāmī, “*Durrat tāj al-rasā’il wa-ghurraṭ minhāj al-wasā’il*,” Süleymaniye MS Nuruosmaniye 4905, fol. 28a.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 25a, for example.



point of entry to this chain, its function in terms of al-Biṣṭāmī's attempts to position himself as an inheritor of Sufi knowledge may be to establish his bona fides with regard to the "sober," shari'ah-minded Sufi tradition associated with figures such as Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) and al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910). This tradition had long been dominant in Egyptian Sufism, and by the ninth/fifteenth century existed in an sometimes-uneasy relationship with the western strain of Sufism represented by figures such as Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Shādhilī, with which lettrism was most strongly associated.

Al-Biṣṭāmī goes on to list a welter of further books and authorities with whom he interacted in 808/1405–6, giving the impression of ceaseless learning and initiatic activity.<sup>73</sup> He seems to claim to have taken a number of books from Tāj al-Dīn Ibn al-Durayhim: *Ghāyat al-mughnim fī al-ism al-a'zam*, *Kanz al-durar fī ḥurūf awā'il al-suwar*, *Sayr al-ṣarf fī sirr al-ḥarf*, and *Tā' al-taṣrīf wa-ḥallat al-ta'rīf*. This assertion is problematic, however, given that Ibn al-Durayhim—who indeed is remembered as a master of lettrism, among other topics—is commonly recorded to have died in 762/1361,<sup>74</sup> such that perhaps he means to say that he took these books from one of Ibn al-Durayhim's students. With one Sharaf al-Dīn al-Baghdādī he reads three books by Sharaf al-Dīn's teacher Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Minkalī al-'Alamī, *Kashf al-bayān fī ma'rifat ḥawādith al-zamān*, *Al-Bāqiyāt al-ṣāliḥāt fī burūz al-ummahāt*, and *Al-Sirr al-maṣūn wa-'ilm al-maknūn*. He furthermore reads the aforementioned work written for Barqūq by Abū Muḥammad Makhlūf ibn 'Alī ibn Maymūn al-Ḥintawī, *Al-Lawāmi' al-burūq fī salṭanat al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq*, which he reads with its author. Finally, on the authority of the shaykh Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid al-Dimashqī, he reads two works by al-Dimashqī's teacher Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥanafī al-Qudsī, *Kashf al-ishārāt al-ṣūfiyah wa-nashr al-bishārāt al-ismiyah al-muḥammadīyah* and *Al-Manḥ al-wahhābiyah al-rabbāniyah fī al-milḥ al-ismiyah al-muḥammadīyah*.

At this juncture, al-Biṣṭāmī again complicates his chronology by returning to 807/1404–5. Here the jump in time has a dual narrative purpose. On the one hand, the story he unfolds is clearly the dramatic culmination of the long-term initiatic process he is describing throughout this discourse. On the other, the initial and concluding events in this final story are themselves separated in time, with the climax occurring at the end of 826/1423. The events to hand are a series of initiatic book-transmission experiences, three of which occur in the *mundus imaginalis* of dreams, and one in the world of flesh. Notably, all four occur in Cairo, that city of books and initiations.

<sup>73</sup>Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 10a–b.

<sup>74</sup>For example, the *tarjamah* in Khayr al-Dīn Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām: Qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-al-nisā' min al-'arab wa-al-musta'ribīn wa-al-mustashriqīn* (Beirut, 1980), 5:6.



In the first event, in 807/1404–5, al-Biṣṭāmī dreams that he attends a reading of al-Shādhilī’s great supererogatory liturgy, *Ḥizb al-baḥr*, which has long been credited with having various powers of healing and benediction. The reading is presided over by the shaykh Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Kūrānī (d. 768/1367)—a Sufi of Kurdish origin who was an important figure in Egyptian Sufism many decades before al-Biṣṭāmī arrived<sup>75</sup>—and occurs at a site in dream-Cairo parallel to the waking city, the *miḥrāb* at Qanāṭir al-Sabā‘. When he awakes al-Biṣṭāmī finds he has memorized the poem and “witnessed the power of its secrets.” From that point forward his soul longs to audition the poem in a line of transmission back to al-Shādhilī. It seems that he remains nineteen years in this state of longing, until “the hand of divine wisdom and eternal gnosis” guides him to a meeting with one Tāj al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad al-Miṣrī al-Shādhilī. Al-Biṣṭāmī broaches the subject of auditioning the *Ḥizb* with this master, and the shaykh produces for him a codex bearing a certificate in the hand of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī (who, al-Biṣṭāmī has told us elsewhere in the book, took the science of letters from al-Būnī), recording his having read/heard the work with al-Shādhilī. He “hears” the work from that codex and thus joins the chain of transmission:

In the year 807 when I was in Cairo I saw in a dream the shaykh of the wayfarers and imam of the ascetics, the scholar, the learned one Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Kūrānī. He was sitting in the prayer niche in Qanāṭir al-Sabā‘ and surrounding him was a group and they were reading *Ḥizb al-baḥr* by the shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. I awoke from the dream and verily I had memorized it [the *Ḥizb*] and verily I had witnessed the beneficent powers of its secrets, the wonder of wonders... For a very long time my soul was in anticipation of acquiring it by means of audition [through a line of transmission leading back] to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, until the hand of divine wisdom and eternal gnosis guided me to a meeting with the shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad al-Miṣrī al-Shādhilī. I asked him about the Shādhilī chain [*silsilah*], and about *Ḥizb al-baḥr* and other such things, and he showed me a book upon which was the signature [i.e., on an audition certificate] of the shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mursī in Cairo [who had auditioned the work] in the presence of the shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. I was joined to the chain with it [the book, or with him, Ibrāhīm] through audition, and he licensed me with a comprehensive license

