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THEURGY

IN THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC WORLD

CONCEPTIONS OF COSMOLOGY IN AL-BUNI'S
DOCTRINE OF THE DIVINE NAMES

John D. Martin III

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The American University in Cairo

2011

For my grandmother, JoAnn.

Acknowledgments

There are a few people without whose suggestions, interventions and other efforts this thesis would never have come to fruition.

First, I wish to thank my colleagues and compatriots Jeffery Wardwell, Paul Anderson and Amanda Propst, who listened enthusiastically and at great length (or at least pretended convincingly) while I talked my way through the more problematic aspects of this project. They are truly dear and genuine friends. I am further thankful to all my friends in Cairo and abroad who listened while I digested aloud some of the minutiae being synthesized here. They are too numerous to list, but I appreciate their patience.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Terri Peszle for her efforts in the final proofreading and editing of this thesis.

I would like to thank least a few individuals whose suggestions set off a chain of events which ended in the writing of this thesis, namely: Stacey Pollard, who taught me the difference between talent and expertise and made me feel comfortable being squarely situated in the humanities; Lennart Sundelin, who gave me the seminar paper assignment which led directly to my interest in the topic at hand; and Mona Mikhail, for introducing me to the advisor of this project and for whose advice I will always be grateful.

This would have been a very different project indeed if not for a research support grant from the American University in Cairo and for those members of the Arab and Islamic Civilizations department who saw fit to recommend me for support. The grant allowed me to travel to Istanbul to conduct research in the Süleymaniye Library on several occasions which resulted in the second chapter and appendix contained herein. I am most grateful for the help of the staff of the Süleymaniye Library, particularly Amir Bey, for

making me feel very much at home as a researcher and providing me with a great deal of digital copies of manuscripts.

I wish to thank my readers Nadya Chishty Mujahid and Amina Elbendary for taking the time to read and critique this work. Their efforts, commentary and suggestions are endlessly appreciated. It is my hope that I did them justice in my final revision.

Finally, I cannot muster sufficient gratitude for my advisor, Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad. Without his unfaltering guidance as a mentor, the writing of this thesis would not only have been impossible, but I would also be a different person today. His encouragement and enthusiasm allowed me to grow as a scholar in ways that I had not considered plausible. I am eternally grateful for his willingness, his unbounded interest in the project and, perhaps most of all, his friendship.

Abstract

The mystical cosmology set forth by Abu-l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī (d. 622 / 1225) is of tremendous importance for understanding the development and application of the medieval Islamic occult sciences. In this thesis, we explore the concept and purpose of medieval Islamic theurgy as it is presented by al-Būnī. We will attempt to contextualize it within its complex and nuanced cosmology. His widely distributed and often banned work *Shams al-maʿārif* presents a challenge to even the most adept reader as it requires advanced understanding in an array of seemingly disparate subjects. This and other of al-Būnī’s works represent a comprehensive, albeit roundabout, guide to medieval Islamic occult philosophy and theurgic rites. The body of work as whole, dubbed the ‘Corpus Bunianum’ by Jan Just Witkam, problematically suffers from lack of critical scholarship and confusion within its textual tradition. We will offer an introductory analysis of the textual tradition and a list of titles which can be reasonably attributed to al-Būnī, along with some information regarding their manuscript tradition.

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Explanatory Notes

Transliteration

The system of transliteration employed in this thesis corresponds to that of the Library of Congress, except in the case that ‘h’ is not used to represent *tāʾ marbūta*.

Abbreviations

Several abbreviations are employed throughout.

GAL Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, vol. 1 (Weimar: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1898)

GALs Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, 2nd ed, vol. suppl. 1B (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1943-1949)

EI² *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 12 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1960-2005)

MS “Manuscript” (pl. MSS)

Texts

A list of texts attributed to al-Būnī and a discussion thereof can be found in the Appendix. Unless otherwise noted: pagination listed for *Shams al-Ma‘ārif* or the *wuṣṭā* corresponds to the anonymous 1936 Istanbul edition titled *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*. References to the *kubrā* correspond to the 1960 Cairo edition.

Dates

Unless otherwise noted, dates are listed in the main body of the text with the Hijrī year followed by Common Era or Gregorian year. Dates in the Bibliography are CE unless otherwise notes. Dates were converted between Hijrī and CE using the *idate* program, which is part of the Arabeyes *itools* software package. For further information see: <http://projects.arabeyes.org/project.php?proj=ITL>.

Typsetting

The text of this thesis was prepared using the X_YTeX environment for the T_EX typesetting program. X_YTeX was originally written in 2010 by Jonathan Kew. For information about X_YTeX see: <http://tug.org/xetex/>.

The typeface used to set the Latin text is Gentium Plus. The typeface used to set the Arabic text is Scheherazade.

Introduction

Researching topics within the purview of the Islamic occult is, perhaps ironically, not without significant difficulty. The secondary source literature is often confused with regard to what is actually being treated. Primary sources come in the form of a material culture (amulets, magic bowls, magic shirts, etc.) or a textual tradition of esoteric manuals comprising segments on a wide array of arcane topics (astrology, alchemy, incantations and the special properties of elements belonging to the above, among many others).

Theurgy in this context is a particularly understudied topic. The word “theurgy” typically refers to a system of practices which are believed to harness divine or supernatural agency for application in human affairs. The etymology of the word is ancient Greek, but it does not appear in English until the 16th century.¹

Though it does have a long history in Islam, theurgy is often wholly confused or conflated with various forms of magic and sorcery by modern scholarship and pre-modern sources alike. This second set of forms is best categorized in English as “goety”, which can be understood as the antonym of theurgy. Goety refers to practices involving the invocation or employment of spirits from the so-called “lower realms,” commonly understood to be evil.² There is also no typical translation of theurgy in the Arabic language, making it difficult to identify directly. In pre-modern treatments, theurgy is confusing to parse as it represents, for some writers on the topic, the highest form

1. θεουργία = θεο- indicating God or gods, as in θεολογία (“theology”) [from θεός “god”] + -ουργία, [part of ἔργον “to work”]. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.

2. Greek γοητεία from γοητ-, γόης meaning sorcerer, wizard, which is in turn from γοάειν to wail or cry. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.

of mystical achievement. As such, its secrets are meant to remain hidden, and while extensive information may be given in the textual tradition, much of it is vague or misleading, meant as a test to weed the uninitiated from the adept. The material culture is no less vague, as it represents the completed material product of the working of theurgic rites, ostensibly, but gives no insight into the spiritual, which is the actual realm of theurgy.

In this thesis, the author hopes to identify and shed some light on several aspects of theurgic cosmology found in the writings of one of the best known, and little studied, authorities: 7th/13th century theurgist Abu-l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī (d. 622/1225).

Chapter 1 begins with a brief discussion of the meaning of the terms *religion*, *magic*, *superstition* and *theurgy* as they are understood from various modern and historical perspectives. The concept of theurgy is framed in its Islamic historical context epistemologically, as well as in terms of the material culture which has been produced by its practitioners. We will also attempt here to define theurgy in Islam as related to the term *sīmiyya*.

In chapter 2, we will introduce the work of al-Būnī. This chapter comprises a discussion of the historical al-Būnī as well as the textual tradition of some of his more important titles.

In chapter 3, we discuss the cosmology in which the occult sciences developed in the medieval Islamic world, as well as historical antecedents in the ancient world.

In chapter 4, we introduce the Divine Names and their relation to *sīmiyya* as they are discussed by al-Būnī in his major works.

Chapter 1

Theurgy in Islam

Theoretical frames of reference

There is little consensus in modern scholarly literature over topics of the occult, the relationship between religion and magic or the further classification of different types of magic as licit or illicit within a given religious tradition.¹ This is even further true for modern treatments of such topics in the context of Islam. The concepts *religion*, *magic*, *superstition* are often used interchangeably to the effect of great confusion. For the purposes of the present work, we will introduce another concept, *theurgy*, into the mix and discuss its existence and form in the Islamic tradition.

For the sociologist, the difference between the concepts of *religion*, *magic*, *superstition* and *theurgy* lies in their social relevance. In this model, each is an aspect of a similar set of behaviors as expressions of explicit (elite) and implicit (popular and local) ideologies which are inevitably found in conflict with one another.² “The Islam of the [*Ulamā*] is highly abstract, formal, and legalistic. Theology in this sense is more reflective than popular systems of religious meaning. At the same time it is less ritualistic and less bound to

1. Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax, “The Notion of Magic,” *Current Anthropology* 4, no. 5 (1963): 499-500.

2. Abdul Hamid el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977): 240.

common sense experience and social action.”³

Anthropologists view these phenomena similarly to sociologists, though they have been more careful to separate their definitions of religion and magic.⁴ They tend to see religion as “formal” and then anything else, whether theurgy or magic, as para-religious ritual or folk-practice.⁵ For magic and theurgy (and perhaps superstition), the exterior forms are often similar, involving practitioners engaged in ritual behaviors, appeals to forces and personalities unseen and a belief that those appeals will have a real and discernible effect on the material world in which the practitioner finds himself immersed.⁶ This means that in any case magic and theurgy are often conflated.⁷

For the historian, each of these concepts might have a particular place in describing the political- or social-historical reality of a religious movement, the culture or subculture of the practitioner and the interaction between different classes and social groups contemporaneous with him.⁸ To quote Humphreys: “culture (the ways in which people express their values, attitudes, and beliefs) and religion (the ways in which people relate themselves to ultimate realities) ... have an important place, but only insofar as they throw light on questions of social structure and political power.”⁹

For the Muslim theologian or jurist, these terms might represent — de-

3. el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam,” 241-242.

4. Dorothy Hammond, “Magic: A Problem in Semantics,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 72, no. 6 (December 1970): 1349-1350.

5. Hasan el-Shamy, *Religion among the Folk in Egypt* (London: Praeger, 2009), 72.

6. Edward A. Tiryakian, ed., “Preliminary Considerations,” in *On the Margin of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric, and the Occult* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), 6-7.

7. For such discussions see Dorothee Anna Maria Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit [Texte imprimé]: die arabische Magie im Spiegel des Uṣūl al-ḥikma von Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī al-Būnī* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995), 23-26 and Mohamed el-Gawhary, “al-Muʿallafāt al-siḥriyya al-mansūba li-l-Būnī,” *al-Funūn al-shaʿbiyya* 15 (December 1970): 25-26.

8. Boaz Shoshan, “High Culture and Popular Culture in Medieval Islam,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 73 (1991): 67-68.

9. R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), iv.

pending very much, of course, on the historical, social and cultural context of the individual — *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy* in the case of religion, but *heterodoxy* and *heteropraxy*, in the case of the rest. For others religion (*dīn*) is made normative and structured to be exclusively correct; theurgy is an aspect of that. The others, magic (*sihr*) and superstition (*khirāfa*), are forbidden or demonstrated to be false. Only those practices which do not constitute disbelief (*kufr*) are to be regarded as theurgy, though there is some confusion over what this means.¹⁰ For instance, though a ritualized practice might be accepted as valid in some religious circles, it will not become formalized, and will remain outside of what might be considered orthodox dogma.¹¹

For the psychologist or skeptic, these terms might appear to describe all the same phenomena, conceived of as irrelevant to the material existence of the practitioner and having no discernible effect on the material world. Anything out of the ordinary occurs as a coincidence or random confluence of events. The supernatural defies scientific investigation and is therefore reduced to a point of psychological and emotional curiosity and unusual events are taken as coincidence.¹² The practitioner is encouraged to believe that the rituals are efficacious on the off-chance that the desired result and inevitable reality are the same.¹³

The believing practitioner, on the other hand, sees religion and theurgy as aspects of one another and that magic and superstition are the domain of those operating outside the scope of his religious paradigm. He views his religion as a body of knowledge which is to be used to test, estimate, hypothesize, experiment, evaluate and then theorize the the world, both material and immaterial, and then apply it to effect changes in those realms. This is the essence of theurgy.

While none of these theoretical models fits perfectly for describing or categorizing the topic of interest, the literature generated by their respec-

10. el-Shamy, *Religion among the Folk in Egypt*, 65.

11. *Ibid.*, 71.

12. L. Zusne and W.H. Jones, *Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Magical Thinking* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: L. Erlbaum, 1989), 4.

13. *Ibid.*, 198.

tive fields on our present topic can be of some assistance in synthesizing and understanding the primary source literature, in the form of manuals and theoretical texts, and the secondary literature, in the form of other writings on these practices and their context in medieval Islamic cosmology.

Knowledge, science, technology and religion

Even more problematic, for the modern person, the above terms might all be confused or conflated with *science* or *technology*, or vice versa. Science can be generalized as any body of theoretical and practical *knowledge* utilized by an investigator in order to observe effects and make predictions within a given frame of reference and under certain conditions in order to develop an understanding of the relationships between elements within a system or with the system itself. Technology is the practical application of scientific knowledge using a set of techniques designed in order to achieve a desired result within a given system. The system within which technologies function is based on previously observed and predicted data, though the inner workings of the technology will not always be plain to the casual, uninformed observer. That which is inscrutable to a human observer appears in turn miraculous, magical, strange or diabolic.

The key to understanding just what constitutes each of these concepts is collapsing the paradigms of practitioner (internal) and observer (external). The conflation of religion, magic, superstition and theurgy collapses only the theoretical paradigms of each. From the observer's point of view, these are a set of ritual forms or theoretical texts to be discussed and compared with effects either observed or reported by the practitioner and those in his immediate social environment. From the practitioner's perspective, each aspect of ritual and every word in the scripture has meaning and connection to forces larger than himself or his social environment. He believes that the techniques belonging to his chosen discipline give him access to means beyond himself to effect changes in the material world, typically by way of appeal to aspects of the unseen world.

None of the theoretical models or scholarly worldviews presented is internally inconsistent. Rather, each only seems inconsistent or unreasonable from the point of view of another model. The language of one frame of reference is insufficient to describe another unless we have methods to connect the frames together by way of a shared reference point and translate between them. For the physicist, this problem can be dealt with using sets of descriptors in order to relate two frames and translate from one to the other, provided that they shared some point of reference, usually inertia.

The problem is slightly different when dealing with aspects of human behavior, philosophical or religious conceptions of knowledge and the underlying framework of reality, and other paradigms not typically described in mathematical terms, but in terms of language and semantics.¹⁴ In this case, there may sometimes be no shared points of reference at all between different observers. One observer may figuratively or actually see practices, rites, effects or phenomena in an entirely different, or mutually exclusive, manner. One perhaps unlikely reconciliation comes from a set of three “laws” of prediction set forth by 20th-century author, futurist and inventor, Arthur C. Clarke.¹⁵ He posited the following:

1. When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.
2. The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.
3. Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.¹⁶

14. Hammond, “Magic: A Problem in Semantics,” 1349-1350.

15. For a complete discussion of Clarke’s Laws of Prediction, see: Arthur C. Clarke, “Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of Imagination,” chap. 1 in *Profiles of the Future: An Enquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, rev. ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 14, 20-21.

16. The word *magic* is being used here as a reference to “magical thinking.” See: Zusne and Jones, *Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Magical Thinking*, for an introduction to the concept of “magical thinking” in modern psychology.

These principles apply to the present line of inquiry, as they pertain to what is possible and impossible, and how such things might appear to any observer. Furthermore, they pertain to the manner in which such phenomena might be described. Without sufficient information to discern the difference between technology and magic, the former will be regarded as the latter by the casual observer. If the observer has a great deal more knowledge with regard to the inner workings of the technology at hand, so-called “magical thinking” becomes unnecessary.

This is not to say that the observer will completely shift in his worldview, but rather only that when technical details are known, the effects of the technology are no longer surprising or shocking. In the same way, when a modern person connects a computer to a wireless data network or places a call using a mobile phone, they would not be surprised to see images of a distant place or hear the voice of someone halfway around the world. Instead, they would expect these phenomena and would understand that something was amiss in the case that they did not occur.¹⁷

Given the above, it is important to define what is meant by each of these terms so as to properly contextualize the topic at hand. Throughout the course of Islamic history, the types of knowledge and science have been

17. It should be made clear that the author is in no way attempting to equivocate technology and magic with modern technology. Such parallels are drawn only for their value as instructive or demonstrative models, particularly in the case of the invocation and control of unseen forces. Electromagnetic energy in particular, due to its being typically invisible and yet capable of transmitting information over long distances (appearing nearly simultaneous on a sublunary scale) or causing discreet reaction between two disconnected items when harnessed, focused and controlled, provides an opportunity for an analysis of modern “magical thinking.” The vast majority of individuals utilizing wireless communications technologies on a daily basis have little to no understanding of how they operate on their most basic levels. This causes the user to speculate and form untested hypotheses with regard to the base-level operations of the devices which they regularly employ. The modern superstition holds that we have given up magical thinking, but in fact it appears that we have simply displaced one paradigm for another. For extensive treatment of the topic of magical thinking and the rise of technology, see Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

treated at length and in great detail, so we shall begin there.

Types of knowledge

The Islamic epistemological tradition is extensive. Rosenthal writes:

“Arabic *‘ilm* is fairly well rendered by our ‘knowledge’. However, ‘knowledge’ falls short of expressing all the factual and emotional contents of *‘ilm*. For *‘ilm* is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion. In fact, there is no other concept that has been operative as a determinant of Muslim civilization in all its aspects to the same extent as *‘ilm*. This holds good even for the most powerful among the terms of Muslim religious life such as, for instance, *tawhîd* [*sic*] ‘recognition of the oneness of God,’ *ad-dîn* [*sic*] ‘the true religion’, and many others that are used constantly and emphatically. None of them equals in depth of meaning and wide incidence of use.”¹⁸

The types of knowledge with which the present study is concerned belong primarily to the realm of the metaphysical. Islamic theurgists recognize Revelation, as presented in the Qur’ân, as the source for all other knowledge, particularly *gnosis* (*hikma*), which holds a place of epistemological prestige for mystics, but also for anyone concerned with the underlying framework of reality. Nasr argues that it holds a special position in the Islamic epistemological hierarchy:

“Gnosis, which has always been held to be the highest form of knowledge in Islam, as well as other Oriental traditions, has definite conceptions of the universe, and in fact provides the only matrix within which the traditional cosmological sciences can

18. Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, rev. ed., Brill Classics in Islam 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1-2.

be properly understood. [...] The gnostic sees all things as manifestations of the Supreme Divine Principle, which transcends all determinations — even Being, its first determination. All entities in manifestation, both visible and invisible, are connected with this Center by the degree to which they reflect the Intellect and also by their existence.”¹⁹

It both describes the cosmological framework within which the theurgist operates as well as giving shape to the practice itself in the form of the language utilized. Indeed, it is knowledge itself which defines humanity’s place in the cosmos. This worldview, however, is not relegated specifically to religious endeavors. Epistemology factors into every aspect of Muslim life and work. Rosenthal continues:

“There is no branch of Muslim intellectual life, of Muslim religious and political life, and of the daily life of the average Muslim that remained untouched by the all-pervasive attitude toward ‘knowledge’ as something of supreme value for Muslim being. *‘Ilm* is Islam, even if the theologians have been hesitant to accept the technical correctness of this equation. The very fact of their passionate discussion of the concept attests to its fundamental importance for Islam.”²⁰

Knowledge is of such importance in Muslim history that there have been extensive classifications made of the various types and forms of thereof and their expression as sciences. Among those who attempted extensive epistemological classifications are, to name a few: the historian, sociologist and philosopher Ibn Khaldūn (732 / 1332 - 808 / 1406); historian, biographer and geographer Hājji Khalīfa (Kātip Çelebi) (1017 / 1609 - 1067 / 1657); theologian and exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (543 / 1149 - 606 / 1209); and Persian scholar and poet ‘Umar Khayyām (439 / 1048 - 517 / 1123 or 526 / 1131).²¹

19. Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 337.

20. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant : The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, 2.

21. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 62.

Occult knowledge, the occult sciences, occultism

The occult sciences (*‘ulūm al-khafiyya*) are represented in the taxonomy as a branch of the metaphysical sciences (*‘ulūm al-ghayb*) which treat the unseen or ephemeral world, whereas the natural sciences treat the natural, physical world. They are often given short shrift and refuted or forbidden without much consideration beyond their being occult. This is perhaps the main source of confusion regarding such topics: the problem of what is permissible and what is impermissible and how to distinguish between them. This question puts the observer into the mode of the jurist, listed above, which is concerned primarily with the moral rather than intellectual aspects of whatever occult practices are at hand.²²

In the case of the Islamic occult, and more specifically Islamic theurgy, the discipline into which the practitioner is entered is connected with the highest perceived forms of mysticism. As well, the theurgic tradition requires orthodoxy and orthopraxy on his part.²³ In the description of the purpose of such works and what sciences they elucidate, there is appeal to what the orthodox dogma might find acceptable.²⁴ There is further appeal to tradition in the form of linking the author with older, august sources through chains of transmission of knowledge. In the case of Aḥmad al-Būnī, in the later manuscripts and editions of his work, he is linked with such figures as Ibn al-‘Arabī, Imām Jafar al-Ṣādiq, ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, and the Prophet Muḥammad himself.²⁵

This functions to contextualize such practices as something which is not only orthodox and orthoprax, but which has ties to the deepest roots of the religion itself. It also further contextualizes theurgy as a tiny, specialized branch of mysticism within the tradition. In some cases, it will function to

22. Wax and Wax, “The Notion of Magic,” 495.

23. At the end of the section explaining the *birhatiyya* oath, al-Būnī states that the practitioner “must ... worship Allah and no other beside him.” Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Manba‘ uṣūl al-ḥikma* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awladuhu, 1951), 90.

24. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā) wa laṭā’if al-‘awārif* (Cairo: Maktabat Jumhuriyyat Miṣr, 1960), 5-6.

25. *Ibid.*, 537-540.

tie the practices with the larger ancient monotheistic tradition as well. In any case, it is recognition that these practices are not marginal or obscure, only secret and hidden. The same can be said to apply to mystical endeavors within other occult traditions.

Helene Petrovna Blavatsky (d. 1891CE), in a 19th century essay on the topic, set forth two observations regarding the occult:

1. There are more well educated and thoughtful men who believe in the existence of Occultism and Magic (the two differing vastly) than the modern materialist dreams of: and —
2. That most of the believers (comprising many theosophists) have no definite idea of the nature of Occultism and confuse it with the Occult sciences in general, the “Black art” included.

While Madame Blavatsky was referring in particular to the mystical / spiritualist group which she co-founded in the 19th century, the *Theosophical Society*, the observation is apt in the present context.²⁶ Madame Blavatsky further illuminates the terminology for us:

“In our highly civilized West, where modern languages have been formed, and words coined, in the wake of ideas and thoughts — as happened with every tongue — the more the latter became materialized in the cold atmosphere of Western selfishness and its incessant chase after the goods of this world, the less was there any felt for the production of new terms to express that which was tacitly regarded as obsolete and exploded ‘superstition.’ Such words could answer only to ideas which a cultured man was scarcely supposed to harbor in his mind. ‘Magic,’ a synonym for jugglery; ‘Sorcery,’ an equivalent for crass ignorance;

26. For a complete history of the origins of the Theosophical Society and information about its founders, including Madame Blavatsky, see: Theosophical Society, *The Whole Truth about the Theosophical Society and its Founders*, Bristol Select Pamphlets (Bristol: University of Bristol Library, 1882)

and ‘Occultism,’ the sorry relic of crack-brained, medieval Fire-philosophers, of Jacob Bohemes and the St. Martins, are expressions believed more than amply sufficient to cover the whole field of ‘thimble-rigging.’ They are terms of contempt, and used generally only in reference to the dross and residues of the Dark Ages and its preceding aeons [*sic*] of paganism.”²⁷

These terms represent one aspect of the occult as it is being presented here. The other aspect is treated by the same author:

“All the rest is some branch of the ‘Occult Sciences,’ i.e., arts based on the knowledge of the ultimate essence of all things in the Kingdom of Nature — such as minerals, plants, and animals — hence of things pertaining to the realm of *material* Nature, however invisible that essence may be, and howsoever much it has hitherto eluded the grasp of Science. Alchemy, Astrology, Occult Physiology, Chiromancy exist in Nature, and the *exact* Sciences — perhaps so called because they are found in this age of paradoxical philosophies the reverse — have already discovered not a few of the secrets of the above *arts*.”²⁸

The reality of sorcery and its effects in the world

It has been suggested that a similar state of affairs existed in the medieval Islamic world. Asatrian speculates that,

“in the [4th / 10th - 8th / 14th centuries] the rising tide of occultism inundated the lands of Islam as a whole, becoming a serious threat for the orthodoxy as if an alternative form of religious cult. Perhaps, in certain Islamic intellectual and religious circles the rise of occultism was viewed as a social disaster, seriously harming the fundamentals of state. This very approach

27. Helene Petrovna Blavatsky, “Occultism Versus the Occult Arts,” in *On the Margin of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric, and the Occult* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), 72.

28. *Ibid.*, 74.

is explicitly traced in Ibn Khaldūn’s interpretation of the occult arts.”²⁹

Moreover, from Ibn Khaldūn’s point of view, the problem was real and dangerous as more than just a “social disaster.”

Ibn Khaldūn sets forth three different varieties of “souls that have magical ability” (*al-naḥūs al-siḥriyya*).

1. Pure sorcery achieved through force of will. The sorcerer needs no “instrument of aid” in working his will, only the power of his mind.
2. That involving the “temper of the spheres and the elements” and the “properties of numbers.” Ibn Khaldūn characterizes this as “weaker” than the first and calls it *ṭilsimāt* (“talismans”).
3. Illusion and trickery, relying “upon the powers of the imagination,” and refers to it specifically as prestidigitation.³⁰

That this is a matter of religious importance to Ibn Khaldūn is further laid bare. He characterizes “magical exercise” (*riyādat al-siḥr*) as consisting of “directing oneself to the spheres, the stars, the higher worlds, or to the devils by means of various kinds of veneration and worship and submission and obeisance. Thus, magical exercise is devotion and adoration directed to (beings) other than God. Such devotion is unbelief.”³¹ He further addresses the reality of *siḥr* by setting the first two varieties listed above apart from the last, acknowledging that there is some confusion among the scholars over the reality of sorcery. He argues that those scholars who do not believe in the reality of *siḥr* have confused the first two, which are real, with the latter, which is imaginary. He states: “It should be known that no intelligent

29. Mushegh Asatrian, “Ibn Khaldūn on Magic and the Occult,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 7, nos. 1-2 (2003): 76.

30. Walī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 158-159; Walī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Wāfī (Cairo: Nahdat Misr, 2006), 1031-1032.

31. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 158-159.

person doubts the existence of sorcery, because of the influence mentioned, which sorcery exercises. The Qurʾān refers to it.”³² Rosenthal refers us to Doutté for an exposition of the “dogma of the reality of sorcery in Islam and medieval Christianity.”³³ Doutté compares the dogma and explains that, unless done in service of God, sorcery “merits death” in the same way as *shirk* (“polytheism”) as its similarity thereto make it tantamount to apostasy and heresy.³⁴

The origins and purpose of sorcery

If the purpose of theurgy is to refine the soul and in the process use it to affect good in the spiritual and material worlds, then the purpose of sorcery is to do evil in the world. The two paradigms are diametrically opposed to one another, having no common goal or function. Ibn Khaldūn explains at several points within the *Muqaddima* that *siḥr* is something preformed only by evil persons.³⁵ He appears, on the surface, to fail at fully distinguishing the practice of *sīmiyya* from that of *siḥr* or talismanic magic. However, Ibn Khaldūn is only critical of the purpose to which the practitioner puts their efforts. He states that: “A person who works with words may have no knowledge of the secrets of God and the realities of divinity, which is the result of vision and the removal (of the veil). He may restrict himself to the various relationships between words and the natures of letters and expressions, and he may become (magically) active with them in this capacity, and that is what people who practice letter magic are commonly supposed to do.”³⁶ All such practices are eventually recognized by Ibn Khaldūn as harmful, both to the Muslim faith and other. This is the nature of their being forbidden, as

32. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 159-160. Here Ibn Khaldūn quotes Qurʾān [*al-Baqara*] 2:102.

33. *Ibid.*, 160, n. 755.

34. Edmond Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l’Afrique du Nord* (Algiers: Adolphe Jourdan, 1909), 336-337.

35. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 100, 167.

36. *Ibid.*, 176.

things which cause harm are forbidden.³⁷

The difference between theurgy and magic

Magic is therefore perhaps an inept term to translate the concept of *siḥr*, except as the latter is used generally. In modern English parlance it simultaneously carries the connotations of occult operations and prestidigitation. The term “magical thinking” also renders “magic” problematic. It gives the connotation that magic has no actual properties which are supernatural. Rather any such properties are a function of illusion and the credulity of the observer. *Sorcery* is perhaps a better term for what we wish to discuss in its relation to theurgy.

Theurgy is still somewhat elusive. It certainly warrants a category of occult science itself in its Islamic context. It is hard, as well, to find an Arabic word which is fully descriptive of it. The sources describe what it is not, as seen in Ibn Khaldūn above, but on the topic of what it is, they are unclear. If we reckon theurgy to be simply whatever is left outside the scope of *siḥr*, then we are left with something called *simiyyā*?. Ibn Khaldūn describes *sīmiyya* as a form of occult science, outside the scope of *siḥr*, as does Ḥājī Khalīfa.³⁸ Ibn Khaldūn also referred to *‘ilm asrār al-ḥurūf* (“the science of the secrets of the letters”). While there are other sciences which exist alongside *sīmiyya*, alchemy and astrology being two examples, it is *sīmiyya* which is most specifically related to what we wish to discuss as theurgy.

Ibn Khaldūn believes *sīmiyya* to have originated in Islam and to have arisen from within the context of Ṣūfī beliefs.³⁹ He identifies al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī as authoritative sources on this topic and gives an explanation of the characteristics of the “activity” (*al-taṣarruf*). Even though there is no equivalent word in the Arabic text, Rosenthal adds “magic” to his descrip-

37. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 169.

38. *Simiyyā*? is a borrowed term, originally from Greek σημεια, meaning “marks” or “badges.”

39. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 171-172.

tion of this “activity.”⁴⁰ It is clear, however, that what is being discussed is not *sihr* as it relates to the invocation of demons or *jinn*. Ibn Khaldūn is very careful to specify this, though he does criticize the practitioners of *sīmiyya* at some length for having the same goals as the practitioners of other forms of magic and the makers of talismans.⁴¹

Sīmiyya is not simply concerned with the properties of the letters of the *abjad*. It also incorporates astrology — for electional purposes, alchemy — in the spiritual sense, at the very least, and the invocation of the Divine Names. The focus of the discipline seems to be on “removing the veil” between the material world and the unseen world.⁴² The removal of the veil — presumably through attainment to a high degree of *gnosis* and spiritual discipline — is believed to afford the practitioner tremendous spiritual and material potency. It is also identified by the authors of its primary treatments as a practice which is to be engaged in by Muslims, to the exclusion of others.⁴³

Theurgy in general is necessarily obscure and *sīmiyya* is therefore no exception. The extant manuals and theoretical texts are vague and sometimes obtuse. They offer little in the way of a clear picture of what either theurgic rites looked like in practice or what their material result should be. The most likely reason for their obscurity is that theurgy was perceived as dangerous to those who were not fully prepared to perform the rites. The assessment can easily be made with regard to any esoteric discipline: the associated rites are kept hidden in order that the uninitiated and unskilled might be protected from harming themselves or others, spiritually or otherwise.

40. See: Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 172 and Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1040-1041

41. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 179-182.

42. *Ibid.*, 176.

43. Cf. the introduction to *Shams al-ma‘ārif*. al-Būnī refers to the “ahl al-qibla” al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā) wa laṭā‘if al-‘awārif*, 6; [90]Buni1951; and el-Shamy, *Religion among the Folk in Egypt*, 69.

Notable figures and works in Islamic theurgy

As mentioned above, Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622 / 1225) and Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (560 / 1165 - 638 / 1240) wrote authoritatively on the topic of *ṣimīyya* or *ʿilm al-ḥurūf*. al-Būnī’s works will be covered at length in the next chapter, so they will not be discussed here, except to note that the major title to which Ibn Khaldūn probably refers is *al-Lumaʿat al-nūraniyya*. The topic is also discussed extensively in the best-known work attributed to him, *Shams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*.⁴⁴

Ibn al-ʿArabī treats the topic in the second part of *al-Futuḥāt al-Makiyya*, entitled “Knowledge of the degrees of the letters and the movements of the cosmos and its wealth pertaining to the Beautiful Names” (*maʿrifat marātib al-ḥurūf wa-l-ḥarakāt min al-ʿālam wa-māhā min al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*).⁴⁵

al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī are both from the Maghrib, though it is arguable that this has little to do with their intellectual provenance, given that they both ended up at the far end of the Mediterranean — al-Būnī in Cairo and Ibn al-ʿArabī in Damascus. A slightly later example of Eastern provenance is the Persian *Asrār-i qāsimī* by Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Kāshifī al-Wāʿiẓ (840 / 1436-37 - 910 / 1504-5).⁴⁶ According to Lory “[t]his medium-sized book opens like any other, as if it were dealing with a subject as incontestable as pharmacology or astronomy. Its goal, however, is to outline the procedures that enable one to participate in the hidden laws that connect all living things.”

44. For an introduction to al-Būnī see: *El²*, s.v. “al-Būnī, Abu’l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlīb. Yūsuf al-Ḥurashī al-Ṣūfī (variants Taḳī al-Dīn, Shihāb al-Dīn)” (by A. Dietrich), as well as chapter 2 of the present work. For a discussion of “letter magic” in al-Būnī’s work, see: Pierre Lory, “La magie des lettres dans le Šams al-maʿārif d’al-Būnī,” *Bulletin d’Études Orientales* 39-40 (1987--88): 97--111

45. Cf. Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Futuḥāt al-Makiyya*, ed. Uthmān Yaḥyā, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya li-l-Kitāb, 2008), 231-361. For biographical information, see: *El²*, s.v. “Ibn al-ʿArabī, Muḥyī’l-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-ʿArabī al-Ḥātīmī al-Ṭāʾī, known as al-*Shaykh* al-Akbar” (by A. Ateş) and Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. from the French by Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

46. See: *El²*, s.v. “Kāshifī, Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī” (by Gholam Hosein Yousofi) and *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. “Kāšefi, Kamāl-al-Din Ḥosayn Wāʿeẓ” (by M. E. Subtelny).

The first topic treated in the text is *sīmiyya*.⁴⁷

The obscurity and importance of theurgy

Theurgy is not very well treated in the modern secondary sources on the occult in Islam. Many conflate the concept with that of magic, etc. Fahd tells us that the term *theurgy* is the same as *tilasm* (“talismans”), which is Ibn Khaldūn’s second category of *siḥr*, and leaves it at that.⁴⁸

However, as we have seen, none of these is a sufficient mode of description or a sound basis for analysis. Part of the problem is that it is difficult to discern these differences in the modern, industrialized, increasingly technology-driven world. The purpose of theurgy particularly is obscure in the context of the modern world. Humans have surrounded themselves with a great technological apparatus which extends to every aspect of daily life, from social interaction to societal function. Where, then, was there ever a place for such arcane and recondite practices as those seemingly conducted by the writers of great, cryptic volumes of lore on mystic rites and the rituals and theory associated with theurgy?

This, however, should not be the basis for misjudging the place of theurgy and its importance in the pre-modern context. Nasr believes the occult sciences to be “a field that is of far greater significance for the understanding of the medieval sciences than is usually recognized.”⁴⁹ Rosenthal describes this as a conundrum and handicap for the modern scholar: “Any historical problem must be viewed from a modern vantage point, resulting from the author’s understanding of the state of the problem in his own time and cultural environment.”⁵⁰ This sentiment was never more true than in regarding the present line of inquiry. Theurgy is also still widely practiced in the Is-

47. Pierre Lory, “Kashifi’s *Asrār-i Qāsimī* and Timurid Magic,” in “Husayn Va‘iz-i Kashifi,” *Iranian Studies* 36 (December 2003): 532.

48. *Et*², s.v. “Siḥr” (by Toufic Fahd).

49. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 111.

50. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, 3.

lamic world.⁵¹

While connections with magical and scientific thinking have been discussed above, it should be understood first and foremost that theurgy is an aspect of a spiritual discipline. Islamic theurgy is tied to the religion itself from the point of view of the practitioner. It is simply an extension of practice, but it does not supplant, in any way, the core of the religion. Neither can it be separated from the religion. Islamic manuals of the occult sciences would be of little to no use for the non-Muslim practitioner.⁵²

Collapsing elite and vulgar forms

Pielow and el-Gawhary both refer to the theurgic rites described al-Būnī's writings as "magic" (*die Magie* or *siḥr*). Pielow goes as far as to define *siḥr* as "Islamic magic," which is not accurate at all. Fahd has characterized theurgy as equivocal to the second form of *siḥr* described by Ibn Khaldūn.⁵³ While there does seem to exist a conceptualization of licit magic, as described by Ibn Khaldūn, it certainly does not have the same form or function as *siḥr*.

In other cases, anthropologists relegate theurgic rites and *siḥr* alike to the realm of "folk religion," thus deeming the occult manuals to be "folklore." This treatment in modern scholarship tends to stem from the concept of formal and vulgar religious forms which was set forth by David Hume, and which received quite an extensive critique by Peter Brown.⁵⁴ Karamustafa extended this critique to the formation of conceptions of normative and

51. For a few examples of modern practitioners of theurgy, see: Remke Kruk, "Harry Potter in the Gulf: Contemporary Islam and the Occult," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 1 (May 2005): 47-73; Geert Mommersteeg, "'He Has Smitten Her to the Heart with Love' The Fabrication of an Islamic Love-Amulet in West Africa," *Anthropos* 83, nos. 4/6 (1988): 501-510.

52. al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma'ārif (al-kubrā) wa laṭā'if al-awārif*, 6.

53. *Et*, s.v. "Siḥr" (by Toufic Fahd).

54. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity (The Haskell Lectures on History of Religions)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 14-16.

non-normative forms of piety in early Šūfism.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, the realm of the occult suffers from this same bias in analyses thereof. For el-Shamy theurgy falls into the category of “formal magic,” which,

“within the context of monotheism ... is not magic at all. It is rather a form of institutionalized but not formalized folk religious subsystem. It relies on religious beliefs and on the old ‘science of letters’ for its procedures; this subsystem revolves around the concept of God, and rests on certain formal religious doctrines that explain its efficacy and provide the basis for its development and open existence in a community.”⁵⁶

There are strict conditions under which the practitioner must conduct the prescribed theurgic rituals. Primarily, the practitioner must be pure of intention and “not harbor sinful notions.”⁵⁷ The practitioner must also be in an state of purification (*tahāra*). In addition, “devotions and exercises certainly play a very insignificant role in [working with talismans]. Though for the theurgist, the practitioner of *sīmiyya*, the opposite is true. “Their exercise is the most extensive that it can be.”⁵⁸

An emphasis on purity of intention and physical state reflects that which is considered necessary for conducting any of the prescribed Islamic prayers. In the case of prayer, the person must make ablutions prior to beginning the prayer and then make the proper intention for the prayer (*niyya*).⁵⁹ These conditions are mandatory for the performance of theurgic rites, as they are with prayer, because they involve the recitation of Qurʾān, et al.: “[Prostrating] when reciting the [Qurʾān] at verses in which is sunna to do so; [Prostrating] out of thanks; ... and [Reciting] the [Qurʾān]” — all of which feature in the performance of theurgic rites — are forbidden if the practitioner is in

55. See: Ahmet Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1999).

56. el-Shamy, *Religion among the Folk in Egypt*, 68.

57. *Ibid.*, 70.

58. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 176.

59. Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyāʾ Yaḥyā b. Sharaf b. Murī al-Nawawī, *Al-Nawawī’s Manual of Islam (al-Maqāṣid)*, trans. Nuh Ha Mim Keller (London: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 9.

a state of major ritual impurity (*janāba*).⁶⁰ As such, the same requirements must obviously apply. In the case of non-theurgic, magical rituals, it is often necessary for the practitioner to be in a state of *janāba*. This would be the case particularly in rituals involving necromancy, contacting demons, and other dark rites.⁶¹ Sorcerers keep their activities hidden for fear of the authorities.⁶²

The theurgic practitioner would probably also do well to dissimulate with regard to his arcane knowledge as much as possible, either to avoid scrutiny and being suspected of sorcery or to avoid being known to have power based in the esoteric. In either case, the appearance of orthodoxy is important for deterring the interest of any who would intercede or disrupt the theurgist. As such, it is sensible that the inner and outer piety of the practitioner should be as unremarkable as possible. The best place to hide, so to speak, is in plain sight.

This is not to say that the practitioners of theurgy were so obscure that they left nothing behind. We have discussed some of the textual tradition of Islamic theurgy, but there is another side to its history as well: that of its material culture.

Material culture and history of theurgy

The extensive material culture of the Islamic occult is another point at which the dichotomy between high and low forms collapses, confusing what is actually occurring. Schaefer states that “such objects, popularly believed to provide their owners with a prophylactic or apotropaic effect against a vari-

60. al-Nawawī, *Al-Nawawī's Manual of Islam (al-Maqāṣid)*, 25-26.

61. There are associations as well with *ḥarām* (“forbidden”) elements, objects and substances. Ibn Khaldūn writes: “I have met a number of them and witnessed their kinds of magical practice. They informed me that they practice devotions and exercises [consisting of heretical prayers to jinn and the stars]. These things are written down on a sheet of paper they possess, and called [*khinzīriyya*].” *Khinzīr* is of course a pig. Rosenthal writes that the meaning and derivation of this term are uncertain, though if seen in this regard, it would appear to be clear. See: Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 164-165.

