

Esotericism in a manuscript culture:
Aḥmad al-Būnī and his readers through the Mamlūk period

by

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Dedication

To my parents, Elaine and Charlie Gardiner, who have
always let me find my own way.

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Notes on manuscript references

This study refers to a great number of manuscripts, and in each case where a specific codex is under discussion, I use the library name + shelfmark to refer to it, for example ‘Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590’. This may strike the reader as obtrusive, but I do it throughout to emphasize that the information discussed in this study is drawn from numerous unique artifacts, each with its own history and textual idiosyncrasies. Indeed, it is my goal to keep the variety, even the chaos, of the manuscript inheritance in full view.

The complete lists of the manuscripts taken into account for this study, including their basic codicological information and some other details, are to be found in Appendices A-F. All of this information is from a database kept during the course of my research, and it must be said that translating a database to the page is a sometimes-inelegant operation, though I have done my best here to make the information accessible. I have listed all Būnian manuscripts in Appendix A in chronological order by copying date or estimated century of production (and alphabetically by title within the latter category), with a reference number attached to each entry. Appendix B is a list of the major medieval Būnian works (along with incipits, alternate titles, *et cetera*), along with lists of reference numbers referring back to Appendix A. This is to say that, if one would like to see the details on all copies of al-Būnī’s *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, one would check Appendix B for the list of reference numbers, and then consult each entry in Appendix A.

Appendix C is a list of the minor works attributed to al-Būnī (a distinction explained in chapter one), again attached to reference numbers referring back to Appendix A. Appendices D and E are lists of works in manuscript by two other late-medieval lettrist authors, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī and Abū Ya‘qūb al-Kūmī. Finally, and quite importantly, Appendix F is list of all the manuscripts taken into

account for this study organized alphabetically by library + shelfmark and cross-referenced to the reference numbers given in Appendix A. Thus, to look up the details on a manuscript discussed in the study, one goes to Appendix F to look up the shelfmark, then refers to Appendix A using the reference number.

Notes on Arabic latinization and *abjad*-numerology

Throughout this study I use the United States Library of Congress system of latinizing Arabic script, which is given below. For the sake of efficiency, and due to the special demands of a study on the science of letters, I also include here the numerical values of the letters of the Arabic alphabet—their *abjad* values, as they are often called—according to the Western and Eastern systems. Unsurprisingly given his Ifrīqīyan origin, al-Būnī used the Western system exclusively, though I include both here for purposes of comparison.

Ar.	Lat.	West.	East.		Ar.	Lat.	West.	East.
ا	, ā	1	1		ض	ḍ	90	800
ب	b	2	2		ط	ṭ	9	9
ت	t	400	400		ظ	ẓ	800	900
ث	th	500	500		ع	‘	70	70
ج	j	3	3		غ	gh	900	1000
ح	ḥ	8	8		ف	f	80	80
خ	kh	600	600		ق	q	100	100
د	d	4	4		ك	k	20	20
ذ	dh	700	700		ل	l	30	30
ر	r	200	200		م	m	40	40
ز	z	7	7		ن	n	50	50
س	s	300	60		ة\ه	h	5	5
ش	sh	1000	300		و	w, ū	6	6
ص	ṣ	60	90		ي	y, ī	10	10

Abstract

In this dissertation I address the spread and reception of the works of the North African Sufi, author on the controversial ‘science of letters and names’ (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmā’*), and putative ‘magician’ Aḥmad al-Būnī, from the period near the end of his life in Cairo in the first quarter of the seventh/thirteenth century through the end of the Mamlūk period in the early-tenth/sixteenth. Beginning from a survey of hundreds of manuscript copies of Būnian works, and drawing on a variety of manuscript paratexts and codical elements as well as on the contents of al-Būnī’s texts and contemporary literature, I examine concrete and ideological aspects of the transmission of ‘dangerous’ ideas in a late-medieval Islamic manuscript culture. Beginning with al-Būnī’s promulgation of his own works in Cairo, I argue that his written texts were intended for circulation only among closed, secretive communities of learned Sufi readers, but that by the second quarter of the eighth/fourteenth century they had begun to reach a broader readership, and by the ninth/fifteenth had come to circulate widely among influential scholars and bureaucrats, even reaching the courts of ruling Mamlūk military elites. Reading literary sources against the evidence of the manuscript corpus, and with careful attention to the book-practices, identities, and motivations of readers, I show that Būnian works continued to gain in popularity even as some authorities denounced them as heretical, and that a bustling ‘occult’ scene was in place in Cairo by the turn of the ninth/fifteenth century. In discussing the career of the corpus I consider questions of al-Būnī’s bibliography and the misattribution to him of the famous *Shams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā*. I also address the necessity of contextualizing al-Būnī as part of a wave of esotericist Sufis who emigrated from the Islamic West to Cairo and beyond around the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century, and whose controversial teachings—some with roots in Ismā’īlī Shī’ite thought—were only slowly and contentiously taken up in these new environments. The study is

intended as a contribution to Islamic intellectual history, the history of the occult sciences, and the study of medieval manuscript cultures.

Chapter One

Introduction: Al-Būnī in the archives

And even if We had sent down to you something written on parchment and they touched it with their hands, the disbelievers would say, This is not but obvious magic.

- Qur'ān 6:7¹

... nur im Detail ist Leben.

- Heinz Halm²

1.0 Preamble: Turning to the manuscripts

This dissertation examines the spread and reception of the writings of the Ifrīqīyan *cum* Egyptian Sufi Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225 or 630/1232-3), a controversial figure best known as an author on the science of letters and names (*'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmā'*) and often regarded in modern scholarship as a 'magician'. The study is grounded in extensive research on the large, complex, and, until recently, mostly unexamined manuscript corpus of works attributed to al-Būnī; however, aside from some bibliographical insights, it is not an exercise in textual scholarship *sensu stricto*. Rather, in tracing how al-Būnī's texts and ideas moved from the fringes of Arab Sunnite culture to the salons and libraries of ruling Mamlūk elites over the span of less than three centuries, and reading this manuscript evidence against a range of literary sources, it is a cultural and intellectual-historical examination of the roles of books and readers in the spread of 'dangerous' knowledge in the late-medieval Arab-Islamic world. It is also intended as a demonstration of some ways in the which the vast inheritance

¹ « وَ لَوْ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ كِتَابًا فِي قِرْطَابٍ فَلَمَسُوهُ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ لَقَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ »

² Heinz Halm, *Das Reich Des Mahdi: Der Aufstieg Der Fatimiden (875-973)* (München: Beck, 1991).

of medieval Arabic manuscripts—which are greatly underutilized in Islamic historical studies—can be drawn upon as historical sources for purposes beyond edition-making, particularly with regard to the recovery of discourses resistant to the main categories of Islamic cultural and intellectual history constituted by modern scholarship.

Two remarkable facts of past scholarship on al-Būnī provided the initial motivation for this project. First, that while much modern scholarship has dismissed al-Būnī as a ‘magician’ whose thought was of little relevance to major currents in Islamic intellectual history, hundreds of manuscript copies of works attributed to him survive in collections around the world, indicating that numerous premodern Muslim readers considered his works and the ideas they contain worthy of reproduction. Second, that the vast majority of the small amount of modern scholarship focused on al-Būnī has relied primarily on printed editions of a large work attributed to him entitled *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*.³ This is despite the fact that many scholars, even while working from it, have pointed out glaring anachronisms in that text relative to the widely accepted death for al-Būnī of 622/1225.⁴ Dissatisfied with this state of affairs, and inspired by Jan Just Witkam’s suggestion that the “corpus Būnianum”—a term he coined in an important 2007 article—has a richly complex history,⁵ I resolved to move past *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā* and delve into these manuscripts. While I originally had hoped merely to access texts authentic to al-Būnī, the training and experience in manuscript studies that I gained in preparing for and executing the initial research for the project made clear that more could be achieved. I saw that through gathering paratextual and codical data, it would be possible to formulate a picture of the spread and development of the corpus in time and space, as well as gain some understanding of the

³ Or some variant thereof, particularly *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif*, although this should not be confused with either of the two medieval works bearing that name, as discussed below. To distinguish it from those works in this study I always refer to it as either *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā* or simply the *Kubrā*.

⁴ Anachronisms that range from references to slightly later actors such as Ibn Sab‘īn (d. 669/1269-70) to a mention of Amrīka; Constant Hamés, *EI3*, s.v. “al-Būnī.” See also the review below of scholarship on al-Būnī.

⁵ 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 Honour of Remke Kruk* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 183.

actors who produced, transmitted, and read these numerous codices. With such goals in mind, I undertook an examination of the manuscript corpus *in extenso*, which is to say I attempted to take into account as many codices as possible of works attributed to, or directly related to, al-Būnī. At present, I have gathered information from almost 350 copies of Būnian works in over 200 codices (the disparity owing to codices with multiple Būnian works), and also numerous copies of commentaries and other related works. In doing so, I have paid particular attention to paratextual and codical elements that convey details about the human actors who produced, read, bought, sold, and otherwise interacted with these material texts. This research also has given me access to a rich variety of Būnian texts, authentic and otherwise, thus fulfilling my original intention of turning to the manuscripts.

The dissertation consists of this introductory chapter and three others (as well as appendices with lists of the manuscripts surveyed and other elements). In this chapter I discuss previous research on al-Būnī, my own manuscript research and bibliographical findings, and some terminological and methodological points central to my analysis of the career of the corpus, such as ‘esotericism’ and the notion of ‘manuscript culture’ as a lens through which to approach medieval Islamic cultural and intellectual history. I end this chapter with a brief discussion of what can be known of al-Būnī’s biography, and with an encapsulated version of the narrative of the career of the corpus that is developed over the course of the three main chapters. The second chapter addresses the initial promulgation of al-Būnī’s works and their circulation in ‘esotericist reading communities’ during the late-Ayyūbid and early Mamlūk periods, with particular attention to the tension between secrecy and the written word in the circulation of books. The third is centered on a reading of parts of al-Būnī’s *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwīyāt*, especially his lettrist cosmology and doctrine of the human-as-microcosm. This is undertaken with an eye toward the book as an instrument of Sufi instruction and initiation, particularly as it was used by the small groups of esotericist Sufis discussed in the previous chapter. The discussion is bracketed with forays into the roots of al-Būnī’s lettrism aimed at bettering our understanding of its Ayyūbid and Mamlūk-era reception, the first addressing cosmologically-

oriented lettrism in Shī'ite and Western Sufi thought, and the second examining differing accounts of al-Būnī's education and Sufi training. The fourth and final chapter looks at the reception of al-Būnī over the course of the Mamlūk period and the efflorescence of Būnian works among that era's expanding class of cosmopolitan secondary elites, putting the manuscript evidence in conversation with a range of literary sources. I focus on few predominant trends in this reception, including attempts by encyclopædist authors to classify al-Būnī's teachings, denunciations of al-Būnī as a heretic by various of the 'ulamā', and the synthesizing of al-Būnī's thought with that of other authors by later lettrist thinkers who themselves were the late products of the esotericist reading communities discussed in the second chapter. As we will see, by the ninth/fifteenth century these later lettrists were promulgating a new, 'post-esotericist' form of lettrism that would carry al-Būnī's teachings forward—albeit in a greatly altered form—into the early modern period and beyond. The brief conclusion explores some of the successes and failures of the innovative research methods employed in this project, and the tremendous amount of work that remains to be done in al-Būnī studies.

That I was initially led to 'turn' to the manuscripts in the early stages of my research out of frustration with the printed sources on al-Būnī speaks to an issue which, though hardly unique to Islamicate medieval studies, is certainly endemic to it: a tendency to regard manuscripts solely as conveyors of texts. In trying to reach beyond this quite limited use of these rich sources of historical data, I have employed various other methods of working with them, such as compiling basic metadata (titles and alternate titles, dates of copying, *et cetera*) from the manuscripts, which has allowed me to take various 'wide-angle' views of the corpus. This led me to the fundamental that al-Būnī's works were relatively rarely copied in the century or so after his death, but that the corpus underwent a rapid efflorescence in the later eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries. Indeed, this observation has structured the dissertation to a large extent, insofar as the second chapter is focused on the earlier, 'germinal' period of the corpus, and the fourth chapter deals with that of its efflorescence. This metadata has proven quite useful in examining questions of al-Būnī's bibliography as well, particularly

with regard to when certain works seem to have come into circulation. I also have paid a great deal of attention to paratexts: colophons, audition certificates, and patronage statements, among others. To take just one example, much of chapter two consists of close readings of a small but important cluster of paratexts that record al-Būnī having composed and auditioned two of his works in Cairo in 621/1224 and 622/1225. In chapter three I offer a reading of al-Būnī's *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* 'qua manuscript', which is to say with attention to how it was used as a teaching/initiatic tool in small gatherings of Sufis, particularly as regards al-Būnī's use of complex diagrams. And in chapter four I draw on various types of paratexts and metadata to trace the movement of the corpus beyond Cairo, and to garner some rudimentary prosopographical information about Mamlūk-era readers of al-Būnī, including their professions and social class. These data then serve as a foundation for readings of a range of Mamlūk-era reactions to al-Būnī preserved in literary sources.

Beyond these methods of extracting information from the manuscripts, I have also striven to keep late-medieval manuscript culture always in view when discussing al-Būnī's texts and those of other authors, often lingering on points of detail relating to books so as to emphasize the ways they pervaded the lives of the medieval actors under discussion. In all this I hope to demonstrate the rich variety of details manuscripts can provide to discussions of those corners of medieval society in which books and reading played a major part, and the utility of such methods in the recovery of 'minor' discourses, such as lettrism, that too often fall through the cracks of the major frames of reference through which medieval Islamdom is commonly studied.

1.1 Al-Būnī studies

Though al-Būnī is frequently footnoted where issues of 'Islamic magic' and 'popular religion' are discussed—usually along with a mention of *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*—focused research on him has been relatively rare. To the best of my knowledge, the earliest dated records of Western scholarly engagement with al-Būnī are some brief accession notes penned in the flyleaves of at two al-Būnī-attributed works in 1735 by Joseph Ascari, a Syrian Maronite employed as a cataloger of Arabic

manuscripts at the royal precursor to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.⁶ The next is in the late nineteenth century, in Wilhelm Ahlwardt's detailed description of Berlin MS or. We. 1210, a late-eleventh/seventeenth-century copy of *Shams al-ma'arif al-kubrā*, in his magisterial catalog of the Arabic codices then held at the Königliche Bibliothek.⁷ In hindsight, the lavish attention Ahlwardt paid to this work can be taken as an omen of things to come in al-Būnī studies over the next century or so.

Shams al-ma'arif al-kubrā is a lengthy, talisman-laden, quasi-encyclopaedic work on the occult sciences that is replete with texts on alchemy, astrology, geomancy, the science of letters, and other topics that could be gathered under the broad heading of 'occult sciences'. It is in fact an amalgamation of bits and pieces of some of al-Būnī's authentic works with texts by other authors. In the manuscripts surveyed for this project, there were no copies of it dated to earlier than the eleventh/seventeenth century, and in my view it is likely a product of that century or the latter part of the preceding one. The *Kubrā* was quite popular judging from the number of surviving copies, was reproduced in lithograph in the nineteenth century, and has been continuously in print in a series of non-scholarly editions, mostly emanating from Cairo and Beirut, since around the turn of the twentieth century.⁸ Copies of this work—particularly the heavily error-ridden printed editions—have served as the primary basis of nearly all modern scholarship on al-Būnī. Though the *Kubrā* would obviously be a highly important source for studies of Islamic occultism in the eleventh/seventeenth century onward, scholarly recourse to it has most often led to serious misapprehensions of the historical al-Būnī and occult scientific thought of the late-medieval period.

⁶ The codices are MSS arabe 2649, a copy of the quasi-pseudepigraphic 'courtly' *Shams al-ma'arif* (on which see below), and arabe 2656, a copy of the pseudepigraphic *Kitāb al-uṣūl wa-al-ḍawābiṭ*. On Ascari, see Stephan Roman, "France," in *The Development of Islamic Library Collections in Western Europe and North America* (London: Mansell, 1990), 19.

⁷ Wilhelm Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss Der Arabischen Handschriften Der Königlichen Bibliothek Zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1887), entry no. 4125.

⁸ Constant Hamés, *EI3*, s.v. "al-Būnī."

A. Dietrich's article in the second edition of the *Encyclopædia of Islam* is typical of mid-to-late-twentieth century scholarship on al-Būnī derived from the *Kubrā*. He describes al-Būnī as a writer on 'magic', and the *Shams al-al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*—for which he refers readers to a 1905 Cairo edition—as al-Būnī's "main work." He characterizes the text as "a compilation based rather on current popular customs than on literature transmitted from Hellenistic superstition," and as "a collection both muddled and dreary of materials for the magical use of numbers and letters-squares, single *Ḳur'ān*-verses, the names of God and of the mother of Mūsā, indications for the production of amulets, for the magical use of scripts... even the words with which Jesus is supposed to have resuscitated the dead."⁹ Dietrich's evaluation of the work's origins seems to be derived in part from the great historian of Islamic science Manfred Ullmann's brief and vitriolic discussion of al-Būnī, in which he arrives at the conclusion that the material in the *Shams* is drawn entirely from "folklore" (*Volkstum*) rather than "literary sources." Ullmann's assessment apparently also was based on printed editions, as pointed out by Witkam.¹⁰ It misses or ignores entirely al-Būnī's participation in the science of letters and names, and nowhere does it mention Sufism. Ullmann does offer his unvarnished opinion of al-Būnī, however, calling him a "credulous" man who thought he could control the universe through "stupid, formalistic arithmetic."¹¹

In the cases of Dietrich and Ullmann, their reliance on *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* can in part be taken as reflective of their participation in a tendency, well-entrenched in the humanities and social sciences of their time, to regard 'magic' as an ancient but persistent detritus, an irrational and antisocial atavism thriving primarily among the poorly educated and flourishing in moments of cultural decline.¹² That they were content to draw on the easily available *Kubrā* as the main

⁹ A. Dietrich, *EI2*, s.v. "al-Būnī, Abu l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Yūsuf al-Ḳurashī al-Ṣūfī Muḥyī l-Dīn."

¹⁰ Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun," 190.

¹¹ Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 390–391.

¹² For some excellent accounts of the history of 'magic' as an analytical category in the modern social sciences and humanities, see Styers, *Making Magic*, and Hanegraaff, "The Emergence of the Academic Science of Magic."

representative of al-Būnī's thought is, in my estimation, symptomatic of their presumption of his fundamentally irrelevant and/or deleterious role in Islamic thought. Another scholar who exemplifies this trend is Armand Abel, for whom the "confused doctrine" and jumbled contents of *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* are prime evidence in his essay on the occult sciences of the "decadence" of late-medieval Islamic thought and culture.¹³

More puzzling is the reliance on the *Kubrā* by scholars not overtly hostile to al-Būnī, most of whom acknowledge the presence of obvious anachronisms in the text. Mohamed el-Gawhary, whose 1968 Bonn dissertation was the first book-length study dedicated to al-Būnī, appears to have worked from printed editions of *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* and from Mamlūk-era literary sources. He spends a number of pages pointing out anachronisms and contradictions in the work and then arrives at the conclusion that the *Kubrā* must have been composed by al-Būnī's followers in the century or two after his death, but that it could still be counted as a reliable source for investigating late-medieval thought.¹⁴ Dorothee Pielow largely follows el-Gawhary's line of reasoning in her 1995 book-length study of al-Būnī, consulting a printed edition and a small selection of mostly seventeenth-century manuscripts of the *Kubrā* as the bases of her research.¹⁵ Toufic Fahd, whose earliest published discussion of al-Būnī slightly preceded al-Gawhary's, appears to have investigated the manuscript corpus somewhat more broadly; however, he arrives at the conclusion that the *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* was al-Būnī's true *magnum opus*, and asserts that the various shorter works attributed to al-Būnī were monographs

Specifically in regard to the Islamic occult sciences, see Francis, "Magic and Divination", and Lemay, "L'Islam historique et les sciences occultes."

¹³ Armand Abel, "La place des sciences occultes dans la décadence," in *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l'histoire de l'islam* (Paris: Editions Besson, 1957), 302 ff.

¹⁴ Mohamed El-Gawhary, "Die Gottesnamen im magischen Gebrauch in den Al-Būnī zugeschriebenden Werken" (Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität, 1968), 14–27.

¹⁵ Dorothee Pielow, *Die Quellen der Weisheit: Die arabische Magie im Spiegel des Uṣūl al-Ḥikma von Aḥmad Ibn 'Alī al-Būnī* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995), 11–13, 183–184.

extracted from it.¹⁶ Even in his more recent article from 2002 on al-Būnī as a Neoplatonist thinker, Fahd solely consults the *Kubrā*, and though the article is a compelling study of that text, it is by no means an accurate description of the thought of the historical al-Būnī nor the state of occult-scientific thought in the seventh/thirteenth century.¹⁷ Pierre Lory, who has produced a series of important essays on the history of lettrism, discusses al-Būnī as a lettrist on the basis of the *Kubrā*, but admits that he can find no consistent system of thought in the text, nor firmly ascertain when it was written.¹⁸ Similarly, Edgar Francis discusses al-Būnī as a Sufi in general terms on the basis of the *Kubrā*—along with a few references to other works in manuscript—but can offer few specific conclusions regarding al-Būnī’s intellectual background due to the jumbled nature of the text.¹⁹ While these studies sometimes contain valuable insights into the text they investigate, their conclusions are inevitably compromised with regard the historical al-Būnī and the thought of his times.

Jan Just Witkam’s 2007 article on al-Būnī was, in my estimation, a watershed moment for al-Būnī studies, pushing scholars in the direction of more serious forays into the manuscript corpus. The article is centered on Leiden MS Or. 1233, a copy of the pseudepigraphic Būnian text *Tartīb al-da‘awāt fī talkhīṣ al-awqāt*, but it addresses other issues in the study of al-Būnī, as well. Most compellingly, Witkam coins the term “corpus Būnianum,” a reference to similar appellations for large bodies of occult writings considered to be of questionable and/or multiple authorships, such as the corpora Hermeticum and Jābirianum. Furthermore, Witkam proposes that the corpus is “the product of the work of several generations of practicing magicians, who arranged al-Būnī’s work and thought...

¹⁶ Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe: Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l’islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 230.

¹⁷ Idem., “La magie comme ‘source’ de la sagesse, d’après l’œuvre d’al-Būnī,” in *Charmes et sortilèges: magie et magiciens* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l’étude de la civilisation du moyen-orient, 2002), 61–108.

¹⁸ Pierre Lory, “La magie des lettres dans le Shams al-ma‘ārif d’al Būnī,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 39–40 (1987): 97–111.

¹⁹ Edgar Francis, “Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals for Protection and Healing: Religion and Magic in the Writings of Ahmad b. Ali al-Buni (d. 622/1225)” (University of California, 2005).

probably while mixing these with elements of their own works.”²⁰ It must be said that the concept was not entirely original; indeed, el-Gawhary, Pielow, and others had argued for some level of outside interference in the writings attributed to al-Būnī, but Witkam’s restatement of the problem was particularly compelling. Perhaps in connection to Witkam’s article, a ‘stronger’ version of this notion was delivered the following year by the Mamlūkist Robert Irwin in a review article, in which he states: “It seems likely that the ascription of writings to [al-Būnī] was intended to suggest the nature of their contents rather than indicate their actual authorship.” Irwin also notes that “[a]l-Buni, like Jabir ibn Hayyan, was used as a label for an occult genre,” and that “the writings of both these semi-legendary figures were almost certainly produced by many anonymous authors.”²¹

I began research on the manuscripts in earnest in 2009, and in early 2012 published a lengthy article with a number of my preliminary findings.²² Little did I know that a handful other efforts were being made to investigate various aspects of the corpus during roughly the same period. On the critical-editing front, Jaime Cordero’s 2009 Salamanca dissertation is an edition and Spanish translation of the first half of *Shams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā*.²³ It is of immense value for those interested in the *Kubrā*, and also contains a painstaking breakdown of the textual continuities and discontinuities between the *Kubrā* and some medieval copies of the ‘courtly’ *Shams al-ma’ārif* (on which see 1.3.3), at least as concerns the first half of the *Kubrā*. If Cordero indeed releases the second half of the text as planned then it will be a major resource for those wishing to trace the textual ‘archeology’ of the *Kubrā*. More pertinent to investigation of the corpus beyond the *Kubrā*, John D. Martin completed an M.A.

²⁰ 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 Honour of Remke Kruk*, ed. Arnoud Vrolijk & Jan Hogendijk (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 183.

²¹ Robert Irwin, “Review of *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*,” *Journal of Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 3, no. 1 (2008): 107.

²² Noah Gardiner, “Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production, Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Aḥmad Al-Būnī,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012): 81–143.

²³ Jaime Cordero, “*El Kitāb Šams al-Ma’ārif al-Kubrā (al-ŷuz’ al-awwal)* de Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Būnī: Sufismo y ciencias ocultas” (PhD dissertation, Universidad de Salamanca, 2009).

thesis at the American University in Cairo in December of 2011 that includes a chapter on his research on Būnian manuscripts at the Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi in Istanbul. Though he labors under the notion of there having been three ‘redactions’ of *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, he nonetheless produces some valuable insights into the sizable share of the corpus held at that library, particularly regarding the clustering of Būnian works in the collections of the Ottoman Sultans Bāyazīd II (r. 886/1481-918/1512) and Mahmud I (r. 1143/1730-1168/1754).²⁴ It should be mentioned that Martin’s adviser at the American University in Cairo, Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, has also been conducting research on Būnian manuscripts, though he has yet to publish any findings.²⁵

Finally, the work of Jean-Charles Coulon is a major addition to al-Būnī studies that will soon be available. Coulon’s 2013 Sorbonne dissertation is apparently a massive study of al-Būnī and the corpus that includes editions of a number of Būnian works, authentic and otherwise.²⁶ At the time of writing I have not seen his dissertation, but I have had the pleasure of meeting Coulon and participating on a panel with him at the Princeton Islamicate Occult Sciences workshop in February 2014. His paper and our discussions in and out of the panel addressed many points where our projects converge, as well as some important points of his bibliographical findings that shed new light on the history of the corpus. I briefly discuss those findings to the best of my ability in my discussion below of medieval texts that went under the name of *Shams al-ma‘ārif*.

²⁴ John Martin, “Theurgy in the Medieval Islamic World: Conceptions of Cosmology in Al-Būnī’s Doctrine of the Divine Names” (M.A. thesis, The American University in Cairo, 2011), 47. Martin’s should prove a fruitful line of inquiry whenever the issue of al-Būnī in the Ottoman period is taken up, as a study on this would certainly have to address the creation of *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*.

²⁵ Ahmad was kind enough to send me a draft of an article of his on Būnian manuscripts, in which he responds to some of the arguments in my 2012 article—particularly to defend what sees as the possibility that the *Kubrā* was authored by al-Būnī—as well as some very interesting material on the procedures for the making of mathematical ‘magic squares’. However, as I do not know the current status of this article, I will not respond to it in this dissertation.

²⁶ Jean-Charles Coulon, “La magie islamique et le « corpus bunianum » au Moyen Âge” (Ph.D. dissertation, Paris IV - Sorbonne, 2013).

1.1.1 Other recent research on the occult sciences

Mention should also be made of the important body of quite recent research on the Islamicate occult sciences beyond al-Būnī, and shifts this research may herald the broader study of medieval and early modern Islamic(ate) thought and culture. With regard to the era prior to al-Būnī, there has been a recent tendency to seek out enduring continuities between Late Antique thought and sociocultural formations and those of the first three or four centuries of Islam, rather than just the first one or two (as in, for example, recent works by Jonathan Berkey, Aziz al-Azmeh, and Garth Fowden).²⁷ This work lays important ground for new research into Islamic reception(s) of the Hellenistic occult sciences. Along these lines, the new edition of the *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, which is being produced over several volumes since 2008 by the Institute of Ismā'īlite Studies, demonstrates a growing awareness of the immense importance of this seemingly marginal group of Shī'ite Neoplatonist thinkers over the long term of Islamicate intellectual history.²⁸ Kevin van Bladel's 2009 study of Arabic hermetica has reopened a long-neglected inquiry into the impact of that important body of Late Antique thought and praxis.²⁹ Also of note regarding the period preceding al-Būnī is Michael Ebstein's research on the influence of 'extremist' and Ismā'īlite Shī'ite discourses on Western Sufism, as exemplified by his recent monograph on the topic.³⁰ I draw heavily on Ebstein's work in this study, particularly in chapter three, and there is no doubt that further research on al-Būnī will continue to shed light on this important subject.

²⁷ Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Aziz Al-Azmeh, *A History of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Garth Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

²⁸ See the essays in the inaugural volume, Nader El-Bizri, ed., *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: The Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā' and Their Rasā'il: An Introduction, Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā' and Their Rasā'il 1* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Kevin Van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science*, Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁰ Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn Al-'Arabī and Ismā'īlite Tradition*, Islamic History and Civilization 103 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014).

With regard to the period after al-Būnī, a handful of important, recent studies addresses the place of the occult sciences in so-called ‘post-classical’ Islamdom, which is to say that of the late-medieval and early modern periods, particularly in relation to the Ottomans and the Persianate world. Most of this work on the occult sciences is yet in dissertation form, such as İ. Evrim Binbaş’ study of the ninth/fifteenth-century Tīmūrīd historian and occult thinker Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, Matthew Melvin-Koushki’s work on the Safavid occult philosopher Şā’in al-Dīn Turkah, and Tuna Artun’s thesis on Ottoman alchemy.³¹ That Binbaş and Artun both completed their studies within Cornell Fleischer’s sphere of influence is hardly a coincidence, as Fleischer’s work on the Antiochene letrist ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454) and on millenarianism and the occult sciences at the Ottoman court has decidedly shaped this area of inquiry.³² While many twentieth-century scholars dismissed the post-classical period as one of intellectual and cultural decline, stagnation, and unoriginal commentarialism, this perception has begun to change of late. As Melvin-Koushki puts it, “the late medieval period in the Islamicate lands is now being increasingly recognized as host to a wide range of grand intellectual and cultural syntheses and creative energies spanning various fields of human endeavor, from philosophy to literature, from astronomy to global trade.”³³ The decisive importance of the occult sciences in post-classical Islamicate thought has only begun to be explored with these recent studies, though research on them has flourished in Europeanist studies in recent decades. As Melvin-Koushki points out, such research, which seeks to “tak[e] early modern thinkers on their own terms,” has been central to efforts

³¹ İlker Evrim Binbaş, “Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (ca. 770s-858/Ca. 1370s-1454): Prophecy, Politics, and Historiography in Late Medieval Islamic History” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009); Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Şā’in Al-Dīn Turka İṣfahānī (1369-1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran” (PhD dissertation, Yale, 2012); Tuna Artun, “Hearts of Gold and Silver: The Production of Alchemical Knowledge in the Early Modern Ottoman World” (Ph.D., Princeton University, 2013).

³² Cornell Fleischer, “Mahdi and Millenium: Messianic Dimensions in the Development of Ottoman Imperial Ideology,” in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilization, Vol. 3: Philosophy, Science, and Institutions*, ed. Çiçek Kamal (Istanbul: Isis, 2000); idem., “Shadow of Shadows: Prophecy in Politics in 1530s Istanbul,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (2007): 51–62; idem., “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2009), 231–44.

³³ Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science,” 10.

to problematize the ‘Scientific Revolution’ and the “presentist and exclusivist narrative of European intellectual progress” it undergirds.³⁴ There is little question that the continuing study of the post-classical Islamic occult sciences will offer a reckoning on a similar scale, no doubt serving to further complicate narratives of the ‘decline’ or ‘calcification’ of Islamic thought in the period.

Al-Būnī, whose lifetime can be said to have crossed the threshold from the high-medieval to late-medieval periods, is a major hinge joining classical and post-classical understandings of the science of letters and the occult sciences more broadly. As discussed throughout this study, his writings gave voice to a cosmologically-oriented lettrism that seems to have originated in second/eighth through fourth/tenth-century extremist and Ismāʿīlite Shīʿite thought, and which had found its way into Western Sufi thought probably through diverse channels. Furthermore, his writings were instrumental in effecting an eastward return of this intellectual current first to Egypt and Syria, and then to Ottoman and Safavid centers of power. Indeed, one of the goals of this study is to ground an understanding of the movement of this ‘current’ of lettrism in the concrete evidence of the Mamlūk-era manuscript corpus.

1.2 The survey of the corpus

At the heart of this project has been an attempt to survey the Būnian manuscript corpus *in extenso*, which is to say an effort to see, and aggregate information on, as many manuscripts of works attributed to al-Būnī as possible. Though the present state of global Arabic manuscript cataloging militates against achieving a truly complete survey of the corpus, I have accomplished a quite large one. At present I have gathered information on 344 works attributed to al-Būnī and sixty related works, such as commentaries and works by authors otherwise influenced by al-Būnī. The vast majority of these are held in state-run libraries, though I have taken information from a small number of auction notices as well. The libraries visited include the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, the

³⁴ Ibid., 11.

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, the Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, the Schloss Friedenstein Library in Gotha, the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, the British Library in London, the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, the Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi in Istanbul, the Manisa Kütüphanesi, the Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the Dār al-Kutub (Egyptian National Library) in Cairo, the Firestone Library at Princeton University, and, of course, the Hatcher Graduate Library at the University of Michigan. I have obtained copies of manuscripts from many other libraries as well, and in some cases have drawn data from catalogs and other sources. I have seen the majority of the manuscripts (253 of the 352 Būnian works, 57 of the 94 others) either through autopsy or by viewing digital or microfilm surrogates, and have gathered information on the remainder from catalogs or other secondary sources. The information I have collected includes such basic metadata as titles, numbers of folia, lines of text per page, and, when available, dates and places of copying. When possible I also have recorded such codicological information as measurements, notes on the hand and paper, *et cetera*. These basic data are to be found in Appendices A-D. I have also paid particular attention to paratexts that contain information about the actors who transmitted, copied, owned, read, or otherwise interacted with the manuscripts. I have not transcribed all of the paratexts from the corpus, though the list in Appendix A does note the presence of many paratexts of various types in the manuscripts.

1.2.1 'Wide-angle' views of the corpus

I have drawn on these various data in multiple ways, including using the aggregated metadata to gain 'wide-angle' views of the corpus that can elucidate trends in its career across space and time. The most basic of these wide-angle observations—and that which raised some of the questions which have most fundamentally shaped this study—is that a vanishingly low number of copies of Būnian works survive from the seventh/thirteenth and early eighth/fourteenth centuries, but the numbers increase dramatically beginning in the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century and even more so in the last century or so of the Mamlūk period (see Charts 1 and 2). It is my position that these numbers

are reflective of actual historical phenomena, which is to say that I think a rather low number of copies of Būnian works circulated in the first century after his death, and that they were much more widely copied after that. Thus throughout the dissertation I refer to the initial period as the ‘germinal’ period of the corpus, and the latter part (from around the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century through the end of the Mamlūk period) as that of its ‘efflorescence’. Many elements of the historical narrative I present in this study address why and how al-Būnī’s works went from being only rarely copied for the century or so after his death, to being far more widely so in the next two.

Similarly, I use this aggregated metadata to look also at the numbers of copies of specific Būnian works across the centuries (see Table 1), both as a tool for evaluating al-Būnī’s bibliography and as a means of gauging roughly the popularity of various of his works at different times. For example, the fact that not one of the numerous dated copies of *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā* work is dated earlier than the eleventh/seventeenth century is an important datum in my argument that the work likely originated in that century. As another example, in support of an argument that al-Būnī readers’ interests in him shifted during the ninth/fifteenth century, I note that his highly pietistic work on the names of God, ‘*Alam al-hudá wa-asrār al-ihtidá fī sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-husná*’, seems to have been most widely copied during the eighth/fourteenth century, while the authentic and pseudepigraphic Būnian works geared more toward operative lettrist practices, such as *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* and the ‘courtly’ *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā‘if al-‘awārif*, entered their heyday in the ninth/fifteenth century.

Such techniques have not, to the best knowledge, been used previously in studies of medieval Islamic manuscripts. Thus, as a point of methodology, one must ask how reliable this aggregated metadata is for evaluating such historical phenomena. To take one example, can the fact that only two Būnian manuscripts colophonically dated to the seventh/thirteenth century survive, in contrast to twenty-one from the eighth/fourteenth century, be taken to indicate there having been a corresponding difference in the number of copies in circulation in each century? The issue is complex, to put it mildly, and has never been addressed systematically with regard to medieval Arabic

manuscripts. To do so one would need to calculate the attrition rates of manuscripts over time, as it would seem to be a given that fewer manuscripts (Būnian or otherwise) survive from the seventh/thirteenth century than from subsequent ones, but this is far more easily said than done. With the current state of research it is difficult even to approximate how many Arabic manuscripts have survived to the present. Jonathan Bloom notes “one estimate” that “600,000 Arabic manuscript (hand-copied) books survive from the period before printing was introduced, and they must represent only a fraction of what was originally produced.”³⁵ Adam Gacek, in reference to the broader category of “Islamic manuscripts,” proposes that there are “hundreds of thousands, if not several millions of manuscripts” extant today, and does not even wager an estimate of how many there once were.³⁶

With such approximate knowledge of what has survived, it is of course all the more difficult to calculate the number of Arabic manuscripts that have been lost. However, scholars of medieval European manuscripts have addressed the survival rates of manuscripts from the Latin West, and their insights can provide at least food for thought on this matter. Bernhard Bischoff has suggested on philological grounds that around one-in-seven codices have survived from ninth-century CE Carolingian workshop, and a 2005 study that draws on catalog data for copies of three of the Venerable Bede’s works and statistical methods to construct a stochastic model of the codices ‘population growth’/‘birth and death’ rates corroborates Bischoff’s estimate.³⁷ Of course, the fundamental differences in the conditions of the production and preservation of manuscripts between Carolingian Europe and the late-medieval Arab world are too numerous to list, the most obvious ones—beyond the gap of four hundred or more years—being the use of paper rather than parchment in the latter context and the utter dissimilarity of the bustling book markets and vast private libraries of the Arab world to

³⁵ Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 93. He unfortunately does not give the source of this estimate.

³⁶ Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), x.

³⁷ J. L. Cisne, “How Science Survived: Medieval Manuscripts’ ‘Demography’ and Classic Texts’ Extinction,” *Science* 307, no. 5713 (February 25, 2005): 1305–7.

the largely monastic settings of book production and storage in ninth-century France. A far more extensive and detailed statistical study of the production and loss rates of medieval Latin manuscripts is Eltjo Buringh's 2011 monograph on the topic, though he takes pains to point out that his findings cannot be unproblematically ported the medieval Arab-Islamic milieu.³⁸ Bearing this caveat in mind, and drastically simplifying Buringh's extremely rich data, I would at least note that his findings suggest an increased survival rate for fourteenth century manuscripts over thirteenth ones of no more than 100%, and then only with regard to certain locales, with significantly lower disparities in others.³⁹ This is to say that, while we can assume that age-difference of the manuscript is a factor in why there are fewer seventh/thirteenth-century Būnian manuscripts than eighth/fourteenth-century ones, and so on for succeeding centuries, this factor alone almost certainly cannot explain the sharp difference in the number of surviving copies from each century.

Given the indeterminacies inherent to the present state of Arabic manuscript studies, I have treated these wide-angle views of the corpus as heuristic devices, as springboards for questions that otherwise might not have arisen. Thus I have refrained from drawing hard conclusions on the basis of them without some kind of corroborating evidence from al-Būnī's texts, specific paratexts, or contemporary literary sources. Thus, for example, in chapter two I adduce the low number of copies of Būnian works from the germinal period as just one point of evidence in arguing that they were circulated clandestinely among small groups of esotericist Sufis. Other elements of my argument include al-Būnī's statements on the importance of discretion with regard to the science of letters and names, as well as the fact that references to al-Būnī in outside literary sources appear only in the latter part of the seventh/thirteenth century, with many more references originating in the two following centuries. This suggests, I argue, that his works were not widely known until at least several decades after his death. Similarly, while I take the numbers of surviving manuscript-copies of the various works

³⁸ Eltjo Buringh, *Medieval Manuscript Production in the Latin West: Explorations with a Global Database*, vol. 6, Global Economic History (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2011), 2-3.

³⁹ Buringh, *Medieval Manuscript Production*. See, for example, the charts at 465 and 493-495.

into account in exploring al-Būnī's bibliography, I use this data in combination with various paratexts and literary sources that offer lists of al-Būnī's works, in addition to observations regarding the contents of the texts themselves.

1.2.2 The importance of the survey in this project

The information drawn from this extensive survey of the corpus—whether utilized in aggregate or, in the case of the some of the paratextual evidence, adduced as points of microhistorical detail regarding particular codices and human actors—has been an indispensable resource in tracing and understanding the spread and reception of al-Būnī's works, offering information that could never have been gained just from reading his texts and other literary sources of the period. Indeed, the data gathered from the manuscripts have served as the terrain across which much of the narrative of the corpus' career has been charted. It is hoped that other researchers may find the methods developed for this dissertation—the wide-angle view outlined here and/ or the approaches to paratextual information and the notion of 'reading communities' and 'textual economy' discussed below—useful for their own projects, whether for the recovery of authors and discourses that past scholarship has neglected or for revisiting figures whose ideas and impact on medieval Islamic are thought to be well understood, but whose manuscript corpora have been utilized for little other than the extraction of texts.

1.3 Bibliographical findings

Though not the central concern of this study, the contours of al-Būnī's bibliography are an important issue in al-Būnī studies, and one to which I hope my research—particularly my 2012 article, which I revisit here—has made a not-insignificant contribution. Carl Brockelmann, writing at the end of the 19th century, listed almost forty works attributed to al-Būnī,⁴⁰ while Jaime Cordero's 2009 survey of Būnian works as they appear in various bibliographical works and the catalogs found seventy titles.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Brockelmann, *GAL*, I 497.

⁴¹ Cordero, "Sufismo y ciencias ocultas," ix–xviii.

Both lists are of great value, though several items within each can be shown to be either single works under variant titles⁴² or works by other authors misattributed to al-Būnī.⁴³ In my 2012 article I proposed that of these numerous works only five can be reliably attributed to al-Būnī, which I labelled his ‘core’ works: *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā‘if al-‘awārif* (N.B. not the *Kubrā*, but see below); *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*; *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyādāt*; ‘*Alam al-hudá wa-asrār al-ihtidá fī sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-husná*’; and *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyāt*. I also noted the particular importance of a sixth work, *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah fī awrād al-rabbānīyah*, which cannot be attributed to al-Būnī with as much confidence as the aforementioned ones, but is, to my current thinking, almost certainly by him. Finally, I included in the article some new evidence to establish the late origin of *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*. My thinking on these matters has remained largely unchanged since that time, with a few exceptions that I discuss in detail below. The most important of these is with regard to the devilishly complex issues surrounding *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā‘if al-‘awārif*, to which Coulon has introduced a discovery of fundamental importance that has caused me to adjust my previous argument regarding that text. A second development in my thinking concerns *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah*, the authenticity of which I offer some additional arguments for below, along with a few relatively minor adjustments that I also address. What follows can be divided into three parts: a review of my arguments for the identification of al-Būnī’s ‘core’ works, including a brief descriptions of those works; a discussion and description of the most commonly copied medieval works attributed to al-Būnī, a list that does not overlap entirely with that of his core works; a survey of bibliographical paratexts that cast further light on the medieval

⁴² For example, Brockelmann lists *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* and also notes a *Risālah fī al-ism al-a‘zam*, a common alternate title for *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah*. Cordero lists *Tartīb al-da‘awāt fī takhṣīṣ al-awqāt* and *Kitāb manāfi‘ al-Qur‘ān* as separate works, when they in fact are alternate titles for the same work, and does the same with ‘*Alam al-hudá*, counting it again under one of its common alternate titles, *Mūḍīḥ al-ṭarīq wa-qusṭās al-taḥqīq*. See Appendix B for lists of common alternate titles for the main Būnian discussed in this study.

⁴³ Both Brockelmann and Cordero count *al-Durr al-munazzam fī al-sirr al-a‘zam* as among works attributed to al-Būnī, when it is properly assigned to Ibn Ṭalḥa (regarding whom, see the discussion of *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā‘if al-‘awārif* below). Cordero also attributes to al-Būnī a work called *al-Durr al-fahkirah*, which was written by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, *et cetera*. None of these instances are particularly blameworthy, as the misattribution/miscataloging of occult works is quite common, in large part because so little scholarship has been done on them.

corpus; and an examination of the numerous issues surrounding the works that circulated under the title *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-awārif*, including a discussion of Coulon's discovery and a recapitulation and slight expansion of my arguments regarding the late date of the *Kubrā*.

1.3.1 Al-Būnī's 'core' works

My argument for the identification of the aforementioned five works as those most reliably attributable to al-Būnī is, in essence, straightforward and has two parts. First, a series of paratexts from a handful of medieval copies of *'Alam al-hudá wa-asrār al-ihtidá fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-husná* and *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-'ulwīyāt*, along with a line from the text of the latter work, place al-Būnī composing and auditioning these two works in Cairo between 621/1224 and 622/1225. These paratexts are discussed in extensive detail in chapter two of this study. Paratexts such as these, which appear as a series of mutually supportive paratexts from different codices, are in my estimation the most secure evidence of al-Būnī's authorship of these two works that could be obtained short of signed holographs. Second, and as is also discussed in depth in chapter two, within these two works al-Būnī makes a number of repeated cross-references (what I refer to as 'intertexts') to two works that appear to be lost and, significantly, to the three other works in the group: *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-awārif*; *Hidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*; and *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyāḍāt*. These works also contain intertexts referring to one another (see Table 4). In almost all cases al-Būnī clearly refers to the other works as "my book" (*kitābnā*, lit. "our book"), bidding the reader to look there for expansion or clarification upon a particular topic, which I argue is al-Būnī's implementation of the much older esotericist writing strategy of *tabdīd al-'ilm* (the dispersion of knowledge). The important point here is that these intertexts serve to identify other works al-Būnī claims as his own and link the books together: because *'Alam al-hudá* and *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* can be reliably attributed to al-Būnī on the basis of the paratextual evidence, then the works he refers to as his own within those two texts can reliably be counted as having been authored by al-Būnī, as well.

1.3.1.1 Descriptions of the core works

Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn (See Appendix B for a list of copies of this and the other core works) is a relatively short work (typically around forty folia) in which al-Būnī describes the Sufi path. The work is divided into descriptions of four ‘roots’ (*uṣūl*): submission (*islām*), faith (*īmān*), virtue (*iḥsān*), and proximity (*qurb*).⁴⁴ He discusses these as complexly inter-related with various ‘stations’ (*maqāmāt*), as experienced by aspirants of three ascending ranks: *sālikūn* (seekers), *murīdūn* (adherents), and ‘*ārifūn* (gnostics).

Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyāḍāt is another short work (roughly the same length as the previous), and it deals mainly with traditional Sufi practices such as ritual seclusion (*khalwah*) and mantric litanies (*dhikr*, lit. ‘remembrance’). The work is divided into parts on the spiritual exercises (*riyāḍāt*) of the *sālikūn*, *murīdīn*, and ‘*ārifūn*, i.e. the same three categories of actors discussed in the previous work. It also touches upon matters taken up at length in some of the other core works, such as prophetology, metaphysics/cosmology, the invisible college of the saints, and the natures of such virtual actors as angels, devils, and jinn.

‘*Alam al-hudá wa-asrār al-ihtidá fī sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-husná* is al-Būnī’s lengthiest work.⁴⁵ It addresses the beautiful names of God and ascending through the stations of the names toward union with the divine, particularly through *takhalluq* (‘adoption of the divine nature’) by means of the contemplation and invocation of the divine names in supererogatory spiritual exercises.⁴⁶ Each chapter of the work deals with one name of God, and in some rare cases more than one name. Many contain a

⁴⁴ For a similar discussion of the ‘states’ and ‘stations’ of the Sufi path but in the context of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s use of the first three terms, see W. C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 281–282.

⁴⁵ In my 2012 article I referred to this work as *‘Ilm al-hudá* rather than ‘*Alam*. I first saw the title rendered as ‘*Alam* in Martin, “Theurgy in the Medieval Islamic World.” It was only after this that I noticed the title is indeed vocalized that way in some of the oldest Būnian manuscripts, and thus was convinced of the correctness of that reading.

⁴⁶ Regarding *takhalluq* as “the adoption of the divine nature” (or *theomimeosis*) and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ideas on the matter see Gerald Elmore, “Shaykh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Al-Mahdawī, Ibn Al-‘Arabī’s Mentor,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121 (2001): 609; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 21–22.

subchapter on “drawing closer to God the Highest by means of this name” (*al-taqarrub ilá Allāh ta‘āllá bi-hādha al-ism*) in which specific spiritual exercises are discussed in varying levels of detail.

Laṭā’if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwīyāt is entirely dedicated to the letters. A copy of it, Berlin MS or. fol. 80, was copied in 669/1270, and is thus the oldest dated Būnian manuscript. As I note in some detail the third chapter of this study, this work opens with a lengthy cosmological discourse relating the roles of letters in the constitution of the cosmos and of Adam as the primordial human microcosm. The text contains various instructions on operative letterist practices, including some talismans. It also includes a series of complex diagrams which the reader is instructed to contemplate in combination with various regimens of fasting, *khalwah*, and the *dhikr*, on the premise that doing so well will allow the reader to witness several of the invisible worlds underlying the manifest one.

Of the five core works, *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif* stands out for having a history severely complicated by pseudepigraphy, and is thus discussed in a separate section below. Al-Būnī also makes single mentions in *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* of two works of his, copies of which I have never encountered (at least not under the titles he gives): *Asrār al-adwār wa-tashkīl al-anwār fī asrār al-haqā’iq al-kinānīyah wa-al-asrār al-nabawīyah* and *Mawāqīt al-baṣā’ir wa-laṭā’if al-sarā’ir*.

As discussed in chapters two and three, it is my position that al-Būnī intended that his followers would read these core works in combination with one another, such that they formed a kind of *organon* of his teachings on Sufism and the science of letters and names—topics that for al-Būnī were essentially co-extensive. Unfortunately, I am not able to consider all of these works in detail within this dissertation. Rather, in my discussions of the contents of al-Būnī’s texts/teachings I focus primarily on *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, and secondarily on *‘Alam al-hudá* because, in my estimation, these two works contain the clearest and most mature expressions of al-Būnī’s original teachings. As we will see, however, they were not necessarily the works that received the most attention from al-Būnī’s readers, at least not in the ways that he may have intended in composing them. If this might be seen as an oversight of the study, then I would defend it by pointing out the need to address the disparity between the most

important aspects of al-Būnī's teachings as he presented them, and those in which later readers were most interested. As discussed in chapter four, the process by which this disparity developed—one in which readers seem to have come to regard al-Būnī first and foremost as a writer on operative lettrist practices rather than on theoretical lettrism and Sufi pietism generally—was a key dynamic in the reception of al-Būnī over the course of the Mamlūk period.

1.3.2 Other medieval Būnian works, authentic and pseudepigraphic

As can be seen in Table 1, a handful of works other than those discussed above also were in somewhat regular circulation during the late-medieval/Mamlūk period, though none of these works is mentioned in al-Būnī's core works. The works considered in what follows include one work that in my estimation almost certainly was authored by al-Būnī, *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, and three other works (aside from the 'courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*, discussed below) that most likely were not: *Tartīb al-da'awāt fī talkhīṣ al-awqāt*, *Qabs al-iqtidā' ilá wafq al-sa'ādah wa-najm al-ihtidā' ilá sharaf al-siyādah*, and *Khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*. I do not discuss here *al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābīṭ* and *Risālah fī faḍā'il al-basmalah* because they seem to have emerged only in the early modern period (see their entries in Appendix A and Appendix B), nor do I investigate fully the sixty-six works that I have categorized under the heading of 'Other', these being works attributed to al-Būnī that appear only in one or two copies and are mentioned nowhere else. I offer no opinion on the authenticity of these 'Other' works, since time has not allowed for evaluation of them. See Appendix C for a list of these titles.

Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah fī awrād al-rabbānīyah, as measured by the number of surviving copies, is by far the most important of these 'non-core' works, and one of the most important works of the corpus as a whole. The survey for this project found forty-five at least partial copies of the work, making it the second most widely copied medieval work among the manuscripts surveyed for this study (the first being the courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif*). One copy, Chester Beatty MS 3168.5, was copied in or around 686/1287, and is thus the second oldest dated Būnian manuscript. The work is in four parts: 1) a collection of invocatory prayers keyed to each hour of each day of the week, with brief commentaries

on the operative functioning of the names of God that appear in each prayer; 2) a division of the names of God in ten groupings (*anmāṭ*) of names, the actions of which in the world are closely related; 3) a further series of invocatory prayers for when various religious holidays, such as the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*), fall on a given day of the week; and 4) instructions for the composition of *awfāq* (cryptogrammatic talismans). The whole is conceived as a comment on the Greatest Name of God (*al-ism al-a'zam*), and the work is sometimes found under the title *Sharḥ al-ism al-a'zam*. The prose style is highly similar to that of the core works and addresses similar themes of ascent to God through use of the name in supererogatory prayer. Furthermore, the work is listed in all the bibliographical paratexts discussed below, including the one found in Berlin MS or. fol. 80, copied in 669/1270. The work plainly was strongly associated with al-Būnī from early on. Furthermore, as I show in chapter four, it is almost certainly the work Ibn Taymiyya intended when he referred to al-Būnī as the author of *al-Shu'lah al-nūrānīyah* (an essentially synonymous title), it is the only work mentioned by name in Ibn al-Zayyāt's notice regarding al-Būnī's tomb in Cairo, and it is also almost certainly the work referred to by Ibn al-Khaṭīb and Ibn Khaldūn as *Kitāb al-anmāṭ*. All of this is to say that even if the work was not composed by al-Būnī himself, it must have been composed by some of his closest students in the decades soon after his death, in which case it likely contains a great deal of authentic material.

Tartīb al-da'awāt fī talkhīṣ al-awqāt, by contrast, was certainly not composed by al-Būnī. As mentioned above in my discussion of al-Būnī studies more broadly, this work has been described briefly by Witkam, on the basis of Leiden MS Or. 1233, in his 2007 article on al-Būnī. Bristling with complex talismanic designs and ending with the key to an exotic-looking 'Alphabet of Nature' (*qalam al-ṭabī'ī*), the work is perhaps the most overtly 'sorcerous' of all the members of the medieval corpus, as it is almost exclusively dedicated to the construction and use of talismans toward concrete, worldly ends, including in some cases the slaying of one's enemies. That in many cases these talismans are derived from the Qur'ān, through the 'deconstruction' of the letters of a given *āyah* into a complex design to be inscribed on parchment or a given type of metal, would, one imagines, have been unlikely to assuage

critics. The talismans are entirely different in form from those discussed in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, as is the terminology used to discuss them. What is more, the quality of thought is, frankly, far more pedestrian and accessible than that of al-Būnī's authentic works.

Qabs al-iqtidā' ilā waḥq al-sa'āda wa-najm al-ihtidā' ilā sharaf al-siyādah is somewhat tame in comparison to *Tartīb al-da'awāt*, although as the title implies, it does contain instructions on the devising and use of *awḥāq*. I am strongly inclined to regard the work as having been composed by someone other than al-Būnī. It seems likely that the work was not intentionally fathered on al-Būnī, but rather was a text already in circulation by his lifetime and was attributed to him at some later point, probably in the eighth/fourteenth century. As Coulon has noted, this is one of the texts from which the courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif* borrows, though nothing in its style strongly suggests that it is by al-Būnī and it lacks his specialized cosmological terminology. The work does appear, however, to be of Western-Islamic origin, as it cites the famed Maghribī *shaykh* Abū Madyan (d. 594/1197), of whom al-Būnī's teacher 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawī was a disciple. It also mentions Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurashī (d. 599/1202), another disciple of Abū Madyan, and al-Qurashī's own student Abū al-'Abbās al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 636/1238).⁴⁷ These *shaykhs* also appear in some of the *isnāds* (chains of transmission) alleged to be al-Būnī's in *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*, though this is almost certainly because, as we will see, the *isnāds* were plagiarized from a work of 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Biṣṭāmī's, who did regard this work as authentic to al-Būnī.

Final there is the work most often is found under the title *Risālah fī Khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh ta'ālā*, though its proper title may well be *Al-Muntakhab al-rafi' al-asnā fī al-taṣrīfāt asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*. It is relatively rare, and the earliest copies of it I have encountered seem to have been produced only in the ninth/fifteenth century. It deals with the construction of *awḥāq*. I have not investigated it closely enough to form a strong opinion of its authenticity.

A final group of works that must be mentioned are those collected under the heading of 'Sermons'. These are four manuscripts of collections of poetry and sermons attributed to al-Būnī each

⁴⁷ Süleymaniye MS Laleli 1594.5, fol. 96a-97b.

of which bears a different title and none of which are mentioned elsewhere (see Appendix B). Their texts overlap to varying degrees, and they may all be versions or portions of the same work. The work(s) is/are certainly of interest, not least because the Cairene historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) makes mention of a book on *waʿz* (preaching) by al-Būnī that he claims was very popular in North Africa, a point I discuss in chapter four. I have not investigated these texts closely enough to have an opinion as to their authenticity, but they may well be a valuable avenue for future research.

There are three works appearing in numerous manuscript-copies that seem to be of early modern origin and thus are not discussed in this study, but which are included in many of the tables, charts and appendices for the sake of completeness. One of them is *Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā*. The others are entitled *al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābiṭ* and *al-Risālah fī Faḍāʾil al-basmalah*. Finally, there is a host of both medieval and early modern minor works, which is to say works attributed to al-Būnī that survive in only one or two copies. A list of these is given in Appendix C.

1.3.3 Issues surrounding *Shams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*

The title most famously associated with al-Būnī—at least in the modern period—is also that with the most confoundingly complex issues stemming from pseudepigraphy. As noted above and in chapter two with regard to the series of ‘intertexts’ with which al-Būnī wove his core works together, numerous references are made in *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*, *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*, *ʿAlam al-hudá*, and *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* to a text entitled *Shams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*. In my 2012 article I indicated that the widely-copied medieval text that goes under that title (the one demarcated as the ‘courtly’ *Shams al-maʿārif* throughout this dissertation) was a *version* of the text referred to in those intertexts, though one that had been interpolated with other writings by later actors. As I noted then, there are numerous problems with the courtly *Shams al-maʿārif* if we are to take it as written by al-Būnī while accepting that he died at the threshold of, or early in, the second quarter of the seventh/thirteenth century, as was asserted by Katip Çelebi and as I think is almost certainly correct. Though I think Coulon has solved this mystery, I will nonetheless briefly recapitulate these issues.

One problem with courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif* is apparent in its references to, and possible textual overlap with, *al-Durr al-munazzam fī al-sirr al-'āzam*, a work by the Damascene scholar, *khaṭīb*, occasional diplomat, and author of apocalyptic literature Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Ṭalḥah (d. 652/1254).⁴⁸ Mohammad Masad, who devotes a chapter to Ibn Ṭalḥah in his 2008 dissertation on the medieval Islamic apocalyptic tradition, argues that *al-Durr al-munazzam* was probably completed in the first half of 644/1246.⁴⁹ The dating conundrum arises from the fact that the authentic *Shams al-ma'ārif* is cited extensively in *'Alam al-hudá* and *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, both of which were auditioned in 622/1225, roughly 20 years prior to the completion of *al-Durr al-munazzam*. The other even more glaring anachronism is found in the citation of a statement made in the year 670 (the date is given in the text) by *al-imām al-'ārif al-'alāmah* Fakhr al-Dīn al-Khawārazmī.⁵⁰ Al-Khawārazmī's name is followed by a standard benediction for the dead, *qaddasa Allāh rūḥahu*, which indicates that this section of the text postdates 670/1271-2, well after al-Būnī's death. That this interpolation was made fairly early is shown by the fact that the statement and date appear in the earliest copy of the courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif* surveyed for this project, BnF MS arabe 2647, a codex briefly discussed at the end of chapter two. Finally, there is the issue of significant textual overlaps between the courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif* and parts of some al-Būnī's other core works, particularly *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* and *'Alam al-hudá*, two works in which *Shams al-ma'ārif* is frequently referenced(!). The work is decidedly dedicated to occult-scientific matters, as made clear in a declaration in the introduction that it contains “secrets of the wielding of

⁴⁸ The story begins with a holy man in Aleppo who has a vision of a mysterious tablet, and, in a subsequent vision, is instructed by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to have the tablet explained by Ibn Ṭalḥah. We are then informed that Ibn Ṭalḥah recorded his interpretation of the tablet in his work *al-Durr al-munazzam fī al-sirr al-'āzam*. This is a work of apocalyptic literature of which numerous copies survive, although some of these appear to have been wrongly attributed to al-Būnī. To further confuse matters, a version of *al-Durr al-munazzam* is entirely incorporated into *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*, along with an additional frame story that implies al-Būnī's personal involvement in these events. Given the importance of Ibn Ṭalḥah's work in apocalyptic traditions of the late medieval and early modern periods, especially in the influential writings of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (about whom see the third section of this paper), the entire matter requires closer scrutiny.

⁴⁹ Mohammad Ahmad Masad, “The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition: Divination, Prophecy and the End of Time in the 13th Century Eastern Mediterranean” (Washington University in St. Louis, 2008), 71–73.

⁵⁰ BnF MS arabe 2647, fol. 46^a.

occult powers and the knowledge of hidden forces,” with the accompanying injunction: “It is forbidden for anyone who has this book of mine in hand to show it to someone not of his people and divulge it to one who is not worthy of it.”⁵¹

Since it has long been clear to me that this this courtly version of *Shams al-ma‘ārif* was interfered with by actors after al-Būnī, I greatly de-emphasized it in my ongoing research into al-Būnī’s thought; it thus does not play a major role in my discussions of his teachings in this study. I did not, however, make the final leap that Coulon has, which is to assert that this medieval text is in fact not the original *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif* referred to in the other core works, but rather a new, hybrid work created several decades after al-Būnī’s death from a combination of portions of al-Būnī’s works and other texts.⁵² As noted above, I have not had access to Coulon’s dissertation, though I have discussed the matter with him and am provisionally convinced that his arguments have great merit. Given the circumstances, I will treat his arguments only very briefly here rather than risk misrepresenting them.

At the center of Coulon’s assertion is his claim to have discovered in Damascus a manuscript copy of the authentic *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, a relatively brief text primarily on cosmological themes (as is much of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, as discussed in chapter three of this study) and entirely distinct from the courtly *Shams al-ma‘ārif* that was in much wider circulation. Based on his description of the text, I believe that I, in fact, encountered another copy of it in Cairo in the winter of 2013. This is Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwuf Mīm 147, a codex copied in 873/1468 that indeed bears the title *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif*, but which I had guessed was a piece of pseudepigraphy and marked for later investigation.

⁵¹ BnF MS arabe 2647, fol. 3^b, lns. 10-13.

في صمته من لطائف التصريفات وعوارف التأثيرات فخرام على من وقع كتابي هذا بيده ان يبيده لغير اهله و يوح به لغير مستحقه

⁵² It is my understanding that Coulon has given a detailed account of many of the sources from which the courtly *Shams* is compounded, thus I will not attempt to replicate that effort here. A few examples can be easily noted however, such as the numerous overlaps between the introductions (*ammā ba‘ds*) of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* and the courtly *Shams* (compare BnF MS arabe 2658 [LI], fol. 2^a, ln. 15 ff. and BnF MS arabe 2647 [Courtly *ShM*], fol. 2^b, ln. 13 ff.) or the lengthy portion of text from *‘Alam al-hudá* which also appears in the courtly *Shams* (compare Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 [AH], fol. 77^a, ln. 11-fol. 78^a, ln. 20 and BnF MS arabe 2647 [Courtly *ShM*], fol. 7^a, ln. 17-fol. 9^a, ln. 17).

Various events—including a broken microfilm-copying machine while I was in Cairo and, far more tragically, the severe damaging of the Bāb al-Khalq branch of that library by a car bomb—have prevented me from obtaining it since then. According to Coulon, what proves the text he has discovered is the authentic version is that the intertexts mentioning *Shams al-ma'ārif* in the other core works point unambiguously to sections of it, something that cannot be said of the more common medieval 'courtly' version.

As for the choice to label the more widely copied medieval *Shams al-ma'ārif* as the 'courtly' version, this comes in part out of discussions with Coulon, though it also reflect arguments I made in my 2012 article and that are further developed in this study. In a paper drawn from his dissertation given by Coulon at the Islamicate occult sciences workshop at Princeton University in February 2014, he notes that the courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif* draws on various tropes and themes that are familiar from 'mirrors for princes' and related *adab* literature, but are alien to al-Būnī's authentic works. These include prominent references to such figures as the prophet-king Sulaymān and his vizier Āṣaf b. Barakhiyā, various astrological themes pertinent to the notion of the court as a reflection of the heavens, a magic ring said to have been possessed by the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Ma'mūn, and a set of powerful names in Hebrew claimed to have been in the possession of the Ayyūbid sultans.⁵³ Coulon is entirely correct that these themes are alien to al-Būnī's core works. Furthermore, the notion that this quasi-pseudepigraphic *Shams al-ma'ārif* would have been compiled for a 'courtly' audience—which is to say Mamlūk military elites and/or bureaucrats and hangers-on in their orbit—is consonant with the argument I put forward in 2012 that Būnian works were moving into bureaucratic/courtly circles over the course of the Mamlūk period, and one that I pursue in much greater detail in chapter four of this study. In short, I am at this stage provisionally convinced that Coulon's argument regarding the quasi-pseudepigraphic nature of this work and the milieu in which it emerged is correct, though I of course reserve the right to revise this opinion when I am able to examine his arguments in detail.

⁵³ Coulon notes that these arguments are drawn from his dissertation, "La magie islamique," I/650–656 and I/989–1038.

1.3.3.1 The notion of 'three redactions' of *Shams al-ma'ārif*

Brief mention must be made of the notion—which modern scholarship largely has accepted as fact—that al-Būnī produced short, medium, and long redactions of *Shams al-ma'ārif*—i.e. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-ṣuḡhrá*, *al-wuṣṭá*, and *al-kubrá*. The notion has, in my view, been quite deleterious with regard to al-Būnī studies, as it has encouraged the notion that the *Kubrá* is an accurate representation of al-Būnī, and perhaps has led many scholars to ignore other copies of al-Būnī's on the assumption that the *Kubrá* was his *magnum opus*. Hans Winkler appears to have been the one to introduce the idea of three redactions of the text—which he refers to as al-Būnī's *hauptwerk*—in his 1930 monograph *Siegel und Charaktere in der muhammedanischen Zauberei*.⁵⁴ He can hardly be blamed for this, however, as a similar notion seems to have gripped readers beginning in the late medieval period, when size-appellations seem to have begun to appear on texts entitled *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-awārif*, though only in rare cases, with the vast majority of copies having no additional size-appellation. These phenomena perhaps arose out of confusion between the authentic and courtly versions of the work, though the manuscript evidence suggests it was due more to conflation of *Shams al-ma'ārif* and *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*. Thus, for example, the earliest example of a size-appellation attached to the title that I am aware of is BnF MS arabe 6556, a copy of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* produced in 781/1380 that bears an illuminated titlepiece with the name *Shams al-ma'ārif al-ṣuḡhrá wa-laṭā'if al-awārif*. Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2799, a copy of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* copied in 861/1457, is simply titled *Shams al-ma'ārif*. And Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2802, an undated but most likely ninth/fifteenth-century copy of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, is declared on its opening leaf to be “the book *Shams al-ma'ārif* of which no [other] copy exists,” with a further claim that “this copy is not the one found among the people, and in it are bonuses and additions to make it complete.”⁵⁵ Some other copies with size-appellations are merely copies of the courtly *Shams*. I cannot confirm the

⁵⁴ Hans Winkler, *Siegel Und Charaktere in Der Muhammedanischen Zauberei* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1930), 67 ff.

⁵⁵ Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2802, fol. 1a.

كتاب شمس المعارف التي ليس لنسختها وجود وهذه نسخة ليس!! هي النسخة التي موجودة بين الناس وفيها فوائد وزوائد على التام

existence of any manuscripts bearing the title *Shams al-ma'ārif al-wuṣṭá* that were produced prior to the seventeenth century, and those that I have seen which bear this appellation appear to all be copies of that work.⁵⁶ The oldest manuscript that I am aware of bearing the title *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* is BnF 2649, a copy of the courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif* produced in 913/1508 for an amīral library (the codex is discussed in chapter four). It must be said, however, that the *al-kubrā* designation, which is written in smaller letters and tucked in above the leftmost end of the title, may have been added at a later date. In any case, that designation does not appear again until the seventeenth century copies of the much larger work that usually goes under that name, i.e. what I refer to in this study as ‘the *Kubrā*’. To the best of my knowledge, the first bibliographical notice mentioning three redactions of *Shams al-ma'ārif* is al-Munāwī’s entry on al-Būnī in *al-Kawākib al-durrīyah fī tarājim al-sārat al-ṣūfiyah*, a work completed in 1011/1602-3, though al-Munāwī mentions only that short, medium, and long versions exist, without giving incipits or other clues as to their contents.⁵⁷ Hājji Khalīfah, writing a few decades after al-Munāwī, does not list three versions of *Shams al-ma'ārif* in *Kashf al-zunūn*, although he does include a very brief entry for a work called *Fuṣūl shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*, which he says “is perhaps *Shams al-ma'ārif*,” and he makes a passing reference to a *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*, though without mentioning al-Būnī, in the entry for Ibn Ṭalḥah’s *al-Durr al-munazzam fī sirr al-a'zam*.⁵⁸

In my 2012 article I suggested that the idea of there being different-length versions of *Shams al-ma'ārif* by al-Būnī himself was a sort of a self-fulfilling rumor that gained traction as time went along. In this way the appellation *al-ṣuḡhrā* was applied to various shorter Būnian or pseudo-Būnian texts, while others were subsequently labeled *al-wuṣṭá* and *al-kubrā*, and the rumor was eventually exploited by the actor or actors who produced the eleventh/seventeenth-century work known as *Shams al-ma'ārif al-*

⁵⁶ The only manuscripts bearing that title that I am aware of are Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1548 (copied in 1111/1699-1700); Süleymaniye MSS Carullah 1547.1; and Hacı Ahmed Paşa 350.3, the last two of which are likely of 11th/17th-century origin. BN Tunis MS 7401 also bears that title, but I have not seen it and thus have no basis to comment on it.

⁵⁷ al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durrīyah fī tarājim al-sārat al-ṣūfiyah* (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azharīyah li-al-Turāth, n.d.), II/38.

⁵⁸ Kâtip Çelebi (Hājji Khalīfah), *Kitab Kashf Al Zunūn*, 2 v. (18, 2056 columns) (Maarif Matbaasi, 1941), 1270 and 734.

kubrā. I stand by this idea in general outline, though it must be admitted that Coulon's discovery of the authentic *Shams al-ma'ārif* potentially complicates my original assertion, especially given that part of the opening of the *Kubrā* is drawn from the authentic *Shams al-ma'ārif*, while other parts are drawn from the courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif* (and others from various other texts), demonstrating that the compiler(s) of the *Kubrā* had access to copies of the authentic and courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif*s.

1.3.3.2 Notes on *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

This brings us finally to *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*. As I believe this work has drawn much attention away from the important task of examining al-Būnī's authentic works and their medieval circulation, I will dwell only briefly on this large, quite late, and quasi-pseudepigraphic work and will return to several of the arguments I made in my 2012 article to provide some context for this work.

The most basic observation regarding *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* to have emerged from the survey conducted for this project is that, of the thirty colophonically-dated copies of the work (out of fifty-five copies total), the earliest complete copy, Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek MS 2755, is dated to 1623 in a handlist of the collection.⁵⁹ Of the undated copies that I have been able to view, none are possessed of any features that suggest an earlier date of production, but rather are remarkably similar in their *mise-en-page*, hands, and other features, to the dated copies. Given the plethora of dated copies of other Būnian works stretching back to the seventh/thirteenth century, there is no compelling reason that, if such a lengthy and important work were composed much earlier than the eleventh/seventeenth century, not even a single earlier dated copy would have survived. The fact that al-Munāwī mentions *ṣuḡhrā*, *wuṣṭā*, and *kubrā* versions of *Shams al-ma'ārif* might indicate a slightly earlier origin for the work, but this could just as well have been the result of owners or booksellers with copies of the medieval *Shams al-ma'ārif* reacting to the presence of other texts marked as *Shams al-*

⁵⁹ It should be noted that there exists a text one folio long with the title *Fā'idah min Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* in a *majmū'ah* dated 1022/1613-14 (Süleymaniye Hacı Ahmed Paşa 336.16), though I have not verified whether or not it is from the *Kubrā* proper.

ma'ārif al-ṣuḡhrá. Whatever its precise date of origin, the encyclopedic *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrá* is certainly a product of one or more early modern compilers, and not of al-Būnī or his amanuenses.

A section of *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrá* that has commanded a great deal of attention from modern scholars is a set of *isnāds* or chains of transmission for al-Būnī near the end of the work which claim to identify al-Būnī's mentors in the science of letters and other areas of knowledge, as well as to identify the lines of teachers preceding al-Būnī's masters through whom this knowledge was passed down. Indeed, some of the oft-noted issues of anachronism in *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrá* stem from these chains, insofar as they place people assumed to have been younger than al-Būnī several steps before him in the chain of transmission. For example, he is said to have received the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī through five intermediaries, and those of al-Shādhilī's pupil Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) through three intermediaries.⁶⁰ Several modern researchers have commented on these issues, although Witkam has done the most thorough analyses of these chains based on the forms they take in printed editions of the work, and I draw, in part, on Witkam's work in what follows.⁶¹

As I demonstrated in 2012, at least two of the *isnāds* were copied from the writings of the Antiochene lettrist al-Biṣṭāmī, who, writing in the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century, gave them as his own *isnāds*. The first instance is the *isnād* that, in *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrá*, claims to trace one of the lines through which al-Būnī's knowledge of the science of letters was developed back to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; this is "Pedigree C" in Witkam's analysis.⁶² Table 2 shows the *isnāds* as they appear in three sources: the left-hand column is from Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 930, a codex copied in 836/1433 of a work by al-Biṣṭāmī bearing the title *al-'Ujāla fī ḥall al-anmāṭ al-ma'rūf bi-jam' Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad*. Although the work is obviously related to al-Būnī, al-Biṣṭāmī is clearly listing his own credentials in supplying this list. The middle column is from Süleymaniye MS Beşir Ağa 89, a copy of *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrá* produced in 1057/1647, one of the earlier dated copies of the work. When these two are

⁶⁰ Pierre Lory, *La science des lettres en islam*, 92; Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun," 194.

⁶¹ Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun," 190–197.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 193.

compared side by side, it is quite clear that al-Biṣṭāmī's *isnād* has been arrogated to al-Būnī, with a few names having been omitted. Even some of the language al-Biṣṭāmī uses to open the presentation of his *isnāds* is reproduced in *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*, and the language used within the *isnād* regarding modes of transmission is also identical. Finally, the right-hand column is from Witkam's article; it reflects the Murad printed edition of *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*. In addition to the swapping out of al-Biṣṭāmī's name for al-Būnī's, one can see a cumulative loss of information from one chain to the next as names drop out or become garbled.

A similar process appears to have occurred with regard to al-Būnī's alleged *isnād* for knowledge of *kalimat al-shahāda*, "Pedigree A" in Witkam's analysis. In Table 3 the source for al-Biṣṭāmī's *isnād* is Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1543.1, an abridged copy of his commentary on al-Būnī's *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, *Rashḥ adhwāq al-ḥikmah al-rabbānīyah fī sharḥ awfāq al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, probably produced in the tenth/sixteenth century. In it the *isnād* is given as al-Biṣṭāmī's source for knowledge of 'the science of letters and cryptograms' (*ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*). In this case, where al-Biṣṭāmī has abbreviated the list by skipping the names of the "poles" (s. *quṭb*) between al-Shādhilī and the Prophet Muḥammad, those names have been supplied in *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*, though with al-Shādhilī's name suppressed.⁶³ A similar degeneration of information as that noted for the previous set of chains occurs here as well. The proof of plagiarism lies in the names at the top of the list, particularly in that of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Kūmī (al-Tunisī), a turn-of-the-ninth/fifteenth-century figure whom al-Biṣṭāmī claimed as a personal teacher, and who is briefly discussed in later chapters of this study. That al-Kūmī could have been four steps removed from al-Shādhilī and also have been al-Biṣṭāmī's teacher is perfectly conceivable. The same obviously cannot be said of al-Biṣṭāmī and al-Būnī. Although certain of al-Būnī and al-Biṣṭāmī's works perhaps could easily be mistaken as a work of the other (several modern catalogers have done so), I find it difficult to conceive of a scenario in which the arrogation of al-Biṣṭāmī's *isnāds* to al-Būnī could have occurred other than through a deliberate act of forgery,

⁶³ For a related chain recorded by al-Biṣṭāmī linking al-Shādhilī to the Prophet, see section 3.3.2 of this study.

especially as al-Biṣṭāmī refers to himself in the third person in his versions of these chains. I think it highly likely that all of the *isnāds* given for al-Būnī are taken from al-Biṣṭāmī's works.⁶⁴

The kind of textual archaeology that would be required to adduce all of the sources from which *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* was compiled is beyond the scope and priorities of this project, though as I have noted, certain parts of the work clearly were taken from earlier Būnian works.⁶⁵ The fact that al-Biṣṭāmī's chains were assigned to al-Būnī suggests that al-Biṣṭāmī's texts were another pool from which the compilers drew. Of course, some parts of the *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* may be entirely original to it, and a careful study of both men's writings and similar works will be required to establish the provenance of the text's many parts.⁶⁶

From certain perspectives, particularly presentist ones, these issues of pseudepigraphy in the various works that have gone under the name *Shams al-ma'ārif* might be perceived to be of little importance. Indeed, one potentially could argue that the figure of al-Būnī—'mnemo-Būnī', if you will—has long since outgrown the historical author. However, such an attitude would be highly deleterious with regard to the history of late-medieval thought. Additionally, the study of the occult sciences has too often suffered from such ahistorical conflation of discourses from different periods, whether by Orientalists who have seen all occult thought as evidence of decadence and intellectual regression, historians of science or philosophy who have regarded 'magical thinking' and 'irrationalism' with contempt, or Perennialists and members of related schools of thought who have insisted on the reality of a reservoir of theurgic wisdom existing beyond the vagaries of mere time and human ratiocination. With regard to historians of medieval and early-early modern thought and culture at least, it is hoped

⁶⁴ For example, note that Pedigree F in Witkam's article includes 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn Jamā'ah, a figure whom we will meet in chapter four as the person with whom al-Biṣṭāmī read al-Būnī's *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*.

⁶⁵ Cordero's comparison of the *Kubrā* and the courtly *Shams* document the relationship between the courtly *Shams* and the *Kubrā* quite well, at least for the the first half the *Kubrā*.

⁶⁶ I suggested in my 2012 article that al-Biṣṭāmī's works, particularly his *Shams al-āfāq fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq* were probably the source of parts of the main body of the *Kubrā*. Coulon has confirmed this to be the case to me, though I am still awaiting the details of his findings in this regard.

that, going forward, far greater care will be taken in the attribution of works to the actual seventh/thirteenth-century Sufi al-Būnī.

1.3.4 Medieval bibliographical paratexts and notices

Finally with regard to al-Būnī's bibliography, a series of medieval bibliographical paratexts and notices, which have not been adduced in previous scholarship on al-Būnī, provide glimpses of the expansion of the Būnian corpus over the late-medieval period. In what follows I provide first the lists, followed by a brief analysis of trends that can be discerned in them. Many of these paratexts and notices are discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

The first bibliographic list is found near the end of Berlin MS or. fol. 80, which is the earliest dated Būnian manuscript of which I am aware, copied in 669/1270.

List one (669/1270):

1. *'Alam al-hudá*
2. *Shams al-ma'ārif*
3. *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
4. *Sharḥ al-asmā' al-husnā* (A common alternate title for *'Alam al-hudá*, thus probably a repetition.)
5. *al-Sulūk ilá manāzil al-mulūk* (Almost certainly an alternate title for *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*, as discussed in chapter two.)

The second and third lists are both found in Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, a copy of *'Alam al-hudá* produced in Damascus in 772/1370; both lists are also reproduced in Süleymaniye MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 588, a copy of *'Alam al-hudá* produced in 792/1390. Other paratextual elements in Hamidiye 260.1, discussed in detail in chapter two, suggest that the first list was probably copied from the exemplar, which likely dated from around the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century.

List two (probably turn of the eighth/fourteenth century):

1. *Kitāb Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif*
2. *Kitāb Mawāqīt al-baṣā'ir wa-laṭā'if al-sarā'ir* (One of the lost authentic works mentioned previously.)
3. *Kitāb Laṭā'if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-'ulwīyāt*
4. *Kitāb Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*
5. *Kitāb Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyāḍāt*

The other list in the codex (i.e. list 3) may well have originated with the copyist of Hamidiye 260, i.e. roughly seventy years after the first.

List three (probably 772/1370):

1. *Kitāb Taysīr al-'awārif fī talkhīṣ Shams al-ma'ārif* (I am aware of a single copy of this work, Escorial MS Derenbourg 946, probably produced in the early tenth/sixteenth century.)
2. *Kitāb Asrār al-adwār wa-tashkīl al-anwār* (The other of the lost authentic works mentioned previously.)
3. *Kitāb Al-Taṣrīf wa-ḥullat al-ta'rīf*
4. *Risālat yā' al-wāw wa-kāf al-yā' wa-al-'ayn wa-al-nūn*
5. *Kitāb al-Lum'ah al-nūranīyah*
6. *Kitāb al-Laṭā'if al-asharah* (Perhaps a surviving copy: Manisa MS 1486.2)
7. *Kitāb al-Ta'līqah fī manāfi' al-Qur'ān* (Frequently an alternate title for *Tartīb al-da'awāt*)

The next list is from al-Maqrīzī's *tarjamah* for al-Būnī in his *Kitāb al-muqaffā al-kabīr* from the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century. The *tarjamah* is discussed in detail in chapters three and four. Al-Maqrīzī claims that al-Būnī authored approximately forty works, but he mentions specifically only the following.