<sup>75</sup>On whom see Ahmed El Shamsy, “Returning to God through His Names: A Fourteenth-Century Sufi Treatise,” in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, ed. William Granara et al. (Berlin, 2016), 204–28.



for everything that he could transmit. To God belongs grace and charity.<sup>76</sup>

Soon thereafter, in the final month of 826/1423, he has a dream in which he sees the Prophet sitting in a house in dream-Cairo. He asks the Prophet to speak to him about *Ḥizb al-baḥr*. The Prophet points to the letter *bāʾ*, and in that moment al-Biṣṭāmī comprehends the Mystery of union with divine, and loses himself in the beauty and luminosity of the Prophet's face. He then separates from the Prophet, and—still in the dream—encounters “one of the Shādhilī shaykhs,” and informs the shaykh that the Prophet has given him permission to speak on behalf of the Shādhilīs. The shaykh replies: “I shall write for you a proclamation [*manshūr*],” which is to say a certificate, a license to transmit. Only then does al-Biṣṭāmī awake, in flesh and stone Cairo, and in that moment realizes he has taken complete knowledge of the science of letters and names, a knowledge he explains in an ecstatic series of paired rhymes, culminating in the assertion that his knowledge of the science was transmitted on the authority of the Prophet, “he who unveiled the structure of the letters prior to the coming into being of the cosmic conditions of existence”:

In the wake of my auditioning of that mighty *ḥizb* I saw the Messenger of God (God's blessings and peace be upon him). It was in Cairo in the last part of Dhū al-Ḥijjah of 826. He was seated prominently in a house, and when I saw him I said, “O Messenger of God, speak of the discourse [*lisān*] of the Shādhilīs [i.e., *Ḥizb al-baḥr*].” He pointed to [the letter] *bāʾ* emphatically, and it was as eloquent an explanation as if he had spoken. I understood that he alluded to *bāʾ* as the union of the mystery of being and the mystery of the *logos*. And my breast opened and my heart expanded from the sublime beauty of his delicate brow and the luminosity of his splendid complexion that is the *qiblah* of all desires and the *kaʿbah* of all fervent prayers. When I parted from him (God's blessings and peace be upon him) I saw one of the Shādhilī shaykhs and I said to him, “Verily the Prophet (God's blessings and peace be upon him) has given me leave to speak on behalf of the Shādhilīs [*adhana lī bi-al-kalām ʿalā lisān al-Shādhilīyah*].” And he said to me, “I shall write for you a proclamation.” I awoke from the sleep blameless. God had made of it [the dream] a genuine *taʾwīl* and a truthful discourse. And those sublime sciences and beautiful mysteries—verily I took [the knowledge of] their lettrist subtleties, numerical cryptograms, combinatory benefits, isolated and combinatory

<sup>76</sup>Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 10b.





workings [i.e., working with single letters or conjoined ones], and other such things from among the advantageous uses and greater goals. [All this] by means of the letters of their speech, the clues to their puzzles and the signposts to their treasures, and the chapters of their verses and the forms of their outermost limits. [All this] on the authority of the shaykh of shaykhs, the basis of the firmly-rooted foundations (*al-thābit li-qawā'id al-rusūkh*), He who unveiled the structure of the letters prior to the coming into being of the cosmic conditions of existence (*wujūd kawnīyat al-ẓurūf*).<sup>77</sup>

Thus al-Biṣṭāmī, through his readings in authorized lines of transmission of books by al-Kūmī, al-Būnī, and the other shaykhs and gnostics, achieves a beatific vision of the beauty of the Prophet's face, and with it comes the complete knowledge of lettrism, the basis of his authority to write *Shams al-āfāq*.

The spiritual experiences al-Biṣṭāmī claims in his account of his initiation into lettrism—encounters with discarnate Sufi shaykhs of centuries past, a beatific vision of the Prophet, a dramatic experience of *kashf*—are noteworthy, but are hardly unprecedented in Sufi thought. What is extraordinary, however, is al-Biṣṭāmī's intertwining of these tropes with the rituals of book-transmission and their accompanying bureaucracy of licenses to transmit texts—an admixture that manifests most fully in his dreaming and waking readings of *Ḥizb al-baḥr*, and in the figure of the dream-shaykh who promises to write a license declaring al-Biṣṭāmī's authority to represent the knowledge of the Shādhilīyah following his climactic encounter with the Prophet.

## Conclusion

In the phenomenology of revealed religions, there are inevitable eschatological implications to the disclosure of sacred knowledge that formerly had been held back from all but the most elect among the believers. In the *Zohar* and the culture of readers that surrounded it, for example, the secret Kabbalistic teachings of the great sages were represented as having been passed down covertly for a thousand years, such that, as Rachel Elior notes, “their revelation in the end of the thirteenth century and their dissemination in the following period signified the emergence of the messianic era.”<sup>78</sup> Al-Biṣṭāmī likewise invokes the impending end of time as licensing his encyclopedic project of synthesizing and making available teachings on the science of letters and names, a tradition represented as having been passed down in secret from the prophets and thence through lines

<sup>77</sup>Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 10b–11a.