62. *Ibid.*, 164.

ety of real or imaginary dangers, or to endow them with certain abilities or powers, have long been a feature of life in the Middle East (as they have been elsewhere).”⁶³ The generation of an amulet on the part of a theurgist is ostensibly shorthand for the longer forms of an invocation. As a hypothetical example, if the prescribed rite is to invoke the the Name *al-Wadūd* (“the Loving”) one thousand times, it might also be possible to construct an amulet based on that name. If it is possible to construct an amulet, it is probably easier for a practitioner of theurgy to do so correctly, with all the appropriate preparations and at the most auspicious times, than for an average person who wishes to receive the benefits of that invocation. As such, this creates a point of interaction between the theurgic elite and the folk. It also perhaps presents an opportunity for commerce on the part of the theurgist. As discussed above, there are similarities between the exterior forms of some aspects of rites associated with theurgy and those associated with magic. It should follow, of course, that there are also similarities between the material culture generated by each. Ibn Khaldūn is critical of those theurgists who would use their blessings to create talismans, lumping them in with the charlatan talisman-makers. It is very clear from the vastness of the extant material culture that, while he may have disapproved, this was quite common practice.

There are extensive collections of talismans and amulets from the Islamic world which have been photographed and published. There also exist such items as “magic bowls,” “magic shirts,” pendants, rings and plaques. Most such items state their purpose as being for the protection of the bearer, though there are other purposes.

63. Karl R. Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums*, ed. Karl R. Schaefer, *Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section One: Near and Middle East* 82, H. Attenmuller, B. Hrouda, B. A. Levine, R. S. O’Fahey, K. R. Veenhof, C. H. M. Versteegh, series editors (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2.

Paper amulets

Two types of paper amulet exist from the Islamic world. The first type comprises handwritten examples which are constructed for a specific purpose at a specific time. The second type comprises mass- or multiple-produced examples printed on paper by way of carved wooden blocks or etched tin.⁶⁴

While it might be the case that a practitioner of theurgy conceived of or initially constructed block-printed amulets, it is clear that they are very different from those made for a specific person and purpose. Block-printed amulets often have handwritten aspects, as if they were produced and then customized. They typically also contain a list of indications — as with modern pharmaceuticals — to which they are meant to be applied. These lists tend to range widely depending on the length of the amulet in question. There may be other elements as well which are similar to handwritten amulets, such as magic squares, the names of angels, strings of numbers, verses of Qurʾān and an invocation. Such amulets appear as though they have an “all-purpose” quality about them.⁶⁵

In the former case, “the practitioner constructs an *amal* (lit.: “work” ..) which is assumed to produce the desired effect under prescribed conditions.”⁶⁶ In the case of an amulet which is meant to attract a specific lover or spouse, a suitable passage of the Qurʾān is chosen, its numerical value calculated, and then an array of numbers which corresponds to that value is worked out.⁶⁷ After this, an appropriate time is selected, according to the electional astrology which remains an aspect of this practice. Some information about those with whom the *amal* is being associated is needed, such

64. Richard W. Bulliet, “Medieval Arabic Ṭarsh: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of Block Printing,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 3 (1987): 427-428.

65. See Michaelides (Charta) E 33 (Plate 8), 76-79; T-S Ar. 38.133 (Plate 10), 85-89; GM 03.1 Schr. (Plates 15a, 15b, 15c, 15d), 103-110 printed in Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums* Schaefer’s introduction provides a good background information for both the practice of block-printing and the social, religious and historical context in which such amulets were produced.

66. el-Shamy, *Religion among the Folk in Egypt*, 69.

67. Mommersteeg, “‘He Has Smitten Her to the Heart with Love’ The Fabrication of an Islamic Love-Amulet in West Africa,” 503.

as the names of the man and his mother. It is also helpful to have an object which has been within close proximity to the person upon whom the *ʿamal* is being enacted.⁶⁸ The amulet is written and the correct supplications and invocations are made. If everything goes according to plan, when the appropriate “servant beings” have responded that the request will be met, the practitioner is given a signal. After this, a copy of the amulet is written and given to the client, with the intent that the client will carry it with him.⁶⁹

Durable amulets

Amulets in the form of pendants, rings and other wearable or non-wearable durable materials are quite plentiful. The materials used range from precious brass and precious metals to semi-precious gemstones.⁷⁰ Their durability has ensured that they are found in large numbers in museums throughout the world. With these amulets, the forms represented are more similar to that of the handwritten amulets discussed above. Many involve verses of Qurʾān, magic squares, the Names of God, the names of angels and so on. Others incorporate numbers, symbols — particularly those representing the Highest Name of God — and sometimes pictorial images of animals.⁷¹ Tewfik Caanan wrote the seminal study on Islamic amulets and talismans. He covers many aspects of their form and function which are important for understanding the material culture of theurgy, but for which there is not sufficient space in the present study.⁷²

68. el-Shamy, *Religion among the Folk in Egypt*, 70-71.

69. Geert Mommersteeg, “Allah’s Words as Amulet,” in “FETISHISM,” *Etnofoor* 3, no. 1 (1990): 71-72.

70. Venetia Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum*, British Museum Research Publications 160 (London: The British Museum, 2011), 181-183.

71. *Ibid.*, 166.

72. See: Tewfik Caanan, “The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans,” in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Formation of the Classical Islamic World 42 (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), 125-177.

Magic Bowls

Magic or healing bowls (*shifā'*), as they are more appropriately called, are among the most interesting and elaborate items from the material culture of Islamic theurgy. As Savage-Smith points out, unlike other amulets which were carried on the person of the afflicted, *shifā'* bowls were a household item, used only when someone was ailing.⁷³ There are several types of *shifā'* bowl. One was used primarily to aid someone who was ill. They have verses from the Qur'ān, usually a magic square of some description (or multiple squares) and they are made out of etched brass, copper, bronze, silver, or gold. Sometimes a precious metal will be inlaid over an alloy. The other type is similar to the first, but has a very specific purpose. This type tends to be called a "poison cup," though these are not, as one might assume, meant for the purpose of poisoning someone. Their actual purpose is to remove the effects of poison, in someone so afflicted. These cups often include images of certain animals, such as lions (or dogs), scorpions, snakes and two intertwined dragons.⁷⁴ All such bowls have a list of indications for which the afflicted can utilize them in relief.⁷⁵

Magic Shirts

Another odd, yet thoroughly fascinating aspect of the material culture are "magic shirts."⁷⁶ These are shirts which are meant to be worn underneath outer garments and act as a sort of talismanic garb. They tend to be inscribed

73. Emilie Savage-Smith, "Magic-Medicinal Bowls," in *Science, Tools and Magic*, bk. 2, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art XII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 72.

74. *Ibid.*, 74.

75. The author has had the privilege of seeing and inspecting a number of authentic magic bowls in the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. They are as described by the limited sources on the topic and they are most fascinating.

76. There is surprising little written about magic shirts or talismanic garments in Islam. For the most extensive treatment available, see: Philippe Demonsablon, "Notes sur deux vêtements talismaniques," *Arabica* 33, no. 2 (July 1986): 216–250.

with various magic squares and invocations as well as the Seal of the Greatest Name.⁷⁷

Gaps between the textual tradition and the material culture

Based on the sheer volume of the material evidence for medieval theurgy — amulets, talismans, healing bowls, magic shirts — it can be safely asserted that it held a quotidian presence in medieval Islamic society. There is, however, a missing link between the information available in the theurgic textual tradition and what exists in the material culture. Though there are huge numbers of amulets in various forms which survive, many of these types are not at all mentioned in the manuals. No instructions for the construction of amulets are presented in the texts, though there are explanations of some of the forms that are contained in them. In the case of artifacts such as magic shirts and magic bowls, there is simply nothing at all in the texts which corresponds to or describes them in any way.

This missing link must unfortunately stay missing. In any system of such great erudition as exemplified by the theurgic tradition in Islam, there must be a component of initiation in order to maintain the esoteric qualities of the system. This is the key to the system. The texts may demonstrate the theory and the cosmology behind the work, but rarely if ever the work itself. Even if details for the practices are given, they tend to be broken up across several works. There is also the problem of intentional mistakes in texts, which are meant to throw off the uninitiated. The material culture left behind, if it exists at all, gives no further clues as to what the practice exactly entails. In the context of Islam, we should be thrilled indeed that there exists such a rich material culture that can be associated with the occult. It is vastly understudied at present, as are many topics specifically related to the occult. The only way to really fully study the unwritten aspects of theurgy is to be

77. This is in fact a loose description of one such shirt, presumably for a child or very slight person which the author saw, again in the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul

initiated into the knowledge, though few would be willing to do this, even if it would be possible to find a mentor to take them on as a disciple. Without this knowledge, we are left to speculation as outsiders looking in.

Pearls before swine

Again we return to the issue of the insider-outsider paradigm. As discussed, there is a necessity for obscurity on the part of the practicing theurgist. The occult is not something that is simply ignored or forgotten and lost to obscurity. Instead it is a secret, never to be forgotten, for which the adept must always strive: “the Pearl of Great Price.”⁷⁸ It is something which is to be actively hidden and then closely guarded. Peters writes: “The occult is doubly occult: it is a hidden knowledge of hidden truths or powers. These latter were concealed it is agreed, by the Maker of Truths who appears to have been generally reluctant to cast his Pearl before Swine, while those who do possess them are careful to keep a close guard on their treasure. Indeed in many societies those ‘knowers,’ who everywhere and always constitute an elite, banded together in guilds and brotherhoods to stand guard of the extremely useful and valuable knowledge that was theirs.”⁷⁹

In the next chapter we will introduce the foremost occult sage of Islamic civilization, Abu-l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī (d. 622 / 1225). His work is among the most recondite and confusing to access, and almost nothing is known about his life. In spite of this his best-known work, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*, remains the most famous (and infamous) work on the the occult sciences in Islamic history.

78. Francis E. Peters, “Hermes and Harran,” in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Formation of the Classical Islamic World 42 (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), 56.

79. Ibid.

Chapter 2

Abu-l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī (d. 622/1225)

Very little is known about the historical Aḥmad al-Būnī. Most of the information which appears in modern scholarship about his life and whereabouts has been covered repeatedly, and typically traces to the same core of several sources. Several more recent treatments of his work have interpreted this paucity of historical data as evidence that he may not have existed. Irregularities in language usage and repetitions in texts attributed to al-Būnī have allowed the same authors to conjecture that he may have been a figurehead for a corpus of otherwise authorless works: a ‘Corpus Būnīanum’ as it was coined by Jan Just Witkam.¹ It is possible that there exist works which have been incorrectly attributed to al-Būnī, or that some of his works were re-compiled long after his death. There is very little in the way of evidence for claims that he may not have existed. If there is a dearth of information about him to sufficiently establish his having existed, there is certainly no great wealth of data to the contrary. It will be demonstrated in this chapter that at least some of al-Būnī’s work is directly attributable to the historical person bearing his name. It will also be demonstrated that some such works appear to have been included in later attributed editions, though sometimes

1. Jan Just Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” in *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture (in Honor of Remke Kruk)*, ed. Arnold Vrolijk and Jan P. Hogendijk (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 183.

in an altered form.²

The Historical al-Būnī

The eminent bibliographer and historian Ḥājji Khalīfa (1017 / 1609 – 1067 / 1657) has al-Būnī's death date at 622 / 1225, with no further details beyond the year.³ Rosenthal speculates a later death date, sometime in the late 7th / 13th century, citing dates which appear in the printed editions of *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-awārif (al-kubrā)* as well as MS BERLIN 4126, dated 669H. He also argues that the mystical pedigree in the final section of *Shams al-ma'ārif (al-kubrā)* indicates that his death might have occurred late in the 7th / 13th century, on the basis of some of the names listed therein.⁴ The pedigrees are problematic, however, as they appear not to have been part of the original text. The problem and origin of the pedigrees is discussed below. Most other catalogs and similar works reference Ḥājji Khalīfa for this

2. These conclusions were arrived at after careful research in the manuscript collections at the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul conducted throughout 2011. The Appendix contains a list of works attributed to al-Būnī, drawn from various sources, listed with manuscripts corresponding to those titles.

3. Muṣṭafā b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qusṭanṭīnī Ḥājji Khalīfa (Kātip Çelebi), *Kashf al-zunūn 'an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn Lexicon Bibliographicum et Encyclopedicum*, ed. and trans. Gustave Flügel, 7 vols. (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1853), vol. 4, 74, #7658. Ḥājji Khalīfa lists the same date in all entries related to al-Būnī, save one. For the text titled '*Alam al-hudā wa asrār al-ihṭidā'*, Ḥājji Khalīfa lists 630 / 1232 as the death date; cf. vol. 4, 246, #8286. The date appears in both Flügel's edition and in the lithograph editions. It is occasionally echoed in later sources as a possible alternative date, but never further substantiated. One possible explanation is a note which appears in MS KILIÇ ALI PAŞA 588 at the end of a list of works said to be by the same author (f. 221r). This note may perhaps have been mistaken for a death date, given that there is a date listed for the MS in the colophon. The final section does appear to be a second colophon, but is in fact a list of titles copied from the margin of MS HAMIDIYE 260 after the colophon at the end of the first section (f. 239v, margin). The last two lines of the note read "By the grace of his Lord, the poor slave of Allāh, the mamlūk, finally arrived at the Ḥanafī *madhhab* and this [was] on the sixteenth of Rabī' II year 30 and praise to Allāh alone." This MS is listed alternately as *Sharḥ al-asmā' al-ḥusnā* and as '*Alam al-hudā wa asrār al-ihṭidā'*. See the Appendix for full details and discussion.

4. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 172, n. 807.

information. According to Ibn al-Zayyāt (d. 814 / 1411), his grave is near that of the jurist and traditionist ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 649 / 1251) in the covered tomb referred to as *al-Bāb*, the location of which was perhaps already lost at the time of Ibn al-Zayyāt’s writing in 804 / 1401. Ibn al-Zayyāt relates that al-Ṭaḥāwī’s grave is “at the door of the tomb, and near it in the *mihrab*” is that of al-Būnī.⁵

Most sources cite Būna, the name given by early Arab geographers, as the birthplace or original home of al-Būnī.⁶ The town has a long history of habitation.

“It was successively a Phoenician settlement, a Punic city, a possession of the Numidian kings, and a Roman city named Hippo Regius, it played a major role during the Christian era when Saint Augustine was bishop there (395-430CE). Captured by the Vandals (430CE), retaken by the Byzantines, it became a Muslim possession at the end of the [1st /]7th or beginning of the [2nd /]8th century.”⁷

It is now called al-‘Annāba, situated in north-eastern coastal Algeria.⁸

5. Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Nāṣr al-Dīn al-Anṣārī Ibn al-Zayyāt, *al-Kawākib al-sayyāra fi-l-tartīb al-ziyāra* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthanā, 1907. Reprinted in Cairo, 1968), 268:

قال القرشي وهو في التربة المقيبة الباب وهي لا تعرف الآن وعند باب هذه التربة قبر
الفقيه الامام العالم المحدث عبد الجليل الطحاوي مات سنة تسع وأربعين وستمائة
وقبره على باب التربة وقريب منه في المحراب قبر الشيخ الامام العالم أبي العباس
أحمد البوني صاحب اللمعة النورانية...

Ibn al-Zayyāt is cited in A. Dietrich, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “al-Būnī, Abū’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Ḳurashī al-Ṣūfī Muḥyī’l-Dīn (variants Takī al-Dīn, *Shihāb al-Dīn*.)” The al-Ṭaḥāwī to which Ibn al-Zayyāt is referring should not be confused with the more famous Ḥanafī jurist and traditionist from Egypt of several centuries prior, Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321 / 933). The al-Ṭaḥāwī of interest, it would appear, was doomed to relative obscurity.

6. See: *El*²; Yūsuf Ilyān Sarkīs, *Mu‘ajam al-maṭbū‘āt al-‘arabiyya wa-l-mu‘arraba*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Sarkīs, 1928); et al.

7. *El*², s.v. “al-‘Annāba” (by G. Marçais).

8. *Ibid.*

While equally little is known about Aḥmad al-Būnī’s ancestry and progeny, according to Brockelmann, Aḥmad al-Būnī had a son named Abu-l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Abbās al-Būnī.⁹ Considering the structure of ‘Alī al-Būnī’s name, al-Būnī is more likely to be his grandfather, himself being Abu-l-‘Abbās and his “son” being Ibn ‘Abbās.

We have some insight into the intellectual and spiritual pedigree of Aḥmad al-Būnī from his own texts, as well as from his inclusion in others as well. al-Nabhānī mentions al-Būnī and cites among his miracles (*karamāt*) the identification of specific supplications which were related to him by the Prophet Muḥammad in a vision.¹⁰ Witkam provides a group of *sanads* (“lineages”) which trace the intellectual traditions of the specific ‘ulūm in which al-Būnī is initiated. These pedigrees are taken from the printed editions of *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā wa laṭā‘if al-‘awārif*.¹¹ Witkam comments that “[if these pedigrees] were not an integral part of the *Shams al-ma‘ārif* from the very beginning (and the manuscript tradition does not seem to warrant this), they may have been part of the author’s *Fahrasa*, the educational (auto)biography, a genre which has become particularly popular in the Maghrib.”¹² These lists, beginning with the heading “Epilogue on the commemoration of the chain of authority of our *shaykhs*,” do, however, appear in at least two of the earliest manuscript copies of *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*, which means that this feature was present in the manuscript tradition as early as the middle of the 11th / 17th century.¹³

The pedigrees, regardless of their actual historical veracity, do demon-

9. Brockelmann, *GALs*, 911. Brockelmann attributes his son (“Sein Sohn ...schreib”) with writing a MS titled *Fukūk* [poems and stories,] Berl. Qu. 1044.

10. Yūsuf b. Ismā‘īl al-Nabhānī, *Jāmi‘ karamāt al-awliyā’* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1962), 508.

11. Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” 190–196.

12. *Ibid.*, 190.

13. ((حَاتِمَةٌ فِي ذِكْرِ سَنَدٍ مِشْأَخُنَا...)) MS HACI SELIM AĞA 528 (dated in the colophon, f. 313r: Friday at the end of Dhū al-Qa‘da 1140 H), ff. 310v, ln. 15–312r, ln. 10 and MS HACI BEŞİR AĞA (EYÜP) 89 (dated in the colophon, f. 215r: the middle of Jumāda I 1057 H), ff. 213r, ln. 43–214v, ln. 8.

strate that there is an effort, as in the case of most mystic authors, at connecting al-Būnī to a larger tradition, which can be traced back all the way to the Prophet Muhammad himself.¹⁴ He is also variously connected to the first five Shī‘ī Imāms,¹⁵ as well as to renowned Andalusian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (560 / 1165 – 638 / 1240)¹⁶ and Spanish traditionist Abū-l-‘Abbas Aḥmad b. ‘Umār al-Anṣārī al-Mursī (504 / 1110 – 584 / 1188).¹⁷ Witkam elaborates that these pedigrees demonstrate that al-Būnī has been linked to both the Western and Eastern Islamic esoteric and mystical traditions, but again cautions the reader not to associate al-Būnī as a Shī‘ī author simply due to the mention of the Imāms in his *sanads*, as was done by el-Gawhary.¹⁸

Summary of the state of the textual tradition of al-Būnī

The textual tradition of works attributed to al-Būnī is confused and confusing to assess. At present there exists no exhaustive study of his works as a whole. This is not to say that his works are in any short supply, nor that the most widely known are particularly difficult to acquire at present, in printed form. There exists a group of printed works attributed to al-Būnī, the earliest in lithograph form, from the 13th / 19th century produced variously in India and Egypt, some printed in Cairo and elsewhere throughout the 14th / 20th century, and some printed and reprinted within the last decade, primarily in Beirut. There also exists a large number of manuscripts attributed

14. Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” 192, 195, 196.

15. *Ibid.*, 192.

16. See *EF*².

17. See *EF*², s.v. “Ibn Ḥubaysh, Abu ‘l-Ḳāsim ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf b. Abī ‘Īsā al-Anṣārī al-Mursī” (by D.M. Dunlop).

18. Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” 196. See also el-Gawhary, “Die Gottesnamen im magischen Gebrauch in den al-Buni zugeschriebenen Werken,” 14, and “al-Mu‘allafāt al-siḥriyya al-mansūba li-l-Būnī,” 26.

to him in collections throughout the Islamic world and Europe.¹⁹

Most modern studies on al-Būnī treat only those of his works which have made it into print form and wide circulation or they focus on only a handful of MSS, which usually comprise part of a European collection. *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā* receives the most attention since it has been printed a number of times in the last two centuries. It is regarded as a manual for the occult sciences of *ṣimīyya* and *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, which relate to the use of the Arabic letters for theurgic purposes, as discussed in the first chapter. Witkam expands the discussion of the textual tradition initiated by el-Gawhary in “Die Gottesnamen im magischen Gebrauch in den al-Buni zugeschriebenen Werken.”²⁰ Witkam discusses al-Būnī’s intellectual lineage at length in order to further his discussion of the Corpus itself, rather than placing al-Būnī into the category of “magician.” His study represents one of very few truly philological studies on al-Būnī. el-Gawhary proposed this as well, but then focused more on the body of texts as an example of folk practice rather than a textual tradition. Presently, the underlying assumption for most discussions of al-Būnī’s textual tradition is that very little of his work can be directly attributed to him, and should be viewed as a “corpus.”²¹ This concept was first suggested by el-Gawhary, is a feature in all studies of al-Būnī’s works in every study

19. The greatest number of these manuscripts languishes in Turkey, practically untouched, in a variety of collections and libraries, many of which have been digitized and are now housed in high-resolution, electronic format at the library belonging to the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul. The collections housed at the Süleymaniye alone contain around 150 MSS attributed to al-Būnī, approximately one third of which are dated. Those manuscripts which are housed in state-run libraries can be viewed in low-resolution online or downloaded in high resolution for a fee at the website for the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism - “Turkey Manuscripts” (Türkiye Cumhuriyet Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı - “Türkiye Yazmaları”) [<https://www.yazmalar.gov.tr/>]. The site also gives a relatively complete listing of municipal, regional and *waqf*- (*vakıf*-) based libraries (*kütüphaneler*) throughout the country [<https://www.yazmalar.gov.tr/kutuphane.php>] and the names of the collections (*koleksiyonlar*) contained therein [<https://www.yazmalar.gov.tr/koleksiyonlar.php>].

20. el-Gawhary, “Die Gottesnamen im magischen Gebrauch in den al-Buni zugeschriebenen Werken,” 17–18.

21. *Ibid.*, 15–16, 18.

conducted thereafter.²²

Aversion to scholarship on al-Būnī

There is a modern scholarly aversion to al-Būnī's work, due in part to the nature of its content and to difficulties in understanding and analyzing the texts themselves. In the first chapter we described some of the problems of dealing with theurgy and the occult as a topic. There is no shortage of similar problems present when dealing with the textual tradition of a given author or set of authors in some sort of intellectual lineage. The topics themselves are complex to the point of being indecipherable without a background in astrology, alchemy, history both ancient and late antique, ancient philosophy, theology, and religious law and custom. This is not an endeavor for the faint of heart or the easily frustrated. Ullmann found al-Būnī's work to be poorly organized and difficult to understand.²³ To be fair to Ullmann, however, his purpose was not in sorting out the bizarre and labyrinthine textual tradition of an author nearly lost to obscurity save for a few references in catalogs and a handful of works which survive to the modern era. He worked to create a modern taxonomy of sciences in the Islamic world—hence the title: *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* — using all of the resources

22. The most extensive studies of al-Būnī's work after al-Gawhary are: Edgar Walter Francis, "Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals for Protection and Healing: Religion and Magic in the Writings of Ahmad ibn Ali al-Buni (d. 622 / 1225)" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2005); Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit*; Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work." Pielow's study is on the topic of magic in general and uses al-Būnī as its basis for analysis and Francis' is on the topic of healing by means of occult practices. Only Witkam's study is a discussion of the textual tradition using MSS found in the collection at Leiden University. This topic is one which warrants further investigation on a much larger scale. It would be interesting to collect together images and information on MSS attributed to al-Būnī from all over the world and develop a full catalog of works, much in the same way that Osman Yahia did for the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī in his *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn ʿArabī*. It is the hope of the present author to contribute to the definition of the "Corpus Būnianum," in Witkam's appellation.

23. Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, Erg. VI, Abt. I (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 391.

available to him. It would be unfair to criticize Ullmann's point regarding the work of al-Būnī, since anyone approaching the works would be hard pressed to find them any less perplexing, even if they had an extensive background in Islamic history and theology. It is also highly unlikely that one would be able to find the best sources available for al-Būnī, since he deliberately spread information across a huge body of written works which represent a huge single source if taken together. These are now scattered throughout the world, which even further obscures their content.²⁴ Further, al-Būnī, unlike a figure such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, does not have extensive commentaries written by his disciples. He also does not refer to himself or give very much in the way of autobiography in his writing. As a result, it is difficult to evaluate the historical personage of al-Būnī, as demonstrated above.

Ullmann seems also to be frustrated with the intellectual character of al-Būnī's work, seeing it simultaneously as credulous with regard to the unseen world, and as a work comprised of "stupid formulaic arithmetic which he [al-Būnī] thinks he can dominate."²⁵ As Witkam aptly observes, Ullmann appears to be suggesting that "al-Būnī, if only he had worked in a less formalistic arithmetical way, would really have provided his readers with meaningful answers to the enigma of the universe."²⁶ el-Gawhary theorizes two possible reasons for this lack of scholarship: first, during the time when al-Būnī was alive, there were "almost countless saints, ascetics and mystics," many of whom became quite well known; and second, that al-Būnī's writings have been previously associated with Shīʿī themes and authors.²⁷ Though, as mentioned above, with regard to the intellectual and spiritual pedigrees, placing al-Būnī as a Shīʿī is largely nonsensical. The lineage which connects him to the Imāms is likely to connect him to Jafr al-Ṣādiq, the ʿAlī Ibn Abī Tālib and finally the Prophet Muḥammad for the purposes of *ʿilm al-bāṭin* ("the science

24. Witkam points out that Ullmann must have been using one of the printed editions of *Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā wa laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif* as the section to which he refers is not present in the MSS evaluated by the former.

25. Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 391.

26. Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work," 184.

27. el-Gawhary, "al-Muʿallafāt al-siḥriyya al-mansūba li-l-Būnī," 26.

of the interior”) or *‘ilm al-jafr* with which mystics widely accepted to be Sunnīs, such as Ibn al-‘Arabī, were also interested.²⁸

Problems in establishing authorship

Lack of access to dated MSS has also played a part in relegating al-Būnī’s work to the realm of the unapproachable. Though, on this point, Fahd has a fairly comprehensive listing of dated MSS for *Shams al-Ma‘arif*, mostly in Turkey, in which he includes several not listed elsewhere.²⁹ There is also a rather long list in Brockelmann, in both the first edition and in the supplemental volumes.³⁰

What we do lack is autograph copies of any of al-Būnī’s works, even though we do have some very early MSS.³¹ The earliest dated extant MS from al-Būnī’s work is MS MANISA IL HALK KÜTÜPHANESI 1445, which is dated 618H, though its origins are murky.³² MS HAMIDIYE 260, on the other hand, while dated 772H, also indicates that it was copied from a MS which was copied from the words of al-Būnī himself, begun in the first ten days of Dhū al-Qa‘ida 621H and completed on Monday, 17 Dhū al-Ḥijja in the same year.³³ This information is significant for two reasons. First, it establishes that al-Būnī was alive prior to 622H, which helps to establish further that he did, in fact, live in the period which has been commonly accepted for his life. Second, this is, to date, the only MS which bears any such certificate of recitation for al-Būnī. It is interesting that this title is one which receives little to

28. See Toufic Fahd, *La Divination arabe, etudes religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l’Islam* (Strasbourg / Leiden: Brill, 1966), 219-224; and *EI*², s.v. “DJafr” (by Toufic Fahd).

29. Fahd, *La Divination arabe*, 231.

30. Brockelmann, *GAL*, 497-498 Brockelmann, *GALs*, 910-911.

31. Budge refers to an autograph by al-Būnī in a note, though this reference is erroneous. Budge’s reference is to a note in Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l’Afrique du Nord* which simply refers to the 1291 / 1874 lithograph of *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*, which is not an autograph in any sense of the word.

32. See discussion below.

33. Colophon, f. 239v.

no attention until now. *‘Alam al-hudā* appears in several catalogs and there are a handful of references to it, but it is never properly treated. This is an important piece in the puzzle of al-Būnī’s textual corpus.

The “Corpus Būnīanum”

Witkam, in his article “Gazing into the Sun,” proposes that we should consider some of al-Būnī’s works as a “*Corpus Būnīanum*,” in which the texts represents a compendium or “cookbook” of work by multiple authors and generations of practicing magicians. He argues, citing el-Gawhary’s 1968 dissertation, that “[t]his does not merely imply that there is a pseudepigraphic Būnīan literature, but also that some works by al-Būnī, or ascribed to him, may in fact constitute a composition of fragments of very diverse origin.”³⁴

Similar assertions were made with regard to the legitimacy of the work of Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, which was demonstrated in part to be the case by the late Paul Kraus. Kraus demonstrated that some of the texts attributed to Jābir were actually written by later Ismā‘īlīs.³⁵

el-Gawhary’s insight is not necessarily accurate with regard to the entire catalog of al-Būnī’s work, but it is an adept analysis of what has happened in the case of *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif (al-kubrā)*. On its surface, the book appears to be a large single work in four volumes. There is significant evidence to suggest, however, that the modern editions and the late manuscripts bearing this title are in fact a sort of compilation or edition themselves. el-Gawhary states that the book did not always appear in the form in which it now exists.³⁶ He discovered this through an analysis of the themes and language contained in the text.³⁷

34. Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” 183.

35. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 259.

36. el-Gawhary, “Die Gottesnamen im magischen Gebrauch in den al-Buni zugeschriebenen Werken,” 18.

37. His access to manuscripts for the purposes of his dissertation, it seems, was limited to only a few in Cairo. We shall attempt here to pick up where el-Gawhary left off, having had the good fortune to inspect a fair number of dated manuscripts which shed light on some

The three shumūs

Witkam identifies that there are at least two, and more likely three, versions or recensions of *Shams al-ma‘ārif* in its manuscript tradition, and that the practice of having multiple versions of a text is common in classical Islamic scholarship. In this case, a given work might have a long or full recension (*kabīr*, *basīṭ*, *mabsūt*, *muṭawwal*), as well as concise (*ṣaghīr*) and intermediate (*wasīṭ*) versions.³⁸ Fahd identifies that there are in fact three recensions which bear the name *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, each with noted differences.³⁹ Ziriklī also lists three recensions or versions in *al-‘Alām: qāmūs tarājīm li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisā’ min al-‘Arab wa-l-must‘aribīn wa-l-mustashriqīn*.⁴⁰

The smallest of the Suns

Fahd presents at least two MSS as the (*ṣughrā*) version, MS MANISA, GENEL, 1445 (a.k.a. MS MANISA IL HALK KÜTÜPHANESI 1445, dated 618H in numerals in the colophon) and MS AYASOFYA 2799 (dated Thursday 13 Ramadan 861 in the colophon). These have some features that belong in *Shams*, including diagrams which explain aspects of the cosmology and example of squares, but they are otherwise quite different. Fahd seems to be wary of the date in the colophon, though he does not specify why.⁴¹ Indeed the MS has an aspect of strangeness to it.

The hand is inspired by Shikasta Nasta‘līq and the text is framed, though not very precisely. The diagrams which appear in both MS AYASOFYA 2799 and MS AYASOFYA 2802 (N.D.) are not fully complete in this MS. Some are fully drawn and labeled, others have an outline of the background shapes in red ink, but no text. It is possible that the shapes were meant to be the

of the textual problems in al-Būnī’s modern editions.

38. Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” 186.

39. Fahd, *La Divination arabe*, 231.

40. Khayr al-Dīn Ziriklī, *al-‘Alām: qāmūs tarājīm li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisā’ min al-‘Arab wa-l-must‘aribīn wa-l-mustashriqīn*, 9th ed, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm al-Malāyīn, 1990), 174.

41. Fahd, *La Divination arabe*, 231.

only presentation of the diagrams, but this is unlikely given the style of the diagrams in all of the other MSS ascribed to al-Būnī. It is also possible that this is a later copy which has been presented as though it is earlier. Images of the MS do not provide enough information for any possibility to be more than speculation.

Another peculiarity of this text, in each of its extant copies, is that it refers to the title *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif* by name.⁴² There are two alternate possibilities: first, the work may actually be another title entirely. It is labeled as *Mawāqīt al-baṣā’ir wa-laṭā’if al-sarā’ir* in the catalog of the Manisa Library, even though there is a title page which identifies it as *Shams al-ma‘ārif*. The text also corresponds to two others with the same title. Second, it is possible that they represent a commentary *Shams al-ma‘ārif* which has been mislabeled. The text is very different than that in the other two recensions, though it does seem to be related. There is an otherwise unattested commentary listed at the end of MS HAMIDIYE 260 and MS KILIÇ ALI PAŞA 588 titled *Taysīr al-‘awārif fī tilkhīṣ shams al-ma‘ārif*. In that same list, there is only reference to a single *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif*. Multiple recensions are not cited until much later.⁴³

Either of these possibilities are equally plausible, as is that this text is another version of the same title, as has been suggested in several of the sources listed here. The relationships between these three texts have yet to be studied in deep detail.

The case for an authentic *Shams*

Witkam observes, as does el-Gawhary that the manuscript tradition varies widely from the printed tradition — lithograph or otherwise — at least in the case of the *kubrā*.⁴⁴ There exist two printed editions of *Shams al-ma‘ārif*

42. MS MANISA IL HALK KÜTÜPHANESİ 1445, f. 48v, lns. 1-2 and MS AYASOFYA 2799, f. 34v, ln. 12. The reference reads ((كتابنا المعروف شمس المعارف ولطائف العوارف)).

43. See the Appendix for details.

44. Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” 186.

which refer to themselves as the *ṣuḡhrā*. One was recently printed in Beirut without notes and by an anonymous editor.⁴⁵ It contains no information with regard to which manuscripts were used in its compilation and edition. The text of this edition corresponds with that of another published in Istanbul in 1936, with minor variants throughout.⁴⁶ It too has an anonymous editor, though it divulges a great deal more about the origin of its text. The editor, whoever he might have been, saw fit to include an introduction with some information about al-Būnī and a list of his works edited and otherwise, as well as an image of the title page, first folios, and last folio of the manuscript which was used to establish the text.⁴⁷ The introduction reads:

“This manuscript which we have in [the present] edition is from the manuscripts of one of our associates, and [which] I have in photograph after consideration of the original and its revision. I have photographed a copy in the Institute for Arabic Manuscripts, and another photographed copy is present in the Institute at ‘al-Kitāniyya’ Library, Rabat, Morocco, under number 49 [titled] *ḥurūf wa-awqāf (shams al-ma‘ārif)*. The use of them came to pass in some strange situations, but our version is more accurate and better.”⁴⁸

The date in the colophon as seen in the printed image is obscured and illegible. The layout and style is similar to several MSS which the author has seen in Istanbul, but does not appear to actually be any of those listed in the first appendix for this title. It is obviously a finely-executed commission as it has an ornate headpiece and the text appears to be framed.

The text does, however, match that of a very finely executed MS ATIF EFENDI KOLEKSIYONU 1539, dated 831H which also happens to be the earliest

45. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā* (Beirut: Mu’sasat al-Nūr li-l-Maṭbu‘āt, 2005).

46. See: Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, The text actually corresponds with *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-wuṣṭā*. (Istanbul: unknown publisher, 1936).

47. *Ibid.*, 3-9. Information from this list is included in the Appendix.

48. We have to assume that the anonymous editor is referring to the Institute of Arabic Manuscripts in Cairo, given that he refers to other MSS in Cairo in his notes.

dated for this particular version of the text. The text of MS BAĞDATLI VEHBI 1721, dated 1065H, also matches that of MS ATIF EFENDI KOLEKSİYONU 1539 and the 1936CE printed edition. It is noted as “*wuṣṭā*” in a *majmūʿ* of commentaries by the owner: MS BAĞDATLI VEHBI 2250, dated 1321H, f. 54r. MS HACI SELİM AĞA 529, was ostensibly produced alongside its *kubrā* mate (MS HACI SELİM AĞA 528) in 1140H, making it one of the latest examples of this version. Between this and the copy in Bağdatlı Vehbi, it would appear that the text was still known in an older shorter form long after the *Kubrā* had been compiled. Given the lack of a better appellation and the confusion regarding the *ṣuḡhrā*, we will refer to the printed editions of the latter and the MSS to which they correspond collectively as the *wuṣṭā*. While this is not the earliest dated example of al-Būnī’s work, it is consistent throughout the different MSS and the most likely to actually be *Shams al-maʿārif*. There are a great number of said correspondences between the *kubrā* and the *wuṣṭā* which are pointed out in the notes of 1936 printed edition of the latter.⁴⁹

The *kubrā* manuscripts

The earliest dated MSS of the *kubrā* appear in the mid-11th century: MS BÂYAZÎD 1304 (1055H); MS BEŞİR AĞA (EYÜP) 89 (1057H); and Nuruosmaniye 2831 (dated 1064H). There are *kubrā* MSS produced until the 1291 lithograph, after which the manuscripts taper off. There is one particularly interesting copy in a beautiful hand, with gilt frames and headpiece: MS HACI SELİM AĞA 528 (1140H). This has a second volume which is not dated, but is in a similar hand, and with the same gilt features. The second volume is the *wuṣṭā*.

Though the text is similar in places between the *wuṣṭā* and the *kubrā*, there is a key difference which is striking, once noticed. The text of the *wuṣṭā* is much more personal in its presentation. The lack of personal or first-person voice throughout the *kubrā* has already been noted by Witkam. He pointed out that the end section of the *kubrā* is presented in the third-

49. al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif al-ṣuḡhrā*

person, whereas the rest of the text tends not to be.⁵⁰ Indeed, the portions of the *kubrā* which correspond to those in the *wuṣṭā* tend to be written in first-person, addressing the reader through the use of the “royal we.” There are further differences and discrepancies which serve to convince the careful reader that this text has at the very least been altered at a later date, if not compiled from multiple sources.

Problems within the text of *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā)*

Fuṣūl 21-30, according to el-Gawhary, contain a number of expressions not found elsewhere in the text. *Faṣl* 21 begins the third part belonging to the larger book.⁵¹ el-Gawhary is quite right in his assessment that this does not belong to this work, and is possibly not attributable to al-Būnī at all. This particular section seems to correspond to the the work titled *al-Luma‘at al-nūraniyya*, the work to which Ibn Khaldūn refers as *al-Anmāṭ*.⁵² This book, which also appears in the *majmū‘* MS HAMIDIYE 260, as well as numerous other MSS, begins with a series of hourly supplications which are sorted by the day of the week, beginning with the “first hour belonging to Sunday” and proceeding through the rest. This section does not appear in any form in *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā)*. The next section is a series of *anmāṭ*: “types,” classifications or groupings pertaining to the divine names. This is where the differences between the texts become very noticeable. First, each section is different: they do not appear in the same order in the MS as in the printed edition. Second, the names explained are different names.

A similar phenomenon occurs in the final *faṣl* of *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā)*. This section appears at first to be nearly identical in content to a work called ‘*Alam al-hudā wa-asrār al-ihtidā*’. This title is the first part of the *majmū‘* MS HAMIDIYE 260 (copied in Cairo, dated 772H in the colophon, f. 239v). MS KILIÇ

50. Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” 190.

51. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā) wa laṭā‘if al-‘awārif* (Cairo: Maktabat Jumhuriyyat Miṣr, 1960), 277.

52. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 177-178.

ALI PAŞA 588 (dated 792H, f. 221r) is a copy of this *faşl* from MS HAMIDIYE 260. This book is mentioned in *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-wuṣṭā)*, which might indicate that the former was written prior to the latter.⁵³ The reference does not appear in the *kubrā*, which would make sense, since a version of the very book appears at the end. This section — number 39 in the printed edition, number 37 in MS HACI BEŞİR AĞA (EYÜP) 89 — appears at first glance to be the same as ‘*Alam al-hudā wa-asrār al-ihtidā*’. Upon thorough reading of both ‘*Alam al-hudā*’ and this section, it is discovered that the names that are treated in both have nearly verbatim text in the treatments. However, there are a great many names which do not overlap. It appears that al-Būnī used an entirely different set of names than do his modern counterparts. Doutte, Pielow and Gawhary all list the Divine Names as they appear in the *ḥadīth* compendia of al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Māja.⁵⁴

Issues of authorship

It was noted by Fahd that at least one section of *Shams al-Ma‘ārif*, titled *Sharḥ asmā’ al-‘aẓama*, was copied for Bâyezîd II.⁵⁵ This section appears in the printed *kubrā* edition as section number 12. There is a heading similar to this in the *wuṣṭā*. Al-Būnī appears not to actually be the author of this section, but rather to have copied it from an older work.⁵⁶ Fahd notes: “al-Buni claims to have copied a copy that belonged to Prince Najm al-Din Ayyūb, who had

53. al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḥrā*, 18. The anonymous editor indicates that this title exists in Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyya.