List four (earlier ninth/fifteenth century):

1. A book on *wa'z* (preaching) that was popular in Ifrīqiyyah (See above and Appendix B regarding the manuscripts under the heading of 'Sermons'.)
2. *Sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā* (Here certainly an alternate title for *'Alam al-hudā*)
3. *Shams al-ma'ārif fī 'ilm al-ḥarf* (Almost certainly an alternate title for some version of *Shams al-ma'ārif*, probably the courtly *Shams*. He notes it is difficult to find.)

4. *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
5. *Kitāb al-Anmāṭ* (Almost certainly an alternate title for *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, as discussed above and in chapter four, and thus a repetition.)

The fifth and final list comes from al-Biṣṭāmī, who, in addition to giving his own *isnāds* to al-Būnī, was an important popularizer of Būnian works and thought among intellectuals and courtiers in Mamlūk and early Ottoman milieu. This bibliographic list is from Chester Beatty MS 5076, a copy of his great letrist opus *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq* produced in 844/1440 (near the end of al-Biṣṭāmī's life, though the work is not an autograph).

List five (mid-ninth/fifteenth century):

1. *Kitāb Laṭā'if al-ishārāt fī asrār al-ḥurūf al-'ulwīyāt*
2. *Kitāb Hidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*
3. *Kitāb Tanzīl al-arwāḥ fī qawālib al-ashbāḥ* (A work of which I am otherwise unaware, though see number 10 below.)
4. *Kitāb Asrār al-adwār wa-tashkīl al-anwār* (As above.)
5. *Kitāb Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyādāt*
6. *Kitāb Qabs al-iqtidā' ilā wafq al-sa'āda wa-najm al-ihtidā' ilā sharaf al-siyādah* (Discussed above.)
7. *Kitāb al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah fī awrād al-rabbānīyah*
8. *Kitāb Barqat al-lāmi'ah wa-al-hay'at al-jāmi'ah* (A work of which I am otherwise unaware.)
9. *Kitāb 'Alam al-hudā wa asrār al-ihtidā' fī fahm sulūk ma'nā asmā' Allāh al-husnā*
10. *Kitāb al-Tawassulāt al-kitābīyah wa-al-tawajjuhāt al-'aṭā'īyah* (A minor work that seems to survive in two copies, though each has slightly variant titles. The first is Süleymaniye Hamidiye 260.2, which may have been copied at the same as Hamidiye 260.1, i.e. in 772/1370. The second is Konya MS Akseki 144.2, dated 1123/1711. The text contains an intertext much like those found in the core works to *Tanzīl al-arwāḥ fī qawālib al-ashbāḥ*, i.e. number 3 above.⁶⁷)
11. *Kitāb al-Laṭā'if* (Perhaps the same as *Kitāb al-Laṭā'if al-asharah*, number 6 in the second list above.)

⁶⁷ Konya MS Akseki 144.2 (*Tawassulāt al-thana'īyah wa-al-tawajjuhāt al-'aṭā'īyah*), 291. (The MS is paginated rather than foliated.)

12. *Kitāb Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif*

I would posit that these lists, as they change over time, are consonant with the basic vision of the expansion of the corpus sketched thus far and as explored further throughout this study. This is to say that first two lists, both of which probably fall within the ‘germinal’ period of the corpus—i.e. the roughly little more than a century following al-Būnī’s death—mention only al-Būnī’s core works, *al-Luma’ah al-nūrānīyah*, and one of the seemingly lost works mentioned in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*. (Also note that it is the core works and *al-Luma’ah al-nūrānīyah* that repeat most often in the rest of the lists). The third list, which at circa 772/1370 falls into the first part of the efflorescence of the corpus, mentions a handful of minor and/or pseudepigraphic works, as well as what is likely a commentary (*Taysīr al-'awārif fī talkhīṣ Shams al-ma'ārif*), suggesting that the corpus began to be added to as it became more widely known. Al-Maqrīzī’s limited and somewhat faulty knowledge of al-Būnī’s works is, as we will see, par for the course with his knowledge of al-Būnī himself. Al-Maqrīzī seems not to have been an ‘initiate’ to lettrist circles, a position/role I examine in chapters three and four. Al-Biṣṭāmī, on the other hand, names all of al-Būnī’s core works, *al-Lum’ah al-nūrānīyah*, and a variety of other works, including at least one minor works that survives.

1.4 Al-Būnī through the lenses of ‘New Philology’ and the study of ‘manuscript cultures’

While historians commonly speak of the importance of considering the ‘historical context’ in which a text was created and/or read, a central methodological tenet of this project is that any attempt to do so must begin from an examination of the circumstances of the text’s physical circulation, a topic that is all too often overlooked in medieval studies. In his 1994 monograph on glosses in manuscript copies of the important Spanish work *Libro de Buen Amor*, the medievalist John Dagenais notes laconically: “Medievalism, as it has been practiced over the past two centuries, is the only discipline I

can think of that takes as its first move the suppression of its evidence.”⁶⁸ His comment is in regard to the long-cultivated habit among medievalists of treating manuscripts “as ‘vehicles for reading’ to be discarded in the process of edition-making” rather than approaching them as concrete evidence of transmission, reading, and commentarial practices, and “as living witnesses to the dynamic, chaotic, error-fraught world of medieval literary life.”⁶⁹ His is but one voice in the wave of ‘New Philology’ that emerged in Europeanist medieval studies in the late-1980s and 90s and continues to the present.⁷⁰ The studies under this rubric often have been efforts toward understanding specific medieval ‘manuscript cultures’, which is to say the socially embedded, physically embodied writing and reading practices of particular medieval milieux. The roots of such lines of inquiry can be located in the efforts of theorists of the sociocultural impacts of orality, writing, and print,⁷¹ as well as in research on the history and sociology of the printed book.⁷² In recent years the study of ‘manuscript cultures’ has expanded well

⁶⁸ John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de Buen Amor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), xviii.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ For a number of examples of the early fruits of this movement, see *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990), an issue dedicated to New Philology edited by Stephen Nichols. The issue opens with Nichols’ presentation of his since-influential notion of the “manuscript matrix,” wherein multiple contesting actors (authors, copyists, glossators, illuminators) contributed to the constitutions of a given codex. For more recent work in this vein see Brian Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*, xiv, 317 p. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Marilyn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn, *Myth, Montage, & Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Lauryn S. Mayer, *Worlds Made Flesh: Reading Medieval Manuscript Culture*, Studies in Medieval History and Culture 16 (New York: Routledge, 2004); Erik Kwakkel, *Writing in Context: Insular Manuscript Culture, 500-1200*, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Book Culture (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2013).

⁷¹ Most notably Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); idem., *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002); Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); idem., *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁷² Such as Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); D.F. McKenzie, “The Sociology of a Text: Orality, Literacy and Print in Early New Zealand,” in *The Book History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), 205–31; Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?,” *Daedalus* 111 (1982): 65–83; Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

beyond the boundaries of Europe,⁷³ a move paralleled by recent studies of postcolonial book history and the ‘anthropology of texts’ in India and Africa.⁷⁴ Islamic medievalism, however, has remained mostly innocent of these developments, such that most scholars in the field continue to treat manuscripts as sources for texts and little more.

My methodological decision to approach the examination of al-Būnī and the reception of his ideas through the lenses of New Philology and ‘manuscript cultures’ was due not only to the availability of such a large body of Būnian manuscripts, but also to my growing understanding that a given medieval Arabic manuscript is by no means simply a copy of a text, but rather one edge or node of a network or community of human actors—readers, teachers, copyists, booksellers—as well as other manuscripts. Furthermore, that these networks in which books were produced, studied, and transmitted had comprised much of the dynamic social and material basis of the abstraction we refer to as ‘Islamic intellectual history’. Modern understandings of that abstraction typically have excluded ‘al-Būnī the magician’ from the annals of Islamic ‘religious’, ‘scientific’, and ‘mystical’ thought, frequently relegating him to the ill-defined, often abject category of ‘popular religion’. My hope, however, was that close attention to the networks of people and books through which al-Būnī’s texts and teachings spread would facilitate subversion and escape from such categories and lead to a clearer understanding of how ‘dangerous’ ideas such as al-Būnī’s came to be dispersed so widely. Doing so has required the development of various conceptual tools for approaching the manuscript evidence. I have already mentioned my use of ‘wide-angle’ views for discerning broad trends over time in the growth and internal variation of the corpus. The two interrelated tools/terms I introduce in what follows operate at a different scale and are concerned with how paratextual and codical elements of the manuscripts,

⁷³ For example the several scholars whose work is collected in Stephen Berkwitz, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown, eds., *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art* (London: Routledge, 2009). Consider also the ongoing research currently being conducted by the working group in “Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa” at the University of Hamburg.

⁷⁴ Such as Robert Fraser, *Book History through Postcolonial Eyes: Rewriting the Script* (London: Routledge, 2008); Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons, and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

read in combination with the texts themselves, can cast light on medieval actors' uses of books and book practices as a means of regulating or transforming social relationships. The first of these tools/terms is the notion of 'reading communities' as a way of conceiving various types of networks of books and readers, 'esotericist reading communities' being my primary concern in this study. The second is the idea of the 'textual economy' as a rubric for investigating various aspects of books and book practices—from various transmission methods, to the conceptual organization of texts, to the *mise-en-page* of specific manuscripts—as indicators of social transactions that were conducted via books.

1.4.1 'Reading communities', esotericist and otherwise

The notion of 'esotericist reading communities' that features particularly in chapters two and three of this study derives from the specific circumstances in which al-Būnī's early readers operated, but also from a recognition in much modern scholarship that the production and use of books in late-medieval Arab-Islamicate milieux was largely a communal affair. This is to say that many of a given medieval actor's reading activities—and many authorial activities, as well—were undertaken as part of one or more local communities of readers, probably one(s) with which he or she interacted regularly. The majority of these communities would not have been particularly 'esotericist' in orientation; indeed, many would have been decidedly public.

As first noted in the groundbreaking scholarship on the use of books in medieval Arab-Islamicate cultures by Jan Pedersen and Franz Rosenthal, and as further explored by such scholars as George Makdisi, Michael Chamberlain, Jonathan Berkey, Gregor Schoeler, Jonathan Bloom, and, more recently, Stefan Leder, Eerik Dickinson, Shawkat Toorawa, Konrad Hirschler, and others,⁷⁵ interaction

⁷⁵ Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981); Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994); Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992); Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006); idem., *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*, trans. Shawkat M. Toorawa (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Bloom, *Paper before Print*; Stefan Leder, Yāsīn al-Sawwās, and Ma'mūn al-Ṣāgharjī, eds., *Mu'jam al-samā'āt al-Dimashqīyah : al-muntakhabah min sanat 550 ilá 750 H / 1155 M ilá 1349 M*, 2 vols. (Damascus: al-Ma'had al-Faransī lil-Dirasāt al-'Arabīyah, 1996); Stefan Leder, "Spoken Word and Written Text – Meaning and Social Significance of the Institution of Riwāya," *Islamic Area Studies Working Paper Series* 31 (2002): 1–18; idem.,

with books was rarely an entirely solitary activity. From the third/ninth century onward, manuscripts became increasingly common tools in Muslim knowledge production and transmission due to both spreading Arabic literacy and the moderate costs of paper production (relative to parchment).⁷⁶ Individuals, however, often were discouraged from attempting to learn solely from books and independently of a teacher. Indeed, a book with no living teacher to vouch for and elucidate its contents might even be regarded as hazardous.⁷⁷ Particularly in fields such as the *ḥadīth* sciences, jurisprudence, and grammar, reading ideally was done in study circles under the supervision of *shaykhs* who could claim transmitted authority to teach the text, with solitary reading being viewed primarily as an adjunct to group reading.⁷⁸ In evaluations of scholarly expertise a premium was placed on skilled performances of written and memorized texts in group settings, and those who would claim to be learned were expected to have copious amounts of written materials committed to memory, including of course the Qurʾān and numerous *ḥadīths*, but also lengthy and complex works specific to their area(s) of expertise.⁷⁹ An ethos of communal reading prevailed with regard to belletristic literatures, as well, where texts were things to be enjoyed or debated in sociable settings.⁸⁰

“Understanding a Text through Its Transmission: Documented Samaʾ, Copies, Reception,” in *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, ed. Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler, *Beiruter Texte Und Studien* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2011), 59–72; Shawkat M. Toorawa, *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-Century Bookman in Baghdad*, *RoutledgeCurzon Studies in Arabic and Middle-Eastern Literatures* 7 (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005); Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); and the essays by numerous authors in Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler, *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, *Beiruter Texte Und Studien* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2011).

⁷⁶ Bloom, *Paper before Print*, 110–123; Toorawa, *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur*, 1–2.

⁷⁷ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 26 ff; Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 145 ff.

⁷⁸ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 133–151; Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 31 ff; Leder, “Spoken Word and Written Text.”

⁷⁹ Makdisi, *The Rise of the Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, 99 ff; Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 29 ff.

⁸⁰ Toorawa, *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur*, 13; Samer M. Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past*, *Poetics of Orality and Literacy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

Even the composition of written works often occurred at least partly in group settings, with many works originating in lectures by scholars or *shaykhs* that were taken down in writing by their students and later circulated as or in books.⁸¹ They also sometimes were composed in processes through which—to use the Greek terms helpfully introduced to Islamicist scholarship by Schoeler—*hypomnemata* (notes, *aide-mémoires*) originally made for personal study and in preparation for oral performances were later compiled and edited into *syngrammata* (complex written compositions), either by a *shaykh* or by his students.⁸² The copying and correcting of manuscript texts often were group activities, as well, and at times were incorporated into teaching and transmission activities. Thus, while late-medieval learned actors sometimes read or wrote in isolation, they regularly were called upon to participate in communal book practices. As discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, there are indications that by the ninth/fifteenth century, reading in the Arab-Islamic world were transitioning away from many of these group practices and toward a greater emphasis on private reading, though in the period under investigation in the earlier chapters of this study the prestige of group book practices was still quite intact. Indeed, as discussed in chapter two with regard to audition practices, it was in some ways at its apex, particularly in Egypt and Syria.

Europeanist and Islamicist medieval studies scholars of the past few decades have generated various ways of conceptualizing the communal nature of medieval actors' interactions with written texts and, in some cases, have suggested assorted methods for 'working back' from texts and/or manuscripts in reconstructing and otherwise understanding groups of readers. Some of these approaches that I have found particularly useful are the Europeanist Brian Stock's concept of 'textual communities', Dagenais' notion of the 'ethics of reading', and Konrad Hirschler's recent discussion of 'reading communities' in late-medieval Arab-Islamic manuscript culture. These approaches are

⁸¹ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 24.

⁸² Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam*, 21.

largely distinct methodologically, and I will briefly discuss each in turn, with reference to their applicability to this study.

1.4.1.1 Stock on 'textual communities'

Stock, a historian of late antique and medieval European societies, introduced the term 'textual communities' as a tool for describing and analyzing small, dissident socioreligious movements in which written texts "played a dominant role in the internal and external relationships of the members."⁸³ The concept functioned as an important component of his larger project of examining the "interpenetrat[ion]" of "social and literary norms"⁸⁴ in European society during the medieval period. The study of medieval heresies and other sectarian movements, Stock argues, had long been mired in parallel tracks. On the one hand were approaches that sought the origins of medieval sectarianisms primarily in the immediate socioeconomic conditions of the actors among whom they arose, with little regard for the movements' doctrinal contents. On the other were intellectualist approaches that viewed religious thought as "an autonomous aspect of cultural development"⁸⁵ and thus regarded these movements as having manifested doctrinal mutations or misunderstandings (an approach Stock viewed as often biased by normative Christian theological views). The concept of 'textual communities' was Stock's attempt to overcome this divide by attending to dissident movements—such as the heresy at Orléans in 1022 and the reformist *patarini* of late eleventh-century Milan—as instances in which the introduction to a collectivity of new texts, or new ways of interpreting texts and arguing on the basis thereof, had fundamentally altered its members' relations to their socioeconomic and cultural environments.⁸⁶ As Stock strikingly puts it, the coalescence of a textual community entailed the

⁸³ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 90.

⁸⁴ Idem., "Medieval Literacy, Linguistic Theory, and Social Organization," *New Literary History* 16, no. 1 (1984): 17.

⁸⁵ *The Implications of Literacy*, 92–101. The quote is from a related discussion in idem., *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, Parallax: Re-Visions of Culture and Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 156.

⁸⁶ *The Implications of Literacy*, 88–240.

transformation of group members' norms of interaction, both among themselves and with the wider society, into "existential glosses on real or putative documents."⁸⁷ He pays close attention to preaching and other ways in which nonliterate actors were brought into textual communities alongside literate ones, thus complicating notions of a strict divide between 'learned' and 'popular' cultures, and he emphasizes that membership in these new collectivities often crossed prevailing categories of class and profession. Durability was not a defining characteristic of the movements he examined. As the Judaicist Tom Thatcher observes, "some of Stock's textual communities were suppressed almost as soon as they came into existence," the "[i]nstitutional response" being "swiftest when the community's alternative vision include[d] a realignment of spiritual authority."⁸⁸

The main value of Stock's concept to my arguments in this study is his notion that new hermeneutical approaches to holy texts, particularly when given an originalist frame—which is to say claims that a new approach was based in ancient and therefore superior praxis—have the potential to act as foci for the coalescence of new communities, and to significantly alter the behaviors and relations of group members. The science of letters and names, I argue in chapters two and three, acted as a discourse around which 'esotericist reading communities' formed in part because it was, to late-medieval Egyptian audiences, a new and rarified approach to Qur'ānic hermeneutics. It was one that treated the holy text, the names of God, and the letters of the Arabic alphabet as keys to occult powers and visionary knowledge unattainable through more commonly accepted approaches to God's book. Furthermore, the sense that lettrism was a form of *bid'āh madhmūmah* (unwarranted innovation) was at least potentially mitigated by al-Būnī's characterization of it as emanating from a secret tradition that stretched back to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Muḥammad, and the other prophets back to Ādam. The communities that I propose formed around al-Būnī and his texts were not 'dissident' movements in the stridently, sometimes violently, activist sense that typified the groups with which Stock was concerned, though, as

⁸⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁸⁸ Tom Thatcher, "Literacy, Textual Communities, and Josephus' 'Jewish War,'" *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 29, no. 2 (1998): 126.

we will see, they were concerned with establishing alternative standards of socioreligious authority, and with making a place of influence for themselves in Ayyūbid *cum* Mamlūk society. They also differed from the groups Stock discusses, and from many of the numerous other communities of readers that populated Ayyūbid and early Mamlūk milieux, in their concern for discretion and exclusivity. This concern was both for their own protection from charges of irreligion and for the sake of protecting from non-initiates the body of knowledge in which they traded.⁸⁹

1.4.1.2 Dagenais on the ethics of reading

For all his attention to literacy and textuality, Stock was not much concerned with issues of manuscripts or their use as historical sources. Dagenais' work, however, deals with related themes of the interpenetration of textual and social norms while focusing on the place of manuscripts and people's interactions with them as sites of cultural practice and transformation. He asserts that the world of medieval readers was quite remote from that of relatively stable texts which we moderns inhabit, and it was removed from "contemporary models of literature, grounded as they are on the idea that the purpose of texts is to signify, to say something, and that this thing is located (or worked out by the reading subject) in the words of the text."⁹⁰ In order to understand what is occurring in these glosses of the *Libro de Buen Amor*, Dagenais argues, we must learn to see past our own relationships to texts to a medieval 'ethics of reading':

Where we tend to see our texts as webs of language, medieval readers saw a world of human action for good or ill co-extensive with their own. Texts were

⁸⁹ I am hardly the first to adapt Stock's idea of textual communities to other historical milieux and analytic priorities; numerous scholars of the past thirty years have transformed it to suit their own areas of study, e.g. Anne Clark Bartlett, "Miraculous Literacy and Textual Communities in Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*," *Mystics Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1992): 43–55; Thatcher, "Literacy, Textual Communities, and Josephus' 'Jewish War'"; Kim Haines-Eitzen, "Textual Communities in Late Antique Christianity," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 246–57; Kirsty Campbell, *The Call to Read: Reginald Pecock's Books and Textual Communities* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); T. Snijders, "Textual Diversity and Textual Community in a Monastic Context: The Case of Eleventh-Century Marchiennes," *Revue D'histoire Ecclésiastique* 107, no. 3–4 (2012): 897–930. Islamists, notably, have not engaged much with Stock's ideas, an important exception being Toorawa, *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur*, 25 and *passim*.

⁹⁰ Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading*, xvii.

acts of demonstrative rhetoric that reached out and grabbed the reader, involved him or her in praise and blame, in judgments about effective and ineffective human behavior. They engaged the reader, not so much in the unraveling of meaning as in a series of ethical meditations and of personal ethical choices. They required the reader to take a stand about what he or she read.⁹¹

Dagenais' observations regarding the ethical choices inherent to medieval reading are, in my estimation, largely applicable to Arab-Islamic milieux. Indeed, I would argue that webs of ethical obligations—the responsibility to transmit the words of the Prophet with the utmost accuracy, faithfulness to one's teacher or Sufi master, fealty to a city or patron, *et cetera*—were essential aspects of the cohesion of many communities of readers. To accept a text was to promote its survival and promulgation, sometimes through authoring new texts such as commentaries or abridgements, but more often through teaching, memorizing, glossing, transmitting, or attending auditions of it. Similarly, to reject a text might mean to compose a refutation of it, or even to call for the prosecution of its author and the destruction of existing copies of it, though more often it meant simply refusing to contribute to its survival. Because these were inherently social activities, things one did in group settings, one's attitude toward a text was not a matter simply of intellectual conviction, but of loyalties and obligations in the lived world with which the text, as Dagenais says, was coextensive. In chapters two and three I discuss the ethics and practices of esotericist writing and reading, both through examining esotericist sentiments in al-Būnī's writings, and through close attention to various sorts of codical and paratextual evidence that reveal important facets of the ethical world al-Būnī's readers inhabited. At the end of the fourth chapter I look at the transformation of those ethics in the 'post-esotericist' lettrism of al-Būnī's important interpreter al-Biṣṭāmī, who leaves us an extraordinary account of his own reading practices and how they shaped his authority to promulgate lettrism to the world.

⁹¹ Ibid.

1.4.1.3 Hirschler on 'reading communities'

Hirschler's notion of 'reading communities' and his methods for defining and analyzing them are the most concrete and quantifiable of these ways of discovering and conceptualizing communities of readers and the bonds that held them together, and are also quite specific to late-medieval Arab-Islamic milieux. I have obviously adapted his term to my own ends, and my use of it is closely related to his, though not identical. His methods depend largely on paratextual evidence of group book practices, including especially the 'audition' certificates (*samā'āt*) found in many late-medieval Islamic manuscripts, which are records of 'audition' (*samā'*), a group practice for textual transmission that is discussed in greater detail in chapter two. In some recent publications Hirschler has drawn on more than 500 Zengid, Ayyūbid, and Mamlūk-era audition certificates from copies of a single work, the Syrian historian Ibn 'Asākir's immensely popular *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, to track the composition and durability of numerous 'reading communities' of both scholarly and non-scholarly actors who participated in public and semi-public readings of the work. Using prosopographical and onomastic analyses of these certificates, he has demonstrated ways in which an elite scholarly family utilized its members' positions as authorized transmitters of this work to maintain their high social rank.⁹² Hirschler also has documented that the reading communities constituted through auditions of the work were quite socially variegated, with some being restricted entirely to professional scholars and others drawing significant numbers of artisans and other non-scholarly actors.⁹³ Similarly to both Stock and Dagenais' studies, Hirschler's research addresses ways that changing means of interacting with texts altered social relations, though in his focus on transmission practices he is less concerned than the other two with the contents of the texts or their interpretation.

⁹² Konrad Hirschler, "Reading certificates (*sama'at*) as a prosopographical source: Cultural and social practices of an elite family in Zangid and Ayyubid Damascus," in *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, ed. Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler, *Beiruter Texte und Studien* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2011), 73–92.

⁹³ *Idem.*, *The Written Word*, 32–81.

In this study my concerns and methods intersect most directly with Hirschler's in chapter two, where I examine the use of audition practices by al-Būnī and his followers. I compare them with the use of audition for the transmission of more 'mainstream' and decidedly exoteric texts—primarily *ḥadīth* collections and works from genres closely connected to the *ḥadīth* sciences—and also their use by al-Būnī's fellow esotericist Ibn al-'Arabī. The thrust of my argument regarding al-Būnī and Ibn al-'Arabī's use of audition is that al-Būnī's and Ibn al-'Arabī's use of audition often was geared toward the discreet and exclusive circulation of texts and the cultivation of authority in smaller, more closed communities. This is contrary to the largely popular and popularizing audition practices of the transmitters Hirschler (along with most other researchers into audition practices) has studied who often were oriented toward public accessibility to texts, expansive transmission, and scholarly actors' public displays of authority. While Hirschler stresses the widely varying motivations of attendees of public auditions of *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I argue that the reading communities circulating al-Būnī's works during the germinal period, while certainly not entirely homogenous, were unified in their commitment to the particular strain of Sufism promulgated by al-Būnī and others of his Western Sufi cohort.

In the final analysis, my use of the term 'reading communities', as informed by Stock and Dagenais, is less restricted than Hirschler's and applies to any group within which actors engaged in book practices, whether through formal audition or otherwise. To my mind, the key point methodologically is the awareness that a community of readers stands behind most every medieval manuscript, such that the challenge for the researcher lies in how to draw on the manuscript to discover something of the nature of that community, the priorities that drove them, and the webs of ethical obligations that bound them to one another and the larger society.

1.4.2 *The textual economy*

The notion of the 'textual economy' that I utilize in this study also derives from the work of a handful of scholars, though in this case none are medievalists. It relates to the strategic use of oral and written 'texts' by human actors and ways in which both the internal, formal properties of texts and

their external, contextual properties can reflect and shape the ways people deploy them and even draw people into new social relationships. If ‘reading communities’ are the groupings of actors that we can discern standing behind each manuscript, then the ‘textual economy’ is the medium through which these groups of actors *qua* readers, transmitters, *et cetera* interacted with one another and the larger society, and the field through which text-based exchanges of authority, prestige, *et cetera* were transacted.

Of central importance to my thinking on this topic is the anthropologist Karin Barber’s use of the term ‘textual economy’ in a discussion of ‘entextualization’ theory. This is a body of thought developed in recent decades in anthropology and performance studies that does not limit the term ‘text’ to written compositions/inscribed artifacts, but rather allows it to encompass any “utterance (oral or written) that is woven together in order to attract attention and to outlast the moment.”⁹⁴ Barber makes reference to the textual economy of a given milieu in discussing how the survival of ‘texts’ is dependent not just on their medium (oral, written, recorded, *et cetera*) and rhetorical form, but on the settings and purposes to which they are considered appropriate:

In both oral and written traditions, then, it is not the textual forms alone that are important in the process of entextualisation. Equally important are the formal and institutional arrangements set up by the owners, producers or users of these texts. Texts are not memes that in and of themselves survive or fail to do so. They survive because of the efforts that human beings go to, to mark them out, bind them up and project them across time and space. Some written genres, like some oral ones, are considered to deserve or to require more of that effort than others. This involves both internal, textual properties and external contextual ones. Human intentions and human strategies are at the centre of this textual economy. And we can go on to ask, comparatively and cross-culturally, with what kinds of ‘intention’, i.e. to what end, with what point, is a particular kind of text directed to other human beings?⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Barber, *Anthropology of Texts*, 2, 21–28; cf. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 59–88.

⁹⁵ Barber, *Anthropology of Texts*, 28.

Thus, in Barber's sense the textual economy is the sum of actors' instrumental deployments of texts in a given milieu. It is both the arena in which a text's survival is determined and that in which a human actor's use of a text might materially impact his or her own survival.⁹⁶

A crucial aspect of the notion of the textual economy is that it is something which operates both internally and externally to a text. Indeed, to discuss the textual economy is to draw attention to the ways in which a text is mediated to various audiences or 'publics', to its actual and imagined readerships.⁹⁷ Bruce Curtis, for example, deploys it in a discussion of a nineteenth-century text on statistics, defining it as "the ways in which the presentation of information and the creation of knowledge result from the ordered relations among devices such as images, tables, charts, graphs, or photographs, and descriptive or explanatory text."⁹⁸ In other words, Curtis' sense of the textual economy intersects with the realm of what, in manuscript studies, is referred to as *mise-en-page* (another element usually lost in editions of texts extracted from manuscripts), the arrangement of the text on the page and often alongside other elements such as glosses, illustrations or diagrams. There are of course countless studies of manuscript *mise-en-page* from art- and literary-historical perspectives, but approaching it from the perspective of the textual economy draws analytical focus away from the manuscript page simply as a self-contained composition. It redirects focus toward consideration of "[t]he translation of the complexities of social relations and conditions onto the flat surface of the text" and ways in which *mise-en-page* can constitute such things as expressions of "scientific and technical mastery."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ For a similar use of the concept, see Paul Crumbley's discussion of Emily Dickinson and a contemporary poet's differing relationships to commercial success and of the notion of the poem as gift in nineteenth century American culture; "As If for You to Choose - Conflicting Textual Economies in Dickinson's Correspondence with Helen Hunt Jackson," *Women's Studies* 31, no. 6 (2002): 743-57.

⁹⁷ Barber, *Anthropology of Texts*, 137 ff.

⁹⁸ Bruce Curtis, "Textual Economies and the Presentation of Statistical Material: Charts, Tables and Texts in 19th Century Public Education," *Scientia Canadensis: Canadian Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine* 29, no. 1 (2006): 4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

I engage with and develop the notion of the textual economy at several points in this study. In chapter two I discuss it with regard to al-Būnī's use of the esotericist writing strategy of *'tabdīd al-ilm* (dispersion of knowledge), and means of both deepening and obfuscating his teachings that I argue was intended to necessitate studying his texts with a *shaykh* and to protect their contents from non-initiates. In chapter three I consider ways in which control over the circulation of al-Būnī's texts and the obscurity of elements of his teachings allowed Sufi readers to foster an alternative community of religious elites. In the same chapter I discuss the claims to knowledge and mastery of the invisible worlds implicit in al-Būnī's complex diagrammatic figures in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*. In chapter four, in the context of a discussion of encyclopædist authors' engagements with al-Būnī, I draw on the work of Elias Muhanna and others to consider ways in which authors and copyists of works such as al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab* structured those texts so as to facilitate bureaucratic readers' ability to assert a degree of mastery over multiple fields of knowledge, and how inclusions of al-Būnī in such texts were attempts to discipline lettrism and mitigate its dangers. Finally, I also discuss in that chapter 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī's distinct effort to assert mastery over a range of lettrist material through claims to have mastered numerous books on the topic through means both ordinary and occult.

1.5 'Esotericism' and the Science of letters and names

A key term in the narrative of the career of the Būnian corpus presented in this study is 'esotericism', a label that requires some clarification. To begin, I should state that I do not intend it as a synonym for 'the occult sciences' or cultural forms pertaining to them, as it is often used in the subfield of Europeanist cultural-intellectual history that styles itself 'Western esoteric studies'.¹⁰⁰ Rather, my use

¹⁰⁰ I am grossly oversimplifying, but issues of what 'esoteric' and 'esotericism' mean in the context of 'Western esoteric studies' already takes up a number of books and articles, none of which are pertinent to the meaning of the term intended here to justify a lengthy exposition. On these debates, see such works as Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994); Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esoterism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London ; Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub, 2005); idem., *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, v. 186 (Leiden; Boston: Brill,

of the term more closely follows its typological use in much religious studies scholarship, as denoting attitudes and practices of elitism, exclusivity, and secrecy in the production and transmission of religious knowledge; “the practice in various religious contexts of reserving certain kinds of salvific knowledge for a selected elite of initiated disciples,” as Wouter Hanegraaff has put it.¹⁰¹ As discussed in greater detail below, the distinguishing characteristic of ‘Islamic esotericism(s)’ is that these social attitudes and practices are allied to theories of Qur’ānic hermeneutics which hold that the holy text conceals *bāṭin* (hidden) meanings unavailable except to initiates of the given esotericist community.

The ‘esotericism’ that I attribute to al-Būnī, and the term ‘esotericist reading communities’ that I employ with regard to al-Būnī’s readers during the germinal period of the corpus, is indicative of the importance of *bāṭin*-oriented hermeneutics to his and his followers’ understanding of the nature of the holy text and of the cosmos as a thing made of signs of God. Just as importantly, the terms denotes their having practiced a high level of exclusivity and discretion in the promulgation and circulation of al-Būnī’s texts, both for their own protection and to guard from ‘the vulgar’ what they perceived to be a powerful body of knowledge. As I show in the fourth chapter, the aspect discretion seems largely to have given way by the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century, such that Būnian texts came to circulate more freely, giving rise to the efflorescence of the corpus. I argue that an important development of this latter stage was the emergence of a new strain of what I refer to as ‘post-esotericist’ lettrism. This is to say a lettrism that no longer felt a need for secrecy—that indeed announced itself as a science for the new age—but yet drew much of its allure from formerly having been a secret science.

2010); Arthur Versluis, “What Is Esoteric? Methods in the Study of Western Esotericism,” *Esoterica* 4 (2002): 1–15; idem., “Methods in the Study of Esotericism, Part II: Mysticism and the Study of Esotericism,” *Esoterica* V (2003): 27–40; Wouter Hanegraaff, “Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism,” *Esoterica* 1 (1999): 3–19; idem., “Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism Between Counterculture and New Complexity,” *Aries* 1 (2001): 5–37. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁰¹ Hanegraaff, *DGWE*, s.v. “Esotericism.”

The esotericism of al-Būnī and his early readers has important implications for our understanding of the impact of his texts over the course of the late-Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods, particularly with regard to the significant changes undergone by Sufism in the central Arab-Islamic territories during that time. Although esotericism as a social phenomenon is sometimes regarded as inherently subversive and liberating,¹⁰² religion scholars such as Paul Johnson and Hugh Urban emphasize that the social functions of esotericism are by no means fixed, and indeed can be quite mutable within a given social setting. As Johnson puts it in his study on Brazilian Candomblé: “Secrecy may leave hermeneutic space for multiple interpretations and thereby invite pluralism and resistance to monolithic authority, just as it may occlude and mystify the equal status of human beings and reify hierarchies of power as natural or inevitable.”¹⁰³ And as Urban discusses in a paper juxtaposing the traditions of the Śrīvidyā school of Indian Tantra and the Rectified Scottish Rite of French Freemasonry, though esotericism is sometimes “‘counter-cultural’, subversive or revolutionary,” it can equally well be “the province of highly educated, affluent and powerful intellectuals, who do not wish to over-throw the existing religious and political structures, but rather, either to reinforce them or else to bend and reshape them to suit their own private interests.”¹⁰⁴ This fluidity of the social functions of esotericism can be seen over the course of the career of the Būnian corpus discussed in this study. What begins with mainly foreign (i.e. non-Egyptian) and relatively powerless Sufis and their followers in Cairo cultivating lettrism as an alternative basis of socioreligious authority evolves into the taking up Būnian lettrism by individuals at the courts and households of Mamlūk military elites, a transition that occurs in tandem with the taking up of various strands of Sufism by political leaders but also partakes of older patterns of court patronage of the occult sciences as instruments of power.

¹⁰² E.g. in Edward Tiryakian, “Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1972): 491–512.

¹⁰³ Paul C. Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

¹⁰⁴ Hugh Urban, “Elitism and Esotericism: Strategies of Secrecy and Power in South Indian Tantra and French Freemasonry,” *Numen* 44 (1997): 3.

In the first subsection that follows I briefly discuss the history of Islamic—i.e. Shīite and Sufi—esotericisms in the periods leading up to al-Būnī’s time, with particular attention to the interplay of hermeneutics, elitism, and secrecy that typified them, and that informs our understanding of the ethics of esotericist knowledge transmission that is a central topic of chapter two. I do not dwell specifically on the science of letters here, as its history is discussed in chapter three. However, as I do throughout this dissertation, I draw attention to points where notions of ‘the book’, orality and the written, and related topics appear. In the next two subsections I address two points of analytical/terminological importance. The first is the relationship of ‘esotericism’ to ‘mysticism’ and how both relate to the importance in medieval Islamic culture of ‘human spiritual exemplars’, such as Shīite *Imāms* and Sufi saints. This issue is of particular relevance to chapter three and al-Būnī’s emphasis on the human-as-microcosm and the perfectibility of the spiritual aspirant through ascent to God (*henosis*), as well as to the discussion of al-Biṣṭāmī’s claims to initiation in chapter four. The second point is the relationship of esotericism to the ‘occult sciences’. I emphasize the non-synonymy of these terms as I use them, but also discuss some points where they converge. This is particularly relevant to the discussion in chapter four of the discourses on *taṣnīf al-‘ulūm* (classification of the sciences) employed by various Mamlūk-era thinkers such as al-Nuwayrī and Ibn Khaldūn, and is an issue of great importance with regard to the Islamicate occult sciences more broadly.

1.5.1 Islamic esotericisms

Since the ancient period, it was not uncommon for some religious groups in the Near East and around the Mediterranean “to define and protect themselves by keeping various sets of beliefs or/and cultic practices secret, to remain unseen or unheard by outsiders,” a trend that came to include some late-antique Jewish and Christian collectivities.¹⁰⁵ Within the ‘book religions’, texts played a major role

¹⁰⁵ Guy Stroumsa, “From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity,” in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, ed. Hans Kippenberg and Guy Stroumsa, Studies in the History of Religions (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 291 and passim.

in esotericist movements and attitudes, which often were tied to access to ‘secret’ scriptures or to claims of privileged hermeneutical access to hidden aspects of the major holy texts.¹⁰⁶ Notions of secret oral traditions relating to major holy texts also were common, though it is of course in written texts that we hear of them. As Guy Stroumsa observes, “Gnostic Apocalypses, i.e. ‘revelations’, often insist that the secrets being revealed to the reader have been kept and transmitted only orally, ‘neither transcribed in a book nor written down’.”¹⁰⁷ The notion that esotericist groups typically restricted themselves to oral modes of knowledge-transmission is an ancient one, though, as discussed in chapter two, its accuracy should not be taken for granted.

These trends held with the emergence of what can be termed ‘Islamic esotericism’ among certain Shīʿite thinkers of the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries, who posited that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his designated successors the *Imāms* were uniquely able to apprehend the hidden meanings of the Qurʾān due to their divinely ordained quasi-prophetic status and accompanying “hiero-intelligence” (as Amir-Moezzi calls it).¹⁰⁸ References also were made to their exclusive access to a number of powerful books of secret knowledge.¹⁰⁹ Claims for the *Imāms*’ special exegetical abilities were inseparable from the notion that the Qurʾān is possessed of both *ẓāhir* (‘exoteric’, lit. ‘exterior’) and *bāṭin* (esoteric, lit. ‘interior’) layers of meaning, the latter of which were discernible only through the guidance of the *Imāms*. At some point in the cultural and intellectual ferment of the second/eighth and

¹⁰⁶ The scholarship on these subjects obviously is vast. For brief introductions regarding Judaism and Christianity, see Elliot Wolfson, “Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism,” in *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, ed. Yaakov Elman and I. Gershoni, Studies in Jewish Culture and Society (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 166–224; Stroumsa, “From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity.”

¹⁰⁷ Stroumsa, “From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity,” 297. The internal quote is from *Apocalypse of Adam*.

¹⁰⁸ Mohammad Ali. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 6 ff.

¹⁰⁹ Etan Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scriptures in Early Imami Shiʿism,” in *Les Retours aux écritures: Fondamentalismes présent et passés*, ed. Évelyne Patlagean and Alain Le Boulluec (Louvain: Peeters, 1993), 295–312; Khalid Sindawi, “‘Fāṭima’s Book’: A Shīʿite Qurʾān?,” *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 78 (2004): 57–70; Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Sayyārī, Etan. Kohlberg, and Mohammad Ali. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification: The Kitāb Al-Qirāʾāt of Aḥmad B. Muḥammad Al-Sayyār*, Qirāʾāt (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009).

third/ninth centuries that gave rise to Sufism and so many other enduring Muslim discursive traditions, the hermeneutic principle and terminology of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* was adopted, *mutatis mutandis*, by many Sufi theorists. In their non-genealogically-determined framework, the ability to discern the *bāṭin* became a function of an adept's capacity for *kashf* ('unveiling'), the divinely-granted revelation of hidden meanings "to the heart or mind of the practitioner."¹¹⁰

At the hands of various Shī'ite and Sufi theorists, such hermeneutics were applied not only to the Qur'ān, but also to many other matters of religious doctrine and praxis, such that elements of ritual such as prayer and fasting, for example, also were understood to have hidden meanings. Ismā'īlite Shī'ite thinkers were particularly active in the elaboration of hidden meanings behind religious teachings and practices. As Ismail Poonawala has put it, "the conviction that to everything apparent, literal, exoteric there corresponds something hidden, spiritual, esoteric, is the fundamental principle at the very foundation of Ismā'īlite doctrine."¹¹¹ The view widespread among non-Ismā'īlite Muslims that members of that sect de-emphasized or outright rejected the *ẓāhir* of the Qur'ān—and the religious law derived from it—in favor of the *bāṭin* taught by their *Imāms* was the cause of Ismā'īlites sometimes being referred to as *al-bāṭiniyah* (i.e. 'the esotericists', though 'preferers of the esoteric meaning' would better reflect its historical usage). The term sometimes also was wielded by Sunnite polemicists in attempts to discredit non-Ismā'īlite esotericist thinkers whose understandings of the Qur'ān and Islam were considered by their critics to be beyond the pale of normative religion, in what essentially were charges of heresy in the form of crypto-Ismā'īlism.¹¹²

In both Shī'ite and Sufi practice, the hermeneutical claim that some levels of Qur'ānic meaning were discernible only to a spiritual elect developed alongside elitist social attitudes, as well as actual

¹¹⁰ Alan Godlas, ed., "Sufism," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 350; cf. Kristin Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (London: Routledge, 2006), 29–34.

¹¹¹ Poonawala, *EI2*, s.v. 'al-Ẓāhir wa 'l-bāṭin'. Cf. Daftary.

¹¹² Marshall Hodgson, *EI2*, s.v. 'Bāṭiniyya'; Paul Walker, *EI3*, s.v. 'Bāṭiniyya'; Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 19 ff.

practices meant to ensure that those hidden meanings were not made freely available to non-initiates. As Etan Kohlberg has argued from early Imāmic *ḥadīths*, pre-Occultation Shī'ites regarded themselves as the spiritual elect within the Muslim community, often referring to members of their own sect as *al-khāṣṣah* (the elites) and to non-Shī'ite Muslims as *al-'āmmah* (the vulgar commonalty). One of the *Imāms* (unnamed) is quoted as having put it rather more severely: “We are the possessors of knowledge (*‘ulamā'*), our Shī'a are those who acquire it (*muta'allimūn*), the rest of humanity are scum (*ghuthā'*).”¹¹³ As an often-persecuted minority concentrated mostly in urban areas, early Shī'ites developed doctrines and practices for the secretive transmission and preservation of certain elements of their religious knowledge. Falling under the headings of *kitmān* (concealment) and *taqīyah* (caution), these ranged from the outright concealment of information (such as the identities of the *Imāms*) to dissimulation and obscurantism about certain doctrines, and also facilitated the articulation of internal hierarchies in which different members of the sect were differentially privy to the *Imām's* teachings. Kohlberg argues that these practices were variously motivated by an interest in protecting the community from persecution, by elitist sensibilities (which is to say by the notion that the non-Shī'ites were unworthy and/or incapable of comprehending the *Imāms'* teaching), or both.¹¹⁴ As Maria Dakake notes, these elitist attitudes and secretive practices among Shī'ites were at odds with an emerging, quasi-democratic Jamā'i Sunnite ethos in which “doctrinal and practical correctness were located with the majority,” and in which those teachings that were most publicly and widely disseminated were accounted most reliable.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless—or perhaps in resistance to the dominant paradigm—*logia* from the early *Imāms* demonstrate that *taqīyah* and *kitmān* were considered crucial to the sect's survival and role in the world.

¹¹³ Quoted in Etan Kohlberg, “Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period,” in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. S. A. Arjomand (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 32.

¹¹⁴ Etan Kohlberg, “Taqīyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion,” in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, ed. Hans Kippenberg and Guy Stroumsa, Studies in the History of Religions (Leiden: Brill, 1995), passim. He discusses these varying motivations under the headings of “prudential” and “non-prudential” *taqīyah*.

¹¹⁵ Maria Dakake, “Hiding in Plain Sight: The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi'ite Islam,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2006): 327.

The *Imām* Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) is reported to have said: “[T]aqīyah is our religion and the religion of our fathers; he who has no *taqīyah* has no religion.”¹¹⁶ Following the onset of Major Occultation (329/941 to the present), *Imāmī* Shī‘ites gathered the teachings of the *Imāms* into books that soon came to circulate relatively openly, largely denecessitating the day-to-day use of *kitmān* and *taqīyah* and particularly in the relatively Shī‘ah-philic atmosphere of the Būyid period.¹¹⁷ However, similar programs of religious secrecy flourished among *Ismā‘īlite* Shī‘ites throughout the medieval period and beyond in connection with the *Ismā‘īlite* mission organization (*da‘wah*), a body which often operated under hostile conditions in non-*Ismā‘īlite* regions, and which, even in *Ismā‘īlite*-controlled territories such as Fātimid Egypt, placed socioreligious value on hidden teachings, hierarchies of initiation, *et cetera*.¹¹⁸

Sufism of the classical period displayed similar tendencies toward elitism and secrecy. Claims that it was Sufis who were the *khāṣṣah* of the Muslim *ummah* were prevalent in Sufi writings from an early stage, based on assertions that their knowledge of God’s message was based in *kashf*, *ma‘rifah* (extra-discursive knowledge), and *taḥqīq* (‘personal realization’, lit. ‘verification’) rather than in rational disputation and rote learning.¹¹⁹ Under the heading of *ḥifẓ al-sirr* (protection of the secret) there were frequent expressions of the need for adepts to conceal experiences and understandings of the divine that were so beyond the intellectual and spiritual capacities of ordinary Muslims as to harm their faith, and/or that could be perceived as breaching religious norms, thus placing practitioners of Sufism in

¹¹⁶ Kohlberg, “Taqiyya,” 356. Kohlberg notes, however, that just because these practices were mandated does not mean that they were flawlessly observed, and he argues that the great number of logia from the *Imāms* reiterating the need for *taqīyah* “points to a serious problem which the *Imams* faced when trying to impose rules of concealment on their community”; *ibid.*, 354.

¹¹⁷ Dakake, “Hiding in Plain Sight,” 348–9; Lynda Clarke, “The Rise and Decline of *Taqiyya* in Twelver Shī‘ism,” in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought: Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*, ed. Hermann Landolt and Todd Lawson (London ; New York : London: I.B. Tauris, Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005), 55–59.

¹¹⁸ Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning* (London: Tauris, 1997), 46; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlites: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 215.

¹¹⁹ Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 41.

danger.¹²⁰ There are a handful of accounts of early Sufis having been expelled from cities and otherwise chastised after having failed to take such precautions. In Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī's (d. 261/874 or 264/877-8) case, for example, he was blamed for alleging that he had ascended through the heavens as Muḥammad did, while Sahl al-Tustarī's (d. 283/895) was chastised for claiming to have conversed with angels, jinn, and devils.¹²¹ The ultimate cautionary tale in this regard, however, was that of al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, the 'Sufi martyr' executed in Baghdad in 309/922 against a background of religious and political intrigue. According to some contemporary and later commentators, al-Ḥallāj came to his fate by committing the transgression of *ifshā' al-sirr* ('divulging of the secret'),¹²² which is to say that he failed to abstain from making public teachings and *shaṭaḥāt* ('ecstatic utterances') that shocked majoritarian religious sensibilities, a violation of what Louis Massignon described as "the esoteric prudence and the discipline of secrecy which had become the rule in Baghdad Sufi circles."¹²³

In the centuries between al-Ḥallāj and the eastward emigration of al-Būnī, Ibn al-'Arabī, and others of their Western Sufi cohort, the Sufism of the central Arab-Islamic lands was considerably domesticated to the dictates of Jamā'ī Sunnism, at least as it was represented by the sorts of Sufis who wrote the most famous books on Sufism from that era. As Alexander Knysh and Ahmet Karamustafa have discussed at length, influential Sufi apologists such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) worked to define "the boundaries of 'normative' Sufism" by "dissociat[ing] it from suspect approaches of all kinds," while reconciling it, in some cases, with 'traditionalist' views of the *ahl*

¹²⁰ Michael Ebsstein, "Absent yet at All Times Present: Further Thoughts on Secrecy in the Shī'ī Tradition and in Sunnite Mysticism," *Al-Qanṭara* 34, no. 2 (2014): 388 ff.

¹²¹ For these and other examples see Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.," *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 64.

¹²² Annemarie Schimmel, "Secrecy in Sufism," in *Secrecy in Religions*, ed. Kees Bolle (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 81.

¹²³ Massignon & Gardet, *EI2*, s.v. "al-Ḥallādj (the wool-carder), Abu 'l-Mughīth al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr b. Maḥammā al-Bayḍāwī." Massignon traces the origins of this "discipline of secrecy" to the tribulations of Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad al-Nūrī (d. 295/907) and his followers, who, at the behest of Ḥanbalī activists in Baghdad, were "called to give an account before the courts of their teaching on the love of God."

al-ḥadīth on the one hand, and with Ḥanafī or Shafīī *fiqh* and Ash‘ārī *kalām* on the other.¹²⁴ While themes of Sufis’ abilities to unveil the *bāṭin* of the Qur’ān and the need for circumspection in relation to ordinary Muslims continued to be emphasized, Sufi authors of these centuries “were anxious to justify the movement in the eyes of its critics, especially those Sunnite scholars who were apprehensive of its potential to disrupt Muslim communal life.”¹²⁵ The latter stages of these developments may have been stimulated in part by the rise of the Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlite dynasty in Ifrīqiyah and then Egypt (and later the Nizārī Ismā‘īlites in Persia), and the increasingly institutionalized authority of Jamā‘ī Sunnism under their most prominent rivals, the Saljūqs. The famous Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), a leading thinker under the Saljūqs, would fiercely criticize Ismā‘īlite esotericism in a number of his works.¹²⁶ During al-Būnī’s lifetime, this ‘sober’ Sufism found one of its greatest and most politically skilled advocates in the person of Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), whose written works and actions as a Sufi leader in Baghdad laid many of the foundations of the institutionalized *ṭarīqah* Sufism that would come to prominence by the end of the late-medieval period, as Erik Ohlander has convincingly argued.¹²⁷ However, as discussed at length in chapters two and three, al-Būnī and his Western compatriots would bring a strongly *bāṭin*-oriented, elitist, and secretive strain with them to the central Arab-Islamic lands that would present fresh challenges to the advocates of a ‘sober’ Sufism which made few extraordinary claims to divinely-granted knowledge. It was a struggle those advocates largely had lost at the end of the Mamlūk period, at least until the modern age.

¹²⁴ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism, the Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 83.

¹²⁵ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 116.

¹²⁶ Particularly in his *Kitāb Faḍā’ih al-bāṭinīyah wa-faḍā’il al-mustazhirīyah*, on which see Henry Corbin, “The Isma‘ili Response to the Polemic of Ghazali,” in *Isma‘ili Contributions to Islamic Culture*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 69–98; Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis*.

¹²⁷ Erik S. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition : ‘Umar Al-Suhrawardi and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2008).

1.5.2 Esotericism and 'mysticism'

A point of analytical and terminological difficulty in discussions of Islamic esotericism is the relationship between esotericism and 'mysticism', which is to say between "the restriction of knowledge to those who are by nature and by experience qualified to receive it," as Carl Ernst has put it, and "the negation and transcendence of ordinary knowing in unknowing."¹²⁸ With regard to early Christianity, Stroumsa has argued that during the Late Antique period, as Christianity moved from being a persecuted cult to a socially dominant institution, it underwent a transition from esotericism to mysticism. In his telling this entailed a reconceptualization of the human individual as possessed of spiritual interiority, a process in which the *mysterion* of Christian faith, originally actual discursive teachings, was interiorized, a kind of "turning in" that was "also understood as 'turning from' the outer world of the senses and common experience."¹²⁹ This transformed it from something "that should not be spoken about" into something experiential "that cannot be entirely described in words."¹³⁰ However, such a narrative of a historical transition from esotericism to mysticism cannot be supported in Islamic contexts, where the two tendencies seem to have been thoroughly intertwined from the outset in Shī'ite and Sufi thought.

James Morris makes some important contributions to this interplay of esotericism and mysticism in Islamic culture in certain of his essays on Ibn 'Arabī's writing strategies and on the general place of 'mystical' texts within the broader sociointellectual ecology of the medieval Islamic world. Briefly put, Morris argues that the notion of there being hidden, deeper truths of God's word and world that are intended for and/or directly available to only a select few is embedded in the Qur'ān: in its central concern with prophets, angels, and other divine-human intermediaries, as well as in the spirit of inquiry bidden by the lyrical and often gnomic nature of the 'inimitable' text itself. As a result, he

¹²⁸ Carl W. Ernst, "Esoteric and Mystic Aspects of Religious Knowledge in Sufism," *Journal of Religious Studies* 12 (1984): 93.

¹²⁹ Stroumsa, "From Esotericism to Mysticism in Early Christianity," 301.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 304.

says, a great deal of cultural energy was focused at both learned and popular levels on issues of the “human spiritual exemplars through which the full meaning of the revelation [could] be known and realized,” which is to say such figures as the Shī’ite *Imāms* or individuals acclaimed as ‘saints’ (*abdāl*, *awliyā*) and great *shaykhs*.¹³¹ Shī’ism and Sufism, as multifarious cultural assemblages largely independent of the constrained sphere of ‘orthodox’ Sunnite learning, were primary arenas for exploring the “creatively unsettled”¹³² questions of “who are those special persons (whether in this world or the ‘unseen’) and how can one best locate and contact them (so as to follow their guidance and seek their aid and intercession) or else develop the spiritual qualities necessary to move toward that same state of perfection?”¹³³ Thus, for Morris, the secrets of the holy text were ineluctably linked to the holiness of certain persons, such that those who would have the secrets communicated to them had to attain to some portion of, or proximity to, that sanctity, ordinary discursive learning and religious practice being insufficient to the task. As discussed throughout this study, the notion that human actors could, through *riyāḍāt* (‘spiritual exercises’), attain higher states of sanctity and thereby gain extraordinary access to the secrets of the Qur’ān is central to al-Būnī’s teachings. As we will see, this was a major point of contention for one of his critics, the great historian Ibn Khaldūn.

1.5.3 Esotericism and the ‘occult sciences’

A final conceptual and terminological point regarding esotericism is its relationship to ‘the occult sciences’, the latter term having long been used in intellectual-historical scholarship as

¹³¹ James Morris, “Situating Islamic ‘Mysticism’: Between Written Traditions and Popular Spirituality,” in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies* (New York: Lang, 1993), 309.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 310.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 309.

encompassing astrology, alchemy, ‘magic’,¹³⁴ and related praxeis. The term ‘the occult sciences’, of sixteenth-century European origin, requires explanation. The word ‘occult’ in ‘occult-scientific’ derives from the notion of *qualitas occultas*, a Scholastic term for properties or qualities of things that were considered inexplicable through reference to the things’ observable traits, and that in some formulations were held to be invulnerable to any form of rational analysis.¹³⁵ Rooted in Hellenistic thought, the concept was prevalent in medieval Arabic-Islamic thought as well, the term equivalent to *qualitas occultas* being *khāṣṣīyāt* (s. *khāṣṣīyah*) or *khawāṣṣ* (s. *khāṣṣah*).¹³⁶ The forces exerted by a magnet are an example of an occult property famous from medieval natural philosophy, but there also fell under this heading the forces that were thought to emanate from (or to be linked by sympathetic correspondence to) the stars, be contained within certain stones, metals, and herbs, or be inherent in such immaterial entities as letters, numbers, and even the names of God. Broadly speaking, ‘occult-scientific’ disciplines thus can be understood as those that investigated and utilized these hidden properties, the *munāṣabāt* (sympathetic correspondences) between things on account of these properties, *et cetera*.

Written traditions of the major occult sciences—astrology, alchemy, and magic—of Hellenistic, Persian, Indian, and other origins entered Muslim milieux primarily during the ‘Abbāsid translation movement of the second/eighth through fourth/tenth centuries. As such they were part of the what were sometimes called the ‘ancient sciences’ (*al-‘ulūm al-qadīmah*, or ‘sciences of the ancients’, *‘ulūm al-awā’il* or *‘ulūm al-qudamā’*), alongside philosophy, Galenic medicine, mathematics, and other disciplines of pre-Islamic provenance. Dimitri Gutas has argued that the desire for astrological learning as a hallmark of imperial power was among the foremost initial motivations for political elites’ sponsorship

¹³⁴ Which is to say practices intended, as Edgar Francis has succinctly put it, “to influence the world or gain hidden knowledge by manipulating unseen (occult) forces”; “Magic and Divination in the Medieval Islamic Middle East,” *History Compass* 9, no. 8 (2011): 622.

¹³⁵ Regarding various notion of *qualitas occultas* see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 177–180.

¹³⁶ Fahd, *EI2*, s.v. ‘*Khawāṣṣ*’. Note that *khāṣṣah/khawāṣṣ* also commonly refers to human elites.

of that movement,¹³⁷ with reasons of state perhaps having driven some early translations of alchemical texts as well.¹³⁸ Many texts of pre-Islamic origin on ‘magic’ also were translated in the same period, though there is no indication of this having been done under state auspices.¹³⁹

The status of the ‘ancient sciences’ in medieval Muslim culture has been a matter of much debate among modern scholars. Since the publication of an influential article of Goldziher’s on the topic,¹⁴⁰ the idea often has prevailed that ‘orthodox’ Muslim scholars were from the start opposed to the ancient sciences as a whole, on the grounds that they somehow challenged the authority of the revelation to Muḥammad and the sciences dedicated to it—i.e. *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tafsīr* (exegesis), *ḥadīth* sciences, *kalām* (disputational theology), the Arabic linguistic sciences, *et cetera*. Some have framed this as a struggle in Muslim thought between ‘reason’ and ‘revelation’, marshalling as evidence such statements as al-Ghazālī’s valorization of *al-‘ulūm al-shar‘īyah* (the religious sciences) as “those which have been acquired from the prophets and are not arrived at either by reason, like arithmetic, or by experimentation, like medicine, or by hearing, like language.”¹⁴¹ However, Paul Heck has argued in an important article that, at least in the Classical period, classifications of the sciences were based more on a division between those native or foreign to the Arabic language than on the basis of their use of rational methods.¹⁴² Gutas, focusing on philosophy, points out that polemics such as those adduced by Goldziher often represented minority (particularly Ḥanbalī) views that were penned in settings, such as

¹³⁷ Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998), 108 ff. Cf. Abdelhamid Sabra, “The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement,” *History of Science* 25, no. 3 (1987): 235.

¹³⁸ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 115–166.

¹³⁹ For example Ibn Waḥshīyah’s *al-Filāḥah al-Nabaṭīyah* which, though not of ancient origin as thought by 19th-c. orientalisks, almost represent a translation of a pre-Islamic source. Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Ibn Waḥshīyah, *Al-Filāḥah Al-Nabaṭīyah*, ed. Toufic Fahd (Dimashq: al-Ma‘had al-‘ilmī al-Faransī lil-Dirāsāt al-‘Arabīyah, 1993).

¹⁴⁰ Ignaz Goldziher, “The Attitude of Orthodox Islam toward the Ancient Sciences,” in *Studies on Islam*, trans. Merlin Swartz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 185–215.

¹⁴¹ See Osman Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1999), 205.

¹⁴² Paul Heck, “The Hierarchy of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization,” *Arabica* 49, no. 1 (2002): 27–54.

that of Būyid rule, in which “the study and cultivation of the ancient sciences were, by universal acknowledgement, pursued by the overwhelming majority of all intellectuals and dominated cultural life in most of its manifestations.”¹⁴³ Gutas also notes that other of Goldziher’s examples were drawn from early Mamlūk-era thinkers who wrote in the shadow of such foreign threats as the Crusaders and Mongols, such that they and their audiences were drawn to “a less tolerant version of Islam” than that embraced in more peaceful times.¹⁴⁴ Abdelhamid Sabra famously argued that, rather than being marginalized, the ‘ancient sciences’ were assimilated as they were instrumentalized in the service of religion. Thus he asserted, “what we see in the history of Islamic science is a process of assimilation ending in a complete naturalization of imported sciences in Muslim soil,” a *telos* embodied in such Mamlūk-era ‘jurist-scientists’ as the Cairene physician Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 687/1288) and the Damascene astronomer Ibn al-Shāṭir (d. 777/1375).¹⁴⁵ This narrative of assimilation does not much account for the occult sciences, however, which some prominent scholars of the same period thoroughly denounced, such Ibn Khaldūn in his lengthy fomentations against alchemy and astrology.¹⁴⁶ Such polemics can perhaps also be taken as evidence of the popularity of such practices rather than of their having been marginal.

As for the occult sciences and esotericism, there is no necessary connection between the two, though some texts can be said to have been both occult scientific and esotericist. This is to say that, on the one hand, certain medieval works on the occult sciences were clearly produced for courtly settings and make no effort to obfuscate their teachings. On the other hand, some occult-scientific discourses, particularly alchemy, were taken up with particular enthusiasm in esotericist communities, with surviving texts bearing the hallmarks of esotericist knowledge transmission practices. As I discuss in

¹⁴³ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 169.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁴⁵ Sabra, “The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam,” 236–242.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. his chapters on astrology and alchemy in the *Muqaddimah*. Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 227–280.

chapters two and three, this was particularly the case with the alchemical writings of the Corpus Jābirianum, which claim to have been produced at the ‘court’ of the Shī‘ite *Imām* Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. Another great classical-era work dealing extensively with the occult sciences, *Rasā‘il Ikhwān al-ṣafā’*, seems also to have been produced by Shī‘ite activists, probably Ismā‘īlites of some variety (see chapter three). Pierre Lory has asserted a deep historical relationship between the occult sciences and Sufism as well, though one that depends on the historical exchanges of ideas between Shī‘ism and Sufism that largely are lost to time. He proposes a circuit by which Shī‘ite notions that the *Imāms* were possessed of secret books containing esoteric knowledge—including knowledge of divination, magic, and alchemy—were transferred onto Sunnite Sufi saints. This, according to Lory, was an important element in the bifurcation of ascetic and mystical Sufism, and is what is reflected in the accusations of sorcery against al-Ḥallāj.¹⁴⁷ Further, according to Lory a reciprocal process occurred in which professional occult practitioners availed themselves of the prestige of Sufism.¹⁴⁸ One cluster of evidence he cites to this effect is the numerous alchemical texts attributed to the likes of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī, Junayd, *et cetera*.¹⁴⁹

The science of letters is perhaps the prime example of a discourse that was at once occult-scientific and esoteric. As discussed throughout this study, al-Būnī presents the science of letters as a secret—even *the* secret—at the very heart of Sufism, a ‘science of the saints’ that had been kept back from non-initiates and was to remain exclusive. As we will see, Mamlūk-era authors had a tendency to push back against this notion, giving rise to a tension that is one of the important forces that shaped the reception of the Būnian corpus in that period.

¹⁴⁷ P. Lory, “Soufisme et sciences occultes,” in *Les voies d’Allah: les ordres mystiques dans l’islam des origines à aujourd’hui*, ed. A. Popovic & G. Veinstein (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 186-89.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 190

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 191 Cf. Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*, 195-96.

1.6 Al-Būnī's life and the career of his corpus

The man Aḥmad al-Būnī mostly remains a cipher. He was, almost without fail, silent in his major works about the events of his own life, such that the vast majority of his embodied passage through the world can be sketched only in the broadest strokes. This is a tendency toward self-effacement that stands in contrast with the sometimes-flamboyant autobiographical efforts of his contemporary Ibn al-ʿArabī, or those of the most influential Sufi author of the previous period, al-Ghazālī. My 2012 article was the first to draw attention to the fact that one of the few data he provides is a mention in his *ʿAlam al-hudá* of having studied with the great *shaykh* of Tunis ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Mahdawī (d. 621/1224). However, as discussed at the end of chapter three, his comments about al-Mahdawī elucidate no details about al-Būnī's own life beyond the fact of their relationship. Other than this, he reveals only having been in Mecca in early 621/1224¹⁵⁰ and in Cairo by the end of that year.¹⁵¹ As discussed in detail in chapter two, some paratexts from medieval manuscripts give us a rare glimpse of al-Būnī's activities in Cairo, including his auditioning of two of his works at the Qarāfah cemetery.

As for outside sources, one might expect an author as alternately praised and reviled as al-Būnī to have been a fixture of the ever expanding body of late-medieval biographical dictionaries and Sufi *ṭabaqāt* works, genres that could be sites for constructing the memories as much of 'bad' actors as of 'good' ones.¹⁵² However, surviving biographical works from the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries are silent about al-Būnī, a trend that extends even to such works as the biographical *Risālah* of the seventh/thirteenth-century Egyptian Sufi Ṣafī al-Dīn b. Abī al-Manṣūr Ibn

¹⁵⁰ BnF MS arabe 2658 (*LI*), fol. 54^b, lns. 11-13.

¹⁵¹ See chapter two regarding the authorial colophon for *ʿAlam al-hudá*.

¹⁵² See, for example, Knysh's survey of biographical entries for Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī; *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 25-48.

Zāfir (d. after 657/1259),¹⁵³ the best surviving guide to the society of Western Sufis and their disciples in late-sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth-century Egypt, and the *Manāqib* of Abū Saʿīd al-Bājī (d. 628 or 629/1230 or 1231), a close associate of both al-Mahdawī and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī.¹⁵⁴ The two earliest accounts of al-Būnī by later authors of which I am aware are both from the ninth/fifteenth century, and are of quite distinct kinds. The first comes from a copy of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī’s major lettrist treatise *Shams al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq* and appears in the form of an *isnād* that purports to list the line of teachers through which al-Būnī garnered his knowledge of the science of letters. The second is a *tarjamah* for al-Būnī in al-Maqrīzī’s *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, a work composed in the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century. Both are highly unreliable—al-Maqrīzī’s all but entirely so—though both repay close inspection with insights into Mamlūk-era attempts to decipher the origins of al-Būnī’s thought. These texts are discussed in detail at the end of chapter three as part of an inquiry into al-Būnī’s intellectual lineage, and then again in chapter four. In what follows I draw on them only occasionally in giving a summary of the little that can be known of al-Būnī’s life.

1.6.1 *The man from Būnah*

The vast majority of medieval manuscripts of al-Būnī’s works give his full name as Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī. The *nisbah* ‘al-Būnī’ indicates that he was from the port-city of Būnah on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa: Roman Hippo Regius, of which Saint Augustine was bishop in the early fifth century C.E., now the Algerian city of ‘Annābah. Despite this, some recent scholarship has referred to al-Būnī simply as an Egyptian.¹⁵⁵ Given claims of his burial in

¹⁵³ Ṣafī al-Dīn Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr, *La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Zāfir: biographies des maîtres spirituels connus par un cheikh égyptien du VIIe/XIIIe siècle*, ed. Denis Gril, Textes arabes et études islamiques, t. 25 (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire, 1986), 6.

¹⁵⁴ On al-Bājī and al-Mahdawī see Elmore, “Shaykh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Al-Mahdawī,” 605–606. On al-Bājī and al-Shādhilī see Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (London: Hurst, 2007), 104. The *Manāqib* was penned by his disciple Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Hawārī; *Manāqib Abī Saʿīd Al-Bājī*, T. 628/1230, ed. Aḥmad al-Bukhārī Shitwī (Tūnis: Aḥamad al-Bukhārī al-Shitwī, 2004).

¹⁵⁵ E.g. the title of Witkam’s article, “Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and his Work.”

Cairo¹⁵⁶ and other evidence of his time there, it would not be unreasonable to wonder if he was born and raised in Egypt, retaining the locative ‘al-Būnī’ merely as a marker of some progenitor’s life in the West. Other factors, however, strongly support his Ifrīqiyān origin, including especially his relationship with al-Mahdawī, and, as discussed throughout this study, the distinctly Western pedigree of his ideas. It is worth noting as well that Mamlūk-era writers showed little doubt as to his region of origin: Ibn Taymīyah, for example, calls him “al-Būnī *al-maghribī* [the westerner],”¹⁵⁷ and al-Maqrīzī states that al-Būnī “was born in the city of Būnah, which is known as *balad al-‘unnāb* [the land of jujubes], a province of Ifrīqiyah.”¹⁵⁸

Al-Būnī’s date of birth is, with the evidence presently available, impossible to determine. Al-Maqrīzī places it at “no earlier than” (*fī ḥudūd*) 520/1126-7, a date he (or his informant) may have arrived at by counting back from the incorrect 602/1205-6 death-date given for al-Būnī in the *tarjamah*. The paratexts discussed in chapter two show that, contrary to al-Maqrīzī, al-Būnī lived at least as late as 622/1225, which is also the *obiit* given for him by Katip Çelebi (Ḥajjī Khalīfah) that modern researchers have commonly repeated. It should be noted, however, that Çelebi also gives the date as 630/1232-3 at one place in *Kashf al-ẓunūn*. If one accepts either date, then, using the same method as al-Maqrīzī, one could surmise that al-Būnī likely was born around the middle of the sixth/twelfth century; however, given his discipleship to al-Mahdawī, who probably was born around 550/1155-56 and lived until 621/1224, it is likely better to assume al-Būnī was younger than his master, perhaps born around 560/1165, like another famous student of al-Mahdawī’s: Ibn al-‘Arabī. If this is the case then al-Būnī died somewhat, though not shockingly, young.

¹⁵⁶ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-Zayyāt, *Kitāb Kawākib al-sayyārah fī tartīb al-ziyārah* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Azharīyah li-al-Turāth, 2005), 268.

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmu‘ fatāwá shaykh al-Islam Aḥmad b. Taymīyah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥman b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (n.l.: Maṭba‘ah al-Mukhtar al-Islāmī, 1979), 10/251.

¹⁵⁸ Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ya‘lāwī, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2006), 462.

In many manuscripts the name of al-Būnī's father is elaborated as Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī, and is sometimes accompanied by titles indicative of an elevated social and/or spiritual rank, such as *al-imām*, *al-shaykh* and *al-ṣāliḥ*, and often also by the professional descriptor *al-muqrī* (the Qu'rān reciter). These honorifics, along with the level of education evinced by al-Būnī *filis'* facility with literary Arabic, suggest that the family was of a moderately high social status and income. Given their status, it is likely that the family lived in Būnah al-Ḥadīthah (New Būnah), the fortified neighborhood that overlooked the city's port, and that was home to the congregational mosque built in 425/1053 that at some later point was named for the local saint Sīdī Bū Marwān (d. 505/1111).¹⁵⁹ Though not the largest of the Ifrīqiyan port-cities, Būnah was a center of maritime trade as well as of piracy.¹⁶⁰ The wealth generated through these enterprises inevitably would have subsidized a local community of Muslim scholars and other religious professionals, to the ranks of which al-Būnī's Qu'rān-reciter father likely belonged. Al-Būnī no doubt received at least a basic education in the religious sciences, including Mālikī *fiqh*, the overwhelmingly predominant school of law in the region.

Like many of the cities of the littoral, Būnah was home to a range of confessional communities, including long-established Jewish and native Christian populations,¹⁶¹ though the Almohads' extraordinarily harsh policy of forced conversion/expulsion of *dhimmīs* within their realms probably impacted this state of affairs during al-Būnī's youth. As a point of maritime transit, the city was regularly visited by a variety of non-local actors. The Andalusian historian Abū 'Ubayd 'Abd Allāh al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094) wrote that the city's port was favored over others in the area by Muslim merchants from al-Andalus,¹⁶² with many ships no doubt originating from the busy docks of Almería (al-Marīyah, a

¹⁵⁹ Marçais, *EI2*, s.v. Al-'Annāba.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ On Būnah's small Jewish community, which may have been continuous with that of Augustine's time, see Cutler, *EJIW*, s.v. Annaba (Bône). As for the Christian community, Pope Gregory VII appointed a bishop for Būnah as late as 1076.

¹⁶² Saïd Dahmani, "Le Port de Būna Au Moyen Âge," in *Histoire et Archéologie de l'Afrique Du Nord: Spectacles, Vie Portuaire, Religions. Actes Du Ve Colloque International Réuni Dans Le Cadre Du 115e Congrès National Des Sociétés Savantes*

city of particular interest in the history of Western-Islamicate Sufism, as discussed in chapter three), and some number of that Andalusian city's wealthier citizens may have relocated to Būnah when Alfonso VII of Castile captured and decimated it in 541-2/1147.¹⁶³ Ships hailing from Alexandria and ports further east also would have docked occasionally at Būnah, as would have numerous vessels from Northern Mediterranean trading cities. Many of the transregional merchant vessels that docked at Būnah—perhaps even the majority—would have sailed under the flags of Christian principalities, primarily the Italian trading cities, even during Almohad rule.¹⁶⁴ Ifrīqiyan Muslims often utilized such ships for traveling and trading along the southern Mediterranean coast, as, for example, Ibn Jubayr did in 578-9/1183 when he boarded a Genoese ship bound from Ceuta (Sabtah) to Alexandria.¹⁶⁵ Al-Būnī may well have done the same in his travels along the coast, particularly between Ifrīqiyah and Egypt. When he emigrated to Egypt is unclear, though it seems unlikely that it was prior to the installation of the Ayyūbid regime, and may not have been until well into the seventh/thirteenth century. Upon his arrival in Egypt he presumably integrated himself with the community of Westerners, perhaps first in Alexandria and then later in Cairo. This sort of reasoned speculation aside, all that definitively can be said of al-Būnī's life was that he at some point studied with al-Mahdawī, that he was in Mecca in early 621/1224, and that in 621/1224 and 622/1225 he was in Cairo.

(Avignon, 9-13 Avril 1990) (Paris: Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 1992), 374.

¹⁶³ Bosch-Vilá, *EI2*, s.v. al-Mariyya.

¹⁶⁴ Despite raising intolerance to the level of policy with regard to Maghribī Jews and Christians, the Almohads reestablished commercial relations with Christian trading cities almost immediately after driving out the Norman forces that had occupied many of the cities of the littoral in the years before their arrival. This is evidenced by treaties signed from 1160 to 1186 that allowed merchants from Genoa, Pisa, and Sicily to operate in Būnah, and further by the fact that, in treaties signed between various Christian Mediterranean cities and Ḥafṣid rulers in the 1230s C.E., Bijāyah, Būnah, Tunis, al-Mahdīyah, and other cities of the littoral were classified as *in locis consvetis* ('accustomed to trading'), suggesting they had been regular ports of call for Christian ships in the preceding decades. See: Dahmani, "Le Port de Būna Au Moyen Âge," 375; Ronald Messier, "The Christian Community of Tunis at the Time of St. Louis' Crusade, A.D. 1270," in *The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange Between East and West During the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir Goss (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1986), 243; Dominique Valérien, "Ifrīqiyan Muslim Merchants in the Mediterranean at the End of the Middle Ages," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 14 (1999): 47–66.

¹⁶⁵ Valérien, "Ifrīqiyan Muslim Merchants," 49.

1.6.2 A synopsis of the career of the Būnian corpus through the Mamlūk period

Of course, al-Būnī's life is but an actor in the story of the career of the Būnian corpus that this study explores; it is the corpus itself and the communities of readers standing behind it that are the main subjects of this dissertation. As such, I shall end this chapter with a brief synopsis of the story of the corpus' career through the Mamlūk period. It is not a précis of the dissertation as a whole, but rather an overview of the historical narrative that is developed—not entirely chronologically—over the next three chapters. It hopefully will help guide the reader through the thicket.

Al-Būnī was born and raised in Ifrīqiyah. He was an initiate into a tradition of Sufism largely unique to the Islamicate West, one that clashed periodically with the political authorities and was permeated with Neoplatonism. Prominent in it was a cosmologically-oriented discourse on letters of the Arabic alphabet and the divine names, elements of which were rooted in early 'extremist' Shī'ite and Ismā'īlite thought. Wrapped in esotericist elitism and secrecy, it comprised a 'theosophical' discourse on the workings of the invisible worlds and the invisible college of the saints, and an operative praxis that included certain talismanic and visionary techniques. He came east as part of a wave of Western (i.e. North African and Andalusian) Sufis who emigrated to Egypt and the Levant during the Ayyūbid and early Mamlūk periods, a group that, over the course of roughly two generations, also included the famous Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarālī, Ibn Hūd, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, Ibn Sab'īn, and numerous others. The teachings of these Westerners were largely alien to their new environs, and were assimilated only slowly, and not without conflict, in a process that extended well beyond al-Būnī's lifetime. Because of this, some Western Sufis, including al-Būnī, were cautious in the circulation of their written teachings, restricting them to relatively closed groups of disciples/readers. Al-Būnī's works continued to circulate primarily within such groups (esotericist reading communities) for roughly a century after his death. Only a small handful of manuscript copies of al-Būnī's work survive from this period.

In the first few decades after al-Būnī's death, many of the participants in these esotericist readings communities were other Sufis of Western origin, though others were Egyptian natives who had come to follow Western *shaykhs*, including some early disciples or disciples-of-disciples of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. From early-on they read al-Būnī's works alongside those of other Western masters, sometimes actively synthesizing their teachings. Toward the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century, as Cairo was becoming the new cultural-intellectual capital of the Sunnite world in the wake of the Mongol sack of Baghdad, other non-natives visiting or emigrating to Cairo and particularly from Anatolia were drawn to these reading communities. This stemmed in part from the fact that al-Būnī's texts and ideas, with their emphasis on the attainability of a highly advanced spiritual states and occult powers, provided a framework for the cultivation of alternative modes of socioreligious authority, such that they particularly appealed to those from outside established Cairene Sufi and social hierarchies.

By the early eighth/fourteenth century al-Būnī's works had begun to escape the confines of those esotericist reading communities and were coming to be somewhat more widely known, resulting in both praise and condemnation. As Cairo and other Mamlūk cities continued to grow and attract foreigners, a trend toward encyclopædism and commentarial writing came to the fore as bureaucrats, scholars, and other intellectuals strove to assimilate and discipline the wide variety of discourses and expressions of piety with which newcomers were arriving. Al-Būnī's works are mentioned in a handful of important encyclopædic works of the eighth/fourteenth century, suggesting that they continued to gain in popularity among educated secondary elites. By the end of the century the corpus has truly begun to effloresce, and pseudepigraphic Būnian works aimed at courtly audiences had come into circulation. As al-Būnī's works continued to grow in popularity among elites so did resistance to them, and some scholars, most famously Ibn Khaldūn, penned attacks against his ideas and followers. A physician and alchemist, perhaps from Persia, by the name of Sayyid al-Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī was brought to Cairo by the sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq. Al-Akhlāṭī received students, including many non-Egyptians

from Persia and the Ottoman territories at his home on the bank of the Nile, and almost certainly taught lettrism with frequent reference to al-Būnī's works.

By the ninth/fifteenth century the mood in the Mamlūk territories had taken on an apocalyptic edge due to the combination of the rising threat of the Ottomans and the Black Death repeatedly ravaging the cities. Būnian works continued to grow in popularity, with some being copied in lavish volumes for military-elite households. On the basis of the writings of the Antiochene intellectual 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī there appears to have been a bustling lettrist scene in and between Cairo and Damascus. Al-Biṣṭāmī and some of al-Akhlāṭī's students transformed lettrism from an esotericist Western Sufi discourse into a 'post-esotericist' occult philosophy, a queen science for the coming millennial age. With their work the continued popularity of Būnian texts into the Ottoman period was guaranteed, though much about al-Būnī's teachings already had been altered and intermingled with the ideas of others.

Chapter Two

The heart trusts in writing:

Esotericist reading communities and the early transmission of al-Būnī's works

I have seen the sage and wise and pious who wagged their tongues and stretched out their hands to write of great and awesome things in their books and letters. But what is written abides in no cabinet, for often it may be lost or its owner may die, and the books thus come into the hands of fools and mockers, and consequently the Name of Heaven is desecrated.

- Isaac the Blind¹⁶⁶

The heart trusts in writing.

- Ja'far al-Şādiq¹⁶⁷

2.0 Introduction: The ethics of esotericist knowledge transmission

Bound into the compilatory codex Süleymaniye MS Şehit Ali Pasha 2813 is a short treatise by the famous Andalusian Sufi Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) on certain aspects of the science of letters and names, entitled *Kitāb al-mīm wa-al-wāw wa-al-nūn*.¹⁶⁸ Copied in 621/1224 by Ibn al-‘Arabī's

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 71.

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 348.

¹⁶⁸ Süleymaniye MS Şehit Ali Pasha 2813, fol. 18a-23b. The work is no. 462 in Osman Yahia's 1964 analytical inventory of MSS of Ibn al-‘Arabī's works, *Histoire et classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Damascus: Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 1964), 382 ff. He lists other manuscript copies of the work as well. The treatise has been published twice. The first printing is a Hyderabad edition of 1948. The second, edited and somewhat freely translated into French by the Traditionalist (in the Perennialist sense) author and translator Charles-André Gilis, appears under the title *Le livre du mīm, du wāw, et du nūn* (Beirut: Les Éditions Albouraq, 2002). The latter edition has been used here, though all translations from the Arabic are my own. Regarding the audition statement in Şehit Ali Pasha 2813, see the discussion later in this chapter, p. 10 of Gilis' edition, and Yahia's notes.

close disciple Ayyūb b. Badr b. Maṣūir al-Muqri',¹⁶⁹ it bears on its opening leaf a *samā'* (audition certificate), signed by *al-shaykh al-akbar*¹⁷⁰ at his home in his adopted city of Damascus, indicating his approval of the work's transmission to those in attendance at the reading of the text (see Figure 1). Most of the work is taken up with discussions of the cosmological and prophetological implications of *mīm*, *wāw*, and *nūn*, the three letters of the Arabic alphabet that, when spelled out, have identical first and last letters, and thus, as the shaykh would have it, have neither end nor beginning.¹⁷¹ It is an excursus from the treatise's central subjects, however, that most loudly hails our attention with regard to the topics of this study, and that helps seed the questions driving this chapter. In this brief digression Ibn al-'Arabī argues as to why the elect community of Sufis learned in the science of letters should refrain from writing about methods of instrumentalizing the *khawāṣṣ* ('occult properties') of the letters for the achievement of material and spiritual goals. In other words, he counsels strongly against writing books about those operative aspects of the science that some (though by no means all) medieval actors would condemn as *sihr* (sorcery)—and that many modern scholars might categorize as 'magic'—and precisely the sort of books for which his contemporary Aḥmad al-Būnī became best known in the centuries after their deaths.