<sup>78</sup>Rachel Elior, “Not All Is in the Hands of Heaven: Eschatology and Kabbalah,” in *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Ravenlow (Sheffield, 1997), 49–61.



of Sufi adepts. That this redounded to his benefit as someone who made a career of advising on lettrism and related topics to Mamluk and Ottoman elites speaks only to his divine election to the role of revelator, or so al-Biṣṭāmī would have us think. In a period replete with *mahdīs*, and with the *hijrī* millennium an impending—if not quite near—event, this was his small but significant part in the closing acts of the cosmic drama.

I would argue that al-Biṣṭāmī’s efforts to authorize his synthesis and disclosure of lettrism are reflective not only of the rising millenarian sentiments of his time, but also of shifts taking place over the course of the Mamluk period in Muslim learning and Arabic-Islamic manuscript culture. The Arabic book, which throughout the earlier medieval period had been something of a material epiphenomenon of the teacher-student/master-disciple relationship, seems by the latter part of the Mamluk period to have gained a new integrity as a standalone source of knowledge. The great encyclopedias of the age, Mamluk-era copies of which typically were arranged for ease of use through nested arrays of headings and subheadings and by new habits of *mise-en-page* that allowed the eye to more quickly navigate the page, facilitated quick access to vast volumes of information for a reading public of busy scholar-bureaucrats.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, the ever increasing production of digests, commentaries, and anthological codices devoted to particular mystical, theological, and philosophic topics and viewpoints helped break the spell of the authoritative old codex filled with transmission certificates.

One area where this shift in the status of the book is most evident is with regard to the use of “audition” (*samāʿ*) and related practices of formal text-transmission. While such practices had their roots in early methods of hadith transmission, their use peaked in popularity between the sixth/twelfth and eighth/fourteenth centuries—particularly in the Bilād al-Shām and Egypt, where audition sessions became popular events attended not just by scholars, but by literate elites, craftspeople, and others wishing to extract some *barakah* from being read into lines of transmission linked to great scholars and mystics, and of course to the Prophet himself.<sup>80</sup> The ninth/fifteenth century, however, seems to have witnessed a decline in their use. This was due in part, perhaps, to the rise in popular-

<sup>79</sup>Maaïke Van Berkel, “The Attitude towards Knowledge in Mamlūk Egypt: Organisation and Structure of the *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā* by Al-Qalqashandī (1355–1418),” in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1–4 July 1996*, ed. Peter Binkley (Leiden, 1997), 159–68.

<sup>80</sup>On the rise and decline of audition practices, see *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-Dimashqīyah: al-muntakhabah min sanat 550 ilā 750 H/1155 M ilā 1349 M*, ed. Stefan Leder, Yāsīn al-Sawwās, and Maʾmūn al-Ṣāgharjī (Damascus, 1996); Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2012), 60–70; Noah Gardiner, “Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture: Aḥmad Al-Būnī and His Readers through the Mamlūk Period” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2014), 125–31.



ity of the issuing of various types of *ijāzah* that relaxed the necessity for hearing books in their entirety, and that could license a student or disciple to teach whole corpora of their masters and masters' masters at the tic of a pen—a loosening of the more rigorous forms of transmission through which al-Biṣṭāmī claims to have taken the science of letters and names from his earthly teachers.<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, his assent to this more relaxed model of knowledge transmission with regard to his own works is evidenced by the *ijāzah* he wrote on the final leaf of Süleymaniye MS Hekimoğlu 533, in Shawwāl 837/1434, for one Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī al-Shāfi'ī al-Tirmidhī, granting him a license not only for *Shams al-āfāq*, which he had read in al-Biṣṭāmī's presence, but for "all of my works and what is mine through knowledge and transmission (*mālī min dirāyah wa-riwāyah*), in accordance with the usual rules of the scholars (*'alā al-shurūṭ al-ma'lūfah bayn al-ʿulamā'*)," which is to say a license for the entirety of his corpus.<sup>82</sup>

As a key text in al-Biṣṭāmī's larger project, *Shams al-āfāq* helps marks a crucial point in the history of lettrism, and indeed of Islamic occultism more broadly, wherein a science that had formerly been the reserve of small and discreet communities of practitioners was being mainstreamed, i.e., being made available to a much wider audience of literate and devout readers, as well as Turkish military-political elites. His lettrism might thus best be characterized as "post-esotericist" in the sense that its secret history—which is to say its history of having long been secret—was what rendered its exposure so significant. The encyclopedic nature of *Shams al-āfāq* was an indispensable element of this transition, a rendering limpid and accessible in book-form of what previously had been obscure, hidden, and scattered. As scholars such as Fleischer, Binbaş, and Melvin-Koushki have begun to show, lettrism and other of the occult sciences would go on to be essential to the "sacral power"<sup>83</sup> many early modern rulers sought to claim in constituting their authority to rule in a new, apocalyptic age. More broadly, they were key elements of what Shahab Ahmed describes as the "Sufi-philosophical amalgam" that characterized much early modern Islamic thought,<sup>84</sup> an emerging conviction of the accessibility of the powers of the visible and invisible worlds to human knowledge and agency.