54. See Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l’Afrique du Nord*, 200-203; el-Gawhary, “Die Gottesnamen im magischen Gebrauch in den al-Buni zugeschriebenen Werken,” 166-169 and Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit*, 91-92, 94-95. Pielow actually lists the Divine Names as they correspond to the so-called ‘Sūryānī’ names as they appear in the *Jaljalūtiyya*. See Chapter 4 for further discussion of this.

55. Fahd, *La Divination arabe*, 238, n. 3. Fahd references MS AYASOFYA 1872, ff. 1-15r, 17. The author has not seen this MS.

56. This work appears in print in two editions from Cairo, one undated, the other dated 1358 / 1939. It is identified in print as either *Sharḥ ism Allāh al-‘aẓama* or *al-Lu‘lu‘ al-manẓūm fi-l-ṭalāsīm wa-l-nujūm*. See Rosenthal’s note: Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 168, n. 793.

made a copy of Ubayy b. Ka‘b’s copy, which was owned by the Prophet.”⁵⁷ “Prince Najm al-Dīn” refers to the man who would become al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb b. Kāmil Muḥammad (603 / 1207 – Sha‘bān 647 / November 1249), ostensibly the last of the Ayyūbid Sulṭāns, who came to power in 637 / 1240 and reigned until his death. He served as his father’s deputy in Egypt during the reign of his father, al-Malik al-Kāmil I Nāṣir al-Dīn (573 / 1177 or 576 / 1180 – 21 Rajab 635 / 6 March 1238, r. 615 / 1218 – 635 / 1238).⁵⁸ This would place him in Cairo at roughly the end of al-Būnī’s life, at a time when Egypt was under attack from Crusader invasions, and his father was subject to various intrigues on the parts of members of his family in Syria.⁵⁹ Perhaps more interesting is that this text is said to have been owned by Ubayy b. Ka‘b al-Anṣārī al-Madanī (d. between 19 / 640 – 35 / 656), secretary to the Prophet Muḥammad in Medīna, who is purported to have compiled a copy of the Qur’ān prior to Caliph ‘Uthmān’s compilation.⁶⁰ The authenticity of that claim is unverifiable, but it does suggest that al-Būnī himself, rather than someone else, may have compiled other older texts into his own works.

At the very least, al-Būnī is establishing a theurgic textual tradition that precedes him, and which perhaps is connected with the Prophet Muḥammad himself. At most, he is legitimating his intellectual efforts and placing himself in a position of great importance. If he was in the employ of a ruler, then al-Būnī is also establishing his legitimacy in another way. The reference to al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ also might indicate some sort of patronage relationship be-

57. Fahd, *La Divination arabe*, 238, n. 3. Translation from the French belongs to the author.

58. For al-Ṣāliḥ see *El²*, s.v. “al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Naḍjmal-Dīn Ayyūb b. al-Kāmil Muḥammad” (by D.S. Richards) and Joan Wucher King, *Historical Dictionary of Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1984), 552-4. For al-Kāmil, see *El²*, s.v. “al-Kāmil (al-Malik)” (by H.L. Gottschalk) and King, 381.

59. King, *Historical Dictionary of Egypt*, 381.

60. *El²*, s.v. “Ubayy b. Ka‘b” (by A. Rippin). For further references to Ubayy b. Ka‘b and the compilation of the Qur’ān, see Muḥammad ibn Ishāq Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: a tenth-century survey of Muslim culture*, trans. Bayard Dodge, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 58, 65, 81; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abu-l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1967), 181-2; and Abī Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Dāwud b. al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1985), 31-4, 63-4, 164-6.

tween al-Būnī and the Ayyūbid prince. If al-Būnī did have an Ayyūbid prince as his patron, then it is almost certain that he was *working* for him — in other words, performing theurgic rites on the behalf of the patron. This relationship between the powerful ruler and his court theurgist, represents an occult formulation of authority and hegemony. It places a great deal of power in the hands of the theurgist, whether one believes in the the effects of his work or not. It is all but certain that a ruler of this era would have had an astrologer in his employ and sought his consultation before undertaking any major endeavor. The same goes for the theurgist.

Evidence of patronage for the works of al-Būnī

The above may be impossible to establish, but the provenance of codices, collections and MSS containing al-Būnī's work gives some clue to the reasons why these texts survive until the present, and why they appear to have been copied, recopied, compiled and edited many times and in different forms. As stated, the reference to al-Būnī's copying of a text owned by al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ, if accurate, indicates that al-Būnī probably had the patronage of an Ayyūbid prince. There is some evidence as well for the posthumous patronage of his works on the part of the Ottomans. Many of the MSS now housed by the Süleymaniye Library have the signet stamp and ownership or commission statements which relate them to the Ottomans. On the surface, it is clear that the Ottomans had some interest in these texts, as they amassed more and better copies of them than existed anywhere else in the world. This fact alone does not mean a great deal, since the Ottoman sultāns collected a great many texts from a wide range of authors, the best of which are known to exist in Istanbul.⁶¹

61. Rosenthal notes this in the introduction to his translation of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*, as does Nader Bizri in his foreword to *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: the Ikhwan al-Safa' and their Rasa'il : An Introduction*. Additionally, Osman Yahia showed that the best manuscripts belonging to the work of Ibn al-ʿArabī in *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn ʿArabī*. The same appears to be the case for al-Būnī, there being around 170 MSS containing his works and very elusive commentaries thereupon in the collections managed by the

Two Ottoman Sultāns, in particular, seem to have had a great interest in the writings of al-Būnī. The mystical interests of Bâyezîd II (d. 918 / 1512, r. 886 / 1481 – 918 / 1512) are noted, as is his patronage of the Halveti order of Şūfî dervishes, who flourished after he invited one of their *shaykhs* to Istanbul.⁶² Bâyezîd II has a signet stamp on a fair number of MSS by al-Būnī.⁶³ This fact may mean nothing beyond the fact that he, like other sultāns, endowed a library and filled it with volumes from around the Ottoman world. However, the MSS which bear this distinction are also typically either very old or very beautifully executed, which means that they are important. The same occurs with the signet and ownership statements of Mahmud I (d. 1168 / 1754, r. 1143 / 1630 – 1168 / 1754), though in this case, they are far more prolific.⁶⁴ At least one of every title found in the Turkish collections bears the ownership statement of Mahmud I.

The state of the ‘Corpus’

As stated, the textual tradition of al-Būnī is far from linear. However, we have gained some insight into the development of the “Corpus Būnīanum” and some of the more prominent texts which fall under this heading. It is quite clear that al-Būnī’s compositions are meant to be taken as a group, not one by one, in order that the theory and practice which he presents be synthesized before it can be applied by the practitioner. The corpus represents an occult tradition, after all, and such obfuscation would make sense in context. The practical information is no better organized than the theory. It is likely that, given enough time, the practitioner might study this body of

Süleymaniye Library. This does not even account for the libraries elsewhere in Turkey which have at least another 50. For a list of titles and important corresponding MSS, see the Appendix.

62. Caroline Finkle, *Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (London: John Murray, 2006), 57-102.

63. For more information about the reign of Bâyezîd II, see *ibid.* and Halil İnalcik, *The Ottoman Empire; The Classical Age 1300-1600* (London: Phoenix, 2000), 30-33.

64. For more on the reign of Mahmud I, see Finkle, *Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923*, 254-271.

work and be blessed with the illumination required for such an endeavor. It is, however, equally likely that the practitioner might never achieve illumination. In either case, the arrangement of information in the texts provides a hurdle which the novice must clear, in order to attain to higher levels of practice.

Of the texts discussed here, as well as those listed in the Appendix, *Shams al-ma'ārif* remains the most problematic. It is arguable that in its latest and longest form, it is either a compilation or an edition which strays quite far from its source material. It could even be argued, given the differences in the content of the texts presented, particularly with regard to the names used, that the *kubrā* recension represents a later bowdlerization.

We will look more closely at the *wuṣṭā* in the second half of the present work. The cosmology and the place of the Divine Names therein, which will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4, respectively, is somewhat more straightforward than in the *kubrā*.

Chapter 3

The ancient roots of Islamic theurgy

Understanding medieval Islamic cosmology

The sciences extant in the medieval Islamic world were an agglomeration of referred knowledge from cultures existing prior to the advent of Islam, which came to be expressed and developed wholly within the context of the central doctrines and tenets of an Islamic system. Seyyid Hossein Nasr characterizes this process as cultural development through enrichment; synthesis rather than accretion: “In this region, the home of many earlier civilizations, Islam came into contact with a number of sciences which it absorbed, to the extent that these sciences were compatible with its own spirit and were able to provide nourishment for its own characteristic cultural life.”¹ Pielow makes a similar observation, arguing for a conception of synthesis over syncretism.²

We must, therefore, understand the conceptual framework upon which the ancient sciences hung in order to understand their development in the Islamic world. Ancient cosmology is the marriage of philosophy and science. Staggering in complexity, it represents the study of the ordering of nature and reality at abstract, fundamental and essential level as well as particular, developed and manifest levels.

1. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 30.

2. Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit*, 27.

Platonism is perhaps the most important philosophical framework within which to conceptualize and analyze the Islamic occult. The doctrines of Platonism are widely discussed in Islamic philosophical writing, both in praise and in criticism. The noted theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is said to have greatly appreciated the synthesis represented in Platonism: Kraus posited that “the reconciliation of philosophy with theology is achieved, in al-Rāzī’s view, at the level of a Platonistic system which in the last resort derives from the interpretation of [Plato’s] *Timaeus*.”³ The platform is seemingly even accepted by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (450/1058 – 505 / 1111) in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (“The incoherence of the philosophers”), even though he is typically thought to have rejected it completely.⁴ al-Ghazālī’s rejection can be argued not to be of the ancient philosophers themselves, but of the view of them taken by later philosophers. Particularly rejected as “failure to understand their supposed masters” is the view held by later philosophers that the ancients were other than monotheists themselves, “or that they had denied the existence of God, prophecy, and religious law.”⁵ Whether praised or rejected on a philosophical level, Platonism features very much in the Islamic worldview and in the conception of the sciences which are based thereupon.

It is perhaps useful to analyze the ways in which this Platonic worldview has survived until recent periods both in the Islamic world and elsewhere, and work backward to its origins in the philosophies. As such, we shall begin in the late medieval period with a brief discussion of several occult works which were of tremendous interest to both scholars of Islam and of other fields in the 20th century, and even to the present day.

3. Paul Kraus, “The controversies of Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī,” *Islamic Culture* 12 (1938): 131–153 cited in *IEP*, s.v. “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī” (by G.C. Anawati)

4. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 2-3.

5. John Walbridge, “Explaining away the Greek Gods in Islam,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 3 (July 1998): 401-402.

Medieval European occult associations with Platonism

Modern treatments of the Islamic occult tend to link its forms and concepts to the European occult tradition, which has as its basis such works as Agrippa von Nettesheim's *Three (or four) Books of Occult Philosophy* and pseudo-Majrīṭī's *Ghayāt al-Ḥakīm*, known in Latin as the "Picatrix."⁶ While there is some similarity between these texts and those belonging to al-Būnī, it is primarily in the form of a shared philosophical lineage, that of neo-Platonism, or perhaps more accurately and simply put, Platonism. Further discussion is warranted in order to analyze the ways in which the texts are similar and dissimilar.

The Picatrix antedates that of al-Būnī by approximately two centuries, though its exact origins are unknown. Its translations, Spanish and then Latin, are said to have occurred during the 7th / 13th century.⁷ While the book does share the qualities of being neo-Platonistic in its philosophical bent, it is seen as being indifferent to, or disdainful of "the governing religion and accepted moral standards."⁸ Hartner questions how the work could have been allowed to exist at all, in either its Muslim or Christian context, both of which he deems "intolerant," presumably of anything which was seen to deviate from orthodoxy:

"How is it possible that, in a Muslim society which may be characterized by any epithet whatever except tolerant, a book can be composed and read which, apart from the Basmala heading

6. Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit*, 7-9.

7. The authorship of the work is controversial. Ibn Khaldūn names the Andalusian mathematician and astronomer Maslama b. Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī (d. ca. 397 / 1007) as the author. It has been argued more recently that this is impossible, given that the work was compiled some fifty years or more after his death. See: David Pingree, "Some of the sources of the Ghāyat al-ḥakīm," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 1. For more information on al-Majrīṭī, see *El²*, s.v. "al-Maḍjriṭī, Abu 'l-Ḳāsim maslama b. Aḥmad al-Faraḍī" (by J. Vernet).

8. Willy Hartner, "Notes on Picatrix," *Isis* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1965): 441.

the first page, contains nothing whatsoever that would seem acceptable to the faithful, nothing but sheer and pure pagan idolatry? And, again, how is it possible that a no less intolerant Christian society, a couple of centuries later, feels the need of having the same specimen of the most flourishing paganism translated into Latin? Looking at the grinning monsters and incubi decorating, side by side with figures of saints, our Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals, or looking at the monstrous, thoroughly pagan figures with which pious medieval readers sometimes have adorned the most saintly texts, we get a kind of answer to our question and a glimpse into a world other than our traditional one, a world that betrays its close kinship with the one revealed to us by *Picatrix*. It is thoroughly amoral, in the sense of making no distinction between good and evil.”⁹

Pingree agrees on this point, though in a less unctuous manner, arguing that “while the magic of the *Ghāya* is claimed to be based on a Neoplatonic theory whose virtue was that it derived all magical powers from the One who is by definition the Good, the types of magical acts described in the text reflect also ancient traditions[.]”¹⁰ This feature marks it as very different from the work of al-Būnī. As has already been discussed in Chapter 1, al-Būnī does make it clear from the outset that the practitioner engaging in theurgy of the nature proposed by him must be a pious Muslim, with purity of intent. While Hartner is certainly basing his above analysis on specific editions in the tradition of *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* or *Picatrix*, it is clear that there are elements present therein which fall solidly outside the scope of orthodoxy and fall into the realm of pure idolatry. It may have been the case that inclusion of any troublesome or heretical material was a form of dissimulation on the part of the compiler of the text. Such dissimulation does in fact occur often in the form of mistakes and omissions in the text and illustrations within al-Būnī’s works, though it should be noted that there are never any directly pictorial

9. Hartner, “Notes on *Picatrix*,” 441.

10. Pingree, “Some of the sources of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*,” 2, 14-15.

representations of beings, human, angelic, demonic or otherwise.

A further similarity between *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and the work of al-Būnī, beside that of their Platonist connection, is a rather confusing textual tradition. This, as we have seen in the last chapter, is probably a feature of any occult textual tradition over time, given both the secret nature of the topics at hand, and the lasting effects of efforts on the parts of religious authorities in given periods to purge the realms of such arcane or esoteric literature, for the ostensible purpose of eliminating impious activities.¹¹ It should be noted, however, as we discussed in the last chapter, that rather than destroying the works of al-Būnī, the Ottoman Sultans saw fit to collect, copy and preserve them on several occasions. The literature on the Picatrix is so extensive that the author cannot even begin to give it proper treatment here. Suffice it to say that the association with al-Būnī is problematic.

The work, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy (De Occulta Philosophia)*, by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (AD 1486 – 1535), on the other hand, exhibits a much less controversial neo-Platonism, which is in line with that of al-Būnī. Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* presents a cosmological framework in which the natural powers—those belonging to God and his servant beings, namely angels—can be entreated for theurgic purposes. Charles G. Nauert points out that: “[t]hese natural powers, however, are not what we mean by the same phrase today. Sometimes Agrippa means ‘terrestrial’ when he writes ‘natural.’ Generally, however, he uses the latter term to describe any thing or event which exists or occurs without the direct action of some divine or angelic power.”¹² This does not rule out indirect action through other means, such as the energies in the celestial spheres or any attendant beings, but only in the case that they are understood to be subordinate to the Divine principle underlying their existence.

Agrippa constructed his philosophy as a corrective, believing that “the

11. For an extensive treatment of the textual tradition of *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*, see: David Pingree, “Between the Ghāya and Picatrix. I: The Spanish Version,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981): 27–56.

12. Jr. Charles G. Nauert, “Magic and Skepticism in Agrippa’s Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 18, no. 2 (April 1957): 167.

usual authorities in the various occult sciences, Albertus Magnus, Robert of Lincoln, Roger Bacon, Arnold of Villanova, [the] Picatrix, Pietro d'Abano, and Cecco d'Ascoli, had mixed much nonsense with their writings and so were largely responsible for the ill repute in which magic (which, to Agrippa, was the generic term for all the occult sciences) was generally held.”¹³ Agrippa's view is, like that of al-Būnī, that the ancients had access to a powerful revealed science, beginning with the Revelation given to Moses and extending to the Gospel of Jesus, though in the latter case the tradition ends with the Revelation embodied in the Qurʾān. Agrippa includes a chapter on “What magic is, what are the parts thereof, and how the professors must be qualified.”¹⁴ Agrippa breaks the discipline into three sciences, a sort of *trivium occultum*, comprising:

1. “Natural philosophy,” which is to be understood as what we would normally call the natural sciences.
2. “Mathematical philosophy,” which is specified as arithmetic, geometry / trigonometry, and astronomy as well.
3. “theological philosophy, or divinity,” which is “what God is, what the mind, what an intelligence, what an angel, what a devil, what the soul, what religion, what sacred institutions, rites, temples, observations, and sacred mysteries are: it instructs us also concerning faith, miracles, the virtues of words and figures, the secret operations and mysteries of seals, and ... it teacheth us rightly to understand, and to be skilled in the ceremonial laws, the equity of holy things, and rule of religion.”

He summarizes thus, “these three principle faculties magic comprehends, unites, and actuates; deservedly therefore was it by the ancients esteemed

13. Charles G. Nauert, “Magic and Skepticism in Agrippa's Thought,” 169.

14. Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, ed. Donald Tyson, trans. James Freake (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2007), 5. It should be noted that when Agrippa refers to magic, he is referring to the all of the occult sciences, particularly theurgy. See last note.

as the highest, and most sacred philosophy.”¹⁵ The truth of this science most arcane was believed to have been known to Antiquity, though not that of the Romans, but of the ancient Greek philosophers, namely Pythagoras and Plato.¹⁶

This conception of the Wisdom of the Ancients is treated by authorities and practitioners in both the medieval Islamic and Christian worlds as the highest tradition of knowledge, and by skeptics as pure myth, constructed to justify occult activities as pious acts. Nasr does not conceive of such integration as borrowing or undue influence. He regards it, in the case of Islam, as a synthesis which only strengthens and is strengthened by the core of the Islamic system:

“The primordial character of its revelation, and its confidence that it was expressing the Truth at the heart of all revelations, permitted Islam to absorb ideas from many sources, historically alien yet inwardly related to it. This was particularly true with regard to the sciences of Nature, because most of the ancient cosmological sciences—Greek, as well as Chaldean, Persian, Indian, and Chinese—had sought to express the unity of Nature and were therefore in conformity with the spirit of Islam. Coming into contact with them, the Muslims adopted some elements from each—most extensively, perhaps, from the Greeks, but also from the Chaldeans, Indians, Persians, and perhaps in the case of alchemy, even from the Chinese. They united these sciences into a new corpus, which was to grow over the centuries and become part of the Islamic civilization, integrated into the basic structure derived from the Revelation itself.”¹⁷

15. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 6.

16. Paola Zambelli, “Magic and Radical Reformation in Agrippa of Nettesheim,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976): 93-94.

17. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 30.

Platonism in the the Islamic hierarchy of knowledge

The taxonomy of sciences or hierarchy of knowledge is a topic of much discussion for Islamic historians. This taxonomy begins with the classification of Greek learning into two schools: the Hermetic-Pythagorean school which was “metaphysical in its approach, its sciences of Nature depending upon the symbolic interpretation of phenomena and of mathematics;” and the Aristotelian syllogistic-rationalistic school which “was philosophical, rather than metaphysical, and [whose] sciences were therefore aimed at finding the place of things in a rational system, rather than at seeing, through their appearances, the heavenly essences.”¹⁸

Seyyid Hossein Nasr makes the case that Ibn Khaldūn’s “classification contains in summary fashion the plan according to which the arts and sciences have, in fact, been studied in most religious and Islamic schools during the past several centuries. Even if many of these schools, especially in the Sunni world, have not studied all the subjects enumerated by Ibn Khaldūn, they have usually accepted the principles of his classification, which can be considered the final version of the Islamic division of the sciences.”¹⁹

Both Ibn Khaldūn and Hājji Khalīfa (Kātıp Çelebi) placed the metaphysical sciences in a category unto themselves, placing prophetic knowledge and the knowledge of angels in the realm of metaphysics. Ibn Khaldūn also relegates the occult sciences to the metaphysical.²⁰ Hājji Khalīfa (Kātıp Çelebi), on the other hand, includes the occult sciences with the physical sciences.²¹ Ibn Khaldūn’s classification is of course more in line with materialist philosophy than is that of Hājji Khalīfa (Kātıp Çelebi). The latter asserts the physical reality of the effects of the occult sciences as well as their spiritual or immaterial reality.

18. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 32.

19. *Ibid.*, 63.

20. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 1028-1030.

21. Hājji Khalīfa (Kātıp Çelebi), *Kashf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn Lexicon Bibliographicum et Encyclopedicum* 34-35.

The place of astrology

Particularly important for understanding cosmology are the sciences of astronomy or astrology—typically viewed as the same discipline throughout Islamic history.²² Their features are used to describe natural reality, but also metaphysical reality as well. That realm in which astronomy / astrology functions *is* outside the scope of the natural world by virtue of its being outside the sphere of Earthly existence. In the modern world, the stars are giant, burning balls of gas light-years away from what we know to be a planetary system surrounding our local star, the Sun. In the pre-modern world, while the nature of the helio-centric planetary system may have been known, it was of little importance. Abū-l-Rayḥān al-Birūnī (362 / 973 – 442 / 1050) is said to have eschewed the heliocentric system and settled on the geo-centric view.²³ This has nothing whatever to do with superstition. The stars were features in the night sky, some moving, some fixed. Knowledge of them was absolutely necessary to determine where one might be or what time it was.

For the theurgist, the position of the heavenly bodies was a snapshot of the state of the cosmos. From that snapshot, information could be determined about the relative auspiciousness of a given time for the practice in which the theurgic practitioner was engaged. This is not wholly different from using the positions of stars to determine the appropriate time for prayers which occur after dark. Given that the rules concerning when prayers are not to be performed are based on observation of the position of the sun in the sky, this point of practice depends upon the observation and observance of the positions of the heavenly bodies.²⁴

22. Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of nature and Methods Used for its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*, rev. ed (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 132.

23. *Ibid.*, 136.

24. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 147.

The cosmological purpose of astrology

Cosmological paradigms can typically be described by the same language used to describe those belonging to astrology or astronomy. In the ancient world, understanding the configuration of the firmament was tantamount to having a grasp on a deeper reality. The cosmological underpinnings of the universe were represented in the heavens, and as such, the names of stars and constellations came to be named for aspects of the mythos to which a particular culture subscribed. The characters in the mythos were used to explain and remember aspects of the system, e.g. mapping the relationships of the Gods over the relationships between the elements.²⁵

In a non-mythological context like Islam, the cosmos is described in terms of the religion itself, using the scripture and its features as the background in which the order of reality is set. “[P]latonic magic as the texts seem to describe it employed the archangels, angels and demons who are subordinate beings in the chains descending from the planets,” as opposed to what is found in *Ghayāt al-ḥakīm*, which uses the celestial forces directly.²⁶ The cosmos is an expression of the Qur’ānic revelation and, in turn, can be described in the same manner.

There are astrological boundaries for the spheres of influence in such a cosmological framework. One such division is the sublunary sphere, i.e. the boundary between the Heavens and the Earth. The moon is the boundary of the shifting reality of material existence and the fixed reality of the firmament.²⁷ The firmament can have an effect on the sublunary sphere, but the opposite is not the case as the former is unmoving, unchanging and eternal.

25. Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and the Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 15-16.

26. Pingree, “Some of the sources of the Ghāyat al-ḥakīm,” 14.

27. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of nature and Methods Used for its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*, 139.

al-Būnī's cosmos

Toward the beginning of *Shams al-ma'ārif*, al-Būnī lays out a description of the cosmos.

“I speak in the first [matter] on the number of the letters of the alphabet as [they are] the origins of speech and its foundation, and in them it is built up.

“I am aware that the numbers are secrets just as the letters are relics, and that the Upper (‘*ulwīyy*) realm supports the Lower (‘*flīyy*) realm, and the realm of the Throne (*al-‘arsh*) supports the realm of the Pedestal (*al-kursī*), and the realm of the Pedestal supports the sphere of Saturn (*zaḥal*), and the sphere of Saturn supports Jupiter (*al-mashtarī*), and the sphere of Jupiter supports the sphere of Mars (*al-marīkh*), and the sphere of Mars supports the Sun (*al-shams*), and the sphere of the Sun supports the sphere of Venus (*al-zuhra*), and the sphere of Venus supports Mercury (‘*aṭārid*), and the sphere of Mercury supports the sphere of the Moon (*al-qamr*), and the sphere of the Moon supports the sphere of Air (*al-hawā’*), and the sphere of Air supports the sphere of Water (*al-mā’*), and the sphere of Water supports the sphere of Earth (*al-turāb*), and the sphere of Earth supports the sphere of Fire (*al-ḥarāra*). So belonging to Saturn in the Upper [realms] is the letter *jīm*, and the number of [its magic square] (*al-mawāfiqa*) is three [by three], and it is also three letters, and belonging to [Saturn] in the Lower [realms] is the letter *Sād*, and it [is] ninety-five,²⁸ and belonging to the sphere of Jupiter is the letter *dāl* and it is four in number, and belonging to it the square (*al-murabba’*) four times four [i.e., the four by four square], and

28. This is deliberate obfuscation on the part of al-Būnī or a later scribe. He has added the numerical value of the letters in the word *Sād* rather than using the numerical value of the letter itself, as in the case with the other letters mentioned. The value of the letter *Sād* is 90. The experienced practitioner or serious adept would take note of this.

then belonging to the sphere of Mars in the Upper [realms] is the sum of five, and it is the letter *hāʾ*.

“And belonging to the sphere of the Sun is six, and it is the letter *wāw*, and from the forms it has the six by six (*al-musaddas*).

“And then the sphere of Venus is seven, and it is the letter *zāyy*, and belonging to the the sphere of Mercury is eight, and it is the letter *ḥāʾ*.

“And belonging to the sphere of the Moon is nine, and it is the letter *ṭāʾ*, and from the forms it has the nine by nine (*al-mutassaʿ*).”²⁹

This passage lays out a cosmic subordination.

The Lower realms are subordinate to the Upper realms. Anything that is referred to as *ʿulwīyy* is associated with the higher levels of the hierarchy of spheres. Anything that is referred to as *sufliyy* is associated with the sub-lunary sphere. That which inhabits the upper realms can have an effect on that which inhabits the lower realms.³⁰ The highest level of the cosmos, *al-ʿarsh*, is inhabited by Allāh himself and none other. This is concordant in terms of theological reality, as this particular point is stated in the “Throne verse,” as it is known (Qurʾān [*al-baqara*] 2:255).

29. Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, The text actually corresponds with *Shams al-maʿārif al-wuṣṭā*. (Istanbul: unknown publisher, 1936), 16 The translation is the author’s. It should be noted here that the names for common polygons which are listed here should not be translated as such. These names designate the dimension of magic square which should be associated with a particular planet. The word *mawāfiqa* is associated with *wafiq*, which typically means “magic square.” Some aspects of *awfāq* and how they fit into the cosmology will be discussed in the next chapter.

30. The word “supports” has been chosen to render the Arabic ((يُمدُّ)) as it conveys that there is a directional relationship of power and influence inherent in this cosmology. If one of the higher realms removes support for the lower realms they collapse. The lower realms are dependent upon the upper realms for their continued existence.

The Platonic worldview in al-Būnī's cosmos

The passage presented is perhaps the most important in al-Būnī's work for understanding his cosmology. It sets forth several principles which are important for constructing a theurgic system around, like some sort of cosmological rubric. Of course, this being an occult work, the system will not be fully explained. There is enough information in the passage to figure out what information is missing, in the case of associated squares and other values. al-Būnī explains the cosmology in more detail in *al-Uṣūl wa-l-ḍawābiṭ* and fills in some lacunae.³¹

In *al-Uṣūl wa-l-ḍawābiṭ*, al-Būnī presents the work as being the “order of the works belonging to the ancient philosophers” (*tartīb al-a‘maāl min al-ḥukāmā’ al-aqdamayn*).³² There are minor differences between the specific examples in *Shams al-ma‘ārif* and the elaboration given in *al-Uṣūl*, but this should not be surprising. Such texts were often copied by scribes who did not understand what they were copying. There are also occasional intentional “mistakes” introduced by the author(s) in order to keep such texts from being used by the uninitiated.

The planets each have associations with a square of a particular dimension (*wafq*), a day of the week (*yawm*), a metal (*ma‘ādan*), a gemstone (*jawhar*), a set of elemental variables (*daraja*), a specific lunar mansion (*manāzil*) and a set of earthly actions, events or realities. By this, we mean, aspects of human interaction which can be generalized. Mars, for instance is associated here with wars, disputes, etc.

The letters of the alphabet are given associations with the four Platonic elements. The elements are very important, as they tend to be used to describe practically every aspect of theurgic cosmology.

31. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Manba‘ uṣūl al-ḥikma* (Beirut: Mu‘asasat al-Nūr li-l-Maṭbu‘āt, 2000), 5-58.

32. *Ibid.*, 5.

The Platonic elements

The true roots of Platonism lie not with Plato himself, but with Empedocles and his system of roots.³³ Plato adapted the system of roots as elements and this is how classical Platonic physics was thereafter conceived. The elements are important for understanding medieval theurgy because they feature heavily in describing the features of the physical world, but also of the unseen world. This should not be confused with elemental magic, in which the elements themselves are personalities.

Instead, they should be conceived as qualities, the same way that we might describe spicy food as “hot” or someone’s mood as “light,” the use of elemental descriptions describe a certain element as “fiery” or a letter as “watery.” The latter case is the one most often seen in the work of al-Būnī.³⁴

The association of Arabic letters with qualities in this manner allows for their classification at finer levels as well and their further association with other aspects of the occult sciences. These associations, and their inherent description in terms of quality, allow for the discernment of the most opportune times and most appropriate methods for the working of theurgic rites. al-Būnī observes that there are twenty-eight mansions of the moon and that there are twenty-eight letters in the Arabic alphabet.³⁵ It follows that there is a single letter and therefore an elemental description of each lunar mansion. There is a chart which illustrates all such associations in the beginning of the section on the lunar mansions in the *kubrā*.³⁶

The elemental system represents a perfect cosmos: a closed system. Every quantity of each element was used in the creation of the cosmos, without a trace left over. From *Timaeus*: “Now of the four elements in the construction of the cosmos had taken up the whole of every one. For its Constructor

33. See Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and the Pythagorean Tradition*, 13–68 for a complete treatment and depiction of these elements and their place in the ancient cosmos.

34. See the table of elemental associations with the *abjad*, as well as the explanation which follows in: al-Būnī, *Manbaʿ uṣūl al-ḥikma*, 66.

35. al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 16.

36. al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif (al-kubrā) wa laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*, 23.

had constructed it of all the fire and water and air and earth that existed, leaving over, outside it, no single particle or potency of any one of those elements.”³⁷ This is the reason that change must occur at the sublunary level, because there is nothing from which to make anything new unless something is destroyed. Therefore, living beings consume and die and become consumed. The system was viewed as being very much alive, an organism.³⁸

The same cosmology is explored in the *Rasāʾil ikhwan al-ṣafāʾ* (*The Treatises of the Brethren of Purity*). The third treatise (*risāla*) is an explication of the ordering of the cosmos and the relationship of the heavenly spheres to one another.³⁹ Here we see a system almost identical to the subordination of the spheres presented by al-Būnī.⁴⁰ The *Rasāʾil* present much of the prerequisite information which was taken for granted as understood by the theurgic practitioner, particularly in the case of astrology. This fact makes it clear that the cosmology and system expressed in al-Būnī’s work is much older than the 7th / 13th century in the Islamic period.

Cells in an organism

If we take up the metaphor of the cosmos as a living organism, then we can extend the associations in both directions. Just as the cosmos is the whole of reality—the macrocosm—a human being represents a microcosmic representation thereof.⁴¹ This means that the spheres and their attendant beings are represented within a person. If this is the case, then the representation of parts of the human being are represented in the macrocosm as well.

Earlier we mentioned that the highest level of the cosmos, *al-ʿarsh*, is inhabited by Allāh himself and none other. It should be clear by now that the

37. Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, ed. and trans. R. G. Bury, vol. IX, The Loeb Classical Library 234 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 61.

38. *Ibid.*, 61-63.

39. Anon, *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, ed. Butros al-Bastūnī (Beirut: Dār al-Sadr, 2011), 114-158.

40. *Ibid.*, 146-147.

41. Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit*, 34-35.

other spheres in this system are inhabited as well. Every part of the system is full of smaller parts, each working in a specific way to continue the existence of the system, like cells in a body.

These workers inhabit the spheres and are identified by the same designations as the upper and lower spheres. Those who are in the category of *‘ulwīyy* are generally understood to be angels.⁴² Those in the category of *sufliyy* are understood to be *jinn*.⁴³ It is worth keeping in mind that not all *jinn* are evil, some are Muslim, and subservient to God. The concept of a *jinn*-like being also has roots in the ancient sources. Plotinus said: “There are, in fact, fiery living beings among the spirits.”⁴⁴

Each such being has a specific name which can be derived from elements in a magic square.⁴⁵ This practice is among the more arcane, never fully described in al-Būnī’s works. He approaches a discussion of the *sufliyy* beings in *al-Uṣūl wa-l-ḍawābiṭ*⁴⁶, but does not describe how they are contacted.

Building microcosms

The true purpose for al-Būnī’s cosmological outline in both *Shams al-ma‘ārif* and *Uṣūl wa-l-ḍawābiṭ* is the construction of magic squares (*awfāq*, s. *wafq*). The *awfāq* are used in the execution of amulets and feature centrally. In the above framework, any square can be executed at the most auspicious time possible for the client, based on whatever problem he is trying to solve. The structure of the square is quite complex.

al-Būnī demonstrates the method for filling squares in an article called *Bughyat al-mushtāq*, which follows *al-Uṣūl wa-l-ḍawābiṭ*.⁴⁷ At first glance, this

42. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *al-Kashf fi ‘ilm al-ḥarf wa-yalī Uṣūl ‘ilm al-ḥarf wa-ḍawābiṭ al-āfāq li-l-ḥakīm suqrāt* (Beirut: Mu’sasat al-Nūr li-l-Maṭbu‘āt, 2004), 169-170.

43. *Ibid.*, 170-180.

44. Plotinus, *Ennead*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong, vol. II, The Loeb Classical Library, 441 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), 27.

45. el-Shamy, *Religion among the Folk in Egypt*, 156.

46. al-Būnī, *Manba‘ uṣūl al-ḥikma*, 22-23.

47. *Ibid.*, 58-68.

might appear to be simply an exercise in mathematical abstraction. As the squares get larger, curious and interesting things begin to occur. In odd-sized squares, there will always be a 3x3 square in the center, if al-Būnī's pattern is employed. For odd-sized squares, he gives a template up to 9x9, though it is relatively clear after working through such a square, what the pattern for the next larger square will be. The even squares are relatively complicated to predict in terms of pattern, but there is a discernible method for adding a row / column and figuring the appropriate order of the elements. al-Būnī demonstrates templates up to 10x10, though he mentions higher order squares.

This exercise is indeed no mere mathematical abstraction. Each square is unique in its features and each represents a microcosmic representation of the cosmos at large. Perhaps even more accurate would be to say that each magic square is an entire universe unto itself, replete with boundaries, elemental properties, and existential meaning. Inside a system of theurgic cosmology, "we may compare the physical universe to an immense magic square."⁴⁸ This aspect of Islamic theurgy is, unsurprisingly, related to some of the oldest and most recondite aspects of Pythagorean philosophy. It also demonstrates that the ancient philosophers were not simply sitting idly around drawing up magic squares for the sake of curiosity. Based on al-Būnī's near-veneration of Plato and Socrates in *al-Uṣūl wa-l-ḍawābiḥ* as the highest authorities on the construction of *awfāq* for the purposes of theurgy, it seems that there was more to their work on magic squares than simple curiosity about the mathematical properties of arrays of numbers.

In W.S. Andrews' volume, *Magic Squares and Magic Cubes*, the author suggests that the "best expositions of Pythagorean philosophy are found in the 'Timaeus' and 'Republic' of Plato."⁴⁹ It is here that it is made clear that the Platonic system of philosophy is more than just that. Rather it is a system by which the interconnected nature of reality can be understood intimately.

Plato suggests that all of the sciences should be studied together for their

48. W. S. Andrews, *Magic Squares and Cubes* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1908), 167.

49. *Ibid.*, 158.

“mutual relationships that we may learn the nature of the bond which unites them. For only then will a pursuit of them have value for our object, and the labor, which might otherwise prove fruitless, be well bestowed.”⁵⁰ Andrews further points out that the modern scholar tends to be narrowly specialized amid a complexity of sciences, which renders him incapable of contemplating their synthesis. This is probably true at the present as well.

The purpose for all of this “stupid formalistic arithmetic,” as Ullmann commented on the work of al-Būnī, is to represent reality in a simultaneously complex and simple underlying reality for the cosmos. This understanding is the true goal of theurgy, as we shall see.

“When Plato’s advice is followed and the ‘mutual relationships between our sciences’ are understood we may perchance find this clue, and having found it be surprised to discover as great a simplicity underlying the whole fabric of natural phenomena as exists in the construction of a magic square.”⁵¹

50. Andrews, *Magic Squares and Cubes*, 167.

51. *Ibid.*, 168.

Chapter 4

The doctrine of the divine names in al-Būnī's work

The power of names

In the last chapter, we demonstrated the inner workings of al-Būnī's cosmology. Within this cosmology, there exists the room for theurgic works. However, since the lower spheres of influence, *al-‘ālam al-sifliyyāt*, are subordinate to the highest, *al-‘ālam al-‘ulwiyyāt*, in order for theurgy to work, there must be a method for harnessing the intelligences or beings at the higher levels. That method is found in the secrets and sciences associated with the Divine Names.

Names have long been believed to have power over the named. This power links the act of naming and the act of creating: a thing cannot *be* until it is named. el-Shamy writes that

“[a]n inherent aspect of the creation of things is the creation of names. The name, as in the case with God's names, is believed to be organically integrated with the ‘thing’ that it designates—be it a person, plant animal, inanimate object, or abstract entity such as ‘blessedness,’ ‘goodness,’ or ‘evil.’ Letters of the Arabic alphabet and numerals were also created. ...al-Būnī, ...sheds light on the practical aspect of applying the hidden attribute of let-

ters and names toward performing certain tasks with the aid of supernatural beings and forces.”¹

The properties described by the Divine Names appear in the cosmos as creative forces.

Modern psychology on magical thinking, as discussed in the first chapter, emphasizes the importance of names. “Of all possible words, names have the greatest power.”² Indeed this is held to be true in the case of al-Būnī’s writings. The most excellent Names of God (*asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā*) are arguably the most important aspect of his writings, or at least the most-treated therein. In every work attributed to al-Būnī, there is at least some description (*tafṣīl*) of the Names of God, their related supplications (*ad‘iyya*, s. *du‘ā’*), or their special properties (*khawāṣṣ*, s. *khāṣṣa*). The extent to which this is the case varies from title to title. In *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-wuṣṭā* there are sections on the special properties of the *basmala*,³ the division, classification and special properties of the Divine Names,⁴ and the number of the names—ninety-nine—known to the highest saints (*al-awlīyā’*).⁵

al-Būnī does not, as we should expect, give a full explication of any of these topics in the *wuṣṭā*, at least not all in one place. As with other esoteric writings, al-Būnī switches subjects and leaves out key details, which must either be known to the practitioner, inferred or worked out using other information presented.

In the *kubrā*, a great deal more specific information is given with regard to the *awfāq* associated with the given names.⁶ There is also an extensive listing and explication of all of the ninety-nine names discussed above. The problems with this section have already been discussed in the second chap-

1. el-Shamy, *Religion among the Folk in Egypt*, 28.

2. Zusne and Jones, *Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Magical Thinking*, 196.

3. The opening line to each *sūra* of the Qur’ān, save one: ((بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ)), al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 27-36.

4. *Ibid.*, 86-92.

5. *Ibid.*, 56-57.

6. See section (*faṣl*) 16 “on the most excellent Names of God and their beneficial squares (*awfāqihā al-nāfi‘āt*)” in al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā) wa laṭā‘if al-‘awārif*, 164-206

ter of the present work, but perhaps deserve some further treatment in light of what is found in the *wuṣṭā* with regard to the names.