The great *shaykh's* arguments against writing books of this sort are primarily of an ethical nature rather than a moral one. At least in this text, he in no way impugns the fundamental permissibility of operative lettrism in relation to God's law,¹⁷² but rather focuses on the

¹⁶⁹ On whom see Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Peter. Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 265 & 268.

¹⁷⁰ This epithet means 'the greatest *shaykh*', and was (and is) so commonly applied to Ibn al-'Arabī to have become synonymous with his name, to the extent that Western scholars will write of 'Akbarian' traits in later thought to denote his influence—presumably to avoid resorting to such grotesqueries as 'Ibn 'Arabian' or 'Ibn 'Arabesque'.

¹⁷¹ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Le Livre du mim, du waw, et du nun*, trans. Charles-Andre Gilis (Beirut: Editions Albouraq, 2002), 38.

الذي آخرها أولها فلا أول ولا آخر

¹⁷² Though Ibn al-'Arabī frequently refers to lettrism as '*ilm al-awliyā'* ('science of the saints'), his views on the propriety of its operative application are complex. In *al-Futūḥāt* he criticizes Ibn Barraḡān for using astrology to predict the capture of Jerusalem when the letters could have been used for the same purpose, but then says that

misunderstandings and dangers that would result if such knowledge were made available to a wide audience. Of the three arguments he puts forward, the first two relate to negative reactions to which the hypothetical author will be exposed due to the ignorance of the reading public: first, that exposition of these topics leads, “most of the time” (*fī akthar al-awqāt*), to suspicion regarding the author’s religiosity (*tuhmah fī dīnihi*) by those who misunderstand the principles of the science; second, that it leads to denials of his truthfulness (*takdhībihi*) by those ignorant of the intricacies of letterist practice.¹⁷³

As for suspicion regarding the author’s religiosity, he says that, though truly a Sufi initiate (a member of the *ahl al-kashf wa-al-wujūd*), the adept-author will be lumped together by the vulgar with the sorcerers and heretics (*fa-yulḥaqu bi-ahl al-siḥr wa-al-zandaqah*). He may even be accused of being an unbeliever for speaking of secrets that God has concealed within the created things (*wa-rubbamā kuffira wa-huwa yatakallamu ‘alā al-asrār allati awda‘ahā al-Ḥaqq fī mawjūdātihi*), as the people (*al-nās*) will assume that the author intends the use of these secrets for sorcerous acts (*al-afāl*). On this account they will declare him an unbeliever (*yukaffirūnahu*), though they err before God in doing so, as their reasoning fails to inquire into or comprehend the initiated understanding of these matters possessed by Ibn al-‘Arabī and his peers (*ḥaqqinā*, “our truth”).¹⁷⁴ As for accusations of dishonesty, these will result from the

both techniques are merely means of expressing knowledge revealed by God through *kashf*. Elsewhere in that work, Ibn al-‘Arabī claims that he could have produced great wonders through the operative science had he not taken an oath never to use it. Generally speaking then, he discourages readers from pursuing knowledge of the topic, while refusing to indict it as improper in itself. See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkīyah* (Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), I, 160 and 190; Michel Chodkiewicz, “Introduction: Toward Reading the *Futūḥāt Makkīyah*,” in *The Meccan Revelations*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, vol. 2 (New York: Pir Press, 2004), 24–25; Denis Gril, “The Science of Letters,” in *The Meccan Revelations*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, vol. 2 (New York: Pir Press, 2004), 123–124.

¹⁷³ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Le Livre du mim, du waw, et du nun*, 56.

ومن مراتب أسرار الحروف أيضاً أن يكون آخر الحرف كأوله في بعض الألسنة كالميم والواو والنون في اللسان العربي وهو من مراتب التلغظ بإساءة الحروف لا من مراتب الرقوم فكلما منا على أسرار كطريقة ابن مسرة الجبلي وغيره لا على خواصه فان الكلام على خواص الأشياء يؤدي إلى تهمة صاحبه وإلى تكذيبه في أكثر الأوقات

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

أما تهمة في دينه أن يكون من أهل الكشف والوجود فيلحق بأهل السحر والزندقة وربما كفر وهو يتكلم على الأسرار التي أودعها الحق في موجوداته وجعلها أمناً عليها والناس ينسبونه إلى أن يقول بنسبة الأفعال إليها فيكفرونه بذلك فيأثون عند الله حيث لم يوفوا من النظر في حقنا ما يجب عليهم ولا غصوا عن ذلك فهذا وجه تكفيرهم

fact that, in order to perform a given lettrist operation effectively, the operator must have detailed knowledge of the proper ways of combining letters (*ṣuwar al-tarkīb*), as well as of the timing (*awqāt*), special scripts (*aqlām*),¹⁷⁵ and other elements requisite to such procedures. Inevitably, therefore, some unworthy individual who has failed to duly attend to these intricacies, and thus failed to achieve the desired result, will attempt to vindicate himself at the author's expense by saying: "Someone [scil. the author] lied, for I did what he said and obtained no effect thereby."¹⁷⁶ The potential consequences of charges of either type in the late-medieval period should not be underestimated, as they could have entailed a loss of public reputation with attendant social and economic repercussions, or, in the case of accusations of sorcery, trial and execution. For figures such as Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Būnī, emigrants to locales where, at least upon arrival, they were mostly unknown, and where their Sufi masters' names might carry little weight, such charges could be particularly dangerous.

In his third line of argumentation, Ibn al-'Arabī shifts his attention away from the faults of ignorant readers and toward the responsibilities of the adept-author, whom he charges with preventing knowledge of the operative science from falling into the wrong hands, as its power would be liable to abuse if made available to the vulgar masses (*al-'āmm*). Only here does Ibn al-'Arabī take recourse to a language of religious (im)permissibility, declaring that silence is best, as it is forbidden (*ḥarām*) for adepts to discuss the 'operative spiritual sciences' (*al-'ulūm al-'amalīyah al-rūḥānīyah*) in ways comprehensible to both the elite (i.e. the Sufi adepts) and the vulgar, lest the immoral among the latter utilize them to ill ends. Having earlier asserted that his exposition (*kalāmunā*) deals only with certain non-operative aspects of the science, and that it therefore is in keeping with the precedent set by the early fourth/tenth-century Cordovan thinker Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī and other, unnamed lettrist

¹⁷⁵ *Aqlām* here is almost certainly a reference to cryptographic scripts, such as the *qalam marmūz bi-hi* Ibn 'Arabī himself offers in his *Kitāb 'Anqā' Mughrib*; see Gerald Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn Al-'Arabī's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 574–579.

¹⁷⁶ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Le Livre du mim, du waw, et du nun*, 56.

وأما وجه تكذيبهم فإن المجرمين [المجرمين؟] لهذه الأشياء ينبغي أن يكونوا عارفين بصور التركيب وأوقاته وأفلامه وغير ذلك فحتى نقصهم من ذلك دقيقة بطل عملهم العمل المتصود للعامل فلا يقول انه أخطأ في التركيب أو لم يحسن وإنما يزكي نفسه ويقول إن فلاناً كذب فاني جريت ما قال وما وجدت له أثراً

authorities (*ka-ṭarīqat Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī wa-ghayrihi*),¹⁷⁷ he closes by defending his own extensive writings on the science of letters as falling within these restrictions. He asserts: “The limit at which we stop ourselves in our own books is to address only our fellow adepts [*aṣḥābunā*], in such a way that no-one but them can understand that to which we allude, and so that no-one who is not among them can attain to it.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, written discussions even of theoretical aspects of the science of letters were to be so coded and allusive as to be incomprehensible to non-initiates, while knowledge of its operative details was to be kept out of books altogether. As should be clear from the discussion of Islamic esotericism in the previous chapter, the three arguments together are a classic expression of an esotericist ethics of knowledge transmission: an assertion that access to a certain body of arcane knowledge is appropriate to, and must be restricted to, a class of spiritual elites, both for the protection of the adepts from an ignorant public and for the protection of that public from its own spiritual, intellectual, and moral shortcomings.

Though there is no indication that the two ever met or read one another, the careers and ideas of the Andalusian Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Ifrīqiyan al-Būnī intersected at various points. Both were at some point disciples of an important Sufi *shaykh* in Tunis, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawī (d. 621/1224), as is further discussed in the following chapter. And perhaps as a result of their shared relationship to al-Mahdawī, both wrote extensively on the science of letters and names, drawing on a repertoire of cosmological and theosophical ideas that, in the period in which they lived, were largely specific to the rather isolated Sufism of the Islamicate West. Al-Būnī’s writings on lettrism were far more instructive than Ibn al-‘Arabī’s with regard to operative aspects of the science, and likely would have drawn the opprobrium of his Andalusian contemporary.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. For the text see fn 173 *supra*.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 58.

فالسكوت عن العلوم العملية الروحانية بأهل طريقنا أولى من كل وجه بل هو حرام عليهم بسطها بحيث يدركها الخاص والعام فيستعين بها المفسد فساده وغايته أن وضعنا نحن منها في كنبنا أيما لأصحابنا حيث وثقنا انه لا يعرف ما أشرنا إليه في ذلك سواهم فال يصل إليها من ليس منهم

The apparently radical disjuncture between Ibn al-‘Arabī’s proscription of disseminating knowledge of operative lettrist practices in books and al-Būnī’s writings thereon raises some questions that have great bearing on the reception of al-Būnī’s works. Is it correct that, as Denis Gril has put it, al-Būnī “was undoubtedly acting deliberately when he published” elements of the science of letters that “others either had kept under greater cover or had limited to oral transmission?”¹⁷⁹ And did al-Būnī fail to share Ibn al-‘Arabī’s concerns regarding the potential consequences, personal and societal, of disseminating knowledge of operative lettrism to non-initiates? I explore these questions at length throughout this chapter, arguing that, though al-Būnī’s strategies for protecting lettrist secrets differed from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s, he in fact shared the latter’s esotericist ethical sentiments, and never intended for his works to be freely and widely disseminated. Based on a range of textual and paratextual evidence, I endeavor to show that al-Būnī indeed meant his works to be restricted to a community of Sufi elites, beginning with his personal disciples in Egypt, and that this in fact was typical of how they circulated during his life and in the ‘long’ century after his death; this is to say from around the time of al-Būnī’s documented presence in Cairo in 621-622/1224-1225—probably shortly before his death—through roughly a decade beyond the first quarter of the eighth/fourteenth century. As discussed below, the last dated codex I include as belonging to this period is a non-extant copy of *‘Alam al-hudá* (described in a slightly later, extant codex) copied in 738/1337.

I regard this stretch of time as the ‘germinal’ period in the career of the Būnian corpus. It is a time from which only a handful of manuscripts of his texts have survived, and during which, so far as surviving literature of the period testifies, al-Būnī and his works attracted only minimal attention from admirers and critics.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, it might seem to have been a period in which al-Būnī’s name and writings were destined to be forgotten, were it not that the surviving corpus and other sources testify to a remarkable efflorescence of copies of his texts in the latter parts of the eighth/fourteenth-century

¹⁷⁹ Gril, “The Science of Letters,” 143.

¹⁸⁰ The only references to al-Būnī from the period that I am aware of are from the lexicologist Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311-12), the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328), and, right at the outer limit of the period, al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333). All of these are discussed in the chapter four.

and onwards (see Charts 1 and 2). The apparent rarity of copies of al-Būnī's works in this early period raises questions of why and how they survived to so engage the interests of readers living a century and more after his death. The answers, in my view, are closely linked to al-Būnī's esotericism and that of his early readers.

A central method I employ in examining the history of the corpus is to work from the texts, paratexts, and codical elements of the manuscripts of a given period in formulating an understanding of the 'reading communities' in which the manuscripts circulated. I argue throughout this chapter that the preservation and transmission of al-Būnī's works occurred through what can be characterized as 'esotericist' reading communities: small, somewhat effervescent groups of Sufis, primarily or entirely in Egypt, who studied and transmitted his works early-on. These groups who considered themselves members of a spiritual elite entrusted with a body of powerful knowledge that had the potential to be dangerously misunderstood and misused by less spiritually advanced actors, such that they practiced discretion in the circulation of his works, limiting it to those they considered fellow initiates.

2.0.1 Manuscript evidence relating to the germinal period

I am aware of only three surviving manuscript copies of al-Būnī's genuine works that can be dated—definitively or with a high degree of confidence—to the germinal period of the corpus:

- Berlin MS or. Fol. 80, *Latā'if al-ishārāt* (titlepage has *Ma'ānī asrār al-ḥurūf*). Copied 669/1270. Untrained hand, probably Egyptian. Rather crudely rendered diagrams and talismans, very occasional corrections.
- Chester Beatty MS 3168.5, *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*. Dated 2 Jumādā al-thānī 686/July 1287. In a volume with six works by other authors, all copied in the same hand. Trained hand, probably Egyptian. Vocalized text, corrected.
- Süleymaniye MS Carullah 986.1, *Hidāyāt al-qāsidīn* (titlepage has *Bidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*). Undated, probably 7th/13th century. In a volume with thirty-four

treatises by Ibn al-‘Arabī. Maghribī hand, but probably copied in Syria or Egypt by someone close to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s followers.

In addition, it is possible to speak of another four or five known but non-extant copies of al-Būnī’s works that circulated during the germinal period; this is to say ones that, to the best of my knowledge, have not survived, but are mentioned in paratexts from somewhat later codices. The paratexts in which they are described are discussed within this chapter. These are:

- A possibly holograph¹⁸¹ copy of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* referred to in a copied audition certificate in BnF MS arabe 2658 (another copy of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*). Auditioned in Cairo in the presence of al-Būnī in the first third of Rabī al-awwal 622/mid-March 1225.
- Another alleged holograph copy of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*; this may have been the same manuscript as the one above, though numerous minor differences in the text suggest this may not have been the case. Referred to in a collation statement in Berlin MS or. Fol. 80, *supra*.
- An autograph copy of *‘Alam al-hudá* referred to in collation statements in Süleymaniye MSS Reşid efendi 590.1 and 590.2 (a two-part copy of *‘Alam al-hudá*). Auditioned in Cairo in the presence of al-Būnī in sessions ending 23 Rabī al-Awwal 622/early April 1225.
- Another copy of *‘Alam al-hudá* referred to in collation statements in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.1 and 590.2. Copied from the copy above in Alexandria in or before Şafar 738/August 1337.

¹⁸¹ I use ‘holograph’ here in the technical sense of a codex the main text of which was copied in the hand of the author. This is to be distinguished from the broader category of the ‘autograph,’ a codex that somewhere bears the author’s signature, notes in his hand, etc., but the main text of which was not necessarily copied by the author.

- Another copy of *‘Alam al-hudá*, this one referred to in a bibliographical paratext in Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (another 8th/14th-century copy of the work). Purchased or otherwise obtained by one Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād, perhaps as late as the turn of the 8th/14th century.

Finally, what is almost certainly the earliest extant copy of the pseudo-Būnian ‘courtly’ *Shams al-ma‘ārif* probably belongs to the lattermost part of this period. As discussed later, it probably signals the first stages of the movement of al-Būnī’s works into courtly circles, and thus is a harbinger of the transition out of the germinal period of the corpus and into that of its efflorescence. This is:

- BnF MS arabe 2647, the ‘courtly’ *Shams al-ma‘ārif*. Undated. Baron De Slane estimated it to be from the late 7th/13th century and Vajda apparently concurred¹⁸²; I would suggest that it likely is later, though more recent than the middle of the 8th/14th. Illuminated titlepage and colored chapter separators, trained hand, almost certainly Egyptian. Some corrections.

Certainly these codices were not the only copies of al-Būnī’s works in circulation during the germinal period; however, given the general absence of mentions of al-Būnī in contemporaneous sources, I would suggest that copies of his works indeed were quite rare.

2.0.2 Chapter overview

My examination of the early circulation of al-Būnī’s works and the reading communities in which they were read and transmitted includes five parts, as well as a conclusion. The first examines expressions of esotericist sentiments within al-Būnī’s texts, particularly *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* and *‘Alam al-*

¹⁸² William MacGuckin Slane, *Catalogue Des Manuscrits Arabes (Bibliothèque Nationale, France)* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1883), 478; George Vajda, “Notices des manuscrits arabe 2400 à 2759” (Bibliothèque nationale de France, n.d.), entry no. 2647.

hudá, with a focus on how his teachings intersect with the nexus of Qur’ānic hermeneutics, elitism, and secrecy which, as discussed in the previous chapter, characterized Islamic esotericism(s) up to al-Būnī’s time. Of primary interest is al-Būnī’s framing of the science of letters and names as the secret science at the heart of Sufism and in need of protection from the vulgar. In the second part I address the series of intertextual cross-references (what I call ‘intertexts’) that bind al-Būnī’s major works together. I argue that these represent his implementation of the esotericist writing strategy of *tabdīd al-‘ilm* (the ‘dispersion of knowledge’) and that this strategy, at least in the germinal period of the corpus, had important practical implications for the transmission and circulation of his works. In the third section I closely interrogate a number of paratexts that provide evidence of al-Būnī’s practices for composing and promulgating his texts, paying particular attention to his use of *samā’* (audition) as a means of limiting and controlling the transmission of his texts. In the fourth part I examine various pieces of paratextual and codical evidence—bibliographical paratexts, various statements regarding transmission, and the inclusion of Būnian works in *majmū’ahs* (compilatory codices)—for insights into the esotericist reading communities in which al-Būnī’s works were taught and circulated in the century or so after his death. In the fifth section I look at some phenomena that herald the transition from the germinal period to that of the efflorescence of the corpus.

2.1 Esotericism in al-Būnī’s works

My focus in this chapter is on the reading communities through which al-Būnī’s works moved early-on, and I begin here by addressing an element of the content of al-Būnī’s texts that I argue had particular bearing on their early circulation: his framing of the science of letters and names as a body of secret knowledge intended only for spiritual elites. In keeping with Dagenais’ attention to the ethics of medieval reading, I would posit that this framing amounted to an ethical injunction upon readers to limit access to his texts to elect Sufi initiates—an injunction that had particular force while al-Būnī lived and throughout the germinal period. This was due to certain continuities in the Ayyūbid and early Mamlūk milieux in which his texts initially circulated, a defining characteristic of which was an

ongoing and sometimes hostile encounter between Sufis and other religious authorities native to the cities of the central Arab-Islamic lands and Sufi immigrants from the Islamic West. The latter brought with them doctrines and practices peculiar to the West and thus largely alien to their adopted homelands, the science of letters and names having been among the most alien of these. Certainly this was the case with al-Būnī's teachings, and it is his efforts to present lettrism to his audience in Egypt as a holy secret that interests me here.

In examining this framing and ways it may have influenced the attitudes and practices of the communities of readers among which his works circulated early-on, I focus in what follows on al-Būnī's manipulation of the nexus of Qur'ānic hermeneutics, elitism, and secrecy that typifies prior Islamic esotericism(s). I first address certain of his statements on the role of lettrism in unveiling the mysteries of the Qur'ān and the elitism inherent to his ranking of different exegetical methods and those who practiced them. I then move to his depiction of lettrism as a discipline of prophetic origin that, for the ultimate good of the Muslim *ummah*, was kept back from the common majority of Muslims. The material I discuss is drawn primarily from *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* and *'Alam al-hudá*, two of his major works that, as discussed later in this chapter, were composed and auditioned in Cairo in 621/1224 and 622/1225.

2.1.1 Al-Būnī and the Qur'ān: hermeneutics and elitism

The Qur'ān is, of course, central to Islamic thought and practice, and all claims to Muslim religious authority have been in some way linked to the ability to extract meanings from God's book and thus guide human actions in accordance with God's commands. However, al-Būnī sought far more than to extract legal determinations and moral guidance from the text. In his works the Qur'ān and its constituent parts, particularly the names of God and the letters of the Arabic alphabet, are not just elements of God's speech *qua* semantic communication; rather, they are entities or forces constitutive of the very fabric of the created worlds. They are at once the instruments of God's will in a

continuously remade cosmos—conceptualized by al-Būnī along Neoplatonic lines—and the means by which, through various *riyāḍāt* (‘spiritual practices’), including operative lettrist techniques, an elect class of human actors could ascend the ladder of being toward the divine while serving as God’s agents on earth. Al-Būnī’s discourse on the Qur’ān is directed toward readers already familiar and sympathetic with the classical Shi’ite and Sufi notion of the text being possessed of *zāhir* and *bāṭin* meanings, but he differs from many earlier Sufi theorists in positioning the science of letters and names as the ultimate key to the holy text’s hidden meanings and powers. As discussed in later chapters, I would argue that this discourse was central to his own attempts to carve out a position of religious authority for himself in an Egypt that, in the final decades of Fāṭimid rule and under the administration of the Ayyūbids, had come to be dominated by networks of Shafi’ite and Ḥanbalite scholars moving in from points east, a goal shared by many of his germinal-period readers.

In the introduction (*ammā ba’d*) to *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, he declares that the purpose of the science of letters is to apprehend the ‘nobility’ or ‘sublimity’ (*sharaf*) of the Qur’ān, but with an understanding that encompasses even its most arcane aspects: hidden forces—at once linguistic and numerical—at work in the letters of the text. In this regard he cites two *ḥadīths* relating to Qur’ānic interpretation. In both of these the word *ḥarf* (generally ‘letter’, but see below) figures prominently, and the second is a variant of a *ḥadīth* that was a major touchstone in Sufi understandings of the *zāhir/bāṭin* dichotomy:

فأقول ليس المقصود من شرح شرف الحروف ولا من كشف أسرارها إلا ليعلم بذلك شرف كتاب الله عز وجل وما أودع في بحره من أنواع الجواهر الحكيميات واللطائف الإلهيات وكيف سر التضعيف العددي في الحروف كما قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم بكل حرف عشر حسنات وألف لام ميم ثلاثة أحرف وكما قال عليه السلام إن للقرآن ظهراً وبطناً ولكل حرف حدّ ومطلع

I say that there is no purpose in explicating the sublimity of the letters, or in unveiling their secrets except that one is brought thereby to know the sublimity of the Book of God (glorious and exalted be He) and what was concealed in the ocean of it from among the various gnostic essences and divine subtleties. And what of the secret of numerical multiplication with regard to the letters? It is as the Prophet of God [*scil.* Muḥammad] (God’s blessings and peace be upon him) said, There are ten merits for every letter [*ḥarf*], and *alif lām mīm* are three letters. And as he (peace be upon him) said,

Verily the Qur’ān has a back and a belly, and for every letter [*ḥarf*, see below] there is a limit and a lookout point.¹⁸³

The first of the two *ḥadīth*s evokes the mysterious *fawātiḥ al-suwar*, the nonverbal clusters of letters that appear at the heads of twenty-nine *sūrah*s of the Qur’ān.¹⁸⁴ These were an element of the Qur’ānic text that exegetes within the Jamā’ī Sunnite *tafsīr* tradition, recognizing certain limitations to their philological and traditionist approaches to understanding the Qur’ān, often deemed *mutashābih* (‘obscure’).¹⁸⁵ This was a category that some scholars ruled off-limits to interpretations, on the grounds that speculation on the *mutashābihāt* led to unwarranted speculation, unbelief, and dissension within the Muslim community,¹⁸⁶ though this hardly prevented Sufi exegetes from sometimes dwelling upon the *fawātiḥ al-suwar* in their writings.¹⁸⁷ Sufis in the medieval Islamicate West, from Ibn Masarraḥ to al-

¹⁸³ BnF MS arabe 2658 (L1), fol. 2^b, ln. 17-fol. 3^a, ln. 7.

¹⁸⁴ This appears to be one of many variants in a complex of *ḥadīth*s clustered around a *leitmotif* of “ten merits for every letter” (*bi-kull ḥarf ‘ashar ḥasanāt*), some of which addressed parts of the Qur’ān other than the *fawātiḥ al-suwar*, such as the *basmalah*, for example. Ones relating to the *alif-lām-mīm* of Q 2:1 sometimes were taken as proof-texts for the notion (widely accepted since well before al-Būnī’s time) that the *fawātiḥ al-suwar* are to be regarded and recited as groups of distinct letters each of which is to be said in full, rather than as phonemes combining to form words; thus, for example, the *a-l-m* to which this *ḥadīth* refers, is to be read as three separate letters/words: *alif, lām, mīm*, despite that the letters are connected orthographically. The *ḥadīth* seems to be a variant or paraphrase of one transmitted on the authority of the Companion Ibn Mas’ūd (d. 32/652-3), which has the prophet saying: “Read [recite] the book of God (may He be glorified and exalted), for verily there are ten merits for every *ḥarf*; however, I say not that *a-l-m* [i.e. *alif-lām-mīm*] is a *ḥarf* [which here logically must mean ‘word’ rather than ‘letter’] but rather that there are ten merits for *alif*, ten merits for *lām*, and ten merits for *mīm*.” Here is the full *ḥadīth*, with its chain of transmission, as it appears in ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mandah’s (d. 470/1077) *al-Radd ‘alā man yaqūlu “alif lām mīm” ḥarf li-yanfī al-alif wa-al-lām wa-al-mīm ‘an kalām Allāh ‘azza wa-jall* (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Āsimah, 1988), 46–47.

فَأَخْبَرَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ أَخْبَرَنَا الطَّبْرَانِيُّ حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ عَبْدِ الْعَزِيزِ حَدَّثَنَا عَفَّانُ بْنُ مُسْلِمٍ حَدَّثَنَا شَلَيْمَانُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الْعَزِيزِ عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ بْنِ مُسْلِمٍ الْهَجْرِيِّ عَنْ أَبِي الْأَخْوَصِ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ مَسْعُودٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَتَلُوا كِتَابَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فَإِنَّ لَكُمْ بِكُلِّ حَرْفٍ عَشْرَ حَسَنَاتٍ أَمَا إِنِّي لَا أَقُولُ الْم حَرْفٌ وَلَكِنْ بِالْأَلِفِ عَشْرُ حَسَنَاتٍ وَبِاللَّامِ عَشْرُ حَسَنَاتٍ وَبِالْمِيمِ عَشْرُ حَسَنَاتٍ

¹⁸⁵ Leah Kinberg, “*Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis,” *Arabica* 35, no. 2 (July 1, 1988): 155–156; Martin Nguyen, “Exegesis of the *ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa‘a*: Polyvalency in Sunnite Traditions of Qur’anic Interpretation,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2012): 7.

¹⁸⁶ Kinberg, “*Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt*,” 155–156.

¹⁸⁷ Nguyen, “Exegesis of the *ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa‘a*,” 12.

Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī, outstripped their eastern Sufi peers in this regard, often giving the *fawātiḥ* prominent places in their lettrist cosmologies.

The second *ḥadīth* is a variant or paraphrase of a report often transmitted on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd (though similar *logia* are attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib) that often served as a proof-text for the notion of there being *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* meanings in the Qur’ān. As Gerhard Böwering and Kristin Sands have discussed, in the influential Sufi Sahl al-Tustarī’s (d. 283/896) reading of this report the words *ẓahr* (‘back’) and *baṭn* (‘belly’) were made synonymous with their etymological affines, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, and the *ḥadd* (‘limit’) and *maṭla‘* (‘lookout point’) were understood to denote differing modes of comprehending and applying the Qur’ānic text: one juristic and proper to the general populace, the other ‘mystical’ and exclusive to the elect.¹⁸⁸ As al-Tustarī puts it:

Every verse of the Qu’rān has four kinds of meanings: an exoteric sense [*ẓāhir*], an esoteric sense [*bāṭin*], a limit [*ḥadd*], and a lookout point [*maṭla‘*]. The exoteric sense is the recitation, the esoteric sense is true understanding [*fahm*]. The limit is what [the verse] permits and prohibits. The lookout point is the elevated places of the heart [beholding] what was intended by it as understood from God Almighty. The knowledge of the exoteric sense is public knowledge (‘*ilm ‘āmm*). The understanding of its esoteric sense, and what was intended by it, is exclusive (*khāṣṣ*).¹⁸⁹

As Böwering discusses, al-Tustarī asserts that the ‘*ilm ‘āmm* (public knowledge) of the Qur’ān is that which is proper to the common people, while its inner levels of meaning are *khāṣṣ* (exclusive), which is to say appropriate only to the *khuṣūṣ*, the Sufi ‘elect’.¹⁹⁰

As for the *ḥarf/aḥruf*, each of which is said to have a *ḥadd* and *maṭla‘* in al-Būnī’s rendering of the *ḥadīth*, this is a term that in the early centuries of Islam often was taken to mean a ‘reading’ (*qirā‘ah*) of

¹⁸⁸ Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’ānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl al-Tustarī* (d. 283/896), *Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients* 9 (Berlin ; New York: de Gruyter, 1980), 140 ff; Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 8 ff.

¹⁸⁹ Modified trans. from Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence*, 141, 232 ff; cf. Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 9.

the Qur’ān.¹⁹¹ In *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, however, al-Būnī invites a reading of *ḥarf* as ‘letter’, with the implication that each individual letter of the Qur’ān is possessed of multiple registers of significance. It is an artful move on al-Būnī’s part—as surely his audience was familiar with more conventional Sufi understandings of the *ḥadīth*—a move intended to signal that his teachings entailed an understanding of the Qur’ān’s hidden meanings at once related to, and deeper than, those found in other Sufi texts.

Slightly later in *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, al-Būnī discusses three different modes of understanding the Qur’ān: one, *tafsīr*, the ‘scientific exegesis’ that dominated Jamā’ī Sunnite learning and methodologically-speaking was primarily philological (i.e. grammatico-lexicological) and traditionist (i.e. based in large part on *ḥadīths* and the etiologizing ‘historical’ approach of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, ‘the occasions of revelation’); two, *ta’wīl*, a term used by many Shī’ite and Sufi thinkers that, when contrasted with *tafsīr*, usually denoted the discovery of hidden (*bāṭin*) meanings in the Qur’ānic text through allegorical readings aided by divine inspiration; and three, *fahm*, ‘understanding’, which al-Būnī portrays as the direct perception of Qur’ānic meanings through communion with God. In doing so he asserts a hierarchy of exegetes—or as he puts it, “the scholars of expositions of the meanings of the Qur’ān” (*al-‘ulamā’ fi ‘ibārāt ma’ānī al-Qur’ān*)—with those who employ the methods of *tafsīr* at the bottom, those who perform *ta’wīl* in the rank above, and the ‘people of understanding’ (*fahm*) at the top. A fourth group, who deal in ‘opinion’ or ‘whim’ (*ra’y*) and analogy (*qiyās*), and whom he seems to accuse of a hollow sort of knowledge devoid of piety, he declares damned.

This brief discussion is somewhat complex, addressing the differences between these categories of scholars through various criteria. There is an initial ranking of the four groups in accordance with God’s *ḥazz* (‘allotment’) to each, and another ranking through the lens of a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet compares three types of learned authorities: *al-kubarā’* (‘the great ones’), *al-ḥukamā’* (‘the wise ones’), and *al-‘ulamā’* (‘the scholars’, lit. ‘the knowledgeable ones’), groupings al-Būnī assimilates to the people of *fahm*, *ta’wīl*, and *tafsīr* respectively. Other criteria include a brief assessment of the means through

¹⁹¹ Frederik Leemhuis, EQ, s.v. “Readings of the Qur’ān.” See also the section in *Sunan Abī Da’ūd* entitled *Bāb unzila al-Qur’ān ‘alā sab‘ah aḥruf*, nos. 1475-1478.

which each group arrives at their understandings of the holy text, and a closing series of *logia* supporting the rather remarkable claims al-Būnī makes for the *ahl al-fahm*. In the end he of course makes clear that the *ahl al-fahm* are the masters of the science of letters:

واعلم أن العلماء أربعة عالم حظّه الله وعالم حظّه من الله العلم والمعرفة وعالم حظّه السير إلى الآخرة وعالم حظّه علم السير إلى الآخرة فالأول مع الله بالله والثاني يدعوا إلى الله بعلم الله والثالث يدعوا إلى الآخرة والرابع يدعوا إلى علم الآخرة كما بلغنا عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه قال جالسوا الكبراء وخالطوا الحكماء وسائلوا العلماء فالكبراء هم الذين ينطقون عن الله بالله وهم أهل الفهم عن الله في كتابه وأسرار مصنوعاته لأن بين الفهم والتأويل والتفسير فرق كما قال الله تعالى ﴿سَأَصْرِفُ عَنْ آيَاتِيَ الَّذِينَ يَتَكَبَّرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ﴾ قال ابن عباس رضي الله عنه سأزع عنهم فهم القرآن والعلماء في عبارات معاني القرآن على ثلاثة أقسام أحدهم بالتفسير وهو أذانهم والثاني بتأويل وهو أوسطهم والثالث بالفهم وهو أجلمهم والرابع هلكته فالتفسير بالتعلم والدراسة أقاويل السلف والتأويل بالهداية والتوفيق والفهم بالله تعالى والرأي بالعقل والقياس فأهل الفهم ينطقون بالله كما قال تعالى كنت لسانه الذي ينطق به إلى آخر الجبر وقال لقمان الحكيم يد الله على أفواه الحكماء فما ينطقون بشيء حتى يهيباً لهم وقرأ ابن عباس رضي الله عنه ﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ﴾ ولا محدث وهم الذين ينطقون في القرآن بالحكمة وروي عن بعض الصحابة رضي الله عنهم أنه قال قلت يا رسول الله إنا نجد في قرأتك ما لا نجد في قرأتنا قال لا تكلم بقرآننا ظاهراً وأنا اقرأ باطناً والغرض المقصود من ذلك ليعرف شرف أهل الباطن اعني الذين فهموا عن الله تعالى بأسرار التدبير وانواع انوار التذکر ولطائف التفکر ما اراده في بواطن آياته من اطوار إراداته واعلم ان علم الحروف اشرف علوم المحققين

Know that the scholars are four [i.e. are of four types]: a scholar whose allotment is God, a scholar whose allotment from God is knowledge and gnosis [*ma'rifah*], a scholar whose allotment is the path to the life to come, and a scholar whose allotment is knowledge about [i.e. rather than fulfillment of] the path to the life to come. For it has reached us that the messenger of God (God's blessings and peace be upon him) said, attend to the greatest, mingle with the wise, and question the scholars. The greatest are those who speak on the authority of God [and] on behalf of God. They are the people of understanding [*fahm*] that which God communicates¹⁹² through His book and through the secrets of His handiworks. For there is a difference between *fahm*, *ta'wil*, and *tafsir*; as God the Highest said: 'I will divert from My revelations those who are arrogant on earth without justification'.¹⁹³ Ibn 'Abbās (may God be pleased with him) said [that this meant], I [*scil.* God] will deprive them of understanding of the Qur'ān. The scholars of expositions of the meanings of the Qur'ān are of

¹⁹² *Fahima 'anhu* = "He understood what he (another) said"; Lane's Lexicon, s.v. '*fahima*'.

¹⁹³ Q 7:146. The verse in full: "I will divert from My revelations those who are arrogant on earth, without justification. Consequently, when they see every kind of proof they will not believe. And when they see the path of guidance they will not adopt it as their path, but when they see the path of straying they will adopt it as their path. This is the consequence of their rejecting our proofs, and being totally heedless thereof."

three types. The first are of *tafsīr*, and they are the lowliest of them. The second are of *ta'wīl*, and they are the middling of them. And the third are of *fahm*, and they are the highest of them. The fourth [*scil.* the fourth group mentioned above] are doomed to perdition. *Tafsīr* is [arrived at] through learning and studying the statements of the pious ancestors. *Ta'wīl* is through divine guidance and mediation; and *fahm* is through God the Highest. Opinion [presumably the method of the fourth group] is through ratiocination and analogizing. The people of understanding speak on the behalf of God, for just as the Highest said, I was his tongue that spoke for him (and the rest of the report). The sage Luqmān said, The hand of God is upon the mouths of the wise ones, and they speak of something only as God disposes them to do. And Ibn 'Abbās (may God be pleased with him) read: 'And we have not sent before you any messenger or prophet¹⁹⁴ or one spoken to [i.e. by an angel/God, see below]'. And it is they who speak with wisdom regarding the Qur'ān. It was transmitted on the authority of one of the Companions (may God be pleased with them) that he said, I said, O messenger of God, verily we find in your reading [recitation] that which we do not find in our reading. He replied, That is because you are reading externally while I am reading internally. The intention of that [report] is that one knows the nobility of the people of the esoteric meaning [*ahl al-bāṭin*]. I mean those who understand on God's authority by means of the secrets of contemplation and the subtleties of reflection that which He intended regarding the inner meanings of His verses from among the [various] levels of His decrees. Know that the science of the letters is the most sublime of the sciences of the accomplished adepts.¹⁹⁵

Al-Būnī clearly considered *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and *fahm* all to be legitimate approaches to understanding the Qur'ān; indeed, the function of the fourth group, rhetorically-speaking, seems to be to serve as a foil against which the other three can be legitimated. However, in ranking *tafsīr*, with its reliance on discursive learning and human-transmitted knowledge, as the least illustrious of these legitimate methods, al-Būnī was aligning himself with some earlier Sufi thinkers—such as Abū al-Saīd al-Kharrāz (d. 277/890 or 286/899)¹⁹⁶ and al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922)¹⁹⁷—who had asserted the superiority of experiential, 'mystical' knowledge (*ma'rifah*, *ḥikmah*, *fahm*) over the discursive and traditionist learning

¹⁹⁴ Q 22:52. The verse in full, as it appears in the *textus receptus*: "And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he spoke [or recited], Satan threw into it [some misunderstanding]. But Allah abolishes that which Satan throws in; then Allah makes precise His verses. And Allah is Knowing and Wise."

¹⁹⁵ BnF MS arabe 2658 (LI), fol. 3^b, ln. 10-4^a, ln. 15

¹⁹⁶ *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 22–24.

¹⁹⁷ Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 4–5.

(*ilm*, *ta'allum*) that characterized the training of Jamā'ī Sunnite scholars. Al-Būnī inserts a moralizing element into this claim, implying through the citation of Qur'ān 7:146 (“I will divert from My revelations those who are arrogant on earth without justification”) that the scholars’ inferior knowledge is a result of their arrogance—perhaps an accusation that they were seeking undue worldly prestige and power, a common criticism of scholars by Sufis.¹⁹⁸ *Ta'wīl* and *fahm* are obviously the prestige categories for al-Būnī, with the former resulting from *hidāyah* (divine guidance) and *tawfiq* (assistance) rather than mere learning, though still falling short of the near-total communion with the divine implied in his description of the *ahl al-fahm*.

The three *logia* at the end—one from the legendary sage Luqmān al-Ḥakīm, an alternate reading of Qur'ān 22:52 ascribed to ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/686-8), and the closing *ḥadīth*—all emphasize the exalted status of *ahl al-fahm*, implying their near equality with the prophets; this is particularly the case with the latter two citations. The alternate Qur'ān reading asserts that the *ahl al-fahm* are among the ranks of the *muḥaddathūn* (N.B. not *muḥadd-I-thūn*), which is to say those to whom God or God’s angels speak. The reading is a well-known remnant of an early alternate version of the Qur'ān that, according to the widely-accepted story of the Qur'ān’s history, circulated in the decades after the death of the Prophet and prior to the making and promulgation of the so-called ‘Uthmānic redaction. It constituted a major departure from the version of the verse in the ‘Uthmānic text, which mentions only ‘messengers’ (s. *rasūl*) and ‘prophets’ (s. *nabī*) having been sent prior to Muḥammad, forgoing any mention of a *muḥaddath*. The term was taken up as descriptive of the *Imāms* by early Shī'ite thinkers, who utilized it to assert that the *Imāms* received communications from God’s angels through a process of *ilhām* (inspiration) while yet maintaining a distinction between the *Imāms* and the prophets.¹⁹⁹ A

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Ibn al-‘Arabi’s disparaging of greedy scholars (as well as false Sufis) in his *Risālat Rūḥ al-Quds*; Roger Boase and Farid Sahnoun, “Excerpts from the Epistle on the Spirit of Holiness (*Risāla Rūḥ Al-Quds*),” in *Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi: A Commemorative Volume*, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan, vol. Shaftesbury: Element, for the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, 1993 (Shaftesbury: Element, for the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, 1993), 48.

¹⁹⁹ As Kohlberg notes, in the most common formulation of this Shī'ite typology, messenger-prophets were in contact with angels whom they could both see and hear, either while waking or asleep, non-messenger prophets saw and heard angels in dreams, and the *Imām-muḥaddaths* also communicated with angels in dreams, but could

number of Sufi thinkers prior to al-Būnī also took up the term *muḥaddath*, including al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. betw. 318/936 and 320/938), Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), al-Sulamī, and al-Qushayrī, for whom the *muḥaddathūn* were among the highest saints.²⁰⁰ Al-Būnī's message to his readers in this hierarchy of approaches to the Qur'ān is clear: the techniques of *tafsīr* are sufficient for the common denominator of the *ummah*, with the allegories of *ta'wīl* being a step above. But the true science of the saints, the key to communication with God's angels and the authority deriving from it, is none other than the science of letters.

Al-Būnī's elitism with regard to different modes of understanding of God's word runs throughout his works, though one more important example will suffice. In the introduction to *'Alam al-hudá*, al-Būnī distances the topics of his inquiry from grammatico-lexicological approaches to understanding the names of God. The latter areas of inquiry he describes as having been exhausted by previous thinkers, and as producing meanings suitable only to the spiritual and intellectual aptitude of the commonalty of Muslims, rather than to the potentials of the spiritual elite to which his own works were addressed. The understanding of the names al-Būnī promises is one that reveals their roles both as structural elements of the cosmos as God created and maintains it, and as a means through which the Sufi adept could ascend toward the godhead:

رسمت هذا الكتاب موضحاً للطريق وقسطاساً للتحقيق ولم نرد بذلك إطالة الكلام ولا بسط الإشتقاق ولا
الإستقراء اللغوي ولا التركيب التحوي إذ من تقدم من الأئمة والجم الغفير سَطَرُوا في ذلك ما ملاء الاسباع
من اللّغة العربيّة والابنية التحويّة فاعنوا بذلك عن الإعادة إذ ليس على الإستقراء من زيادة ولسنا نريد إلّا

only hear and not see them. The process by which prophets received divine communications was called *waḥy* ('prophecy'), while the Imāms were the recipients of *ilhām* ('inspiration'), and thus were sometimes called *al-mulḥam* ('he who is divinely inspired'). Etan Kohlberg, "The Term 'muḥaddath' in Twelver Shī'ism," in *Studia Orientalia memoriae D.H. Baneth dedicata* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 40 ff; cf. Wilferd Madelung, "Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abbās and Shī'ite Law," in *Law, Christianity and Modernism in Islamic Society: Proceedings of the Eighteenth Congress of the Union Européenne Des Arabisants et Islamisants Held at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (September 3-September 9, 1996)*, ed. Urbain Vermeulen and J. M. F. van. Reeth, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 86* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 14. As Mohammad Amir-Moezzi notes, the notion of *al-tahdīth* ('speaking to someone') sometimes also was paired with that of *al-tafhīm* ('making someone understand'), such that they also were called *al-mufahham* ('he who receives understanding, i.e. from heaven'); *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, 70.

²⁰⁰ Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, "*Manāhij al-'ārifīn*: A Treatise on Ṣūfism by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī," ed. Etan Kohlberg, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 22.

محض التحقيق والقصد إلى سواء الطريق فاحسن الكلام ما قلّ وجلّ وبين ودلّ وليس المقصود من شرح أسماء الله تعالى إلا سعادة العبد بالتخلّق بها والتجلى بمعاني الاسماء والصفات بقدر ما قسم له إذ من ليس حظّه من أسماء الله تعالى إلا سماع اللفظ واشتقاق اللّغة واعتقاد القلب فذلك مبخوس القدر مطموس القلب والفكر فإن سماع اللفظ حظّ حاسة السمع بحسب الذي بها ندرك الاصوات فهذه رتبة يشاركه فيها البهائم وفهمه من حيث اللّغة لا يستدعي إلا معرفة قول العرب وهذه رتبة يشاركه فيها الاديّب والتحوي بل العربي البدوي واما الاعتقاد فليس إلا التصديق وهذه رتبة العامة بل الصبيان واما الحقيقة التي عثر عليها اولوا التحقيق بكشف اسرارها في قوالب الاعمال وشهود انوارها في حقائق المال فصفت اسرارهم واستنارت افكارهم وعظم في الملكوت الاعلي مقدارهم قال الله تعالى ﴿وَلِلّٰهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا وَذَرُوا الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي أَسْمَائِهِ﴾ قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إنّ لله تسعة وتسعين اسماً من احصاها دخل الجنة فهي حجب بين الله وبين العبد ومقامات واطوار الترجمة السابقة والمئة اللاحقة فيجد السالك إلى الله تعالى مقاماً من الاسماء ويرتقي بحقيقة حقيقته ومنه قول السلف رضي الله عنهم الطّرق إلى الله شتى ولولا الحجب الاسائية لأحرقت سبحات وجهه ما انتهى إليه بصره من خلقه

I conceived of this book as a clarification of the path and a means to weigh spiritual realization, intending thereby neither a longwinded exposition nor an expansion on [matters of] etymological derivation, lexical investigation, or syntactic configuration, for those who have gone before from among the teachers of religion and the great multitude have discoursed on such things, and have filled the ears with [such topics as] the Arabic language and grammatical structures, sufficing in that as to make reiteration superfluous, since there is naught to add to the investigation. I desire nothing but pure spiritual realization in endeavoring on the straight path, thus the best discourse is that which condenses, elevates, clarifies, and provides guidance. There is no other goal in explicating the names of God the Highest except in aiding the servant [*scil.* the Muslim] in self-transformation [*takhalluq*²⁰¹] by means of them [*scil.* the divine names] and revelation of the meanings of the names and attributes to the extent apportioned to him. For if someone's share in the names of God the Highest is merely hearing the utterance, comprehending the lexical meaning, and taking to heart dogmatic belief, then that is a diminishment of what God intended and a blinding of the heart and thought. For hearing the utterance is a function of the auditory faculty, by which we perceive sounds, and this is a level [of understanding] the beasts share with him [*scil.* the Muslim]. And his comprehension with regard to language requires nothing but a grasp of the speech of the Arabs, and this is a level the litterateur, the grammarian, and even the bedouin shares with him. And as for dogmatic belief, it is nothing but trusting something to be true, and this is the level of the vulgar commonalty, even of children. But as for the [hidden] reality that the great masters of realization have discovered through the unveiling of their [*scil.* the divine names] secrets through various operations and the witnessing of their lights in the realities of the final outcome, they [the names/lights] have ordered their [the masters] innermost

²⁰¹ The concept of *takhalluq* is addressed in chapter three.

beings and illuminated their thinking such that their stature in the supernal *Malakūt* has become great. God the Highest said, ‘And to Allah belong the best names, so invoke Him by them. And leave those who practice deviation concerning His names’.²⁰² The messenger of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him) said, God has ninety-nine names, and one who enumerates them [i.e. recites them all] shall enter Paradise. For they [*scil.* the divine names] are veils between God and the servant, and [they are] the stations and planes of the primordial efflux of God’s mercy and subsequent benevolence, such that the aspirant toward God the Highest will find a station among the names and ascend via the reality of its reality. As the pious ancestors (may God be pleased with them) said, The paths to God are manifold; and, Were it not for the onomastic veils, God’s august splendors would burn up whatever His sight fell upon in His Creation.²⁰³

Here, then, we see that al-Būnī positions the science of letters and names as a praxis that altogether transcends the semantic meanings of the Qur’ān, revealing the holy text as a kind of mediatory instrument for interacting with the invisible worlds that join material reality to the godhead. Access to such mysteries of the Qur’ān, it is implied, is available only to the spiritual elite.

2.1.2 Al-Būnī and ‘the esoteric tradition’

This radical understanding of the Qur’ān, the names of God, and the letters was largely new to the Sufism of Ayyūbid Egypt. Novelty in religious matters, often perceived as ‘unwarranted innovation’ (*bid’ah madhmūmah*), was generally perceived as a negative phenomenon, and an important aspect of al-Būnī’s teachings was his moves to frame the science as unimpeachably authentic to Islam while at the same time casting its unfamiliarity in a positive light. He does this—almost certainly in keeping with the Western Sufi discourses in which he had been initiated—by portraying it as body of secret teachings originating with the prophets and the first generations of Muslims, one that Muḥammad passed on only to the elect of the Muslim community.

²⁰² Q 7:180. The verse in full: “And to Allah belong the best names, so invoke Him by them. And leave those who practice deviation concerning His names. They will be recompensed [i.e. punished] for what they have been doing.”

²⁰³ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 2^a, ln. 21-fol. 2^b, ln. 18.

Near the beginning of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, al-Būnī adduces a series of prophetic *ḥadīths* and reports of other seminal figures in Islamic myth and early history, including: the first man and prophet Ādam; the fourth of the rightly-guided caliphs and first Shī'ite *Imām* 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661); 'Alī's martyred son (and the Prophet's grandson) al-Ḥusayn (d. 61/680); the early convert Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (Jundub b. Junādah b. Sufyān, d. 32/652-3); the man remembered as the greatest scholar of the early Muslim community, 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/686-8); and others. As arranged by al-Būnī, these *logia* suggest the existence of an 'esoteric tradition' of secret teachings regarding the science of letters, one rooted in the divinely-inspired knowledge of the long line of prophets from Ādam to Muḥammad, transmitted from Muḥammad by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib through some number of his sons, the Shī'ite *Imāms*, and passing into the guardianship of the Sufi tradition. Taken together they comprise an apologetic account of the origins of the science of letters that validates lettrism as an ancient, sanctified, and powerful means of engaging with divine revelation, while also announcing and justifying the secrecy surrounding the science.

Al-Būnī's positioning of the science of letters as a secret body or form of knowledge passed down from the prophets commences with a dialog about Ādam between Muḥammad and the Companion Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, the latter having been remembered as one of the earliest converts to Islam and revered by many Sufi thinkers as a proto-Sufi on account of his reputation for asceticism and humility²⁰⁴:

وروى أبو ذر الغفاري أنه قال سألت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقلت يا رسول الله كل نبي مرسل بم أرسل قال بكتاب منزل قلت يا رسول الله أي كتاب أنزله الله على آدم قال كتاب المعجم قلت أي كتاب المعجم يا رسول الله قال ا ب ت ج إلى آخره قلت يا رسول الله كم حرفاً قال تسعة وعشرون قلت يا رسول الله عددت ثمانية وعشرين حرفاً فغضب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم حتى أحمرت عيناه ثم قال يا أبا ذر والذي بعثني بالحق نبياً ما أنزل الله على آدم إلا تسعة وعشرين حرفاً فقلت يا رسول الله أليس فيها ألف ولام فقال عليه السلام لام ألف حرف واحد قد أنزله الله على آدم في صحيفة واحدة ومعه سبعون

²⁰⁴ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 5. For some examples of Sufi praise for Abū Dharr, see Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism*, trans. Alexander Knysh, Great Books of Islamic Civilization (Reading: Garnet, 2007), 166, 208, 255.

ألف ملك من خالف لام ألف فقد كفر بما أنزل الله علي من لم يعدد لام ألف كمن الحروف فهو متي بري وأنا
بريء منه ومن لم يؤمن بالحروف وهي تسعة وعشرون لا يخرج من النار أبداً فكأنه قال يا محمد هذه
الحروف ذلك الكتاب الذي أنزلته على أهلك آدم

Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī narrated: I questioned the Prophet of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him), saying, O Prophet of God, every messenger-prophet, with what was he sent? He [*scil.* Muḥammad] said, A revealed book. I said, O Prophet of God, which book did God reveal to Ādam? He said, The Book of the Alphabet. I said, Which Book of the Alphabet, o Prophet of God? He said, *Alif, bā’, tā’, thā’, jīm, et cetera*. I said, O Prophet of God, how many letters [are there]? He said, Twenty-nine. I said, O Prophet of God, I counted twenty-eight letters. Then the Prophet (God’s blessings and peace be upon him) became so angry that his eyes grew red, and he said, O Abū Dharr, by the One who sent me as a prophet with the truth, God revealed to Ādam exactly twenty-nine letters. And I said, O Prophet of God, is it not so that *alif* and *lām* are among them? And he (peace be upon him) said, *Lām-alif* is a single letter. God revealed it to Ādam on a single sheet [or scroll] with seventy-thousand angels. Anyone who denies *lām-alif* disbelieves what God revealed to me. He who does not admit that *lām-alif* is among the letters, he is bereft of me and I of him. He who does not believe in there being twenty-nine letters will never leave the hellfire. For it was as if He said, O Muḥammad, these letters are that book that I revealed to your father, Ādam.²⁰⁵

That the book revealed to Ādam was this “Book of the Alphabet” (*kitāb al-muḥjam*) establishes the letters of the Arabic alphabet as the primordial instruments of revelation and the foundations of human knowledge. A prefiguration of the Qur’ān given to the final prophet, the first prophet’s book is that by which communication with the divine is made fundamentally possible. The implication that Ādam’s book, whether a vision or a physical object, was sufficiently concrete as to have had one sheet or scroll (*ṣahīfah*) per letter hints that the letters themselves bridge the metaphysical and material worlds. In this way the *ḥadīth* (the provenance of which is unknown²⁰⁶) foreshadows the emanational

²⁰⁵ BnF MS arabe 2658 (*LI*), fol. 3^a, ln. 7–fol. 3^b, ln. 5

²⁰⁶ I have been unable to locate this *ḥadīth* in any earlier sources. Its origin is a question of some significance even beyond its place in al-Būnī’s writings, insofar as the same *ḥadīth*, or one closely related to it, played a major role in the thought of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, the Persian mystic and founder of the Ḥurūfīyah sect who was executed as a heretic around the turn of the 9th/15th century; see Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 69 ff. The possibility that Faḍl Allāh came upon it in al-Būnī’s writings must be considered, as al-Būnī seems likely to have been among his sources given their shared concern with the spiritual meanings and powers of the letters.

anthropogony/cosmology al-Būnī presents slightly later in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*—discussed in the following chapter—wherein the letters are sown into the constitution (*jibillah*) of Ādam at each stage of his creation. As for the dispute over the number of letters in the Arabic alphabet, this was an old debate already in al-Būnī's time, and the seemingly counterintuitive position taken in this anecdote by Muḥammad (and God) that *lām-alif* is itself a letter—and thus is the twenty-ninth letter of the alphabet—also was endorsed by early Sufi masters such as al-Ḥallāj and al-Sulamī.²⁰⁷ Aside from establishing al-Būnī's position on that matter, the debate here between Abū Dharr and Muḥammad also introduces/reinforces a number of themes that run throughout al-Būnī's writings. One of these is that the written word conveys secrets unknowable through spoken and heard language, such as that *lā* is a single letter rather than two letters, a distinction meaningful only on the page or in the mind of someone literate. Another is that divinely-inspired knowledge is superior to that garnered through normal human cognition and reason, i.e. Muḥammad's prophetic knowledge of *lām-alif* as the twenty-ninth letters versus Abū Dharr's normal perception that there are only twenty-eight. And another is that of connections between the letters of the alphabet and the angels, an indication of the letters' role in the created worlds as instruments of God's will, and a notion concordant with the aforementioned assertion that the *muḥaddathūn*, who communicate with angels, are masters of the science.

The subject of the need to guard the secrets of the letters is introduced shortly after the Abū Dharr *ḥadīth*. This is presented along lines roughly similar to those of Ibn al-ʿArabī's call for discretion in communicating the operative spiritual sciences. First it is asserted that the nature of lettrist teachings is such that they cannot be fully comprehended except by those possessed of an advanced spiritual state. However, al-Būnī implies that this alone does not protect these secrets from misuse, and that they must be guarded from *al-ʿāmmah* (the common people), for if disclosed they would lead to *fitnah* (social disunion) and the destruction of the community. The testimony of the third Shīʿite *Imām*,

²⁰⁷ Gerhard Böwering offers a synopsis of the debates over the number of letters in the alphabet as reviewed by al-Sulamī, with a detailed recounting of the views on the matter al-Sulamī attributes to al-Ḥallāj, in “Sulamī's Treatise on the Science of Letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*),” in *In the Shadow of Arabic: The Centrality of Language to Arabic Culture, Studies Presented to Ramzi Baalbaki on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Bilal Orfali, 2012, 349, 352 ff.

grandson of the Prophet, and martyr of Karbala al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who was himself, in death, an emblem of the tragic consequences of Muslim disunion, is called upon first. Al-Ḥusayn’s testimony is followed by a *ḥadīth* on the authority of the Companion and prototypical Muslim scholar and exegete Ibn ‘Abbās which legitimizes on a general level the notion that certain of Muḥammad’s teachings that might exceed the intellectual capacities of most Muslims were kept out of widespread circulation:

واعلم أنّ علم الحروف من أشرف علوم المحققين كما بلغنا عن الحسين عليه السلام أنّه سأله رجل عن معنى ﴿كهيعص﴾ فقال لو فسرتها لك لمشيت على الماء إلا أنّه لا يمكن التصريح بكل أسرارها لعدم الأفهام المستنيرة بنور الهداية المستضية بمشكاة اليقين ولنلّا تبدوا أسرار الله تعالى للعامة فيكون سبباً لفتنتهم وهلاكهم كما قال ابن عباس رضي الله عنه لرسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يا رسول الله أحدث بكلّ ما أسمع قال نعم إلا أن تحدّث بحديث لا يبلغ عقول القوم ذلك الحديث فيكون على بعضهم فتنة

Know that the science of letters is among the most sublime of the sciences of the accomplished adepts. Such is what reaches us on the authority of al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him), [who said] that a man asked him about the meaning of *kāf-hā-yā-‘ayn-ṣād*.²⁰⁸ He [*scil.* al-Ḥusayn] said, If I explained it to you then you would walk on water, except that, due to its mysteries, it would be incomprehensible to one who lacks understandings illuminated by the light of enlightenment and the guidance of the lamp of certainty. For if the secrets of God the Highest were made plain to the common people it would be the cause of their disunion and destruction. It is like when Ibn ‘Abbās (may God be pleased with him) asked the Prophet (God’s blessings and peace be upon him), O Prophet of God, shall I transmit everything which I have heard? He [Muḥammad] replied, Yes, except for transmitting a report that will not suit the minds of the people, for such a report will cause disunion among some of them.²⁰⁹

The preternatural power and potential danger of the science of letters having been asserted, al-Būnī then clarifies that divine assistance (*tawfiq*) is required if its secrets are to be comprehended, a beneficence granted only to God’s pure elect (*khawāṣṣ aṣfiyā’ Allāh*). While the difficulty for all but the elect of understanding these secrets is emphasized by reference to their origins in the hidden planes of the creation (the *Malakūt* and *Jabarūt*), the obligation of initiated actors to protect them from disclosure

²⁰⁸ Qur’ān 19:1.

²⁰⁹ BnF MS arabe 2658 (*LI*), fol. 4^a, ln. 14–fol. 4^b, ln. 6.

is declared once again. The alterity of these secret teachings in relation to the norms of the Muslim community, and the gravity of the upheaval they might trigger if disclosed, are then hinted at through a statement attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who declares that he himself would be shunned as a liar and a transgressor of the community’s moral sensibilities (*fāsiq*) were he to share Muḥammad’s teachings *in toto*, even with an audience of a hundred of its ‘best’ (i.e. the most learned and morally upright) members:

واعلم يا أخي أن الأسرار لا تدرك إلا بتوفيق الله تعالى ولا يثبت عند سماعها إلا خواص أصفياء الله لأن الحجب الترابية طمست أنوار البصائر عن شهود عجائب الملكوتيات ولطائف الغيبات بجبروتيات فأندرت معالم المعارف العلويات وأمحت آثار سبل الأسرار القدسيات فإذا سمعوا الحقائق فكأنما ينادون من مكان بعيد أو من وراء حجاب حديد فهذا سبب كتم الأسرار ومحو الآثار كما بلغنا عن عليّ ابن أبي طالب رضي الله عنه أنه قال لو جمعت من خياركم مائة فأحدثكم من غدوة إلى العشي ما سمعت من في أبي القاسم عليه السلام لتخرجون من عندي واتم تقولون إن علياً من أكذب الكاذبين وأفسق الفاسقين

O my brother, know that the secrets will not be perceived except through the mediation of God the Highest, and that he who hears them will not be secure in them unless he is among God’s pure elect. For the veils of earthliness have obscured the visionary rays that make apparent the wonders of the things pertaining to the *Malakūt* and the subtleties of the things occulted in the *Jabarūt*. Guarded are the places of the divine gnoseis and effaced are the traces of the paths of the holy mysteries. When the realities are heard it is as if they are shouted from a distant place or from behind an iron curtain, and this is the cause of the concealment of the secrets and the effacement of the traces. It is like that which has reached us about ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (may God be pleased with him), that he [‘Alī] said, If I gathered a hundred people from among the best of you, and from morning to evening transmitted to you what I have heard from the mouth of Abū Qāsim [*scil.* Muḥammad] (peace be upon him), you would all flee from me, saying: Verily ‘Alī is among the most egregious of liars and the most iniquitous of sinners.²¹⁰

Finally, then, the implication is that only the best of the best, the elite of the elite, are worthy of the knowledge passed down through this esoteric tradition.

Al-Būnī’s references to such central figures of Shī’ism as ‘Alī and al-Ḥusayn should not lead one to the conclusion that he was a Shī’ite, though one mid-twentieth century researcher did hold this

²¹⁰ Ibid., fol. 4b, ln. 6–fol. 5a, ln. 1.

view.²¹¹ As noted previously, al-Būnī almost certainly was a Mālikī Sunnite. Rather, the notion that the members of the *ahl al-bayt* were the inheritors and transmitters of a body of arcane and powerful knowledge passed down from the prophets but kept back from the general mass of Muslims was a not-uncommon theme in Sufi writings prior to al-Būnī.²¹² ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454), perhaps al-Būnī’s most important posthumous reader and interpreter, would later record or invent accounts of the various secret sciences imparted to the prophets leading up to Muḥammad, as well as detailed chains of transmission along which knowledge of the science of letters and names had been transmitted from the Prophet Muḥammad to the Shī’ite *Imāms* and thence via numerous Sufi masters down to his own day. Al-Būnī’s approach to historicizing the ‘esoteric tradition’ of the science of letters was more suggestive than explicit, leaving information to be filled-in, whether in face-to-face interactions with his disciples or in the imaginations of readers already immersed in Sufi lore.

2.1.3 The impact on al-Būnī’s readers

What was the impact of these discourses on al-Būnī’s readers? It is of course difficult to generalize, but I would argue that those who studied with al-Būnī directly took these claims quite seriously, as they were effectively required to do by the conventions of the master-disciple relationship. In the sections that follow I explore various types of evidence that suggest that transmission of al-Būnī’s works indeed was carried out with discretion throughout the period under discussion in this chapter. I think this was the case largely because it required this period of time for some—though by no means all—of the tensions generated by the introduction of these Western

²¹¹ Mohamed El-Gawhary, whose 1968 Bonn dissertation was the first book-length treatment of al-Būnī by a modern scholar, posited that al-Būnī was a Shī’ite, apparently on the basis of the Twelver Shī’ite *Imāms* listed in the first chain of teachers attributed to al-Būnī at the end of *Shams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā*, and the listing of that text in a modern catalog consisting largely (though not entirely) of Shī’ite works. El-Gawhary, “Die Gottesnamen,” 14. For the *isnād* in question—which, as discussed in the previous chapter, has nothing to do with claims made by al-Būnī—see (pseudo) Aḥmad al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā* (Birmingham: Antioch Gate, 2007), 119; also the discussion of “Pedigree A” in Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun,” 119. The catalog in question is Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī’s *al-Dharī’ah ilā taṣānīf al-shī’ah*.

²¹² For several examples see Hamid Algar, “Imām Mūsā Al-Kāẓim and Ṣūfī Tradition,” *Islamic Culture* 64, no. 1 (1990): 1–14.

discourses to Egypt to be counterbalanced by a new disposition of powers, one in which followers of these ‘new’ doctrines could proclaim themselves more or less openly with less fear of negative repercussions, a shift in affairs brought about political elites having sufficiently embraced this school of thought as to offer its advocates protection.

2.2 Esotericist reading communities and al-Būnī’s use of *tabdīd al-‘ilm*

I now move to an examination of an important feature of al-Būnī’s texts I consider to shed light on practical aspects of his and his early readers’ esotericism, particularly with regard to how he taught his texts and expected his followers to engage with them: the intertextual cross-references—‘intertexts’ for short—through which connections are drawn between many of his works. They are a feature of al-Būnī’s texts (and some other esotericist texts) that can be placed under the heading of manipulations of the textual economy, insofar as they comprise a formal characteristic of the texts that had important implications for how the works were used in the transmission of knowledge, and for the nature of the reading communities in which they were read. As we will see, the intertexts at once impeded access to al-Būnī’s teachings for actors who might stumble across a lone book and attempt to read it unassisted by a teacher, and expanded the texts and meanings made available to those who read al-Būnī’s works as a member of an esotericist reading community.

These ‘intertexts’ have already been mentioned in the previous chapter’s discussion of al-Būnī’s bibliography. In the context of this chapter I argue that they should be understood as al-Būnī’s use of the esotericist writing strategy of *tabdīd al-‘ilm* (‘the dispersion of knowledge’), a technique known from earlier and contemporary esotericist corpora and works. I reason that this strategy not only reflected the esotericist nature of al-Būnī’s project as he conceived of it, but also both grew out of and fostered (at least for a time) close communication and interaction among those who engaged with al-Būnī’s texts. I begin with a brief introduction to the phenomenon of *tabdīd al-‘ilm* in earlier and contemporary

bodies of literature, and then proceed to an overview of the web of intertexts connecting al-Būnī's core works. I then move on to a discussion of what al-Būnī's use of the strategy suggests about how his works were taught and otherwise utilized, both by al-Būnī and his immediate disciples and by some of his posthumous readers.

2.2.1 *Tabdīd al-‘ilm*

The notion of *tabdīd al-‘ilm* ('the dispersion of knowledge') as an esotericist writing strategy and means of manipulating the textual economy seems first to have been articulated explicitly in the large corpus of writings attributed to the perhaps-legendary second/eighth-century figure Jābir b. Ḥayyān. These writings were a large collection of alchemical texts that, according to the widely accepted hypothesis of Paul Kraus, was produced by a number of Iraqi Shī'ite (probably Ismā'īlite or quasi-Ismā'īlite) intellectuals of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries,²¹³ though this notion of relatively late, multiple authorship has been challenged by Nomanul Haq.²¹⁴ At various points in the corpus, 'Jābir' states that he had acted on the instructions of his master, the sixth Shī'ite *Imām* Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, in scattering teachings on various elements of 'the great work', i.e. the supreme goal of alchemy, throughout different texts of the corpus, such that a 'vulgar' reader happening upon a stray volume would be prevented from understanding them, and even a dedicated student would be able to acquire the knowledge in question only through intensive effort and thoroughgoing familiarity with the corpus as a whole.²¹⁵ Readers of Jābir are reminded repeatedly within the texts of the need to seek additional information. In some cases readers are told only that a matter is explained "in another book" in the

²¹³ Paul Kraus, *Contributions à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam: Volume I, Le corpus d'écrits jābiriens* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1943), xvii–lxv.

²¹⁴ Nomanul Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things: The Alchemist Jabir Ibn Hayyan and His Kitab Al-Ahjar* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 8–29.

²¹⁵ Kraus, *Contributions*, Vol. I, xxvii–xxxiii; Jābir b. Ḥayyān, *Dix Traités d'alchimie: Les dix premiers Traités du Livre des Soixante-dix*, ed. and trans. Pierre Lory (Paris: Sindbad, 1983), 53, 242 ff; Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things*, 6–7, 14.

corpus and in others they are referred to a specific title therein.²¹⁶ On occasion readers are even instructed to master certain works in a particular order so as to properly piece certain teachings together.²¹⁷ Thus the technique has a didactic purpose even as it serves to discourage, as Lory puts it, “the greedy [i.e. those seeking only to make gold], charlatans, and the merely curious.”²¹⁸ Kraus and Lory, in line with their shared view that the Jābirian texts were written by multiple authors over a considerable period of time, further proposed that the technique also was used to generate the illusion of unitary authorship and ideational consistency across the vast corpus.²¹⁹

That al-Būnī likely was familiar with the practice is supported by the fact that some of his contemporaries and fellow émigrés from the West also employed *tabdīd al-‘ilm* in their writings.²²⁰ David Bakan has noted Maimonides’ (d. 600-601/1204) explicit utilization of it in *Guide for the Perplexed*, proposing that the great Cordovan *cum* Cairene Jewish thinker may have adopted it from Ismā‘īlite texts mentioned in that work, possibly ones from the collection of books once owned by the last Fāṭimid caliph, al-‘Ādil, which Ṣalāh al-Dīn b. Ayyūb had transferred to his vizier al-Fāḍil, whose physician Maimonides was for a time.²²¹ Arguably most relevant to al-Būnī’s use of the technique is that, as James Morris and Sarah Sviri have noted (somewhat indirectly), it also features in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings. For example, as Morris points out, in the conclusion to *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*, the great *shaykh* states in regard to a particularly important and abstruse element of his teachings:

And as for explicitly stating the credo of the ‘quintessence (of the spiritual elite)’, we did not separate it out in particular, because of its profundity and difficulty. Instead we have placed it dispersed throughout the chapters of this

²¹⁶ For examples of the first second types, respectively, see Jābir b. Ḥayyān, *Dix Traités d’alchimie*, 102, 190.

²¹⁷ Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things*, 7, 36 n43.

²¹⁸ Jābir b. Ḥayyān, *Dix Traités d’alchimie*, 242.

²¹⁹ Kraus, *Contributions*, Vol. I, op. cit.; Jābir b. Ḥayyān, *Dix Traités d’alchimie*, 243. For Haq’s rebuttal of this notion see *Names, Natures, and Things*, 14.

²²⁰ Kraus, *Contributions*, Vol. I, xxxi.

²²¹ David Bakan, *Maimonides’ Cure of Souls: Medieval Precursor of Psychoanalysis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 76–77.

book, in full detail and clearly explained, but... separated and scattered, so whomever God grants its understanding will recognize it and distinguish it from the rest.²²²

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s use of the technique arguably was not limited to *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*, but rather extended between his works as well. In an article on the immense power attributed to language in Sufi thought, Sviri observes that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s “bold, often daring, thoughts concerning language, letter mysticism and the creative power of speech are dispersed in many of his works,” such that “occasionally they seem to have been scattered haphazardly, as it were, without any obvious context, almost as though their author wished to play them down, or even make them inconspicuous, especially when they could be understood as related to magical acts.”²²³ *Al-shaykh al-akbar* also sometimes employed explicit cross-references to others of his own works, much like those in al-Būnī’s works described below.²²⁴

2.2.2 The intertexts in al-Būnī’s works

The main phenomenon that I identify as *tabdīd al-‘ilm* in al-Būnī’s corpus is the apparatus of intertexts binding together his core works: *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*, *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*, *‘Alam al-hudá*, and *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*. Similar to many of the references between works in the Jābirian corpus, these are instances in which the reader is told that a given matter is elaborated upon in the other work. There are fourty in total. The great majority of intertexts refer back and forth among the aforementioned five works, with a two exceptions in *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt* of works mentioned nowhere else, as indicated below (see Table 4 for a summary of this information):

²²² Quoted and translated in James Morris, “Ibn Arabi’s ‘Esotericism’: The Problem of Spiritual Authority,” *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990): 42.

²²³ Sara Sviri, “KUN -- the Existence-Bestowing Word in Islamic Mysticism: A Survey of Texts on the Creative Power of Language,” in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 49–50.

²²⁴ For one compilation of such cross-references in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works, see Yahia, *Histoire et classification*, 55–56.

- *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn* references *Shams al-ma'ārif* once.
- *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt* refers to *Shams al-ma'ārif* three times, to *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn* twice, and to *'Alam al-hudá* once.
- *'Alam al-hudá* refers to *Shams al-ma'ārif* eight times, *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn* once, *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt* five times, and *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* twice.
- *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* refers to *Shams al-ma'ārif* seven times, and to *'Alam al-hudá* eight times. It also includes a single references to two works apparently by al-Būnī of which there is no other mention in al-Būnī's texts that I am aware of, one entitled *Asrār al-adwār wa-tashkīl al-anwār fī asrār al-haqā'iq al-kinānīyah wa-al-asrār al-nabawīyah* and the other *Mawāqif al-baṣā'ir wa-laṭā'if al-sarā'ir*. To the best of my knowledge no copy of either work survives.

A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the main features of the intertexts and some different ways that al-Būnī used them to direct readers and relate his works to one another.

In the chapter on God's name 'al-Ṣamad' (the Eternal) in *'Alam al-hudá*, in the subchapter on spiritual practices for "drawing closer to God the Highest by means of this name" (*al-taqarrub ilá Allāh ta'āllá bi-hādhā al-ism*), al-Būnī notes that one approaches God through this name not by *dhikr* of the name itself, but rather through continuous *dhikr* of the name 'Allāh' (which he also refers to here as *ism al-dhāt*, 'the name of the Quiddity [of God]') during a meditative 'vigil' (*khalwah*). This has the effect of harnessing the qualities of ceaseless effort (*al-ṣamadīyah*) and steadfastness (*ṣumūd*) inherent to the name. Al-Būnī evokes a handful of famous Sufis who are said have attained great spiritual heights through continuous *dhikr* of the name Allāh, thus reinforcing the aforementioned notion that the science of letters and names is indeed the science of the saints. He refers the reader to *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt* and *Shams al-ma'ārif*, where, he says, the 'lesser' and 'greater' forms of this practice are discussed:

والذي تقرب بهذا الاسم في خلواته يكون ذكره اسم الله تعالى وتكون حركاته وسكناته يصمد فيها الى الله تعالى لان الصمدية صفة الذات الأزلية والاسم اسم الذات ازلتي فيكون الصمود في الباطن والظاهر والذكر اسم الذات لانه ليس من حقيقة الآ وسر الصمود لها لازم وأهل هذه الخلوات بهذا الاسم يكشف لهم اسرار الجبروت وحقائق الملكوت وذلك شاهد أكثره سهل بن عبد الله التستري وذو النون المصري وابو يزيد البسطامي وأكثر الجماعة رضي الله عن فتمكن وغير متمكن وقد شرحنا كيفية الرياضات الصغرى في كتابنا مواقف الغايات في اسرار الرياضات والرياضات الكبرى في شمس المعارف ولطائف العوارف والله الملمهم للصواب

As for him who would draw closer to God in his vigil by means of this name [al-Ṣamad], his *dhikr* will be the name ‘Allāh’ the Highest, and the motions and stillnesses in which he perseveres will be toward God [Allāh] the Highest, because ceaseless effort is an attribute of the eternal Quiddity and the name ‘the name of the Quiddity’ [*ism al-dhāt*] is eternal. He will be steadfast in his inner and outer [behavior] and in the *dhikr* of the name of the Quiddity, for it [*scil.* the *dhikr*] is not realized except that the secret of steadfastness [*ṣumūd*] is inherent to it. The mysteries of the *Jabarūt* and realities of the *Malakūt* have been unveiled to those who undertake vigils by means of this name, as witnessed to a great degree by Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī, Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī, Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, and many others of that school (may God be pleased with them). There are those well-versed and not well-versed [in such practices], and we have explained the method of the lesser practices in our book *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyāḍāt*, and of the greater practices in *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif*. God is the inspirer of that which is correct.²²⁵

In another example, in *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*—a work which, as the above quote suggests, is largely dedicated to ‘vigil’ (*khalwah*) practices—al-Būnī, in a discussion of obstructive ‘veils’ a practitioner of such retreats may face, declares that elaboration on a certain point regarding this phenomenon would entail too lengthy a digression. He thus urges the reader to consult a detailed discussion of the matter in *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*:

والحجاب الثالث يظهر له خيالات شيطانية لا تثبت حقائقها لا علماً ولا كشفاً بل تروج الشيطان لاجل الخلوة فمن وجد ذلك فليغتسل وليذكر يا ذا القوة فانه يذهب عنه ومواجيد ذلك لا يحاط بها اذ هي عدد الخواطر فليزن ما يرد عليه في قسطاس الشيخ المقتدي به ولو شرحنا ذلك على التفصيل لخرجنا عن لطف الاختصار بثقل الاكثار وقد استوعبنا ذلك في حقائق درج المقامات وحصر اطوار الواردات على اختلاف التجليات في كتابنا المرسوم بهداية القاصدين و!نهاية الواصلين فتدبره هنالك ان شاء الله تعالى

The third veil appears to him (*scil.* the practitioner) as satanic phantasms. Their reality is not grounded in knowledge or spiritual ‘unveiling’, for they are an insinuation by the devil on account of the vigil. One who experiences this should perform a major ablution and recite [i.e. as a *dhikr*] ‘O He who has power’, and verily it will depart from him. He shall not grasp at these manifestations, for they are numerous stray thoughts, but let him weigh what he receives on the scales of the *shaykh* he follows. If we were to explain this

²²⁵ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 17^b, ln. 20–fol. 18^a, ln. 7.

[matter] in detail we would stray from the sweetness of brevity into the heaviness of lengthiness, for we have addressed this [topic] in depth with regard to the realities of advancement through the [spiritual] stations, along with an enumeration of the stages of receiving different theophanies, in our book entitled *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*. You shall ponder it there, God willing.²²⁶

While in most of the intertexts the reader is referred somewhat generally to another work, in a minority of instances the reader is directed to a particular section of the other text. In *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* for example, in a discussion of a talisman that draws upon God's name 'al-Dā'im' (the Permanent), the letter *dāl*, and the divine qualities of mercy and generosity linked with the planet Jupiter, he refers the reader to the chapters in '*Alam al-hudá* on God's names al-Dā'im and al-Raḥmān (the Merciful):

من كتب شكل الدال في حريرة بيضاء خمسة وثلاثين مرة والقمر في السرطان محظوظ من المشتري وجعله في خاتمه في مثل ذلك الوقت ولبسه على طهارة وصوم وصفاء باطن دائم ادام الله تعالى عليه التعمة التي هو فيها واقامه الى كل حركة ظاهره ووسع الله عليه رزقه ومن اكثر من اسمه الدائم كان له ذلك وقد شرحناه جملة في اسمه الدائم والدال من الحمد في كتابنا علم الهدى واسرار الإهتداء في فهم سلوكك معنى اساء الله الحسنى وباطنه في اسمه الرحمن تعالى

He who writes the shape of *dāl* on a piece of white silk thirty-five times while the Moon is in Cancer and aligned favorably with Jupiter, and places it in his signet-ring during that time and wears it while in a state of ritual purity, fasting, and continuous internal quietude, God will make lasting for him the state of grace he is in, and support him in every external undertaking. And God will extend His sustenance generously to one who multiplies [i.e. performs *dhikr* of] His name al-Dā'im if he has that [talisman] with him. We have explained it [*scil.* God's generosity] extensively regarding His name al-Dā'im and the *dāl* in *al-ḥamd* [i.e. in the phrase *al-ḥamd li-llāh*] in our book '*Alam al-hudá wa-asrār al-ihtidā' fī fahm sulūk ma'ná asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*, and its esoteric meaning in [the chapter] on His name al-Raḥmān (Most High).²²⁷

It should be noted, however, that the apparent specificity of this reference is somewhat misleading, as the themes in question (the name 'al-Dā'im' and the *dāl* in *al-ḥamd li-llāh*) are discussed at several points throughout '*Alam al-hudá*, and not solely in the mentioned chapters. Indeed, the topics

²²⁶ Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160.2 (MGh), fol. 48^b. ln. 5-49^a, ln. 1.

²²⁷ BnF MS arabe 2658 (Li), fol. 76^a, lns. 1-10.

that many of the intertexts promise to clarify are themselves diffused throughout the works indicated, such that the intertexts most often are less references to clearly delineated points in the other texts than puzzles for the reader to deduce with time and effort. Much as in the Jābirian corpus, then, the function of the intertexts is obfuscatory toward casual readers of a single volume, while encouraging dedicated ones to seek out answers in his other works.

2.2.3 Implications of the intertexts regarding al-Būnī's composition and revision practices

The intertexts have implications with regard to the order in which these works were composed, stemming from the fact that the great majority of the intertexts are in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* and *'Alam al-hudá*. These are the two works that, as mentioned previously and discussed in detail in the following section, can definitively be said to have been composed and auditioned in Cairo in 621-622/1224-1225. They are also the only two works which we have in copies that claim to be 'descended' from auditioned copies of the works. Assuming that we can take this to mean that the texts preserved in these copies are faithful reproductions of the texts that were auditioned—which certainly is one of the things that audition certificates were meant to vouchsafe—then the other three works, *Shams al-ma'ārif*, *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*, and *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*, must have been composed prior to these two in order for intertexts referring to them to be present. This in turn would indicate that the reference to *'Alam al-hudá* in *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt* was added at some point after *'Alam al-hudá* was composed. This is the basis of my working assumption that *'Alam al-hudá* and *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* were the last of these five works to be composed. Furthermore, I would proffer the hypothesis that *all* of the intertexts were added around the time that *'Alam al-hudá* and *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* were composed, including those between the earlier three works. This is to say that, if my suspicion is correct, it was in Cairo that al-Būnī put the entirety of this apparatus of intertexts in place, a move that likely evolved from the way he taught these texts.