<sup>81</sup>On various types of *ijāzah* see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1981), 140–52; Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, 1992), 31–33. The gradual (and by no means total) replacement of the audition certificate (sometimes called *ijāzat al-samā'*) with these broader, looser forms of *ijāzah* is an area of inquiry that remains to be explored in detail.

<sup>82</sup>Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 151b.

<sup>83</sup>Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Astrology, Lettrism, Geomancy: The Occult-Scientific Methods of Post-Mongol Islamicate Imperialism," *The Medieval History Journal* 19, no. 1 (2016): 142–50.

<sup>84</sup>Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, 2016), 31 and passim.



### Appendix: Al-Biṣṭāmī's Occult Booklist in *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*

The following is the list of 238 occult works that al-Biṣṭāmī claims to have read during his studies in Egypt and the Shām. The versions of the list given in the two recensions of *Shams al-āfāq* vary in length, with only the first 128 titles being given in the earlier recension, as represented by Süleymaniye MS Hekimoğlu 533, and the last 100 titles being added in Chester Beatty MS 5076, for a total of 238. Some variations in the titles themselves also occur between the two versions of the list, probably arising from the errors of copyists. As such, for the first 138 titles preference has been given to the spellings in Hekimoğlu 533—an authorial holograph—and variants from CB 5076 have been included in parentheses. The final 100 titles are given as they appear in CB 5076. Footnotes address instances where the author of a work is known to the present author or indicated in the title. It should be noted that several of these works are mentioned in Ḥājji Khalīfah's *Kashf al-ẓunūn*; however, given the dearth of additional information in these listings, it is quite likely that Ḥājji Khalīfah simply copied the titles from *Shams al-āfāq*.<sup>85</sup> *Nota bene* that another lengthy list of works on occult subjects appears at fol. 14b–17b of Süleymaniye MS Nuruosmaniye 4905, the unicum MS of al-Biṣṭāmī's "Durrat tāj al-rasā'il wa-ghurraṭ minhāj al-wasā'il." Many of the titles overlap, but the list in "Durrat tāj al-rasā'il" differs to the degree that it will require a separate study.

1. Shams maṭālī' al-qulūb wa-badr ṭawālī' al-ghuyūb
2. Nūr anwār al-qulūb wa-asrār al-ghurūb (al-ghuyūb)
3. Ka'bat al-asrār wa-'Arafāt al-anwār
4. Al-Sirr al-khafī wa-al-jawhar al-'alī
5. Sajanjāl al-arwāḥ wa-nuqūsh al-alwāḥ
6. Al-Washy al-maṣūn wa-al-lu'lu' al-maknūn fī ma'rifat 'ilm al-khaṭṭ alladhī bayn al-kāf wa-al-nūn
7. Al-Sirr al-khafī fī 'ilm al-ātá (al-'ilm al-ālī)
8. Qāf al-anwār wa-jīm al-asrār
9. Ṭilsam al-ashbāḥ fī kanz al-arwāḥ
10. Laṭā'if al-asmā' fī ishārāt al-musammá
11. Sitr al-asrār wa-nūr al-anwār (Sin al-asrār wa-nūn al-anwār)
12. Al-Sirr al-bāhir fī ramz al-fākhir (Al-Sirr al-fākhir fī ramz al-bāhir)
13. Ḥall al-rumūz fī fath al-kunūz
14. Al-Sirr al-makhzūn fī al-'ilm al-maknūn
15. Laṭā'if al-āyāt wa-nuqūsh al-bayyināt
16. Nayl al-ishrāq fī 'ilm al-awfāq

<sup>85</sup>Confusingly, however, he mistakenly notes for many of them that they are mentioned by al-Būnī, by which he almost certainly means al-Biṣṭāmī!



17. Kanz al-alwāḥ fī sirr al-afrāḥ
18. Laṭā'if al-khafīyah fī al-asrār al-Īsawīyah
19. Ḥadā'iq al-asmā' fī ḥaqā'iq al-musammá
20. Al-Durr al-manẓūm fī al-sirr al-maktūm
21. Asrār al-adwār wa-tashkīl al-anwār
22. Tanzīl al-arwāḥ fī qawālib al-ashbāḥ
23. Sirr al-asrār wa-baṣā'ir al-anwār
24. Yā' (Tā') al-taṣrīf wa-hullat al-ta'rīf
25. Sirr al-jamāl fī anwār al-jalāl
26. Al-Nasamāt al-fā'iḥah fī asrār al-Fātiḥah
27. Fakk al-rumūz al-suryānīyah fī fatḥ al-kunūz al-furqānīyah
28. Al-Sa'd al-akbar fī al-sirr al-anwar
29. Al-Sirr al-rabbānī fī 'ālam al-jismānī
30. Tuḥfat al-abrār fī da'awāt al-layl wa-al-nahār
31. Al-Sirr al-asnā fī asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā
32. Ka'bat al-jamāl wa-'Arafāt al-kamāl
33. Bahjat al-asrār fī sharḥ lum'at al-anwār
34. Al-Adwiyah al-shāfīyah wa-al-ad'iyah al-kāfīyah
35. Barqat al-anwār wa-lum'at al-asrār
36. Kanz al-asrār wa-dhakhā'ir al-abrār
37. Al-'Ilm al-akbar wa-al-sirr al-afkhar
38. Rawḍat al-asrār wa-nuzhat al-abṣār
39. Qabs al-anwār wa-jāmi' al-asrār
40. Al-'Iqd al-manẓūm wa-al-sirr al-maktūm (second title-element missing in CB 5076)
41. Al-Bāqiyāt al-ṣāliḥāt fī burūz al-ummahāt
42. Salāsīl al-anwār fī natā'ij al-afkār (al-adhkār)
43. Al-Kibrīt al-aḥmar wa-al-tiryāq al-akbar
44. Al-Laṭā'if al-abjadiyah fī asrār al-aḥmadiyah
45. Al-Kanz al-bāhir fī sharḥ ḥurūf al-Malik al-Zāhir<sup>86</sup>
46. Nūn (Nūr) anwār al-ma'arif wa-sīn (sanān) asrār al-'awārif
47. Qalam al-asrār wa-lawḥ al-anwār
48. Sirr (Sayr) al-ṣarf fī sirr al-ḥarf
49. Washy al-asmā' wa-lu'lu' al-musammá
50. Al-Ism al-a'zam wa-al-nūr al-aqwam
51. Ramz al-ḥaqā'iq al-'ibrānīyah wa-kanz al-ma'arif al-suryānīyah