The names found in *Shams al-Ma'ārif al-wuṣṭā* are ninety-nine in number, though al-Būnī never fully lists them in a single location. They can be found throughout the text. The work '*Alam al-hudā wa-asrār al-ihtidā*', however, comprises a full list and extensive treatment of each of the ninety-nine names presented in the *wuṣṭā*. The order of the names presented, when they are partially listed in the *wuṣṭā*, is also correspondent between the two texts. Their relationships, that is, when they are presented in pairs or groups, also corresponds. '*Alam al-hudā* is exhaustive in its description of the names, whereas the treatments in the *wuṣṭā* are practical, with very little theoretical information presented. The latter presents itself as a theoretical manual for initiates and for adepts investigating the "realities of the Names, and their rankings in the ladder of accession, and the discovery of the secret of enumeration."⁷

Compassion and Mercy as creative forces

The three sections listed above from the *wuṣṭā* are representative of three levels of complexity or illumination regarding the Divine Names. In the first case, the *basmala*, these names are uttered with a high level of frequency. They appear at the beginning of every *sūra* of the Qur'ān. Muslims utter these words before beginning even the smallest endeavor. al-Būnī reminds the reader that the *basmala*, though common in usage, is also very powerful. He relates it as being the first scripture of Ibrāhīm, Nūḥ and Sulaymān as well as the first Revelation given to the Prophet Muḥammad.⁸ This gives the phrase a special place among the usages of the Names, and emphasizes its importance. The section on the *basmala* in the *wuṣṭā* is involved enough to warrant a detailed treatment on its own, for which there is not space in the present work. Suffice it to say that the most important aspect for the

7. MS HAMIDIYE 260, f. 2r.

8. al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma'ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 33.

topic at hand is that these names represent the first words revealed to the Prophets listed above, which gives them a rarefied position in the ranking of the names.

Particularly important in this is the mention of compassion, as noted above. There is another cosmological principle at work here: “According to Ibn ‘Arabī and most other Ṣūfīs, the creation of the world is thus based upon the ‘compassion’ (*al-rahīmān*) of the Infinite. It is by His Compassion that God gives being to the Names and Qualities which are the archetypes of creation.”⁹ In this cosmology it is through compassion that creation is allowed to exist. This will be explored further as it relates to the illumination of certain names to the highest Saints *awlīyā’*.

The division and classification of the Divine Names

The next aspect of the Divine Names is described toward the end of the *wuṣṭā*, though it makes more sense to present it first. Throughout the text, al-Būnī discusses which names have significance for what purposes and their associations and representations within the cosmology. For al-Būnī, the Divine Names describe the Creator as well as His influence and place in the created cosmos.

In the *wuṣṭā*, Būnī gives a classification of Names and a brief discussion of their attributes and relation to one another. He writes:

“Now we recall, by the power of God and his strength, the special properties of the Excellent Names of God most high, with their sum and their effect and which from them is grouped and which is alone, and which is employed by Him Alone, and what pertains to every Name in its meaning and its exposition.

“The Names are divided into five divisions: names of essence (*asmā’ al-dhāt*), names of attributes (*asmā’ al-ṣifāt*), names of descriptions (*asmā’ al-awṣāf*), names of characters (*asmā’ al-akhlāq*),

9. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 344-345.

names of effects (*asmāʾ al-afʿāl*), and from these names, specific [among them] were revealed and hallowed with special properties of fact, and joined names entering one in the other.”¹⁰

al-Būnī’s classification is subtle, but the distinctions therein are very important. The Divine Names are typically discussed as abstract attributes ascribed to God. These names or attributes of the divine are quite heavily discussed in modern discourse on Islamic spirituality, especially in the realm of literature directed at modern Ṣūfis.¹¹ The above, however, is an aspect which is often completely left out. As with knowledge, the Names have different types, which are descriptive of the ways in which they are meant to be employed.

In the case of the first group, for example, al-Būnī says that they are the names in the *āyāt* which begin “Huwwa Allāh alladhī la ilāha illa huwwa.”¹² These *āyāt* are *al-ḥashr*: 22-23, and the names which appear there are *al-ʿĀlim al-ghayb wa-l-shahāda* (“Knower of the Invisible and the Visible”), *al-Rahmān* (“the Compassionate”), *al-Raḥīm* (“the Merciful”), *al-Malik* (“the Sovereign”), *al-Quddūs* (“the Holy”), *al-Salām* (“the Peace”), *al-Muʾmin* (“the Keeper of the Faith”), *al-Muḥaymin* (“the Guardian”), *al-ʿazīz* (“the Majestic”), *al-Jabbār* (“the Compellor”), *al-Mutakabbir* (“the Superb”).

al-Būnī tends to shorten the first in the list to *al-ʿĀlim al-ghayb* or to present it as *ʿalām al-ghuyūb*.¹³ While the rest of the names conform to the lists with which modern readers will be familiar, this name does not fit. el-Gawhary and Doutté both list out the 99 Divine Names as they appear in the Ḥadīth collections of the traditionists al-Tirmidhī and alternatively Ibn Māja.¹⁴

10. al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 86. The translation is the author’s.

11. Many such books are infused with the same sort of popular psychology as modern astrology and other “new-age” spiritual products. These treatments are largely without value for assessing the uses of the Divine Names in theurgic rites or their place in medieval cosmology.

12. al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 86.

13. *ibid.*, 87; MS HAMIDIYE 260, f. 235f.

14. el-Gawhary, “Die Gottesnamen im magischen Gebrauch in den al-Buni zugeschriebenen Werken,” 166-169; Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l’Afrique du Nord*, 200-203

The rest of the categories are spread throughout the final sections of the text and nothing is listed categorically. Presumably it is up to the novice to discern which names fit into the other categories, from the Qurʾān, at least in this particular work.

The Names known to the saints

The last level of the Names for al-Būnī include those names which are the domain of the highest saints (*al-awliyāʾ*). This aspect of the Divine Names is of particular interest to the theurgist, as it deals with finding the names which are 99 in number, the knowledge of the hidden names which are behind those 99, and having access to the Greatest Name.¹⁵ These are the measures of a Saint *wālī* for al-Būnī.

Nabhānī, in *Jāmiʿ Karamāt al-awliyāʾ*, identifies al-Būnī's *karamāt* as being related to the revealing of certain names and practices related to those names. He relates that the Prophet Muḥammad appears to al-Būnī in a vision and

“he asks [the Prophet] about the names of seclusion (*asmāʾ al-khilwa*), and he said [that] ‘they are seven: *yā Allāh*, *yā Ḥayy*, *yā Qāyyūm*, *yā Dhā Jalāl wa-l-Ikrām*, *yā Nihāyat al-Nihāyāt*, *yā Nūr al-Anwār*, *yā Rūḥ al-Arwāḥ*.’ And he said, ‘if you are in danger of being overcome by lust in the retreat, then perform ablutions and powerfully recite *yā Hādī*.’ And he said, ‘for too many thoughts [at once] recite after ablutions *yā Latīf*.’ And he said, ‘for appetite for food, recite after ablutions *yā Qawī*.’ And he said, ‘for hardship, recite after ablutions, *yā Fattāḥ*.’ And he said, ‘for an abundance of psychological dangers and satanic fantasies, *yā Dha al-Quwwa*.’ And he said, ‘if something surprises you and causes you concern, then recite *yā Bāsiṭ*.’ And he said, if you are faced with

15. al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 56.

something otherworldly, recite *yā Qawī*, *yā ‘Azīz*, *yā ‘Alīm*, *yā Qadīr*,
yā Samī‘, *yā Baṣīr*.”¹⁶

This bit of hagiography is quite telling, both in terms of what the perception was of al-Būnī’s occupations, and also in terms of, how a Saint perceives that which has been kept secret from the average person, or even the pious person. The anecdote describes one of the methods for glimpsing beyond the veil of the material world in which human beings are mired. al-Būnī is given these names in a vision, by the Prophet himself. Ibn al-‘Arabī is known to have experienced similar visions and dreams, about which he wrote extensively.

The reason for hiding aspects of the theurgic rites is that they are dangerous to the uninitiated and the improperly trained, as discussed in the first chapter. The names alone, when repeated, typically a very large number of times, are considered to be quite potent. al-Būnī writes that writing the *basmala* 600 times, then carrying the written artifact on one’s person would bring an individual tremendous rewards in the form of material and spiritual gain.¹⁷ This is something that can be achieved by accident, apparently, if the practitioner were to simply commit to doing the repetitions recommended. For this reason the more powerful and therefore more dangerous Names must be hidden.

The Greatest Name and the Hidden Names

The ultimate piece of information which is sought by the theurgist is the Greatest Name of Allāh (*al-ism Allāh al-a‘zam*). al-Būnī was no exception. Again, from modern psychology: “In some religions, the real name of the deity is not to be used because of its potency, and substitutes are resorted to.”¹⁸ This name is of the utmost importance in al-Būnī’s theurgic system. As stated above, al-Būnī says that access to the Greatest Name belongs only

16. al-Nabhānī, *Jāmi‘ karamāt al-awliyā’*.

17. al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 27.

18. Zusne and Jones, *Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Magical Thinking*, 196.

to the Saints. This Name is therefore not ever represented as a Name, but rather as a series of arcane symbols which are said to represent the Name itself and which have various intrinsic connections with certain letters, the heavenly bodies, metals, and herbs. This set of symbols are often, perhaps mistakenly, referred to as the “Seal of Solomon.”¹⁹ These associations are discussed at length in Winkler’s *Siegel und charaktere in der Muhammadanischen Zauberei*, particularly the associations with the *sawāqīṭ*, the “hidden letters” in *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*. Al-Būnī also has a lengthy treatise on this topic called *Sharḥ sawāqīṭ al-Fātiḥa*, which is partially excerpted and included in *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*.²⁰ This Greatest Name or this Great Seal, was used in this form in amulets of various types, as well as other talismanic objects.²¹

The Names behind the 99 Names

al-Būnī’s cryptic and mysterious reference to “the Hidden Names behind the 99 Names” is something very different from everything else we have explored. This refers, in fact, to a form of *nomina barbara* or pure sound, which is known only to the angels, the Prophets and the Highest Saints. In writings attributed to al-Būnī, one will often come across strings of letters which seem to have no meaning within the Arabic language, but are referred to as names. In two texts in *Manba‘ uṣūl al-ḥikma*, titled “Sharḥ al-birhatihin” and Sharḥ al-jaljalūtiyya,” we find these names abound. Therein, each is associated with one of the Divine Names as we are accustomed to seeing them in other places in al-Būnī’s works.²² Pielow lists the names found in the *Jal-jalūtiyya* with their Arabic Divine Name equivalencies.²³

19. J. MoG. Dawkins, “The Seal of Solomon,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1944): 145-147.

20. MS BAĞDATLI VEHBİ 928

21. See, Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum*, 168, A118; Mommersteeg, “‘He Has Smitten Her to the Heart with Love’ The Fabrication of an Islamic Love-Amulet in West Africa,” 504; and Mommersteeg, “Allah’s Words as Amulet,” 69.

22. See al-Būnī, *Manba‘ uṣūl al-ḥikma*, 69-92 and 93-325, respectively.

23. Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit*, 91-92.

In the text on the *Jaljalutiyya* one will also find examples of the usages and explanations of the so-called seven seals and their associations.²⁴ al-Būnī refers to these names as *al-asmāʿ al-suryāniyya*.²⁵ This *Sūryānī* does not refer to the middle-Aramaic Syriac language spoken in the Fertile Crescent during the first millennium CE. As has been noted by O’Kane and Radtke, the so-called *Sūryānī* to which al-Būnī refers is nothing like the latter, and appears instead to be gibberish.²⁶ This is, however, the nature of *nomina barbara*.

In *Kitāb al-ibrīz*, *Sūryānī* is explained to be available only to the highest saints, the Prophets and the angels. In this work, Ibn al-Mubārak relates the *ibrīz*, literally “pure gold” of his master ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh, which includes knowledge of *Sūryānī*. Ibn al-Mubārak’s master was an unschooled, but not illiterate mystic of the 12th/18th century.²⁷ Indeed, he is reported to have attained the highest form of spiritual knowledge, *‘irfān*, through piety and purity of spirit alone. al-Dabbāgh is an example of the type of person to which al-Būnī refers in *Shams al-ma‘ārif* when he discusses *al-awliyāʿ*.²⁸ The *Sūryānī* language of al-Dabbāgh is linked to the disconnected letters of the Qurʾān and represents a sort of primordial language. These provide the basis for a language of pure sound, in which each phoneme can bear meaning. al-Dabbāgh indicates that anyone who knows how to understand *Sūryānī* “ascends to a knowledge of the secrets of letters. Herein is an awesome science which God has veiled from minds as a mercy unto people lest they be informed of wisdom while darkness is [still] in their bodies and they come to perish. We beseech God for protection from this!”²⁹ Here again we return to the idea of a powerful, secret rite which is only made accessible to those who are ready, in order to protect those who are not.

24. al-Būnī, *Manbaʿ uṣūl al-ḥikma*, 257.

25. Ibid.

26. Aḥmad b. al-Mubarak al-Sijilmāsī al-Lamaṭī, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh (al-Ibrīz min kalām Sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh)*, trans. John O’Kane and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 422.

27. Ibid., xvi.

28. al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 57.

29. al-Lamaṭī, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh (al-Ibrīz min kalām Sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh)*, 425.

The relationship of Divine Names, secret languages and subtle beings to theurgic rites

All of this may seem quite far-fetched to the skeptic. Indeed, secret languages, invisible beings and Saints who can communicate therewith will probably push even the most devout modern person into skepticism. These things all seem quite unnecessary to the average pious practitioner of the faith. For most, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, charity and faith are sufficient. As discussed in the first chapter, though, the theurgic practitioner does not operate outside this system. In fact, it is a requirement that the practitioner be established on a practice of orthodox piety in order to attain to the spiritual states necessary for theurgy.

So what is all of the rest of this then? Is it mere affectation, or is it something more significant? For the theurgist, the cosmology is simply what Nasr has termed “traditional cosmology.” It describes the universe in which they live and in which they practice their faith in the Creator of the same. “Traditional cosmology is an application of metaphysical principles to the cosmic domain.”³⁰ It is only with an understanding of this cosmology that one may proceed toward understanding the Divine names as an expression thereof.

Acts of theurgy are like supererogatory prayers. They are not required for practitioners, but they are another mode of piety, one which is believed to have positive mechanical effect when worked. The other aspects—the secret languages, the hidden names, the sciences known only to the Saints and Prophets—are a form of shorthand, or code.

In other words, if a normal prayer supplication has the effect of pleasing God by way of the pure intention of the praying individual, then a rite of theurgy focuses the intention and amplifies the prayer or supplication a thousandfold, a millionfold, or more. These rites allow for the mystic practitioner to tap into the raw creative power which is believed to be the catalyst for the very existence of the universe. That a Saint or Prophet is afforded

30. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of nature and Methods Used for its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*, 99.

this is regarded by the theurgist as a blessing, nothing more or less.

Methods for working theurgic rites based on the Divine Names and *awfāq*

As stated, these rites represent a form of shorthand employed by the practitioner for communicating with the unseen world. As we have seen with al-Dabbāgh's presentation of the nature of this primordial language, it is said to contain meaning, even in its smallest unit, the phoneme. This, he says, is the manner in which angels communicate: "If you see them [i.e., angels] speaking Syriac, you see how they indicate things with one or two letters, or with one or two words, which others [i.e., humans] could only indicate by means of one or two [complete] notebooks."³¹ Similarly, encoding a massive supplication in a *wifq* allows for the beings who will do the actual work to interpret the request more clearly, and without the confusion of the languages of human beings.

al-Būnī never fully describes the processes for the construction of magic squares and their purpose in the writing of an talisman or the creation of an amulet. As with any esoteric or occult work, certain aspects are left to be communicated from practitioner to practitioner, or completely omitted. In the case of al-Būnī, it would appear to be the former. Given that his works are among the most prevalent when it comes to the occult sciences in the modern period, it should come as no surprise that there is a degree of regularity in methods for and rituals surrounding the execution of amulets and talismans. The practitioner can represent an entire universe in a square and then use that square to be able to address the beings which hold the proverbial keys to linking the microcosm with the macrocosm it represents.

"[U]sing a square is not only easier and quicker [for the practitioner]. Squares ... are also very easy to read for the spirits who will be invoked in order to realize the request as formulated in the amulet. Spirits can read

31. al-Lamaṭī, *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidī 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh (al-Ibrīz min kalām Sayyidī 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh)*, 426.

squares at a glance. Immediately they understand what is asked for. Constructing a numerical square might be seen, therefore, as a ‘condensed’ way of writing.”³²

The Divine Names in *awfāq*

al-Būnī’s work must be understood as a set of materials meant to be used for theoretical purposes on the part of a practitioner, rather than as some sort of practical manual, as it is often cast.³³ While there are specific applications or outlines of theurgic rites explained on occasion these are accessory to the cosmology-centered theurgy which is the primary focus of the text. A great deal must be inferred or passed between practitioners who inherit the sciences from their progenitors.

The standard 3x3, or *budūh*, square appears in most sources in one form or another. This is often mistaken for being an amulet on its own and, as such, is believed to have special properties unto itself. The 3x3 (along with the 4x4) serves to demonstrate the order in which numbers should be filled into squares.³⁴ Higher order squares do not appear in Islamic sources until the 7th / 13th century.³⁵

For the purposes of executing an amulet, a suitable Divine Name must be chosen. This is not a task conducted at random or with only the meaning of the Divine Name in mind. The name must have a specific numerical value in order that it might be used to derive a ‘magic square’ or *wafq*.

In a magic square, any column, row, or long diagonal should add to the same sum. This means that the Name or Names chosen must be suitable for the given size of square, based on divisibility of its numerical value. Any

32. Mommersteeg, “‘He Has Smitten Her to the Heart with Love’ The Fabrication of an Islamic Love-Amulet in West Africa,” 505.

33. Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 371.

34. al-Būnī, *Manba‘ uṣūl al-ḥikma*, 59, 61.

35. Emilie Savage-Smith, “Introduction,” in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Formation of the Classical Islamic World 42 (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), xxvi.

Arabic text can be fit into a square, so often whole verses from the Qurʾān are used in this manner.³⁶ There is a set of mathematical transformations which must be performed on the numerical value of the name to derive numbered elements in the square from the numerical value.³⁷

Magic squares in the construction of amulet

Once the square is set, is written on the amulet paper and it is framed by the names of the Archangels and the names of the attendant or agent beings associated with the square (*al-mawākil*) are written.³⁸ The attendant beings are the angels and *jinn* associated with a given square. There are different ways for finding the names of the *mawākil*. Caanan refers to these names as “spiritual names” and identifies the “angelic syllable” as *ʾil*, which is to be added to the end of the abjad representation of the numerical value found in the square, or for the given verse, or even the letters of the alphabet.³⁹ These are referred to as *al-mawākil al-ʿulwīyy*. The names of the other beings, the *mawākil al-siflī* are derived in a similar manner, using a variety of suffixes or syllables, according to Caanan.⁴⁰ Every single letter in the Qurʾān has an angel associated with it, which can be invoked.⁴¹ The entire amulet becomes an invocation. It is not meant to be simply written, but read aloud or invoked, which is done by the practitioner.⁴²

In this way, we come full circle and return to the cosmology. The beings invoked have certain properties and can work only within certain realms. Each element in the square represents an angel or jinn, depending on the conception. These are what operate on the material world, subordinate to

36. See Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum*, #A119, 168 and Mommersteeg, “‘He Has Smitten Her to the Heart with Love’ The Fabrication of an Islamic Love-Amulet in West Africa,” 502-503.

37. *Ibid.*, 505.

38. al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif al-ṣuḡhrā*, 71.

39. Caanan, “The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans,” 138.

40. *Ibid.*, 141-142.

41. Mommersteeg, “Allah’s Words as Amulet,” 508.

42. *Ibid.*, 507.

God and to all the beings in the realms which exist above the sublunary sphere.

Analysis of the use of divine names in theurgic rites

The Divine Names, as we have seen, are an act of creation unto themselves. In the cosmology of al-Būnī, reality is layered and its layers are subordinate to one another. The purpose of theurgy in such a system is to manipulate the macrocosm by connecting its attributes to those represented in a microcosm. The Divine Names describe not only the attributes of the Divine Personality, but also the expression of those attributes in the material world as a form of creation. The cosmos itself is therefore acted upon at a very fine level by its Creator. The names also relate the Creator in this system to the created in a very intimate way. Through various theurgic rites involving knowledge and methods known only to very few, the cosmos can be nudged and shifted this way and that, but only with the permission of its Creator, or His subordinates.

Conclusions

General Remarks

The theurgic writings of al-Būnī represent a simultaneously illuminating and obfuscating body of esoteric theory and methods. They are non-linear in their presentation, but are nothing if not comprehensive, covering a wide range of topics, which have as their central aim the spiritual alchemy of the practitioner. This alchemy is not literal, but figurative, meant to hone the piety and devotion of practitioners to the point that they may work theurgic rites, without transgressing the bounds of what is religiously legal. This is the purpose of theurgy. It stands in opposition to goety, which has its roots in the debasement of piety and the engagement with evil.

al-Būnī's writings demonstrate very clearly that there is a place for theurgy in an Islamic system. The cosmology that is presented therein also represents something at once Islamic and also very ancient. The Islamic theurgic system encodes and incorporates the most ancient systems of mysticism and monotheistic piety, synthesizing them into a form of spiritual technology. Additionally, this writings represent a rich and valuable resource for the study of this mode. The increasing availability of manuscripts in digital formats will allow for ever finer treatment of al-Būnī's work. Such efforts will hopefully begin to demystify the Corpus Būnīanum in the coming years, and will allow future generations of scholars better access to materials which pertain to the occult sciences in Islam.