2.2.4 Rhetorical and social-practical effects of the intertexts

While al-Būnī composed no single *magnum opus* on the scale of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*, the intertexts have the effect of binding al-Būnī’s core works together into a sort of *organon* of his teachings on Sufism and the science of letters and names, framing the science not as a subject auxiliary to religious pursuits, but as one integral to Sufism itself as the royal road of Islamic devotion. As discussed previously, these works variously address an overview of the Sufi path as a process of accomplishments (*Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*), ‘standard’ Sufi spiritual practices such as *dhikr* and *khalwah* (*Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*), the comprehension and utilization of the divine names as the means of ascending the ladder of being toward God (*‘Alam al-hudá*), and contemplative and operative understandings of the letters and of talismans (*Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*). By linking these works together, the intertexts point to the integrated nature of these ideas and practices as al-Būnī conceived of them. Simultaneously, however, specific topics were distributed to different works. For example, the most explicitly astrological and talismanic materials are limited primarily to *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, while other texts would have seemed, at least on casual perusal, to be more typical expressions of Sufi piety. This may have been a useful state of affairs where suspicions of irreligion arose or where there were concerns about the gradual introduction of students to different types of materials.

As noted above, I suspect that the intertexts were included for the benefit of al-Būnī’s Cairene disciples, and that they were products of al-Būnī’s methods of teaching his texts in person. This is not to say, however, that the intertexts were meant to obviate the need for a master to guide readers through this maze of texts. As Morris has observed regarding the dispersion of knowledge in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Futūḥāt*, a living teacher was an almost absolute necessity for fully comprehending works such as these: “[It was a] fundamental fact that a text like the *Futūḥāt*—as with virtually all the Islamic esoteric traditions—was always meant to be read primarily in the company of a master, with the guidance of the *oral* commentary and taking into account the specific capacities of each student.”²²⁸ The

²²⁸ Morris, “Ibn Arabi’s ‘Esotericism,’” 43. Morris’ emphasis.

contents of this oral component no doubt included guidance with regard to the written texts, but also additional instruction not contained in the texts. This certainly included matters of embodied practice, e.g. *dhikr* techniques, but perhaps also such matters as mathematical operations that underlay the designs of some cryptogrammatic talismans (*wafq*, pl. *awfāq*). The section of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Kitāb al-mīm wa-al-wāw wa-al-nūn* discussed in the introduction to this chapter suggests that Ibn al-‘Arabī regarded operative elements of the science of letters as belonging to this sphere of strictly oral instruction, but the fact that al-Būnī included in his texts some degree of instruction in operative lettrism and related spiritual practices should not be taken to imply that the written instructions were meant to be sufficient for mastering the science. Indeed, as discussed in the following chapter, al-Būnī regularly reinforces the need for a master in learning matters of Sufi practice.

Finally, I would argue that the difficulty of obtaining copies of al-Būnī’s works during the germinal period reinforced the social-practical impact of the intertexts, as well as an aura of mystery surrounding the texts. A lone reader in possession of a single work who desired to follow the lead of an intertext would have been hard-pressed to do so unless he could find some point of entry into one of the reading communities in which they circulated, much as he would need to do in order to find a qualified master with whom to read these works. Of course, al-Būnī’s use of *tabdīd al-‘ilm* was only one practice he employed in efforts manipulate the relationship of his written works to the textual economy of Ayyūbid Egypt, and the transmission practices discussed in the following section should be understood as having been utilized in conjunction with this composition practice toward the goal of limiting distribution of his teachings to those he most likely would have considered worthy of them.

2.3 Al-Būnī’s composition and transmission practices

Al-Būnī’s practices for promulgating his works are a topic of obvious interest for examining how and by whom he expected them to be read, and insofar as his disciples might be expected to have

imitated them in further transmitting his works. There is a small but rich body of evidence that testifies to this matter: an extraordinary cluster of mutually reinforcing paratexts offers glimpses of al-Būnī composing and transmitting his works *‘Alam al-hudá* and *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*. As these paratexts tell us, these processes took place between the first part of Dhū al-Qa‘dah of 621 (mid-to-late November, 1224) and the end of Rabī al-awwal of 622 (early April, 1225) at the Qarāfah al-Kubrā cemetery, Cairo’s great ‘City of the Dead’, a site then at the edge of Cairo. Taken as a group, these paratexts provide some of the only precise, multiply-attested sets of spatiotemporal coordinates for al-Būnī’s embodied career. As mentioned previously.

2.3.1 The composition and transmission paratexts

In what follows I present each of these paratexts in full. As we will see, none of them are found in manuscripts produced during the germinal period. One is an authorial colophon appearing in some late eighth/fourteenth-century copies of *‘Alam al-hudá*. The others are paratexts found in codices of a similar age that reproduce or reference paratexts from the germinal-period manuscripts from which they were copied. These surviving manuscripts are also the sources of much of the information on the non-extant copies of Būnian works mentioned above. Some of these paratexts are relevant to our understanding of more than one transmission event and reading community. In this section I focus on their relevance to al-Būnī’s own transmission practices, while I discuss certain other information they contain later in this chapter and in subsequent ones.

2.3.1.1 Authorial colophon for ‘Alam al-hudá, and notes on al-Būnī’s compositional practices

The first of these paratexts is an authorial colophon for *‘Alam al-hudá* that is reproduced identically in at least three eighth/fourteenth-century copies of that work: Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (copied in Damascus in 772/1370), Beyazid MS 1377 (copied in 773/1371), and Süleymaniye MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 588 (copied in 792/1390). The text of the statement, which in each case appears immediately following the end of the main text and prior to the scribal colophon, is as follows:

قال أبو العباس مؤلفه رضى الله عنه ابتدائه في العشر الاوّل في ذي القعدة من ستّة احدى وعشرين
وستماية وفرغت منه صبيحة يوم الاثنين السابع عشر من ذي الحجة من الستّة المذكورة وذلك بظاهر مصر
حرسها الله تعالى وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد النبي وعلى آله وصحبه وسلّم كثيراً

Abū al-‘Abbās, the author of it [*scil.* ‘*Alam al-hudá*], may God be pleased with him, said: I began it in the first third of Dhū al-Qa‘dah in the year 621 [mid-to-late November, 1224] and I finished it on the morning of Monday the seventeenth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah of the same year [the end of December, 1224]. That was on the outskirts of Miṣr [*scil.* greater Cairo] (may God the Highest protect her). God’s blessings and peace be upon our master and patron the noble Prophet Muḥammad, and upon his family and Companions.²²⁹

As we will see, these dates and whereabouts are corroborated in another paratext discussed immediately below; that and other paratexts further specify the location, mentioned here only as “the outskirts of Cairo,” as being al-Qarāfah al-Kubrā cemetery.

One will note that the period of composition given in the statement is quite brief, and it seems unlikely that al-Būnī penned ‘*Alam al-hudá*—his longest work that has survived, averaging more than two hundred and twenty folia—in a little over a month. It seems more feasible if common writing practices of the period are considered. First, it is quite possible that these dates are reflective only of the time during which the fair copy of the work was penned. The work may have been drafted over the course of years prior, and in any case likely grew out of al-Būnī’s teaching activities in group settings, during which much of the content would have been developed in lectures and perhaps even recorded as *hypomnemata* by al-Būnī or a disciple. Second, it is entirely possible that al-Būnī worked with an amanuensis in committing this and other works to paper. Ibn al-‘Arabī is known to have used such methods,²³⁰ and a work of Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Ḥarālī, another important Western Sufi and letrist of the period, is recorded as having been created this way in Cairo. This is noted in the opening lines of Süleymaniye MS Fatih 3434, a manuscript of his *Kitāb al-Lamḥah fī ma‘rifat al-ḥurūf*, in which it is stated

²²⁹ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 239^b, lns. 16-18; cf. Beyazid MS 1377, fol. 178^b; Süleymaniye MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 588, fol. 221^a.

²³⁰ Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 128.

that the text is based on his lectures over a period of months in 629/1231-32 at the Jāmi‘ al-‘Atīq in Cairo (Miṣr) which were preserved through the “dictation of his speech and his editing of it [*scil.* the transcript] at the time of dictation.”²³¹ Indeed, though the subject has not been studied systematically, one might suspect that dictation practices were the norm rather than the exception in the composition of medieval Sufi works given the emphasis on master-disciple relationships within Sufism.

2.3.1.2 Collation statements in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.1 and 590.2

The next paratexts bearing on al-Būnī’s months in al-Qarāfah come from another copy of ‘*Alam al-hudá*, this one in two parts: Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.1 and 590.2. The authorial colophon discussed above is absent from this copy of the work, possibly suggesting a fairly early divergence of *stemma* and/or lines of transmission. According to the scribal colophon, the set was copied in Cairo by one Maḥmūd Shāh b. Sallār b. Dāwūd al-Āfī(?), who completed it on the tenth of Rajab, 798 (April, 1396) in Cairo. The most important paratexts from this volume, for our purposes, are two *muqābalah* (‘collation’) statements, one at the end of each part; these are statements recording the text of a codex having been checked for accuracy (collated) against another copy. These collations were conducted by someone other than the copyist, one Ayyūb b. Quṭlūbak al-Rūmī al-Ḥanafī, only months after the copying of the volumes was completed, the first being collated in Shawwāl, 798 (July, 1396) and the second in Dhū al-Ḥijjah (September) of the same year. These statements are extraordinary in that, like a Russian doll set, they contain a recessed series of paratexts from previous copies of the work. In this way they provide information on both the older codex against which the surviving codex was collated (a non-extant copy completed in or before Ṣafar of 738/1337, listed at the beginning of this chapter), and the yet-older copy against which that intermediate copy was collated and which apparently was auditioned in the presence of, and signed by, al-Būnī himself (also listed above). As we will see, the

²³¹ Süleymaniye MS Fatih 3434 (*Kitāb al-lamḥah fī ma‘rifat al-ḥurūf*, copied 721/1321), fol. 1^b, lns. 1-3.

قال... الحرالي إملاء من لفظه وتحريره في حال الإملاء بجامع العتيق لمصر...

statements convey information on three distinct communities of readers, only two of which are in the time period under discussion in this chapter: one was a community around al-Būnī in al-Qarāfah, and the other an early eighth/fourteenth century Sufi collectivity calling itself the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā' wa-khullān al-wafā'* ('the brethren of purity and friends of sincerity', a quite unsubtle reference to the famous community of quasi-Ismā'īlite esotericists of fourth/tenth-century Iraq who went by the same name).

Below is the collation statement from the end of the first part (Reṣīd efendi 590.1), which appears directly under the scribal colophon (see Figure 2). Note that Ayyūb b. Quṭlūbak, the collator and the author of this statement, quotes from a collation statement in the exemplar from which he worked. Below I have separated the quote out with paragraph-breaks:

بلغت مقابلة هذا الدفتر من اوله إلى آخره من نسخة صحيحة مقابلة مكتوبة في آخرها:
 سطره أقلّ عبید الله تعالى یحیی بن احمد الخلیلی الشافعی الصوفی وقابلها بنسخة علیها سماع المصنف بخطه
 رحمه الله في رابع صفر سنة ثمان و ثلاثین وسبعماية وكان بحضرة الإخوة الصوفیة بالخانقاه المحسنیة بنجر
 الاسکندریة انتهى

واتفق الفراغ عن مقابلة هذا الجزء على النسخة المشار إليها اعلاه على يد أضعف عبید الله واحوجهم إلى
 رحمته وغفرانه ایوب بن قطلوبک الرومی الحنفی عامله الله بلطفه الجلی والحنفی فی جوار المدرسة
 الصیرغمشیة بقاهرة مصر المحروسة حماها الله تعالى عن الافات وحفظها عن العاهات بتاريخ الثاني عشر
 من شوال المبارك من شهر عام ثمان وتسعين وسبعماية هجرية

The collation of this volume [*daftar*] from beginning to end was completed from a sound copy of the text with a collation note at the end:

The most insignificant servant of God the Highest Yaḥyá b. Aḥmad al-Khalīlī al-Shāfī'ī al-Ṣūfī inscribed it [the codex]. He [*scil.* Yaḥyá] collated it—against a [copy of the] text which had a certificate of audition before the author (may God have mercy on him) that carried his [*scil.* al-Būnī's] signature—on the fourth of Ṣafar in the year 738 [September, 1337] while he [Yaḥyá] was at a gathering of Sufi brothers at al-Khānqāh al-Muḥsinīyah in Alexandria. [The *intaḥá* here marks the end of the quote.]

The collation of this section [i.e. the first part of the set to hand] against the aforementioned copy of the text [i.e. that collated by Yaḥyá] was completed and finalized at the hand of the weakest servant of God and most needful of His mercy and forgiveness Ayyūb b. Quṭlūbak al-Rūmī al-Ḥanafī (may God treat him with manifest and hidden kindness) near al-Madrasah al-Ṣuyurghuṭmushīyah in Cairo the [city] protected [by God] (may God the Highest guard her from

plagues and preserve her from diseases) on the date of the twelfth of the blessed [month] Shawwāl of the year 798 [July, 1396].²³²

To be clear, three copies of *‘Alam al-hudá* are in play in this statement: 1) the one to hand (i.e. Reşid efendi 590.1, in which the statement is found), collated at the *madrasah* of the *amir* Şarġhatmish (Şuyurghuţmush)²³³ in Cairo²³⁴ in 798/1396 by Ayyūb b. Quţlūbak; 2) the copy Ayyūb collated his copy against, which itself was collated by Yaĥyá b. Aĥmad in 738/1337 at al-Khānqāh al-Muĥsinīyah, an institution founded by a governor of Alexandria not very long before, and located outside the walls of the city²³⁵; and 3) the text Yaĥyá collated that copy against, which contained a *samā‘* (audition certificate)—a type of paratext discussed in detail below—signed by al-Būnī himself (*nuskah* *‘alayhā samā‘ al-muṣannif bi-khaţṭihi*).

The second collation statement is at the end of Reşid efendi 590.2, winding sideways and upside down along the bottom and right margin of the final folio (see Figures 3 and 4). It repeats much of the information from the previous statement, but quotes a different part of the collation statement from the codex collated by Yaĥyá b. Aĥmad in 738/1337. This quoted statement again mentions the copy auditioned before al-Būnī, but goes into more detail about that audition session, though (unfortunately) without reproducing the text of the original certificate. The statement is as follows, with a paragraph-break denoting the beginning of the statement quoted from the 738/1337 copy:

²³² Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.1 (AH), fol. 64^b, bottom of page.

²³³ This *madrasah*, completed in 757/1356, still stands and is located adjacent to the Mosque of Ibn Ṭulūn. It is number 218 on the Comité list of Cairene historical structures. For a description of the *madrasah* see Caroline Williams, *Islamic Monuments in Cairo: The Practical Guide*, 2008, 49–50. As for Şuyurghuţmush/Şarġhatmish, there was considerable variation in the medieval Arabization of Turkish names, a fact reflected in written sources. For a brief discussion of this phenomenon, and specifically of Şuyurghuţmush, Şarġhatmish, and other variants on that name, see J.M. Rogers, *El2*, s.v. ‘al- Qāhira’.

²³⁴ Given the location of the *madrasah* (see the fn above), the phrase ‘*bi-qāhiraţ Mişr*’, which I have glossed simply as ‘Cairo’, obviously does not refer to the old walled city of the Fāṭimids, but to a somewhat larger area extending at least as far south as the Citadel. This can be seen as a step toward the modern habit of referring to the entire conurbation as al-Qāhira/Cairo.

²³⁵ This *khānqāh* was built by a governor of Alexandria, Bīlīk b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Muĥsinī, sometime after he came into office in 712/1312. Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, 5:143; Martina Müller-Wiener, *Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias von 564/1169 bis in die Mitte des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: Verwaltung und innerstädtische Organisationsformen*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen Bd. 159 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1992), 116.

فرغ من مقابلته وتصحيحه حسب الإمكان بحضرة الإخوان العبد الفقير إلى الله تعالى أيوب بن قطلوبك الحنفي عامله بلطفه الجلي والخفي بجوار المقام الشريف الشهير بالمدرسة السيفية الصيرغتمشية بقاهرة مصر المحروسة صانها الله عن العاهات بتاريخ السابع عشر من ذي الحجة من شهر عام ثمان وتسعين وسبعماية حامداً ومصلياً والنسخة التي قوبلت هذه عليها مكتوب في آخرها:

وقوبلت حسب الإمكان بحضرة الإخوان إخوان الصفاء وعلان الوفي بالخانقاه المحسنية بغير الإسكندرية والنسخة التي كتب منها عليها سماع المصنف وخطه والساع في مجالس آخرها الثالث والعشرون من ربيع الأول ستة إثنين وعشرين وستماية وكان الفراغ من نسخة الأصل المنقول منها بالقرافة الكبرى بظاهر مصر يوم الإثنين السابع عشر من ذي الحجة ستة إحدى وعشرين وستماية وكان ابتداء تصنيفه أول شهر ذي القعدة وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وآله وصحبه وسلّم تسليماً

The poor servant of God the Highest Ayyūb b. Quṭlūbak al-Ḥanafī (may God treat him with manifest and hidden kindness), in the presence of the brothers, completed to the extent possible the collation and correction of it [*scil.* this volume]. [This was done] in the vicinity of the honored place known as al-Madrasah al-Sayfīyah al-Ṣuyurghuṭmushīyah in Cairo the [city] protected [by God] (may God the Highest sustain her against diseases) on the seventeenth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah of the year 798 [September, 1396], as he [Ayyūb] gave praise and prayer. The [copy of the] text against which this [one] was collated has written at the end of it:

This was collated to the extent possible at a gathering of the brothers—the Brethren of Purity and Friends of Sincerity—at al-Khānqāh al-Muḥsinīyah in Alexandria. The [copy of the] text it was written from has in it a certificate of audition before the author, and his signature. The audition was in sessions [i.e. it took place over multiple sessions] the last of which was on the twenty-third of Rabī al-Awwal [in the] year 622 [early April, 1225]. The original copy of the text [*nuskhat al-aṣl*] that was being transmitted was completed in al-Qarāfah al-Kubrā on the outskirts of Miṣr on Monday the seventeenth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah [in the] year 621 [the end of December, 1224], and the start of its composition was at the beginning of the month Dhū al-Qa'dah. God bless and grant salvation to our master Muḥammad, his family, and his companions.²³⁶

The information in the collation statement reproduced from the 738/1337 copy thus corroborates the dates of composition for *‘Alam al-hudá* given in the authorial colophon discussed at the beginning of this section, adding the detail that the place “at the outskirts of Miṣr” where it was composed was al-Qarāfah al-Kabīrah (the latter being a variant on ‘al-Kubrā’). It further provides the

²³⁶ Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.2 (AH), fol. 130^b, bottom and right margin.

date of the last of the sessions (*majālis*) at which *‘Alam al-hudá* was auditioned before al-Būnī: the twenty-third of Rabīʿ al-Awwal, 622, about three months after al-Būnī completed his composition of the work. As we will see, the next paratext to be considered further fleshes out the events of al-Būnī’s months in the Cairene cemetery. The neo-*Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* mentioned in these statements are discussed later in this chapter and in the fourth chapter.

2.3.1.3 Copied audition certificate in BnF MS arabe 2658, further evidence of audition

This final piece of paratextual evidence relating to al-Būnī’s time at al-Qarāfah is found near the end of BnF MS arabe 2658, a handsome copy of *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* that, according to the colophon, was copied by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, *imām* of al-Jāmiʿ al-Yūsufī in the Fayyūm, and completed at the famous al-Azhar mosque in Cairo (al-Qāhirah) at the end of Muḥarram, 809 (July, 1406). Just after the explicit and prior to the colophon—under the heading, “Among what was found at the end of this book” (*mimmā wujida ‘alā ākhir hādhā al-kitāb*)—it contains an audition certificate reproduced from the exemplar from which the copyist worked (see Figure 5). The copyist takes care to note that: “The text of this [certificate] was in a hand not that of the *muṣannif*” (*hādhā nuskhātuhi bi-ghayr khaṭṭ al-muṣannif*). *Muṣannif* often, though not always, means ‘author’; thus, as George Vajda points out in his notes on this manuscript, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad’s statement indicates a strong possibility that the exemplar from which he worked was—aside from this certificate—in the hand of al-Būnī himself.²³⁷ The text of the certificate is as follows:

سمع كتاب لطائف الإشارات في الحرف العلويات القاضي الاعدل الصالح الزاهد قاضي الفقراء وعمدة
الصلحاء عمر بن إبراهيم الربيعي وولده إبراهيم وفقهما الله وذلك في العشر الأول من شهر ربيع الأول سنة
اثنين وعشرين وستماية وذلك بالقرافة الكبيرة بظاهر مصر حماها الله تعالى وهو موضع تاليه

²³⁷ “Comme le copiste fait remarquer que ce certificat n’est pas de la main de l’auteur, il est probable que le reste du manuscrit copié était autographe”; Vajda, “Notices des manuscrits arabes 2400 à 2759,” sec. on BnF MS arabe 2658. N.B. that the Bibliothèque nationale de France has made Vajda’s typed and handwritten notes on BnF MSS arabes 2-6669 available for downloading on their Gallica website (gallica.bnf.fr). Filled with Vajda’s insights and the fruits of his paleographical skills, they are an invaluable resource for working with the collection.

The most just and virtuous judge, the ascetic, the judge of the poor ones [i.e. Sufis] and support of the pious ones ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm al-Rabā’ī and his son Ibrāhīm (may God make them both suitable) heard the book *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥarf[!] al-‘ulwīyāt*. That was in the first third of the month Rabī‘ al-awwal of the year 622 (mid-March, 1225), at al-Qarāfah al-Kabīrah on the outskirts of Miṣr (may God protect her). This was the site of its [scil. the book’s] composition.²³⁸

Although al-Būnī is not named as having been present at the auditioning of *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt* documented in the certificate, his participation in the event is implicit in the text by virtue of the very exclusion of his name—an assertion that requires some explanation. Audition certificates (*samā‘, tasmī‘*) are formulaic paratextual documents that record performances of a ritual for the transmission of written texts in which a work was read aloud either in the presence of the author of the text, or in that of a *shaykh* in a line of transmission from the author. This practice typically was understood to endow the ‘listeners’ in attendance with the authority to teach, transmit, and otherwise use the text in question, and also to certify the written copy of the text in which the certificate appears as highly reliable. As discussed below, it was a vital ‘external’ component of the textual economy of much of the medieval Arab-Islamic world, such that inclusion of an audition certificate in a codex—even one copied from the exemplar, as is the case with BnF MS arabe 2658, could greatly enhance the value of codex as an instrument for the transferal of the authority the work, above and beyond its utility simply as a copy of the text.

The basic formula for an audition certificate is: *Sami‘a al-kitāb‘ alā fulānⁱⁿ fulān^{um} wa-fulān.^{um}* The verb *sami‘a* takes two objects, one direct and one indirect; the former is the work being auditioned, and the latter—that which follows the preposition ‘*alā*, meaning ‘before’, as in ‘in the presence of’—being the *musmi‘*, the *shaykh* presiding over the event. The grammatical subjects of the verb *sami‘a*, of whom there must be at least one, though often there are many more, are the listeners who heard the performance of the work and were thereby inducted into its chain of transmission. In the audition certificate reproduced in BnF MS arabe 2658, the names of two listeners are given, ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm al-

²³⁸ BnF MS arabe 2658 (*Li*), fol. 90^a, bottom half of page.

Rabāī and his son Ibrāhīm, but the name of the presiding *shaykh* is elided. Without a presiding *shaykh* the event being recorded would have been meaningless, thus the elision must indicate that his identity is obvious: the author of the work being auditioned.

‘Obvious’ is a relative term of course, and what was obvious to actors of the time may be less so to modern readers, but a number of other elements in this and the other paratexts under discussion help confirm al-Būnī’s participation in this event. As Vajda suggested, the copyist’s preliminary note may indicate that the exemplar in which the certificate originally was inscribed was a holograph, which would strongly suggest al-Būnī’s presence at the proceedings. The final line of the certificate stating that the Qarāfah was also the site of the work’s composition additionally supports the notion that al-Būnī presided over the audition there. Not incidentally, the latter is also beneficial in that, in combination with a reference within the text of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* to events in Mecca in 621,²³⁹ we can ascertain *termini post* and *ante quem* for the composition of that work, i.e. sometime between 621 and its auditioning in Rabī al-awwal of 622. Most convincing, however, is the confluences of the date and place of this audition of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* with the dates and locations mentioned in the various ‘*Alam al-hudá*’ paratexts discussed previously. Those tell us that al-Būnī composed ‘*Alam al-hudá*’ at the Qarāfah cemetery between early Dhū al-Qa’dah and the seventeenth of Dhu al-Ḥijjah of 621 (between mid-to-late November and the end of December, 1224), and that the work was auditioned at al-Qarāfah in a series of *majālis* ending on the twenty-third of Rabī al-Awwal, 622 (early April, 1225). The audition certificate from *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* allows us to conclude that al-Būnī completed that work sometime between 621 and Rabī al-Awwal of 622, and tells us explicitly that it too was composed at al-Qarāfah. Furthermore the certificate tells us it was auditioned there in the first third of Rabī al-awwal, which is to say shortly prior to the auditioning of ‘*Alam al-hudá*’. In sum we learn that the two works were composed either successively or simultaneously, and that they were auditioned in back-to-back series

²³⁹ BnF MS arabe 2658 (*Li*), fol. 54^b, lns. 12-13.

of sessions. In short, the cemetery was the site of a remarkable flurry of writing and auditioning activity for al-Būnī and others involved.

2.3.2 Audition, reading communities, and esotericism

In modern scholarship, the topic of audition practices was first investigated in depth by a small handful of scholars in the mid-twentieth century,²⁴⁰ enjoyed a revival of interest in the 1990s with regard to cultural aspects of knowledge production,²⁴¹ and has gained momentum since as a growing body of researchers has turned its attention to audition certificates and other types of manuscript paratexts as historical sources.²⁴² Because audition certificates appear most frequently in medieval copies of *ḥadīth* collections, and because medieval scholars explicitly theorized and wrote manuals on audition and related transmission practices only in relation to the *ḥadīth* sciences, the vast majority of modern scholarship on audition has been in connection with the transmission of *ḥadīth* works and closely related genres, such as prosopographies of *muḥaddithūn*.²⁴³ The use of audition in the transmission of Sufi works—apparently a somewhat rare phenomenon—has not been systematically addressed, though here I hope to lay some groundwork for a more comprehensive study of the topic.

²⁴⁰ Such as Franz Rosenthal, “The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship,” *Analecta Orientalia* 24 (1947): VII–74 (79 pgs); Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*; Georges Vajda, *Les certificats de lecture et de transmission dans les manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1956). Though rather later, another groundbreaking work on these topics was Makdisi, *The Rise of the Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*.

²⁴¹ For example Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*; Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*; Devin Stewart, “The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria,” in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of George Makdisi* (Cambridge (USA): Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 45–90. It should be noted that these studies, which made some important advances in theoretical understandings of the social functions of *samāʿ* and other transmission practices, dwelled primarily on statements made *about* these practices by medieval authors, and not so much on actual paratexts. The more recent generation of scholarship on these topics (discussed in the following fn) takes the logical next step of paying far greater attention to the analysis of actual paratexts.

²⁴² Some of the best examples being Stefan Leder’s numerous articles on these topics, as well as his aforementioned *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-Dimashqīyah*. Most recently, several excellent articles on paratext-based research are to be found in Konrad Hirschler and Andreas Görke’s previously mentioned *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*.

²⁴³ Such as in the scholarship of Eerik Dickinson, Stefan Leder, and Konrad Hirschler discussed above and in the previous chapter.

Some of the best evidence of Sufi use of the practice comes from the realm of Ibn al-‘Arabī studies, as *al-shaykh al-akbar* avidly employed it. Thus he serves as an important point of comparison as I turn to the question of what al-Būnī and his disciples were accomplishing, or attempting to accomplish, through the auditioning of his works. While much modern scholarship has focused on the public nature of audition as employed in the context of *ḥadīth* works, I emphasize in what follows that it was a flexible tool that could be turned to various ends by different types of actors, arguing that Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Būnī’s use of it was of a piece with their esotericism, such that, in many cases, they employed it as a means of restricting the circulation of their works to trusted disciples. I begin with a brief review of the social, historical, and geographical parameters of audition, including the apparent peak popularity of the practice in the Ayyūbid and early Mamlūk periods. I then move to a discussion of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s use of audition, with particular attention to Claude Addas’ comments thereon, comparing it with what the evidence shows about al-Būnī’s use of the practice.

2.3.2.1 Social, historical, and geographical parameters of audition

As noted previously, an audition session (*samā’*) was a ritual practice entailing the oral performance of a text before an audience of listeners, under the supervision of either the author of the text or someone in a line of transmission from the author (the *musmi’*), with the outcome that listeners were granted the authority to further transmit the work, along with other social and spiritual benefits. Audition sessions were formal affairs, with the presiding *shaykh*’s top student/disciple typically fulfilling the role of the reader (*qāri’*). In many cases certificates note the name of the reader as such, and sometimes also that of the *kātib* (‘writer’, ‘secretary’), this being the person who inscribed the certificate and who, in large gatherings, was in charge of keeping track of who attended.²⁴⁴ The order in which the names of the listeners are recorded often is reflective of the seating arrangement, which was

²⁴⁴ On various formulae for audition certificates and the roles of different actors in the sessions, see Leder, “Spoken Word and Written Text,” 6 ff.

itself reflective of a hierarchy of participants, with those seated nearer to the *shaykh* being of higher social and/or spiritual station.²⁴⁵ Finally, on a terminological and typological note, the practice of ‘auditioning’ a text is difficult to distinguish clearly from that of ‘reading’ a text in the presence of a qualified *shaykh* (*qirā’ah*, *qara’a ‘alā*)—of which the transmission event discussed above between Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād and Abū al-Faḍl al-Ghumārī is an example. The terms seem often to have been interchangeable,²⁴⁶ though *samā’* may have been the favored term in describing the practice of when employed in group settings, with ‘listeners’ as well as the reader gaining the right to transmit. In that sense one could posit that all *samā’* events are instances of *qirā’ah*, but not vice-versa,²⁴⁷ though the variability of usage in transmission paratexts seems to defy precise distinctions.²⁴⁸

Audition and ‘reading’ practices seem to have grown out of practices for the transmission of *ḥadīths*, and they allowed learned actors to take advantage of the compositional and information-storage technologies afforded by the codex while also, at least notionally, subordinating it to the authority of living teachers. Books were regarded as not entirely reliable means of preserving and transmitting texts—quite correctly, given the inevitably high incidence of scribal errors—and medieval commentators on audition practices emphasized their value in helping prevent the promulgation of textual errors, especially with regard to quasi-scriptural texts such as *ḥadīths* that were effective in matters of religious law. This corrective aspect of audition also was stressed by some of the modern researchers who first discussed audition practices in detail, particularly Jan Pedersen, who presented audition primarily as a process of “check-reading” intended to eliminate errors in the copying

²⁴⁵ Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 47 ff.

²⁴⁶ Makdisi, *The Rise of the Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, 243.

²⁴⁷ See Leder, who subsumes audition under the heading of *qirā’tan ‘alayhi* practices, “Spoken Word and Written Text,” 5 ff.

²⁴⁸ Jonathan Berkey makes the potentially misleading distinction that *sami’a min* meant to “[hear] a text read or recited from memory by its author, or by one who himself had previously studied the work with another shaykh,” and the *qara’a ‘alā* meant that the student “himself ‘read to’... a teacher, out loud, his own transcription of the text.” While both descriptions could be accurate in some, even many, instances, neither rises to the level of a rule in my estimation; *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 24.

process.²⁴⁹ However, more recent scholarship on audition practices, especially that of Jonathan Berkey, Michael Chamberlain, Konrad Hirschler, and Stefan Leder, has emphasized that far more than textual accuracy was at stake, and that audition and related practices were important means by which Sunnite *‘ulamā’* negotiated relations of status among themselves, forged individual and group identities as religious specialists, and otherwise labored to produce and reproduce their socioreligious authority. Berkey notes that the audition certificate (and related types of licenses) was issued not just on authority of a licensee’s *shaykh*, but “on the authority of... his teacher’s teachers, and all those in a chain of authority (*sanad, isnād*) reaching back to the author of the book or, in the case of ḥadīth, to the Prophet himself or his Companions,”²⁵⁰ such that it testified to a student’s specific relationship to a given textual-transmission tradition and line of teachers while also reaffirming the legitimacy of Jamā’ī Sunnite learning as a whole. Chamberlain has discussed audition as one key component of a complex of practices entailing an “endless circular displacement between the oral and the written, between [textual] production and reproduction” which “identifies the production of texts as a ritual practice.” Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of bodily ‘habitus’, he argues that to perform a text properly during an audition session or in related group reading environments was not merely to recite the words correctly, but also to embody *shaykh*-liness. That is a mixture of competencies and comportment that a student acquired not just through discursive learning, but also through the imitation of his teacher’s “pronunciation, intonation, and gestures,” qualities that were important components of scholarly *adab*.²⁵¹ In Chamberlain’s view, these transfers of habitus and performances of scholarly *adab* in transmission proceedings, in combination with claims of generations of face-to-face tradents linking the present time to that of the Prophet and other authorities of the past, could even achieve the

²⁴⁹ Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, 28–30.

²⁵⁰ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 31.

²⁵¹ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 148.

‘presencing’ of long-dead masters in the person of the presiding shaykh²⁵²—an embodied expression of what Aziz al-Azmeh has called the “serial recursivity” of Muslim epistemology.²⁵³

Audition and ‘reading’ practices also served to mitigate dangers that many medieval Sunnite scholars perceived to be posed by books as sources of learning. As books came to be indispensable tools for knowledge transmission, practices such as audition served to discipline the spread and use of books, and, at least to some degree, to prevent them from becoming unruly sources of knowledge that could threaten the authority of established learned elites. That books were regarded as potentially disruptive is evidenced by numerous statements from medieval scholars criticizing in strong terms those who took knowledge from books without the guidance of living teachers, and even admonitions that books unaccompanied by teachers should be destroyed. The great fifth/eleventh-century *ḥadīth* scholar and historian al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) attributed to the caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 138/755-56) the injunction: “Whenever one of you finds a book containing knowledge that you did not hear from a scholar, place it in a container of water and soak it there until the black [of the ink] becomes mixed with the white [of the paper or parchment].”²⁵⁴ As Berkey notes, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Jamā‘ah (d. 733/1332-33)—a highly regarded ‘ālim and judge of early Mamlūk Cairo whose great-grandson ‘Izz al-Din Muḥammad (d. 819/1416-17) we will meet later as a transmitter of one of al-Būnī’s works—advised aspiring scholars that to base their learning on books alone was among “the most scandalous of acts.”²⁵⁵ And Hirschler observes that, as audition practices came into widespread use around the sixth/twelfth century, “scholars started to refer in disputes to the absence of certificates in manuscripts in order to identify what they perceived to be reprehensible works.”²⁵⁶ It is important to

²⁵² Ibid., 148–150.

²⁵³ Aziz al-Azmeh, “Muslim Genealogies of Knowledge,” *History of Religions* 31 (1992): 405.

²⁵⁴ Quoted in Eerik Dickinson, “Ibn Al-Salah Al-Sharazuri and the Isnad,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122 (2002): 488.

²⁵⁵ Quoted in Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 26.

²⁵⁶ Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 62.

note that audition practices not only helped establish and regulate relationships among groups of people, but also relationships between people and specific codices. Audition certificates conferred prestige and authority on the people named in them (especially the listeners, for whom they were a proof of their license to transmit further the work), and also marked the specific codex in which a certificate was inscribed as a particularly accurate and authoritative copy of the text.²⁵⁷ Thus manuscripts sometimes contain certificates from great numbers of sessions and in some cases ones performed over the course of centuries, thus marking the codices as loci for multi-generational communities of readers, indeed, as vital *members* of these communities.²⁵⁸ This is to say that reading communities could not have existed without the codices in which the texts they read were contained, and which also bore paratextual testaments to many of a community-members' interactions. This is a key element that makes medieval manuscripts such invaluable sources for understanding the history of a given text as it was embedded within a particular community.

An aspect of audition practices emphasized by a number of recent researchers is their public nature. As Leder and others have noted, sessions for the auditioning of *ḥadīth* works and related texts often were held in congregational mosques or other sites visible and accessible to passers-by, and the lists of auditors that fill many certificates—lists that often end with references to unnamed and unnumbered 'others' in attendance—show that sessions frequently occasioned gatherings of tens or even scores of people. Such visibility and accessibility would have been in keeping with the quasi-democratic, thoroughly *exotericist*, and notionally consensus (*ijmā'*)-based ethos of medieval Jamā'ī Sunnism.²⁵⁹ This is not to say that audition sessions were egalitarian events, however, and Leder has argued that they embodied a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion in that they at once made bodies of

²⁵⁷ Leder, "Spoken Word and Written Text," 5.

²⁵⁸ For several examples of such codices see Leder, al-Sawwās, and al-Ṣāgharjī, *Mu'jam al-samā'āt al-Dimashqīyah*; Hirschler, "Reading certificates (*sama'at*) as a prosopographical source: Cultural and social practices of an elite family in Zangid and Ayyubid Damascus."

²⁵⁹ Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 351. Regarding Sunnism as both democratic and conservative, see 351 of the same article.

ḥadīth and other texts available to a wider (and often illiterate) public while also projecting the authority of the Sunnite scholars as the most capable guardians and administrators of those texts.²⁶⁰

According to Leder the earliest known surviving audition certificate is from a copy of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's (d. 241/855) *Kitāb al-ashribah* that was auditioned in 332/943-44, though other evidence suggests that some form of the practice was already in use during the third/ninth century.²⁶¹ Leder further observes, based in part on his survey of around 1350 audition certificates drawn from eighty-five medieval Damascene manuscripts from the present-day collection in that city's Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhirīyah (a selection from approximately 4000 certificates in manuscripts at that library that were produced between the years 550/1155 and 750/1349²⁶²), that the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries seem to have represented the practice's peak popularity. However, he acknowledges that the low survival rate of manuscripts from before that time may bias this perception. Data drawn from Vajda's 1956 study of almost 200 certificates from seventy-two Arabic manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris—a sample that, though small, has a greater geographical distribution than Leder's—roughly support Leder's estimation, though they suggest that the practice was almost as common in the sixth/twelfth century, as well (see Chart 5). Of course, the small number of certificates available to Vajda in his study means that these numbers, too, must be taken with a large grain of salt. Even with such reservations in mind, however, I think there is little question that the precipitous ninth/fifteenth-century (and onwards) decline in the use of audition practices indicated by Vajda's data was an actual historical phenomenon.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Leder, "Spoken Word and Written Text," 4.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 10. Cf. Pedersen regarding other records of the use of audition in the 4th/10th century, *The Arabic Book*, 28–30.

²⁶² Leder, al-Sawwās, and al-Ṣāgharjī, *Mu'jam al-samā'āt al-Dimashqīyah*, 30.

²⁶³ To the best of my knowledge the reason(s) for this decline has not been studied, though it certainly should be. Some possible lines of inquiry might include the rise of the Tīmūrīds and their impact on Sunnite scholarly culture; standardization(s) of the curriculum in the training of Sunnite 'ulamā' (including the possibility of practices similar to the *pecia* system of late-medieval France, wherein students rented loose quires of standardized textbooks to copy); the late-medieval/early modern increase in the popularity of writing practices and technologies such as abridgements and the indexed compilatory codex; and the rise of the 'teaching license'

Geographically speaking, audition was used across the Arabic-speaking Islamicate world, though not uniformly. Certain major cities of the central Arab-Islamicate region—i.e. Arabia, Iraq, Syro-Palestine, and Egypt—are the locales most often named in the eighty-nine certificates that come from forty-one codices and have locative notations in Vajda’s aforementioned study (see Charts 6 and 7), with Cairo and Damascus being best represented. While the sample is severely limited, the results it affords nonetheless fit well with what is known of broader sociopolitical developments in these regions during the Middle Ages. For example, Mecca and the cities of Iraq are the sites for most of the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth-century certificates, a period during which one would expect them to be leading intellectual centers. While Mecca remains well-represented in ensuing centuries, Damascus and Cairo swiftly assume the positions of greatest importance in the period following the Mongol invasion of Iraq. Also immediately comprehensible is that the earliest Cairene certificate comes from the period immediately after the fall of the Fāṭimids, a time when Ayyūbid military elites were busily sponsoring a new infrastructure of *madrasahs* and similar facilities in Egypt as networks of Sunnite scholars, most originating from points east, were being established.²⁶⁴ Compared to the central Islamic lands, the use of audition in the Islamicate West (the Maghrib and al-Andalus) appears to have been quite limited, perhaps due to the relatively late rise to prominence of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and the *ḥadīth* sciences in those regions as a result of the dominance of *taqlīd*-based Mālikī *fiqh*.²⁶⁵ As discussed below, the apparent dearth of audition in the Islamicate West is of interest regarding al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s use of it in Cairo and Damascus, as it may suggest adaptation on their parts to the reigning cultural practices of their adopted homelands.

(*ijāzah bi-al-tadrīs*) as a form of licensing attached more particularly to human individuals than to codices (in contrast with audition certificates).

²⁶⁴ Gary Leiser, “The Madrasa and the Islamicization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 22 (1985): 29–47.

²⁶⁵ Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 15–16.

2.2.2.2 Audition's peak popularity: Damascus and Cairo in the 6th/12th-8th/14th centuries

As mentioned above, the apex of the use of audition practices seems to have occurred in Damascus in the Zengid through Bahrī Mamlūk periods (mid-sixth/twelfth through mid-eighth/fourteenth centuries), and in Cairo throughout roughly the first two centuries of Mamlūk rule (i.e. through sometime in the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century). Leder describes this period in Damascus' history as one in which the city “experienced a blossoming cultural and political era during which numerous impressive buildings, schools, mosques, mausoleums, and other place of public interest were built,” and one in which “[t]he number of scholars and students increased enormously in the city and its environs [...]”.²⁶⁶ During this period audition came to be an immensely popular activity in and around the city, as attested by the more than 1300 certificates Leder has surveyed. This popularity does not appear, however, to have been an inevitable outcome of the elite-sponsored build-up of scholarly-cultural infrastructure in the period. Indeed, Hirschler argues, contra some earlier scholars, that the phenomenon cannot be linked particularly to the spread of *madrāsahs* and similar institutions, as they were by no means the most popular sites for audition sessions.²⁶⁷ Leder's research suggests another explanation, which is that the practice's popularity seems to have been incited to a considerable degree by the actions of a single family of Arab notables, the Maqdisī clan (also known as the Banū Qudāmah²⁶⁸). They were “supporters of the Ḥanbalite school of Islamic law, who had moved to Damascus from *Ġammā'īl* (or *Ġammā'īn*), a town not far from Nablūs,” and “encouraged the people [of Damascus] to participate in public meetings, and showed particular interest for acquiring and copying books.”²⁶⁹ Demonstrating the impact that a relatively small collectivity could have on a local culture, the family produced a number of notable *ḥadīth* scholars, and, “from the second half of the twelfth

²⁶⁶ Leder, al-Sawwās, and al-Şāgharjī, *Mu'jam al-samā'āt al-Dimashqīyah*, 29.

²⁶⁷ Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 65.

²⁶⁸ George Makdisi, “Ibn Qudāma Al-Maḳdisī,” *EI2*, n.d.

²⁶⁹ Leder, al-Sawwās, and al-Şāgharjī, *Mu'jam al-samā'āt al-Dimashqīyah*, 29.

century onwards, they led a movement that proclaimed total reliance on Islamic *ḥadīth* texts and made their transmission the main issue of scholarly interest,” such that “[t]he certificates [in Leder’s study] embody abundant names of the Maqdisī family... [members of which] appear frequently as the attending authorities or other functionaries in the documents... and participating in the lectures in great numbers.”²⁷⁰

The Maqdisī family’s reach was not limited to Damascus and the villages surrounding it; members of the family also participated in and officiated over audition sessions in Alexandria during the late sixth/twelfth century. For example, as recorded in certificates from 569/1174 and 573/1177 inscribed in a copy of a minor *ḥadīth* collection entitled *Faḍā’il al-ramy fī sabīl Allāh* (Michigan Islamic MS 479), the *muḥaddith* ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī (d. 600/1203) participated in sessions in Egypt with the great Iṣfahānī cum Alexandrian shaykh Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī (d. 576/1180), the master of the first Shafīī *madrasah* in Egypt and almost certainly the most prolific presider over auditions of *ḥadīth* works of his age (we will meet him again in the fourth chapter as an alleged interlocutor with al-Būnī).²⁷¹ This was during the period when, as mentioned above, new networks of mostly Shafīī and Ḥanbalī Sunnite scholars were forming in Egypt with during the last half-century or so of Fāṭimid power, and it bears testimony to the important role that the auditioning of *ḥadīth* works played in establishing trans-*madhhab* scholarly networks that stretched across these regions.

Beyond its use as a scholarly practice, audition in high-medieval Damascus and environs took on a ‘popular’ character that seems to have been lacking in earlier periods, a local development that also passed into Egypt by the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century. As discussed by Leder, and in greater detail by Eerik Dickinson in his studies of Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī’s (d. 643/1245) *Kitāb Ma’rifat anwā’ ‘ilm al-ḥadīth* and other treatises on *ḥadīth* science, audition sessions came to be attended by numerous actors other than scholars and students, with participation becoming a popular means of expressing piety and seeking blessings. This development, Dickinson has argued, resulted in part from a

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Michigan Islamic MS 479, fol. 6^a. On al-Silafī’s prolific audition activities see Gilliot, *EI2*, s.v. “al-Silafī.”

shift over time in the tastes of *ḥadīth* transmitters toward ‘elevated’ (*‘ulwī*) chains of transmission for individual *ḥadīths* or collections thereof, which is to say shorter chains that entailed fewer transmitters between the source (i.e. the Prophet Muḥammad in the case of a single *ḥadīth*, or the author-compiler with regard to a collection) and the present time.²⁷² As Dickinson notes, many of the greatest Classical authorities of *ḥadīth* transmission, such as ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Amr (d. 181/797), ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), had warned their students against preferring elevated chains on the grounds that such chains often included unreliable tradents. Despite these warnings, interest in such chains had existed for centuries prior to the period in question and in Damascus had reached the level of popularity that later writers such as al-Shahrazūrī overlooked their predecessors’ views to defend it.²⁷³ Medieval Damascus offers some of the best evidence of an institutional and economic prioritization of elevated chains, such as, in one example, the foundation document (*waqfiyah*) formulated by al-Shahrazūrī for the city’s Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafīyah that mandated startlingly large stipends for visiting transmitters with the authority to deliver such texts.²⁷⁴

As elevated chains were not necessarily more reliable, their appeal seems largely to have resided in a resonance with the concept of ‘proximity’ (*qurb*), an important facet of Muslim spirituality by which physical and/or temporal nearness to sanctified human actors was associated with nearness to God and the blessings inherent therein. Thus Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ approvingly quotes the early ascetic Muḥammad b. Aslām al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 242/856) maxim: “Proximity in the *isnād* is proximity—or a means of proximity—to God.”²⁷⁵ Dickinson argues that, because transmitters were often ranked into ‘generations’ (*ṭabaqāt*) on the basis of their number of steps of remove from the Prophet, medieval actors felt that participation in elevated chains allowed them to claim a place among an earlier generation of Muslims.

²⁷² Dickinson, “Ibn Al-Salah Al-Sharazuri and the Isnad,” 490 ff.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 491–492.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 490.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 503.

This placing allowed them to distance themselves from what was seen as the increasing moral decrepitude of the *umma*, seeking a spiritual renovation that “participants in the quest for elevation imagined... happening with a vividness we can scarcely hope to recapture.”²⁷⁶ This notion of spiritual, rather than merely educational, benefits accruing from participation in audition sessions with *shaykhs* who carried elevated *isnāds* plainly struck a chord in the high-medieval Damascene imaginary. As Leder, Dickinson, and others have shown through analysis of the titles (s. *laqab*) of long lists of auditors mentioned in certificates, attendance at audition sessions by people of all classes, including the sick and the very old, became common; even non-Muslims were said to attend. Hirschler, however, in his study of the reading communities around *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, cautions against the notion that non-scholars had only spiritual benefits in mind in attending audition sessions, and argues convincingly that, at least in the case of Ibn ‘Asākir’s history, civic pride and appreciation of the literary merits of the work itself were important factors as well.²⁷⁷ The practice of bringing young children to the sessions, so that they could secure a place in an elevated chain of transmission, seems to have become commonplace in this period, much to the dismay of some scholars who complained that these attendees were too young to participate in a meaningful sense. Denunciations by Mamlūk-era Egyptian scholars show that the tendency carried over into Cairene culture, suggesting that these ‘popular’ elements of audition practices also took hold in Egypt.

2.3.3 Audition practices and esotericism with regard to Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Būnī

It is to Cairo, Damascus, and other cities of the *mashriq*, at the height of audition’s popularity, that we turn in examining al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s use of the practice. As mentioned above, its utilization in the transmission of Sufi texts seems to have been somewhat rare. Though the subject requires far more study, it at least can be observed that Vajda’s aforementioned compilation of certificates from manuscripts in Paris notes only three out of seventy-two auditioned works as falling

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 504.

²⁷⁷ Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 52 ff.

under the heading of “mystique.”²⁷⁸ The most abundant collection of audition certificates in Sufi works that I am aware of is in Osman Yahia’s landmark analytical catalog from 1964 of manuscripts of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works. In it Yahia records the contents of 187 certificates from thirty-one works in manuscript (some in multiple copies).²⁷⁹ Given both the similarities and differences previously discussed in Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Būnī’s statements on the ethics of esotericist knowledge transmission, the former’s use of the practice is fertile ground for comparison with al-Būnī’s.

There is reason to think that Ibn al-‘Arabī—and perhaps al-Būnī as well—did not take up the practice until after having emigrated from the West, where the practice seems to have been less common. Gerald Elmore makes no mention of a certificate being present in Berlin MS or. 3266, a copy of ‘*Anqā’ Mughrib* that apparently was made in 597/1201, while Ibn al-‘Arabī was yet in the Maghrib.²⁸⁰ To the best of my knowledge the earliest certificates for any of his works appear in University of Istanbul MS 79a, a copy of *Rūḥ al-quds fī munāṣahat al-naḥs*. This work was composed in Mecca in 600/1203-4 and framed as an epistle to his and al-Būnī’s teacher in Tunis, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawī. It contains nine certificates, the earliest of which are from Mecca in 600, Baghdad and Mosul in 601, Al-Khalīl (Hebron) in 602, and Cairo in 603, and tracks some of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s early travels in the East. Other certificates in the codex are from as late as 628, recorded in his adopted city of Damascus.²⁸¹ If Ibn al-‘Arabī indeed began recording audition certificates only after coming to the East, was he merely responding to the expectations of Eastern readers? Or did he find these practices useful in building a network of peers

²⁷⁸ Vajda, *Les certificats de lecture et de transmission*, v–vi. He unfortunately does not delineate which works he considers to fall under what heading. Thus it is not clear, for example, whether he consider BnF MS arabe 2658, the copy of al-Būnī’s *Latā’if al-ishārāt* discussed above, to fall under the heading of ‘mysticism’ or if it is the single work he counts under the heading of ‘magic and philosophy’.

²⁷⁹ For Yahia’s overview of the certificates he recorded see *Histoire et classification*, 76 ff.

²⁸⁰ Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time*, 197–199; cf. Rudolf Sellheim and Ewald Wagner, *Arabische Handschriften*, Verzeichniss der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland 17 (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1976), no. 94.

²⁸¹ Yahia, *Histoire et classification*, 446 ff (entry no. 639).

and disciples in and across these new locales? Similar questions must be asked of al-Būnī's use of the practice.

Erik Ohlander has noted that Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī—the aforementioned prominent Sufi of early seventh/thirteenth-century Baghdad—made use of audition in the transmission of both his own works and *ḥadīth* works, and that Abū Ḥafṣ explicitly paralleled the formal transmission of written texts with the imparting of initiatic Sufi knowledge, such as a prayer formula (*talqīn al-dhikr*) or the 'mantle of discipleship' (*khirqat al-irādah*).²⁸² Ohlander's comments on the matter are instructive as to how Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Būnī may have utilized audition and related practices in relation to their own works:

Alongside the way in which... texts served as instruments of authority and repositories of memory in terms of their content, the text as an object also served as an instrument of authority and legitimacy, for as a hypostatized repository of learning, a text linked its possessor to both a physical object (the transmitted text) as well as to a process taking place in time and space (the event of its transmission). As such, the text could come to serve as an instrument of affiliation and status, a thing sought out and asked for, procured and conserved, exchanged, reproduced, and deployed.²⁸³

In short, then, audition potentially could function as way of forging and formalizing new relationships, whether scholarly or initiatic, a matter of significant concern to a medieval actor newly arrived to a locale. Ibn al-'Arabī seems to have come to the East with just a few companions, and with only limited contacts in Cairo and elsewhere, mostly among expatriate Andalusians.²⁸⁴ While the details of al-Būnī's arrival to the region are quite uncertain, his situation as an émigré from Ifrīqiyah likely was comparable. Furthermore, no matter how impressive either man's Sufi pedigree may have been in the eyes of his co-regionalists, it likely carried less weight in the new settings in which he found himself.

²⁸² Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 53–55.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁸⁴ Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 194–195.

Indeed, Ibn al-‘Arabī recounts having been challenged by a *shaykh* in Cairo who asserted that there were no Western Sufi masters worthy of acclaim, this having been the putative impetus for Ibn al-‘Arabī’s authoring of *Rūḥ al-quds*, an account of his saintly teachers in the West.²⁸⁵ It is tempting to think that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s multiple auditionings of *Rūḥ al-quds* was a means not only of forging new relationships with peers and disciples, but also of certifying the bridging of these regions in his own person and the knowledge he imparted.

2.3.3.1 *Ibn al-‘Arabī’s two types of audition*

The evidence collected by Yahia shows us that Ibn al-‘Arabī auditioned numerous works between the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century and his death in 638/1240. As Addas has pointed out, he seems eventually to have employed the practice for the achievement of two rather distinct purposes: in some cases the public dissemination of a work, as largely was the norm in the paradigm of audition discussed in the previous section, but in other cases for the discrete and restricted—which is to say esotericist—transmission of decidedly initiatic works. An important result of these differing uses of audition was the fostering of two distinct types of reading communities, one more closely akin to the sort discussed by Hirschler with regard to *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, and the other esotericist in nature.

The major example of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s relatively public-oriented use of audition comes in the final decade of his life, in relation to his massive *summa*, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*. A holograph of the work in thirty-seven volumes, Süleymaniye MSS Evkaf Musesi 1736-1772, contains a total of seventy-one certificates. The majority of these record a series of sessions performed between 633/1235-36 and 636/1238-39 in which Ibn al-‘Arabī served as *musmi*. The final fourteen document sessions conducted after the *shaykh*’s death, performed under the authority of two of his closest disciples, Ismā‘īl b. Sawdakīn al-Nūrī (d. 646/1248) and Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 672/1274), both of whom had attended many of the earlier sessions as listeners. Most of the sessions presided over by Ibn al-‘Arabī occurred at his home, but were nonetheless sizable, with some accommodating more than forty listeners. More

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 196–197.

than 125 participants are named in these certificates, with a core group of around twenty-five individuals attending regularly. Many of these can be identified as having been among Ibn al-‘Arabī’s devoted disciples, and their names appear on certificates in numerous other works as well. The other attendees, however, must be accounted for as having been among local notables whose favor Ibn al-‘Arabī sought in inviting them (or who sought his in attending), those who came in search of *barakah* and for pious motives generally, and even the merely curious. Here then was a reading community that shared many features with those described by Hirschler and Leder, including: a considerable numbers of attendees, some persistent, some casual; attendees who brought with them children far too young to comprehend what was being read; and people of diverse social ranks and, no doubt, educational backgrounds, *et cetera*. One participant even seems to have been a member of the famous al-Maḡdisī clan discussed above, ‘Alī b. Yūsuf b. Ṣadaḡah al-Maḡdisī, though his name does not appear in Leder’s extensive list (drawn from other Damascene certificates) of members of that family.²⁸⁶ Numerous of the other attendees can be found in Leder’s index, however, including one of Ibn al-‘Arabī sons.²⁸⁷ Another example is Aḡmad b. Abī Bakr b. Sulaymān al-Ḥamawī (d. 649/1251), whose father Abū Bakr was a noted preacher (*wā‘iz*) who attended thirty-three audition sessions for *al-Futūḡhāt* during the year 633, in many cases accompanied by Aḡmad and his other son ‘Abd al-Wāḡid (d. 687/1288-89).²⁸⁸ A certificate recorded by Leder has Aḡmad and his sister Khadījah as two of twenty attendees at a reading of a *ḡadīth* work convened at a *ribāt* in Damascus in 610/1213.²⁸⁹ In short, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s auditions of *al-Futūḡhāt* were part of a steady stream of similar events in early seventh/thirteenth-century Damascus, and drew a community of readers that was distinctive to some extent, but nonetheless overlapped significantly with many others in the city.

²⁸⁶ Leder, *al-Sawwās, and al-Ṣāḡharjī, Mu‘jam al-samā‘āt al-Dimashqīyah*, I, 589–608.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 563. Which of his sons, both of whom were named Muḡammad, is unclear.

²⁸⁸ On the al-Ḥamawī family and Ibn al-‘Arabī see Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 265–266.

²⁸⁹ Leder, *al-Sawwās, and al-Ṣāḡharjī, Mu‘jam al-samā‘āt al-Dimashqīyah*, 171.

To these readings of *al-Futūḥāt* and the community they instantiated can be contrasted a number of auditions of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s most obviously initiatic works, which, as Addas has noted, bear certificates suggestive of gatherings that were far more exclusive. To be sure, *al-Futūḥāt* contains much material that can be described as initiatic—including a great deal on theosophical aspects of the science of letters—but, as discussed above, such materials are so ‘dispersed’ as to hardly be apprehendable on the basis of a single hearing, to an extent that even would-be critics in attendance might not find much fodder. As Addas observes, among the *shaykh*’s works it “was least susceptible to criticism thanks to its sheer size and the diversity of themes it covers, scattered over thousands of pages.”²⁹⁰ The texts belonging to this second category, however, are more focused in their content, arguably were more susceptible to criticism, and were auditioned only to small groups of listeners, all of whom were Ibn al-‘Arabī’s close disciples. In the most extreme cases, such as *Fuṣūs al-ḥikam*²⁹¹—the work that incited some of the most severe critiques of Ibn al-‘Arabī once it came to circulate more widely²⁹²—and the densely enigmatic ‘*Anqā’ Mughrib*,²⁹³ the sole listener was the *shaykh*’s close disciple and son-in-law Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī. In other cases, such as the auditionings in 621 of the works that comprise Süleymaniye MS Şehit Ali Pasha 2813—including the lettrist treatises *Kitāb al-alif* (alt. *Kitāb al-aḥadīyah*), the aforementioned *Kitāb al-mīm wa-al-wāw wa-al-nūn*, and other works dedicated to esotericist understandings of the Qur’ān—the listeners comprised a small, consistent group of three disciples: Badr al-Dīn Ayyūb al-Muqrī, Ibrāhīm b. ‘Umar al-Qurashī, Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī.²⁹⁴ Other groupings that similarly consisted of his intimate followers can be identified as well. As Addas points out, these gatherings of circles of initiates in audition sessions were no doubt occasions for the *shaykh* to

²⁹⁰ Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 267–268.

²⁹¹ Yahia, *Histoire et classification*, 240 ff. (no. 150).

²⁹² Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 121–122, 124–128, and elsewhere indicated in the index.

²⁹³ Yahia, *Histoire et classification*, 157 ff. (no. 30).

²⁹⁴ For the two lettrist works see *Ibid.*, 151 ff. (no. 26), 382 ff. (no. 462). On this group of three disciples see Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 268.

elaborate orally on his writings,²⁹⁵ including, presumably, on aspects of lettrism and other topics that he kept out of his texts in accordance with his own dicta on the ethics of esoteric knowledge transmission.

2.3.3.2 *Al-Būnī's use of audition*

The paratextual evidence we have for al-Būnī's use of audition—of which the paratexts discussed above are, to the best of my knowledge, the entirety—is obviously far more limited than the wealth of Akbarian certificates. Nonetheless, some pertinent observations can be made, particularly by using the evidence of Ibn al-ʿArabī's practices as a basis for comparison. Primary among these is that al-Būnī's use of audition, from the scant evidence of it that survives, would seem to most closely mirror the second, esotericist use of the practice discussed above.

The copied certificate for *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* in BnF MS arabe 2658 names only two listeners, the *qāḍī al-fuqarāʾ wa-ʿumdat al-ṣūlahāʾ* ʿUmar b. Ibrāhīm al-Rabāʿī and his son Ibrāhīm, individuals on whom I have been able to find no additional information. ʿUmar's title, 'judge of the poor ones (i.e. Sufis), is unusual; it likely means he was in fact a judge, and thus relatively high-placed socially, and identified as a Sufi. The use of *walad* (rather than *ibn*) suggests that his son Ibrāhīm was a young child. The small number of listeners is of course reminiscent of Ibn al-ʿArabī's most restricted circles of listeners. That and the operative lettrist content of *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* are the strongest indicators that the event was in no way 'open to the public.' Indeed, I think it a reasonable assumption that ʿUmar was a close disciple of al-Būnī's, especially bearing in mind that the exemplar from which BnF 2658 was copied likely was a holograph. Of course, that ʿUmar and his son are the only listeners named in the certificate by no means necessarily implies that they were the only individuals in attendance, but it does that suggest that al-Būnī was not performing the audition with the intent of licensing numerous transmitters.

Neither should this limited paratextual evidence be taken to mean that ʿUmar was al-Būnī's only disciple. The example of Abū Faḍl al-Ghumārī, who benefitted from al-Būnī's instruction in

²⁹⁵ Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 269.

Alexandria and later presided over a reading of at least one of his works, is evidence that others studied under him, too. Additionally, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, writing in the early ninth/fifteenth, claimed that two important figures studied the science of letters under al-Būnī. One is Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ṭalḥah (d. 652/1254), better known simply as Ibn Ṭalḥah, a Damascene bureaucrat turned mystic who authored the apocalyptic work *al-Durr al-munazzam fī al-sirr al-a‘zam*. As mentioned previously, actors after al-Būnī seem to have incorporated parts of that work into the ‘courtly’ *Shams al-ma‘ārif*. The other is Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Umar al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), the Andalusian émigré to Alexandria (by way of Tunis) who was the premier disciple and spiritual successor to the great Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), eponym of the Shādhilīyah order.²⁹⁶ However, neither claim can be confirmed. It is quite possible that al-Biṣṭāmī reached this conclusion about al-Būnī and Ibn Ṭalḥah on the basis of the courtly *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, and his impression regarding al-Būnī and al-Mursī may also be based on faulty evidence. His claims probably should not be dismissed entirely, however. As we will see, there do seem to have been connections of some kind between readers of al-Būnī and early/proto-Shādhilites in Cairo.

The references to al-Būnī’s auditioning of *‘Alam al-hudá* in the collation statements in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590 unfortunately provide no names, though they do offer up some key points of information. The first of these is that the work was auditioned in close temporal and physical proximity to *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*, in the Qarāfah cemetery, shortly or even immediately after *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*. The Qarāfah—Cairo’s famous ‘city of the dead’—is a striking location to hold an audition ceremony. The cemetery was (and is) something of a liminal zone, located physically at the edge of the city beneath the Muqaṭṭam hills, and socially as a place where rich and poor inhabitants of the city went to visit the tombs of relatives and saints buried there and appeal to the latter’s intercessory powers for the fulfillment of invocatory prayers (*du‘ā*). The Qarāfah was also a site of festive celebrations with music, feasting, and dancing—activities that frequently were condemned as un-

²⁹⁶ For the mentions of al-Mursī and Ibn Ṭalḥah, see Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-Āfāq*), fol. 16^b, lns. 8-12.

Islamic by many jurists among the ‘*ulamā*’.²⁹⁷ Al-Būnī himself eventually was buried there, if Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-Zayyāt’s (d. 815/1412) grave visitation guide, *Kawākib al-sayyārah fī tartīb al-ziyārāh fī al-Qarāfatayn al-kubrā wa-al-ṣuḡhrā*, is to be believed. The inclusion of al-Būnī in that work suggests that his tomb was, at least by Ibn al-Zayyāt’s time, favored by some as a visitation site.²⁹⁸ By the late Ayyūbid period, when the auditions took place, the Qarāfah already was somewhat built-up with mosques, *ribāṭs*, and inhabited tomb-shrines in which Sufis and other travelers frequently lodged, and the non-specificity of the paratexts regarding the location suggests, to my mind, that the auditions took place at a private and/or minor shrine rather than at a well-known site.

The second point to be taken from the collation statements is that the ‘*Alam al-hudā*’ was auditioned over the course of some number of *majālis*. This is not unusual given the length of the work, but is of interest in that it indicates that the sort of speed-reading that sometimes was utilized in auditions of lengthy works—when conferral of the license to transmit was the overriding concern—was not employed in this instance. This in turn suggests that these were teaching sessions in which al-Būnī guided readers through the text, expanded on key points, *et cetera*, which further strengthens the notion that the proceedings were not intended for non-initiates. Such indications that al-Būnī’s works were initially transmitted under fairly intimate conditions are pertinent to another set of questions that, while perhaps not unique to the Būnian corpus, is certainly important to it. These concern the role of audition in the transmission of the complex talismans that populate *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, the work I discuss this work in greater detail in chapter three. The work includes a number of cryptograms—i.e. grids with some number of letters and or numbers in each square—as well as more complex talismanic compositions. In many cases these are given on the page with little or no additional verbal description in the text, which is to say they seemingly were transmitted visually. In the case of cryptograms, many of which were constructed on mathematical principles (i.e. on the basis of mathematical ‘magic

²⁹⁷ Tetsuya Ohtoshi, “Cairene Cemeteries as Public Loci in Mamluk Egypt,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (2006): passim; Christopher Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt*, vol. Leiden: Brill, 1999, (Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and texts, 22) (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 56–8.

²⁹⁸ Ibn al-Zayyāt, *Kitāb Kawākib al-sayyārah fī tartīb al-ziyārāh*, 268.

squares’), there was a logic inherent to their construction that, while not explicated in the texts, could have been taught or perhaps even deduced by an astute reader.²⁹⁹ In many other cases, however, such as certain complex figures assigned to specific letters of the alphabet in *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*—which the reader is directed to contemplate, in combination with various spiritual exercises, so as to reveal to the inner eye wonders of the hidden worlds—the designs are ‘inspired’ compositions rather than ones constructed along mathematical principles, and thus could only have been learned or transmitted visually. What is striking, in the context of a discussion of audition, is that this requirement for visual apprehension would seem to undermine the valorization of the oral/aural that pervades these transmission practices. As I discuss later, I indeed think the work represents al-Būnī’s experimentation with books an initiatic device.

What, finally, are we to make of this extraordinary five months in the Qarāfah during which al-Būnī seems to have composed and auditioned two of his most important works? Was he a Sufi intellectual at the height of his powers? Or, taking into consideration the 622/1225 death date Katip Çelebi (mostly) records, were these the acts of someone aware of his impending death and trying to impart his knowledge to posterity? My impression is that it was for him a period of intense interaction with a small, close-knit community of disciples/readers, one that distinctly shaped those two works, and probably caused him to reshape his earlier works as well. In the final analysis, perhaps the most important aspect of the evidence from these five months, aside from it being our most specifically dated and located data on al-Būnī, is that it shows us that al-Būnī was composing and promulgating his works within a distinctly medieval paradigm of the book. In this way the book—certainly the kinds of books al-Būnī composed—was not meant to stand alone as source of knowledge, as an independent entity, but rather was a thing to be bound tightly to human *shaykhs* and communities of readers who could discipline and administer it in an ethical manner.

²⁹⁹ Sayyid Nizamuddin Aḥmad has, to the best of my knowledge, done the most work on the construction of these squares in Būnian texts (particularly the *Kubrā*), though none which has been published at the time of this writing.

2.4 Esotericist reading communities in the 'long' century after al-Būnī's death

In the century or so after al-Būnī's death, the community of disciples/readers that he had gathered around himself in Cairo seems not to have endured as a distinct entity. Although, as discussed in the fourth chapter, one Mamlūk-era critic, Ibn al-Naqqāsh (d. 763/1361), makes mention of a community (umma) of Būnian lettrists, this is the lone voice on this matter, and he seems to have provided no specifics about this group.³⁰⁰ What can be said, however, is that al-Būnī's works continued to act as nodes about which reading communities coalesced, ones that, as I discuss in this section, continued to be esotericist, which is to say exclusivist and discreet with an emphasis on lettrism. In what follows I examine codical and paratextual evidence (some of it from paratexts reproduced in later manuscripts) regarding the nature of these communities. What the evidence suggests, in my view, is small groups of Sufis, limited mostly or entirely to Cairo and Alexandria who came together to read, transmit, and reproduce works by al-Būnī and sometimes other authors. I begin with bibliographical paratexts reflective of readers' efforts to account for the full scope of al-Būnī's writings, efforts that I argue were linked to al-Būnī's use of *tabdīd al-ʿilm*. I move on to the rather sparse evidence both of formal transmission practices having been employed by his readers in this period, and of other ways readers sought to maintain a sense of connection to al-Būnī. I then move on to the evidence that these groups were engaged not only with al-Būnī's texts, but early-on were actively reading al-Būnī alongside other lettrist authors. Finally, in concluding this section and the chapter, I discuss the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā' referred to in the copied collation statement in MS Reṣīd efendi 590, a group that, to my mind, represents—and quite possibly was the engine of—the transition from the germinal period of the corpus to its efflorescence.

³⁰⁰ At least not in the summary of his views preserved in al-Sakhāwī and Khālid b. al-Arabī Mudrik, "al-Qawl al-munbī fī tarjamat Ibn al-ʿArabī" (M.A. thesis, Umm al-Qura University, 2001), II/317.

2.4.1 Bibliographical paratexts considered in relation to the intertexts

In the previous chapter's discussion of al-Būnī's bibliography I considered a handful of bibliographical paratexts originating in the germinal period. Here I present them in greater detail, considering them as indications that the intertexts, and al-Būnī's overall application of the principle of *tabdīd al-'ilm*, led readers to seek out as many of his texts as possible—a phenomenon that, in my view, suggests the effectiveness of that means of manipulating the textual economy in maintaining participation in, and perhaps even drawing new members into, these esotericist reading communities.

The earliest of these comes from Berlin MS or. Fol. 80, a copy of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* dated in the colophon to 669/1270, and which bears the variant title *Ma'ānī asrār al-ḥurūf*, written in what appears to be the copyist's hand. The copy almost certainly was made by an individual for his or her own use, as the sometimes difficult hand is hardly professional, and a *miṣṭarah* was not used; however, the complex diagrams and talismans that populate the work are all present, if crudely rendered. A collation statement adjacent to the colophon states that it was collated against an autograph of the work (i.e. the second non-extant copy of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* in the list at the beginning of this chapter), though this note seems to be in a hand other than that of the copyist (note the differences in how *sīn* is written, see Figure 6).³⁰¹ The bibliographical paratext appears immediately after the explicit, as part of a colophon. The copyist has written:

وله تصانيف كثيرة منها علم الهدى ومنها شمس المعارف ومنها اللامعة النورانية ومنها شرح الاسماء الحسنی
ومنها السلوك الى منازل الملوك

There are many compositions by him [*scil.* al-Būnī], among them are *'Alam al-hudá* and *Shams al-mā'ārif* and *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* and *Sharḥ al-asmā' al-husná* and *al-Sulūk ilá manāzil al-mulūk*.³⁰²

³⁰¹ Berlin MS or. Fol. 80 (*LI*), fol. 66a, upper left margin:

بلغ مقابلة على نسخة عليها خط المصنف بالصحة

³⁰² Berlin MS or. Fol. 80, fol. 66^a, lns. 5-7.

It would seem that our copyist, at least at the time this statement was written, did not have access to a copy of *‘Alam al-hudá*. This is suggested not only by the incorrect title for *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, the correct one of which he might have had from *‘Alam al-hudá*, but also by the fact that *Sharḥ al-asmā’ al-husná* is a common alternate title for *‘Alam al-hudá* (and indeed is part of the full title of the work), which implies that he had heard both titles without realizing that they were one and the same work. *Al-Sulūk ilá manāzil al-mulūk* is almost certainly an alternate title for *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*, as that phrase appears in the *ammā ba’d* (introduction) of that work in such a way that it could easily be taken for the title,³⁰³ suggesting that he did have access to a copy. If he had had access to *‘Alam al-hudá* or *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt* then he might have ascertained the correct title, as it is referenced in both works. There is no way to tell if he had access to *Shams al-ma’ārif* or only knew the title from *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, and it is similarly indeterminable if he had seen or only heard of *al-Lum’ah al-nūrānīyah*.

The list is of interest in that, given its inaccuracies, and in keeping with the miniscule number of surviving manuscripts from the period, it further suggests that al-Būnī’s works were not easily obtainable at this point, forty or so years after his death. It can also be taken as an indication that readers of al-Būnī’s works actively sought his other texts, an undertaking that, as discussed in the section on *tabdīd al-‘ilm*, would have required them to seek out the reading communities in which his works circulated. A sign that this copyist also pursued other works on lettrism and related topics is the few pages of notes that begin immediately following the colophon, written in the hand of the copyist. The first of these appears under the heading: “And I found in one of the texts [*nusakh*] of teachings of the predecessors [*kalām al-mutaqaddimīn*]...”³⁰⁴ It is a brief discourse on the occult properties of numerical cryptogrammic talismans (*khawāṣṣ al-wafq al-‘adadī*). The second, is “a description of the carpet [*bisāṭ*] of Sulaymān b. Dāwūd,” complete with a diagram.

³⁰³ Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160.1 (HQ), fol. 2^a, ln. 13-fol. 2^b, ln. 1.

³⁰⁴ Berlin MS or. Fol. 80, fol. 66^a ff:

وجدت في بعض النسخ من كلام المتقدمين...

The second of the pair of bibliographical paratexts originating in the germinal period is a gloss that contains two distinct lists of Būnian works. While the paratext appears in a copy of *‘Alam al-hudá* copied in Damascus in 772/1370, Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, not all parts of it date to that manuscript, as at least some of it was copied from a gloss in the exemplar from which Hamidiye 260.1 was copied, the precise dating of which is unknown. As we will see, the exemplar of *‘Alam al-hudá* from which the first parts of the gloss were copied was obtained by one Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād, who likely also compiled the first of the two lists of Būnian works. Muḥammad also records that he ‘read’ (*qara’a ‘alá*) the text in the presence of his Sufi master (*mawlá*) Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abbās al-Ghumārī. Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abbās, we are told, had himself been taught by al-Būnī in Alexandria. We can reasonably assume that this event—which is one of the few acts of formal transmission recorded from after al-Būnī’s death—took place sometime in the middle or the latter half of the seventh/thirteenth century.

The paratext breaks naturally into four parts: an opening statement from the copyist of Hamidiye 260.1 on the gloss’ origin, the first list of works, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād’s transmission statement, and the second list of works. Here I have separated the parts with line-breaks:

حاشية على هامش الاصل المنقول منه
ومن مصنفات المؤلف رحمه الله كتاب شمس المعارف ولطائف العوارف وكتاب مواقيت البصائر ولطائف
السرائر وكتاب لطائف الاشارات في الحروف العلويات وكتاب هداية القاشدين ونهاية الواصلين وكتاب
مواقف الغايات في اسرار الرياضات

وقد ملكت هذا الكتاب وقراته على مولاي الفاضل ابي الفضل عباس الغماري نفع الله به ولقي المؤلف
بالاسكندرية وافاده في معاني السلوك والاسرار اليقينية واستفدت انا من مولاي عباس والله الحمد قاله محمد
بن الحداد خار الله له فيما يقضيه
ومن مصنفاته ايضاً كتاب تيسير العوارف في تلخيص شمس المعارف وكتاب اسرار الادوار وتشكيل
الانوار وكتاب التصريف وحلة التعريف ورسالة ياء الواو وكاف الياء والعين والنون وكتاب اللمعة النورانية
وكتاب اللطائف العشرة وكتاب التعليقة في منافع القرآن

A gloss in the margin of the exemplar from which it [scil. Hamidiye 260.1] was copied:

Among the compositions of the author [scil. al-Būnī] (may God have mercy on him) are *Kitāb Shams al-ma’ārif wa-laṭā’if al-‘awārif* and *Kitāb Mawāqīt al-baṣā’ir wa-*

laṭā'if al-sarā'ir and *Kitāb Laṭā'if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-'ulwīyāt* and *Kitāb Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn* and *Kitāb Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyādāt*.

I obtained [or purchased] this book [scil. the exemplar] and read it in the presence of my master, the distinguished Abū al-Faḍl 'Abbās al-Ghumārī (may God benefit him). He [scil. Abū al-Faḍl] met the author in Alexandria and he [scil. al-Būnī] bestowed upon him the meanings of the path and the secrets of certainty, and I drew benefit from my master 'Abbās, praise be to God. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād said this.

Also among his compositions are *Kitāb Taysīr al-'awārif fī talkhīṣ Shams al-ma'ārif* and *Kitāb Asrār al-adwār wa-tashkīl al-anwār* and *Kitāb Al-Taṣrīf wa-ḥullat al-ta'rīf* and *Risālat yā' al-wāw wa-kāf al-yā' wa-al-'ayn wa-al-nūn* and *Kitāb al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* and *Kitāb al-Laṭā'if al-asharah* and *Kitāb al-Ta'līqah fī manāfi' al-Qur'ān*.³⁰⁵

It is not possible to ascertain with certainty whether the second list is also from the gloss the copyist of Hamidiye 260.1 found in the exemplar, though I consider that to be unlikely. Given the split in the lists (see Figure 7), and the second one's position following Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād's transmission statement, it is probable that it was not intended to fall under the aegis of that statement and thus is of later origin. Indeed, the second list likely was compiled by the copyist of Hamidiye 260.

The first list of Būnian works in this paratext should be read in conjunction with Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād's transmission statement if we are to gather its full import. It is a list only of the works named in *'Alam al-hudá* and *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* suggesting that he may have drawn the list only from those texts rather than from outside knowledge of the corpus, unlike in the example above, where the copyist mentioned *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, which is not mentioned in any intertexts. Nonetheless, it would testify to Muḥammad's close attention to the intertexts and thus to the importance of knowing both al-Būnī's other works and a qualified teacher, in his case his *mawlá* Abū al-Faḍl 'Abbās.

As mentioned above, it is likely that the second list originated with the copyist of Hamidiye 260.1. Some of the titles in the second list are known to us, particularly *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*. That the list includes *Asrār al-adwār* might indicate the compiler's familiarity with *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* (in which it is referred to), though it is likely that the work was still extant at that time. Although Hamidiye 260.1 was

³⁰⁵ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 239^b, gloss in bottom margin.

copied quite too late for the timeframe with which this chapter is concerned, it is still noteworthy that the copyist took it upon himself not only to reproduce the first list from the exemplar, but also to expand upon it, an act that can be taken as a response to the injunction placed upon him Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād (who by the time Hamidiye 260.1 was copied in 772/1370 almost certainly was long dead). Indeed, as further proof of al-Būnī's readers' interest in this matter, it is noteworthy that this double-list is reproduced in yet another copy of *'Alam al-Hudá*, Süleymaniye MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 588, though the copyist of that codex, perhaps skeptical of the accuracy of the second list, appends to it the exclamation, "And God knows!" (*wa-llāhu a'lam*).³⁰⁶

2.4.2 Issues of transmission and compromise substitutes for it

It presumably was al-Būnī's intention that his disciples would carry on the practice of formally transmitting his works through audition, but there is little paratextual evidence that they did so with any consistency. Some of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī's claims regarding the formal transmission of Būnian works are discussed in later chapters. Here, however, I discuss evidence of other ways readers tried to draw some sort of connection between themselves and al-Būnī, and what it tells us about the ethics and flexibility of medieval readers regarding transmission.

Intriguing microhistorical questions arise from Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād's statement that he 'obtained' or 'purchased' (*malaka*) a copy of *'Alam al-hudá*, and that he then 'read' it before his *mawlá* Abū al-Faḍl 'Abbās. The verb *malaka* strongly suggests that he took possession of an existing copy rather than making or commissioning one for himself. Had Muḥammad been Abū al-Faḍl 'Abbās' disciple prior to obtaining the book, and did he seek out the work knowing that his master had known and studied with al-Būnī? Or did Muḥammad discover the codex by chance in a bookseller's stall and then seek out a teacher who was (at least somewhat) qualified to teach and transmit it? In other words, was Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād an example of an actor who stumbled across one of al-Būnī's works and then

³⁰⁶ Süleymaniye MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 588 (AH), fol. 221a. It appears in a slightly different form, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād's transmission statement being absent, though the copyist notes that he took it from a copy of *'Alam al-hudá* other than the exemplar from which he worked; quite possibly it was Hamidiye 260.

sought to join a community of readers—i.e. Abū al-Faḍl and, presumably, his other disciples—to guide him in a proper understanding of the work? Or was he already a member of such a grouping, who sought to incorporate that copy of the work into his reading community? In either case, interactions possessed of ethical dimensions and occurring among an individual, a codex, and a community of readers underlie the statement. Their ethical nature is implicit in Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād’s having felt the need to inscribe the statement in the first place, and in the fact that the copyist of Hamidiye 260.1 found the gloss worthy of reproduction. For Muḥammad it was a means of assuring later readers and copiers of the codex that the text therein was reliable, but also a record that he himself had acted in an ethically sound manner in reading the work with a qualified teacher rather than attempting to learn from it independently. This in turn acted as an ethical injunction on the later actors that he assumed would interact with his codex in the years to come, though there is no indication that the copyist of Hamidiye 260.1 was able to meet this requirement.

Even Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād’s having ‘read’ the work with Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abbās may have been perceived as a compromise rather than participation in a full-fledged line of transmission. This observation rests on the assumption that, had Abū al-Faḍl al-Ghumārī himself ‘read’ or ‘heard’ *‘Alam al-hudá* during the time that he studied under al-Būnī in Alexandria, then Muḥammad almost certainly would have mentioned this fact. To do so would not only have bolstered his own claim to knowledge of the text, but also would have strengthened the authority of Muḥammad’s codex, the integrity of which perhaps was in question due to its having been purchased or acquired rather than made in a setting that Muḥammad could vouch for. In other words, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād’s reading with Abū al-Faḍl amounted to something of an ethical compromise, a less-than-ideal but still acceptable means of utilizing his copy of *‘Alam al-hudá*.