<sup>86</sup>By Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī; see p. 17 supra.





52. Qabs al-iqtidā' ilá wafq al-sa'ādah wa-najm al-ihtidā' ilá sharaf al-siyādah<sup>87</sup>
53. Kayfiyat al-ittifāq fi tarkīb al-awfāq
54. Ḥall al-rumūz fi fath al-kunūz
55. Sawāti' al-anwār fi lawāmi' al-asrār
56. Manba' al-farā'id (al-fawā'id) wa-'uyūn al-fawā'id (al-farā'id)
57. Al-Sirr al-abhar fi al-qamar al-anwar (al-azhar)
58. Ṣuwar al-arwāḥ (al-riyāḥ) al-nūrāniyah fi suwar al-ashbāḥ al-zulmāniyah
59. Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fi asrār al-riyādāt<sup>88</sup>
60. Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn<sup>89</sup>
61. Kanz al-qāṣidīn ilá asrār al-sa'ādah wa-ramz al-wāṣilīn ilá anwār al-siyādah
62. Fath al-kunūz al-ḥarfīyah wa-fakk al-rumūz al-'adadiyah
63. Laṭā'if al-wafqīyah al-nūrāniyah wa-al-ma'ārif al-'adadiyah al-rūḥāniyah
64. Al-Lum'ah al-nūrāniyah fi awrād al-rabbāniyah<sup>90</sup>
65. Al-Barqah al-rabbāniyah fi al-asrār al-furqāniyah
66. Mashriq al-anwār fi maghrib al-asrār
67. Fawātiḥ al-jamāl wa-rawā'iḥ al-kamāl
68. Miftāḥ al-kunūz fi ḥall al-rumūz
69. Majma' al-aqlām al-rasmīyah wa-manba' al-asrār al-ḥikmiyah
70. Mawāhib al-Raḥmān wa-'aṭāyā al-Mannān
71. Washy al-jamāl wa-lu'lu' al-kamāl
72. Rawḍ al-ma'ārif wa-riyāḍ al-laṭā'if
73. Shams al-sa'ādah wa-qamar al-siyādah
74. Ghāyat al-magham fi al-ism al-a'zam
75. Kanz al-anwār wa-ramz al-asrār
76. Rawḍ al-asrār al-'adadiyah wa-hawḍ al-anwār al-ḥarfīyah
77. Lawāmi' al-burūq fi salṭanat al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq<sup>91</sup>
78. 'Arūs al-āfāq fi 'ilm al-awfāq
79. Al-Nūr al-lāmi' wa-al-sirr al-jāmi'
80. Al-Hay'ah al-jāmi'ah wa-al-barqah al-lāmi'ah
81. Shams al-asrār al-rabbāniyah wa-qamar al-anwār al-'irfāniyah

<sup>87</sup> A work commonly, though falsely, attributed to Aḥmad al-Būnī. See Gardiner, "Esotericism in a manuscript culture," 26; Jean-Charles Coulon, "La magie islamique et le «corpus bunianum» au Moyen Âge" (Ph.D. diss., Paris IV - Sorbonne, 2013), 1:500ff.

<sup>88</sup> By Aḥmad al-Būnī. See, for example, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2160/2.

<sup>89</sup> By Aḥmad al-Būnī. See, for example, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2160/1.

<sup>90</sup> By Aḥmad al-Būnī. See, for example, Chester Beatty MS Ar. 3168/5.

<sup>91</sup> By Abī Muḥammad Makhlūf ibn 'Alī ibn Maymūn al-Ḥintawī al-Jannātī al-Mālikī. See pp. 16–17 supra.