The Corpus Būnīanum

As we have seen, there are several parallel traditions within the body of al-Būnī's work. It is the hope of the author that the information presented in Chapter 2 will further elucidate the interaction between these parallel traditions and help to clarify the state of the Corpus as we understand it. Given the little we know about the historical personage of al-Būnī, the identification of the recitation certificate in MS HAMIDIYE 260 gives us strong evidence that al-Būnī actually lived in the beginning of the 7th / 13th century. It also gives us at least one work which is directly and incontrovertibly attributable to him, providing a basis for which we might someday vet the character of other work purported to be a part of the Corpus.

The problem of magic

It is hoped that the information presented here has demonstrated that, contrary to the referred knowledge on al-Būnī, he was not a "magician" and did not practice or write about "magic," but rather, he advanced a system of theurgic techniques which were couched in the traditional mystic cosmological framework which was present in the 6th / 12th – 7th / 13th century Islamic world. The mysterious and opaque nature of the topic, as well as the lack of historical information from that particular period make it difficult to certainly identify any significant milestones in the development of this worldview. It is clear from al-Būnī's writings that medieval Islamic cosmology absorbed late-Platonist cosmology, at least in the area of mystic endeavors and theurgic rites. It is also clear, that the medieval Islamic systems of theurgy had an influence on contemporaneous and later esoteric systems in Europe. Both of these points are far too vast to have been covered fully within the scope of this work, but will hopefully be taken up in the future.

List of works attributed to al-Būnī

This list has been compiled based on research conducted over several extended visits in 2011 to the manuscript collection in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul. It is corroborated using Ḥajjī Khalīfa's *Kashf al-ẓunūn 'an 'asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn* and Carl Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen litteratur*, among other sources. In MS HAMIDIYE 260, a collection of several works attributed to al-Būnī, there is a listing of his works penned perhaps by the scribe who copied out the first section, *'ilm al-hudā wa asrār al-ihdā'* (see below), or by a later scholar. The MS is dated 772H in the colophon (f. 239v) and represents the earliest known listing of works attributed to al-Būnī. The present list is based thereupon and is presented in the order in which it appears in the MS. The same list appears verbatim in MS KILIÇ ALI PAŞA 588, dated 792 in the colophon, suggesting that it was copied from the former. The list is in the same hand as the main text and is neatly copied after the colophon. This list below comprises important manuscripts, if extant, and any lithographed or printed copies listed in modern sources. Appearance in the following sources is noted below:

- HKh Muṣṭafā b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qusṭanṭīnī Ḥajjī Khalīfa (Kāṭıp Çelebi), *Kashf al-ẓunūn 'an 'asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn Lexicon Bibliographicum et Encyclopedicum*, ed. and trans. Gustave Flügel, 7 vols. (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1853), specific pages and entry numbers listed below.
- GAL Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, vol. 1 (Weimar: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1898).
- GALs Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, 2nd ed, vol. suppl. 1B (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1943-1949).

- Z Khayr al-Dīn Ziriklī, *al-‘Alām: qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisā’ min al-‘Arab wa-l-must‘aribīn wa-l-mustashriqīn*, 9th ed, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm al-Malāyīn, 1990), 174.
- K ‘Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥalah, *Mu‘jam al-mu‘allifīn; tarājim muṣannifī al-kutub al-‘Arabiyya*, 15 vols. (Damascus: al-Maktabah al-‘Arabiyya, 1957-1961), 26.
- S Yūsuf Ilyān Sarkīs, *Mu‘ajam al-maṭbū‘āt al-‘arabiyya wa-l-mu‘arraba*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Sarkīs, 1928).
- F Toufic Fahd, *La Divination arabe, etudes religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l’Islam* (Strasbourg / Leiden: Brill, 1966)

All MSS that I have not personally seen or printed editions to which I have not had access are marked with an asterisk. MSS to which I have not had access are listed with their referring source. Full information has been given for those MSS which have been inspected closely, otherwise only information which appears in the Süleymaniye Library catalog is listed. All measurements are given in millimeters. This list represents the present state of my ongoing research aimed at establishing an authoritative list of titles attributable to al-Būnī as well as any extant MSS and editions thereof. As such, apologies for any heretofore uncorrected mistakes or omissions are given.

Titles listed in Hamidiye 260 and Kılıç Ali Paşa 588

‘*Alam al-hudā wa-asrār al-ihtidā*’ عَلْمُ الْهُدَىٰ وَأَسْرَارُ الْإِهْتِدَاءِ

“The Characteristics of Guidance and the Secrets of the Guided”

This title is often listed as *Sharḥ al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* (شَرْحُ الْأَسْمَاءِ الْحُسْنَىٰ), including a reference by al-Būnī himself (see GALs 910; *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣughrā*, print. ed. 1936, 18). I have confirmed that several MSS listed as such are in fact ‘*Alam al-hudā*, though not all. The title *Khawāṣṣ al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* is also often conflated with *Sharḥ*.

HKh IV, 248, #8268 (‘*Alam al-hudā*’); HKh IV, 24, #7463 (*Sharḥ al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*), mentions a commentary by al-Biṣṭāmī; GAL 497 (*Sharḥ al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā fi ‘Alam al-hudā*’); GALs 910 (listed under both titles). MSS:

HAMIDIYE 260 (1), dated 772H, f. 239v in numerals in the colophon (ff. 1-240, 21 lns, 250x180). There is also a certificate of recitation copied above the date which indicates in words that it was begun in first ten days of Dhū al-Qa‘ida 621H and completed on Monday, 17 Dhū al-Ḥijja in the same year. There is a list of works by al-Būnī in the margin on f. 239v as well; KILIÇ ALI PAŞA 588, dated 792H in numerals in the colophon on f. 221r before a second colophon which presents a list of works. This is a copy of MS HAMIDIYE 260 (1).; ESAD EFENDI 1501, dated 733H f. 233 before colophon (233 ff., 21 lns, 259x182); LALELI 1550, dated 739H f. 255 before colophon (255 ff., 21 lns, 186x135); NURUOSMANIYE 1550, dated 794H f. 255r in colophon (255 ff., 21 lns, 186x135);

Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā‘if al-‘awārif شَمْسُ الْمَعَارِفِ وَلَطَائِفِ الْعَوَارِفِ

“The Sun of Knowledge (and the Subtleties of the Practices)”

HKh IV, 74-75, #7658; GAL 497; GALs 910; Z.

There are ostensibly three recensions of *Shams al-ma‘ārif*: a *kubrā* (‘full’ or ‘longer’), *ṣuḡhrā* (‘small’ or ‘shorter’) and *wuṣṭā* (‘middle’). All three recensions include some text at the beginning which is nearly identical in the three recensions. There are further correspondences between the *kubrā* and *wuṣṭā* recensions. For a full discussion, see Chapter 2. For extensive note on the correspondences between the *kubrā* and *wuṣṭā* recensions in the printed tradition, see the 1936CE Istanbul edition titled *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*.

kubrā

HKh, III, 194, #4886; K (listed erroneously as *Sharḥ al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*; Z (PRINT ED); F, 231.

MSS: BEYAZID 1304,* dated 1055H (273 ff.); BEŞİR AĞA (EYÜP) 89, dated 1057 in numerals in a note next to the colophon on f. 215v (215 ff., 43 lns.). This MS is quite finely executed, but appears to be a draft. It is bordered but has not gilt header or frame; HACI SELIM AĞA 528, dated 1140H in the colophon on f. 313v (313 ff. 39 lns.). A very fine execution with gilt frame and header;

HEKIMOĞLU 535, dated 1099H (503 ff., 25 lns., 301x196); CARULLAH 1548, dated 1111 (337 ff., 306x205); HEKIMOĞLU 534, dated 1118H; HEKIMOĞLU 537, dated 1119H. This is in the same hand as HEKIMOĞLU 534; NURUOSMANIYE 2830, dated 1122H (204 ff.); NURUOSMANIYE 2832, dated 1126H (176 ff.); NURUOSMANIYE 2833, dated 1126H (224 ff.); HAMIDIYE 677, dated 1171 (379 ff., 21 lns., 205x155); HAMIDIYE 678, dated 1171 (395 ff., 21 lns., 210x155).

Printed editions: Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā wa laṭā’if al-‘awārif* (Cairo: unknown publisher, lithograph, 1874, listed in the text as “1921H.”), lithograph, copies of this are in the Sülemaniye library, cf. ALI EMIRI ARABI 2808* and IBRAHIM ISMAIL HAKKI 2060.* There is also another lithograph in 4 parts which was printed in 1347H, cf. MEHMET SEFAYHI 614 (131 + 110 + 120 + 38 pp.)*; Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā) wa laṭā’if al-‘awārif* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlāduhu, 1927); al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif (al-kubrā) wa laṭā’if al-‘awārif*.

wuṣṭā

Z (MS); F, 231.

MSS: ATIF EFENDI 1539, dated 831H in the colophon on f. 131v (132 ff., 17 lns.). This is a very finely executed MS with vowel-ling throughout. There do appear to be some missing folios if the text is compared to other MSS which correspond to the same text; AYASOFYA 2804, dated 838H (94 ff., 19 lns.); AYASOFYA 2806, dated 849H (126 ff., 19 lns., 182x134); LALEI 1576, dated 849H (142 ff., 17 lns.); HAFID EFENDI 198, dated 855H (60 ff., 30 lns. 177x133); KADIZADE MEHMED 335, dated 869H (45 ff., 25 lns., 255x160); NURUOSMANIYE 2831, dated 903H(99 ff.); KEMANKEŞ 316, dated 1030H (180 ff.); CARULLAH 1533 (2), dated 378-533, 19 lns., 205x180); BAĞDATLI VEHBİ 1721, dated 1065 (135 ff., 19 lns., 152x106). The owner of the MS, though not its scribe, authored a commentary dated 1321H in which he names it the “wuṣṭā,” cf.

BAĞDATLI VEHBI 1721, ff. 24-53; HACI SELIM AĞA 529, not dated. This appears to be very late compared to the rest, ca. mid-11th century H. If so, it would be one of the latest copies of this recension by about a century.

The printed editions of this text are titled “Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā.” This appellation is meaningless, as the text contained therein corresponds directly to these *wuṣṭā* MSS. 1533 Printed editions: al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*; al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-ṣuḡhrā*.

ṣuḡhrā

Z (MS); F, 231.

This recension would appear to actually be some sort of commentary. Its MSS manuscripts are only three in number and only two of them are dated. One is roughly contemporaneous with those of the *wuṣṭā* and its mate would appear to be from the same century. The other is purported to be very early, but the handwriting is an odd shakasta nast‘alīq script and the date written in numerals.

MSS: MANISA, GENEL, (A.K.A. - MANISA IL HALK KÜTÜPHANESİ) 1445, dated 618H in numerals in the colophon (210x130); AYASOFYA 2799, dated Thursday 13 Ramadan 861H in the colophon (255x170); Ayasofya 2802.

Mawāqīt al-baṣā’ir wa-laṭā’if al-sarā’ir مَوَاقِيتُ الْبَصَائِرِ وَلَطَائِفِ السَّرَائِرِ

“The Timings of Discernment and the Subtleties of the Inner Secrets”

HKh VI, 244, #13359;

Laṭā’if al-ishārāt fi-l-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt

(var. *fi asrār al-falak wa-l-ḥurūf al-ma‘nawīyyāt*)

لَطَائِفِ الْإِشَارَاتِ فِي الْحُرُوفِ الْعُلُويَّاتِ
(أَيْضاً: فِي أَسْرَارِ الْفَلَكَ وَالْحُرُوفِ الْمَعْنَوِيَّاتِ)

“The Subtleties of Signs and in the Divine Letters” or “...in the Secrets of the Heavenly Spheres and the Spiritual Letters”

HKh V, 313, #11105; GALs 911 mentions variants listed above; K;

Printed edition: Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Kitāb Latā’if al-Ishārāt fī asrār al-ḥurūf al-‘uluwiyyāt* (Cairo: unknown publisher, lithograph, 1899, listed in the text as “1317H.”).

Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāsilīn هِدَايَةُ الْقَاصِدِينَ وَنِهَائَةُ الْوَاصِلِينَ

“The Guidance of the Two Paths and the End of the Two Roads”

HKh VI, 496, #14375; GALs 911.

Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-ihtidā’ مَوَاقِفُ الْغَايَاتِ فِي أَسْرَارِ الرِّيَاضَاتِ

“The Positions of the Destination and in the Secrets of the Guided”

HKh VI, 235, #13354; GAL 497; Z (MS).

Taysīr al-‘awārif fī talkhīṣ shams al-ma‘ārif

تَيْسِيرُ الْعَوَارِفِ فِي تَلْخِيصِ شَمْسِ الْمَعَارِفِ

“The Facilitation of the Practices in the Abridgement of the Sun of Knowledge”

This title appears in none of the catalogs. I would speculate that this is the actual title of the *ṣuḡhrā* recension, which seems itself to be some sort of commentary and is very different from the other recensions, as mentioned above.

Asrār al-adwār wa-tashkīl al-anwār أَسْرَارُ الْأَدْوَارِ وَتَشْكِيلُ الْأَنْوَارِ

“The Secrets of the Stations and the Organization of the Illuminations”

HKh I, 279, #640;

Kitāb yā’ al-taṣrīf wa-jullat al-ta’rīf كِتَابُ يَأِ التَّصْرِيفِ وَجُلَّةِ التَّعْرِيفِ

“The Book of the Yā’ of Conduct and the Importance of Instruction”

رسالة ياء الواو وقاف الياء والعين
النور
Risālat yāʾ al-wāw wa-qāf al-yāʾ wa-l-ʿayn al-nūr

“Treatise on the Yāʾ of the Wāw and the Qāf of the Yāʾ and the Eye of Illumination”

al-Lumaʿat al-nūrāniyya (fi-l-awrād (var. -l-kushūfāt) al-rabbāniyya

اللُّمَعَةُ النُّورَانِيَّةُ فِي الْأَوْرَادِ (أَيْضاً: الْكُشُوفَاتُ) الرَّبَّانِيَّةُ

“The Luminous Brilliances in the Divine Supplications”

HKh V, 337-338, #11200 (full title listed above); GAL 497 mentions variants listed above; GALs 910 mentions a commentary by al-Biṣṭāmī in MS YENI CAMI 785, II, f. 231, dated 858H; K; Z.

It is difficult to ascertain at present what content belongs in this text. The shorter MSS listed below are perhaps excerpts or the longer MSS collections.

MSS: REISULUKUTTAB 1162 (017), dated 789H (ff. 210-235, 17 lns.); CARULLAH 2083 (1), dated 798H (ff. 1-31, 17 lns., 180x135); CARULLAH 2095 (23), dated 838 (ff. 159-162, 23 lns., 280x161); AYASOFYA 2810, dated 851 (96 ff., 11 lns., 167x210). A version of this also appears in HAMIDIYE 260.

Printed edition: Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī, *Sharḥ ism Al-lāh al-ʿaẓam fi al-ruḥānī wa yalayyhi kitāb al-lamaʿat fi fawāʿid al-ruḥāniyya ʿaẓīzat al-samaʿat* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Mahmūdiyya al-Tijāriyya bi'l-Azhar, 1939, listed in the text as “1358H.”), 81-119.

al-Laṭāʿif al-ʿashar

اللطائف العشر

HKh V, 316, #11122.

al-Taʿalīqat fi manāfiʿ al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm

التعليقة في منافع القرآن العظيم

“Notes on the Beneficial Uses of the Glorious Qurʾān”

Hkh II, 368, #3317 (? , see below); GAL 498 (? , see below). HKh lists a work titled *Tafsīr al-Shaykh Sharaf al-Dīn al-Būnī* which may correspond

to this title. *Tafsīr* does not appear anywhere else. GAL lists a work titled only *Ta'liqa* which may correspond to this.

Titles appearing in later sources

Asrār al-ḥurūf wa-l-kalimāt أسرار الحروف والكلمات

“The Secrets of the Letters and the Words”

HKh I, 280, #647; GAL 498; GALs 911.

Khawāṣṣ al-asmā' al-ḥusnā خواص الأسماء الحسنى

“Special Properties of the Most Beautiful Names”

HKh III, 180, #4813; GAL 498; GALs 911.

Izhār al-rumūz wa-ibdā' al-kunūz إظهار الرموز وإبداء الكنوز

“Appearance of the Symbols and the Manifestation of the Treasures”

HKh I, 346, #889; K.

Qabas al-iqtidā' ilā wifq (var. *falak*) *al-sa'āda*

(*wa-najm al-ihtidā' ilā sharaf al-sāda*)

قَبَسُ الْإِقْتِدَاءِ إِلَى وَفْقٍ (أَيْضًا: فَلَكٍ) السَّعَادَةِ

(وَنَجْمُ الْإِهْتِدَاءِ إِلَى شَرَفِ السَّادَةِ)

“The Firebrand of Emulation toward the Quadrate (Sphere) of Joy (and the Star of the Guided toward the High Rank of the Distinguished)”

HKh IV, 503, #9367; GAL 497; GALs 910 mentions variants listed above.

MSS: HACI AHMET PAŞA 1549 (002), dated 881, f. 121v (ff. 103-122, 15 lns., 185x138); HACI AHMET PAŞA 120 (007), dated 1112, f. 142v (ff. 124-142, 23 lns., 214x128).

al-Uṣūl wa-l-ḍawābiṭ الأصول والذوابط

“Fundamentals and General Rules”

GAL 498; GALs 911.

MSS: FATIḤ 5370 (002), dated in colophon on f. 82v (ff. 21-82, 21 lns., 202x143; YAZMA BAĞIŞLAR 706 (1), dated 1129 (ff. 1-47, 21 lns., 220x168).

Printed editions: al-Būnī, *Manbaʿ uṣūl al-ḥikma*, 1-55; al-Būnī, *Manbaʿ uṣūl al-ḥikma*, 1-57; al-Būnī, *al-Kashf fi ʿilm al-ḥarf wa-yalī Uṣūl ʿilm al-ḥarf wa-ḍawābit al-āfāq li-l-ḥakīm suqrāt*, 144-225.

Sharḥ ism Allāh al-aʿẓam

شَرْحُ اسْمِ اللَّهِ الْأَعْظَمِ

“Commentary on the Greatest Name of God”

F, 238, Z (PRINTED).

MS: AYASOFYA 1872* (ff. 1-15r, 17).

Printed edition: al-Būnī, *Sharḥ ism Allāh al-aʿẓam fi al-ruḥānī wa-yalayhi kitāb al-lamaʿat fi fawāʿid al-ruḥāniyya ʿaẓīẓat al-samaʿat*, 1-80.

Mūdiḥ al-tariq wa-qisṭās al-tahqīq

مَوْضِحُ الطَّرِيقِ وَقِسْطَاسِ التَّحْقِيقِ

“The Clearing of the Path and the Balance of Truth”

HKh IV, 24, 7463; GALs 911.

al-Silk al-zāhir

السِّلْكُ الزَّاهِرِ

“The Shining Cord”

Z (MS).

Fadāʿil (fawāʿid) al-basmala

فَضَائِلُ (فَوَائِدُ) الْبِسْمَلَةِ

“The Virtues (Benefits) of the Basmala”

GAL 497 (variant title above in parentheses). Z lists a printed edition entitled *Faḍl bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*] (فَضْلُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ) or “The Importance of the Basmala.”

Fī faḍl (khawāṣṣ) āyat al-kursī

فِي فَضْلِ (خَوَاصِّ) آيَةِ الْكُرْسِيِّ

“On the Importance of the (Special Properties) of the Throne Verse”

GAL 497 (variant title above in parentheses).

Sirr al-ḥikam wa-jawāmi‘ al-kalim

سِرُّ الْحِكْمِ وَجَوَامِعِ الْكَلِمِ

“The Secret of Wisdom and the Collection of Utterances”

GAL 498.

al-Durr al-munazzam fi-l-sirr al-a‘zam

الدُّرُّ الْمُنْظَّمُ فِي السِّرِّ الْأَعْظَمِ

“The String of Pearls in the Greatest Secret”

GAL 498.

Works wrongly attributed to al-Būnī

Mafātiḥ asrār al-ḥurūf wa-maṣābiḥ anwār al-ẓurūf

مَفَاتِيحُ أَسْرَارِ الْحُرُوفِ وَمَصَابِيحُ أَنْوَارِ الظُّرُوفِ

“The Keys to the Secrets of the Letters and the Sources of the Illumination of the [Favorable] Conditions”

GALs 911; K. GALs lists this title as wrongly attributed to al-Būnī (Paris 2660, II, 252, 16). K refers to GAL.

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