A similar observation can be made of Yaḥyá b. Aḥmad al-Khalīlī, the collator in Alexandria in 738/1337 of *‘Alam al-hudá*, whose statement is quoted in the collation statements in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590. Yaḥyá collated his copy of *‘Alam al-hudá* against one that bore an audition certificate

signed by the author, but makes no mention of having found someone qualified to transmit the text to him. Instead, he seems to have taken the next best option in recording certain details of the certificate in the exemplar from which he worked, much as the copyist of BnF MS arabe 2658 would do some seventy-years later in copying the audition statement from his exemplar, which, as discussed earlier, likely was a holograph.

2.4.3 Reading *al-Būnī* with other lettrist authors

There is quite straightforward evidence that, within a bit more than half a century after *al-Būnī*'s death, the reading communities in which his works circulated were also engaging with texts by other lettrist authors. This is in the form of two very early codices in which *al-Būnī*'s works are bound together with those of other lettrists in two early compilatory codices: Chester Beatty MS 3168 and Süleymaniye MS Carullah 986.

Chester Beatty MS 3168 is a compilatory codex containing seven treatises by various authors and was copied in Cairo between 686/1287 and 687/1288 in the well-trained hand of one 'Uthmān b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad b. Arslān al-Ḥanafī. It is an incredibly important codex for the study of lettrism. Among the treatises included is not only the oldest dated copy of *al-Būnī*'s *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, but also two short works that, in 1972, were identified by Muḥammad Kamāl Ibrāhīm Ja'far as the only surviving writings of the Andalusian thinker Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī (d. 286/899), an individual who, as we will see in the following chapter, is a key figure in the history of Sufi lettrism. The compilatory codex also includes a treatise on the letters that, in 1974, the same scholar attributed to the great Sufi theorist Sahl al-Tustarī, though this identification has been compellingly called into question recently by Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri.³⁰⁷ The full list of contents is as follows:

³⁰⁷ Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat Al-Ḥurūf* (Epistle on Letters) Ascribed to Sahl Al-Tustarī and Letter Mysticism in Al-Andalus," *Journal Asiatique* 299.1 (2011): 213–70.

1. *Natā'ij al-qurbah wa-nafā'is al-ghurba*, by Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad al-Khabrī al-Fārisī (d. 622/1225), fol. 1-64, dated 687/1288; a treatise on the Sufi path.
2. *Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf wa-ḥaqā'iqhā wa-uṣūluhā*, by Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī, fol. 65-83^b, n.d.; a treatise on the meanings and cosmic functions of the *fawātiḥ al-suwar*.
3. *Risālah fī al-ḥurūf*, attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī, fol. 83^b-87, n.d.; a brief work on topics similar to the previous one.
4. *Risālat al-i'tibār*, by Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī, fol. 88-95, n.d.; a treatise on the relationship between the inferior and superior worlds, and on ascending from the former to the latter.
5. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, by al-Būnī, fol. 96-125, dated 686/1287.
6. *Nuzhat al-qulūb wa-bughyat al-maṭlūb*, attributed to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, fol. 126-153, dated 686/1287; sermons and prayers gathered by an anonymous disciple.
7. *Al-faṣl al-rābi'*, no author given, fol. 154-160, dated 687/1288; part of a work on Arabic phonetics.

The Sufi character of the majority of these texts is unmistakable, and the compilation of discourses attributed to al-Shādhilī is of particular interest given al-Biṣṭāmī's claim that al-Shādhilī's leading disciple, Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī, studied lettrism under al-Būnī, especially since the codex was copied right around the time al-Mursī's death and thus during a quite unsettled phase of the consolidation of Shādhilism into an enduring movement.³⁰⁸ The codex strongly suggests that the reading communities in which al-Būnī's works circulated in this period overlapped with proto-Shādhilī collectivities, the latter of which also took up many aspects of Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings.³⁰⁹

The presence of Ibn Masarraḥ's works in the codex is of course also quite striking, and, in my view, strongly indicative of the esotericist nature of the reading community of which this codex is a product. As we will see in the following chapter, Ibn Masarraḥ and some of his followers were denounced as heterodox and accused of *bāṭin*-ism (i.e. crypto-Ismā'īlism) by Western-Islamicate critics

³⁰⁸ Richard J. A. McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafā' Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn 'Arabī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 28 ff.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 ff.

in the period between his death in 319/931 and the end of the seventh/thirteenth century. His works even were ordered burned in his native Córdoba on at least one occasion. For the only known surviving copies of his works to reside in a Cairene codex alongside one of al-Būnī's suggests that this particular reading community, and likely others in which al-Būnī's works circulated, included some number of Western Sufi participants. Abū al-Faḍl al-Ghumārī, for example, should likely be included in this category, as his *nisbah* indicates his origins in the Ghumārah Berber clan, whose lands were south of Ceuta in present-day Morocco, the same area from which al-Shādhilī hailed.³¹⁰ Ibn al-‘Arabī of course referred approvingly to Ibn Masarraḥ in some of his works—including citing him as an authority on lettrism in *Kitāb al-mīm wa-al-wāw wa-al-nūn*, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter—which supports the notion that other Western Sufi émigrés with esotericist leanings might have had access to Ibn Masarraḥ's works. However, given the radical dearth of copies of his works, they obviously were not in common circulation. All this should hardly be taken to suggest that these reading communities were exclusively composed of Westerners. The copyist of Chester Beatty 3168 seems plainly to have been of Eastern stock, as announced by his Ḥanafism and his great-grandfather's resoundingly Turkic name. Indeed, as we will see in the discussion of the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā', these communities rather should be understood as a venue where arcane ideas and spiritual practices from the edges of the Arab-Islamic world were brought into contact and allowed to percolate under cover of the participants' discretion and exclusivity.

The second compilatory volume of the period in which we find al-Būnī is Süleymaniye MS Carullah 986, the first work of which is a copy of al-Būnī's *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn* (called in this volume *Bidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*), followed by thirty-works by Ibn al-‘Arabī. The manuscript is neither dated nor signed by the copyist. Yahia asserts that it was copied during Ibn al-‘Arabī's lifetime, and though this cannot be confirmed, certainly it was copied no later than the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century. It is a large volume, with forty-three lines per page in small Maghribī

³¹⁰ On the Ghumārah see A.M.M. Mackeen, "The Early History of Sufism in the Maghrib Prior to Al-Shadhili," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91 (1971): 478.

script, suggesting that the copyist was a Western Sufi who had come east during the seventh/thirteenth century. Whoever he was, the copyist must have been well-acquainted with the communities in which *al-shaykh al-akbar*'s works circulated. Ibn al-'Arabī scholars regard the texts in the volume as being highly accurate, and it contains a copy of *Fuṣūs al-ḥikam*, which, as mentioned earlier, was closely guarded by Ibn al-'Arabī's early disciples, and which only very rarely was included in compilations of the *shaykh*'s works.³¹¹

Later interpreters of al-Būnī commonly discussed his works and ideas in combination with those of Ibn al-'Arabī, and this codical pairing of the two authors is important evidence that this phenomenon had already begun by the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century, and may even have been initiated by some of the earliest generations of Ibn al-'Arabī's disciples, which is to say his own disciples or the disciples of his disciples. In sum, then, what we see with these early compilatory codices is that al-Būnī's texts were circulating in the intellectual ferment of early Mamlūk Egyptian Sufism, among communities that also traded in the works of his major contemporaries, such as Ibn al-'Arabī and early Shādhilite authors. These authors' works would greatly shape the *ṭarīqah* Sufism that would rise to prominence over the course of the late-medieval period, as well as the highly synthetic, 'post-esotericist' lettrism that would be developed in the ninth/fifteenth century by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī and some of his peers working in Ottoman and Tīmūrid courtly environments.

2.5 Some signs of transition, the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā' and the 'courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif

Finally, I would address two phenomena belonging to the end of the germinal period that signal the transition into the next phase of the corpus's career: the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā' mentioned in the elaborate collation statements in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590, and the early (though undated) copy of the 'courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif* found in BnF MS arabe.

³¹¹ Correspondence with Stephen Hirtenstein of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society.

2.5.1 *The neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*

The second of the three reading communities indicated in the collation statements in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590 is the Sufi gathering at the al-Muḥsinīyah *khānqāh* outside Alexandria in 738/1337 that is mentioned by the collator Yaḥyá b. Aḥmad al-Khalīlī al-Shāfiī al-Ṣūfī. Yaḥyá's statement suggests that this community, of which he was a part, referred to itself as *Ikhwān al-ṣafā' wa-khullān al-wafā'*, 'the Brethren of Purity and Friends of Sincerity'. The name would appear to be an entirely unsubtle reference to the proto- or quasi-Ismā'īlite Shī'ite collectivity of fourth/tenth-century Iraq by the same name, a group that Pierre Lory has referred to as "a clandestine fraternity with an initiatic character,"³¹² and whose Epistles, which contain pronounced lettrist elements, are one of that era's great works of Shī'ite-Neoplatonic and occult scientific thought. It is a bold choice of moniker in an age when Ismā'īlites were still a favorite target for Jamā'ī Sunnite scholars in search of a polemical foil. In some ways, these neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā' seem like the most concrete example of the esotericist reading communities that I have been discussing throughout this chapter. Yaḥyá, who takes the *nisbah* 'al-ṣūfī', emphasizes that his collation of the book occurred in a group setting, "at a gathering of the brothers" (*bi-ḥaḍrat al-ikhwān...*), and they seem to wear their esotericism like a badge in their bold choice of name. Yaḥyá even makes an effort to link their activities back to al-Būnī in the Qarāfah by referencing the signed audition certificate in the exemplar from which he worked. However, there is strong reason to think that they in fact represent something different from the germinal-period communities discussed thus far: a transformation that was under way in the communities in which al-Būnī's works were read and circulated.

It is highly likely that this group of Sufis gathering in Alexandria in the second quarter of the eighth/fourteenth century was a predecessor to a coterie of intellectuals who went by that name in the latter part of that century and the first half of the one following. I discuss this later group in more detail in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, but at this juncture suffice it to say that they seem to have been a presence at or around the court of the Mamlūk sultan al-Mālik al-Zāhir Barqūq (d.

³¹² Pierre Lory, "Science des lettres et chiisme," in *La science des lettres en islam* (Paris: Editions Dervy, 2004), 65.

801/1399), at which time they were under the leadership of one of Barqūq's courtiers, a physician, alchemist, and astrologer named Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Akhlāṭī (d. 799/1397). The group included, at various times, the aforementioned 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, as well as such notables as the Tīmūrid occult philosopher Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (d. 835/1432), and the Tīmūrid historian and occult thinker Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī, each of whom drew to varying extents on al-Būnī, Ibn al-'Arabī, and other Western Sufi lettrists in formulating original understandings of the science of letters and names. It is in the likely connection between these early neo-ikhwānīs and those at Barqūq's court that we can detect stirrings of the efflorescence of the Būnian corpus in the late eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries, when al-Būnī's works were taken up by new communities of readers at the courts and households of Turkish military elites and the Arab civilian elites who served them, first in Egypt and Syria, and later with even greater success in Anatolia, Iran, and beyond.

2.5.2 BnF MS arabe 2647, the 'courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif

The other marker of this transition is BnF MS arabe 2647, likely the earliest surviving copy of the 'courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*, the pseudo-Būnian work that, as Coulon has argued, amalgamates portions of al-Būnī's genuine works with texts by other authors, such as the aforementioned Ibn Talḥah, to make a work on operative lettrism designed to appeal to courtly and bureaucratic sensibilities. The codex cannot be dated with precision; a terminus post quem of 670/1271-72 can be established from a mention of that date in the text,³¹³ and codical characteristics such as the hand and the paper suggest it is from no later than the mid-eighth/fourteenth century. It bears many of the hallmarks of a courtly codex: decorative elements such as multi-colored inks (beyond just red and black); chrysographed rosettes as section dividers; and a handsomely colored and chrysographed titlepiece and *shamsah*. Its pages are well worn, but otherwise it shows very few signs of interaction with a reading community, having neither patronage nor transmission statements, nor even a colophon, and there are only a few corrections in the margins. The major exception is a birth-notice inscribed over the *shamsah* on the

³¹³ BnF MS arabe 2647 (*ShM*), fol. 46^a, ln. 9.

titlepage that is difficult to read, but seems to be dated to 975/1567-68, centuries after its production. If it yields no precise details, it at least gives us a rough indication of when efforts were made to adapt al-Būnī's lettrism to this new audience, and the period seems both to coincide roughly with that of the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā' and to shortly precede the notable increase in the number of surviving copies of Būnian works that commences in the latter half of the eighth fourteenth century.

2.6 Conclusion: *The heart trusts in writing*

Despite the hoary trope equating secrecy with strictly oral knowledge transmission—wisdom passed only 'mouth-to-ear'—the relationships between the spoken/written and the secret/public were always complex and subject to conditions of time and place. As Maria Dakake notes, during the early centuries of Islam, when *ḥadīth* transmitters often were discouraged from writing traditions and urged instead to commit them to memory, early Shī'ites were ordered to write down the secret teachings of the *Imāms* that they heard; thus Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is supposed to have said: "The heart trusts in writing." Dakake explains this apparent paradox as reflective of milieux in which orality was the prestige form of public communication and the written was intrinsically private, hidden from view.³¹⁴ Though books came to be indispensable tools of knowledge transmission in the intervening centuries, the Ayyūbid-era craze for audition discussed previously demonstrates the lingering primacy of orality in public venues.

There may seem to be an irreconcilable tension between Ibn al-ʿArabī's dicta against written transmission of the secrets of operative lettrism and al-Būnī's writings, and a sense that, whatever precautions al-Būnī took in the promulgation of his works, whatever ethical injunctions he placed on his readers, the promulgation of his texts would inevitably have led to the profanation of the secrets conveyed therein. It is difficult to determine if al-Būnī shared this sense of inevitability, and if his upbringing and Sufi training in the relative backwater of Ifrīqiyah may have left him ill-equipped to

³¹⁴ Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 345–349; cf. Michael Cook, "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam," *Arabica* 44 (1997): 437–530.

grasp the fertile and increasingly promiscuous nature of Cairene manuscript culture—a culture that, as discussed in the fourth chapter, was during the ninth/fifteenth century effecting a transformation of the status of books as standalone sources of knowledge.

Tensions in this period regarding the commitment of secret teachings to writing were not exclusive to Western Sufis. The first epigraph to this chapter comes from a letter by the sixth/twelfth-seventh/thirteenth century Provençal Kabbalist Isaac the Blind (d. 1235 C.E.), directed at two of his disciples who have incurred his anger. In it he warns darkly that secrets committed to writing are prone to exposure despite the best intentions of their authors, a disastrous chain of events he claims to have witnessed previously. The exact circumstances of his disciples' transgression is unknown, but in the same letter Isaac expresses even greater wrath at the Kabbalists of Burgos, who, he asserts, "speak openly in the marketplaces and in the streets as agitated and confused people, and from their words it is clear that their hearts have turned away from the divine and they have cut down the shoots."³¹⁵ He contrasts both ranks of misdeed against the utter probity of his "fathers," who, he states, concealed when in the company of the vulgar the very fact that they possessed any special knowledge. As Moshe Halbertal notes, it is clear that Isaac feared "an unravelling of the organic ties of transmission" and a threat therein to the social order he strove to preserve.³¹⁶

As I will relate in the following chapter, al-Būnī, fecklessly or not, seems to have been actively experimenting with the book as a teaching and initiatic instrument, a tendency that (like so many others) he shared with Ibn al-ʿArabī. This should not surprise us, as these two émigrés to the central Arab-Islamic lands as well as other Western Sufis who made similar transitions were engaged less in the preservation of an existing social order than in a relocation of their spiritual authority to new locales markedly different from their homelands. Indeed, much of what has been discussed thus far, and of the material ahead, reflects efforts of such highly creative Sufi actors who, apparently having realized the outsized power of books and book-practices in the cities of the *mashriq*, sought to exploit the textual

³¹⁵ Quoted in Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, 71.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*; cf. Wolfson, "Beyond the Spoken Word," 176 ff.

economy of their adopted cities as one means of forming new communities of peers, disciples, and patrons. Al-Būnī, in pushing the limits of what elements of Western Sufi thought could be committed to written form without engendering a dangerous backlash, unleashed a body of writings the future of which he hardly could have foretold.

Chapter Three

Portable cosmos:

Al-Būnī's lettrist cosmology and the uses of the Sufi book

Then God, great and glorious, made all that He created, heaven and earth, to be signs indicating Him, expressing His Lordship and His beautiful attributes. The world in its entirety is therefore a book, whose letters are His speech.

- Ibn Masarra al-Jabālī³¹⁷

My disciples are my books.

- Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī³¹⁸

3.0 Introduction: Esotericism, cosmology, and the Sufi book

In the previous chapter I argued that al-Būnī's works originally were intended for circulation among small, discreet communities of Sufi initiates in Egypt, and that this indeed was largely characteristic of the career of the corpus through the first few decades of the eighth/fourteenth century. In this chapter I turn from issues of manuscript circulation to a closer examination of some of the content of his writings and of ways in which his texts were read and otherwise utilized by these early readers. I focus particularly on the lengthy discourse on cosmology in his lettrist treatise *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-'ulwīyāt*, a highly arcane text that includes a series of complex diagrams and

³¹⁷ Quoted and translated in Sarah Stroumsa and Sara Sviri, "The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra and His Epistle on Contemplation," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 36 (2009): 217.

³¹⁸ Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī, *Laṭā'if al-minan*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 24.

كني اصحابي

The quote is al-Shādhilī's response when asked why he wrote no books. Literally it is "My books are my disciples," but the sense is better communicated in English by reversing the nouns.

talismans, some of which are said to offer the reader visionary access to the hidden worlds or planes of reality discussed in the work. Reading the text *qua* manuscript—which is to say as a material text that was read primarily in group settings and thus was encountered both visually and aurally—I consider issues of how this difficult work was taught and understood, and to what ends actors engaged with it. Noting certain aspects of the history of Western Sufism and the roots of al-Būnī’s lettrism in certain strains of Shī’ite thought, and focusing attention on various ‘textual-economic’ elements of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, I examine ways that, for germinal-period Sufi actors, it and al-Būnī’s other texts were tools for establishing themselves as spiritually accomplished religious elites with access to extraordinary knowledge and occult power.

As discussed in chapter one, an oft-noted element of esotericism as a socioreligious phenomenon is that it can function to create new ‘hermeneutic spaces’ in which, as Maria Dakake puts it, “alternate or subversive social structures or religious interpretations might dwell, as [participants] seek to consolidate themselves and draw in new members.”³¹⁹ In my view, this paradigm well pertains to the esotericist reading communities in which al-Būnī’s works circulated during the germinal period. Though the paratexts discussed in the previous chapter give us only a little information about the specific members of these communities, one aspect of their identities that does emerge is that a significant number of them seem to have originated outside of Cairo and environs, and thus likely were at the fringes of local networks and hierarchies of Sufis and other religious authorities. While the *qāḍī* ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm presumably was well-placed socially, others, such as Abū Faḍl ‘Abbās al-Ghumārī (to whom Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād read his copy of *‘Alam al-hudá*), ‘Uthmān b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad b. Arslān al-Ḥanafī (the copyist of Chester Beatty 3168, which contains *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* and Ibn Masarraḥ’s works), and the anonymous Maghribī copyist of Süleymaniye MS Carullah 986 (in which *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn* is bound up with a number of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works) were certainly or most likely of non-Egyptian origin. I would posit that it was such outsiders to Cairene society who drove the early

³¹⁹ Dakake, “Hiding in Plain Sight,” 336.

career of the corpus as they utilized it and the small communities in which it was read in attempting to forge positions of religious authority for themselves. Establishing such positions was a matter of some urgency in a region that rapidly was being transformed by larger developments in the Islamic world of the seventh/thirteenth century, such as the disintegration of Muslim power in al-Andalus, the violence and upheaval accompanying the final showdown with the Crusaders at the end of the Ayyūbid period, and the Mongol sack of Baghdad that left Cairo as the new cultural and intellectual center of gravity in the region. Though al-Būnī's move to Cairo had preceded most of those events, he too was an outsider to the city presumably seeking to make a place for himself and the school of Western Sufism of which he was a product, and the assertion of sources of spiritual authority distinct from and superior to those of the mainly Shafi'ite and Ḥanbalite jurists who had come to dominate Egypt in the waning decades of the Fāṭimid rule and under that of the Ayyūbids is arguably central to his texts, as discussed in the previous chapter with regard to his Qur'ānic hermeneutics.

The 'hermeneutic space' that al-Būnī's works seek to establish entails the cultivation of a particular vision of the cosmos, one that attributes extraordinary knowledge and power to sanctified human actors and posits the potential for this sanctity and its effects to be intentionally developed through initiation and spiritual exercises. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* is centrally concerned with expounding this cosmological vision, and with facilitating both intellectual and visionary access to the hidden worlds al-Būnī describes as emanating from the godhead to this world of manifestation. What I term 'cosmology' consists of interlaced theories of cosmogony, quasi-Neoplatonic metaphysics (intellect, world-soul, etc.), the macrocosm and microcosm, spiritual anthropology (the individual intellect, spirit, soul, etc.), astrology and the elements, and "the unicity of Nature" (as Seyyed Hossein Nasr has put it), which is to say the interrelatedness of all existing things and their dependence upon God.³²⁰ This cosmological discourse is decidedly letterist, meaning that the letters of the Arabic alphabet play central roles, particularly in joining the worlds of the macrocosmic Creation to microcosmic human nature. As such

³²⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and the Methods Used for Its Study by the Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā', Al-Birūnī, and Ibn Sīnā* (Boulder: Shambala, 1978), 4–5 and passim.

it outlines a conceptual and practical framework for the various operative lettrist exercises al-Būnī prescribes in his works, including those often regarded as ‘magical’ or ‘theurgic’, such as the use of talismans and other methods for the attainment of advanced spiritual states and miraculous powers. The hermeneutic space potentiated by al-Būnī’s teachings is thus one that is located as much within this lettrist vision of the cosmos as in the world of everyday experience. *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, perhaps the most comprehensive written vehicle of this cosmological vision, is al-Būnī’s greatest efforts to bring this cosmos to an Egyptian audience. It is in this sense that the book itself is a portable cosmos, a point of entry and initiation into a new way of seeing and experiencing the world and what lies behind it.

The first major section of this chapter sketches the historical background of al-Būnī’s cosmologically-oriented lettrist teachings. While the delineation of al-Būnī’s ‘influences’ is not a primary goal of this study, this sketch of the history of this intellectual current is, for a few reasons, useful in examining the promulgation and reception of his ideas. First, precedents in older discourses in this ‘tradition’ can be helpful when attempting to decipher what al-Būnī is talking about in some of his more gnomic utterances and to otherwise fill in certain gaps in his exposition. Second, it arguably is instructive regarding both the antagonistic relationships that sometimes erupted between Western Sufis and the political and religious authorities of the Almoravid and Almohad regimes, and—most importantly for the purposes of this study—the ways these antagonism influenced the ideas and social practices that al-Būnī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, and other Sufi émigrés of their generation adapted to their new environments. And third, it helps provide a basis for understanding some of the accusations of crypto-Isma‘īlism and heresy that, as discussed in the following chapter, were leveled against al-Būnī and his compatriots by certain Mamlūk-era thinkers.

The second and main section of this chapter is the examination of parts of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*. In it I focus not only on recounting the main features of his cosmological teachings, but also on how the text *qua* manuscript may have been taught in the context of small Sufi communities, whether by al-Būnī himself or by later *shaykhs*. Proceeding from the assumption that the works largely were read aloud in

group settings, I note particular gaps in the exposition that likely would have required further explanation, references to spiritual exercises that assume a basic knowledge of embodied practices, and other elements that point to the use(s) of these text. A particular point of interest is the aforementioned diagrams and talismans, some of which are claimed to have facilitate visions of the hidden worlds when contemplated under the proper conditions. These are, to best of my knowledge, quite unusual in Arabic manuscripts of this period, and I argue that they mark *Latā'if al-ishārāt* as an important experiment in the use of the Sufi book as an initiatic instrument.

The last part of this chapter is a brief study of al-Būnī's initiatic lineage within Western Sufism, a topic explored as something of a coda to the examination of al-Būnī's cosmology, insofar as the latter is the fruit of his Western Sufi upbringing. Insofar as many medieval readers based their evaluation of a text's merits in part on the lineage of its author this is an important element in addressing the reception of his works. I begin with what can be known of al-Būnī's relationship with 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawī, touching on al-Mahdawī's relationship with the great Abū Madyan (d. betw. 588/1192 and 594/1198), arguably the most important *shaykh* of medieval North African Sufism prior to the seventh/thirteenth century. Of foremost consideration in doing so is the question of to what extent al-Būnī's lettrism can be traced to these esteemed teachers. I then turn to the views on al-Būnī's background of two roughly contemporaneous Mamlūk-era thinkers: the Antiochene Sufi and occultist 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454), whom I have already introduced briefly in past chapters, and the great historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), who wrote the earliest surviving *tarjamah* of al-Būnī. As we will see, neither man's account of al-Būnī can be considered entirely credible—al-Maqrīzī's probably not at all—but they are nonetheless valuable as an introduction to Mamlūk-era notions of al-Būnī's career and the origins of his strange ideas, and thus serve as an important bridge to the final chapter of this study.

As discussed at the end of the chapter and in the one following, the participants in these esotericist reading communities—at least some of them—seem to have been largely successful in

establishing themselves a religious authorities, a success evidenced by the efflorescence of the corpus from the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century onward as they escaped the confines of these communities, and as the communities' need to protect themselves from 'mainstream' authorities decreased thanks to the interest and support of powerful elites. It was noted previously that esotericist movements, when taken up by actors in positions of social advantage, can as easily serve to buttress and mystify existing power relations as it had to undermine them, and I argue later that al-Būnī's readers were no exception to this pattern.

*3.0.1 Notes on the manuscripts of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* drawn on in this chapter*

As noted in Appendix B, my survey of the corpus has taken into account twenty extant copies of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, seven of which are colophonically dated to the medieval period and five others of which probably also originate from before the tenth/sixteenth century. The earliest of these is Berlin MS or. fol. 80, copied almost certainly in Egypt in 669/1270, allegedly from an autograph. As discussed in the previous chapter, this copy is rendered in a difficult, nonprofessional hand, and thus seems to have been someone's personal copy. The passages from the text transcribed in this chapter are mostly from BnF MS arabe 2658, which, as also mentioned in the previous chapter, was copied in Cairo in 809/1406 and includes a copy of an audition certificate from the exemplar stating that it (the exemplar) was auditioned in Cairo in 622/1225. For difficult readings, and to account for some folia missing from BnF 2658, I have taken recourse primarily to Berlin 80. Another codex I utilized for such reasons is BnF MS arabe 2657, copied in Mecca in 788/1386 by one 'Umar Ismā'īl al-Samarqandī in a small, fine *naskh* with Eastern tendencies. The images of diagrams reproduced for this chapter have been selected from all three of these codices and are labelled accordingly.

3.1 Cosmology and lettrism prior to al-Būnī

Speculation on 'mystical' or hidden meanings of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, especially in relation to the Qur'ān, was a topic of interest from early-on for Muslim thinkers of various schools and

disciplines. The *fawātiḥ al-suwar/muqatta‘āt* often were at the center of such speculation, despite some scholars’ admonitions against attempts to interpret them. Al-Ṭabarī associates various theories of the disconnected letters with famous authorities of the early Islamic period, for example crediting the great scholar Ibn ‘Abbās with numerous opinions on the topic, including that the letters were “names for the Qur’ān, titles to the suras, abbreviations for God’s names and attributes, God’s way of opening specific passages, divine oaths, or—by some unexplained or inexplicable means—God’s greatest name when combined.”³²¹ The letters also were a popular topic among medieval Sufi writers such as al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and al-Qushayrī (d. 475/1072), sometimes in regard only to the *fawātiḥ* and sometimes to the alphabet as a whole. Alliterative/acronymic approaches to the letters were most common among such classical Sufi thinkers, which is to say methods in which a letter is regarded as an allusion (*ishārah*) to a word that begins with or at least includes the letter. Al-Sulamī, for example, tells us in his *Sharḥ ma‘ānī al-ḥurūf* that the letter *khā’* alludes to eternal life (*khulūd*) and the fear of death (*khawf al-mawt*), *rā’* to God’s mercy (*rahmah*), and *sīn* to submission to God (*istislām*).³²² Gerhard Böwering, in his recent article on al-Sulamī’s treatise, describes this approach as entirely “moderate” compared to more “provocative” methods of symbolical or numerological analysis.³²³

Of course, it is precisely those provocative methods that are our central concern here, particularly the decidedly esotericist and cosmologically-oriented strain of lettrism in which al-Būnī’s thought participates, which arose among ‘extremist’ and Ismā‘īlite Shī‘ite thinkers and later was taken up by Sufis in the Islamicate West. Briefly put, it is distinct from the moderate approaches of al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī *et alii* as it tended, as Ebstein and Sara Sviri have put it, to regard the letters of the Arabic

³²¹ Nguyen, “Exegesis of the *ḥurūf al-muqatta‘a*,” 10.

³²² Böwering, “Sulamī’s Treatise,” 358–60.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 356 & 365.

alphabet not merely as symbols but “as the primordial building blocks of the cosmos.”³²⁴ The history of this tradition, variously conceived, has been addressed in some detail by Denis Gril in his essay on the science of letters as found in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*,³²⁵ by Pierre Lory in a series of essays,³²⁶ and more recently by Matthew Melvin-Koushki in his study of Ibn Turkah³²⁷ and Michael Ebstein in his studies of Ismā‘īlite influences on Ibn Masarraḥ and Ibn al-‘Arabī.³²⁸ In what follows I limit myself to a synoptic overview of that history with particular attention to points that can inform our understanding of al-Būnī’s thought and its reception.

In a discussion of early Islamic cosmological discourses, Josef van Ess has followed the historian of classical philosophy David Furley in drawing attention to the “cosmological crisis” that prevailed from antiquity through the medieval period: a “profound difference of opinion regarding the origin of the world and of things” that was further “exacerbated by new axiomatic positions” as the ‘book religions’ rose to prominence.³²⁹ Differences between Muslims, particularly in the white-hot intellectual ferment of the first few centuries *anni hegirae*, were no less sharp than interconfessional ones. As Dimitri Gutas notes, the ‘Abbāsīd adoption of Sasanian traditions of court astrology necessitated “the concomitant adoption of an underlying cosmological theory that support[ed] the practice of astrology,” generally the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic model utilized by practitioners like the Baṣran Jewish astrologer

³²⁴ Ebstein and Sviri, “The So-Called *Risālat Al-Ḥurūf*,” 231. Ebstein and Sviri distinguish between lettrisms type- α and type- β , the first being the somewhat diffuse speculations on the letters in exegetical and Sufi literatures (al-Ṭabarī, al-Sulamī, etc.), and the second being the cosmologically-oriented tradition that is our main concern here.

³²⁵ Denis Gril, “La science des lettres (analyse du chapitre 2 des *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyya*),” in *Ibn ‘Arabī, Les Illumination de la Mecque. Textes choisis présentés et traduits*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (Paris: Sinbad, 1988), 385–438; translated as “The Science of Letters.”

³²⁶ Lory’s essays on the topic, written from the mid-1980s onward, have been collected in the volume *La science des lettres*.

³²⁷ Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science,” 171–216.

³²⁸ Particularly his recent *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 77–122.

³²⁹ Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 80–81.

Māshā' Allāh (d. after 193/809) and his peers.³³⁰ Various political elites came to patronize the emerging *falsafah* tradition, with thinkers such as al-Kindī (d. mid-3rd/9th c.), al-Fārābī (d. after 330/942), and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) drawing upon the Hellenistic inheritance to produce Neoplatonized Aristotelian cosmic models that variously accommodated revelation. Heresiographers recall thinkers whom they labelled *dahrīs*—actors apparently from within the Muslim community who seem to have put forward essentially non-theistic accounts of an eternal cosmos and a world determined strictly by the motions of the heavenly bodies—and Patricia Crone argues that their participation in learned debates helped spur the development of cosmologies more in harmony with Qur'ānic statements about God's creation of the cosmos and its structure.³³¹ Finally, Mu'tazilite and (eventually) Ash'ārite scholars of disputational theology (*kalām*) theorized atomist cosmologies that were theocentric, occasionalist, and diverged strongly from the ideas of their Hellenophilic contemporaries.³³² It was in the midst of this 'crisis' of contesting voices that certain early Shīites formulated their own images of the making and order of the Creation.

All of these cosmological projects had sociopolitical implications. Courtly patrons of such efforts sought the prestige of sponsoring authoritative accounts of the order of things, an order tilted largely in their favor. Similarly, though not always in service to the court, the *mutakallimūn* argued for the supremacy of Arabo-Islamic³³³ knowledge of the world over that of pagan ancients and conquered peoples. Early Shīite thinkers, however, were faced with the distinct challenge of describing a world-order of which their *Imāms* were the rightful rulers in the eyes of God yet suffered an appalling lack of

³³⁰ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 71.

³³¹ Patricia Crone, "The Dahrīs according to Al-Jāhīz," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 63 (November 2010): passim.

³³² On *kalām* atomism see Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Islamic atomism*, ed. Y. Tzvi. Langermann, trans. Michael Schwarz, *Beiträge zur islamischen Atomenlehre* 9 (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1997); Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Mu'tazilī Cosmology*, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science* 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

³³³ On the valorization of specifically Arabo-Islamic knowledge over the sciences produced by other nations, see Heck, "The Hierarchy of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization."

temporal power. They accomplished this in part through the announcement of hidden worlds prior and superior to this lowliest one, worlds that in their very structure were made to testify to the sovereignty of the *Imāms*. The formulation of these cosmologies was closely linked to the development of esotericist methods of Qur'ānic interpretation (i.e. *bāṭinī ta'wīl*) and thus to new propositions about both the relationships of different types of human actors to the Qur'ān and ways that meaning could be derived from language and its component parts, particularly the letters. In other words, these early Shī'ite cosmologies were closely linked to the earliest stirrings of Islamic esotericism as discussed in the opening chapter of this study.

3.1.1 Letters and cosmology in 'extremist' and early Ismā'īlite Shī'ite thought

The origins of Shī'ite letterist cosmologies are traced by Lory and others to the 'extremist' (*ghālī*) al-Mughīrah b. Sa'īd (d. 119/737), a pro-'Alid militant and reputed sorcerer of Aramaean stock who likely was influenced by Gnostic discourses on alphabetical mysticism.³³⁴ He is said to have extracted from allegorical readings of the Qur'ān and his own spiritual exertions a mythopoeic vision of "the figure of the creator as a man of light, with limbs in the shape of the letters of the Arabic alphabet,"³³⁵ a demiurge that, in the process of instantiating the cosmos, also created the pre-existent forms of Muḥammad and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.³³⁶ Bernd Radtke argues that the earliest evidence of *bāṭinī* interpretation of the Qur'ān is linked to al-Mughīrah,³³⁷ and Steven Wasserstrom notes that he allegedly attempted ultimately to arrogate Qur'ānic interpretive authority to himself, "assert[ing] that the Qur'ān is entirely composed of symbols [*amthāl*] and cryptic hints [*rumūz*] and that mankind cannot learn anything of its mystical meanings but through him because of the power invested in him by the

³³⁴ Steven Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes: Mughīra B. Sa'īd's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of Its Rejection," *History of Religions* 25, no. 1 (1985): 4 ff; W.F. Tucker, "Rebels and Gnostics: Muḡīra Ibn Sa'īd and the Muḡīriyya," *Arabica* 22, no. 1 (1975): 33–47.

³³⁵ Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest for a Universal Science," 175.

³³⁶ Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes," 17.

³³⁷ Radtke, *EIr*, s.v. "baten."

Imam.”³³⁸ Indeed, al-Mughīrah sometimes is described as having been a pretender to the Imāmate, and even to prophecy.³³⁹ Though he was eventually executed as a rebel and, in the centuries after his death, denounced as a heresiarch by Shī’ites and Sunnites alike, al-Mughīrah’s vision arguably expressed fundamental tensions in the early ‘sectarian milieu’ of the Arab-ruled territories in the thought of Muslims and others regarding holy texts and the human actors who revealed and interpreted them. Wasserstrom regards al-Mughīrah’s lettrist deity as the “apotheosis of the figurative powers of language.”³⁴⁰ And Pierre Lory views the man of light as an “*archétype humano-livresque*,” a response to notions that “God reveals Himself to men through a heavenly, perfect Book, and dispatches to earth equally perfect and exemplary men (prophets and Imams)... necessarily impl[ying] a deep connection between these two forms, a place where the reality of the Book and that of Man are joined in a common seed.”³⁴¹ I would add that this god-man of light and letters can be taken as anticipating the concept of the human as microcosm that would come to play a central part in later iterations of lettrist-cosmological thought, including al-Būnī’s.³⁴²

Other thinkers from among the *ghulāt*, such as Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s erstwhile intimate Abū al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 138/755-56) and his followers (*al-khaṭṭābiyah*), refined and expanded upon al-Mughīrah’s ideas on the letters, light, and the pre-existence of the prophets and *Imāms*, also championing “the *bāṭinī ta’wīl*, the esoteric or allegorical interpretation of the *Qur’ān* and the sacred prescriptions.”³⁴³ A century or so later, pre-Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlite theorists were continuing to generate boldly innovative

³³⁸ Wasserstrom, “The Moving Finger Writes,” 18. The *Imām* in question may have been Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. betw. 114/732 and 118/736), though, according to Wilferd Madelung, after al-Bāqir’s death al-Mughīrah switched his support to the Ḥasanid al-Nafs al-Zakīyah (d. 145/762), declaring him the *mahdī*. Madelung, *EI2*, s.v. “al-Mughīriyya.”

³³⁹ Lory, “Science des lettres et chiisme,” 62; Tucker, “Rebels and Gnostics,” 38–39.

³⁴⁰ Wasserstrom, “The Moving Finger Writes,” 17.

³⁴¹ Lory, “Science des lettres et chiisme,” 63–64.

³⁴² Ebstein devotes a chapter to this topic (though without reference to al-Būnī) in his recent monograph, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 157–188.

³⁴³ Farhad Daftary, “The Earliest Ismā‘īlites,” *Arabica* 38, no. 2 (1991): 217–218.

cosmological discourses that included lettrist elements, as S.M. Stern and Heinz Halm have deduced from non-Ismāʿīlite heresiographies and Fāṭimid-era Ismāʿīlite sources.³⁴⁴ These included allegorical readings of the Qurʾān from which were derived notions of two demiurgic entities, *Kūnī* and *Qadar*, a masculine-feminine pair of beings brought into existence by God’s creation of the primordial light and His utterance thereto of the creative command “Be!” (*kun*).³⁴⁵ The seven letters of those two names (*kāf-wāw-nūn-yāʾ, qāf-dāl-rāʾ*) were doubly interpreted. First they were understood to represent what early Ismāʿīlites regarded as the seven ‘speaking prophets’ (*nāṭiqs*), each of whom were held to have initiated a distinct historical era and cycle of *Imāms*, and simultaneously they were imagined as a cosmogonic heptad from which “all other letters of the Arabic alphabet and names emerged,” along with “the very things they signified.”³⁴⁶ Relatedly, in *Kitāb al-kashf*, a collection of early Ismāʿīlite writings compiled by the Fāṭimid *dāʿī* Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. after 341/953),³⁴⁷ God creates the divine throne (*ʿarsh*) and footstool (*kursī*) with an axis (*quṭb*) stretching between them, and from this axis brings forth the twenty-eight letters in heptads by speaking their names, until they coalesce to form the Qurʾān³⁴⁸—a tandem creation of the cosmos and the Book. A fluid topos of the individual letters of God’s speech being integral to the constitution of sanctified actors and the cosmos as a whole clearly was in play in these conceptualizations of the Creation.

With regard to these clusterings of speculations on cosmology, the letters, the nature of the holy text, and the prophets and *Imāms*, one might consider Henry Corbin’s compelling observation: “*Taʿwīl* presupposes the superimposition of worlds and interworlds, as the correlative basis for a

³⁴⁴ S.M. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismaʿilism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1983), 3–29; Heinz Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismāʿīliya*, *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 44 (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländische Ges., 1978), 53–66.

³⁴⁵ Regarding *kun*, see Q 2:117, 36:82.

³⁴⁶ Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlites*, 133–134.

³⁴⁷ Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre*, 18; Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlites*, 98.

³⁴⁸ Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre*, 38–44; Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 81–82.

plurality of meanings in the same text.”³⁴⁹ The implication is that the very notion of *bāṭinī* exegesis requires the existence of these interworlds in order that the Qur’ān and other elements of religion may be true at once on the plane of physical reality and historical events, as well as on ‘deeper’ levels of existence and meaning that lie outside of ordinary time and place. Thus there must be posited such ‘imaginal’, metaphysical spaces posterior and foundational to material existence. Similarly, the prophets and *Imāms*, as actors capable of contacting these planes, must partake of them in their very beings, such that they are transformed in these accounts into pre-existent forms as lights.³⁵⁰ The letters, as the ingredients of God’s speech and the Qur’ān’s multilayered meanings, are also made to partake of those lights from which the pre-existent forms of the prophets and *Imāms* are composed. This combination of concepts formed a rich terrain for intellectual exploration, one that early Ismā’īlites no doubt used in attracting to their cause intellectuals with Shī’ite leanings and/or those who were dissatisfied with, or lacked social access to, other circles of theological and philosophical debate. In other words, these hidden interworlds and the communities in which they were discussed were ‘hermeneutic spaces’ in which such actors could refine and promulgate alternative theories of religio-political authority, and in that sense can be seen as predecessors to the esotericist reading communities in which al-Būnī’s works circulated.

3.1.2 Letters and cosmology in Fāṭimid-era Ismā’īlite Neoplatonism

As we will see, al-Būnī’s cosmological writings and diagrams map a similar territory of interworlds of lights and letters extending between God and the manifest world, though one structured on a quasi-Neoplatonic, emanative framework. Ismā’īlite theorists of course preceded al-Būnī in this as well. Fāṭimid-era Ismā’īlite missionaries (s. *dā’ī*) such as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/934), Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad al-Nasafī (d. 332/943), Abū Ya’qūb al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 361/971), and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī

³⁴⁹ Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson, Bollingen Series XCI:2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 54.

³⁵⁰ Cf. Uri Rubin, “Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 62–119.

(d. after 411/1021) were “greatly influenced by Neoplatonism, especially by its concept of the unknowable God, its theory of emanation, and its hierarchic chain of beings,”³⁵¹ and creatively synthesized many of the precepts of that late-antique school of thought with earlier Ismāʿīlite discourses. Among adaptations made to Neoplatonic theories of emanation by these Ismāʿīlite thinkers was a modified model of the relationship between the godhead and the Intellect (*nous*, ‘*aql*’), in which God’s *amr* (‘command’), *irādah* (‘will’), or *kalimah* (‘word’)—i.e. the creative *kun* mentioned in the Qurʾān³⁵²—brings into being and directs the Intellect. As Daftary summarizes the matter:

Instead of having the intellect... emanate directly and involuntarily from the source of being, the One, as with Plotinus and his school, in the system of the Iranian *dāʿīs* God brings creation into being through his command or volition (*amr*), or word (*kalima*), in an act of primordial, extratemporal origination (*ibdāʿ*), signifying creation out of nothing—*ex nihilo*. Hence God is the originator or the *mubdiʿ*, and His command or word acts as an intermediary between Him and His creation.³⁵³

This addition of the *amr/irādah/kalimah* to the Neoplatonic cosmological scheme brings it into line, after a fashion, with the Qurʾānic notion of a created cosmos (rather than the eternal one standard to Platonism) and an agentive, though still remote, God. The *dāʿīs* took further steps in integrating this cosmology to the Qurʾān, such as variously assimilating the Intellect to the *kāf* of *kun* and the divine throne (‘*arsh*’) or pen (*qalam*), and the Soul to the *nūn* of *kun* and the footstool (*kursī*) or tablet (*lawḥ*),³⁵⁴ associations that, somewhat like the aforementioned pre-Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlite cosmologies, emphasized an

³⁵¹ Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlites*, 228; cf. Paul Walker, “Cosmic Hierarchies in Early Ismāʿīlite Thought: The View of Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī,” *The Muslim World* 66, no. 1 (1976): 18; Michael Ebstein, “The Word of God and the Divine Will: Ismāʿīlite Traces in Andalusī Mysticism,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012): 247–302.

³⁵² The *amr/irādah/kalimah* (*kun*) triplicity is found in Q 36:82.

﴿إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ﴾

³⁵³ Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlites*, 228–229. This theme has also been explored at length by Ebstein, “The Word of God and the Divine Will,” *passim*; *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 33–76.

³⁵⁴ Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlites*, 230; Walker, “Cosmic Hierarchies,” 20.

integral relationship between the utterance or inscription of God's creative word and the structure of the cosmos.

Officers of a proselytizing and initiatory body, the *dā'īs* were quite concerned not only with metaphysical realities, but also with the matters closer to the manifest world. Moving "beyond the simple triad of One, intellect, and soul described by Plotinus," they elaborated the relationship between the intelligible and sensible worlds such that the emanational chain continues down through the heavenly spheres, the elements, and "all the way to the genesis of man."³⁵⁵ Furthermore they posited correspondences between this 'descending' cosmogonic process of emanations and an 'ascending' soteriological hierarchy, the latter being what al-Sijistānī called '*ālam al-waḍ'* (the world of convention) or '*ālam al-dīn* (the world of religion). Paul Walker, in a discussion of al-Sijistānī's writings, describes this second hierarchy as one "of religious powers whose function is to bring a moral order or a moral direction to creation."³⁵⁶ It facilitates, at least potentially, the purification of the Ismā'īlite initiate's soul and his or her henotic ascent toward salvation, a notion of human perfectibility linked to the concept of the human as microcosm. As Daftary puts it:

This soteriological vision can be explained in terms of descending and ascending scales or paths... The descending scale traces creation from God's command through an emanational hierarchy, to the world of material reality and the genesis of man. As a counterpart, the ascending scale maps the rise of man's soul to the higher, spiritual world in quest of salvation.³⁵⁷

The letters—particularly the two in *kun* and the seven letters that comprise the *Kūnī-Qadar* pair from the older cosmologies—are construed as constitutive elements of both the descending and ascending scales. For example, al-Sijistānī at one point in his *Kitāb al-Yanābī'* explains the relationships between the *kāf* and *nūn* of *kun*, the seven 'superior' or 'heavenly' letters (*al-ḥurūf al-'ulwīyah*) of *Kūnī-*

³⁵⁵ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlites*, 229.

³⁵⁶ Walker, "Cosmic Hierarchies," 17.

³⁵⁷ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlites*, 231.

Qadar, and the cosmic and religious hierarchies (the latter here called ‘normative’, and represented by the seven *nāṭiqs*, the ‘speaking prophets’) as follows:

[T]he *kāf* and *nūn* equal in the alphanumerical system seventy [*kāf* = 20, *nūn* = 50], which is seven tens. This is as if to inform you that through the Command of God (which is also known as the Will), God willed the appearance of the seven heavenly letters from which the spiritual forms came into being, and He willed by it as well the setting up of the [seven] planets by means of which the corporeal forms came into being. He further willed that the seven Speaking-prophets be established in the physical world in order to promote a normative order [...].³⁵⁸

Thus we see the letters—which, as Walker notes, al-Sijistānī regarded as symbols *par excellence*³⁵⁹—effecting relationships between God’s word, the structure of the hidden and visible worlds, and the prophets and *Imāms*. The striking of similar correspondences between the cosmological order of the hypostases, spheres, elements, *et cetera* and a hierarchy of both living and disincarnate saints and prophets would come to be a central feature in the thought of Western Sufis such as al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī.

As Daftary notes, the Neoplatonic thought of the Eastern *dā’īs* was adopted as official Fāṭimid ideology only late in the reign of the caliph al-Mu‘izz li-dīn Allāh (r. 341/953-365/975), the first of the Fāṭimids to rule from Cairo, the court previously having adhered to versions of the older cosmologies discussed above.³⁶⁰ It is noteworthy that these ideas moved from the Fāṭimid dynasty’s periphery, which is to say the covert, subversive communities fostered by *dā’īs* in hostile territories, to its imperial center, suggesting that the former was the true laboratory of innovation in esotericist Ismā‘īlite

³⁵⁸ Walker’s translation, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom a Study of Abū Ya‘qūb Al-Sijistānī’s Kitāb Al-Yanābī: Including a Complete English Translation with Commentary and Notes on the Arabic Text* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 51.

³⁵⁹ Walker, “Cosmic Hierarchies,” 25.

³⁶⁰ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlites*, 232 ff.

thought despite the notion of the *Imām* as chief theologian.³⁶¹ As we will see, a similar dynamic occurs with Western Sufi lettrist thought and its eventual taking up by Mamlūk elites.

3.1.3 Related themes in the *Jābirian corpus* and *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*

Two other bodies of texts originating in seemingly marginal Ismā'īlite (or proto- or quasi-Isma'īlite) communities that have bearing on this lettrist tradition are the *Jābirian alchemical corpus* and the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, though their approaches to the letters are quite distinct from those already discussed and from each other. Like Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, the alchemist Abū Mūsá Jābir b. Ḥayyān was remembered—or imagined³⁶²—as having been a member of Ja'far's entourage. Indeed, Ja'far is credited as the source of Jābir's alchemical knowledge, though, as noted in the previous chapter, much if not all of the corpus likely was composed as late as the late-third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries by one or more communities of Shī'ite actors. Broadly speaking, the corpus' treatment of the letters differs from its treatment by the aforementioned bodies of thought in that the latter assigning the letters less a cosmogonic role than one in *physis*, which is to say the inner workings of nature. As Nomanul Haq has discussed, the *Jābirian* writings ascribe occult elemental qualities to the letters of the Arabic alphabet: *alif* has the quality of heat, *bā'* cold, *jīm* dryness, *dāl* moisture, *et cetera*, and announces the alchemical science of *mīzan al-ḥurūf* ('the balance of letters') as the means of understanding and manipulating these qualities. In doing so they propose a deep relationship between the created things of the world and the Arabic language; as Haq puts it: "[A]n effective and real coordination between the letters of a word which names an object, and the physical structure of the object itself; between the

³⁶¹ With regard to the appeal of the *dā'īs'* cosmological thought, Daftary observes that "the philosophical superstructures of their systems enhanced the intellectual appeal of their message. This explains why their writings circulated widely in Persia and Central Asia, in both Ismā'īlite and non-Isma'īlite intellectual circles. Some non-Isma'īlite scholars, like Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), the Sunnī theologian of Transoxania and founder of the Māturīdiyya school of *kalām* theology, and Abū'l Qāsim al-Bustī (d. 420/1029), a Mu'tazilī Zaydī scholar of Persia, even commented upon aspects of the systems of thought developed by al-Nasafī and his school and preserved fragments of their writings"; *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁶² It is not at all certain that Jābir was a real person, or that, if so, he was a member of Ja'far's entourage. For the skeptical view of Jābir, see Kraus, *Contributions*, Vol. I, xxxvi–xlvi, esp. xlvii–xlvi with regard to his relationship to Ja'far. For a response to Kraus that argues for the historicity of Jābir and his relationship with Ja'far, see Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things*, 14–21.

science of morphology which studies the structure of words, and the science of physics which studies the structure of things.”³⁶³ As we will see below, al-Būnī similarly ascribes a complex set of elemental relationships to the letters, though the details of his system differ from those found in the Jābirian corpus.

The Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ were an esotericist community of quasi-Ismā’īlite intellectuals in fourth/tenth-century Iraq whose *Rasā’il* (Epistles) blended Shī’ite religio-political theory with Aristotelian, Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean elements to expound on a range of religious, natural, and occult sciences, and exerted a considerable—if not always acknowledged—influence on thinkers of many stripes for centuries to come. In their discourses on language, music, mathematics, astrology, and magic (*siḥr*), they granted the letters a role that, though less than cosmogonic, was central in governing human culture and knowledge. Unlike the Shī’ite theorists discussed above—and unlike al-Būnī and other Western Sufis—the Ikhwān did not regard Arabic as the language of God *per se*. Rather, they made reference to a language they call *Suryānīyah*, which Ādam and his early descendants are said to have spoken. Carmela Baffioni takes this to mean Syriac or Nabatean,³⁶⁴ though Lory argues convincingly that it rather denotes a human form of the language of the angels³⁶⁵; of course the two ideas need not be taken as contradictory. This first human language is said to have developed into diverse tongues and scripts—Hindi, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Arabic are specifically mentioned—as succeeding generations of Ādam’s descendants moved out across the face of the earth, and changes in language are seen by the Ikhwān as causative of changes in the sciences and religious creeds of the various nations, such that they even link the variety of sects and *madhhabs* within Islam to localized variations in

³⁶³ Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things*, 82.

³⁶⁴ Carmela Baffioni, “Traces of ‘Secret Sects’ in the *Rasā’il* of the Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā’,” in *Shī’a Islam, Sects, and Sufism: Historical Dimensions, Religious Practice, and Methodological Considerations*, ed. F. De Jong (Utrecht: M. Th. Houtsma Stichting, 1992), 25.

³⁶⁵ Lory, “Science des lettres et chiisme,” 69.

Arabic.³⁶⁶ The Ikhwān nonetheless privileged Arabic above all other languages for being the most “harmonious” with the structure of the cosmos,³⁶⁷ particularly due to its having twenty-eight letters, a mathematically ‘perfect’ number³⁶⁸ which accords with, among other things, the number of the lunar mansions of Indo-Arab astrology.³⁶⁹ Thus they describe the Arabic alphabet as the “seal of writings,” much as Muḥammad was the seal of the prophets.³⁷⁰ Numerology is central to the Ikhwān’s theories of language; for example, they state that the letters of the alphabet Ādam possessed were simply the numerals one through nine, but that by those nine ‘letters’ he knew the names and qualities of all things.³⁷¹

Though al-Būnī’s lettrism bears little similarity to the Ikhwān’s letter theory, it is nonetheless likely that he was familiar with, and otherwise influenced by, the *Rasā’il*, as they had a significant impact on Western-Islamicate thought (both Muslim and Jewish³⁷²); scholars have detected their all but certain influence on Ibn al-‘Arabī, for example.³⁷³ A number of modern scholars have argued that the *Rasā’il* were brought to the West at some point in the late-fourth/tenth or fifth/eleventh century,

³⁶⁶ Carmela Baffioni, “The ‘language of the prophet’ in the Ikhwān al-ṣafā’,” in *Al-Kitab: la sacralité du texte dans le monde de l’islam, actes du Symposium International tenu à Leuven et Louvain-la-Neuve du 29 mai au 1 juin 2002*, ed. Daniel De Smet, Godefroid de Callataÿ, and J.M.F. Van Reeth (Brussels: Peeters, 2004), 357–360.

³⁶⁷ Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science,” 179–180.

³⁶⁸ In mathematics, a ‘perfect’ number is one that equals the sum of its divisors; e.g. $6 = 1+2+3$; $28 = 1+2+4+7+14$; $496 = 1+2+4+8+16+31+62+124$. On this quality of the 28 letters see Ikhwān al-ṣafā’, *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ wa-khullān al-wafā’* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2008), III/143.

³⁶⁹ Daniel Varisco, *EQ*, s.v. “Numerology.”

³⁷⁰ Baffioni, “The ‘language of the prophet,’” 358.

³⁷¹ Ikhwān al-ṣafā’, *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-ṣafā’*, III/141 ff.

³⁷² J.Vahid Brown, “Andalusī Mysticism: A Recontextualization,” *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2 (2006): 80, 89; Steven Harvey, ed., *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy: Proceedings of the Bar-Ilan University Conference*, Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 11 and passim. At the other end of the Arab-Islamic world see Ronald Kiener, “Jewish Ismā’īlism in Twelfth Century Yemen: R. Nethanel Ben Al-Fayyūmī,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 74, no. 3 (1984): passim.

³⁷³ Abul Ela. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibnul ‘Arabī*. (New York: AMS Press, 1974), 183–186; Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 58–59; Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 205–212.

though Maribel Fierro has compellingly argued that they arrived in al-Andalus even earlier, brought by one Abū al-Qāsim Maslamah b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), whom she also considers to have been the author of the Ismāʿīlite-Neoplatonist-tinged occult-scientific works *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* and *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*.³⁷⁴

3.1.4 Letters and cosmology in the writings of Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī

In the scholarship of Gril, *et al.*, the transfer of cosmologically-oriented letterist thought in the Islamicate West has been associated most strongly with Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Masarraḥ b. Najīḥ al-Jabalī, more commonly known as Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī. A native of al-Andalus, it is assumed that he was exposed to the topic in some form during his travels to the East and back. He was born in Córdoba in 268/883 to a family likely of Iberian stock, and his father was a noted scholar who had traveled to study in Iraq and Mecca, dying in the latter in 286/899 while on a second ḥajj.³⁷⁵ At some point after his father's death Ibn Masarraḥ departed on his own pilgrimage and in search of teachers; sources differ on the dates of his journey, and James Morris surmises that he may have sojourned eastward on more than one occasion.³⁷⁶ He studied in Fāṭimid-ruled Kairouan with the great Mālikite *faqīh* Aḥmad b. Nasr (d. 317/929-30), according to one source,³⁷⁷ and no doubt also with numerous traditionists and teachers of the religious sciences in Medina and Mecca, likely including Abū Saʿīd b. al-Aʿrabī (d. 341/952), an

³⁷⁴ M. Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus: Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), Author of the *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm* and the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (Picatrix)," *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996): 106–108. Fierro includes a review of earlier arguments on the topic.

³⁷⁵ ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh ʿulamāʾ al-Andalus*, ed. Ibrāhīm. Ibyārī, al-Maktabah al-Andalusīyah 3 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1983), entry no. 650.

³⁷⁶ James Morris, "Ibn Masarra: A Reconsideration of the Primary Sources" (Thesis, Harvard, 1973), 14–15. This unpublished paper, available for download on the website of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society, is a valuable compilation of the biographical materials on Ibn Masarraḥ, even though it was written prior to the widespread publicization of the discovery of his works in manuscript (on which see below).

³⁷⁷ This according to al-Khushānī (d. 371/981), by way of Ibn ʿAdhārī al-Marrākushī (or ʿIdhārī, d. early 8th/14th c.); al-Marrākushī Ibn ʿAdhārī, *Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne, intitulée al-Bayano'l-Mogrib*, trans. E. Fagnan (Alger: Imprimerie orientale P. Fontana et cie., 1901), I/280.

important traditionist and Sufi ascetic linked to the famous al-Junayd who was in frequent contact with Andalusian pilgrims.³⁷⁸ He may also have visited 'Irāqī centers of learning, which of course were veritable cauldrons of speculative thought in this period. Ibn Masarra returned to Córdoba during the reign of the Spanish Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, which is to say sometime after 300/912, and gathered a group of disciples about himself. It is said that they at some point withdrew to a 'hermitage' (*muta'abbad*) in the mountains outside that city—earning Ibn Masarra the nickname *al-Jabalī*, “of the mountain, “and that he died at that retreat in 319/931.³⁷⁹

Modern scholars believed Ibn Masarra's works to have been lost until 1972, when two short treatises of his were discovered in Chester Beatty MS 3168, the late-seventh/thirteenth codex discussed in the previous chapter that also contains the earliest known copy of al-Būnī's *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* as well as the lettrist treatise attributed by some modern scholars to Sahl al-Tustarī. One of these is his *Risālat al-i'tibār*, in which he attempts to demonstrate that knowledge of God's unity and complete transcendence can be gained through a process of contemplation that begins from attention to the natural phenomena of the sub-lunar, elemental world and ascends through several stages, as on the rungs of a ladder, to knowledge of the divine—an inductive praxis that he asserts produces conclusions entirely concordant with the truths sent down by God to His prophets.³⁸⁰ The other is *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf wa-ḥaqā'iqihā wa-uṣūlihā*, a brief work addressing primarily the *fawātiḥ al-suwar*, the 'disconnected' letters found at the heads of certain *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān.³⁸¹ Though Ibn Masarra's focus on the *fawātiḥ* sets his ideas apart somewhat from those of the Shī'ite cosmologists, there are nonetheless

³⁷⁸ Manuela Marín, “Abū Saīd Ibn al-Arābī et le développement du soufisme en al-Andalus,” *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 63, no. 1 (1992): 29 ff; Morris, “Ibn Masarra,” 17.

³⁷⁹ Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh*, entry no. 1202.

³⁸⁰ Chester Beatty MS 3168.4, fols. 88^a-95^b; Ibn Masarra and Pilar Garrido-Clemente, “Edición Crítica de La *Risālat Al-I'tibār* de Ibn Masarra de Córdoba,” *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes Y Hebraicos. Sección Árabe-Islam*, 2007, 81–104; Stroumsa and Sviri, “The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra and His Epistle on Contemplation.”

³⁸¹ Chester Beatty MS 3168, fol. 83b-87b; Ibn Masarra and Pilar Garrido-Clemente, “Edición Crítica Del K. *Jawāṣṣ Al-Ḥurūf* de Ibn Masarra,” *Al-Andalus Magreb* 14 (2007): 51–89.

fundamental similarities between his writings and theirs, as Ebstein has argued at length and quite convincingly.³⁸² The guiding principle of the work is that God’s command—His creative speech—is manifested at once in the revealed book, the Qur’ān, in the book of the Creation, i.e. the manifest world, and in the human microcosm.³⁸³ Ibn Masarrah asserts (allegedly on the authority of Sahl al-Tustarī) that the letters are the roots of all things (*uṣūl al-ashyā’*), and that they are the *habā’* (the ‘primordial dust’), the prime matter or, as Ebstein would have it, ‘building blocks’ from which the world is created (see below regarding Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Būnī’s uses of this term). He furthermore describes the names of God and the letters of which they are comprised as the rungs of the ladder v which the initiate can ascend to the divine presence, a concept the henotic element of which also resonates with Ismā‘īlite thought. As Lory notes, Ibn Masarrah’s method of argument is not philosophical, but rather a series of meditations on the Qur’ānic text from which inspired declarations spring, a means of “directing the reader of the Qur’ānic text toward the esoteric meaning of the holy book, through the transmutation of the common meaning of the verses, so that the general exhortations may have an intimate, profound impact on the soul of the Sufi.”³⁸⁴ As we will see, many of Ibn Masarrah’s themes, as well as a similarly inspired, initiatic mode of discourse, are to be found in al-Būnī’s writings as well.

3.1.5 Western Sufi lettrism after Ibn Masarrah

Sunni Muslim authorities of Ibn Masarrah’s own time and succeeding centuries often were hostile to his teachings and followers. A number of scholars are said to have composed refutations of his doctrines during or shortly after his life, including the aforementioned Abū Sa‘īd b. al-A‘rabī, who

³⁸² Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, passim.

³⁸³ Pilar Garrido Clemente, “The Book of the Universe: On the Life and Works of Ibn Masarra Al-Jabali,” *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 1 (2010): 395 ff.

³⁸⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 400.

may have been his erstwhile teacher.³⁸⁵ After his death Andalusian writers such as Ibn al-Faraḍī (d. 403/1013) and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) accused Ibn Masarra of Muʿtazilite leanings and improper Qurʾān-interpretation practices (*taʿwīl*), and he frequently was labeled a *ʿbāṭinī*, suggesting he was suspected of Ismāʿīlite sympathies.³⁸⁶ Other medieval authors, such as Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī (d. 462/1070) and Ibn al-Qiftī (d. 646/1248), claimed that Ibn Masarra was a follower of the teachings of Empedocles,³⁸⁷ and this notion greatly shaped modern views of him until recent decades.³⁸⁸ On a few occasions in the decades after Ibn Masarra’s death adherents to his teachings in Córdoba were made to publicly recant their views, and in 350/961 copies of his works were publicly burned there.³⁸⁹ So-called *masarrīyah* of subsequent centuries also were criticized, particularly a turn-of-the-fifth/eleventh-century Cordovan named Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ruʿaynī, to whom were attributed such heterodox views as denial of bodily resurrection on the day of judgment, denial that the world will be destroyed, and the claim that it is possible, through practices of purification, for a person to attain to prophethood (*iktisāb al-nubūwah*). Al-Ruʿaynī additionally is said to have been regarded as an *Imām* by his followers, in the quasi-Shīʿite sense of someone whose spiritual authority also qualified him for absolute political authority.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁵ Morris, “Ibn Masarra,” 39.

³⁸⁶ Sarah Stroumsa, “Ibn Masarra and the Beginnings of Mystical Thought in Al-Andalus,” in *Wege Mystischer Gotteserfahrung. Mystical Approaches to God*, by Peter Schäfer, ed. Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag GmbH, 2006), 99.

³⁸⁷ Ṣāʿid ibn Aḥmad Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam*, ed. Ḥayāt Bū ʿAlwān (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīḥ, 1985), 73; ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf Ibn al-Qiftī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, ed. August Müller and Julius Lippert (Leipzig: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903), 16. Ibn al-Qiftī’s assertion of this seems based entirely in al-Andalusī’s, repeating parts of it almost word for word.

³⁸⁸ The most influent work from this early phase of Ibn Masarra scholarship was that of Miguel Asín Palacios, *Abenmasarra y su escuela: Orígenes de la filosofía hispanomusulmana* (Madrid: Imprenta Ibérica, 1914).

³⁸⁹ Morris, “Ibn Masarra,” 26 ff, 44–45; Fierro, “Bāṭinism in al-Andalus,” 98 ff.

³⁹⁰ On al-Ruʿaynī and the 5th/11th-c. *masarrīyah* see Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī al-milal wa-al-ahwāʾ wa-al-niḥal* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1964), IV/198–200; Morris, “Ibn Masarra,” 32 ff; Maribel Fierro, *La heterodoxia en al-Andalus durante el periodo omeya* (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1987), 167–168.

The broader impact of Ibn Masarraḥ's thought on Western-Islamicate Sufism is a matter of some debate. Fierro notes that there is said to have been a group of *masarrīyah* in Almería at roughly the same time as al-Ru'aynī's community was active, which hints at the possibility that his teachings survived there to play a part in the thought of the so-called 'Almería school' of Sufis of the Almoravid era. One of the best-known members of that school, Ibn Barraḡān (d. 536/1141), authored a treatise on the divine names as instruments of spiritual purification and elevation, and it devotes significant attention to letristic analysis of many of the names. In her recent edition of that work, Purificación de la Torre notes Ibn Masarraḥ as a possible influence.³⁹¹

A theme that surfaces repeatedly in accounts of Western Sufis—and that seems to resonate with both elements of Ismā'īlite thought and accounts of the *masarrīyah*—is their clashes with temporal authorities in which rumors or charges circulated that Sufi leaders had arrogated imāmic authority to themselves. This occurs in connection with the events surrounding the assassination of Ibn Barraḡān by the Almoravids, and certainly was a factor in the violent revolt against the same regime by the self-proclaimed *mahdī* Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151), another Sufi with letrist tendencies. A few decades later, similar rumors surrounded the death of the great *shaykh* Abū Madyan—who was al-Būnī and Ibn al-'Arabī's initiatic *Großvater* through 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawī—when he died on the road after being summoned to the court of the Almohad caliph, though tellings differ greatly in this regard.³⁹² Later still, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) was accused by the Kairouanī 'ulamā' of being a sorcerer and a

³⁹¹Abd al-Salām ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Ibn Barraḡān, *Šarḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā = Comentario sobre los nombres más bellos de Dios*, ed. Purificación de la Torre, Fuentes arábico-hispanas 24 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas : Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2000), 28, 48–49.

³⁹² Regarding Abū Madyan's sometimes contentious relationship with the Almohads, see Vincent Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan: Doctrinal and Poetic Works of Abū Madyan Shu'ayb Ibn Al-Ḥusayn Al-Anṣārī (c. 509/1115-1116 - 594/1198)* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 15. Regarding differing accounts of Abū Madyan's death see Claude Addas, "Abu Madyan and Ibn 'Arabi," in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A Commemorative Volume*, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan, vol. Shaftesbury: Element, for the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, 1993 (Shaftesbury: Element, for the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, 1993), 166 ff.

Fāṭimid(!).³⁹³ Ibn Sabʿīn, another lettrist, was suspected of considering himself the *mahdī*.³⁹⁴ And of course Ibn al-ʿArabī, building in part on earlier notions of Sufi sainthood, promulgated elaborate theories of the “invisible college” of living and disincarnate saints who, under the aegides of the major prophets, preserve and regulate the order of the world. Not incidentally, Ibn al-ʿArabī had considered himself to be a quite high-ranking member of that fraternity, the very ‘seal of the saints’.³⁹⁵

As I address in the following chapter, the Mamlūk-era historian and jurist Ibn Khaldūn famously charged that the Sufism of Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Būnī, and others of their Western cohort was ‘tainted’ with Ismāʿīlism, the Shīʿite *Imāms* having been replaced with the invisible hierarchy of the saints, and the work of Ebstein and others convincingly suggests that he was quite perspicacious in thinking so, though the Sufis in question were not Shīʿites in any conventional, confessional sense. Certainly it was the case that Western Sufism—which for centuries had only limited intercourse with Sunnite ‘mystical’ movements in the East—developed doctrines of the reign of the saints over the hidden worlds and, covertly, the manifest one, and that cosmologically-oriented lettrism played a role in these doctrines. It is with all this in mind that we turn now to al-Būnī’s exposition and charting of the hidden realms that generate the visible world and his considerations of how God’s creative word reverberates therein through the medium of the letters, and of how human adepts can participate in these processes.

³⁹³ Anna Akasoy, “The *muḥaqqiq* as Mahdi? Ibn Sabʿīn and Mahdism among Andalusian Mystics in the 12th/13th centuries,” in *Endzeiten Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 332.

³⁹⁴ Massignon was the first to note this in modern scholarship; “Ibn Sabʿīn et la ‘conspiration hallagienne’ en Andalousie, et en Orient au XIIIe siècle,” in *Études d’orientalisme dédiée à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962), 661–82. However, for the view that the charge is overblown or entirely misplaced, see Akasoy, “The *muḥaqqiq* as Mahdi?,” 315 ff.

³⁹⁵ Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī*, Golden Palm Series (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), passim; McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafāʾ Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn ʿArabī*, 9–26; Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time*, 109–162.

3.2 Reading *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*

In what follows on *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* I seek to provide two things: a) a summary and, where possible, explanation of major aspects of al-Būnī's cosmological thought as presented in the text, and b) a discussion of practical aspects of how the text may have been taught and otherwise used in gatherings of Sufi readers. While the second task of course requires a good deal of supposition, it is invited by the evidence discussed in the previous chapter of the texts' circulation in such communities, as well as by elements of the texts that indicate their being 'set' in the context of a Sufi gathering.

In the beginning of each of al-Būnī's texts, reference is made to unnamed individuals or groups of actors who, we are told, had asked al-Būnī to expound upon some weighty matter of Sufi praxis, the implication being that the main contents of the work are his reply. Thus in the introduction (*ammā ba'd*) to *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*, his overview of the Sufi path and the different benchmarks and ranks of accomplishment thereon, he explains that a group of students or querents (*ṭālibūn*) sought him out. Observing the advanced spiritual state of those Sufis (*sālikūn*, lit. 'wayfarers') "who had attained to the stations of the [divine] names and the realities of the rungs of ascent" and lamenting their own lack of progress in this regard, they asked him to clarify "from whence they [*scil.* the *sālikūn*] had attained such deep familiarity with the great variety of spiritual practices," further requesting that al-Būnī "reveal to their inner sight [*baṣīratihim*] the lights of the hidden realities [*al-ghuyūb*]" and otherwise explain to them the process of "reaching the abodes of the angels [*mulūk*]."³⁹⁶ Similarly in *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*, his guide to 'standard' Sufi spiritual practices such as *khalwah* ('spiritual retreat') and *dhikr* (lit. 'remembrance', mantric litanies), we are told that "a group from among the sincere lovers of God [*al-muḥibbīn*] and the pure devoted ones [*al-mukhlīṣīn al-khālīṣīn*] desired that I would clarify for them the method of the spiritual exercises and the arrangement of their secrets in

³⁹⁶ Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160 (HQ), fol. 2^a, ln. 9-fol. 2^b, ln. 1.

فإن جماعة من الطالبين النظر [النظار؟] إلى مقامات السالكين الواصلين إلى مقامات الأسماء وحقائق درجات الإرتقاء سألوني من أين توغل السالكون في بحار الأعمال ولم يدركوا حقائق المطلوب والمأل وأن تنكشف لبصيرتهم أنوار الغيوب ولم يحصلوا من جد الطلب على راحة المطلوب وكيف السلوك إلى منازل الملوك

relation to the [different] levels of created things.”³⁹⁷ In *‘Alam al-hudá* the reader is addressed in the second-person as being from among “the Sufi novices and accomplished adepts” (*al-ṭālibūn al-sālikūn wa-al-qāṣidūn al-muḥaqqiqūn*) one of whom had inquired of him regarding “the realities of the [divine] names and the arrangement of their rungs on the ladder of ascent.”³⁹⁸ And in *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, al-Būnī notes that an individual who “had devoted his love to me and had proven his effort and seriousness in seeking the [hidden] realities”—which is to say a close and talented disciple—had asked him to clarify the secrets of the science of letters and names to which past masters had made only cloaked references (*sirr mā ramazūhu wa-dakhīrat* [i.e. *dhakīrat*] *mā kanazūhu*).³⁹⁹ The reader is then made to fill the role of this confidant as, throughout the work, the text regularly uses the second-person and the imperative in addressing ‘my brother’ (*akhī*).

Following each of these mentions of the querents whose inquiries spurred each work, al-Būnī recounts having prayed for assistance in expounding on the questions posed to him, in most of the works specifically mentioning having performed *istikhārah*, a quasi-divinatory form of prayer for which there are *ḥadīths* indicating the approval of the Prophet.⁴⁰⁰ Though brief, his descriptions of this

³⁹⁷ Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160 (MGh), fol. 42^b, lns. 5-7.

فإن جماعة من المحبتين الصادقين والمخلصين الخالصين رغبوا إلي أن أبين لهم كيفية الرياضات وترتيب أسرارها في أطوار الموجودات

³⁹⁸ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260 (AH), fol. 2^a, lns. 1-2.

أيها الطالبون السالكون والقاصدون المحققون لما سأل سائلكم كيف التلوك بحقائق الأسماء وترتيب درجاتها في معارج الإرتقاء...

³⁹⁹ BnF MS arabe 2658 (LI), fol. 2^b, lns. 11-13.

وقد رغب إلي من تعلق بي ودّه وثبت في طلب الحقائق اجتهاده وجدّه في ان أفصح له عن سرّ ما رموزه ودخيرة ما كنزوه

⁴⁰⁰ Lexically, *istikhārah* means the requesting of good things from God; Lane has it as asking for God’s “blessing, prospering, or favour” (Lane’s Lexicon, s.v. *khayara*). Its use to refer to special precatory practices requesting divine guidance appears to be quite ancient, and *ḥadīths* in which the prophet Muḥammad expresses approval for, and gives instruction in, how to perform, *istikhārah* are found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* and other of the major Sunnite *ḥadīth* compendia. These typically involve praying of two *rak‘ahs* outside the obligatory prayers, followed by an invocatory prayer (*du‘ā’*) requesting God’s guidance, with the specific matter to hand being named at the end of the *du‘ā’*. For example, the following *ḥadīth* narrated from Jābir is found in the section of *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* on supererogatory prayers (*da‘awāt*):

precatory practice are dramatic, and he leaves no doubt as to their efficacy. In *Hidāyat al-qāsidīn*, for example:

فأجبتهم إلى ذلك بعد أن قرعت باب الإستخارة بيد الإستغاثة والإفتقار وأسبلت دموع الإتهاء من مقلتي
الذلل والإضطراب فأجابني من يجيب المضطر إذا دعاه وكشف السؤ عن قلبه فلم يعرف سواه

And I responded to them [*scil.* the querents] regarding that [*scil.* their questions], only after having knocked on the door of *istikhārah* with the hand of seeking intercession and of destitution. I let tears of needfulness fall from my eyes in abasement and desperation, and I was answered by Him who responds to one in need when one invokes Him, and lifts the affliction from one's heart – for His equal has never been known.⁴⁰¹

And in *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*:

فاجبتهم إلى ذلك إجابة من وثق بحبل مولاه في سرّ سرّه وعلائية نجواه بعد ان انخت راحلة الذلل بباب
الإستخارة والتجات بذلل العبودية واضطراب الإستجارة الذي هو عند المنكسرة قلوبهم الوجلة نفوسهم
ففاض عليّ من انوار رحمته قبول الإجابة وكشف لي عن ابواب الإجابة على أنّ العلماء المتقدمين والأئمة
المهتدين رضى الله عنهم ذكروا

حدثنا مطرف بن عبد الله أبو مصعب حدثنا عبد الرحمن بن أبي الموالي عن محمد بن المنكدر عن جابر رضي الله عنه قال كان النبي يعلمنا
الإستخارة في الأمور كلها كالسورة من القرآن إذا هم أحدكم بالأمر فليركع ركعتين ثم يقول اللهم إني أستخيرك بعلمك وأستقدرك بقدرتك وأسألك
من فضلك العظيم فإنك تقدر ولا أقدر وتعلم ولا أعلم وأنت علام الغيوب اللهم إن كنت تعلم أن هذا الأمر خير لي في ديني ومعاشي وعاقبة
أمرّي أو قال في عاجل أمرّي وآجله فاقدره لي وإن كنت تعلم أن هذا الأمر شر لي في ديني ومعاشي وعاقبة أمرّي أو قال في عاجل أمرّي وآجله
فاصرفه عني واصرفني عنه واقدر لي الخير حيث كان ثم رضني به ويسمي حاجته

The prophet (God's blessing and peace be upon him) used to teach us the *istikhārah* for every matter, [just] as he used to teach us the *sūrah*s from the Qu'rān. [He said] 'If one of you intends to do something, he should offer two *rak'ahs* other than the obligatory prayers, and then say: Allāhumma I ask the best course of You by Your omniscience, and ask You to grant me power by Your omnipotence, and I ask You for Your great favor. For verily You have power and I do not have power, and You know but I do not know, and You know all that is hidden. Allāhumma, if You know that this matter is good for me in my religion, my livelihood, and my ultimate outcome [i.e. in the hereafter]—or he said, in my present and future life—then accomplish it for me. And if You know that this matter is evil for me in my religion, my livelihood, and my ultimate outcome—or he said, in my present and future life—then keep it away from me and me from it, and make happen what is good for me, whatsoever it is, then make me satisfied with it. And then he [*scil.* the one performing *istikhārah*] should name his need.

Fahd notes that in medieval usage the term was associated with a number of divinatory practices, including dream incubation and the casting of lots; Toufic Fahd, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. Th. Bianquis et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), s.v. *istikhārah*. Sezgin notes that al-Zubayrī is said to have written a *Kitāb al-Istishārah wa-al-istikhārah*; *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), I, 495.

⁴⁰¹ Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160.1 (HQ), fol. 42^b, ln. 8-fol. 43^a, ln. 1.

And I responded to them regarding that [*scil.* their questions] as one reliant on the bond with his master [*scil.* God] in both his innermost being [lit. ‘the secret of his secret’] and his public discourse, and only after making the camel of lowliness to kneel down at the gate of *istikhārah* and taking recourse to the humility of servanthood and the necessity of seeking the protection of Him who tends those whose hearts are broken and whose souls are afraid. Then He poured out upon me from the lights of his mercy the ability to respond, and He unveiled to me the gates of deputation so that it was as if the scholars of old and the divinely guided *imāms* (may God be pleased with them) were speaking.⁴⁰²

To be sure, al-Būnī’s brief accounts of the inquiries that allegedly prompted his compositions, his use of the second person, and his claims of having prayed for guidance in responding to his petitioners are quite conventional. The device involving querents is used by many medieval authors and serves to position the author as an authority, as someone of whom such questions would be asked. Addressing the reader directly is not unusual and is in keeping with the oft-remarked upon oral quality of much medieval literature. Mentioning *istikhārah* at the beginning of a work is somewhat common as well, enough so that Toufic Fahd has gone so far as to say that references to it in medieval “literary texts” are “merely a pious formula... with no ritual character.”⁴⁰³ However, textual conventionality does not necessarily equate to mere literary artifice. Rather, in keeping with Stock’s notion of the interaction of literary and cultural norms (discussed in chapter one), I would argue that these written conventions were reflective of practical conventions (and vice-versa, to some extent), and thus were important cues to medieval actors regarding the proper use of the texts.

The notion of petitioners approaching an esteemed Sufi *shaykh* with questions was not just a literary trope, but rather would have been familiar to medieval Sufi readers from practical experience, which is to say from their interactions with their own *shaykhs*. Similarly, the *istikhārah* practices al-Būnī describes in such bodily and emotive detail indeed probably were enacted by him and many *shaykhs* of the period, such precatory exertions having been a common element of the performance of Sufi *shaykh-*

⁴⁰² Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160.2 (*MGH*), fol. 2b, lns. 1-4.

⁴⁰³ Fahd, *Istikhārah*.

liness. For the solitary reader these textual cues would have helped evoke imaginatively the setting of a meeting between a *shaykh* and his disciples. Many ‘readers’, however, would have engaged with the text primarily in group reading situations (and thus may have been listeners as much or more than readers in the usual sense), and in the context of the esotericist reading communities such a meeting often would have been a gathering of Sufis with their own *shaykh*. In this scenario the text would, in a sense, have helped convoke the gathering, the reading under the direction of a *shaykh* mirroring al-Būnī’s engagement with his petitioners. As noted in the previous chapter, Michael Chamberlain has argued that oral performances of texts even facilitated the ‘presencing’ of past masters in the bodies of the participants,⁴⁰⁴ a potentiality al-Būnī himself seems to hint at in the passage above from *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt* regarding the teachers of ages past speaking through him.