82. Mishkāt al-asrār wa-misbāh al-anwār
83. Sirr al-uns wa-al-jamāl wa-nūr al-baṣṭ wa-al-kamāl
84. Falak al-saʿādah wa-quṭb al-siyādah
85. Al-Ramz al-aʿzam wa-al-kanz al-muṭalsam
86. Kashf al-sirr al-maṣūn (al-maknūn) fī waṣf al-nūr al-makhzūn
87. Narjis al-asmāʾ wa-yāsmīn al-musammá
88. Shawāriq al-anwār wa-bawāriq al-asrār
89. Taysir al-maṭālib wa-sakhīr(?) al-maʿārib
90. Fakhr al-asmāʾ wa-ṣubḥ al-musammá
91. Al-Durr al-munazzam fī sharḥ al-ism al-aʿzam<sup>92</sup>
92. ʿUmdat al-ishrāq fī ʿilm al-awfāq
93. Al-Ṭilsam al-maṣūn wa-al-luʾluʾ al-makhzūn
94. Al-Laṭāʾif al-ʿulwīyah fī al-asrār al-ʿĪsawīyah
95. Miftāḥ al-raqq al-manshūr wa-misbāh al-bayt al-maʿmūr
96. Badr riyāḍ al-maʿārif wa-shams samāʾ al-laṭāʾif
97. Al-Nafhah al-qudsīyah wa-al-fayhah al-miskīyah
98. Shams ruqūm al-dawāʾir wa-qamar rusūm al-baṣāʾir
99. Mustawjibat al-maḥāmid fī sharḥ khātim Abī Ḥāmid
100. Al-Īmāʾ ilá ʿilm al-asmāʾ<sup>93</sup>
101. Kanz al-durar fī ḥurūf awāʾil al-suwar
102. Lawāmiʿ al-taʿrīf fī maṭāliʿ al-taṣrīf
103. Al-Kashf al-bayān fī maʿrifat ḥawādith al-zamān
104. Risālat al-khafāʾ fimā zahara wa-baṭana min al-khulafāʾ
105. Sirr al-jamāl wa-laṭāʾif al-kamāl
106. Al-Lawḥ al-dhahab fī asrār al-ṭalab
107. Sirr al-ṣawn fī ḥawādith al-kawn
108. Al-Ism al-maktūm wa-al-kanz al-makhtūm
109. Lumʿat al-anwār wa-barakat al-aʿmār
110. Al-mabādīʾ wa-al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-ḥurūf al-ʿulwīyāt
111. Al-??? (al-Manḥ) al-wahbīyah al-rabbānīyah fī al-??? (al-milḥ) al-ismīyah  
al-muḥammadīyah al-nūrānīyah
112. Al-Sirr al-amjadī fī al-durr al-aḥmadī
113. Shifāʾ al-ṣudūr wa-al-abadān(?) (wa-al-aydhān) fī manāfiʿ al-Qurʾān
114. Badr riyāḍ al-maʿārif wa-shams ʿiyāḍ (ghiyāḍ) al-ʿawārif
115. Miftāḥ asrār al-ghuyūb wa-misbāh anwār al-qulūb
116. Ḥullat al-kamāl wa-hilyat al-jamāl
117. Izhār al-asrār wa-ibdāʾ al-anwār

<sup>92</sup>Perhaps the work by Ibn Ṭalḥah, on whom see Masad, “The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition.”

<sup>93</sup>By Abū ʿAbd Allāh Kūmī. See, for example, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah MS Taṣawwuf 1954.



118. Shams al-arwāḥ wa-qamar al-ashbāḥ  
 119. Mabḥaj(?) al-jamāl wa-manhaj al-kamāl  
 120. Al-Laṭāʾif al-laṭīfah  
 121. Kanz al-saʿādah al-ʿirfānīyah fi ramz al-siyādah al-rūḥānīyah  
 122. Al-Sirr al-jāmiʿ fi al-durr al-lāmiʿ  
 123. Sirr al-saʿādah fi ʿālam al-ghayb wa-al-shahādah  
 124. Al-Sirr al-khafī al-maknūn wa-al-nūr al-ʿalī al-makhzūn  
 125. Sirr al-jamāl al-bāhir (al-zāhir) wa-durr al-kamāl al-zāhir  
 126. Shams al-jamāl wa-badr al-kamāl  
 127. Al-Sirr (al-ism) al-afkham fi al-ism (al-sirr) al-aʿzam  
 128. Nasīm al-ishārāt al-ṣūfiyah wa-sirr al-ʿibārāt al-kashfiyah  
 (LIST IN HEKIMOĞLU 533 ENDS HERE)  
 129. Al-Ḥadiqah al-sundusīyah wa-al-rawḍah al-narjisīyah  
 130. Al-Laṭāʾif al-khafīyah fi al-asrār al-muḥammadiyah  
 131. Rawḍat al-asrār al-zāhirah wa-dawḥat al-anwār al-bāhirah  
 132. Al-Adwiyah al-shāfiyah al-ṭāhirah wa-al-adʿiyah al-kāfiyah al-zāhirah  
 133. Shams al-asrār wa-ins al-abrār  
 134. ʿIlm [ʿAlam?] al-hudá fi asrār asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusná  
 135. Qalam asrār al-maʿārif wa-lawḥ anwār al-ʿawārif  
 136. ʿAlam al-hudá wa-asrār al-ihtidāʾ fi fahm sulūk maʿná asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusná<sup>94</sup>  
 137. Al-Durr al-munazzam fi al-sirr al-aʿzam  
 138. Kanz al-alwāḥ al-rūḥānīyah wa-sirr al-afrāḥ al-nūrānīyah  
 139. Ḥall rumūz al-asmāʾ wa-fakk kunūz al-musammá  
 140. ʿIlm [ʿAlam?] al-hudá fi sharḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusná  
 141. Al-Taraqī ilá manāzil al-abrār fi kayfiyat al-ʿamal fi al-layl wa-al-nahār  
 142. Washy al-asrār al-jamāliyah wa-naqsh al-āthār al-jalāliyah  
 143. Maʿārif al-qulūb al-nūrānīyah wa-laṭāʾif al-ghuyūb al-rabbānīyah  
 144. Al-asrār al-shāfiyah al-rūḥānīyah wa-al-āthār al-kāfiyah al-nūrānīyah  
 145. Shams al-wiṣāl wa-ghurūs al-jamāl  
 146. Al-Ḥaqāʾiq al-subbuḥīyah wa-al-daqaʾiq al-quddusīyah  
 147. Al-Barqah al-nūrānīyah fi al-asrār al-sulaymānīyah  
 148. Baḥr al-fawāʾid al-ḥarfīyah wa-sirr al-fawāʾid al-adadīyah  
 149. Zayn al-āfāq fi ʿilm al-awfāq  
 150. Bahjat al-āfāq fi ʿilm al-awfāq  
 151. Al-Sirr al-afkhar wa-al-kibrīt al-aḥmar  
 152. Mawāqīt al-baṣāʾir wa-laṭāʾif al-sarāʾir  
 153. Al-Laṭāʾif al-farīdah fi al-maʿārif al-mufīdah  
 154. Al-Kanz al-bāhir fi asrār ḥurūf al-ism al-Zāhir