As we will see with *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, and as is the case with al-Būnī’s other works as well, the charismatic authority of the *shaykh*—whether al-Būnī or his ‘stand-in’ at a reading—is a necessary component of the text, as is the reader’s/listeners’ acceptance of that authority. Indeed, it is this master-disciple relationship inherent to his works—a relationship that would have been reinforced in the context of group readings among Sufi actors—that lends them their initiatic character. The writing is at turns terse or effusive, obscure or systematic, likely reflecting al-Būnī’s oral teaching style. He does not argue *per se*, certainly not in a formal philosophical or disputational sense, but rather interlaces scriptural, philosophical, mythopoeic, mathematical, and other elements to generate images and impressions of the emanative series of luciform and ethereal worlds that join the godhead to the material plane. To be sure, not every reader or participant in a reading would have followed and understood the discourse and all its references in their entirety (neither do I, for that matter), but it was up to each to take what he or she was capable of understanding. Put another way, it is an intrinsic textual-economic feature of the work that it does not claim to fully encompass or exhaust its topic, but only to point the way to extra-discursive realities vouchsafed by the sanctity of al-Būnī and/or the *shaykh* in whom he is presenced. That the work is not intended as, and in fact could not be, a complete

⁴⁰⁴ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 148–150.

explication of the topics it addresses is made clear at the end of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, where al-Būnī asserts that he has explained that which it is permissible and possible for him to explain, and that the reader's God-given capacity for apprehending these hidden realities will ultimately determine their understanding of his teachings:

واعلم يا اخي ان اسرار الحروف لا يدرك بشيء من القياس كما تدرك بعض العلوم ولا تدرك الآ بسر العناية
 أما بشيء من اسرار الالتقاء او شيء من اسرار الوحي او شيء من اسرار الكشف... واعلم انا لم نظهر من
 شرح الحروف إلا ما ظهر برسم العبارة وتحت رموز من نور الله تعالى بصيرته تدرك ذلك على التحقيق

O my brother, know that the secrets of the letters cannot be grasped through deduction, as one grasps some of the sciences. It cannot be grasped except through the mystery of divine solicitude (*ināyah*), whether through something of the mysteries of casting (*ilqā'*) or something of the mysteries of prophecy (*wahy*) or something of the mysteries of unveiling (*kashf*)... Know that, in commenting on the letters, we have revealed only that which is subject to explanation, beneath which are signs that belong to the light of God (Most High), the discernment of which you will grasp [only] through Verification (*taḥqīq*).⁴⁰⁵

3.2.1 Al-Būnī's letrist cosmology

The cosmological discourse in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* takes up almost the first half of the work. It follows the introduction that, as explained in the previous chapter, implies the prophetic and 'Alid origins of the science of letters, proclaims the superior access the science offers to the mysteries of the Qur'ān, and alludes that letrism is at the heart of an esoteric tradition of initiatic knowledge passed down through the *Imāms* and saints and kept hidden from the vulgar who might abuse it. The cosmological discourse is followed by a series of chapters on the individual letters that go into further detail on their hidden meanings and properties. In what follows I trace an outline of the main cosmological discourse, with occasional reference to statements from *'Alam al-hudá* and points later in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* that elucidate certain key points.

⁴⁰⁵ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 89^b, lns. 9-17.

The discourse begins with an account of Ādam’s creation, a process that includes the sowing of the letters into his very being. As we will see, this account also maps the basic contours of al-Būnī’s vision of the structure of the cosmos. This anthropogony opens with a brief mention of God’s having predetermined (*qaddara*) and willed (*arāda*) the existence of the cosmos (*al-‘ālam*), followed by a terse description of the creation of Ādam that delineates four planes (s. *ṭawr*) or worlds (s. *‘ālam*) grouped into two categories: the first and second worlds of *ikhtirā’*, a term glossed here as ‘Invention’, and the first and second worlds of *ibdā’*, ‘Origination’.⁴⁰⁶ At each stage of this process the letters are infixed (*gharasa*) into various aspects of Ādam’s constitution (*jibillah*): his intellect (*‘aql*), spirit (*rūḥ*), soul (*nafs*), and body/heart (*fiṭrah/qalb*). Finally, al-Būnī notes the action of the letters in each part of the Adamic—i.e. human—constitution:

واعلم هداانا الله واياك ان البارئ جلت قدرته لما قدر واراد ظهور الوجود من عالم العلم إلى عالم الأكوان أبرز الأكوان العلوية والسفلية بالاختلاف أطوار وتعاقب أدوار وقدر فيها في الإبداع الأول أسراراً حرفية متصرفة بنسبة قدرية تختلف باختلاف الاطوار وتعبر عن اسرار الاقدار

ثم ابداع الله طينة آدم في العماء وهو الإختراع الاوّل الصادر عن غير مثال مسبوق ورتب فيه نسبة من الحروف غرسها في جبلة [ذرتته] ليصدر عنه في عالم إيجاده الإستشراف بلطائف عقله إلى تلك الحضرة الاولى

ثم نقله إلى طور الهباء وهو الإختراع الثاني ورتب فيه نسبة من الحروف غرسها في جبلة هبائية ليصدر عنه في عالم إيجاده الإستشراف بلطيف روحه إلى تلك الحضرة الإبداعية الثانية

ثم نقله إلى طور الدّر وهو الإبداع الأول ورتب فيه نسبة من الحروف غرسها في جبلة ذرية ليصدر عنه في عالم إيجاده الإستشراف بلطيف نفسه إلى تلك الحضرة الإبداعية الاولى

ثم نقله إلى طور التركيب وهو الإبداع الثاني ورتب فيه نسبة من الحروف غرسها في جبلة فطرته ليصدر عنه في عالم إيجاده الإستشراف بلطائف قلبه إلى تلك الحضرة الإبداعية الثانية

⁴⁰⁶ In his article on al-Būnī’s thought based on *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*, Lory glosses *‘ālam al-ikhtirā’* as “*création idéelle en Dieu*” and *‘ālah al-ibdā’* as “*création des formes*”; *La science des lettres*, 97.

وجعل هذه الحروف معان للعقل ولطائفاً للروح وصوراً في النفس وانبعثاً في القلب وقوة ناطقة في اللسان
وسراً تشكيليّاً في الاسماع

Know—may God guide us and you—that when the Maker (may His power be exalted) predetermined [*qaddara*] and willed the emergence of being (*al-wujūd*) from the world of knowledge into the world of existents, He made the superior [*‘ulwīyah*] and inferior [*sufliyah*] existents to manifest at a variety of stages and a succession of phases. At the first origination [*al-ibdā‘ al-awwal*] He established [*qaddara*] in them letteristic secrets disposed according to a predetermined relationship [*nisbah qadariyah*] that differentiated the various stages and gave expression to the secrets of the divine decrees.

Then God originated the clay of Adam in the cloud [*al-‘amā‘*]—and it [*scil.* the cloud] is the First Invention [*al-ikhtirā‘ al-awwal*], which issues from nothing similar prior to it—and He arranged in him a relationship among the letters, infixing them into the constitution of his offspring so that there issues from him in the world of His engendering [*‘ālam ijādihi*] the aspiration, by means of the subtle substance of his intellect [*‘aql*], toward that first presence.

Then He moved him to the stage of the primordial dust [*ṭawr al-habā‘*]—and it is the Second Invention [*al-ikhtirā‘ al-thānī*]—and He arranged in him a relationship among the letters, infixing them into a dust-constitution, so that there issues from him in the world of His engendering the aspiration, by means of the subtle substance of his spirit [*rūḥ*], toward that second inventive presence.

Then he moved him to the plane of the particles [*ṭawr al-dharr*]—and it is the First Origination [*al-ibdā‘ al-awwal*]—and He arranged in him a relationship among the letters, infixing them into a particulate constitution, so that there would issue from him in the world of His engendering the aspiration, by means of the subtle substance of his soul [*nafs*], toward that first originary presence.

Then he moved him to the plane of composition [*ṭawr al-tarkīb*]—and it is the Second Origination [*al-ibdā‘ al-thānī*]—and He arranged in him a relationship among the letters, infixing them into the constitution of his temperament [*fiṭrah*], so that there would issue from him in the world of His engendering the aspiration, by means of the subtle substance of his heart [*qalb*], toward that second originary presence.

He [*scil.* God] made the letters to be meanings accompanying the intellect, subtleties accompanying the spirit, images in the soul, impulses in the heart, the power of speech in the tongue, and the secret of formation [i.e. of words] in the ears.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ BnF 2658, fol. 5^a, ln. 10–fol. 5^b, ln. 12. *Dhurrīyatihi* in the second passage above is omitted in BnF 2657, with *jibillat* becoming *jibillatihi*. This is one of a number of textual issues regarding the *jibillahs* referred to in these passages tha seem to have been a source of confusion from early on.

The four worlds delineated here are the main components of al-Būnī's cosmogonic/cosmological vision, and over the remainder of the discourse he addresses their interactions, as well as their generation and encompassing of the planetary spheres, the four elements, and other fundamentals of the created world. That he begins this discourse on cosmology with a focus on the creation of Ādam signals the central importance in his thought of the concept of the human being as the microcosm, a mirror of the Creation as a whole. As we will see, this notion is key to the power of the letters as instruments—in the hands of spiritual elites—for the unveiling and manipulation of the inner workings of the Creation.

The most fundamental distinction al-Būnī makes among the four worlds is that between the two worlds of Invention and those of Origination, terms that turn out to be of central importance to al-Būnī's understanding of the human microcosm. To the best of my knowledge, this pair of terms is peculiar to al-Būnī as a means of classifying planes of existence, and the meanings he intends by them are not laid down explicitly in any single place in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*. The term *ibdā'* was common to many of the aforementioned Shī'ite cosmological discourses as a designation for the coming-into-being of things *ex nihilo* as the result of God's 'command' (*amr*). It was similarly used in some philosophical accounts of the Creation, such as in al-Kindī's thought, as well as in some related discussions in disputational theology (*kalām*).⁴⁰⁸ The term *ikhtirā'* is less well-attested in such discourses, though not unheard of; it occurs as a synonym for *ibdā'* in *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, for example.⁴⁰⁹ Perhaps more importantly with regard to al-Būnī, it also appears in al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* in reference to the "initial creation" of the 'universal causes' (*al-asbāb al-kullīyah*) resulting from *al-qaḍā'*, God's universal

⁴⁰⁸ L. Gardet, EI2, s.v. "Ibdā'"; Paul Walker, "The Ismaili Vocabulary of Creation," *Studia Islamica*, no. 40 (1974): 82 ff; Carmela Baffioni, "Ibdā', Divine Imperative and Prophecy in the *Rasā'il Ikhwan Al-Safa'*," in *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, ed. Omar Ali-de -Unzaga (London: I.B. Tauris & The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 213–26; Ikhwān al-ṣafā', *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, III/351.

⁴⁰⁹ Ikhwān al-ṣafā', *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, III/351.

decree; the latter is closely associated—at Q 2:117, 3:47, 19:35, and 40:68—with God’s *amr*, and for al-Ghazālī was prior to, and distinct from, the action of *al-qadar*, God’s decreeing of particulars.⁴¹⁰

Are we to think that al-Būnī’s Egyptian Sufi readership would have been familiar with such technical usages of these terms, or with any of the aforementioned precedents? That some were conversant in al-Ghazālī’s texts seems quite feasible, and perhaps in the *Rasā’il* as well. Of course, we know that some did have access to other of al-Būnī’s texts, and, as noted previously, his use of *tabdīd al-‘ilm* would have encouraged readers and teachers of his texts to seek out occurrences of these and other idiosyncratic terms throughout whatever parts of his corpus were available to them. And indeed, the terms *ikhtirā’* and *ibdā’* are discussed at a number of places in his other works, particularly in *‘Alam al-hudá*. In the chapter on God’s name al-Badī, ‘the Originator’ (a name deriving from the same etymological root as *ibdā’*), he explains the relationship between these categories in somewhat more detail than in *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*:

اعلم يا اخي انّ العالم ينقسم قسمين عالم إبداع وعالم إختراع كما قسم سبحانه عالم الغيب من عالم الشهادة فقال ﴿عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ﴾ وذلك انّ الله تعالى خلق العالم كلّهُ بين كثيف ولطيف وعلوي وسفلي ونور وظلمة وما تعدد من هذه المتضادات على التفصيل كلّ عالم بالقدر الذي سبق له والتوحيد الذي اهمه على نسبة قربه من الانوار وبعده فجعل عالم الإبداع السموات والارض كما قال تعالى ﴿بديع السماوات والأرض﴾ وجعل عالم الإختراع هو لطائف السموات والارض فعلم الإبداع ظاهر الملكوت والملك وعالم الإختراع باطن الملكوت والملك

O my brother, know that the cosmos [*al-‘ālam*] is divided into two parts, the world of Origination and the world of Invention, just as He (may He be praised) distinguished the world of the invisible [*‘ālam al-ghayb*] from the world of the visible [*‘ālam al-shahādah*], for He said: ‘The Knower of the invisible and the visible’.⁴¹¹ For God created [*khalāqa*] the cosmos in its entirety between the dense and subtle, the superior and inferior, the light and dark, and the numerous other contraries [*mutaḍādidāt*] regarding which one could go into detail, each world according to that which preceded it and the unity [*al-tawhīd*] that God inspired in it [*alhamahu*] in keeping with its proximity to the lights or its distance. For God made the world of Origination to be the heavens and the

⁴¹⁰ Gardet, “‘Ibdā’”; Richard Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite School*, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 15 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 37 ff.

⁴¹¹ Q 6:73, 9:94, 9:105, 13:9, 23:92, 32:6, 39:46, 59:22, 62:8, 64:18.

earth, for He (may He be exalted) said: ‘The Originator of the heavens and the earth.’⁴¹² And He made the world of Invention to be the subtleties [*laṭā’if*] of the heavens and the earth. The world of Origination is the manifest aspect [*zāhir*] of the dominion [*al-malakūt*] and the kingdom [*al-mulk*], and the world of Invention is the hidden aspect [*bāṭin*] of the Dominion and the Kingdom.⁴¹³

Thus we learn that the *ikhtirā’/ibdā’* dichotomy is similar to, even intertwined with, other sets of contraries/dipolar continua through which God brings the cosmos into being. Most importantly, however, as he tells us slightly later in the chapter on *al-Badī*, the two worlds were key to the God’s ‘perfecting’ (*istikmāl*) of the microcosm, the ‘human cosmos’ (*al-‘ālam al-insānī*):

ولمّا أراد الله سبحانه جمع ما بين عالم الإبداع وعالم الإختراع جملةً بعد ان كان تفصيلاً اوجد من بديع حكمته
ولطيف قدرته العالم الإنساني وجمع فيه سرّ الإبداع وسرّ عالم الإختراع ليشتمل على انواع التوحيد ويكون
محلاً لقبول الامانة إذ هي واحدة في نفسها متعدّدة من غيرها فلم تنطق السموات والارض حملها إذ
السموات والارض عالم التفرق والامانة نور الجمع فخلق الله تعالى العالم الإنساني فاستكمل فيه اسرار عالم
الإبداع والإختراع

When God (may He be praised) desired the coupling of that which was split between the world of Origination and the world of Invention into a whole after it had been divided, He produced [*awjada*], through the wonder of His wisdom [*badī ḥikmatihī*] and the subtle virtue of his power [*laṭīf qudratihī*], the human cosmos [*al-‘ālam al-insānī*], and He collected in it the secret of Origination and the secret of Invention so as to include all the types of unity [*tawḥīd*], and it became the site of the acceptance of the trust [*al-amānah*], as it [scil. the trust] is one within itself and multiple without. The heavens and the earth were incapable of bearing it [scil. the trust], for the heavens and the earth are the world of differentiation [*tafriqah*], while the trust is the light of gathering-together [*jam’*]. Thus God (may he be exalted) created [*khalaqa*] the human cosmos and perfected in it the secrets of the world of Origination and Invention.⁴¹⁴

‘The trust’ (*al-amānah*) evoked here is a reference to verse 72 of Surat *al-Aḥzāb*, which narrates that God offered ‘the trust’—a compact of some sort—to the heavens, earth, and mountains, which

⁴¹² Q 2:117, 6:101.

⁴¹³ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol 88^a, ln. 20-fol 88^a, ln. 5.

⁴¹⁴ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol 88^a, lns. 12-20

rejected it out of fear, but that it subsequently was accepted by humanity.⁴¹⁵ Authorities have interpreted this verse variously, with some taking it simply as evidence of humanity’s debt of obedience to God. Others, such as al-Būnī’s Eastern contemporary Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), argued that the trust represents humankind’s unique ability among God’s creatures to perceive both universals and particulars. Closer to home with regard to the milieu from which al-Būnī emerged, the verse also was an important proof-text for Ibn al-‘Arabī’s conceptualization of the microcosm under the heading of *al-insān al-kāmil* (“the perfect man”), a term that resonates with al-Būnī’s mention of the perfection of the microcosm. Ibn al-‘Arabī read the verse (in conjunction with other texts) as establishing that God had invested humanity with His own image (*ṣūrah*), this being the basis of human viceregency over “every type of sensible and intelligible” in the Creation.⁴¹⁶

For both Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Būnī this virtue of humanity was active primarily in prophets and saints, remaining latent in the vast majority of people. Both maintained, however, that it could be developed within individuals—within God-given limits, of course—particularly through *takhalluq*. This use of the names is indeed a central theme of *‘Alam al-hudá*. Slightly later in the chapter of that work from which the above passages are drawn, al-Būnī states:

واعلم أنّ من كشف الله له حقيقة عالم الإبداع وعالم الإختراع فقد تقرب إليه بخواص اسمائه ولطائف نعمته
 فيعظم التوحيد في باطنه والحياء في ظاهره

Know that he to whom God unveils the reality of the world of Origination and the world of Invention thus draws nearer to Him through the occult properties [*khawāṣṣ*] of His names and the subtleties of His attributes [*nu‘ūt*], such that the unity [*al-tawhīd*] grows great in his inner self [*bāṭin*] as does prudence in his outward manner [*zāhir*].⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Q 33:72 “Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.”

﴿إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا﴾

⁴¹⁶ Quoted in Su‘ad Ḥakīm, *Al-Mu‘jam al-ṣūfi: Al-ḥikmah fī ḥudūd al-kalimah* (Beirut: Dandarrah lil-Tibā‘ah wa-al-Nashr, 1981), 132.

[...] فلما كان هذا العبد مخلوقاً على صورة الرحمن وخليفته سخر الله تعالى له ما في الأكوان من سائر أنواع المحسوسات والمعلوقات

⁴¹⁷ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol 89^a, lns. 3-5.

This notion of human initiatic potential and its development is at the heart of al-Būnī’s written project, and I would posit that it was central to how members of the esotericist reading communities in which his works circulated cast themselves as alternative religious elites and also drew new members into their midst. The notion that humans could bring themselves into a closer relationship with God through the self-discipline and various spiritual exercises was of course central to Sufism; however, al-Būnī’s teachings are framed as a secret, super-charged route to success in this endeavor, one that promised great knowledge and power to adherents. Each of the four worlds and the corresponding aspects of the human microcosm play essential roles in this initiatory process.

3.2.1.1 *The first world of Invention*

The first world of Invention, as noted above, is associated with the intellect and ‘the cloud’ (*al-amā*). In terms of the letters, al-Būnī associates it exclusively with the *alif*:

وذلك ان أول المخاطبين أول المخلوقين وهو العقل الإلهي التوراتي ولما كان لا نظير له في المخترعات الأوليات
والجبروتيات الاقدسيات كانت مخاطبة الحق له بما فيه من معاني الحروف وكانت الحروف في سرّ العقل الفأ
واحداً لانه حقيقة مجمع الحروف بالقوة فسمع اسرار العلوم بمخاتق الحروف قبل وجودها لعالم الاسماء فهو
صاحب رمز وإشارة وإيماء وإدراك

Thus the first entity addressed by God was the first of the created things: the divine, luciform intellect. For when there was nothing similar to it [*scil.* the intellect] among the original incipient things and the holy things of the Realm of Power [*al-jabarūtīyāt*], the True Reality’s [*scil.* God’s] speech was with it in accordance with what was in it of the meanings of the letters. And in the secret of the intellect the letters were a single *alif*, for it is the reality of the union of the letters *in potentia*. It [*scil.* the intellect] heard the secrets of the sciences by means of the realities of the letters prior to their being found in the world of the names. It is the possessor of symbol, allusion, implication, and discernment.⁴¹⁸

This world’s functions are in accord with the intellect in the Neoplatonized cosmologies discussed earlier; it is not identical to God but rather is the first created thing and the prime mediator

⁴¹⁸ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 5^b, ln. 12-fol. 6^a, ln. 2.

of God’s creative command/speech. For humans capable of communing with it, it functions as a ‘hiero-intelligence’—to borrow Amir-Moezzi’s coinage—an “intuition of the Sacred”⁴¹⁹; thus at the end of the anthropogony quoted above al-Būnī credits it with the communication of *ma‘ān*ⁱⁿ, ‘meanings’ in the most rarefied sense of anagogical concepts. Later in *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* he also identifies it as the divine throne (*al-‘arsh*); this arguably is its predominant identity cosmologically-speaking, though al-Būnī circulates fluidly among such correspondences—throne, intellect, cloud, *et cetera*—throughout his writings without necessarily privileging one above others.

As for the notion of ‘the cloud’, it derives from a well-attested *ḥadīth* in which, when asked where God was prior to Creation, the Prophet responded: “He was in a cloud, neither above which nor below which was any air; then He created His throne upon the water.”⁴²⁰ References to *al-‘amā* in a cosmological context are best known to modern scholarship from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings,⁴²¹ and its mention here testifies to his and al-Būnī’s mutual influences. It seems that both conceive of the cloud as the very first place of divine self-expression, the juncture between the Creator and His Creation from whence the worlds unfold. Ibn al-‘Arabī in one place describes it as “the truth by means of which the levels of the world and its entities were created,”⁴²² and often frames it as synonymous with the ‘breath of the Merciful’ (*nafas al-Raḥmān*) which, as Chittick describes it, is “the vehicle for God’s words, which

⁴¹⁹ Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism*, 6 ff (10 for “intuition of the Sacred”).

⁴²⁰ For various alternate readings of the *ḥadīth*, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 125. For references in the main Sunnite *ḥadīth* collections, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, 4: 388. The text as it appears in al-Tirmidhī is as follows:

حدثنا أحمد بن منيع حدثنا يزيد بن هارون أخبرنا حماد بن سلمة عن يعلى بن عطاء عن وكيع بن حذس عن عمه أبي رزين قال قلت يا رسول الله أين كان ربنا قبل أن يخلق خلقه قال كان في عمام ما تحته هواء وما فوقه هواء وخلق عرشه على الماء

⁴²¹ Ibid., 125–127; Ḥakīm, *al-Mu’jam al-Sufi*, 820–826; Ebstein and Sviri, “The So-Called *Risālat Al-Ḥurūf*,” 221–224. For references to the topic in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 125–127; Ḥakīm, *al-Mu’jam al-Sufi*, 820–826; Ebstein and Sviri, “The So-Called *Risālat Al-Ḥurūf*,” 221–224. see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 125–127; Ḥakīm, *al-Mu’jam al-ṣūfī*, 820–826; Ebstein and Sviri, ‘The So-Called *Risālat al-ḥurūf*, 221–224.

⁴²² Quoted and translated in Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 55.

are the creatures.”⁴²³ As we will see, Ibn Masarraḥ also refers briefly to *al-‘amā*’, seemingly conflating it with *al-habā*’, as Ibn al-‘Arabī also does in places.

With regard to the letters, al-Būnī asserts that a single *alif* resides in the first world of Invention, containing all the other letters *in potentia* within itself. He later refers to this *alif* as the ‘pole’ or ‘axis’ (*quṭb*) of the letters, an image at once cosmo- and anthropomorphic.⁴²⁴ Al-Būnī was by no means the first within the lettrist cosmological tradition to associate the *alif* with the intellect; Ebstein notes similar notions in the writings of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī and Ibn Masarraḥ. Likewise others, including the Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ and Ibn al-‘Arabī, associated the letter *alif* with prophets, *Imāms*, saints, and other *quṭb*-like figures.⁴²⁵ Finally, as suggested by the passage immediately above, this singular *alif*, in connection with the letters’ ability to transmit *ma‘ān*ⁱⁿ via the intellect, is made to embody the allusive and symbolic potentials of language that are so central to esotericist exegesis and related Sufi and Shī‘ite discourses, which call upon the authority of a spiritual elect to penetrate the surface meanings—the *zāhir*—of language and of the manifest world.

3.2.1.2 *The second world of Invention*

The second world of Invention is associated with the primordial ‘dust’ (*al-habā*’), the spirit (*rūḥ*), and, later in the text, the Qur’ānic mythologem of the divine pen (*qalam*).⁴²⁶ The term *al-habā*’ appears in the Qur’ān (25:23, 56:6), though as Ebstein documents, it seems to have found its first cosmological application in a treatise from the Jābirian corpus, *Kitāb al-taṣrīf*, in which it designates a kind of prime matter (*hayūlah, jawhar*), and then appeared in the writings of Ibn Masarraḥ.⁴²⁷ Ibn

⁴²³ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 127.

⁴²⁴ BnF MS arabe 2658 (LI), fol. 19^b, ln. 16.

⁴²⁵ Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 111.

⁴²⁶ E.g. at BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 15b, lns. 10–11.

⁴²⁷ Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 88–91. On *Kitāb al-taṣrīf*, cf. Kraus, *Contributions*, Vol. I, 98.

Masarraḥ, passing on what he claims are the teachings of Sahl al-Tustarī,⁴²⁸ seems to conflate the ‘*amā*’ and *habā*’, and identifies the *habā*’ with the letters themselves, regarding them as the ‘source’ (*aṣl*) of the created things.⁴²⁹ Ibn al-‘Arabī, perhaps under the influence of Ibn Masarraḥ, also appears to conflate the ‘*amā*’ and *habā*’ at places, and often describes the *habā*’ as a kind of prime matter from which God crafted the images/forms (*ṣuwar*) of things prior to their manifestation.⁴³⁰ Al-Būnī distinguishes the ‘*amā*’ and *habā*’ into the two worlds of Invention, the former to ‘*ālam al-ikhtirā’ al-awwal*’ and the latter to ‘*ālam al-ikhtirā’ al-thānī*’, but, as we will see, retains an extremely close relationship between them.

With these resonances between al-Būnī, Ibn Masarraḥ, and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works, we are again faced with questions of the audience’s familiarity with these other sources, though in this case we have the rather more concrete evidence of the two compilatory codices discussed in the previous chapter: Chester Beatty MS 3168, which contains al-Būnī’s *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* and the surviving copies of Ibn Masarraḥ’s works, and Süleymaniye MS Carullah 98, in which a copy of *Hidāyāt al-qāṣidīn* is bound together with thirty works by Ibn al-‘Arabī. Although the volumes do not contain a copy of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, they do indicate that some members of these esotericist reading communities were, at least by the end of the seventh/thirteenth century, actively reading al-Būnī together with those other authors, and thus likely were drawing connections between their various statements on the ‘*amā*’ and *habā*’ and related topics. Such connections presumably were under discussion with these reading communities, and explicating them would have been an important element of how these texts were taught and understood. As for apparent discrepancies between the ways masters such as Ibn Masarraḥ, al-Būnī, and Ibn al-‘Arabī presented such concepts, I would argue that Sufi readers generally would have viewed

⁴²⁸ On the authenticity of the Tustarian material in Ibn Masarraḥ’s texts, see Ebstein and Sviri, “The So-Called *Risālat Al-Ḥurūf*,” *passim*.

⁴²⁹ Ibn Masarraḥ and Garrido-Clemente, “Edición Crítica Del K. Jawāṣṣ Al-Ḥurūf de Ibn Masarra,” 62 & 79.

⁴³⁰ Ḥakīm, *al-Mu‘jam al-Sufi*, 1095–1097. For various views on the influence of Ibn Masarraḥ on Ibn al-‘Arabī generally, see Gril, “The Science of Letters,” 146; Claude Addas, “Andalusi Mysticism and the Rise of Ibn Arabi,” in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. S.K. Jayyusi (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 918 ff; Garrido Clemente, “The Book of the Universe: On the Life and Works of Ibn Masarra Al-Jabali,” 403; Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, *passim*.

them as ultimately resolvable, insofar as all three were presumed to be accessing the same hidden realities. Indeed, in the following chapter we will see active efforts to synthesize the teachings of some of these authors, particularly by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī.

This secondary Inventive stage of the primordial dust and the spirit is not the ‘universal soul’ of Plotinian thought that one might expect to proceed from the intellect. Rather it is an intermediary level closely linked to the first and occurs prior to the emergence of the universal soul in the next stage. In this spirit-plane the *alif* of the intellect, along with the totality of the letters it comprises, is described as having produced a prostrate/extended (*mabsūṭ*) reflection of itself, such that the two *alifs* are said to form two sides of an incomplete equilateral triangle: one standing side and the other the base. Al-Būnī’s insists that the letters are still subsumed within the *alifs* rather than expressed individually, those of the standing *alif* being *in actu* and those in the prostrate *alif* being *in potentia*. To illustrate the closeness of the intellect-spirit relationship, he compares it to that between numerical oddness and evenness. The high level of abstraction here, and the lack of individuation of the letters beyond *alif*, signals in my view that the two worlds of Invention are indeed the realm of universals, with particularization to follow in succeeding levels:

ثم الروح وهو ثاني مرتبة في الإختراعات خاطبها الحق بما فيها من قوة لطيف الحروف وكانت الحروف في لطيف الروح ضلعين من مثلث متساوي الاضلاع ضلع قائم وضع هو القائدة للمثلث المذكور وهو هذا [شكل] فالضلع القائم هو ضلع الف والضلع المبسوط هو ضلع ب وذلك انه في قوى الروح فيض بسط أنوار العقل أي هما اشتركا في المبدأ الإختراعي وإن تباينا بالترتبة العددية فقد اتفقا في النشاء الإختراعية كما اتصلت الوترية بباطن الشفعية [وتباينت الشفعية] عن مرتبة الوترية إلا ان الوترية فيها سر الشفعية فاتفقا في وجود الأسرار وتباينا في اختلاف ظهور الأطوار

وكذلك حكم العقل الإختراعي الأول مع وجود الروح الإختراعي الثاني ولما كان سر الالف قام بالعقل وقام به العقل وكل الحروف في سر الالف كان الروح أيضاً قائماً بسر الالف إلا أن بينهما تباين المرتبة والمنوية فكانت الف الروح مبسوطاً والف العقل قائماً إلا أن الحروف في طي الالف المبسوطه بالقوة كما كانت في الألف القائم بالفعل فاتصلت انوار الالف القائم بالالف المبسوطه المنتقي إذ كل من سوى الحق تعالى من كل قائم مفتقر إلى مقام عليه فاتصلت التوران الإختراعيان بالحرفين المتناسبين

And then the spirit: it is the second level of the invented things, and the True Reality addressed it by means of that which is in it of the powers of the subtle substance of the letters. In the subtle substance of the spirit, the letters were two sides of an equilateral triangle, a standing side and the side that is the base of the aforementioned triangle. This is it [see Figure 1]. The standing side is the *alif*-side [i.e. the side marked with an *alif*] and the prostrate side is the *bā'*-side [i.e. the side marked with a *bā'*], and this is because it [*scil.* the prostrate side] is, in the powers of the spirit, an effulgence extending the lights of the intellect; this is to say that they shared an inventive point of origin though they differed in terms of numerical rank [i.e. one appeared after the other].

The quality [*ḥukm*] of the first inventive intellect is conjoined with the being [*wujūd*] of the secondary inventive spirit. For as the secret of the *alif* was established in the intellect and the intellect was established in it, and all the letters were in the secret of the *alif*, so the spirit also was established in the secret of the *alif*, except that between the two [*scil.* intellect and spirit] is a difference in level and duality, such that the *alif* of the spirit was prostrate and the *alif* of the intellect was upright, and except that the letters contained in [lit. 'within the fold of'] the prostrate *alif* were *in potentia* just as they were *in actu* in the upright *alif*. Thus the lights of the upright *alif* were in communication with the prostrate, receptive *alif*, just as everything other than the Real Truth (may He be exalted)—every subsistent thing—requires a superior [*muqām 'alayhi*, i.e. something to be contingent upon]. Thus the two lights are connected by means of the two corresponding letters [i.e. the two *alifs*].⁴³¹

The description of the *alifs* is accompanied by the first diagram to appear in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*—in which, somewhat confusingly, one of the sides/*alifs* is labeled with a *bā'* (see Figure 8). The simple figure is offered without further instructions as to how it should be 'read', but as we will see it is developed through a series of further diagrams related to the subsequent worlds.

Finally, al-Būnī's description of the two *alifs* as "the two lights" at the end of the passage above bears a strong similarity to the notion of the two lights of prophecy (*nubūwah*) and sainthood/imāmhood (*walāyah*), a concept best known from Shī'ite thought, where the lights are held to be the pre-existent forms of Muḥammad and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, with the second light encompassing the latter's *bayt* as well. Al-Būnī's rendering of a similar concept is found in *'Alam al-hudá*, in the chapter on God's name al-Qadīr, where he describes the production of the 'light of Muḥammad' (*nūr*

⁴³¹ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 6a, ln. 2-fol. 7a, ln. 6.

Muḥammad),⁴³² a second light extruded from it, and a third from which the *malakūt*, the heavens, and elements were created. For al-Būnī the second is the pre-existent, luciform expression of the various ranks of prophets (other than Muḥammad) and saints rather than that solely of the Shī'ite *Imāms*. As a scriptural locus al-Būnī adduces at the end of the passage, a *ḥadīth* about God's creation of the spirits and apparitions (*arwāḥ* and *ashbāḥ*) that was also evoked by some Shī'ite theorists of the two lights.⁴³³ Sahl al-Tustarī proposed quite similar ideas in his *Tafsīr*, though without reference to this *ḥadīth*. Nonetheless, his thinking on the matter may well have contributed to al-Būnī's.⁴³⁴ The '*Alam al-hudā*' passage begins after a description the gathering together of various metaphysical lights—the collection of lights from which the light of Muḥammad is drawn—in the first world of Invention:

فاخرج من تلك الانوار بعد اجتماعها خلاصة نور هو نور الانوار الإختراعية فجعل منه نور محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم ثم ابرز من النور المخلص منه نوراً آخر فخلق منه ارواح الانبياء والمرسلين والصدّيقين ثم الامثل فالامثل ثم خلق تما في التور نوراً آخر فخلق منه الملكوت وما حواه من سمواته وافلاكه وكواكبه وحركاته وهيئته وجريان نبراته وسياراته وذلك قبل ان تبرز القدرة آثار الاجسام كثيفها ولطيفها وذلك ما قاله صلى الله عليه وسلم خلق الله الارواح قبل الاشباح من الفي عام

And He [*scil.* God] sent out from those lights, having gathered them together, a quintessence of light, the light of the inventive lights, and He made from it the light of Muḥammad (God's blessings and peace be upon him). Then He brought forth from the refined light another light, and He created from it the spirits of the prophets and the messengers and the righteous ones, each an exemplar. Then He created from what was in the light another light, and created from it the Dominion [*al-malakūt*] and what it encompasses: its heavens, its heavenly spheres, its stars, its movements, its firmament, and the flux of its lights and planets. That was before the omnipotence [*al-qudrah*] brought forth the dense and subtle effects of the bodies. And this is what he [*scil.* the Prophet] (God's

⁴³² This concept, more commonly called the *nūr muḥammadī* (Muḥammadean light) was a well-known but controversial area of Sufi speculation. See Uri Rubin, *EI2*, s.v. "Nūr Muḥammadī"; idem., "Pre-Existence and Light," *passim*.

⁴³³ On the two lights in Shī'ite thought see Mohammad Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris & The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 134 ff. Regarding the *arwāḥ* and *ashbāḥ* see the logion attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq on p. 135 that plainly builds on the same *ḥadīth* or one closely related to it. Also regarding the *ashbāḥ* of the *Imāms* and related motifs, see Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light," 100 ff.

⁴³⁴ Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence*, 153; Annabel Keeler, ed., *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur'an*, 1st U.S. ed, Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur'an, Four (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008), 77 ff.

blessings and peace be upon him) [meant when he] said, ‘God created the spirits two thousand years before the apparitions’.⁴³⁵

If I am correct that the two lights of the two *alifs* are meant to correspond to these lights of *nubūwah* and *walāyah*, then for al-Būnī this second inventive world is also the site of the primordial creation of the prophets and saints who populate the ‘invisible college’, with the exception of Muḥammad, whose light is fused to the intellect. Such a theory of the pre-existence of the saints would have served, for readers sympathetic to al-Būnī’s ideas, to radically bolster notions of the importance of the Sufi elect as an alternative religious hierarchy. Of course it is also typical of what caused Ibn Khaldūn and other Mamlūk-era critics to brand al-Būnī and others of his Sufi cohort as crypto-Ismāʿīlites substituting their saints for the Shīʿite *Imāms*.

3.2.1.3 *The first world of Origination*

The first world of Origination, as indicated in the account of the Ādam’s creation, is associated with the soul (*nafs*, *nafs al-kullīyah*), the world of particles (*al-dharr*), and, later in the text, the divine footstool (*kursī*) evoked in the Qur’ān.⁴³⁶ Al-Būnī’s notion of the soul involves processes of the particularization/individuation of existents as they are drawn out from the pleroma of the inventive worlds. This is not yet the plane of physical manifestation, but rather that in which the immaterial forms/images (*ṣuwar*) of things are brought into being.

As Amir-Moezzi has discussed, references to the world of particles (*‘ālam al-dharr*) are found in various early Shīʿite texts as descriptions of one of the worlds of pre-existence in which the prophets and the holy family were instantiated prior to their earthly careers, an instantiation that might be described as “the transformation of formless light into light with a human shape,” a concept linked to

⁴³⁵ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, fol 44^b, ln. 1-7.

⁴³⁶ E.g. at BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 15b, ln. 12.

the 172nd verse of Surat al-A'rāf and the primordial covenant (*al-mīthāq*).⁴³⁷ Sahl al-Tustarī, in reference to the same verse, also discusses the *dharr* by which the prophets and saints were embodied.⁴³⁸ Al-Būnī strikes a similar chord—though in reference to the letters rather than human exemplars—in describing this soul-plane as where the letters have emerged from the supernal *alif* to assume their individual forms.

Al-Būnī again invokes and diagrams the figure of an equilateral triangle to describe the action of the letters at this stage, in this case a triangle with all three of its sides. The figure alludes, he tells us, to the mystery by which the worlds of Invention meet those of Origination, with the vertical sides now standing for the first and second worlds of Invention, and the base for the world of Origination, as he explains later. He has recourse to another numerical metaphor to clarify the relationships between these worlds, comparing the distinction between them to that between ones and tens and between tens and hundreds. He further explains that this world establishes the possibility of positionality in space:

ثم التمس الكلية وهي اول عوالم الإبداع خاطبها الحق تعالى بما فيها من صور الحروف فكانت الحروف في ذاتها شكلاً مثلثاً متساوي الاضلاع وهو هكذا [شكل] وذلك بسر لطيف معناه وهو ان آخر مرتبة الإختراع [الاول؟] اول درجة الإبداع الاول وآخر درجة الإختراع الثاني اول مرتبة الإبداع الثاني فالتباين بالمعاني الترتيبية الإبداعية الإختراعية فحسب كتابين الاحاد من العشرات [و العشرات من المئين] إتبا هو مرتبة عقلية لفهم معان مختلفة الاوضاع لظهور الجهات

Then the universal soul: it is the first of the worlds of Origination, and the True Reality (may He be exalted) addressed it by means of that which is in it of the images [*ṣuwar*] of the letters. For in its [*scil.* the soul's] essence the letters took the form of an equilateral triangle, such as this [image, not reproduced here, but see below regarding Figure 9] In that is a subtle secret the meaning of which is that the last level of the [first] invention is the first degree of the first

⁴³⁷ Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices*, 141, 283–284, 424. Q 7:172 is read as a reminder to humanity of the covenant they swore to God prior to their incarnation, with the notion of the *dharr* being drawn from the *dhurriyah* mentioned in the verse: “And [remember] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we have testified’. Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, ‘Indeed, of this we were unaware’.”

﴿وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ﴾

⁴³⁸ Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence*, 153 ff.

origination, and the final degree of the second invention is the first level of the second origination. The distinction in the meanings of the inventive and originary scales is like the distinction of the ones from the tens and the tens from the hundreds. Moreover, it is a level of intellection for the apprehension of the meanings of the different positions, giving rise to the manifestation of the directions.

Shortly thereafter in the text, in a display of his ability to move between different modes of expression, al-Būnī abruptly interjects a mythic element that dramatizes the formation of the triangle: a tale of the ‘initiation’ (*al-tawḥī’ah*) of the soul and its emergence from the *rūḥ*. The scene for the narrative is set with the *rūḥ* occupying the righthand upright of the triangle, and with the *nafs* still latent within the *rūḥ*. As the narrative begins, God addresses the *rūḥ*, asking “Who am I?” When the *rūḥ* fails to respond correctly, He casts it into the ‘sea of hunger’ (*baḥr al-jū’*) at the center of the triangle, until it learns to submit and recognize Him as its ruler. The *rūḥ* is then restored to its place, apparently leaving the *nafs*, now fully realized, in its proper place at the base of the triangle:

ناداها الحق تعالى من انا فقالت من انا فلقاها في بحر الجوع وهو ما في باطن المثلث من الحصر إلى ان بلغت بالالف المبسوطة فالفته عالمها الذي حبيت به والسر الإبداعي الذي وجدت به فتطهرت من رذيلة الدعوى فلما علم الباري تعالى انها رجعت إلى نشاتها وحبيت بظهور فطرتها ناداها من انا فقالت انت الله الواحد القهار لما علمت من قهرة لمن يدعي ما لا يليق بذاته فظهر فيها سر الالف المبسوطة التي هي قاعدة المثلث وانتقلت الروح إلى الالف الذي هو ضلع المثلث القائم وان نزول الروح للالف المبسوطة تواضعاً لله تعالى فرفع الله قدرها بتواضعها لعظمة كلامه الازلي بان اضافها إليه لا تفتى ولا تبلى ولما ادعت النفس التكبر فيما لا يليق بمقامها وضعها وقهرها والزحما الموت كما قال تعالى ﴿فَأَقْشِرُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ﴾ فالتقس لا تدرك حقائقها إلا بالقهر والروح لا تدرك حقائقها إلا بالتواضع والتلطف

The Real Truth (Most High) called out to it (*scil.* the spirit), ‘Who am I?’ And it responded, ‘Who am I?’ And he cast it into the sea of hunger—and this is the constriction in the interior of the triangle—until it reached the prostrate *alif*. It came to submit to Him—its Knower by whom it was enlivened and the originative secret by which it existed. It cleansed itself of the vice of pretension, and when the Maker (Most High) knew that it had returned to its original state and been enlivened by the manifestation of its innate nature, He called to it, ‘Who am I?’ It responded, ‘You are God, the One, the Subduer (*al-Qahhār*). When it had learned through compulsion that one who presumes transgresses his own essence, there manifested in it the prostrate *alif* that is the base of the triangle, and the spirit moved to the *alif* that is the standing side of the triangle. The descent of the spirit to the prostrate *alif* was in abasement before God, and God elevated its station through its abasement with the

exaltedness of His eternal speech, and as a result of its attachment to Him it is not consumed and does not age. For when the soul became arrogant such as was not suitable to its station, God put it down and subdued it and imposed death upon it. For He (may He be exalted) said, ‘Kill yourselves’ [‘your souls’]. For the soul will not perceive its realities except through compulsion, and the spirit will not perceive its realities except through abasement and tempering.⁴³⁹

The tale lends a narrative and a sense of animation to the highly abstract, diagrammatic presentation of the superior worlds that al-Būnī has presented thus far. As we will see, it also resonates with Sufi spiritual exercises for overcoming the appetites and pretensions of the soul/ego, rendering the individual aspirant’s struggle for self-discipline a restaging of cosmogenesis.

To aid in the aspirant’s apprehension of these lessons about the third world as it is conditioned by the previous two, al-Būnī provides a diagram (see Figure 9) charting the various correspondences linked to each part of the triangle. It is the first somewhat complex figure to appear in the book, and al-Būnī immediately links it to the notion of visionary experience, promising that in this figure “its [scil. the soul-plane’s] being emerges [or ‘draws near’] in the subtle realities, and its witnessing is revealed to intuitive visions.”⁴⁴⁰ The soul-world, located at the base of the triangle, is “the first manifestation of the originated worlds [*al-‘awālim al-mubda‘āt*] and the first levels of the variegated ethereal forms [*al-ṣuwar al-nafsānīyāt al-mushakkalāt*] in the great footstool [...], the first world of the soul and last level of the intellect and spirit, and the first world of compositional individuation [*‘ālam al-taṣṣīl al-tarkībī*] descended from the inventive spirit.”⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 7^b, ln. 7-fol. 8^a, ln. 2.

⁴⁴⁰ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 9a, lns. 5-6.

وهانا امثل ذلك في شكل يبرز [تقرب] للحقائق وجوده ويظهر للبصائر شهوده

⁴⁴¹ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 8^b, lns. 13-16.

تم الخط الثالث الذي هو فائدة المثلث هو أول ظهور العوالم المبدعات وأول مراتب الصور التفسانيات المشكّلات في الكرسي الاعظم... هو أول عالم النفس وآخر مرتبة العقل والروح
وأول عالم التفصيل التركيبي التزولي عن الروح الإختراعي

Al-Būnī's portrayal of this emergence of the individuated forms of things is centered on the individual letters emanating from the primordial *alif*, coming forth as the angels that bear the throne (*'arsh*):

كانت كلّ الانوار العلوية والسفلية مستمدةً من نور العرش اي من نور ما اودع الله تعالى فيه من انوار
الرحمة وكذلك الحروف مستمدة من الالف واليه مرجعها علويها وسفليها فكذلك كلّ كلمة وكلّ حرف قام
بسّر الالف وان هذه الحروف هي المشار إلى سرّها في العالم العلوي بان جعلت ذواتها املاكاً نورانيات
حاملات للقوائم العرشية

All the superior and inferior lights were emanative from the light of the throne, which is to say from the light of what God (Most High) had installed in it from among the lights of the [divine] mercy. Likewise the letters, superior or inferior, are emanative from the *alif*, and it [scilicet the *alif*] is the source to which they return. So too any word or letter subsists in the secret of the *alif*. Verily these letters allude to its secret in the superior world, for their essences were made as angels of light bearing the pillars of the throne.⁴⁴²

He delineates how the twenty-eight letters constitute the names of eight throne-bearing angels, these eight being a reference to the eschatological vision of God's throne in the seventeenth verse of Surat al-Ḥāqqah.⁴⁴³ The letters are distributed in order according to the Western system of *abjad*, though unevenly: *alif* comprises the entire name of the first angel and *bā'-jīm-dāl* that of the second, with the remaining six names being four letters each. The first four angels are associated with the four worlds/the four parts of the Ādamic constitution, while the last four are linked to the elemental properties that are the fundamental ingredients of the material world (see Table 5). Note that the angels—the inhabitants of the *malakūt*—become 'visible' in the text only in the context of this plane of forms/images that precedes manifestation.

In this cosmic drama al-Būnī stages of the intellect, spirit, and soul, and in the imagery he evokes of the angels bearing the throne, one can detect an important shift in his teaching methods: a

⁴⁴² BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 9^a, ln. 14-fol. 9^b, ln. 1.

⁴⁴³ Q 69:17 "And the angels are at its edges. And there will bear the Throne of your Lord above them, that Day, eight [of them]."

﴿وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ عَلَىٰ أَرْجَائِنَا وَيَحْمِلُ عَرْشَ رَبِّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ ثَمَانِيَةٌ﴾

merging of his so-far highly abstract teachings with Sufi bodily and visionary praxeis. Recall that al-Būnī's other works, particularly *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt* and *ʿAlam al-hudá*, are particularly concerned with spiritual exercises such as fasting, *khalwah*, and *dhikr*, practices that in many cases were meant to bring about powerful affective and visionary experiences, which were phenomena commonly understood to occur in the soul (*nafs*) of the practitioner. Thus, while the first two worlds—those of Invention—could only be discussed abstractly, al-Būnī links his teachings on the first world of Origination and the soul to the rigors and internally-experienced results of Sufi praxis. It is a means of moving past pure intellection and bringing the body and embodied experience into play in communicating abstract concepts, one that relates directly to the emphasis on embodied practices within Sufism and in master-disciple relationships.

3.2.1.4 The second world of Origination

The second world of origination corresponds to the plane of composition (*ṭawr al-tarkīb*) that ultimately produces the material world, and to the human heart (*qalb*) and innate nature (*fiṭrah*), the Qur'ānic mythologem of the preserved tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), and the 'tablet of inscription' (*lawḥ al-nuqūsh*). The diagram is now a square (see Figure 10), with four sides assigned to the four worlds as well as to the elements. Just as space came into being with the previous world, so time becomes relevant in this one. At one point we are told:

فخطّ دال نسبة يوم خلق آدم وخطّ جيم نسبة يوم تسوية آدم وخطّ باء يوم التقخة في آدم وخطّ الف بيوم
السجود لآدم

The line *dāl* corresponds to the day of the creation of Ādam. The line *jīm* corresponds to the day of the arrangement of Ādam. The line *bā'* corresponds to the breathing [of life] into Ādam. The line *alif* is the day of prostration before Ādam.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁴ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 11^a, lns. 2-4.

At this stage, then, we have the realization of Ādam as the human before whom the angels were made to prostrate themselves. And we see in this section that al-Būnī indeed regards humans as potentially very powerful, at least as vessels of God’s will. Within this plane, we are told, are the secrets of the ‘regularly disposed occult sciences’ (*al-‘ulūm al-ghaybīyāt al-tartībīyāt*),⁴⁴⁵ which is to say those operative sciences dealing in the manipulation of manifest reality. The term ‘composition’ (*tarkīb*), as al-Būnī and many other thinkers of the period used it, refers to the notion that all manifest things are made up of various combinations of the four elements as conditioned by the motions of the planets, and it is the ability to understand and manipulate this concert of forces—all of which al-Būnī relates to the letters in various ways—that is at the root of these operative sciences. As we will see, this is particularly pertinent to the use of talismans.

One figure through which al-Būnī depicts the relationship of the letters to the planetary and elemental spheres is a cosmograph of a type not uncommon in works on Ptolemaic astronomy: a series of concentric rings with the earth at the center. In al-Būnī’s figure (see Figure 11) there are thirteen spheres, one within the other: the outermost is the intellect, the second the spirit, the next seven are the planets, and the innermost four the elements. He assigns two letters to each of these thirteen spheres, the first being proper to ‘the superiors’ (*al-‘ulwīyāt*) and the *bāṭin* of that sphere, and the second to its ‘inferiors’ (*al-sufliyāt*) and the *zāhir*; he also assigns a single letter each to the divine pen (*qalam*) and tablet (*lawḥ*), *ṣād* and *nūn* respectively (see Table 6 for these correspondences). Al-Būnī directs the reader to pay close attention to the numerical mysteries contained in these correspondences, then proceeds to calculate the *abjad* values of each letter in itself and when its name is spelled in full—e.g. *kāf* in itself equals twenty, but in full it equals 101, as *kāf*=20, *alif*=1, and *fā*=80—and to determine from these values the number of ‘powers’ (*quwwah*), ‘planes’ (*tawr*), or ‘species’ (*naw*) belonging to each sphere.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁵ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 10^b, ln. 17-11^a, ln. 1

⁴⁴⁶ A tangential benefit of these calculations is that they confirming for us al-Būnī’s adherence to the Western system of *abjad*, as demonstrated by his assigning the letter *ṣād* the values of sixty and sixty-five, *dād* the values of

These correspondences between the letters and the celestial spheres have only occasional bearing on al-Būnī's comments on the letters in the latter part of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, and they are by no means the only correspondences he assigns to the letters. Indeed, he moves fluidly through various sets of these much as he does in assigning the four worlds to various philosophical terms, Qur'ānic mythologems, *et cetera*, such that the very fluidity of the associations seems to be central to his thinking. Slightly later in the text, for example, he assigns the letters a set of elemental correspondences, with each letter said to be hot (*ḥārrah*), moist (*raṭbah*), arid (*yābisah*), or cold (*bāridah*). The twenty-eight letters are divided into seven 'degrees' (*s. darajah*) of four letters each, each degree thus containing a complete set of elemental forces, which he conveys in a straightforward table (see Figure 12). Yet later in the text, a second set of astrological correspondences is assigned to the letters, and they are assigned to the twenty-eight lunar mansions. Following that section, he asserts that he is not offering a lesson on astrology (*al-hay'ah al-nujūmīyah*) but rather on "what God brings into being in the world by means of the letters,"⁴⁴⁷ adding that the positive and negative effects of the mansions are the actions of God's angels, just as in the Qur'ān there are verses of mercy and those that threaten punishment. The total effect is to create the impression of a manifest world bathed in angelic/letteristic forces of which the adept is primed to be cognizant.

3.2.2 *The letters in action: The forty-eight letters of the manifest world*

Rather than dwell on the details of each of these systems of correspondences, in closing this overview of al-Būnī's cosmology I will focus instead on a segment of the text in which he discusses the source of the powers of the letters as they function in the second world of Origination, which is to say in the manifest world. In doing so, I will return once more to the topic of the teaching and reception of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, especially as concerns Sufi audiences and the potentially risky topic of the operative

ninety and ninety-five, etc. If he were using the Eastern *abjad*, *ṣād* would be ninety and ninety-five, *ḍād* 800 and 805.

⁴⁴⁷ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 27b, lns. 6-7.

واعلم يا اخي انا لم ترد بذلك التيقية على الهيئة النجومية بل سرّ ما اقام الله بالحروف من العالم

sciences. This is a section of the text that leads up to the aforementioned table of elemental correspondences for the letters, and that also serves to preface some instructions for the making and use of some fairly simple cryptogrammatic talismans, which are, again, grids of letters and/or numbers. It is of particular importance in that this section of text demonstrates the central role al-Būnī assigns the human microcosm as a mediator of divine forces on the earth, and thus speaks to the notion of a spiritual elect that I argue was central to the interests of al-Būnī’s Sufi readers. The discussion begins with the rather counterintuitive and perhaps unprecedented assertion that “the letters through which God brought the cosmos into being”⁴⁴⁸ are forty-eight in number: seven ‘luciform letters’ (*al-ḥurūf al-nūrānīyah*), twelve ‘spiritual letters’ (*al-ḥurūf al-rūhānīyah*), and twenty-nine ‘corporeal letters’ (*al-ḥurūf al-jismānīyah*). The numbers seven, twelve, and twenty eight (the twenty-ninth letter, *lām-alif*, plays no obvious role in the remainder of the discussion)—being the numbers of planets, zodiacal signs, and lunar mansions respectively, are a clue that astrology will have some bearing on what follows. Indeed, despite his protestation noted above it certainly does.

As for the seven luciform letters, they are not letters in the usual sense, al-Būnī tells us, but rather this is a figure of speech (*majāz*). Though he does not say it explicitly, referring to the letters as such is almost certainly an allusion to the well-known Ibn Mas‘ūd *ḥadīth* that, as discussed in the previous chapter, is referenced earlier in al-Būnī’s text: “The Qur’ān was sent in down in seven *aḥruf*. Each *ḥarf* has a back and a belly. Each *ḥarf* has a border and each border has a lookout point.”⁴⁴⁹ As mentioned previously, the precise meaning of *ḥarf/aḥruf* in that *ḥadīth* is ambiguous, and al-Būnī seems to exploit this ambiguity to imply that it conceals a powerful secret. His explanation of the luciform letters is rather cryptic:

⁴⁴⁸ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 17b, ln. 8.

الحروف اوجد الله بها العالم

⁴⁴⁹ Quoted in Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 8.

وهي انوار مختلفة لا من حيث ذواتها بل من حيث من يدركها وهي المعبر عنها بالاثنتين والواحد والثلاثين
والستين والثمانين والواحد والاربعائة فهي نسبة الحروف النورانية ولولا هذه الحروف التوراتية ما عرف
الله تعالى ولا تصرف الاكوان في اطوار التوحيد

They [*scil.* the luciform letters] are different lights not with regard to their essences, but rather with regard to one who perceives them. They are referred to as the two, the one, the thirty, the sixty, the eighty, the one, and the four hundred; these [numbers] are a reference [*nisbah*] to the luciform letters. Were it not for these luciform letters, God [Most High] would not be known, and the created beings would not be disposed upon the planes of unity.

The most obvious solution to the numerical code is through *abjad* (using the Western system), which gives the phrase *bi-al-ṣifāt*, “by means of the [divine] attributes.” As 2=*bā*, 1=*alif*, 30=*lām*, 60=*ṣād*, 80=*fā*, 1=*alif*, 400=*tā*, the total of the seven letters is 574, which totals to seven (5+7+4 = 16, 1+6 = 7). If this is correct, it must, I think, be understood to mean the divine names, particularly given al-Būnī’s deep engagement therewith. This fits also with his assertion that they are one in their essence but multiple from a human perspective (like the *ism al-dhāt*, Allāh, and the ninety-nine beautiful names), and his statement that were it not for the luciform letters God “would not be known.” The divine names being linked to the number seven in this context suggests that al-Būnī associates them with the world-shaping powers astrology generally attributes to the planets. This notion is roughly in keeping with the assertions of the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā* and other Muslim apologists for astrology, who typically asserted that the planets and their effects were the instruments of God’s will. However, al-Būnī’s way of expressing the concept here, by almost totally subsuming the planets in the notion of the divine names as active forces, far more thoroughly subordinates the astrological content to a Qur’ānic idiom.

The twelve spiritual letters also are not letters in a conventional sense, but rather are human faculties.⁴⁵⁰ He gives them in the following order:

1. the faculty of hearing (*quwwat al-sam*)

⁴⁵⁰ A point of interest is that, as Ebstein has noted, both the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā* and Ibn al-‘Arabī promoted systems of seven faculties, and that these were made to correspond to the planets. Al-Būnī’s set of twelve, and their implied association with the signs of the Zodiac, is a noteworthy variant on this theme. *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus*, 193 ff, 203 ff.

2. the faculty of vision (*quwwat al-baṣar*)
3. the faculty of smell (*quwwat al-shamm*)
4. the faculty of taste (*quwwat al-dhawq*)
5. the faculty of touch (*quwwat al-lams*)
6. the cogitative faculty (*al-quwwah al-mufakkirah*)
7. the imaginative faculty (*al-quwwah al-khayālīyah*)
8. the formal faculty (*al-quwwah al-muṣawwirah*)
9. the administrative faculty (*al-quwwah al-mudabbirah*)
10. the integrative faculty (*al-quwwah al-mushakkilah*)
11. the preserving faculty (*al-quwwah al-ḥāfiẓah*)
12. the dispositive faculty (*al-quwwah al-muṣarrifah*)

Al-Būnī goes no further into detail here about the faculties, except to note that they are not evenly developed among humans, being perfected in some and lacking in others.⁴⁵¹ Neither does he draw any one-to-one correspondences between the faculties/spiritual letters and the twelve signs of the zodiac, though, as with the seven luciform letters and the planets, his readers would likely have seen the implicit connection.

As for the corporeal letters, they are the twenty-eight letters of the regular Arabic alphabet plus the *lām-alif*, though the latter plays no further role in the discussion. The powers of the corporeal letters as they function in operative procedures, al-Būnī explains, can only be understood as a function of their interactions with the luciform and spiritual letters, and it is in this explanation that the quasi-astrological nature of this discourse is confirmed. He further explains that the forces of the *Malakūt* and *Jabarūt* emanate from the luciform letters, are received by the spiritual letters of the human faculties, and only from thence do they pass into the corporeal letters. The model is explicitly astrological in character, but, as he presents it seems to not be identical to the transmission of astrological forces:

فالتأثير الروحاني الملكوتي والجبروتي لا يظهر في الحروف الجسائية وإنما يظهر في الحروف الروحانية ولما
كانت الافلاك السبعة هي مراكز العلويات وبها اهتدى اهل السفليات كانت هي مستمدة من هذه الحروف
التوراتية السبعة كل عالم بما يليق به من شهود انوار تلك الحروف

فقامت روحانية كل فلك بانوار كل حرف من الحروف التوراتية ولما كانت الافلاك العلوية تندرج في السير
في ابراج على درج ودقائق وغير ذلك ليظهر التأثير على الترتيب فيكون سبب للبقاء كذلك كانت هذه

⁴⁵¹ For the list of faculties and brief discussion of their variations in individuals, see BnF MS arabe, fol. 18^a, lns. 6-17.

القوى الحرفية الروحانية الإثنا عشر تستمد من انوار الحروف النورانية طوراً طوراً على سرّ الترتيب
الترجيّ والسرّ الفلكي

ولما كانت الافلاك مستديرةً على العالم السفليّ الكثيف ليظهر فيه إبداع الصنعة وإيقان القدرة كانت
الحروف الجسماينة كالارض للحروف الروحانية إلا أنّ جميع إمدادها اعنى الحروف الروحانية مجتمع في ارض
الحروف الجسماينة لظهور الآثار العلوية في الاكر الترابية

The spiritual force of the *Malakūt* and *Jabarūt* does not manifest itself in the corporeal letters but rather in the spiritual letters. As the seven spheres are the seats of the superior forces and the inferior beings are guided by them, so they [*scil.* the spiritual letters] take from these seven luciform letters, every world in accordance with its witnessing of [i.e. its exposure to] the lights of those letters.

The spiritual force of every star is determined by the lights of every one of the luciform letters. And as the celestial spheres, in their track through the zodiacal signs, are classified [measured] according to degree and minute and so on, so the effect manifests sequentially [*‘alá al-tartīb*], and this is the cause of [the effect’s] duration. Likewise these twelve spiritual lettristic faculties take from the lights of the luciform letters, stage after stage, in accordance with the mystery of the gradated sequence and the astrological mystery [*al-sirr al-falakī*]

As the spheres are encircled over the dense inferior world, making manifest in it the divinely originated workmanship and the definitiveness of the divine power of predetermination, so the corporeal letters are like the earth in relation to the spiritual letters, except that all their provisioning from the spiritual letters is gathered together in the ‘earth’ of the corporeal letters, owing to the manifestation of the superior forces in the earthly sphere.

Thus it is the quality of the faculties of the human operator—the degree to which they are capable of receiving the influx from the luciform letters—that determines the efficacy of the corporeal letters. The human actor is the crucial medium of the operation, and his state of spiritual advancement will mitigate the operation’s efficacy. In the case of the two cryptogrammatic talismans with which al-Būnī follows this discussion (as well as one of the other talismans discussed in the following section), he stresses the necessity of fasting and ritual purity prior to making the talismans, in one case for a period of weeks. He also notes certain *dhikr* to be performed, and specifies an astrological timing to be observed: in one case, for example, on a Tuesday (the day, he says, on which the Prophet was born, was first called to prophecy, and died) when the moon is exalted (presumably when it is in Taurus, as per

classical astrology) and free of detriments.⁴⁵² In other words, the talisman is not presented as effective in and of itself, or as effective simply on the basis of the astrological timing of the operation, but rather its efficacy is dependent on the probity and purity of the practitioner whose person and faculties will mediate the influx from the luciform ‘letters’.

Al-Būnī’s instructions place demands on the reader-practitioner that, from a modern viewpoint, might be viewed as an unusual mix of competencies: a rudimentary knowledge of astrology as well as a proficiency in basic Sufi ritual practices, such as *dhikr* and supererogatory fasting. And yet it is unlikely that it would have been terribly unusual for al-Būnī’s readers to have been possessed of these. The knowledge of Sufi practices is a given for most of his early readers and astrological knowledge seems not to have been difficult to access in the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk cities, as suggested by Ibn Taymīyah and others’ polemics against street astrologers⁴⁵³ and the *muḥtasib* Ibn al-Ukhūwah’s (d. 729/1329) relatively tolerant advice on regulating the same.⁴⁵⁴ For al-Būnī and other Western Sufis the combination may have been quite normal. For example, we know from Ibn al-‘Arabī that Ibn Barraĵān was proficient in it, and he certainly was considered a model for emulation by many Western Sufis.

An equally important point to address is the notion that al-Būnī was somehow concealing ‘pagan’ astrology in Muslim clothes by subsuming the planets to the divine names and the signs of the

⁴⁵² BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 20b, ln. 17 ff. The cryptograms are both standard 4x4 mathematical ‘magic squares’, i.e. the numbers are serial (1-16) with the value of the sum of every row and column being identical (in this case 34). The first is with the numbers and the second with letters substituted according to *abjad* values:

14	11	8	1
7	2	13	12
9	16	3	6
4	5	10	15

يد	يا	ح	ا
ز	ب	ج	يب
ط	و	ج	و
د	ه	ي	يه

⁴⁵³ Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology: Annotated Translations of Three Fatwas,” in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, vol. 42 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 277–340.

⁴⁵⁴ Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *The Ma‘ālim al-qurba fi aḥkam al-ḥisba of Ḍiya’ al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Qurashī al-Shāfi‘ī, known as Ibu al-Ukhuwwa*, trans. Reuben Levy, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series., XII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 67–68, 182–184.

zodiac to the human faculties. While, as we will see in the next chapter, charges of this sort certainly were laid against al-Būnī by some of his Mamlūk-era critics, I would caution against the tendency of some modern researchers to accept such accusations—and indeed the entire modern scholarly trope of the ‘Islamicization of magic’—at face-value. Rather, I suggest that for al-Būnī and many of his readers, this framing of the relationship between the divine names and astrological forces would have been viewed as an initiated Muslim understanding of ‘vulgar’ astrology, a special recognition of the role of God in the continuous making of the world. Much the same can be said of the quasi-Neoplatonic elements in al-Būnī’s cosmological thought and other elements that some late-medieval Jamā’ī Sunnite scholars considered antithetical to orthodoxy. This is not to say that al-Būnī and participants in the reading communities in which his works circulated would have been unaware of these negative appraisals of the knowledge in which they trafficked. Indeed, as I have noted previously, I regard Ibn al-‘Arabī’s dicta against writing on these practices as evidence that their awareness of such attitudes was a real cause for discretion. Of course, the disapprobation of certain authorities could also have been a source of authority and legitimacy within certain circles. Indeed, any project of establishing an alternative religious elite requires a foil party—a role that, as we will see, some late-medieval scholars enthusiastically took up.

3.2.3 *Diagrams and talismans in Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*

In the diagrams from *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* discussed thus far—the triangle(s) and square of the four worlds and the Ptolemaic cosmograph with thirteen spheres—and the texts that accompany them one can follow an unfolding of the cosmos from the point of transition from non-existence to existence and thence into a system of ‘wheels within wheels’ that gives rise to the material world. However, these are among the work’s simplest of the numerous, complex diagrams, many of which are far more elaborate attempts to represent the architectonics of the hidden worlds, and some of which additionally are claimed to function talismanically when utilized properly. Although the use of diagrams in medieval

Arabic manuscripts is a topic the surface of which modern scholarship has barely scratched,⁴⁵⁵ there is reason to regard al-Būnī's efforts as quite experimental for his period. A recently published study of a fifth/eleventh-century Egyptian manuscript of a book of wonders, the anonymous *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-'uyūn*, contains an impressive array of astrological/astronomical diagrams, but nothing in it compares to the figuration of abstract concepts and non-physical realms that *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* contains.⁴⁵⁶ Somewhat more relevant is Marla Segol's recent study of Kabbalistic cosmological diagrams in late-medieval copies of *Sefer Yešira*, many of which originate in the Western Mediterranean and do contain some comparable attempts to map the hidden worlds; however, Segol notes that the use of such diagrams in Kabbalistic texts seems to have begun only in the late-seventh/thirteenth century. Though this is somewhat too late for al-Būnī, her observations regarding a sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth century turn toward "detailed visualization of the cosmos and the process of its creation" that began in *ekphrasis* but then expanded to include new modes of graphic representation, hint at possible avenues for future research.⁴⁵⁷ Another Western Mediterranean genre that could provide fruitful comparisons is the body of early texts (some might be considered forerunners) of the Latin *ars notoria* tradition, such as *De Philosophia Salomonis* or *Liber Lune*. Works such as these described and sometimes portrayed diagrams/talismans that were claimed to make various bodies of knowledge known to the operator when contemplated, sometimes through the cooperation of angels. These works in fact grew out an Arab-Islamic tradition of 'astral image magic' texts, of which Pseudo-Majrītī's *Ghāyāt al-ḥakīm* is only the most famous example; however, the works in this Arabic tradition, to the

⁴⁵⁵ An important study of great relevance to the topic to hand is Ahmet Karamustafa's 1992 article, "Cosmographical Diagrams," in *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward, The History of Cartography, Vol. 2, Bk. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). However, the diagrams he discusses are as often as not drawn from printed editions of medieval works, and in many cases are from manuscripts for which no date is given. Thus, while Karamustafa includes diagrams drawn from manuscript and/or printed copies of Jābirian works, *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, and various Ismā'īlite works discussed earlier in this chapter, the possibility is not raised that these diagrams could be—and I would guess in all likelihood are—additions from late in the history of these works rather than elements original to them.

⁴⁵⁶ Yossef Rapoport and Emilie Savage-Smith, eds., *An Eleventh-Century Egyptian Guide to the Universe: The Book of Curiosities*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, v. 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

⁴⁵⁷ Marla Segol, *Word and Image in Medieval Kabbalah: The Texts, Commentaries, and Diagrams of the Sefer Yetsirah*, The New Middle Ages (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4, 6–7.

best of my knowledge, only described the images that were to be used in operations and typically did not contain images themselves.⁴⁵⁸

As with so many other elements of al-Būnī's thought and writing, the closest parallels to his use of diagrams are found in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī, particularly in his *Kitāb inshāʾ al-dawāʾir al-ihāṭiyah ʿalā muḍāhat al-insān li-khāliq wa-khalāʾiq*, which contains a handful of diagrams tracing processes at work behind the veil of the apparent world.⁴⁵⁹ The work was written prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī's final emigration to the East, and he composed parts of it while he was resident at al-Mahdawī's retreat near Tunis. Thus, it is perhaps to al-Mahdawī and the milieu of turn-of-the-seventh/thirteenth century Ifrīqiyyah that we should look for developments in the use of diagrammatic figures for the transmission of metaphysical truths. Certainly some of al-Būnī's and Ibn al-ʿArabī's diagrams are similar in their basic visual components, and both authors adjure their readers to contemplate the images deeply, hinting—or in al-Būnī's case outright asserting—that doing so might be rewarded with visionary experience. However, there are significant differences as well, particularly in that Ibn al-ʿArabī often devotes more writing to describing and explaining his diagrams, but provides none of the practical ritual instructions for working with them that al-Būnī sometimes offers. And Ibn al-ʿArabī certainly does not state that any of the diagrams can also be rendered as talismans that will shape the material conditions of the adept's situation.

A full study of the figures in *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* unfortunately lies outside the scope of this project. In what follows I briefly examine just two figures from the latter part of the work, which is to say from

⁴⁵⁸ On these (proto-) *ars notoria* texts, see Stephen Clucas, “‘Non Est Legendum Sed Inspecendum Solum’: Inspectival Knowledge and the Visual Logic of John Dee’s *Liber Mysteriorum*,” *Emblems and Alchemy*, 1998, 109–32; Frank F. Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance*, The Magic in History Series (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 33–56. For more on the Arabic ‘astral image magic’ tradition, see David Pingree, “Between the *Ghāya* and *Picatrix*. I: The Spanish Version,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (January 1, 1981): 27–56; Charles Burnett, “Hermann of Carinthia and *Kitāb al-istamātis*: Further Evidence for the Transmission of Hermetic Magic,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981): 167–69.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-ʿArabī*, ed. H. S. Nyberg (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1919), 1–38 of the Arabic text; idem., “The Book of the Description of the Encompassing Circles,” in *Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi: A Commemorative Volume*, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan, trans. Paul Fenton and Maurice Gloton, vol. Shaftesbury: Element, for the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society, 1993 (Shaftesbury: Element, for the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society, 1993), 12–43.

the sections devoted to the individual letters. These should serve to give some idea of what makes these figures unique (or nearly so), and also offer further insights into the use of the work within esotericist reading communities.

3.2.3.1 The alif diagram

This primordial *alif* is a recurrent theme in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, particularly in a brief discussion of the letter *alif* that introduces one of the more striking diagrams in the work (see Figure 13). Al-Būnī offers only a minimal explanation of the figure, but promises that a deep understanding of it will yield great rewards:

الالف وهو اول مخلوق في الحروف ومعه ثلاثة آلاف ملك ومائة وثمانية املاك وجعل فيه مراتب العالم كله
 اجمعةً وهانا امثله لك في العلويات وكيف هو قائم بها وفي السفليات ايضاً [شكل] فهذا شكل الالف وكيف
 رتب الله تعالى فيه اجزاء العالم كله الطبيعي والديني والعلوي والسفلي والملكوتي والملكي فمن تحقق بما في
 ذاته الباطنة والظاهرة ارتقى إلى درجة الوارثين ومن تحقق بعوالمه الظاهرة والباطنة اخدم الله تعالى له
 الاكوان واخذ به كلامه وتلك نسبة نعم الجنة التي إليها نال الاولياء المقربين

The *alif*: It is the first of the letters to be created, and with it are 3,180 angels. He [scil. God] brought about in it all the levels of the cosmos in combination. Here I represent it to you [as it is] in the superior worlds and how it is established there, and in the inferior worlds as well. This is the figure [*shakl*] of the *alif* and of how God arranged in it all the parts of the cosmos, natural and religious, superior and inferior, of the Dominion and of the Kingdom. Whoever realizes what is in its hidden and apparent essence will ascend to the rank of the heirs [of the prophets]. And whoever realizes what is in its apparent and hidden worlds, God will make all beings to serve him and His speech will enjoin him. And that relationship [with God] is the bliss of the garden which he bestows upon the saints, the ones near to God.⁴⁶⁰

In the figure we see the primordial *alif* as encompassing the cosmos rather than being the seed of it, the two conceptualizations being entirely compatible in al-Būnī's way of thinking. The right side of the figure is the *alif* as the 'natural' (*tabī'i*) order of the cosmos, the thirteen 'spheres' (*aflāk*) comprising the intellect and spirit, the seven planets, and the four elements. The left side is the 'religious' (*dīnī*) order, divided into thirteen 'stations' (*s. maqām*) associated with various cult elements,

⁴⁶⁰ BnF MS arabe 2657, fol. 26^a, ln. 16-fol. 27^a, ln. 1. Note that the folia in BnF MS arabe 2658 that would have contained this diagram and text are missing, perhaps because someone intentionally removed the diagram.

such as fasting, prayer, ablutions, *et cetera*, relationships to the Qurʾān (‘recollection of the verses’, *tafakkur al-ayāt*; ‘contemplation of the book’, *tadabbur al-kitāb*), or elements of prophecy (*tablīgh*, *waḥy*). There is a striking similarity between these two orders of existence and al-Sijistānī’s aforementioned pairing of ‘*ālam al-waḍʿ*’ and ‘*ālam al-dīn*’. Al-Būnī’s promise that the full realization of this figure grants entry to the ranks of the ‘heirs of the prophets’ (*al-wārithūn*) and the ‘garden of the saints’ shows that the invisible college and its role in the world is very much on his mind with regard to this figure. Connections between the various ranks of the two sides obviously are implied, but are not explicated, in the text. It is for the aspirant to discover the relationships between, for example, the sphere of elemental heat (*falak al-ḥarārah*) and the station of the mandatory prayers (*al-ṣalāt al-mafrūdah*), or between the sun and contemplation of the Qurʾān. The aspirant will no doubt be aided by his *shaykh*, and by the web of correspondences that is woven throughout this and al-Būnī’s other works. However, the primordial *alif*/hiero-intellect, “the possessor of symbol, allusion, implication, and discernment,” is the faculty through which these connections ultimately will be drawn. This is just one of many examples where al-Būnī leaves elements of the diagrams entirely unexplained, which likely invited expansions on the topic of these figures in group readings of the text.

3.2.3.2 The *rāʾ* diagram

While the *alif* figure certainly promises great rewards for one who pierces its secrets, the text concerning it contains no explicit instructions for copying it in the form of a standalone talisman. The figure for the letter *rāʾ* is a different matter altogether (see Figure 14). Al-Būnī associates *rāʾ* closely with the *rūḥ* (no doubt because *rāʾ* is the first letter of that word), and associates both the letter and the spirit with the notions of God’s *raḥmah*, His ‘mercy’. Making much of the well-attested *ḥadīth qudsī* from Abū Hurayrah, “When God had finished the Creation, He wrote over His throne, ‘My mercy precedes My anger,’”⁴⁶¹ al-Būnī asserts that that inscription was the first words to flow from God’s pen, setting in

⁴⁶¹ As it appears in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s *Musnad* (no. 9633):

motion the processes of life as they reverberated through each of the worlds. He then displays a complex diagram that shows the descent of God’s mercy into the manifest world and notes its action in the human sphere, as well as those of animals and plants. Rather than delving into the complex textual content of the talisman itself, what I would emphasize here are the directions al-Būnī includes on how the reader can utilize this figure, as they demonstrate how the figures in *Latā’if al-ishārāt*, which often appear essentially informational, can pass quite fluidly into the realm of the talismanic:

من تأمل سرّ الرّاء وكيف ربّ الله وضعها في العالم اللّوحي شاهد عجائب مصنوعات الله تعالى وعبر على سرّ الروح وكيف قامت بالأمر لسرّ التحكيم واستدارت فلماً محيطاً بأجزاء العالم علوية وسفلية فمن كتبها في رقّ بعد صوم ثمانية أيام وطهارة وذكر وإخلاص ويكتب معها ﴿رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً﴾ وكلّ آية في القرآن فيما ربّنا وهذا الشكل والصورة وعلى الصورة الآيات دائرةً بها حامل هذه المكتوبة لا يحدث الله في باطنه خوف الفقر ويبسر الله عليه الأسباب الحسنيّة ويظهر في باطنه الرّافة والرّحمة

He who meditates upon the secret of *rā’* and how God disposed its inscription (*waqḍ*) in the tablet-world will witness the marvels of the handiworks of God (Most High) and discover the secret of the spirit, of how it was established in accordance with the divine command by the secret of regulation and took the form of a sphere encompassing all the superior and inferior parts of the cosmos. He who writes it [*scil. rā’*] on a parchment after eight days of fasting, [maintaining] cleanliness, *dhikr*, and [maintaining the state of] sincerity, writing with it ‘Our Lord [*rabbunā*], give us good in this world and good in the hereafter⁴⁶² and every verse in the Qur’ān in which [the phrase] ‘Our Lord’ [occurs], as well as this figure and image, with the verses [written] above the image in a circle around it. One who carries this inscription, God will not inflict the dread of poverty within him, and God will ease the sensory constraints [*al-asbāb al-ḥisīyah*] for him and make clemency and mercy manifest in his interior.⁴⁶³

In the discussion above regarding al-Būnī’s mythopoeic account of the intellect, spirit, and soul, I observed that the tale seemed intended to resonate with Sufi practices of disciplining the body and soul. Similarly, note the integration here of cosmological symbolism into the ritual practice, where the inscription of the figure and the Qur’ānic verses imitates the spirit as the divine pen inscribing God’s

حدثنا وكيع، عن سفيان، عن الأعمش، عن أبي صالح، عن أبي هريرة، قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لما فرغ الله من الخلق كتب على عرشه رحمتي سبقت غضبي.

⁴⁶² Q 2:201

⁴⁶³ BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 52^b, immediately beneath the figure-fol. 53^a, ln. 7.

mercy on the tablet of the world. This is to say that practitioner, in writing the talisman, enacts the *rūḥ/qalam*'s part in the creation, his body-as-microcosm representing the cosmic whole. Again, the practice translates al-Būnī's thought from the realm of intellection into that of embodied realization and initiatic experience.

3.2.3.3 *Talismans in practice*

A host of questions remains about how these complex figures were presented during the audition of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* or at other gatherings in which the work was taught. Was a copy of the book passed around, or held up for all to see? Was the figure reproduced somehow outside the book, drawn on the wall or floor? And in contemplating these figures in search of visionary experience, were practitioners to use the copy of the image in the book, produce a new one outside of it, or perhaps inscribe it 'imaginally' in their mind's eye? Al-Būnī is not explicit on these points, though they presumably were addressed in the face-to-face teaching of the book.

It is impossible to assess if or how often the Sufis reading al-Būnī put the talismanic operations from *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* into practice, but it can safely be assumed that it happened at least occasionally, and possibly quite often. To follow his instructions to the letter would not have been a simple undertaking: the phrase "Our Lord" appears in the Qur'ān 117 times, such that making the talisman would probably consume at least a day's time, and this after eight days of fasting and general withdrawal from daily life. Despite such hardships, this figure promises precisely the sort of super-charged path to spiritual attainment that was central to the appeal of al-Būnī's praxis. As with the quasi-astrological practice discussed above, it can be assumed that certain religious authorities would have denounced these practices as reprehensible. However, as Chamberlain has noted, unusual, even transgressive expressions of religiosity were not without appeal in late-medieval culture,⁴⁶⁴ and the secrecy and/or controversy surrounding some of the practices al-Būnī prescribes would have increased their appeal for a certain Sufi practitioners their devotees, all the more so when bolstered by al-Būnī's

⁴⁶⁴ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 130–133.

rhetoric of an esoteric tradition that was passed down from the prophets and saints and beyond the narrow understanding of the ‘vulgar’.

3.3 Notes on al-Būnī’s education and Sufi training

I turn now to a discussion of al-Būnī’s education and Sufi training, which is to say a closer examination of the specific line(s) of instruction and initiation that informed his teachings. I do this in the interest of what new details can be adduced in the still underexplored history of Western Sufism, particularly with respect to the science of letters and names, but also in consideration of the questions that run throughout this chapter of how participants in esotericist reading communities received his texts. The evaluation of a given figure’s ‘genealogies’—familial, intellectual, spiritual, *et cetera*—was an important aspect of how medieval Muslims evaluated other actors, particularly newcomers to a location. The evaluation of his initiatic lineage would have been of concern to Sufi readers, given the importance of the charismatic authority of the author/*shaykh* as discussed earlier. Thus, better understandings of al-Būnī’s Sufi lineage and of how this lineage was perceived in his adopted homeland are of great utility in understanding the reception of his works. Relatedly, the considerations of al-Būnī’s background in what follows also serve as a bridge into the topics of the next chapter, insofar as they provide an important window onto late-Mamlūk-era perceptions of al-Būnī and his origins.