<sup>94</sup>By Aḥmad al-Būnī. See, for example, Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260/1.



155. Durrat taj al-sa'adah wa-barqat minhaj al-siyadah
156. Izhār al-rumūz wa-ibdā' al-kunūz
157. Sirr al-jalāl
158. Al-Asrār al-khāfiyah wa-al-risālah al-murḍiyah fi sharḥ du'ā' al-Shādhiliyah
159. Sirr al-asrār wa muntahā 'ulūm al-abrār
160. Jāmi' al-laṭā'if fi asrār al-'awārif
161. Lawāmi' al-anwār al-'irfāniyah wa-jawāmi' al-asrār al-rabbāniyah
162. Durrat al-āfāq fi asrār al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq
163. Munyat al-ṭālib li-a'azz al-maṭālib
164. Risālat al-hū<sup>95</sup>
165. Al-Laṭā'if al-rabbāniyah fi sharḥ al-asmā' al-nūrāniyah
166. Fawātiḥ al-asrār al-ilāhiyah wa-lawā'iḥ al-anwār al-rabbāniyah
167. Asās al-'ulūm
168. Kanz al-ma'ānī fi asrār al-mathānī
169. Kashf asrār al-ma'ānī wa-waṣf anwār al-maghānī
170. Shifā' al-qulūb bi-liqā' al-maḥbūb
171. Kanz al-sa'adah fi sharaf al-siyadah
172. Shams al-jamāl
173. Kīmīyā' al-sa'adah al-rabbāniyah wa-sīmīyā' al-rūḥāniyah
174. Laṭā'if al-asmā'
175. 'Ajā'ib al-ittifāq fi gharā'ib al-awfāq
176. Durrat al-ma'ārif fi asrār al-'awārif
177. Ḥadā'iq al-iḥdāq fi 'ilm al-awfāq
178. Al-Mabādī' wa-al-ghāyāt fi asrār al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmā' wa-al-da'awāt
179. Al-Ghāyah al-faṣwī(?) fi asrār al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmā'
180. Al-Maṭlab al-asnā' fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmā'
181. Ghāyat al-adhwāq fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq
182. Al-Sirr al-ismī fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmā'
183. Al-Sirr al-akbar fi al-'ilm al-afkhar
184. Zubdat al-muṣannafāt fi al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt
185. Al-Durr al-naẓīm fi al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm
186. Kitāb al-Malakūt
187. Jawāhir al-asrār fi bawāhir al-anwār
188. Baḥr al-wuqūf fi 'ilm al-awfāq wa-al-ḥurūf
189. Durrat al-asrār li-fakhr al-amṣār
190. Yawāqīt al-asrār fi mawāqīt al-anwār

<sup>95</sup>By Abū 'Abd Allāh Kūmī. See, for example, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Resid efendi 608/3.



191. Al-Tawassulāt al-kitābīyah wa-al-tawajjuhāt al-‘aṭā’iyah<sup>96</sup>
192. Shifā’ al-ma‘ānī bi-laṭā’if al-mathānī
193. Dhawāt al-dawā’ir wa-al-ṣuwar
194. Kitāb al-Lawḥ wa-al-qalam
195. Kitāb al-Ajnās
196. Kitāb Shādhān
197. Kitāb Sirr al-sirr
198. Kitāb al-Jamharah
199. Kitāb al-Muṣḥaf al-khafī
200. Kitāb al-‘Ahd al-kabīr
201. Kitāb Ghāyat al-ḥakīm<sup>97</sup>
202. Kitāb al-Zurqān(al-Zaraqān?)
203. Kitāb Muṣḥaf al-qamar<sup>98</sup>
204. Kitāb Kīnāss(Kanā’is?) al-rūḥānī
205. Kitāb al-Ushūṭās<sup>99</sup>
206. Kitāb al-Hādīṭūsh<sup>100</sup>
207. Kitāb al-Afālīq(?)
208. Kitāb al-Ṭawāliq(?)
209. Kitāb al-Malāṭīs<sup>101</sup>
210. Kitāb Ṭumṭum al-Hindī<sup>102</sup>
211. Kitāb Ṣaṣah(?) al-Hindī
212. Kitāb Iṣṭimākhīs<sup>103</sup>
213. Kitāb Tankalūshā al-Bābilī<sup>104</sup>

<sup>96</sup>A work probably falsely attributed to Aḥmad al-Būnī; see Gardiner, “Esotericism in a manuscript culture,” 39; Coulon, “La magie islamique,” 506ff. See, for example, Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260/2.

<sup>97</sup>The famous *Picatrix*, by Maslamah ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī. See footnote 25 supra.

<sup>98</sup>Manfred Ullmann discusses two works by this name; *Die Natur- und Geheimpwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden, 1972), 380 and 402.

<sup>99</sup>Probably *Kitāb al-Ustuṭās* (also known as *Kitāb al-Ustūwaṭas*); see Burnett, “Arabic, Greek and Latin Works,” 86. As discussed by Burnett, this is part of a complex of pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetic works on astrological magic that includes *Kitāb al-Istimakhīs*, *Kitāb al-Istimṭātīs*, *Kitāb al-Malāṭīs*, *Kitāb al-Hādīṭūsh* (*al-Hādīṭūs*), and perhaps the work attributed to Thābit ibn Qurrah, all of which appear in al-Biṣṭāmī’s list, infra.

<sup>100</sup>See previous footnote.

<sup>101</sup>On which see Burnett, “Arabic, Greek and Latin Works,” 86.

<sup>102</sup>See footnote 25 supra.

<sup>103</sup>See footnote 25 supra.

<sup>104</sup>Tankalūshā = Teukros of Babylon (in Egypt). See Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimpwissenschaften*, 278-79; David King, *A Survey of the Scientific Manuscripts in the Egyptian National Library* (Winona Lake, 1986), Author 23A and Plate LXXVIIa.





214. Kitāb al-Qamar li-Baṭlīmūs<sup>105</sup>  
 215. Kitāb Tafsīr al-rūḥānīyah li-Buqrāṭīs<sup>106</sup>  
 216. Kitāb Kazkah(?) al-Hindī  
 217. Kitāb Arsmīdis<sup>107</sup>  
 218. Kitāb Wazdāsht(?) al-Fārisī  
 219. Kitāb Balīnās<sup>108</sup>  
 220. Kitāb Sam‘ūn(?)  
 221. Kitāb Thābit ibn Qurrah al-Ḥarrānī<sup>109</sup>  
 222. Kitāb Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq al-‘Ibādī<sup>110</sup>  
 223. Kitāb Sharāshim al-Hindī<sup>111</sup>  
 224. Kitāb al-Iṣṭimāṭīs<sup>112</sup>  
 225. Kitāb al-Sirr al-khafī li-Qālīs(?)<sup>113</sup>  
 226. Kitāb Ḥayāt al-nufūs  
 227. Kitāb al-Idhn  
 228. Kitāb Kharqīl<sup>114</sup>  
 229. Kitāb Khafīyat al-Aflāṭūn<sup>115</sup>  
 230. Kitāb Khafīyat Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq<sup>116</sup>  
 231. Khafīyat Hirmis<sup>117</sup>  
 232. Sifr Ādam  
 233. Sifr Shīt<sup>118</sup>  
 234. Sifr Idrīs

<sup>105</sup>Baṭlīmūs = Ptolemy.

<sup>106</sup>Buqrāṭīs = Hippocrates.

<sup>107</sup>Arsmīdis (usually Arshmīdis) = Archimedes.

<sup>108</sup>Balīnās = Pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana. This may refer to *Kitāb Sirr al-khāliqah wa-ṣan‘at al-ṭabī‘ah*.

<sup>109</sup>Thābit ibn Qurrah.

<sup>110</sup>Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq.

<sup>111</sup>Almost certainly the work more commonly known as *Kitāb Sharāsīm al-Hindīyah*, an edition of which is currently under preparation by Jean-Charles Coulon of Institut de Recherche et d’Histoire des Textes, Paris.

<sup>112</sup>On which see footnote 25 supra.

<sup>113</sup>Qālīs should perhaps be Wālīs, i.e., the astrologer Vettius Valens, on whom see Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 281ff.

<sup>114</sup>Kharqīl = Dhū al-Kifl, i.e., Ezekiel.

<sup>115</sup>Aflāṭūn = Plato. This may be *Kitāb Nawāmīs Aflāṭūn/Liber Vaccae*, on which see Liana Saif, “The Cows and the Bees: Arabic Sources and Parallels for Pseudo-Plato’s *Liber Vaccae* (*Kitāb Al-Nawāmīs*),” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 79 (2016): 1–47.

<sup>116</sup>Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq.

<sup>117</sup>Hirmis = Hermes.

<sup>118</sup>Shīt = Biblical Seth.



- 235. Sifr Nūḥ
- 236. Sifr Ibrāhīm
- 237. Sifr Irmiyā<sup>119</sup>
- 238. Sifr Dhī Qarnayn

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<sup>119</sup>Irmiyā = the prophet Jeremiah.