I begin with an examination of al-Būnī’s statements regarding his relationship to his and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teacher ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawī and an inquiry into the possibility that al-Mahdawī and his master Abū Madyan were sources for al-Būnī’s lettrism. I then move on to two ninth/fifteenth-century sources on al-Būnī’s background. The first is his enthusiastic reader and commentator, the Sufi, occultist, and court intellectual ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, who claims to trace a line of transmission to al-Būnī and then from al-Būnī back to the Prophet. The second is the master historian of medieval Cairo, Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, who penned what may be the earliest *tarjamah* of al-Būnī. Though I consider the latter two sources, particularly al-Maqrīzī’s, to be largely unreliable with regard to the

actual facts of al-Būnī's life, they are valuable nonetheless with regard to the later memory of al-Būnī.

3.3.1 *Al-Būnī and al-Mahdawī*

Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Abī Bakr al-Mahdawī, a native of the old Fāṭimid fortress-town of al-Mahdiyyah, came in his maturity to be a leading Sufi *shaykh* in Tunis and its environs. He is best known to modern scholarship from the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī,⁴⁶⁵ as well as from a *tarjamah* in Ibn al-Qunfudh's (d. 810/1407) *Uns al-faqīr wa-‘izz al-ḥaqīr*⁴⁶⁶ and brief mentions in other sources.⁴⁶⁷ He was a disciple of the eminent Maghribī *shaykh* Abū Madyan (Shu‘ayb b. al-Ḥusayn al-Andalusī, d. betw. 588/1192 and 594/1198⁴⁶⁸), a native of Seville who had migrated to Fez to study with the masters there before eventually settling in Bougie (Bijāyah), and who himself was a disciple of such major *shaykhs* of that era as the Ghazālian Ibn Ḥirzihim of Fez (d. 559/1164) and the unlettered Berber saint Abū Ya‘azzā (d. 572/1177).⁴⁶⁹ Pablo Beneito and Stephen Hirtenstein note that al-Mahdawī and Abū Madyan are said

⁴⁶⁵ Ibn al-‘Arabī's main statements on al-Mahdawī are in the introductions to his works *Ruḥ al-Quds*, *Mashāhid al-asrār*, and *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*. For discussions and translations of these see Elmore, “Shaykh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Al-Mahdawī.”

⁴⁶⁶ Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn Ibn Qunfudh, *Uns al-faqīr wa-‘izz al-ḥaqīr*, ed. Abī Sahl Najāḥ ‘Awaḍ Siyām and ‘Alī Jum‘ah (Cairo: Dar al-Muqattam, 2002), 142–144.

⁴⁶⁷ Such as Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr, *La risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Zāfir*, discussed below. See also the brief excerpt from a work by ‘Alī b. ‘Umar al-Hawwārī—a disciple of Abū Sa‘īd al-Bājī (d. 664/1265–66), another student of al-Mahdawī's—in Muḥammad al-Bahlī al-Nayyāl, *al-Ḥaqīqah al-tārīkhīyah lil-taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* (Tunis: Maktabat al-Najāḥ, 1965), 218.

⁴⁶⁸ Regarding debates over Abū Madyan's *obit* see Najib Heravi, *Encyclopedia Islamica*, s.v. “Abū Madyan”; Addas, “Abu Madyan and Ibn ‘Arabi,” 166 ff.. Cf. Gerald Elmore, “Ibn Al-Arabi's ‘Cinquain’ (*Taḥmīs*) on a Poem by Abu Madyan,” *Arabica* 46 (1999): 70–71.

⁴⁶⁹ Whether or not this journey to Mecca took place has important implications for another aspect of Abū Madyan's biography: his alleged relationship with the famous Baghdad Sufi master ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 563/1166). Cornell notes that it “has been taken as an undisputed fact since at least the tenth/sixteenth century” that Abū Madyan studied under al-Jīlānī after meeting him while on the *ḥajj*. However, Cornell calls this seriously into question, noting that neither of Abū Madyan's two earliest biographers, al-Tādīlī and Ibn Qunfudh, make any mention of this meeting, or even of his having traveled further east than Ifrīqiyah. In additional support of the argument against the Abū Madyan/al-Jīlānī meeting, he notes that what would seem to be Abū Madyan's account of his own initiatic chain reaches the Prophet through Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘A‘īshah, with no mention of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. While such a chain would be “not unexpected for a scholar raised in an Andalusian intellectual environment that had been heavily influenced by centuries of anti-‘Alid propaganda,” Cornell argues, it “would seem out of the question for a true follower of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, who was a proud descendant of ‘Alī [...]”; Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 10–11.

to first have met in Tunis in 570/1175 while the latter was en route to Mecca,⁴⁷⁰ though it is unclear if this eastward expedition actually took place.⁴⁷¹ As we will see below, al-Būnī offers a distinct though not necessarily incompatible account of how al-Mahdawī and Abū Madyan met. It is certain that al-Mahdawī at some point relocated to Bougie to “complete his [Sufi] training”⁴⁷² (*yakmilu tarbiyatahu*) under Abū Madyan. He eventually returned eastward to Tunis, taking up residence in the old Carthage lighthouse at Jabal al-Manārah (lighthouse hill) in the bayside village a few miles east of Tunis now known as La Marsa.⁴⁷³ He is known to have maintained contact with Abū Madyan and his followers after settling there, and to have cultivated relationships with Alexandrian Sufis, and probably with Andalusian ones as well. According to the Egyptian Sufi biographer Ṣafī al-Dīn b. Abī al-Manṣūr Ibn Zāfir, he visited Alexandria on at least one occasion,⁴⁷⁴ and Beneito and Hirtenstein note that he thus “acted as a kind of Madyanite link between West and East.”⁴⁷⁵ He died in La Marsa in 621/1224, perhaps only a year or so before al-Būnī, and was buried there alongside other locally-prominent Sufis.

It was at this retreat near Tunis that Ibn al-‘Arabī studied under al-Mahdawī, doing so initially, he claimed, at the urgings of God and a mysterious message from the Iberian saint Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Ashraf al-Rundī.⁴⁷⁶ As Claude Addas points out, word of al-Mahdawī’s spiritual prowess had

⁴⁷⁰ Pablo Beneito, Stephen Hirtenstein, and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawī, “The Prayer of Blessing by ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz Al-Mahdawī,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 34 (2003): 3.

⁴⁷¹ Vincent Cornell has noted that neither Abū Madyan’s writings nor those of his earliest biographer, Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf al-Tādilī (d. 627/1229-30), mention a trip to Mecca, though Ibn Qunfudh does mention an eastward journey that was aborted at some point in Ifrīqiyyah, after which Abū Madyan took up residence in Bougie; Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 10–11; Ibn Qunfudh, *Uns al-faqīr*, 50.

⁴⁷² Ibn Qunfudh, *Uns al-faqīr*, 143.

⁴⁷³ Beneito, Hirtenstein, and al-Mahdawī, “The Prayer of Blessing,” 4–5.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr, *La risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Zāfir*, 168 (102a in the foliation of the Arabic text); cf. Elmore, “Shaykh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Al-Mahdawī,” 602; Beneito, Hirtenstein, and al-Mahdawī, “The Prayer of Blessing,” 6.

⁴⁷⁵ Beneito, Hirtenstein, and al-Mahdawī, “The Prayer of Blessing,” 6.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Sufis of Andalusia: the Rūḥ al-quds and al-Durrat al-fākhīrah of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. R.W.J. Austin (London: Routledge, 2008), 118; cf. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 113.

no doubt reached Ibn al-‘Arabī in al-Andalus by more mundane means as well.⁴⁷⁷ He resided at al-Mahdawī’s school (*dār tadrīsihi*) twice for periods of several months: once in 590/1194, and again in 597-98/1201-2, the second visit “constitut[ing] the terminus of the first leg of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s fateful pilgrimage-trek to Mecca, from which he was never to return to his homeland,” in Gerald Elmore’s words.⁴⁷⁸ As Addas has discussed, Ibn al-‘Arabī reports that his first visit to Tunis was marked by momentous mystical realizations, events that brought about the onset of his “spiritual maturity.”⁴⁷⁹ Some of the credit for these no doubt belongs to al-Mahdawī. Indeed, Elmore notes that *al-shaykh al-akbar* praised al-Mahdawī highly for “his magisterial discretion in translating the more indigestible esoteric knowledge of the Secrets of Unveiling into a pedagogical pabulum suitable to the capacities of the uninitiated.”⁴⁸⁰ Most strikingly, al-Mahdawī is the *shaykh* to whom Ibn al-‘Arabī dedicated his great work, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*.

It presumably was in Tunis that al-Būnī also studied under al-Mahdawī, though he unfortunately provides no dates for his time there that might indicate if he and Ibn al-‘Arabī crossed paths there. As I have noted previously, there are no positive indications that the two ever met or even were aware of one another. Al-Būnī identifies al-Mahdawī as having been his *shaykh* in ‘*Alam al-hudá*, his work on the names of God and the ‘adoption of the divine nature’ (*takhalluq*) by means of the contemplation and invocation of the names in supererogatory spiritual exercises.⁴⁸¹ As discussed in the previous chapter, this work was composed in 621/1224, which also was the year of al-Mahdawī’s death. Could this have been the motivation for mentioning him in the text? His name is always followed in the text by honorifics typically reserved for the dead, but these could have been added by later copyists.

⁴⁷⁷ Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 114.

⁴⁷⁸ Elmore, “Shaykh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Al-Mahdawī,” 593–594.

⁴⁷⁹ Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 116–120.

⁴⁸⁰ Elmore, “Shaykh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Al-Mahdawī,” 595.

⁴⁸¹ Regarding *takhalluq* as “the adoption of the divine nature” (or *theomimeosis*), see *Ibid.*, 609.

The initial mention of al-Mahdawī is in the chapter on God’s name al-Barr (‘the Good’, ‘the Beneficent’),⁴⁸² a name that describes a protective and nurturing God, and it arises in the context of a discussion of the necessity of a Sufi aspirant’s absolute obedience to his *shaykh*, a lesson al-Būnī obviously wished his disciples and readers to observe. The first part of the discussion of al-Barr addresses God’s goodness in protecting His believers from their own base compulsions and the influences of evil beings (*shayāṭīn*), in furnishing humans with prophetic revelations through which they can know God’s laws, and in permitting them the pleasures of paradise. Al-Būnī makes much of the relationship between *barr* and *birr* (‘reverence’, the latter being etymologically linked to *barr*, and the two words being graphically identical unless vocalized). He discusses *barr* as the kindness and protection afforded by God or by human actors, such as one’s parents or *shaykh*, and *birr* as the reverence and obedience an individual owes to their protectors, human or divine.

As with most chapters in *‘Alam al-hudá*, the chapter on al-Barr includes a section with the heading “drawing closer to God by means of this name” (*al-taqarrub ilá Allāh ta‘ālá bi-hādhā al-ism*), and it is in this section that al-Būnī first reveals his relationship with al-Mahdawī. He emphasizes that reverence toward one’s *shaykh*—the teacher one follows on the path to God—is of even greater importance than reverence toward one’s parents, as the latter are the guarantors only of one’s presence on earth, while the *shaykh* is the key to one’s remaining in a condition of grace (*fī al-na‘īm*).⁴⁸³ It is in regard to the necessity of divulging to one’s *shaykh* every thought or action that comes to mind, no matter how insignificant or illicit it may seem,⁴⁸⁴ that al-Mahdawī’s name arises:

⁴⁸² Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 178^a, ln. 9-fol. 180^b, ln. 3.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., fol. 179^b, lns. 13-15.

واعلم ان برك بالشيخ الذي تقتدي به إلى الله تعالى أعظم براً منك بوالديك فهذا سبب بقايتك في التعميم وابواك سبب بقايتك في التراب

⁴⁸⁴ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 179^b, lns. 15-17.

فعليك يا اخي بتر الحواطر بين يدي الشيخ الاستاذ وإياك ان تحقر فعلاً يخطر لك إلا ان تلقية للشيخ طاعة كان او معصية على ابي نوع برز لك

ولقد رأيت تلميذاً من اصحاب شيخنا الإمام تاج العارفين ابي محمد عبد العزيز بن ابي بكر القرشي المهدي
 رحمه الله وكنت جالسا عند فدخل عليه وفي يده باقلآة فقال له يا سيدي إني وجدت هذه البقلآة فما
 اصنع بها فقال له اتركها حتى تفطر عليها فقلت له يا سيدي حتى البقلآة يعلم بها فقال لي يا ولدي لو خالفني
 في سخطه من خطراته لم يفلح أبدا

Verily, I saw a disciple from among the followers of our *shaykh*, the learned crown of the gnostics Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Abī Bakr al-Qurashī al-Mahdawī (may God have mercy on him) who, while I was sitting with him [*scil.* al-Mahdawī], entered with a bean [or herb] in his hand. He [*scil.* the disciple] said to him [*scil.* al-Mahdawī], ‘O master, I found this bean, what shall I make of it?’ He [*scil.* al-Mahdawī] said to him, ‘Get rid of it until [or lest] you break your fast with it.’ I said to him [*scil.* al-Mahdawī], ‘O master, you teach even by means of this bean.’ He said to me, ‘O my son, if he contradicts me in his thoughts, even for a moment, then he will never succeed’.⁴⁸⁵

The anecdote’s didactic message of emphasizing the importance of absolute obedience to one’s *shaykh* is clear from the context, but the telling also suggests some important things about al-Būnī’s view of, and relationship to, al-Mahdawī. His description of the *shaykh* as “the crown of the gnostics” (*tāj al-‘arīfīn*) should not be taken lightly. The term ‘*arīf*, ‘gnostic’, holds an important place in al-Būnī’s writings, and he uses it systematically throughout his short work *Hidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilīn* in delineating three broad ranks of Sufis: the *sālikūn* (seekers) who are initiates of the lowest rank; the *murīdūn* (adherents) as adepts of the intermediate rank; and the ‘*arīfūn* (gnostics) being the most accomplished masters.⁴⁸⁶ That his relationship with al-Mahdawī was one of disciple and master is clear from the ways the two men address each other: al-Būnī calls al-Mahdawī *sayyidī* (or *sīdī*), ‘my master’, and al-Mahdawī addresses al-Būnī as *waladī*, ‘my son’. Finally, that this anecdote is the only place where al-Būnī identifies another figure as having been his master (though see below regarding his brief mention of Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Tajībī), and that it appears in the context of a discussion of the importance of the master-disciple relationship, suggests that this relationship was one he considered to be of prime importance, and one of which he wanted his readers to be aware.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 179^b, ln. 18-fol. 180^a, ln. 2.

⁴⁸⁶ Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160.1 (HQ), fol. 4^a, ln. 3 and *passim*.

Al-Mahdawī is mentioned at one other point in *‘Alam al-hudá*—and nowhere else in al-Būnī’s core works—in an anecdote that further amplifies the importance of the master-disciple relationship. This occurs quite near the end of the final chapter of the work on God’s name *al-Tawwāb* (‘the Acceptor of Repentance’). It is part of a discussion of the special form of *tawbah* (‘repentance’) required of the Sufi aspirant, one that entails constant vigilance against one’s base urges and worldly temptations, and is a basic prerequisite for undertaking more advanced spiritual exercises. Al-Būnī asserts that the novice on his own is incapable of overcoming the deceptions of his corrupt soul (*khud’āt al-nafs*) and the tricks of the devil (*makāyid al-shayṭān*), and that his efforts at repentance will only strengthen their hold over him unless he undertakes these efforts under the guidance of an accomplished adept-instructor (*imām nāṣih ‘ālim ‘āmil muḥaqqiq*).⁴⁸⁷ The necessity of seeking out a master who will be a ‘support’ (*mu’tamad*) in undertaking *tawbah*, and who will “guide you on the method of the path, or guide you to someone who will guide you”⁴⁸⁸ is then illustrated with what is presented as al-Mahdawī’s account of the events that led him to become a disciple of Abū Madyan.⁴⁸⁹ Al-Būnī presents the anecdote—in which al-Mahdawī experiences a ‘spiritual occurrence’ (*wārid*) that only Abū Madyan can explain—as a narration that he took from al-Mahdawī himself. He then holds up al-Mahdawī as an exemplar of the practice of *tawbah*, for overcoming his fear to seek out Abū Madyan:

كما حدثنا الإمام أبو محمد عبد العزيز المهدي رضي الله عنه قال ورد عليّ وارد في الصلوة الظهر فلما فرغت من صلاتي وكنت عند بعض مشايخي تقدّمت إليه وذكرت له ذلك ما ورد عليّ فقال لي لا علم لي بما ورد عليك ولا أعرف لك من يفصح لك عن حقيقة ذلك إلا الشيخ أبا مدين رحمه الله تعالى فقلت له وأين موضعه فقال بالمغرب قال فوادعت الشيخ وخرجت وصليت العصر في الطريق فقال قائل للشيخ أبي

⁴⁸⁷ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 238^a, lns. 16-19.

ولا يدخل الرياضة إلا بعد تصحيح التوبة ولا تصحّ التوبة إلا على يد إمام ناصح عالم عامل محقق لأن الشيطان والتنفس يكون لها استيلاء على العبد قبل التوبة بضعف واحد فإذا تاب العبد ورجع إلى الله تعالى تضاعفت إليه من خدعات التنفس ومكايد الشيطان سبعون ضعفاً

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., fol. 238b, lns. 4-5.

والمعتمد في ذلك على الإمام الناصح العالم بالله تعالى فهو يرشدك على نهج الطريق أو يرشدك إلى من يرشدك

⁴⁸⁹ For an alternate telling of how this occurred, though from a modern scholar whose source is unnamed, see al-Nayyāl, *al-Ḥaḥiqah al-tārikhiyah lil-taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*, 206.

محمد عبد العزيز رحمه الله وما هذه العجلة في الخروج قال خشيت أن يدركني الموت وأنا بغير إمام أهتدي به قال فوصلت إلى الشيخ أبي مدين رحمه الله فعرضت عليه واردي فأفصح لي عنه فأبلغ ما كان فانظر يا أخي إصاف ذلك الشيخ وحقيقته وعدم الدعوى وانظر أيضاً اجتهاد ذلك الشيخ رحمه الله تعالى كيف بادر الأوقات خيفةً لئلا يبقا وقتاً دون إمام وأنه لو مات في الطريق مات وله إمام بالاعتقاد ويتم الله مقامه لأنه تعالى ضمن ذلك في قوله الحق ﴿وَمَنْ يَخْرُجْ مِنْ بَيْتِهِ مُهَاجِرًا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ﴾ والآية فهؤلاء الذين لما حققوا مقام التوبة وشرائطها سهل الله عليهم السلوك في المقامات وملكهم مقاليد الكرامات وأنطق ألسنتهم بالحكمة الإلهية والفتوح الربانية والتوبة هي رجوعك منه إليه وتوبته عليك أن يأخذك عنك وهذه توبة الخواص

As related to me by the *imām* Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawī (may God be pleased with him), he said: ‘There came upon me a spiritual occurrence [*wārid*] during the noontime prayer, and when I had finished my prayer and was with one of my *shaykhs*, I approached him and mentioned to him that which had come upon me. He said to me, I have no knowledge of that which came upon you, and I can commend to you no-one to clarify for you the truth of it except the *shaykh* Abū Madyan (may God have mercy on him). I asked him, Where is he located? He said, In the Maghrib. So I said farewell to the *shaykh* and departed, and I prayed the afternoon prayer on the road’. Someone asked the *shaykh* Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (may God have mercy on him), ‘Why such haste in departing?’ And he [*scil.* al-Mahdawī] said, ‘I was afraid death would overtake me while I had no *imām* whose example I followed’. And he [*scil.* al-Mahdawī] said, ‘I reached the *shaykh* Abū Madyan (may God have mercy on him). I described to him my occurrence, and he clarified it for me and conveyed what it had been’. O my brother, see the equanimity of that *shaykh* [*scil.* al-Mahdawī], his truthfulness and lack of pretense. And see also the determination of that *shaykh* (may God the Highest have mercy on him), how he hurried out of fear, lest he remain for a time without an *imām*. Though even if he had died on the road he would have died with an *imām*, on the basis of his firm commitment. For God made perfect his station because He (the Highest) vouchsafed that in his speech: ‘And whoever leaves his home as an emigrant to Allāh and His messenger’ (and the rest of the verse).⁴⁹⁰ For these people, once they have realized the station of repentance and its conditions, God makes easy for them the way to the [other] stations, puts in their possession the keys to marvels [*karāmāt*], and makes them to speak through divine wisdom and lordly revelations [*futūḥ*]. Repentance is your return from Him, to Him. And His forgiveness of you is a withholding of you from your [lower] self. This is the repentance of the elect.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ Q 4:100, “And whoever emigrates for the cause of Allah will find on the earth many locations and abundance. And whoever leaves his home as an emigrant to Allah and His Messenger and then death overtakes him - his reward has already become incumbent upon Allah. And Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful.” Note the implication that al-Mahdawī invoked this verse, and the reward it promises, by imitating its language in describing his fear that “death would overtake” him on the road.

﴿وَمَنْ يَهَاجِرْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يَجِدْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُرَاعًا كَثِيرًا وَسَعَةً وَمَنْ يَخْرُجْ مِنْ بَيْتِهِ مُهَاجِرًا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ يُدْرِكُهُ الْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا﴾

⁴⁹¹ Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 238^b, lns. 5-20.

In again invoking al-Mahdawī's name in a discussion of the master-disciple relationship, al-Būnī clearly is re-emphasizing the closeness and importance of his relationship with al-Mahdawī, a point further driven home with this account—narrated from al-Mahdawī himself—of the events that led al-Mahdawī to the door of Abū Madyan and to their master-disciple relationship. Thus, beyond their didactic utility, these anecdotes serve to establish and affirm al-Būnī's position in an initiatic chain that included some of the best-known figures of Western Sufism. This would have been of great import in establishing his authority among Sufi actors/readers in Egypt who were inclined toward Western masters.

3.3.1.1 *Al-Mahdawī and lettrism*

What aspects of al-Būnī's teachings can be attributed to al-Mahdawī? It must be said that details of al-Mahdawī's teachings are difficult to discern due to the meager amount of surviving written materials attributed to him.⁴⁹² We know from Ibn Qunfudh's biography of him, as well as from some of Ibn al-'Arabī's comments, that al-Mahdawī placed great stock in intensive feats of supererogatory fasting, a practice with which Abū Madyan and Abū Ya'azzá also are closely associated,⁴⁹³ and al-Būnī also frequently prescribes fasting toward various ends.⁴⁹⁴ The notion of *takhalluq* that al-Būnī addresses

⁴⁹² Somewhat bizarrely, Ibn Qunfudh declares al-Mahdawī to have been *ummī*—a word often taken to mean 'illiterate'—but in the same breath mentions his beautiful writings and poems:

وكان عبد العزيز أمياً وله الكتابة الحسنة والشعر الفائق

Given the ambiguity of the term *ummī*, an inability to write might not preclude his having had great facility with Arabic, and his compositions of course could have been dictated to a scribe. What is more, as Eric Geoffrey has argued, in late-medieval Sufi discourses *ummī* sometimes was used to denote those who receive knowledge directly from God through inspiration (*ilhām*), rather than an inability to read or write, in which case the designation would only confirm al-Mahdawī's credentials within al-Būnī's conception of the greatest teachers being those directly communicated to by God, which is to say the *muḥaddathūn*, as discussed in the previous chapter. Ibn Qunfudh, *Uns al-faqīr*, 143; Elmore, "Shaykh 'Abd Al-'Azīz Al-Mahdawī," 605; E. Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Egypte et en Syrie sous les derniers mamelouks et les premiers ottomans. Orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturels* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1996), 299–307.

⁴⁹³ Regarding al-Mahdawī and fasting, see Ibn Qunfudh, *Uns al-faqīr*, 142–143. Regarding Abū Ya'ázá and Abū Madyan, see Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 8–9, 29–30.

⁴⁹⁴ E.g. BnF MS arabe 2658 (LI), fol. 76^a, ln 6.

throughout *‘Alam al-hudá*, and that Ibn al-‘Arabī also embraced, is strongly associated with Abū Madyan as well, and thus may have been passed down to al-Būnī via al-Mahdawī.

But what of al-Mahdawī and lettrism? Was this tutor of the great lettrists al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī himself versed in the science? The only clues come from the single complete text attributed to al-Mahdawī known to have survived: a prayer in praise of the prophet Muḥammad—or rather, as Elmore observes, in praise of the ‘Muḥammadan Reality’ (*al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadīyah*)⁴⁹⁵—entitled *Ṣalāt al-mubārakah*, and which contains what can be characterized as lettrist elements. Edited in 2003 by Beneito and Hirtenstein, the text is known to survive only in two relatively late manuscripts.⁴⁹⁶ Elmore has cast doubt on its ascription to al-Mahdawī on the charge that it is too “sophomoric” to have been penned by someone whom Ibn al-‘Arabī so revered, and also because it mirrors Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thinking too clearly,⁴⁹⁷ such that Elmore suspects that it likely was fathered on al-Mahdawī by later devotees of *al-shaykh al-akbar*. Beneito and Hirtenstein, however, express no such qualms as to its authorship, and indeed regard *Ṣalāt al-mubārakah* as a composition “of great power and beauty” similar in important respects to other, more famous prayers in praise of Muḥammad by Sufis of this period, such as the *Ṣalāh* of ‘Abd al-Salām b. Mashīsh (d. 625/1227) and Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd al-Būṣīrī’s (d. betw. 694/1294 and 696/1297) *al-Burdah*.

The prayer is in twenty-four parts of varying lengths, each with a distinct theme, and Beneito and Hirtenstein argue convincingly that the prayer as a whole is in two distinct halves, the first twelve parts “emphasising the interior Reality of Muḥammad,” and the second twelve dwelling on “more outward aspects of qualities and descriptions” of the Prophet. Of the first half they note: “This interior

⁴⁹⁵ Elmore, “Shaykh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Al-Mahdawī,” 607.

⁴⁹⁶ These are Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Petermann II.65/Ahlwardt 3645.4, fol. 122a-124a; the codex is a compilation made by one Abū Abd ‘Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dimashqī Ibn ‘Arrāq (d. 933/1526), a disciple of the noted Akbarian *shaykh* ‘Alī b. Maymūn al-Fāsī (d. 917/1511). And Tunis MS Aḥmadīyah 3832, fols. 212b-214a, copied 1242/1827. Cf. Beneito and Hirtenstein’s discussion of the manuscripts, “The Prayer of Blessing,” 16–17. I have not seen these MSS, and have relied on their edition in what follows.

⁴⁹⁷ Elmore, “Shaykh ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Al-Mahdawī,” 609.

dimension is expressed in the esoteric tradition in terms of the letters of the alphabet, since letters are the constituent elements of words and hence the basis of expressing meanings.”⁴⁹⁸ Six of the first twelve parts indeed deal explicitly with the letters (parts four, six, eight, nine, ten, and twelve). Two examples—the fourth and sixth parts—will suffice to demonstrate the technique by which meanings are derived from the letters. The fourth addresses the *fawātiḥ al-suwar* from the opening of the nineteenth *sūrah* (Maryam), *kāf-hā'-yā'-'ayn-ṣād*. The letters here serve as allusions to the divine qualities by which God prepared the way for His prophets, a theme consonant with those of both the *sūrah* and the prayer. The sixth addresses the letters of the Prophet’s name:

(٤) اللهم صلّ على كاف كفايتك وهاء هدايتك وياء يمنك وعين عصمتك وصاد صراطك ﴿صِرَاطَ اللَّهِ الَّذِي
 لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَلَا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَصِيرُ الْأُمُورُ﴾ ﴿صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ
 عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ﴾
 [...]
 (٦) اللهم صلّ على ميم ملكك وحاء حكمتك وميم ملكوتك ودال ديموميتك صلاة تستغرق العدّ وتحيط
 بالحدّ

(4) O God, bless of the *kāf* of Your Satisfying Sufficiency (*kifāyah*), upon the *hā'* of Your Infallible Guidance (*hidāyah*), upon the *yā'* of Your Benevolent Bestowal (*yumn*), upon the *'ayn* of Your Protective Safeguarding (*'iṣmah*), and upon the *ṣād* of Your Path (*ṣirāṭ*), ‘the Path of God to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and upon the earth. Is it not to God that everything returns?’⁴⁹⁹; indeed it is ‘the Path of those to whom You have granted Your Favor, not of those who have incurred anger or those who have gone astray.’^{500 501}
 [...]

(6) Oh God, bless the *mīm* of Your Kingdom, the *ḥā'* of Your Ruling Wisdom, the *mīm* of Your Kingship, and the *dāl* of Your Everlasting Permanence, in a blessing that submerges [all] enumeration, and that encompasses [every] limitation.⁵⁰²

As is quite apparent, an alliterative/acronymic hermeneutic technique is the most prominent, which is to say that each letter in question is regarded as an allusion (*ishārah*) to a word beginning with

⁴⁹⁸ Beneito, Hirtenstein, and al-Mahdawī, “The Prayer of Blessing,” 13.

⁴⁹⁹ Q 42:53

⁵⁰⁰ Q 1:7

⁵⁰¹ Beneito and Hirtenstein’s translation, “The Prayer of Blessing,” 21–22.

⁵⁰² Beneito and Hirtenstein’s translation, *Ibid.*, 23.

that letter. As discussed earlier, this was a common way of attributing meaning to the letters in earlier Sufi discourses. Indeed, some of the associations proffered in the al-Mahdawī prayer, such as *daymūmiyah* for *dāl* and *mulk* for *mīm*, are also found in al-Sulamī’s text on the letters.⁵⁰³ As we have seen earlier in this chapter, al-Būnī also sometimes makes frequent recourse to this technique, as with *rahmah* for *rā’*, though typically in combination with other, more radical means of assigning meanings to the letters. Beyond these obvious features, Beneito and Hirtenstein argue that there exist various encodings of *abjad* numerology in the content and structure of the prayer. For example, regarding the prayer’s sixth part, they note that the letters of ‘Muḥammad’ can be calculated to equal six (*mīm*=40, *ḥā*=8, *mīm*=40, *mīm*=40, *dāl*=4; 40+8+40+40+4 = 132; 1+3+2 = 6), with six being the value of the letter *wāw*, the “symbol of the Perfect Human Being, thus Muhammad.”⁵⁰⁴ In the absence of interpretive commentaries on the prayer from the period, such readings as Beneito and Hirtenstein offer are of course suppositional, but they are almost certainly valid at least to some degree. As they state, attention to such “letter and number symbolism [was] viewed as an important mode of contemplation within the esoteric tradition;”⁵⁰⁵ indeed, such interpretive exercises often were performed on better-known prayer-texts of roughly the same period, particularly Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī’s *Ḥizb al-baḥr*.⁵⁰⁶

If this prayer is authentic to al-Mahdawī, then it indicates that he indeed did engage with lettrism to some degree. However, this meager evidence is insufficient to establish with any certainty that he was al-Būnī’s or Ibn al-‘Arabī’s main source in this matter. The prayer does not display the kind of dense cosmological symbolism that attends both of those men’s lettrist thought, much less give any clear sign of the talismanic practices that populate some of al-Būnī’s writings.

⁵⁰³ Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad al-Sulamī, “*Sharḥ ma‘ānī al-ḥurūf*,” ed. Gerhard Böwering (Unpublished, 2012), §39 and §64. Cf. Böwering’s article on the treatise which includes a full translation: “Sulamī’s Treatise.”

⁵⁰⁴ Beneito, Hirtenstein, and al-Mahdawī, “The Prayer of Blessing,” 14. To their propositions I would add that *wāw* here perhaps is for *waḥy*, though see above regarding the suppositional nature of all such readings!

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁰⁶ Regarding the letters in *Ḥizb al-baḥr* see Nguyen, “Exegesis of the *ḥurūf al-muqatta‘a*,” 13–14.

3.3.2 *Al-Būnī's isnād according to al-Biṣṭāmī*

As I have noted, one of the most important popularizers of al-Būnī's works and ideas during the Mamlūk period was the Antiochene Sufi, court intellectual, and lettrist 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454). In a copy of one of al-Biṣṭāmī's own works on lettrism, *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*, the author gives an *isnād* for al-Būnī that is of great interest regarding al-Būnī's education and Sufi training. Not incidentally, like some of the chains for al-Būnī given in the *Kubrā* that in fact were plagiarized from al-Biṣṭāmī's accounts of his own initiatic lineage (as discussed in chapter one), a chain quite similar to the one discussed here also appears in that work.⁵⁰⁷ A part of this chain was discussed briefly in the previous chapter with regard to al-Biṣṭāmī's claim to have received al-Būnī's knowledge of the letters through a direct line of transmission. Al-Biṣṭāmī's manuscript corpus is complex; he is known to have continued revising and expanding upon his texts after having put them into circulation, such that different copies of his works can vary to an even greater extent than is typical of manuscript texts. *Shams al-āfāq* is no exception, and the *isnāds* discussed here, which are found in Chester Beatty MS 5076, a copy of the work made by one 'Alī b. Muḥannā al-'Aṭṭār al-Athārī in 844/1440—a few years before al-Biṣṭāmī's death—are absent in Süleymaniye MS Hekimoğlu 533, a holograph al-Biṣṭāmī produced in 826/1423.

The *isnād* is of interest in that it traces not only the line of transmitters through which al-Biṣṭāmī ostensibly took knowledge of al-Būnī's teachings, but also the line of transmitters stretching back from al-Būnī to the prophet Muḥammad. It is one of several chains that al-Biṣṭāmī provides to ground his own lettrist teachings in the authority of major Sufi figures from various periods, as well as the Shī'ite *Imāms* and the Prophet. Through this chain he claims also to have absorbed the lettrist teachings of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī,⁵⁰⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī,⁵⁰⁹ Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945),⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ 'Pedigree H' in Witkam's article; Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun," 194–195.

⁵⁰⁸ Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 14^b, ln. 7 ff. (followed by the *sanad* for al-Būnī).

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 14^a, ln. 4 ff. (prior to Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Būnī)

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 14^b, ln. 1 ff.

Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 286/861),⁵¹¹ Muḥammad b. Khafīf al-Shīrāzī (d. d. 371/982),⁵¹² Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī,⁵¹³ and ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (via his famous son Sahl, d. 283/896).⁵¹⁴ He ends with a chain between himself and the prophet Muḥammad via eight Shī‘ite *Imāms* (‘Alī b. Musá through ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib), and a second branch of that chain reaching Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq from Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, from Salmān al-Fārisī, from the Prophet.⁵¹⁵ The chain for al-Būnī is given after those of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī and Ibn al-‘Arabī. At the end of the chain al-Biṣṭāmī mentions an additional teacher for al-Būnī whom I have been unable to identify.

In the transcription and translation I have separated each link in the *isnād* with a line-break and numbered them; in the translation I have also supplied death-dates for each individual, where available. I have omitted a few sentences of hagiographical material regarding Abū Ya‘azzá. The links from al-Biṣṭāmī to al-Būnī (nos. 1-6) were briefly discussed in the previous chapter, and will be revisited in the following one. In the discussion here I am concerned primarily with those stretching back in time from al-Būnī:

١. وأما سندي بعلم الحروف إلى الشيخ الإمام العالم بالله والتال على الله زمزم الاسرار ومعدن الانوار ابي العباس احمد بن علي بن يوسف القرشي البوني شفى الله نراه وجعل الجنة متواه فقد اخذته عن الشيخ الإمام العالم العلامة الفقيه الثقة مساعد بن ساري بن مسعود بن عبد الرحمن [بن] ^{٥١٦} رحمة الهواري الحميري الدمشقي بقرية شبعاء
٢. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ شهاب الدين ابي عبد الله محمد بن محمد بن يعقوب الكويي التونسي
٣. وهو [اخذ] عن الشيخ شهاب الدين الشاذلي
٤. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ تاج الدين ابن عطاء الله الشاذلي المالكي
٥. وهو اخذ عن ابي العباس احمد بن عمر الانصاري المرسي

⁵¹¹ Ibid., fol. 15^a, ln. 19 ff.

⁵¹² Ibid., fol. 15^b, ln. 2 ff.

⁵¹³ Ibid., fol. 15^b, ln. 7 ff.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., fol. 15^a, ln. 1 ff.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., fol. 16^a, ln. 11 ff.

⁵¹⁶ The encounter with Musā‘id is discussed in the same MS on fol. 9b with this element in place.

٦. وهو اخذ عن ابي العباس احمد بن علي القرشي البوني
٧. وهو اخذ عن ابي العباس احمد بن علي بن ميمون القسطلاني
٨. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ ابي عبد الله محمد بن احمد القرشي
٩. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ الإمام العالم العلامة استاذ العصر وواحد الدهر ابي مدين شعيب بن الحسن الانصاري الاندلسي راس السبعة الابدال وواحد الاربعة الاوتاد
١٠. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ الاستاذ الكبير ابي يعزى دادا بن ميمون الهزيري الهسكري^{٥١٧} ...
١١. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ الإمام العالم القطب ابي شعيب ايوب بن سعيد الصنهاجي^{٥١٨} الازموري
١٢. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ الكبير الولي ابي محمد انور
١٣. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ الإمام العالم برة ابي محمد عبد الجليل بن ويجلان
١٤. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ الإمام العالم بالله ابي الفضل عبد الله بن ابي بشر
١٥. وهو اخذ عن والده ابي بشر الحسن الجوهري
١٦. وهو اخذ عن الشيخ ابي علي النوري
١٧. وهو اخذ عن سري السقطي
١٨. وهو اخذ عن معروف الكرخي
١٩. وهو اخذ عن داوود الطائي وهو اخذ عن حبيب العجمي
٢٠. وهو اخذ عن ابي بكر محمد بن سيرين
٢١. وهو اخذ عن انس بن مالك
٢٢. وهو اخذ عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم
٢٣. وايضاً اخذ الشيخ ابو العباس احمد البوني عن الشيخ ابي الحسن علي بن احمد بن الحسن بن احمد بن ابراهيم بن محمد النجيبى [التجيبى؟]

1. As for my [*scil.* al-Biṣṭāmī's] chain of transmission in the science of letters to the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the one learned of God, the signpost to God, the *zamzam* of secrets and treasure-trove of lights Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qurashī al-Būnī (may God give him his rest), verily I took it on the authority of the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the learned one, the jurist, [???] Musā‘id b. Sārī b. Maṣ‘ūd b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān [b.] Raḥmat al-Hawārī al-Humayrī al-Dimashqī in the village of Sha‘bā.
2. He took on the authority of the great *shaykh* Shihāb al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī (fl. 810/1407).⁵¹⁹
3. He [took] on the authority of the *shaykh* Shihāb al-Dīn [Aḥmad b. Maylaq]⁵²⁰ al-Shādhilī.

⁵¹⁷ MS has الهشكوري

⁵¹⁸ MS has النهاجي

⁵¹⁹ According to Brockelmann, *Geschichte Der Arabischen Litteratur* (Weimar: E. Felber, 1898), SII: 358. Elsewhere he gives an *obit* of 880/1475, but this is likely incorrect.

⁵²⁰ These parts of the name are given in al-Biṣṭāmī *isnād* linking to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī; Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 14^a, ln. 12.

4. He took on the authority of the *shaykh* Tāj al-Din Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Shādhilī al-Mālikī (d. 709/1321).
5. He took on the authority of Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Umar al-Anṣārī al-Mursī (d. 686/1287).
6. He took on the authority of Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Qurashī al-Būnī.
7. He took on the authority of Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Maymūn al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 636/1238).
8. He took on the authority of the *shaykh* Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurashī (d. 599/1202).
9. He took on the authority of the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the scholar, the learned one, the teacher of the age and [unique] one of the epoch, Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb b. al-Ḥasan al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī (d. betw. 588/1192 and 594/1198), the head of the Seven Substitutes and one of the Four Pegs.⁵²¹
10. He took on the authority of the great teacher Abū Ya‘azzā Dādā b. Maymūn al-Hazbarī al-Haskurī (d. 572/1177) [...]
11. He took on the authority of the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the scholar, the pole, Abū Shu‘ayb Ayyūb b. Sa‘īd al-Ṣanhājī al-Azamūrī.
12. He took on the authority of the great *shaykh*, the saint Abū Muḥammad Innūr. (Probably Abū Īnnūr ‘Abd Allāh u-Agrīs al-Mashanzāī⁵²²)
13. He took on the authority of the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the scholar of his Lord Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Jalīl b. Wayḥlān (d. 541/1146).
14. He took on the authority of the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the scholar of God Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Bishr [usually Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abd Allāh b. Bishr al-Jawharī, see below].
15. He took on the authority of his father Abū Bishr al-Ḥasan al-Jawharī.
16. He took on the authority of the *shaykh* Abū ‘Alī [usually Abū al-Ḥusayn] al-Nūrī (d. 295/907-8).
17. He took on the authority of Sarī al-Saqatī (d. 253/867).
18. He took on the authority of Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815-16).
19. He took on the authority of Dawūd al-Ṭāṭī (d. 165/781).
20. He took on the authority of Ḥabīb al-‘Ajamī (d. 120/737).
21. He took on the authority of Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/728).
22. He took on the authority of Anas b. Mālik (d. ca. 91/709).
23. He took on the authority of the Messenger of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him).
24. The *shaykh* Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Būnī also took on the authority of the *shaykh* Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Tajībī.⁵²³

The first thing one may notice is that the *isnād* does not include al-Mahdawī; however, it does link al-Būnī to Abū Madyan. This linkage is said to have occurred through two intermediaries, both of

⁵²¹ These terms are well-known from Sufi discussions of the ‘invisible college’ of the saints. For one discussion of such terms see Bernd Radtke, John O’Kane, and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Mysticism: Two Works by Al-Ḥakīm Al-Tirmidhī* (London: Curzon, 1996), 26 ff.

⁵²² On whom see Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 25.

⁵²³ Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 14^b, ln. 16-fol. 15^a, ln. 23.

whom are well-represented in the biographical literature, and also are mentioned in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings: Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurashī, and al-Qurashī’s disciple Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Maymūn al-Qaṣṭallānī, for whom Ibn al-‘Arabī also provides the *nisbah* al-Tawzarī.⁵²⁴ Both were Western émigrés to Egypt. Shaykh al-Qurashī was a native of Algeciras (al-Jazīrah al-khaḍrā’), a port-city at the southeastern tip of al-Andalus. He was a disciple of a number of Andalusian *shaykhs*, and of Abū Madyan as well. He relocated to Cairo in the latter part of the sixth/twelfth century, but left for Jerusalem during the famine that struck Cairo at the end of that century, and he died in Jerusalem in 599/1202-3.⁵²⁵ Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Qaṣṭallānī al-Tawzarī was—despite his seemingly Andalusian *nisbah*—of Ifrīqiyan rather than Andalusian origin, hailing from the village of Tawzar in the southern Ifrīqiyan region then called al-Qaṣṭīlīyah (Tozeur, in the Chott el-Djerid region of modern Tunisia). He was one of al-Qurashī’s closest disciples in Cairo, and also made the acquaintance of Ibn al-‘Arabī in that city, the latter having been invested with the *khirqah* in al-Andalus by Abū al-‘Abbās’ brother, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.⁵²⁶ He spent the last part of his life in Mecca, dying there in 636/1238. In a striking twist, Abū al-‘Abbās’ son Quṭb al-Dīn al-Qaṣṭallānī would mature to become an important Cairene polemicist against the perceived ‘Ḥallājīan conspiracy’ (to use Massignon’s term⁵²⁷) of Western Sufis of his father’s generation. It may be noteworthy that al-Biṣṭāmī also traces Ibn al-‘Arabī’s knowledge of the science of letters through al-Qaṣṭallānī and al-Qurashī to Abū Madyan.⁵²⁸

It is entirely feasible that al-Būnī would have known Abū al-‘Abbās al-Qaṣṭallānī in Cairo or Mecca, or even in the Maghrib, and he conceivably could have met al-Qurashī as well. Indeed, one might expect that al-Būnī would have sought out fellow spiritual ‘descendants’ of Abū Madyan in his

⁵²⁴ On whom see Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 143.

⁵²⁵ Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr, *La risāla de Ṣaḥī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr ibn Zāfir*, 232–233 and *passim*.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 210; Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 143.

⁵²⁷ Massignon, “Ibn Sab’īn et la ‘conspiration hallagienne’ en Andalousie et en Orient au XIIIe siècle.”

⁵²⁸ Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 14^b, lns. 12-14.

travels. Notably, both figures are mentioned in the pseudepigraphic Būnian work *Qabs al-iqtidā' ilā wafq al-sa'ādah wa-najm al-ihtidā' ilā sharaf al-siyādah*. Al-Qurashī is quoted in the text, on the authority of al-Qaṣṭallānī, as endorsing the importance of the divine names as keys to the mysteries.⁵²⁹ However, no direct claim is made that al-Būnī studied with Abū al-‘Abbās or al-Qurashī, rendering the text insufficient as outside proof of al-Biṣṭāmī’s claim, even if one were to accept it as authored by al-Būnī. As mentioned in the discussion of medieval bibliographical texts in chapter one, al-Biṣṭāmī was familiar with *Qabs al-iqtidā'* and considered it to be genuine to al-Būnī, thus raising the possibility that he based his claim only on the mention of al-Qurashī and al-Qaṣṭallānī in this text rather than from information passed on by his own teachers. Finally, regarding the claim that al-Būnī with Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Tajībī, al-Būnī does mention an interaction with al-Tajībī in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, though nothing that suggests discipleship as with al-Mahdawī.⁵³⁰ It seems likely, then, that al-Biṣṭāmī derived his assertion from that work.

The links in the *isnād* leading back from Abū Madyan to Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (called Abū ‘Alī in Chester Beatty MS 5076)—nos. 9-16—are of interest regarding the deeper history of Western Sufism, and may conceivably have historical bearing on the introduction of lettrism to the region. This set of linkages is largely familiar from other accounts of Abū Madyan’s spiritual lineage, though some of the names are garbled in Chester Beatty MS 5076. Vincent Cornell has noted that this lineage for Abū Madyan suggests a merger in the early sixth/twelfth century of the “Moroccan tradition of rural Sufism represented by [the] *ribāṭs*” and the Eastern Sufi tradition as transmitted by the originally-Baghdad-based *ṭā’ifah* of followers of the famous al-Nūrī—the linchpin relationship being that between the Aghmātī mystic ‘Abd al-Jalīl b. Wayḥlān and the Easterner Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abd Allāh b. Bishr al-Jawharī

⁵²⁹ Süleymaniye MS Laleli 1594 (QI), fol. 97b, lns. 12-14. Al-Qaṣṭallānī’s name is garbled in this MS, but the emendation is almost certainly correct. It is unclear precisely where the quote from al-Qurashī leaves off:

قال الاستاذ ابو عبد الله القرشي رضي الله عنه ما نقله الشيخ ابو العباس التسطلاني [الغضلاني] رضي الله عنه الإمانه علم الاسماء والتخلق بمقتضاها فهي سر الاسرار نور الانوار بها ظهرت وبها تصرفت المتصرفات وفهمت المفهومات وهي مفتاح الغيوب وبها يتوصل الى الفتح من كل وجه

⁵³⁰ BnF MS arabe 2658 (LI), fol. 19b, right margin.

(nos. 13 and 14).⁵³¹ This transregional merger may account for what Cornell describes as “an ‘illuminationist’ tradition... in the still little-known world of early Moroccan Sufism,” one that “may indeed have been influenced by Neoplatonic ideas... perhaps via Fāṭimī Ismāʿīlite or even Manichaean antecedents,” and that is “best represented by its most famous proponent, Abū Madyan’s Berber master Abū Yaʿazzá.”⁵³² As Cornell further explains, these early Moroccan Sufis, under the influence of the Nūrīyan tradition, may have seized upon the ‘illuminationist’ notion that “[t]he purified ascetic could partake in a divinely-inspired illuminative wisdom”⁵³³—a concept that is certainly in keeping with al-Būnī’s program of progressive self-purification for the attainment of communion with the divine. For Cornell, this Nūrīyan background for Abū Yaʿazzá and Abū Madyan’s thought represents a possible alternative to the genealogy of Western Sufism first proposed by Asín Palacios that locates the roots of its idiosyncrasies—including its engagement with lettrism—in the teachings of Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī and the so-called ‘Almería school’. Though I do not object to the notion that some elements of esotericist, ‘illuminative’ thought may have arrived via a Nūrīyan *silsilah*, quite possibly including lettrist elements, I also see no reason why this would be to the exclusion from the narrative of the Western Sufism of Ibn Masarraḥ and his followers.

3.3.3 *Al-Būnī’s education in the West according to al-Maqrīzī*

Finally, I turn to the *tarjamah* for al-Būnī penned by Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī’s (d. 845/1442), which has not been discussed in previous scholarship on al-Būnī. This appears in his *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*, a work composed in the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century. It must be said at the outset that the *tarjamah* contains some serious inaccuracies regarding the details of al-Būnī’s life since, as I discuss in the following chapter, al-Maqrīzī seems to have garnered his information from an unreliable informant. Indeed, it is likely that the narrative al-Maqrīzī offers of al-Būnī’s education is entirely

⁵³¹ Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 24 ff; cf. E. Michaux-Bellaire, “Les Confréries Religieuses au Maroc,” *Archives Marocaines* 27 (1927): 40.

⁵³² Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, 22.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 24.

counterfactual; to the best of my knowledge, al-Būnī makes no mention of having studied under any of the luminaries al-Maqrīzī names as his teachers, and most of them are not cited in his major texts. The account is nonetheless worthy of attention, in that, however inaccurate, it speaks to the concerns of this chapter in demonstrating that al-Būnī was perceived as a distinctly Western thinker by later actors such as al-Maqrīzī—a testament, perhaps, to the enduring alterity of his thought in the eyes of some.

As we see in what follows, al-Maqrīzī presents al-Būnī as having undertaken a *riḥlah fī ṭalab al-‘ilm* that took him first to Tunis and al-Andalus in search of teachers, and then to the East; here I have separated the Western and Eastern parts of his purported itinerary with a line break. In the remainder of this chapter I focus on the Western portion of this journey, taking up the Eastern portion in the beginning of the following chapter:

وقرأ القرآن الكريم بالقراءات الثماني في مدينة تونس وتفقه على مذهب مالك وتفطن في عدة علوم واخذ عن جماعة منهم ابن حرز الله وابن رزق الله وابن عوانة وبرع علم الفلك ثم رحل إلى الاندلس ولقي ابا القاسم السهيلي و ابا القاسم بن بسكوال والفقيه الصالح ابا عباس احمد بن جعفر الخزرجي السبتي

وقدم إلى الإسكندرية ولقي الحافظ ابا طاهر احمد بن محمد السلفي و ابا الطاهر اسماعيل بن عوف الزهري المالكي واقام بالقاهرة في ايام الخليفة العاضد ومضى منها إلى مكة فحج وعاد على بيت المقدس وتوجه فحج وعاد على بيت المقدس وتوجه إلى دمشق واجتمع بالحافظ ابي القاسم ابن عساكر ودخل واسط وبغداد ولقي الحافظ ابا الفرج ابن الجوزي ورجع إلى القدس وحج منه مرة ثانية وعاد إلى مصر

He studied the eight recitations of the noble Qur’ān in the city of Tunis, acquired jurisprudence according to the school of Mālik, and mastered a number of sciences. He took instruction from many, among whom were Ibn Ḥirz Allāh, Ibn Rizq Allāh, and Ibn ‘Awānah. He excelled in astrology. He then journeyed to al-Andalus and met Abū al-Qāsim al-Suhaylī, Abū al-Qāsim b. Bashkuwāl, and *al-faqīh al-ṣāliḥ* Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Ja‘far al-Khazrajī al-Sabtī.

He [then] reached Alexandria and met *al-ḥāfiẓ* Abū al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī and Abū al-Ṭāhir Ismā‘īl b. ‘Awf al-Zuhrī al-Mālikī. He [then] took up residence in Cairo during the reign of the caliph al-‘Āḍid, leaving from there to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. On his return he went to Jerusalem, then headed for Damascus and joined with *al-ḥāfiẓ* Abū al-Qāsim Ibn ‘Asākīr. He entered Wāsiṭ and Baghdad, and met *al-ḥāfiẓ* Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-

Jawzī. He returned to Jerusalem, and from there he made the pilgrimage a second time. He then returned to Egypt.⁵³⁴

The depiction of al-Būnī's time in Tunis is perhaps most notable for including no mention of al-Mahdawī, an important indication of the *tarjamah*'s unreliability in my view. It is likely that al-Būnī was in fact trained in Mālikite *fiqh*, and that, as the son of a Qur'ān reciter, he also would have studied the various recitations of the holy text. It is also quite feasible that he could have found instruction in astrology in Tunis, though he makes no mention of it. I have been able to locate no concrete information on the individuals from Tunis al-Maqrīzī names. The figures al-Būnī is alleged to have met in al-Andalus, however, are immediately identifiable. Ibn Bashkuwāl (d. 578/1183),⁵³⁵ born in Córdoba (Qurṭubah) was a highly regarded scholar who, in his youth, served in the judiciary under the well-known *muḥaddith* Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī (Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ma'āfirī, d. 543/1148; not to be confused with Muḥyī al-Dīn) while the latter was chief *qāḍī* of Seville (Ishbīliyah).⁵³⁶ Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-Suhaylī (d. 581/1185),⁵³⁷ born in or near the city of Málaga (Mālaqah), was a student in Seville of the same Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī. Despite having been blind since his late teens, he went on to great acclaim as a scholar, eventually achieving fame and wealth at the Almohad court in Marrakesh. It is chronologically feasible that al-Būnī could have studied with either or both men, even if we assume him to have been born around the middle of the sixth/twelfth century rather than at the earlier date proffered by al-Maqrīzī. Neither figure is remembered as a Sufi, much less as an occultist; however, the connection of both men to Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī is perhaps noteworthy. Abū Bakr is known to have sojourned at length in the East during his youth, and to have studied with Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, whose writings played a crucial role in the history of Western Sufism, and who almost

⁵³⁴ Leiden MS Or. 14533 (*al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*), fol. 89a, lns. 3-13; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*, I/462.

⁵³⁵ al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz* (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), IV/132. M. Ben Cheneb A. Huici-Miranda, *EI2*, s.v. "Ibn Bashkuwāl."

⁵³⁶ J. Robson, *EI2*, "s.v. Ibn al-'Arabī."

⁵³⁷ W. Raven, *EI2*, s.v. "al-Suhaylī."

certainly influenced al-Būnī's thought on the names of God and other matters. This is to say that, if we consider al-Maqrīzī's *tarjamah* to perhaps have been an etiological account of al-Būnī's career based on his writings, then the linkage to al-Ghazālī through Abū Bakr could have been a factor in the inclusion of Ibn Bashkuwāl and al-Suhaylī.

Most compelling, yet still puzzling, is the inclusion of the great saint Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Ja'far al-Khazrajī al-Sabtī (d. 601/1204-5) in the list of al-Būnī's Andalusian teachers, a figure rivaled only by Abū Ya'azzá and Abū Madyan for importance among Western Sufis of the later sixth/twelfth-century.⁵³⁸ Beyond the fact that al-Būnī makes no claim to have studied with al-Sabtī, the puzzlement arises from the notion that al-Būnī would have had to venture to al-Andalus to meet this venerable figure, who is remembered primarily as a denizen of the Almohad capital Marrakesh (in central Morocco) rather than of Iberia. This geographical quandary aside, al-Sabtī might seem an ideal candidate to have taught al-Būnī. He was highly educated, having subsisted at times by teaching grammar and mathematics⁵³⁹— the latter discipline being somewhat pertinent to al-Būnī's thought, as we have seen—and al-Maqrīzī emphasizes al-Būnī's skill in mathematics.⁵⁴⁰ Al-Sabtī also was remembered as a great performer of saintly marvels, though some of the Almohad 'ulamā' him of being "a heretic, an unwarranted innovator, a magician, and a sorcerer."⁵⁴¹ As we will see, this saint/sorcerer pairing also attaches to al-Būnī as he is remembered in the Mamlūk period.

Furthermore, it seems likely that al-Maqrīzī's mentor Ibn Khaldūn, in his discussion in his famous *al-Muqaddimah* of the divinatory instrument known as the *zā'irjah* (or *zā'irajah*), conflated Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Sabtī with one Abū al-'Abbās Muḥammad (or Aḥmad) b. Maṣ'ūd al-Khazrajī al-Sabtī (d. 698/1298?), the author of *Zā'irjah al-'ālam*, a work Ibn Khaldūn cites repeatedly. Ibn Khaldūn

⁵³⁸ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, 80–92 and passim.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁴⁰ al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*, 463.

⁵⁴¹ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, 87.

describes the al-Sabtī who authored the work as “one of the best known Sufis of the *Maghrib*. He lived at the end of the sixth century during the reign of Abū [Yūsuf] Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr [r. 580/1184-595/1199], of the Almohad kings,”⁵⁴² a depiction that obviously fits the great saint al-Sabtī far better than the later figure.⁵⁴³ Use of the *zā‘irjah*, as Ibn Khaldūn depicts it, is closely related to the science of letters; indeed, he describes its use immediately following his discussion of al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s lettrism, the one topic obviously following upon the other. Thus it is not at all far-fetched that al-Maqrīzī, perhaps also laboring under the assumption that it was the saint al-Sabtī whose work his mentor discussed, would have found credible the notion that al-Būnī studied under him.

It is of course purely suppositional to attempt to decipher a logic to the teachers attributed to al-Būnī in al-Maqrīzī’s *tarjamah* for him. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, it is equally unverifiable that al-Būnī met the Eastern authorities al-Maqrīzī credits him with having studied under. Indeed, given al-Būnī’s relationship with al-Mahdawī, it seems unlikely that, as al-Maqrīzī claims, he came to Egypt as early as during the reign of the last Fāṭimid caliph, al-‘Āḍid li-dīn Allāh (r. 555/1160-567/1171), such that he may even have come too late to meet most of those luminaries. As we will see in the next chapter, however, al-Maqrīzī’s *tarjamah*, even if entirely incorrect, yet has a great deal to offer in understanding the *memory* of al-Būnī in the latter part of the Mamlūk period.

3.4 Conclusion

⁵⁴² Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2001), 145; cf. Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, I/239.

من اعلام المتصوفة بالمغرب كان في آخر المائة السادسة بمراكش ولعهد ابي يعقوب المنصور من ملوك الموحدين

⁵⁴³ The question is difficult to assess conclusively short of a close investigation of the manuscript corpus of *Kitāb al-‘ibar*. Rosenthal notes that the Bulaq edition “adds” the phrase “*sīdī Aḥmad*” to al-Sabtī’s name, suggesting that he did not find this in the manuscript witnesses he employed in making his translation; the phrase is present in the 2001 Dar al-Fikr edition as well; *The Muqaddimah*, fn 365PDF; *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*, 145. Even assuming this actually was a later interpolation, Ibn Khaldūn’s description of al-Sabtī’s prominence and his linking of him to the Almohad capital strongly suggest that he himself conflated the two figures. See also Brockelmann’s notes on this topic, *GAL*, I: 655 and SI: 909.

Al-Būnī's teachings partook of a current of esotericist, daringly speculative and visionary cosmological thought that had long inhabited the fringes of Muslim culture, whether among 'extremist' or Ismā'īlite Shī'ites or among the often embattled Sufis of the Islamicate West. His lettrism, at once erudite and steeped in mystical claims of extra-discursive knowledge, was hardly the stuff of 'popular' culture to which much modern scholarship has consigned al-Būnī and all things 'magical', but rather was deliberately abstruse and allusive, gesturing at realities that were posited as beyond the minds of the common people. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, which contains many of his most explicit instructions on matters of operative lettrism, is nonetheless hardly a 'recipe book' for would-be magicians, despite what some of the encyclopædist thinkers discussed in the next chapter will try to make of it. Rather it is a series of meditations meant to be accompanied by the instructions of an accomplished master, the various diagrams and talismans that populate being less a collection of charms than initiatic instruments to be combined with fasting and rigorous prayer in order to gain visionary access to the hidden realities of al-Būnī's lettrist cosmos. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that, with its elaborate talismans and veiled discussions of astrological matters and hidden worlds, it potentially was a dangerous book with which to be associated, for the very reasons Ibn al-'Arabī warned of in advising against writing about operative aspects of lettrism.

In this chapter I have attempted to consider something of the actions and conditions that surrounded al-Būnī's works as they were read: the additional oral instruction that must have accompanied them, the spiritual authority with which teachers of these works must have been invested by their students, the impression of the roots of al-Būnī's authority that readers in Egypt may have had. The reading of a work such as *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, with a *shaykh* to whom one was attached, was, I would argue, often experienced as an initiatic endeavor in and of itself, and such experiences would have been key to the formation and consolidation of the reading communities in which these works circulated, and through which participants may have hoped to better establish themselves in a swiftly-changing Egypt. As we will see in the following chapter, the esotericist actors who trafficked in al-Būnī's texts

(and related works) indeed seem to have opened up a space for themselves in Mamlūk society by the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century, a process that no doubt was facilitated in part by the growing popularity of the teachings of other Western *shaykhs* such as Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Shādhilī, with whose works al-Būnī’s often were read. This success contributed to al-Būnī’s works slipping the confines of the esotericist reading communities in which they had initially survived and being taken up by a broader readership of cosmopolitan secondary elites, a development that was at once symptom and cause of the ever-expanding efflorescence of the corpus that would perdure throughout the remainder of the Mamlūk period.

Chapter Four

Encyclopædism and post-esotericist lettrism: The Būnian corpus in the Mamlūk textual economy

A literary event can continue to have an effect only if those who come after it still or once again have to respond to it—if there are readers who again appropriate the past work or authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it.

- Hans Robert Jauss⁵⁴⁴

4.0 Introduction: Remembering al-Būnī in the Mamlūk period

An important copy of the text known as al-Maqrīzī's *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr* that has been only sporadically available to modern researchers is Leiden MS or. 14.533. Consisting of 550 holograph leaves—which is to say sheets written in the great Cairene historian's quite distinctive hand—it comprises what most regard as a partial draft of what, if executed as planned, would have been a truly massive biographical dictionary.⁵⁴⁵ A noteworthy feature of the document is the numerous marginal glosses scattered throughout the leaves in the hand of al-Maqrīzī's contemporary and fellow Cairene, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), himself a major historian, judge (*qāḍī*), and *ḥadīth* scholar of the period.⁵⁴⁶ The majority of Ibn Ḥajar's marginal glosses are additional biographical entries rather than

⁵⁴⁴ *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, *Theory and History of Literature 2* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 22.

⁵⁴⁵ See Jan Just Witkam's recently penned overview of his acquisition of this complexly provenanced document while head librarian at Leiden. Therein he also reviews questions surrounding the title *K. al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, and argues that what has been taken as a book-draft may never have been intended as a book, but may rather be a copy of al-Maqrīzī's "master file on persons, which he might use as a reference for his other historical works." "Reflections on Al-Maqrīzī's Biographical Dictionary," in *In The History and Islamic Civilisation: Essays in Honour of Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid* (Beirut: Al-Dār al-Miṣrīyah al-Lubnānīyah, 2014), 93–114.

⁵⁴⁶ Regarding the identification of this hand as Ibn Ḥajar's, see Jan Just Witkam, "Les autographes d'al-Maqrīzī," in *Le manuscrit arabe et la codicologie*, ed. Ahmed-Chouqui Binebine (Rabat: Manshūrat Kulliyat al-Adab wa-al-'Ulūm al-Insānīyah, 1994), 89–98.

comments on al-Maqrīzī's efforts; however, a striking exception to this is his gloss on the *tarjamah* for al-Būnī. It runs, in Ibn Ḥajar's rather difficult hand (see Figure 15), along the lefthand and bottom margins of the opening leaf of the entry, and is severely critical of al-Maqrīzī's information:

الحمد لله في هذه الترجمة من الباطل والتهور ما يطول شرحه وملخصه ان اسم الرجل المذكور واسم ابيه
المذكورين هنا ومولده ووفاته ورحلته ومشايخه وكثيراً من صفاته لا حق في شيء من ذلك وانما تلقى مصنف
هذا الكتاب ذلك من شيء كتبه له صاحبنا ابو عبد الله الفرياني من ذهنه فنقله هو عنه تقليداً وقد نهت
المصنف على ذلك فما استيقظ وهذه الترجمة [بادى ؟] على من جزم بها بالجهل باخبار الناس والله
المستعان

The blessing is to God. In this *tarjamah* is that which is baseless and irresponsible, such as would be too lengthy to explain. The short version is that the name of the man mentioned [*scil.* al-Būnī] and the name of his father mentioned here, his date of birth, date of death, travels, *shaykhs*, and many of his attributes—there's no truth to any of that. The author of this book learned that [*scil.* that false information] from something written for him from memory by our *shaykh* Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Furriyānī, and he [*scil.* al-Maqrīzī] took it from him [*scil.* al-Furriyānī] on good faith [*taqlīd^{an}*]. I warned the author [*scil.* al-Maqrīzī] about this, but he did not come to his senses. This *tarjamah* [illegible verb] one who places confidence in it out of ignorance of the reports of the people. And God is the helper.⁵⁴⁷

Ibn Ḥajar's negative evaluation of the content of al-Maqrīzī's notes on al-Būnī is, in my view, objectively sound. Al-Maqrīzī does in fact garble al-Būnī's patronymic, calling him Aḥmad b. Yūsuf rather than Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Yūsuf. As mentioned in the previous chapter and discussed below, nowhere in al-Būnī's texts, to the best of my knowledge, does he claim to have studied with any of the numerous individuals al-Maqrīzī names as his teachers. Most grievously, the *tarjamah* asserts that al-Būnī died in Tunis in 602/1205-6, while the text of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* has him in Mecca in 621/1224, and the mutually supporting paratexts discussed in the second chapter of this study have him alive and auditioning his works in Cairo in latter part of 621/1224 and 622/1225.⁵⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥajar's statement that al-Maqrīzī's source

⁵⁴⁷ Leiden MS or. 14.533 (*K. al-Muqaffá al-Kabīr*), fol. 87^a, left and bottom margin.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 88^a; cf. al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*, 464. Note that in the second edition (2006), al-Ya'lawī has attempted to amend al-Maqrīzī's date for al-Būnī's death to 622 by adding a paranthetical '*ishrīn*, presumably to harmonize it with Katip Çelebi's *obiit* for al-Būnī. This is plainly erroneous, however, since al-Maqrīzī states at the

was Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Furriyānī (d. 859/1454-5, 862/1457-8, or 869/1464-5) is likely correct. The latter, a Sufi *shaykh* from Tunis, was a close friend and confidant of al-Maqrīzī’s, and the historian probably considered him a reliable source on matters relating to Ifrīqiyyah. Al-Furriyānī, seemingly in the mold of some of the Western Sufis discussed in the previous chapter, apparently made claims for his own *mahdī*-ship at one point, and Ibn Ḥajar’s student Abū al-Khayr Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) notes that his master considered the *shaykh* highly unreliable, and even accused al-Furriyānī of having fabricated *isnāds* supporting his authority to transmit a number of books (probably of *ḥadīths*).⁵⁴⁹ At least in this case, that estimation of his reliability seems to have been correct.

Though the *tarjamah* and Ibn Ḥajar’s gloss may add nothing to our knowledge of al-Būnī’s actual life, they are nonetheless invaluable as sources on how al-Būnī was remembered and received in the mid-ninth/fifteenth century. Given that al-Maqrīzī’s mentor Ibn Khaldūn had written on al-Būnī, it is unsurprising that al-Maqrīzī did so as well. What is more, and as Robert Irwin has pointed out, al-Maqrīzī was persistently interested in the occult sciences, though this was far less eccentric of him than Irwin makes it out to be.⁵⁵⁰ It perhaps is surprising, however, that Ibn Ḥajar, a leading *ḥadīth* scholar who served as chief *qāḍī* under various sultans—in other words a member *par excellence* of the ‘orthodox’ ‘*ulamā*’ who were the ostensible guardians of public morality—seems to have known enough about al-Būnī to flatly assert the falsity of al-Maqrīzī’s information. But there were numerous routes through which Ibn Ḥajar might have come into contact with al-Būnī’s teachings, including through his lengthy period of study with the elite Sufi and scholar ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘ah (d. 819/1416), or more indirectly through his dealings with Mamlūk military elites and the bureaucrats who served them. For as we will see, by the fifteenth century the Būnian corpus had greatly expanded in multiple ways,

outset of the entry that al-Būnī was born around 520 and notes at the end that he was around eighty years old when he died. Thus he obviously believed the 602 date to be correct.

⁵⁴⁹ On al-Furriyānī, see al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-‘uqūd al-farīdah fī tarājim al-a’yān al-mufīdah*, ed. Maḥmūd. Jalīlī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2002), III/146–147; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jīl, Beirut), VII/67; Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār min dhahab, Dhakhā’ir al-turāth al-‘Arabī*. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī lil-Ṭibā‘ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘, 1966), VII/261.

⁵⁵⁰ Robert Irwin, “Al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Khaldūn: Historians of the Unseen,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 7 (2003): 217–30.

moving beyond the confines of small circles of Sufis to be taken up, *mutatis mutandis*, by such various communities of readers that a polymath like Ibn Ḥajar might hardly have failed to be aware of al-Būnī.

As discussed throughout this chapter, the two centuries or so between al-Būnī's death and the mature careers of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Ḥajar saw an efflorescence of Būnian works and ideas, as is apparent in both the manuscript evidence and the literary sources from the period. There was not only more copying of his core works, but also an increased dispersion and transformation of his texts and thought through a growing variety of writing and book practices, such as pseudepigraphy, abridgement, epitomization, and the making of compilatory codices. This multipronged flourishing of the corpus was at turns the product and cause of his works' heterogeneous reception at the hands of various reading communities among the expanding class of literate secondary elites that populated Cairo, Damascus, and other Mamlūk cities, with the reactions of these readers ranging from curiosity to condemnation to enthusiastic acceptance. Following a discussion of trends apparent from a 'wide-angle' examination of manuscripts of the period, the bulk of this chapter consists of readings of various Mamlūk-era writers' comments on al-Būnī. Two main trends emerge from these readings. First, many of the writers in whose works al-Būnī appears engaged in 'encyclopaedic' projects, a term I use broadly to include various efforts to gather and categorize the vast range of discourses, including that on lettrism, that were in circulation in this period's newly massive and diverse textual economy. Some of these encyclopaedist authors, ignoring or pushing back against al-Būnī's claims that lettrism was a secret science passed down from the prophets and saints, assigned lettrism to the category of the 'foreign'/'natural' sciences. Others condemned outright his writings as heresy and sorcery (*siḥr*). Still others, most notably Ibn Khaldūn, combined these approaches, positing that the 'modern' Sufism of al-Būnī and his cohort was contaminated with both Ismā'īlism and pagan occultism. The second trend that emerged from my readings and that accompanied the efflorescence of the corpus is the formulation of what can be termed a 'post-esotericist' lettrism, by which I mean a lettrism actively synthesized from the teachings of al-Būnī, Ibn al-'Arabī, and others and declared a revealed science of the invisible for a

new, apocalyptic age. As examined in the final part of this chapter, this project was central to the career and writings of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, as well as with the coterie of intellectuals he called the (neo-)Ikhwān al-ṣafā’, though it had roots in earlier developments driven by less well-known actors. As we will see, this post-esotericist lettrist project itself partook of many of the motives and methods of the encyclopædism of the time.

Al-Maqrīzī’s *tarjamah* for al-Būnī, faulty though it may be with regard to the details of al-Būnī’s life, retains traces of many of these developments to the extent that further examination of the text, particularly as pertains to al-Būnī’s life in the *mashriq*, can serve as a useful introduction to these trends. According to al-Maqrīzī, following his education in the Maghrib and al-Andalus, al-Būnī made his way to Egypt, arriving first in Alexandria and then taking up residence in Cairo (*aqāma bi-al-Qāhirah*) sometime during the reign of the final Fāṭimid caliph, al-‘Āḍid li-Dīn Allāh (r. 555/1160-567/1171)—a dating of his emigration that, as discussed in the first chapter, I regard as almost certainly too early. From Cairo he makes the *ḥajj* to Mecca, and thence to Jerusalem, Damascus, Wasit, and Baghdad. From Baghdad he returns to Jerusalem, then journeys again to Mecca for a second *ḥajj* before returning to Cairo. From Cairo he then travels back to Tunis, taking up residence there to instruct the youth, serve as the *imām* of a *masjid*, and engage in preaching (*aqbala ‘alā al-wa‘z*), and dies there in 602/1205-6.⁵⁵¹ Much as he does in his account of al-Būnī’s time spent studying in the West, al-Maqrīzī here has al-Būnī interact with a veritable who’s-who of celebrated Eastern religious authorities during his travels. Unlike al-Būnī’s alleged Western teachers, some of whom might have been implicated in occult-scientific pursuits, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, those in the East were figures regarded as impeccably ‘orthodox’ in al-Maqrīzī’s milieu. In Alexandria al-Būnī meets the great Shāfi‘ite jurist Abū Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī (d. 576/1180) and the Mālikite Abū al-Ṭāhir Ismā‘īl b. ‘Awf al-Zuhrī (d. 581/1185). In Damascus he encounters the esteemed *muḥaddith* and sometimes anti-Crusader propagandist Abū al-Qāsim ‘Alī Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176). And in Baghdad he meets the famous Ḥanbalī

⁵⁵¹ al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, 462.

jurist, historian, and preacher Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200). Aside from al-Būnī’s mention in *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* of having been in Mecca in 621/1224—a date almost twenty years after al-Būnī’s death according to al-Maqrīzī!—nothing in the core texts suggests the itinerary al-Maqrīzī offers as being founded in fact, though it is hardly an implausible one for a traveler from the West. As for the list of teachers, none of these figures are mentioned in al-Būnī’s core texts.⁵⁵² Al-Maqrīzī, however, includes dialogues between al-Būnī and two of these luminaries: al-Silafī and Ibn ‘Asākir. Though certainly fictional, I would argue that they nonetheless exemplify some of the complexities and ambivalences of the memory and reception of al-Būnī in the Mamlūk period.

As for other details of al-Būnī’s life and character, we are told that he often engaged in vigils, fasting, and other acts of supererogatory devotion, and that while in Tunis he retreated frequently to a place by the sea “two days east of Tunis” and the name of which al-Maqrīzī gives as Jabal Mākūḍ, an otherwise unknown toponym.⁵⁵³ It is also claimed that al-Būnī “never had children, and neither did he have disciples due to his disinclination to that.”⁵⁵⁴ Brockelmann claims that al-Būnī had a son on the basis of a manuscript (Berlin MS Qu. 1044) attributed to one Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Abbās al-Būnī, though this is hardly probative.⁵⁵⁵ I regard the claim about his lack of followers to be baseless, given the paratextual evidence discussed previously. On a more extraordinary level, al-Maqrīzī goes on to credit al-Būnī with the ability to travel on foot with supernatural speed and to make himself invisible. At one point he states: “Sometimes he would be with you and you could see him, but sometimes he would

⁵⁵² Ibn al-Jawzī is referenced in a book on preaching/sermons attributed to al-Būnī (discussed in the introductory chapter), though not as a personal acquaintance. Süleymaniye MS Yeni Cami 1013, fol. 2^a, ln. 1.

⁵⁵³ Neither al-Ya’lawī nor I have found any reference to this toponym; *Ibid.*, 463, fn 1. The possibility that the place described could be an echo of al-Mahdawī’s Jabal al-Manārah (discussed in the previous chapter) should perhaps be considered.

⁵⁵⁴ al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*, 463.

وكان كثير الانتطاع والعبادة من التهجد والصوم يلازم الإمساك عن الطعام في أكثر اوقاته ويؤثر العزلة على مخالطة الناس ويخرج في اغلب الايام إلى جبل مأكوض على البحر شرقي تونس على يومين منها فيقيم به ولم يكن له اولاد ولا اتباع لإعراضه عن ذلك

⁵⁵⁵ GAL SI 911.

vanish from you, disappearing in the road, and would not reappear to you for a week.” Al-Maqrīzī also attributes to him the power to produce—or perhaps fetch from a great distance—fruits and vegetables out of season and to have distributed them to pregnant women.⁵⁵⁶ He then praises al-Būnī’s great erudition, noting his deep knowledge of the interrelated fields of mathematics and the science of letters, and that he was said to be like the great Arab philosopher al-Kindī: “In his time and region neither was there one of better character nor one more knowledgeable in the science of arithmetic and the [science of] letters appurtenant to it, such that it was said of him that he was the al-Kindī of the age (meaning Ya’qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī). It is said that the letters conversed with him, such that he learned from them their beneficial and detrimental uses [*manāfi’ ahā wa-maḍārrahā*].” In what seems to be an explanation of the notion that the letters conversed with al-Būnī, a marginal note in al-Maqrīzī’s hand adds: “They claim that every letter has an angel, and that the spiritual forces attached to the letters would communicate with him [*scil. al-Būnī*].”⁵⁵⁷

The somewhat conventional Sufi-hagiographic material⁵⁵⁸ and acclaim for al-Būnī’s learnedness in mathematics and the science of letters that appears alongside the comparison to al-Kindī points to important tensions in Mamlūk-era reception of al-Būnī regarding the relationship of lettrism to saintly miracles (*karāmāt*). Many of the encyclopaedic works discussed in this chapter participate in the medieval discourse on the ‘classification of the sciences’ (*taṣnīf al-‘ilm*), which is to say rankings of the

⁵⁵⁶ al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, 463.

وتؤثر عنه احوال عجيبة من الخطوة في المشي والاختفاء عن الناس والاحتجاب عنهم فساعة هو معك تراه وساعة يغيب عنك ويتوارى في الطريق فلا يظهر لك إلا بعد اسبوع وأكثر وكان كثيراً ما يأتي بما يفترج عليه من الفواكه والخضراوات في غير اوانه ويأتي إلى النساء اولات الحمل بذلك في غير حينه فيقرع ابواهن ليلاً ونهاراً ويقول خذوا شهواتكن لعل الله ينفعنا بسببكن

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid. The bracketed part is marginal note:

ولم يكن في زمنه بلده احسن خلقاً ولا أكثر معرفة بعلم الحساب والحروف منه حتى إنه كان يقال له كندي الزمان [يعنون يعقوب بن إسحاق الكندي] ويقال إن الحروف كانت تخاطبه فيعلم منها منافعها ومضارها [هم يعزمون ان لكل حرف ملكاً وان الذي كان يخاطبه روحانيته الحروف الموكلة بها]

⁵⁵⁸ Vincent Cornell’s fascinating quantitative analysis of the miracles reported of medieval Maghribī saints includes “food miracles” such as al-Būnī is credited with as a not uncommon category, one that Cornell suggests stem from the needs of believers living a precarious rural existence. Far more common, however, are various types of “epistemological miracles” such as *mukāshafat al-dhikr* (‘mind-reading’), perhaps reflecting the concerns of those living in higher-density settings. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, 15 ff.

sciences in regard to their relationship to revealed knowledge, and as pertains to their social importance, epistemological value, and propriety according to God's law. Their positionings of lettrism within the hierarchy of the sciences stake out various judgments on the origin, validity, and permissibility of lettrism. The notion of al-Būnī as both saint and philosopher had the potential to trouble these categorizations. Indeed, as we will see, a chief accusation of some of al-Būnī's harshest critics was that he and other esotericist Sufis dabbled in philosophy (*falsafah*), a charge sufficient in itself to disqualify them from sainthood. For post-esotericist lettrists such as al-Biṣṭāmī, however, the resolution of this tension was key to their project, as their lettrism was the philosophy revealed by God through his prophets and saints.

A dialog included by al-Maqrīzī that further signals tensions regarding the origin and permissibility of al-Būnī's teachings is one between al-Būnī and the Iṣfahānī *cum* Alexandrian traditionist Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī. Al-Silafī, as mentioned in chapter two, was the head of the first Shāfi'ite *madrasah* in Egypt. He was a seminal figure in Egyptian Sunnite intellectual culture in the waning decades of the Fāṭimid dynasty and early Ayyūbid period, transmitting *ḥadīths* to four generations of scholars over the course of his very long life. According to various reports he lived to be somewhere between ninety-eight and 106 years old,⁵⁵⁹ and as Claude Gilliot notes, "it is impossible to count the number of times that he appears in certificates of audition" and related paratextual documents.⁵⁶⁰ Though an early beneficiary of elite patronage of Sunnite *madrasahs* in Egypt, he was recounted as having maintained an ideal scholarly aloofness to temporal rulers. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn b. Ayyūb and his brother and *amīr* al-ʿĀdil attended some of his *ḥadīth* sessions, as did a number of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's sons,⁵⁶¹ and various source recounts that al-Silafī once scolded the sultan and his brother for "chattering" with

⁵⁵⁹ S. M. Zaman, "Silafī's Biography: His Birth and Family Background," *Islamic Studies* 25, no. 1 (April 1, 1986): 3 ff.

⁵⁶⁰ Gilliot, *EI2*, s.v. "al-Silafī."

⁵⁶¹ Leiser, "The Madrasa and the Islamicization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt," 40.

one another during an audition.⁵⁶² In short, al-Silafī was a figure who loomed large in the Egyptian scholarly imaginary as a model of ‘orthodox’ respectability, and it is in this capacity that he can be read as featuring in the dialog with al-Būnī. Al-Būnī is portrayed as having been the subject of rumors in Alexandria about the suspect nature of his extraordinary knowledge and abilities, and al-Silafī, as a leader in the community, gives voice to these concerns:

وقال له الحافظ السلفي يوماً إنّ أهل بلدنا يعني الإسكندرية يذكرون عنك أنّ عندك شيئاً من علم الغيب فقال له قال الله عزّ وجلّ ﴿قُلْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبْعَثُونَ﴾
 قال الحافظ ابو الطاهر صدق الله وانت تكلمت بالحقّ فما هذا الذي يقوله الناس
 قال تصحيف وتحريف وإنّما اعلم علم الشاهد لا علم الغيب
 قال وما علم الشاهد
 قال ما اظهره الله لي ولا مثالي ممن كان قبلي وفي زماني

One day *al-ḥāfiẓ* al-Silafī said to him, The people of our town (meaning Alexandria) say of you that you are versed in knowledge of the unseen [*ilm al-ghayb*].

He [*scil.* al-Būnī] said to him, God (may he be exalted and glorified) said, ‘Say: none in the heavens and earth knows the unseen except God.’⁵⁶³

Al-ḥāfiẓ Abū Ṭāhir replied, God spoke the truth, and you speak truthfully, so what is this that the people say?

He [*scil.* al-Būnī] said, Misunderstandings and distortions. I know only the knowledge of one who witnesses, not that of the unseen.’

He [*scil.* al-Silafī] asked, And what is the knowledge of one who witnesses?

He said, That which God has disclosed to me and to those like me, before me and in my time.⁵⁶⁴

The accusation that al-Būnī is possessed of knowledge of the *ghayb*—the unseen, the unknowable, the *mysterion*—is inherently vague, but implies that he has knowledge of the invisible worlds, and that the means by which such knowledge is gained must be illicit. That al-Silafī seems to accept al-Būnī’s truthfulness in denying any illicit knowledge, but to nonetheless be puzzled by his

⁵⁶² Dickinson, “Ibn Al-Salah Al-Sharazuri and the Isnad,” 494.

⁵⁶³ Q 27:65.

⁵⁶⁴ al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*, 464.

claim to *'ilm al-shahādah*, marks al-Būnī's alterity in relation to established religious authorities. In effect, the story evokes al-Būnī's esotericism, implying that an 'exotericist' scholar such as al-Silafī would be unfamiliar with his methods. Similarly, al-Būnī's final statement implies his membership in a spiritual elect, along with others of his own and past generations. That the anecdote ends without any indication of whether or not al-Silafī acquiesced to this assertion can be taken as signaling that the propriety of al-Būnī's praxis was not a settled matter, as indeed it was not.

The other dialog found in the *tarjamah* occurs between al-Būnī and the Damascene preacher, traditionist, and historian Ibn 'Asākir, another giant of sixth/twelfth-century Sunnism in the central Arab-Islamic lands, and one particularly associated with matters of politics and the war against the Franks due to his close relationship with Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Zankī (d. 564/1179). The dialog itself is in a political vein, with Ibn 'Asākir calling on al-Būnī to forecast the future politics of the Arab-Islamic world. Al-Būnī predicts not only the imminent fall of the Fāṭimid regime, but also the conquest of the 'Abbāsids by the Mongols in 656/1258:

وقال له الحافظ ابن عساكر بدمشق إنّ الناس يذكرون أنّ هذه الدولة الفاطميّة قرب زوالها
فقال وكذلك الدولة العبّاسيّة ايضاً ولكنّ الدولة الفاطميّة أنّ زوالها وحنّ والدولة العبّاسيّة قرب وكاد وليس
بين الدولتين إلّا قريباً من تسعين سنة
قال فمن يكون بعدهم
قال قوم لا يعبا الله بهم وإن احسنوا هم كالنمر من القبر او كالذئب من الغم يؤيّد الله بهم هذا الدين ويعمر
بهم الشام والحجاز واليمن ومصر والجزيرة هم الذين وقعت فيهم الإشارة من صاحب الشريعة حيث قال صلى
الله عليه و سلم إنّ الله ليؤيّد هذا الدين بالرجل الفاجر فما رايت أكثر منهم عملاً تطاهراً بفجور إذا ظهروا
فقال له ابن عساكر فبلادك انت
فقال يظهر فيها بعد هؤلاء الذين بها قوم سوء ثم قوم سوء ثم قوم سوء
[قال ابن عساكر] فما وراء ذلك
قال كذلك حتى ينزل عيسى بن مريم عليه السلام

In Damascus, *al-ḥāfiẓ* Ibn 'Asākir said to him [*scil.* al-Būnī], The people say that this Fāṭimid regime nears its extinction. And he replied, Likewise the 'Abbāsīd regime. However, the Fāṭimid regime's extinction is at hand, while that of the 'Abbāsīd regime draws nears, and between the two regimes there will not be but about ninety years. And he [*scil.* Ibn 'Asākir] asked, And who comes after them?

He replied, A tribe for whom God cares not, though indeed they will prevail. They are like the lion with the cattle, or the wolves with the sheep. God will strengthen this religion by means of them, and Syria, the Hijāz, Yemen, Egypt, and the Jazīrah will be filled with them. It was to them the master of God's Law [*scil.* Muḥammad] alluded when he (God's blessing and peace be upon him) said, 'Verily God strengthens this religion by means of the debauchee [*al-rajul al-fājir*]', for when they have appeared, never will you have seen them exceeded in the pursuit of immorality.

Ibn 'Asākir said to him, And your lands?

He replied, There will appear, after those who are there now, an evil tribe, and then another evil tribe.

And what after that? [asked Ibn 'Asākir]

He said, Like that until 'Īsā b. Miryam (peace be upon him) descends.⁵⁶⁵

The theme of Sufis making political prophecies through occult-scientific means is familiar from Ibn al-'Arabī's account in *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah* of Ibn Barraġān having employed astrology to predict the fall of Jerusalem, along with his subsequent criticism of him for not having employed the science of letters to do so instead.⁵⁶⁶ In my view, the notion that al-Būnī was some sort of diviner of future political realities bespeaks the emphasis on apocalypticism and enlightened rulers in post-esotericist lettrism, and hints at the appeal of that discourse to military elites and their bureaucrats.

Finally, one area where I think the al-Maqrīzī's entry for al-Būnī in *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr* can be considered somewhat more reliable is his statements on al-Būnī's bibliography and the circulation of some of his works. He writes:

وصتف [البوني] نحواً اربعين كتاباً منها كتاب في الوعظ يتدوله الناس ببلاد إفريقيّة كما يتدولون كتب ابن الجوزي ولا غنى بهم في الوعظ عنه ومنها كتاب شرح الاسماء الحسنی في مجلدين كبيرين ضمنه فوائد جمّة وكتاب شمس المعارف في علم الحرف وهو عزيز الوجود يتنافس الناس فيه ويبدلون فيه الاموال الجزيلة وكتاب اللمة النورانية وكتاب الاممات

He [*scil.* al-Būnī] composed around forty books, among them a book on preaching which the people of the lands of Ifrīqiyah circulate like [people elsewhere] circulate the books of Ibn al-Jawzī, and none of them could dispense with it for preaching. Also among [his works] is *Sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*; it is in two large volumes and he included many useful things in it. Also *Shams al-*

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 463.

⁵⁶⁶ See fn 171, supra.

ma'ārif fi 'ilm al-ḥarf; it is hard to find [*'azīz al-wujūd*], and people contend with one another and spend great wealth to do so. Also *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* and *Kitāb al-Anmāṭ*.⁵⁶⁷

This high number of works reflects the multiplicity of texts attributed to al-Būnī that were in circulation by the ninth/fifteenth century, many of which, as discussed in chapter one, were quasi-pseudepigraphic or entirely so. The comment on the book on preaching—which may well be the al-Būnī-attributed work(s) on sermons mentioned in chapter one—and its popularity in Ifrīqiyah presumably comes by way of al-Furriyānī. The work in two volumes that he calls *Sharḥ al-asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná* is certainly *ʿAlam al-hudá*, which even today is sometimes cataloged under that title. That he includes it and *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* in his list is unsurprising given the number of copies of those works in circulation in the period, a topic I take up below. As I argued in my 2012 article, the *Kitāb al-anmāṭ* he mentions—a title that is also mentioned by Ibn al-Khaṭīb and Ibn Khaldūn—is almost certainly either an alternate title for *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* or an excerpt from that work that at some point circulated independently.⁵⁶⁸ Al-Maqrīzī's statement that people contended with one another and expended great wealth in search of *Shams al-ma'ārif fi 'ilm al-ḥarf*—almost certainly an alternate/erroneous title for *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif*—is an important indicator of the demand for al-Būnī's works in the period. Whether he is referring to the authentic or courtly version is impossible to know (I suspect it was the latter), but it suggests that Būnian works thought to deal specifically with the science of letters were sought after by the kind of people who could expend great wealth on books, which is to say people at the upper end of the social ladder.

4.0.1 Chapter overview

The overarching topic of this chapter is the efflorescence of the corpus that occurred as Būnian works began to escape the confines of germinal-period esotericist reading communities and circulate

⁵⁶⁷ al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr*, 463.

⁵⁶⁸ Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?," 108.

among a variety of sociopolitical elites in Cairo and other cities. Within the frame of the remainder of the Mamlūk period, i.e. from around the second quarter of the eighth/fourteenth century through the entry of Selīm the Grim's forces into Cairo, I address the expansion and transformation of the corpus in a few, interlocking ways. First I examine the manuscript evidence for the taking up of Būnian works by the class of literate, cosmopolitan bureaucrats, scholars, and artisans that flourished as the Mamlūk period matured, as well as Būnian works among Mamlūk military elites. In doing so I address the impact on the corpus of readers' shifting tastes and priorities. I also discuss what paratextual evidence reveals about the movement of Būnian works beyond Cairo.

Second, with an eye to the reception of the corpus, I turn to mentions of al-Būnī in various literary sources of the period, paying particular attention to efforts to categorize al-Būnī in some of the major encyclopædist works of the age, and to accusations of heresy against al-Būnī and his followers in religious screeds. This survey of literary sources culminates with a discussion of Ibn Khaldūn's critique of al-Būnī, Ibn al-'Arabī, and the science of letters in the *Muqaddimah*, which I argue was largely a product of Ibn Khaldūn's anxiety at the growing popularity of al-Būnī's works among 'people who mattered'. In connection with Ibn Khaldūn's *fatwas* condemning works by other Western Sufis and their associates, I close the section with a brief discussion of whether or not al-Būnī's were subject to censorship during the Mamlūk period.

In the third and final part of the chapter I turn to 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā', and the emergence of what I term 'post-esotericist' lettrism. I pay particular attention to al-Biṣṭāmī's portrait of a bustling turn-of-the-ninth/fifteenth-century community of lettrist practitioners conjoining Cairo and Damascus, arguing that it was an outgrowth of the esotericist reading communities discussed in earlier chapters. I close with a detailed examination of al-Biṣṭāmī's remarkable account in *Shams al-āfāq* of his own process of initiation into the secrets of lettrism through auditioning and studying lettrist works, including al-Būnī's *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, with a variety of masters, a process that ends with his own henotic experience in which the secrets of lettrism are laid

bare to him. I argue that the notions exemplified in al-Biṣṭāmī's account of books and book practices as instruments of initiation already were seeded in al-Būnī's works and in the esotericist reading communities he helped establish roughly two hundred years prior to al-Biṣṭāmī.

4.1 Mamlūk-era manuscripts of the Būnian corpus

In the previous two chapters, my attention has been primarily on what I refer to as the germinal period in the career of the Būnian corpus, which is to say from around the time of al-Būnī's documentable presence in Cairo in 621/1224-622/1225 until roughly a century later, and on the circulation and reading of his works within small communities of esotericist Sufis. As such, I thus far have dealt with the relatively small body of manuscripts. There are 107 manuscript copies of Būnian works that I consider as belonging to the period under discussion in this chapter. Seventy are dated in colophons or other paratexts: twenty belonging to the eighth/fourteenth century and fifty to the 'long' ninth/fifteenth (i.e. up to the Ottoman conquest). The others I have estimated to belong to one century or the other based on codical features (such as the hand, paper, and *mise-en-page*) and in comparison with dated copies, bringing the totals to twenty-seven for the eighth/fourteenth century and eighty for the long ninth/fifteenth. Such estimations are of course imprecise, and I thus have avoided drawing conclusions solely on their basis. The manuscripts described in Appendix A, nos. 5-125, are those that I consider to belong to the period. Chart 4 show those manuscripts broken down by century and work; the first includes information on all the manuscripts, and the second only on the dated manuscripts. Note that basic patterns in the number of copies of each work are quite similar in both graphs, suggesting that the estimated datings of the undated codices are, at least in aggregate, roughly accurate.

As explained in the first chapter of this study, I have utilized the collected data on the corpus for certain types of 'wide-angle' analysis, particularly regarding the dates at which certain works appeared, how widely copied a given work was in a given period, and the geographical spread of the

corpus over time. Such analyses have obvious weaknesses given the inevitably incomplete state of the data, but I have nonetheless found them highly useful for heuristic purposes as a body of evidence to be read against the literary sources. In what follows I consider apparent trends in the data for Mamlūk-era copies of al-Būnī's works that have informed my understanding of career of the corpus during the period. The most obvious of these trends is of course the efflorescence itself, and I regard the greatly increased number of copies relative to the previous period to be reflective of an actual dramatic increase in the number of copies in circulation, rather than an artifact of the decreased survival rate of older manuscripts. Understanding the reasons for this dramatic increase—and the cultural success of lettrism in this period that it implies—is one of the driving forces behind this study as a whole. Some other phenomena I discuss in this section are an apparent shift in demand among readers between the eighth/fourteenth and long ninth/fifteenth centuries toward works dealing most explicitly with operative lettrist practices, a transition that coincides with an apparent rise in the circulation of pseudepigraphic works. I will also make some rudimentary prosopographical observations about the readers of Būnian works in this period, including differences in manuscripts that seem to have been produced for 'ordinary' secondary elites versus some that clearly were commissioned for the courts and households of military elites. Finally I address the geographical spread of Būnian works outward from Cairo to neighboring cities and regions.

4.1.1 Shifts in the demand for Būnian works

As I first discussed in my 2012 article, to the extent that the number of surviving copies of a given work can be taken as indicative of its popularity, the manuscript data suggest that not all Būnian works—whether authentic or pseudepigraphic—fared equally or consistently across the eighth/fourteenth and long ninth/fifteenth centuries.⁵⁶⁹ Oversimplifying for the sake of concision, I would suggest that this was the result of a shift in demand among readers of Būnian works, that was increasing overall, as readers moved away from his discourses on 'ordinary' Sufi and pietistic matters,

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 100, 110.

and toward material focused on operative lettrism, and that this was particularly the case in the ninth/fifteenth century. As discussed later in this chapter, this trend toward the increased popularity of works with operative materials is largely attributable to the success of ‘post-esotericist’ lettrism, and to a phenomenon integral to that reframing of lettrism whereby al-Būnī came to be seen as the authority on operative practices, with Ibn al-‘Arabī being the preferred authority with regard to theoretical/philosophical aspects of the science.

As is evident in the tables and charts detailing the codices surveyed for this study, more copies of *‘Alam al-hudá* survive from the eighth/fourteenth century than of any other Būnian work. What is more, it is the only work of the corpus for which there are more surviving copies from the eighth/fourteenth century than from any earlier or subsequent one, suggesting that its popularity may have peaked during that century. Eleven dated copies of it survive from that century along with an undated copy, Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı vehbi 966, that is almost certainly from the same period. The majority of these copies are sizable volumes (at least 25x18 cm), beautifully though austere rendered, and sometimes fully vocalized to ease comprehension and recitation during gatherings of reading communities. Beyazid MS 1377 and the Süleymaniye MSS Reşid efendi 590.1-2, Bağdatlı vehbi 966, Hamidiye 260.1, Esad efendi 1501, Kılıç Ali Paşa 588, and Nuruosmaniye 2875 display prime examples of these traits. While the codices are of high quality and copied in trained hands, they bear none of the hallmarks of books commissioned for courtly settings; this is to say that they lack elaborate titlepiece and chrysography and other multi-colored inks (aside from some rubrication), neither do they contain patronage statements. They would appear, then, to have been prized possessions of secondary elites, likely ones inclined toward Sufi modes of piety. Certainly these readers seem to have held al-Būnī in high esteem: the paratexts regarding al-Būnī’s auditioning of the work in the Qarāfah and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥaddād’s reading of the work with his master Abū Faḍl al-Ghumārī are found in Reşid efendi 590.1-2 and Hamidiye 260.1, respectively, indicating the copyists’ and/or owners’ interests in preserving links back to al-Būnī and his followers. In a somewhat earlier copy of the work, Süleymaniye MS Laleli 1550,

copied in 739/1339, the copyist refers to al-Būnī in the colophon as “the *imām* of the Muslims and gnostic of the age” (*imām al-muslimīm wa-‘ārif al-zamān*).

Paratexts in these copies of *‘Alam al-hudá* contain sparse but valuable information on the readers of these codices, information that would seem to confirm that they were secondary elites in the sense of artisans and bureaucrats. Esad efendi 1501 was copied by *al-‘abd al-faqīr ilá Allāh Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Rabb al-Nabī al-Ḥanafī al-‘Atṭār*, whose use of *al-faqīr* suggests a Sufi orientation and whose Ḥanafism might indicate a Turkic origin, while his final *nisbah* indicates that he was a perfume-maker and/or pharmacist. Hamidiye 260, one of the Damascene codices, was copied by one ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī, *kātib al-qawāsīn* (‘secretary of the archers’), a title suggesting a military-secretarial role. Reşid efendi 590.1-2, a Cairene codex, was copied in 798/1396 by Ayyūb b. Quṭlūbak al-Rūmī al-Ḥanafī, who, judging by his Turkic patronymic, may have been a *mamlūk* or the child of one. And Kılıç Ali Paşa 588, copied in 792/1390, bears a note indicating it was purchased in 840/1436 by *al-mamlūk Ḥasan Qadam al-Ḥanafī*. Certainly these were not actors of Western-Islamicate origin adhering to the Sufi traditions of their homeland, but rather cosmopolitan actors, many with roots in points well east of Egypt, who partook of the new strain of Sufism that al-Būnī had helped introduce to Cairo.

While *‘Alam al-hudá* deals extensively with matters of cosmology and Sufi theory and practice (as we have seen in past chapters), and includes some instructions for *dhikr* and other conventional Sufi practices relative to specific divine names, it includes no instructions for the making of talismans. I suspect this is a primary reason for its apparent decline in popularity in the following century, as al-Būnī’s name had come to be most strongly associated with operative lettrism, particularly talismans. A similar observation can be made regarding *Hidāyat al-qāşidīn*, al-Būnī’s overview of the Sufi path which is long on moral exhortations but short on practical instructions, though it seems never to have been widely circulated. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*, which includes extensive instructions of *dhikr* and *khalwah* practices but no talismanic material, appears to have been moderately successful. In contrast to *‘Alam al-hudá*, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*, which combines cosmological discourse with practical instructions for

operative lettrist practices, seems to have grown in popularity in the ninth/fifteenth century. And as is apparent from Charts 3 and 4, the most successful texts of the Mamlūk period as a whole appear to have been *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* and the quasi-pseudepigraphic ‘courtly’ *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, with both showing great increases in the later period. Both works contain extensive practical material: cycles of supererogatory prayers linked to certain times in the case of *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah*, along with some material on cryptograms (*awfāq*), and in the case of the courtly *Shams al-ma‘ārif* a great deal of talismanic instruction regarding both cryptograms and other types of figures, along with the apocalyptic material drawn from Ibn Ṭalḥah. The other three pseudepigraphic (or likely-pseudepigraphic, in the case of the third) works—*Qabs al-iqtidā‘*, *Tartīb al-da‘awāt*, and *Khawāṣṣ asmā‘ Allāh al-ḥusnā*—deal mostly or entirely with operative practices, and also see upticks in the number of copies from one century to the next, though not with terribly high numbers. Note that the profusion of minor works under the category of ‘Other’ (for a list of which see Appendix C), also flourished in the long ninth/fifteenth century. No doubt many of these are pseudepigraphic.

4.1.2 *Būnian works produced for court settings*

There is a rough correlation between works oriented toward operative practices and codices that bear signs of having been produced in courtly settings. A few of these would appear to be from the eighth/fourteenth century. BnF MS arabe 2647, the undated but obviously early copy of the courtly *Shams al-ma‘ārif* discussed in chapter two, would seem to be the earliest example of a codex that may have been produced for a military-elite household, though there is no probative indication of this. Another obviously early codex is Süleymaniye MS Aşir efendi 169, a finely scripted copy of *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* with delicate chrysography on the titlepiece. The majority of codices with physical signs of courtly readership, however, are from the ninth/fifteenth century. To name just a few, two copies of *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* held at Dār al-Kutub—MSS Ḥurūf wa-asmā‘ Ḥalīm (copied in 840/1436-7) and Ḥurūf Ṭal‘at 182—bear the blue paints and chrysography one expects of a courtly codex. One of the most outstanding examples is Süleymaniye MS Nuruosmaniye 2822, a copy of *Tartīb al-da‘awāt* (but

bearing the title *Sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*). Penned in an elegant Syro-Egyptian hand, its most outstanding feature is that all of the many complex talismans that populate that work are exquisitely chrysographed, with section headings appearing in blue ink (see Figure 16). Though it has no patronage notice, the text does bear a proud colophon in a somewhat unusual square frame on the final leaf, proclaiming that the copying and chrysography were completed on the twenty-seventh of Sha'bān 814/1411 by one Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yūsuf, *al-shahīr bi-al-Jushī*. Finally, there is BnF MS arabe 2649, a handsomely rendered copy of the courtly *Shams al-ma'ārif* produced in Cairo in 913/1508. It includes on its titlepage a patronage statement⁵⁷⁰ (see Figure 17) noting, as Coulon has discussed, that it was produced for the library of the *sayyidī* 'Alī, a descendant of the *amīr* Sayf al-Dīn Ṭūghān b. 'Abd Allāh al-Nūrūzī (d. 856/1452) who was *dawādar* (bearer of the ink stand) to the sultan in Damascus.⁵⁷¹

4.1.3 Geographical spread

Some general comments can be made about the geographical spread of the corpus in this period, although these are limited by the rarity of locative notations in colophons and other paratexts. Of the eighth/fourteenth-century codices, three of them note their having been copied in Cairo, and numerous of the others bear signs of Egyptian origin, mainly with regard to the hands in which they are copied. A number of other codices demonstrate that Būnian works had begun to circulate beyond the confines of Egypt's major cities. Süleymaniye MS Reisülküttab 1163, a compilatory codex with a copy of *al-Lum'ah al-nūrāniyah* alongside works by al-Ghazālī, the Egyptian Sufi poet Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-Būṣhīrī, and many others, was copied in Damietta (Dimyāt) in 789/1387. Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260, a compilation containing a copy of *'Alam al-hudá* (some paratexts of which were discussed in chapter two) along with one of *Tartīb al-da'awāt* and other texts, was copied in Damascus in 772/1370. Another copy of *'Alam al-hudá*, Dār al-Kutub MS Ṭasawwūf Ḥalīm 41, was copied in the same city in

⁵⁷⁰ BnF MS Arabe 2649, fol. 1a.

⁵⁷¹ Jean-Charles Coulon, "Magic and Politics: Historical Events and Political Thought in the *Šams Al-Ma'ārif* Attributed to Al-Būnī" (presented at the Princeton Islamicate Occult Sciences Workshop, Princeton, 2014).

777/1376. A copy of *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, BnF MS arabe 2657, was copied in Mecca in 788/1386 by one ʿUmar b. Ismāʿīl al-Samarqandī, whose distinctly Eastern hand suggests he may indeed have hailed from Central Asia, perhaps discovering the work while in the holy city on the ḥajj. And yet another copy of *ʿAlam al-hudá*, Süleymaniye MS A. Tekelioğlu 183, was copied in Cairo in 787/1385 by *al-faqīr* Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Farghānī, but later was taken to Baghdad where, in 808/1405, al-Farghānī inscribed a notice at the end of the codex celebrating the birth of his son—a not uncommon paratextual practice.

Of the handful of ninth/fifteenth-century codices with locative notations, most are from Cairo, though some modestly extend the range of the corpus. Princeton MS Garrett 1380Y, copied in 834/1430, is a compilatory codex containing *al-Lumʿah al-nūranīyah*, *Qabs al-iqtidāʾ*, and *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*. The hand is small *naskh* with some Maghribī characteristics, particularly in the pointing, though the colophon states that it was copied in Syrian Tripoli (*bi-thughr Tarābalūs al-Shām*).⁵⁷² Another compilatory codex, Süleymaniye MS Laleli 1549, copied in Aleppo in 881/1476-7, bears copies of *Qabs al-iqtidāʾ* and an otherwise unknown al-Būnī-attributed work entitled *Tafsīr asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusná*, and was. F

As for points west of Egypt, though the research for this study was not focused on libraries likely to have large collections of Maghribī and Andalusian manuscripts, it certainly can be said that some of al-Būnī's works had found their way west already by the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century, as is evident from the comments on al-Būnī by the Granadan scholars Abū Ishāq al-Shātibī and Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb, which I discuss later in this chapter. Furthermore, Escorial MS Derenbourg 979, which the catalog estimates may be from the eighth/fourteenth century, is an undated copy of *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* in a Maghribī, possibly Andalusī hand (see Figure 18). The continued presence of al-Būnī's works in the West is attested to by Leo Africanus' observation of Būnian works circulating in Fez around 905/1500.⁵⁷³ In addition, the Escorial collections include a few other undated Būnian works in

⁵⁷² Princeton MS Garrett 1895Y (LN, QI, MGH), fol. 48b.

⁵⁷³ Hamès, *EI3*, s.v. "al-Būnī."

Maghribī script, though nothing indicates that any of them are earlier than the ninth/fifteenth century.⁵⁷⁴

4.2 *Al-Būnī in the Mamlūk textual economy*

Just as al-Maqrīzī has al-Būnī predict in his dialog with Ibn ‘Asākir, the decades between al-Būnī’s death and the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century did, indeed, see a remaking of the political order of the Arab-Islamic world. Almohad power steadily disintegrated in the West, giving way to that of the Ḥafṣids and Marīnids. Internecine struggles among Ayyūbid princes, along with events set in motion by Louis IX’s ill-fated Seventh Crusade, led to the Mamlūk rule of Egypt by 648/1250. And the thunderous arrival of the Mongols drastically reshaped the political and cultural makeup of Central Asia, Persia, Iraq, and (more temporarily) the Levant. The Mongols’ sack of Baghdad in 656/1258 and their subsequent defeat by the Baḥrīyah at ‘Ayn Jalūt in 658/1260 positioned the Turkish military elites of the Mamlūk regime—*dawlat al-turk*, as it was known then—as the new champions of Sunnite Islam. This status was cemented by the sultan Baybars I (r. 658/1260-676/1277) with his installation of a refugee ‘Abbāsīd as caliph in Cairo and appointment of four chief *qādīs*, one from each of the major Sunnite *madhhabs*. The shift of political and cultural capital to Cairo in subsequent decades transformed the city into the regional cosmopolis, with other Mamlūk-controlled cities such as Damascus, Alexandria, and, as vassals, the Ḥaramayn in Arabia, being closely bound to the capital through military, trade, scholarly, and Sufi networks.

The trend that had already emerged in Egypt and Syria under the Ayyūbids of military elites using their personal wealth to build and endow mosques, *madrasas*, *khānqāhs*, and related spaces grew to unparalleled proportions during the Mamlūk period, such that the cities of the sultanate—and Cairo above all—were transfigured by a new physical and economic infrastructure for learning and public

⁵⁷⁴ These are Escorial MSS Derenbourg 944.1 (Courtly *ShM*) and 2 (Khawāṣṣ *asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusná*) and Derenbourg 945 (*AH*). The latter is of interest in that it contains a copy of the authorial colophon for *‘Alam al-hudá* discussed in chapter two.

piety. The intellectual culture of the cities obviously was transformed as well, particularly as new ranks of scholarly, artisan, and Sufi actors arrived from points East and West—many in search of patronage—along with waves of young people seeking to become their students, apprentices, and disciples. This gave rise to a large, culturally transformative class of secondary elites: literate or semi-literate actors who, though typically not in positions of direct political control, wielded considerable influence as counselors to military elites, judges, bureaucrats, educators, merchants, arbiters of public morality including jurists and preachers, and Sufi *shaykhs* and other ‘technicians of the sacred’.

As much recent scholarship has discussed, though actors of these sorts had long played important roles in Islamicate polities, the Mamlūk period saw a unique amalgamation of diverse types of secondary elites into a heterogeneous whole. It was a flourishing, cosmopolitan urban class with its own complex hierarchies and internal conflicts, but ones negotiated largely through cultural interactions—public oratory, written screeds and responses, buildings and charitable endowments, displays of piety and rituals such as processions and grave visitations, marriage and bonds of friendship, *et cetera*—with only limited appeals to the administrative force of the military elites. Jonathan Berkey has discussed the complex webs of personal relationships—both between military and secondary elites and among secondary elites—through which the transmission of knowledge, scholarly prestige, and remunerative postings to *madrasahs*, *khānqāhs*, and other *waqf*-based institutions were negotiated in Mamlūk Cairo.⁵⁷⁵ He also considers ways that legists, Sufis, and popular preachers contested control over the public teaching of religion to the unlettered majority.⁵⁷⁶ Anne Broadbridge, building on Michael Chamberlain’s agonistic vision of struggles for professional appointments among scholars in Ayyūbid Damascus,⁵⁷⁷ has examined ways that intellectuals such as Ibn Khaldūn, Maḥmūd al-‘Ayn (d. 855/1451), al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ḥajar weathered transitions of power among the military

⁵⁷⁵ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*.

⁵⁷⁶ Idem., “Storytelling, Preaching, and Power in Mamluk Cairo,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 4 (2000): 53–73.

⁵⁷⁷ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*.

elites on whose patronage they relied while sometimes utilizing their historiographical texts as weapons against their peer-competitors.⁵⁷⁸ Thomas Bauer has argued that the Mamlūk period saw a transformative revivification of Arabic *belles lettres* in Egypt and the Levant, not as the primarily court-centric phenomenon it had been in the caliphal period, but rather as the prerogative of “a broad, literate and semi-literate middle class” that proved itself “[e]ager to find pleasure in literature, to improve their literary knowledge, and to gain social prestige as cognoscenti of literature and the subtleties of the Arabic language.”⁵⁷⁹ Elias Muhanna, in his recent study of al-Nuwayrī’s *Nihāyat al-arab*, has argued that the encyclopædist tendencies of the era’s authors/compiler was driven by “the aggregative ethos of Mamlūk imperial culture,”⁵⁸⁰ a growing tendency toward cosmopolitan universalism spurred by “[s]cholars and poets emigrat[ing] from the eastern territories where bureaucratic and scholarly institutions had been thrown into upheaval by the [Mongol] invasions, and from the west.”⁵⁸¹ And scholars such as Emil Homerin, Richard McGregor, Alexander Knysh, and Eric Geoffroy have documented how Sufi *shaykhs* and their detractors among the ‘*ulamā*’ jockeyed for public opinion and the favor of military elites in disputing the limits of Muslim ‘orthodoxy’, with the ‘new’ Sufism of Ibn al-‘Arabī and others of the Western Sufi cohort discussed in the previous chapters of this study periodically giving rise to instances of particularly intense contention, but also ones in which new alliances were formed between certain military elites, secondary elites, and groups among the common people.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁸ Anne Broadbridge, “Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth-Century Egypt: Al-‘Aynī, Al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ḥajar Al-‘Asqalānī,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 85–107.

⁵⁷⁹ Thomas Bauer, *EI3*, s.v. “Anthologies (Part 2: Post-Mongol Period).”

⁵⁸⁰ Elias Muhanna, “Encyclopædism in the Mamlūk Period: The Composition of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī’s (d. 1333) *Nihāyat al-arab fī al-funūn al-adab*” (Ph.D., Harvard University, 2012), 40.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

⁵⁸² T. E. Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn Al-Farid, His Verse, and His Shrine* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafā’ Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn ‘Arabī*; Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Egypte et en Syrie*.

Many types of secondary elites heavily utilized written texts, and manuscript culture flourished in the major Mamlūk cities thanks to these actors' pervasive influence and newfound economic power, in Cairo perhaps to a greater extent than ever before in the Arab-Islamic world. The commercial book trade flourished under Mamlūk rule. To take just one example, al-Maqrīzī notes that, around 700/1300, a new bookseller's *sūq* was established on the 'Palace Walk' in al-Qāhirah. Anchored in stalls attached to the *bīmāristān* (hospital complex) of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (r. 677/1279-688/1290), it no doubt filled the street between the hospital and the *madrāsah* of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, the latter being the site where the four chief *qāḍīs* heard cases during the early decades of the Mamlūk period.⁵⁸³ Nourished by the patronage of military elites, the book arts reached new heights of craftsmanship and expense in this milieu. However, the vast majority of volumes were produced for a clientele of scholars, students and various other secondary elites, and thus, though not inexpensive, were relatively austere and utilitarian. In line with new, more widespread reliance on books, significant efforts were made in the late medieval period to make them easier to use, and various book technologies came into more widespread use. Hirschler notes an increase in authors' and compilers' inclusion of tables of contents, and argues that the making of indexes for biographical dictionaries appears to have originated in the eighth/fourteenth century.⁵⁸⁴ Similarly, Maaïke van Berkel observes that al-Qalqashandī's (d. 821/1418) *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā* was arranged for easy information retrieval more so than earlier chancery guides, and that copyists of the period made innovative use of elements of *mise-en-page* such as headlines and differently-sized scripts to further facilitate navigation of such large and complex texts.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸³ al-Maqrīzī, *Les marchés du Caire: traduction annotée du texte de Maqrīzī*, trans. André. Raymond and Gaston Wiet (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1979), 189.

⁵⁸⁴ Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 18.

⁵⁸⁵ Maaïke Van Berkel, "The Attitude towards Knowledge in Mamlūk Egypt: Organisation and Structure of the *Ṣubḥ Al-A'shā* by Al-Qalqashandī (1355-1418)," in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*, ed. Peter Binkley, vol. Leiden: Brill, 1997, (Brills Studies in Intellectual History, 79) (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 161-168.

By the end of the period the Arabic book and practices surrounding it—indeed, the textual economy of the Arab-Islamic world—would be transformed in a number of ways. Though changes in writing and book practices over the course of the Mamlūk period have yet to be studied systematically, there are numerous indications that during that time the medieval paradigm of the book’s subordination to the authority of living teachers was giving way, with books becoming more widely accessible and accepted as standalone sources of knowledge. As mentioned in chapter two, data from Vajda and Leder’s studies suggest that the popularity of audition practices was at its apex in the sixth/twelfth through eighth/fourteenth centuries, but then dropped off sharply in the ninth/fifteenth. A sign that this was due in part to changing expectations among scholars is provided by Hirschler, who notes that use of the phrase ‘he read on his own’ (*qara’a bi-nafsihi*) for describing an actor’s solitary study of a book “occurred only occasionally in biographical dictionaries referring to scholars before the eighth/fourteenth centuries, such as al-Dhahabī’s *History of Islam*,” while “[i]n dictionaries that dealt with the following century... we observe a veritable explosion of this phrase.”⁵⁸⁶ Relatedly, Sufis in late-eighth/fourteenth-century Granada had a heated debate about whether Sufism could be learned from books alone, without the benefit of a teacher, and various jurists, including Ibn Khaldūn, weighed in on the matter.⁵⁸⁷ The history of the Būnian corpus, as one small collection of texts in this vast sea of material, cannot be considered without taking into account these sweeping changes in the book as an instrument of knowledge transmission, even as different actors and communities of readers responded to the changes differently. Some, like the encyclopædist al-Nuwayrī, denigrated “the oral transmission of knowledge as an ineffective method for navigating a literary patrimony.”⁵⁸⁸ Others, such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī and his teacher Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī, revived and sharpened ancient images of the book as an object of occult power, as discussed below.

⁵⁸⁶ Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 14–15.

⁵⁸⁷ Muhsin Mahdi, “The Book and the Master as Poles of Cultural Change in Islam,” in *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages: Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference, May 11-13, 1973, Near Eastern Center, University of California, Los Angeles*, ed. Giorgio Levi Della Vida Conference and Speros Vryonis (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 3–15.

⁵⁸⁸ Muhanna, “Encyclopædism in the Mamlūk Period,” 134.

The manuscript evidence of the efflorescence of al-Būnī's works in the latter parts of the Mamlūk period were discussed above. In what follows in this section, I investigate the reception of al-Būnī's as reflected in a number of important texts of the period. I begin with mentions of him in some of the greatest exemplars of the Mamlūk encyclopædic tradition, the works of Ibn Manẓūr, al-Nuwayrī, and al-Qalqashandī. I then move on to some brief but important denunciations of him by members of the *'ulamā'*: Ibn Taymīyah and Ibn al-Naqqāsh. Then, in preparation for the examination of Ibn Khaldūn's lengthy of discussion of al-Būnī that caps this section, I briefly look westward to look at some statements on al-Būnī by al-Shāṭibī and Ibn al-Khaṭīb. In examining these texts I investigate some of their sociocultural and political implications, while also touching on numerous aspects of the textual economy of the Mamlūk period, including monetary and other practical aspects of manuscript production and use, as well as book and writing technologies that shaped relationships among readers and texts.

4.2.1 *Al-Būnī and the encyclopædists*

A strong indication of the Būnian corpus having become more widely known among Mamlūk-era secondary elites, and no doubt an important vector through which knowledge of it was further spread, was references to Būnian texts and ideas in some of the major encyclopædic works of the period. As various researchers have discussed, encyclopædist tendencies had found diverse expression in earlier Islamicate milieux in such works as the *Fihrist* of al-Nadīm, the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, and Ibn Farīghūn's *Jawāmi' al-'ulūm*.⁵⁸⁹ However, none of those works matched the scope and sheer size of such massive texts as al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab fī al-funūn al-adab*, written between 714/1314 and the author's death in 733/1333, Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī's (d. 749/1349) slightly later *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, and al-Qalqashandī's aforementioned *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, completed in 814/1412. Each of

⁵⁸⁹ On these and other pre-Mamlūk encyclopædic works, see Hans Biesterfeldt, "Medieval Arabic Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy," in *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Steven Harvey (Dordrecht; London: Springer, 2011), 77–98.

these texts comprised thousands of folia and ranged across disciplines and genres from the chancery arts to history, geography, and bibliography to medicine, cosmology, botany, zoology, and others. Even many of the more focused works of the period—Arabic dictionaries such as Ibn Manẓūr’s (d. 711/1311) *Lisān al-‘arab* and historical or biographical texts such as Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddimah* or Ibn Ḥajar’s *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* and *Lisān al-mīzān*—tended to extremes in their attempts at exhaustive treatment of their topics, and thus must be counted as participating in the encyclopædist current of the time.

Some have argued that these Mamlūk-era efforts to comprehensively gather and organize large bodies of knowledge were driven by the seeming civilizational threat represented by Mongols, and/or that they were symptomatic of an intellectual ‘decline’ in the period, such that original thought largely was forsaken in favor of collecting the wisdom of past thinkers. As Charles Pellat put it, they were “attempts to preserve the acquisitions of preceding generations at the moment when the Arabo-Islamic world could be seen as despairing of achieving new progress and felt itself threatened by the worst calamities.”⁵⁹⁰ Others, such as Muhanna, argue that the factors driving Mamlūk encyclopædism “appear not to have been psychological but sociological,” having arisen from Cairo’s new status as the “political and cultural epicenter of the Muslim world” and an emerging cosmopolitanism.⁵⁹¹ While Muhanna’s argument is compelling, and, I think, quite correct with regard to the aggregative and cosmopolitan ethos of late-medieval Cairo, I would note that, driven by the Black Death and, over time, the rise of Ottoman power, the period was also one in which apocalyptic literature and claims to mahdism were on the rise⁵⁹²—a trend that was cause for great concern to a thinker like Ibn Khaldūn, and the seed of a life’s work for one such as al-Biṣṭāmī.

⁵⁹⁰ Charles Pellat, *EL2*, s.v. “Mawṣū‘a.” For an excellent overview of modern scholarly debates on medieval encyclopedism, both European and Islamicate, see Muhanna, “Encyclopædism in the Mamlūk Period,” 10–97.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

⁵⁹² On Mamlūk-era apocalypticism and related trends, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, *Apocalypse Dans l’islam*.English (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 30–48; Masad, “The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition.”

4.2.1.1 *Ibn Manẓūr's Lisān al-‘arab*

To the best of my knowledge, the earliest mention of al-Būnī in any non-Būnian work is found in Ibn Manẓūr's famous dictionary of the Arabic language, *Lisān al-‘arab*, which was completed in 689/1290, which is to say still within what I characterize as the germinal period of the Būnian corpus. Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Ifrīqī al-Miṣrī, better known as Ibn Manẓūr or Ibn Mukarram, was, according to Ibn Ḥajar, a *qāḍī* and longtime employee of the chancery (*dīwān al-inshā’*) in Libyan Tripoli and wrote numerous epitomes of major works from past periods of various genres, such as *Kitāb al-Aghānī* and some of “the great historical chronicles” (*al-tawārīkh al-kubār*).⁵⁹³ It is not clear if he visited Egypt, though Fück mentions that he may be identical with the Muḥammad b. Mukarram who was “one of the *kuttāb al-inshā’*” under the sultan Qalāwūn (r. 678/1279–689/1290), and whose *Tadhkirat al-labīb wa-nuzhat al-adīb* was a source for al-Qalqashandī.⁵⁹⁴ His *Lisān al-‘arab* is a synthesis of five earlier dictionaries, and is considered one of the greatest works of medieval Arabic lexicology. Comprising around fifteen lengthy volumes in manuscript,⁵⁹⁵ it is organized by trilateral root in order of the final radical for ease of reference and to maximize its utility for those searching for rhyming words.

Ibn Manẓūr's mention of al-Būnī occurs in the introduction to *Lisān al-‘arab*, in the relatively brief “Chapter on the titles of the letters, their natures, and their occult properties” (*Bāb alqāb al-ḥurūf wa-ṭabā’ihā wa-khawāṣṣihā*). The section begins with a discussion of ways of classifying and ordering the letters of the alphabet then moves on to the discussion of their occult properties, a topic that Ibn Manẓūr makes a show of being somewhat reluctant to discuss:

⁵⁹³ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāminah fī a’yān al-mi’ah al-thāminah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), III/262–264.

⁵⁹⁴ J.W. Fück, *EI2*, s.v. “Ibn Manẓūr.”

⁵⁹⁵ This estimate of the work's size in manuscript is based on Süleymaniye MS Amcazade Hüseyinpaşa 432, copied in 877/1472, which includes fifteen 27 x 18cm volumes, an average length of roughly 290 folia per volume, and 25 lines per page.

واما خواصها فان لها اعمالاً عظيمة تتعلق بابواب جليلة من انواع المعالجات واوضاع الطلمسات ولها نفع شريف بطبائعها ولها خصوصية بالافلاك المقدسة وملائمة لها ومنافعه لا يحصيها من يصفها ليس هذا موضع ذكرها لكننا لا بد ان نلوح بشيء من ذلك ننبه على مقدار نعم الله تعالى على من كشف له سرها وعلمه علمها وابعاد له التصريف بها

As for their [*scil.* the letters'] occult properties, verily there are powerful forces associated with them having to do with sublime types of operations and the executions of talismans. There belong to them [*scil.* the letters] the noble benefits of their elemental natures and a sympathetic relationship to the holy celestial spheres [*al-aflāk al-muqaddasah*] and that which corresponds to them. The benefits of it [*scil.* the execution of letter talismans] cannot be enumerated by one who describes them. This is not the place to mention them, yet it is inescapable that we must hint at some of it and draw attention to the portion God bestows on one to whom He unveils their [*scil.* the letters'] mystery [*sirr*], teaches the knowledge of them, and grants permission for the disposal of things by means of them [*al-taṣrīf bi-hā*].⁵⁹⁶

Ibn Manẓūr then goes into a discussion of the elemental correspondences of the letters, giving a scheme that differs significantly from al-Būnī's in *Latā'if al-ishārāt*. The letters are assigned to the elements rather than to the qualities—i.e. to fire, earth, air, and water instead of heat, moisture, dryness, and coldness—and in an order that follows the Eastern system of *abjad* rather than the Western one. Noting that the innate natures of the letters are possessed of many “levels and degrees and intricacies” (*marātib wa-darajāt wa-daqā'iq*), he sounds an esotericist note in explaining his refusal to further discuss these deeper secrets of the letters:

ولولا خوف الإطالة وانتقاد ذوي الجهالة وبتعد أكثر الناس عن تأمل دقائق صنع الله وحكمته لذكرت هنا اسراراً من افعال الكواكب المقدسة إذا مزجتها الحروف تحرق عقول من لا اهتدى إليها ولا هجم به تنقيبه وبمشه عليها

Were it not for fear of prolixity, of the criticism of those who are ignorant, and of the great distance of most people from contemplation of the intricacies of God's art and wisdom, then I would mention here such secrets of operations with the holy heavenly bodies [*al-kawākib al-muqaddasah*]. When you combine them, the letters can overwhelm [lit. 'burn'] the intellects of those who have not been divinely guided to them, and who have not strenuously undertaken the deep investigation [*tanqīb*] and study [*baḥth*] of them.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁶ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1990), I/14.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, I/15.

Ibn Manẓūr's first mention of al-Būnī occurs shortly thereafter, and is in regard to the relationship between the letters and the lunar mansions. It particularly concerns the relationship of the unpointed and pointed letters to the auspicious and inauspicious mansions, those without points being auspicious, those with one point tending toward the auspicious, two points indicating an intermingling of the auspicious and inauspicious, and three points being entirely negative:

وذكر الشيخ ابو العباس احمد البوني رحمه الله قال منازل القمر ثمانية وعشرون منها اربعة عشر فوق الارض ومنها اربعة عشر تحت الارض قال وكذلك الحروف منها اربعة عشر مهيمة بغير نقط واربعة عشر معجمة بنقط فما هو منها غير منقوط فهو اشبه بمنازل السعود وما هو منها منقوط فهو منازل النحوس والممتزجات وما كان منها له نقطة واحدة فهو اقرب إلى السعود وما هو بنقطتين فهو متوسط في النحوس فهو الممتزج وما هو ثلاث نقط فهو عام النحوس هكذا وجدته والذي نراه في الحروف انها ثلاثة عشر مهيمة وخمسة عشر معجمة إلا ان يكون كان لهم اصطلاح في النقط تغير في وقتنا هذا

The *shaykh* Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Būnī (may God have mercy on him) said there are twenty-eight lunar mansions, fourteen above the earth and fourteen below the earth. Likewise, he said, there are fourteen unpointed (lit. ‘ungoverned’) letters without any points and fourteen with points. Those which are not pointed are like the mansions of auspiciousness and the pointed ones are the mansions of inauspiciousness and mingling. Those with one point are nearest to auspiciousness. Those with two points are mildly inauspicious, for they are intermingled. Those with three points are entirely inauspicious. Thus I found it, though as we see the letters there are thirteen unpointed and fifteen pointed ones, unless it is the case that the terminology regarding pointing differs in this time of ours.⁵⁹⁸

This statement—the end of which Ibn Manẓūr clearly demarcates with the phrase “thus I found it”

(*hakadhā wajadtuhu*)—would appear to be a rephrasing of a discussion in *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*:

اعلم هداانا الله واياك ان البارئ جلّت قدرته خلق العالم الانساني بسرّ هذه الحروف الثمانية وعشرين حرفاً ولما تقدم ان منازل القمر ثمانية وعشرون منها اربع عشرة تحت الارض ومنها اربع عشرة فوق الفلك كانت الحروف اربعة عشر حرفاً منقوطة واربعة عشر غير منقوطة فالغير منقوطة منها هي منازل السعودات والمنقوطة منها هي منازل النحوسات والممتزجات فما كان له نقطة واحدة كان اقرب إلى السعود وما كان له نقطتان كان متوسطاً في النحوسات وهو الممتزج وما كان له ثلاث نقط كان غاية النحوسات فتدبر ذلك

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

Know that God has instructed [lit. ‘guided’] us and you that the Maker (may His power be exalted) created the human cosmos through the secret of these twenty-eight letters, and, as has been stated previously, that the lunar mansions are twenty-eight, fourteen beneath the earth and fourteen above the celestial sphere. The letters are fourteen pointed letters and fourteen without points. The ones without points are the mansions of the auspicious forces (*al-su‘ūdāt*) and the pointed are the mansions of the inauspicious and mixed forces (*al-nuḥūsāt wa-al-mumtazijāt*). That which has one point is nearest to auspiciousness, that with two points is moderately of the inauspicious forces, and is intermingled. That which has three points is at the extreme of the inauspicious forces. Contemplate that.⁵⁹⁹

Al-Būnī’s statement is a preface to a much longer and more detailed discussion of the various spiritual forces (*rūḥānīyāt*) associated with the letters that emanate from each of the lunar mansions in accordance with God’s command (*amr*), though it must be said that parts of the discussion seem to contradict the statement, as unpointed letters are sometimes associated with negative, mixed forces, *et cetera*. Nowhere does he qualify or explain what Ibn Manẓūr correctly points out as the odd assertion that there are fourteen pointed and fourteen unpointed letters.

Ibn Manẓūr then moves on to a discussion of what can be accomplished with the letters, collectively citing the books of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarālī, al-Būnī, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, one al-Ba‘albakī,⁶⁰⁰ and “others” as his source. The instructions are vague in the extreme, entailing utilizing the letters corresponding to a given elemental nature in written amulets (*ruqyah, kitābah*) or as liquid preparations—by which is meant writing an amulet in ink in a bowl, adding water, and drinking the solution. The desired effects of these operations are medical in nature, aimed at strengthening various bodily humors in order to combat different disease symptoms.⁶⁰¹ At the end of this discussion he turns briefly to the subject of ‘talismans’ (*s. ṭilsam*) utilizing the letters, which he seems to consider an application of lettrism distinct from the written amulets discussed previously, though this is not

⁵⁹⁹ BnF MS arabe 2658 (*Li*), fol. 25^a, lns. 1-9.

⁶⁰⁰ It is unclear to me who this al-Ba‘albakī is, though it may be the Abū Ishāq al-Ba‘albakī whose *R. fi Khawāṣṣ al-hurūf* which is the third work in the probably-9th/15th-c. compendium Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1556 (1556.3, fol. 74b-94b). Also in the volume are a copy of *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt* (1556.1), an anonymous lettrist work that cites *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt* (1556.2, fol. 65b-74a, reference to *Laṭā‘if* on 70a), and a copy of al-Biṣṭāmī’s *Shams al-āfāq* (1556.4, 94b-122a).

⁶⁰¹ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, I/15-16.

entirely clear. He refuses to go into detail on this topic, except to swear that talismans can produce wondrous effects, and that he has personally witnessed their efficacy:

واما اعمالها في الطلمسات فان لله سبحانه وتعالى فيها سرّاً عجبياً وصنعاً جميلاً شاهدنا صحّة اخبارها وجميل
آثارها وليس هذا موضع الإطالة بذكر ما جربناه منها ورأيناه من التأثير عنها فسبحان مسدي النعمة ومؤتي
الحكمة العالم بمن خلق وهو اللطيف الخبير

As for their workings in talismans, by God the Highest and Most High there is wondrous mystery and great art in them. I have witnessed the soundness of what is reported of them and the propriety of what has come down about them. This is not the place to wax long in mentioning what I have experienced with them and what I have seen of their effects. God is the giver of blessing and the giver of wisdom, the Knower of him who He created, and He is the Subtle, the Aware.⁶⁰²

A few aspects of Ibn Manẓūr's comments on al-Būnī and lettrism are of particular interest. First is that, in writing for an audience that presumably consisted primarily of his fellow bureaucrats and other literate secondary elites, he is willing to assert the existence of, and effectively claims membership in, an alternative set of elites that is versed in deep knowledge of the letters. Thus, if Ibn Manẓūr is an encyclopædist with regard to lexicology, he is an esotericist with regard to lettrism. The second is his apparent reticence about mentioning any specific titles of the works with which he claims to be familiar, suggesting that he is privy to books that are not widely circulated. This of course resonates with the notion of esotericist reading communities discussed in the previous chapter.

4.2.1.2 *Al-Nuwayrī's Nihāyat al-arab*

Quite in contrast to Ibn Manẓūr, the treatment of al-Būnī in al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab* is an abrupt uprooting of his ideas from their esotericist Sufi framework. Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī was a native of Cairo from a family of bureaucrats. He spent much of his career in the service of the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (r. 693/1294-694/1295, 698/1299-708/1309, 709/1309-741/1340), including in Cairo in al-Nāṣir's *dīwān al-khāṣṣ* ('Bureau of the Privy Purse'), in exile with al-Nāṣir in the Levant between his second and third reigns, and, after falling out of the sultan's favor due

⁶⁰² Ibid., I/16.

to involvement in court intrigues, in a series of minor positions in the Levant and Egypt. He eventually retired from bureaucratic work, dedicating much of the last two decades of his life to writing his massive encyclopædia. Trained in *ḥadīth* scholarship and a master copyist, al-Nuwayrī supported himself during this last phase of his life largely by producing and selling high-quality, collated copies of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, complete with scholarly apparatus and copied audition certificates.⁶⁰³

Nihāyat al-arab is a massive work, reaching thirty-one volumes in the holograph fair copy that al-Nuwayrī completed sometime between 725/1325 and his death in 733/1333, four volumes of which survive.⁶⁰⁴ The work traverses a wide array of topics from literature and chancery practice to cosmology, history, zoology, and botany, most of the material being excerpted and otherwise adapted from earlier works. Though sprawling, the text is carefully organized with many nested and cross-referenced sections and subsections. In Muhanna’s view, it displays a resistance to the tendency toward drift and digression that characterizes many earlier encyclopædic works. The surviving holograph volumes show that al-Nuwayrī made extensive use of rubrication, chapter headings, and related devices meant to render the whole usable as a consultative reference work, as did later copyists of the work.⁶⁰⁵ Al-Ṣafadī tell us that al-Nuwayrī personally sold a copy of his magnum opus for 2,000 *dirhams* to the notable Mamlūk official Jamāl al-Kufāt (d. 745/1344), which may have been the only sale during his lifetime. Nonetheless, al-Maqrīzī, writing in *Kitāb al-Muqaffá al-kabīr* roughly a century after al-Nuwayrī’s death, refers to the work as ‘famous’ (*mashhūr*), which suggests that it did not languish in obscurity.⁶⁰⁶

Al-Nuwayrī discusses elements of al-Būnī’s lettrism in the final subsection of the eleventh and final subchapter (*bāb*) of the fifth and final chapter (*qism*) of the fourth out of five books (*funūn*, sing.

⁶⁰³ For an extensive account of al-Nuwayrī’s life, see Muhanna, “Encyclopædism in the Mamlūk Period,” 47–56. Regarding his work copying *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, see *Ibid.*, 197–198.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 58–59; Mounira Chapoutot-Remadi, *EI2*, s.v. “al-Nuwayrī”.

⁶⁰⁵ Muhanna, “Encyclopædism in the Mamlūk Period,” 109–124.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 65–67.

fann) that comprise *Nihāyat al-arab*, which is to say in the final subsection of the fourth book. The fourth book is on plants, and its fifth chapter is primarily on aromatics (*ṭīb*) and perfumery (*bakhūrāt*). The eleventh and final subchapter of that chapter bears the title “On what can be done using occult properties,” and within it are three further subsections. The first of these is on utilizations of the occult properties of things in ways bearing on women, sex, and marriage. The second is under the heading of “Things regarding the occult properties that were not mentioned previously, including a talisman put on the table so that flies will not approach it,” a highly apt description of its contents. The third is entitled “a small excerpt on the occult properties of the letters and names,” and is comprised almost entirely of a series of excerpts from al-Būnī’s *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*.⁶⁰⁷

The practices described in the first two subsections range between medical advice and what some readers of the period would surely have identified as sorcery (*siḥr*). Many are drawn from unnamed sources, while others are said to be taken from the works of Jābir b. Hayyān or of physicians such as Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (d. 260/873) and ‘Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (fl. 3rd/9th c.). The practices are given purely as recipes, which is to say with no accompanying theory of occult properties and how they work in the world; indeed, in introducing the subchapter, al-Nuwayrī posits: “Verily the occult properties are so numerous as almost cannot be encompassed, and you cannot explain the causes of their effects.”⁶⁰⁸ The section on women focuses largely on issues relating to sex. It includes various procedures for causing a woman to be attracted to the operator, determining if a woman is a virgin, determining if a

⁶⁰⁷ al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah, 1935), XII/217, 223, 225. The headings are:

فيما يفعل بالخاصية

ذكر الخواص المختصة بالنساء والنكاح التي استقرت بالتجربة

ذكر شيء من الخواص غير متقدم ذكره من ذلك طلسم يجعل على المائدة فلا يقربها ذباب

ذكر نبذة من خواص الحروف والاسماء

⁶⁰⁸ *ibid.*, XII/217.

ان الخواص كثيرة ولا تكاد تنحصر ولا تتعلل افعالها

woman is pregnant, preventing a woman from becoming pregnant, causing a sleeping woman to speak truthfully about what she has done that day, *et cetera*. In one recipe, for example, the reader is instructed to burn and grind the talons of a hoopoe together with his own fingernail clippings, coat a cup with the mixture, and have the targeted woman drink from it without her knowing what it contains. This, we are told, will cause her “to be favorably disposed toward you, and to want very much to be near you.”⁶⁰⁹ The operations in the second subsection are not thematically unified like those in the first, though most concern plant preparations.⁶¹⁰ The aforementioned fly-repelling ‘talismán’ is a paste made of arsenic, various herbs, water, and oil that is to be rubbed on the table. The use of the term ‘talismán’ in relation to a technique devoid of any inscriptive or astrological element demonstrates its flexibility in medieval usage. In another seemingly straightforward botanical note, we are told that Roman wormwood (*afsanatīn rūmī*) keeps mites and vermin out of clothing, keeps inks fresh, and protects paper from bookworms. Not all of the operations have such benign goals, however, nor are they all herbalistic. One somewhat obliquely-worded procedure involves inscribing certain Qur’ānic verses on boiled eggs with the aim of dissolving a marriage. An antisocial act such as is the very definition of *siḥr* as it is discussed—and condemned—in the Qur’ān at 2:102.

The final subsection, on the occult properties of the letters and names, consists almost entirely of extracts from al-Būnī’s *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*. Though al-Nuwayrī sometimes transposes or excludes parts of sentences, his excerpts of the text are mostly faithful to the source. However, the reader unfamiliar with al-Būnī’s text would have no idea of the nature of the original treatise, as al-Nuwayrī reiterates only a series of instructions for relatively simple lettrist operations, decontextualizing them entirely from the complex cosmological discourse that comprises the vast majority of that text. The first several procedures al-Nuwayrī excerpts, for example, are from the chapter of *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* on the letter *ḥā’*.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., XII/218.

فان تميل إليك وتحب القرب منك جداً

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., XII/223–225.

Al-Nuwayrī makes no mention of al-Būnī’s lengthy description of the relationship of ḥā’ to the divine tablet (*lawḥ*) that regulates (and to some degree is commensurate with) the manifest world, or of the way al-Būnī views the letter ḥā’—the *abjad* value of which is eight—as giving expression to the ‘mystery of life’ (*sirr al-ḥayāh*) by mediating the interplay between the four elements (fire, air, earth, water) and the four elemental qualities (heat, moisture, dryness, cold). Neither does al-Nuwayrī mention al-Būnī’s explanation of how the letter’s cold nature (see Figure 12 for its place in the chart of elemental correspondences) prevents the sphere of heat (*falak al-ḥararah*) from overpowering and destroying the sublunar world (*al-‘ālam al-sufli*).⁶¹¹ Instead, he begins by noting al-Būnī’s claim that: “He who inscribes the letter ḥā’ eight times on the bezel of a ring and inscribes with it [God’s names] o Ḥayy, o Ḥalīm, o Ḥannān, o Ḥakīm will be protected from all fevers.”⁶¹² And also: “He who, in the hottest part of summer, says, at the first rising of the sun, o Ḥayy, o Ḥalīm, o Ḥannān, o Ḥakīm and the rest of the holy names the first letter of which is ḥā’, reciting that until the sun, as his eye sees it, turns green while he is looking at it, will not in that day feel the pain of the heat.”^{613, 614} Always interested in sexual matters, al-Nuwayrī also includes al-Būnī’s assertion that, among the virtues of this talismanic ring are its ability to “suppress the compulsion for sex.”⁶¹⁵ All told al-Nuwayrī includes thirty-five such snippets drawn from

⁶¹¹ BnF MS arabe 2658 (*LI*), fol. 53a, ln. 9 ff.

⁶¹² al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 226.

من نقش حرف الحاء في فص خاتم ثمان مرات ونقش معه يا حي يا حلیم يا حنان يا حکیم أمن من الحقیات کلها

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*

قال ومن قال عند طلوع الشمس يا حي يا حلیم يا حنان يا حکیم ومن الاسماء المقدسة ما اوله حاء في زمن القيظ يذكر ذلك حتى تنقلب الشمس في راي عينه خضراء وهو ناظر إليها لم يجش في يومه ذلك الم الحز

⁶¹⁴ Interestingly, there is a well-documented optical phenomenon of a bright green flash that sometimes (though rarely) is seen above the upper rim of the sun when it is observed just before sunrise or after sunset. It was popularized in modern times in Jules Verne’s 1882 novel *Le Rayon vert* (*The Green Ray*), and in Éric Rohmer’s 1986 film by the same name and in which Verne’s novel is discussed at length. It is of course not clear that this is what al-Būnī is referring to.

⁶¹⁵ al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 226.

various parts of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*. None of the cryptogrammatic talismans or other complex figures from the work are referenced or reproduced.

In decontextualizing these practices from al-Būnī's cosmological discourse, he denudes them of the logic that prevails among them, such as the notion mentioned above that ḥā' and its intrinsic coldness protects from heat at the macrocosmic/cosmological level, as well as at the microcosmic level of fever and sunburn prevention, and the cooling of the fiery sex drive. Indeed, though readers for whom the elemental/humoral paradigm was the normal frame of reference for conceptualizing the body—which is to say most late-medieval actors—likely would have recognized that all of the ḥā' operations counteract the negative effects of heat, no sense of the relationship between the macrocosm and the human microcosm that is such a central theme of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, as we have seen in chapter three, comes through. Al-Nuwayrī thus deprives the letters and names of their function in al-Būnī's thought as the vehicles through which the sympathies that run throughout the cosmos are mediated, rendering them merely another set of things-in-the-world possessed of occult properties. His presentation of al-Būnī's teachings is not entirely lacking in sacred elements. He retains mentions of the need to be in a state of ritual purity (*ṭahārah*) when making certain talismans, and also includes a talisman that calls on Ṭā'-Hā', the disconnected letters that appear at the head of the twentieth *surah*. Some the effects of this talisman are of a 'spiritual' nature: "The wearer of it loves all acts of charity, and he is unable to remain for an hour outside a state of ritual purity."⁶¹⁶ However, nothing is communicated of al-Būnī's framing of these practices as elements of a secret science of prophetic, *Imāmic* and saintly pedigree, or of the notion that these practices would be effective only for those who had attained some degree of spiritual accomplishment. This is, then, an outright 'de-esotericization' of al-Būnī's letrism, not just because it makes some of the techniques al-Būnī wrote about available in an

قال ومن خاصيته [أي الخاتم] تعطيل حركة النكاح

⁶¹⁶ al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 228.

من لابسه بحب اعمال البر ولا يقدر يبقى ساعة بغير طهارة

easy-to-reference work intended for a relatively wide audience, but because in doing so it strips away any notion that this is knowledge reserved for those striving through spiritual exercises toward self-perfection, and who have submitted themselves to the absolute authority of masters initiated by their masters before them, as al-Būnī demands of his readers. Even Ibn Manẓūr, though discussing lettrism in a work aimed squarely at urban secondary elites, still set knowledge of the occult properties of the letters aside for an initiated elite. Al-Nuwayrī's letrist, however, is more pharmacist than initiate, with the letters serving as a kind of natural resource that any educated actor could exploit, much like the plants discussed in the same chapter.

An additional element of al-Nuwayrī's treatment of al-Būnī that must be considered is the entertainment value of things 'magical', including the place of lettrism in a wider discourse on 'ajā'ib and *karāmāt*, 'wonders' and 'marvels'. The latter term is, in the context of scholarship on Sufi sainthood, discussed more often as a technical term for saintly 'miracles'—rightly so, as the term certainly was utilized in medieval theological discussions of different sorts of 'interruptions of the natural order' (*ikhtirāq al-'ādah*), such as in the A'sharite theologian al-Bāqillānī's (d. 403/1013) treatment of the topic.⁶¹⁷ But, particularly insofar as *Nihāyat al-arab* belongs to the category of *adab*, we should not discount the place of marvels as fodder for stories, as sources of wonder and entertainment, and as texts that were written and recited and retold at least as much for pleasure and titillation as for instruction and moral edification. Such deployments of al-Būnī would have brought a new range of reading communities into contact with his ideas, or at least this rather denatured, stripped-down version of them.

4.2.1.3 al-Qalqashandī's *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*

Another mention of al-Būnī in a major encyclopædia is in al-Qalqashandī's *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*. It is in the context of that text that the Mamlūk-era discourse on the 'classification of the sciences' (*taṣnīf al-*

⁶¹⁷ al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-bayān 'an al-farq al-mu'jazāt wa-al-karāmāt wa-al-ḥiyal wa-al-kahānah wa-al-sihr wa-al-nārinjīyāt*, *Manshūrāt Jāmi'* at al-ḥikmah fī Baghdād, *Silsilat 'ilm al-kalām* 2 (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Sharqīyah, 1958), *passim*.

‘*ulūm*) comes to the fore as an element aggregation of al-Būnī to the seething expanse of Mamlūk intellectual culture. Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī (or ‘Abd Allāh) b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Fazārī al-Qalqashandī was born in 756/1355 to a family of scholars in a village north of Cairo. In his youth he pursued an education in Shāfi‘ite *fiqh* in Alexandria with the goal of becoming a judge, but after a brief stint as a teacher he instead, in 791/1389, began a career as a secretary (*kātib al-dast*) in the Mamlūk chancery (*dīwān al-inshā’*). He died in 821/1418, perhaps while still an employee of that bureau.⁶¹⁸ He wrote a number of works on *fiqh*, *adab*, and *al-kitābah* (‘the secretarial art’), the best known of which is the gigantic compendium *Ṣūbḥ al-a‘shá fī sinā‘at al-inshā’*, which C.E. Bosworth has described as “the culmination of the secretarial manuals and encyclopædias of the Mamlūk period, and, indeed, of the whole Arabic *adab al-kātib* literature.”⁶¹⁹ Though much of the work is taken up with instructions for writing chancery documents, it covers a wide range of topics in which al-Qalqashandī felt bureaucrats should be conversant—such as grammar, history, geography, and the study of nature—while also aiming to inculcate in his readers the decorum and ethics proper to employees of the chancery. The work is divided into ten overarching ‘discourses’ (*maqālāt*), each of which is broken down into numerous nested and carefully cross-referenced sublevels. As van Berkel has argued, having been “meant as a work of reference,” it was carefully organized in this manner so as to facilitate “the retrieval of specific information.”⁶²⁰ Thus it shares with al-Nuwayrī’s *Nihāyat al-arab* a commitment to ease of reference that, in an important sense, is the textual-economic opposite of the *tabdīd al-‘ilm* and general obscurantism practiced by al-Būnī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, and earlier esotericists. This is to say that it is the product of an ethic of decidedly *exotericist* knowledge transmission that sought to make the book, however complex its contents, an efficient and limpid means of knowledge transmission that required no special licensing or skills beyond literacy.

⁶¹⁸ C.E. Bosworth, *EI2*, s.v. “al- Qalqashandī.”

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁰ Van Berkel, “The Attitude towards Knowledge,” 162.

The section in which al-Qalqashandī briefly mentions al-Būnī is nested deep within the first ‘discourse’ (*maqālah*) of *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā*, which is on “The clarification of what is required of the secretary of the chancery by way of materials (*mawādd*).” More precisely, it is found: in the second ‘part’ (*bāb*) of that discourse, on “What is required of the secretary by way of scientific matters (*al-umūr al-‘ilmīyah*)”; in the second ‘chapter’ (*faṣl*) of that part, on “That which the secretary requires regarding the materials of the chancery”; in the first ‘section’ (*ṭaraf*) of that chapter, on “What is required of him by way of techniques (*adawāt*)”; under the seventeenth ‘category’ (*naw’*) of that section, on “Knowledge of book repositories (*khazā’in al-kutub*) and the types of sciences”; in service of the second ‘goal’ (*maqṣid*) of that category, the “Mentioning the sciences current (*mutadāwalah*) among the learned, the best-known books written regarding them, and their authors”; under the third ‘source’ (*aṣl*) of that goal, which is the “The natural science (*al-‘ilm al-ṭabī‘ī*)”; and, finally, under the seventh heading of that source, “The science of magic (*siḥr*) and the science of the letter and of cryptograms (*‘ilm al-ḥarf wa-al-awfāq*).”⁶²¹

السابع علم السحر وعلم الحرف والافواق ومن كتب السحر المعتمدة في بعض طرائقه السر المكتوم المنسوب
للإمام فخر الدين وكتاب الجمهرة للخوارزمي وكتاب طيمارس [طيمارس] لأرسطاطاليس وفي غاية الحكم
[الحكيم] للمجريطي فصول كافية في بعض طرقه ايضاً ومن كتب علم الحرف كتاب لطائف الإشارات للبوني
وشمس المعارف له وهو عزيز الوجود وفي النسخ المعتمدة من اللمعة النورانية للبوني قطعة كافية منه

⁶²¹ The headings, in Arabic, are as follows:

المقالة الاولى في بيان ما يحتاج إليه كاتب الإنشاء من المواد

الباب الاول فيما يحتاج إليه الكاتب من الامور العلمية

الفصل الثاني فيما يحتاج الكاتب إلى معرفة من المواد الإنشاء

الطرف الاول فيما يحتاج إليه من الادوات

النوع السابع عشر المعرفة بخزائن الكتب وانواع العلوم

المقصد الثاني في ذكر العلوم المتداولة بين العلماء والمشهور من الكتب المصنفة فيها ومؤلفيها

الاصل الثالث العلم الطبيعي

السابع علم السحر وعلم الحرف والافواق

The seventh [science] is the science of magic and the science of the letter and cryptograms. Among the books of magic esteemed in some schools of it [scil. of magic] *al-Sirr al-maktūm* attributed to the *imām* Fakhr al-Dīn, the book *al-Jamharah* by al-Khawārazmī, and the book *Ṭīmāyus* by Aristotle. Also, in *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* by al-Majrīṭī there are chapters that cover some methods of it. Among the books of the science of the letter are the book *Latā'if al-ishārāt* by al-Būnī and his *Shams al-ma'ārif*, which is hard to find. And in the esteemed copies of al-Būnī's *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* there is a section covering it [scil. the science].

It is of course of interest that, like al-Nuwayrī but unlike Ibn Manẓūr, al-Qalqashandī associates just al-Būnī's name with the science of letters, suggesting that al-Būnī was already coming to be the foremost representative of lettrism in the minds of many actors of the period, at least those who were only fleetingly acquainted with it. This is also the first mention of *Shams al-ma'ārif* that I am aware of in the body of a non-Būnian literary work (as opposed to a paratext); there is no indication as to whether al-Nuwayrī is referring to the authentic or courtly version, but the numbers of surviving manuscripts suggest that it is the latter. Beyond those elements, the most immediately noteworthy aspect of al-Qalqashandī's mention of lettrism is the grouping—if perhaps not total identification—of it with *siḥr* ('magic' or 'sorcery'), given that the latter typically was a term of severe disapprobation in Sunnite discourse. Does this signal that al-Qalqashandī regarded lettrism as a moral hazard, even while listing it as one of “the sciences current among the learned?” The answer is difficult to gauge, though he offers what may be an important clue. The next science he briefly discusses is that of talismans (*'ilm al-ṭilsamāt*), and in doing so he makes reference to the book *Irshād al-qāṣid* by the Cairene physician Ibn al-Akfānī, who had died of the plague in 749/1348, a few years before al-Qalqashandī's birth. *Irshād al-qāṣid* is another Mamlūk-era work that, though far shorter than the other works under discussion here, partakes of the encyclopædic spirit of the period as a highly original exercise in the ‘classification of the sciences.’ Al-Qalqashandī's citation of that work suggests his admiration for that text, and thus Ibn al-Akfānī's opening comments on *'ilm al-siḥr* may offer a clue as to al-Qalqashandī's attitude toward the topic. Ibn al-Akfānī makes clear that, while practicing *siḥr* is clearly forbidden, the knowledge of it by morally upright actors is meritorious insofar as it allows for the identification and punishment of sorcerers. Indeed, he mentions that some even declare knowledge of it a *farḍ kifāyah*, a ‘collective

obligation' in the technical legal sense in that a certain number of people in a given community must be sufficiently familiar with it to be able to identify perpetrators of the forbidden art:

علم السحر علم يستفاد منه حصول ملكة نفسانية يقتدر بها على افعال غريبة باسباب خفية ومنفعته ان يعلم
ليحذرلا ليعمل ولا نزاع في تحريم عمله اما مجرد علمه فظاهر الإباحة بل قد ذهب بعض النظار إلى انه
فرض كفاية لجواز ظهور ساحر يدعي النبوة فيكون في الامة من ينكشفه ويقطعه

The science of magic is a science one makes use of [through] the cultivation [ḥuṣūl] of an inborn ability by which one is capable of unusual powers through occult causes (*asbāb khafīyah*). The benefit of it [i.e. of knowledge of it] is to be on guard [against it], not to perform it. There is no dispute as to the prohibition against doing it, though mere knowledge of it clearly is permitted. Indeed, some investigators [of the topic] argue that it [*scil.* knowledge of magic] is a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) in case there appears a magician pretending to prophethood, so that someone in the community will discover him and stop him.⁶²²

It is quite possible, then, that this is the spirit in which al-Qalqashandī includes a discussion of *‘ilm al-sihr*, in which the case his close grouping of *‘ilm al-ḥarf wa-awfāq* with it would suggest that he regards lettrism with severe suspicion as well. If so then his reluctance to openly condemn lettrism is noteworthy, given that, as discussed later in this chapter, there is some evidence to suggest that lettrism was in vogue at the court of al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq (r. 784/1382-801/1399, with a brief interruption in 791/1389), under whose rule al-Qalqashandī spent the first decade or so of his bureaucratic career.

The discourse on the ‘classification of the sciences’—which frequently is discussed alongside encyclopædism in modern scholarship—is an important one in considering the Mamlūk-era reception of al-Būnī. This discourse, which involves the hierarchical ranking of different areas of knowledge in order of their societal importance, stretches back at least to the third/ninth century. According to Pellat, it arose as “the religious policy of the caliphate brought to the forefront by Muslims disturbed by the turn taken by the rather anarchic quest for knowledge and by the danger to the integrity of Islam

⁶²² Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Akfānī and J. J. Witkam, *De Egyptische arts Ibn al-Akfānī (gest. 749/1348) en zijn indeling van de wetenschappen: editie van het Kitāb iršād al-qāṣid ilā asnā al-maqāṣid met een inleiding over het leven en werk van de auteur* (Leiden: Ter Lugt Pers, 1989), 49 of the Arabic text (§647–648).

that they perceived to be posed by a curiosity which appeared reprehensible.”⁶²³ Generally speaking, prescriptive treatises on the topic began to accord the Arabic-Islamic sciences primacy over the so-called ‘foreign’ or ‘rational’ sciences, such as had been the fruit of the ‘Abbāsīd translation movement. The notion of a hierarchical classification of the sciences runs throughout many of the major Mamlūk-era encyclopædic works. Muhanna describes the architecture of *Nihāyat al-arab* as ‘hypotaxic’, with “complex hierarchies [that] steer readers through the maze of chapters and leave them in no doubt as to how things rank.” A hierarchy can also be seen in al-Qalqashandī’s list of the “sciences current among the learned,” wherein the linguistic and rhetorical sciences (under the heading of *‘ilm al-adab*) comprise the first and highest ‘source’ (*aṣl*), in part because they are necessary to comprehend the next source, the religious sciences (*‘ulūm al-shar‘īyah*). The “natural science”—to which *‘ilm al-siḥr* and *‘ilm al-ḥarf wa-al-awfāq* pertain—occupies the third and lowest rank. Within that category, magic, lettrism, and the art of talismans rank beneath the knowledge of medicine (*‘ilm al-ṭibb*), veterinary science (*‘ilm al-bayṭarah*), falconry (*‘ilm al-bayzarah*), physiognomy (*‘ilm al-firāsah*), dream-interpretation (*ta‘bīr al-ru’yā*), and astrology (*aḥkām al-nujūm*). They are, however, ahead of agriculture (*‘ilm al-filāḥah*) and geomancy (*‘ilm ḍarb al-raml*), the former being the specialty of Egyptian peasants (*al-filāḥah al-miṣrīyah*) and the latter of bedouins (*al-‘arab*), groups that were hardly primary concerns of urban secondary elites. Al-Būnī and lettrism fare little better ranking-wise at the hands of al-Nuwayrī, with the sciences of occult properties occupying, as mentioned above, the final subchapter of the section (*fann*) on plants.

As Melvin-Koushki has noted in his recent discussion of the place of the occult sciences within various schema of *taṣnīf al-‘ulūm*, the science of talismans (and/or *sīmīyā*, a term that sometimes encompasses lettrism⁶²⁴) almost always was grouped with the foreign sciences.⁶²⁵ Ibn Farīghūn (d. after 344/955) classifies astrology, alchemy, magic, and talismans as belonging to the ‘natural science’ (*al-‘ilm*

⁶²³ Pellat, *EI2*, s.v. “mawsū‘a.”

⁶²⁴ D.B. MacDonald and Toufic Fahd, *EI2*, s.v. “sīmīyā’.”

⁶²⁵ Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science,” 210 ff.

al-ṭabīʿī). The Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ include them as part of the ‘life-improving’ sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-riyāḍīyah*), a category distinct from the religious sciences. Al-Ghazālī classifies them as among the non-religious sciences, and decrees them blameworthy. And Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), in the Persian work *Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm*, associates them with the natural sciences, and to some degree with mathematics. Importantly, Melvin-Koushki further notes that letterism/*sīmiyāʾ* is almost never associated with Sufism in *taṣnīf al-ʿulūm* works (which only rarely acknowledged Sufism as a distinct science), an observation that largely holds true with these Mamlūk-era encyclopædias. A possible exception, he notes, is an anonymous Arabic work and possible unicum entitled *Masālik al-mubtadī wa-masāʾil al-muqtadī*, copied in 712/1312 (Topkapı MS 6638 A.2542), which places *ʿilm al-ḥurūf* (calling it that rather than *sīmiyāʾ*) between Sufism and astronomy.⁶²⁶ As discussed below, Ibn Khaldūn, whose *Muqaddimah* is in some places structured according to a scheme of *taṣnīf al-ʿulūm*, places the science of letters within the foreign/natural sciences, but also admits its relationship to Sufism, or at least to the dangerous ‘modern’ strain of Sufism that he associates with al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī. Before moving on to Ibn Khaldūn, however, it is important first to consider some of the strenuous criticism of al-Būnī from some other religious scholars of the late sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, whose views represent another important current in the Mamlūk-era reception of al-Būnī.

4.2.2 Critiques of al-Būnī as a heretic

As we have seen, mentions of al-Būnī by encyclopædist authors suggest that his works and ideas were being assimilated to the burgeoning culture of Mamlūk secondary elites with varying degrees of approbation, if sometimes at the cost of eliding al-Būnī’s larger soteriological and cosmological framework. This should not be taken to imply, however, that the reception of al-Būnī’s teachings was entirely irenic, nor that his cosmology, with its radical valorization of the sanctified human actor, was ignored by all. As Louis Massignon noted in his 1962 essay, “Ibn Sabʿīn et la

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 212.

‘conspiration hallagienne’ en Andalousie, et en Orient au XIIIe siècle,⁶²⁷ and as scholars such as Knysh,⁶²⁸ Anna Akasoy,⁶²⁹ Yahya Michot,⁶³⁰ and others⁶³¹ have further explored, a contingent of Mamlūk-era Egyptian, Syrian, and Meccan scholars regarded Western Sufi émigrés such as Ibn al-‘Arabī, Ibn Sab‘īn (d. 668 or 669/1269-71), and others as agents of a new and dangerous strain of Sufism infused with pagan and Ismā‘īlite elements. Though al-Būnī is not mentioned in all of these critiques, those in which he does feature are instructive regarding the negative reactions of ‘conservative’ ‘ulamā’ to his teachings. These include comments by the famous Ḥanbalī firebrand Ibn Taymīyah and the somewhat later Shāfi‘ite Cairene jurist Ibn al-Naqqāsh.

4.2.2.1 Ibn Taymīyah on al-Būnī

Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymīyah was a native of Ḥarrān who, in his youth, took refuge from the Mongols in Damascus with his father and brothers. His was a family of scholars, and he was educated at the Sukkarīyah *madrasah* in Damascus while it was under the direction of his father. Among his teachers was a member of the Maqdisī clan, whose role in Damascene manuscript culture was discussed in chapter two: Shams al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Maqdisī (d. 682/1283), who was appointed by Baybars as the first Ḥanbalī *qādī al-quḍāt* of the Levant. Ibn Taymīyah eventually took over his father’s position at the Sukkarīyah and also taught at the Umayyad Mosque and other institutions in the city.

⁶²⁷ Massignon, “Ibn Sab‘īn et la ‘conspiration hallagienne’ en Andalousie et en Orient au XIIIe siècle.”

⁶²⁸ Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*.

⁶²⁹ Akasoy, “The *muḥaqqiq* as Mahdi?”; idem., “What Is Philosophical Sufism,” in *In the Age of Averroes: Arabic Philosophy in the Sixth/Twelfth Century*, ed. Peter Adamson, Warburg Institute Colloquia 16 (London: The Warburg Institute & Nino Aragno Editore, 2011), 229–49.

⁶³⁰ Yahya Michot, “Misled and Misleading... yet Central in Their Influence: Ibn Taymiyya’s Views on the Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā’,” in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: The Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā’ and Their Rasā’il: An Introduction*, ed. Nader El-Bizri, Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā’ and Their Rasā’il, xix, 304 p. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 139–79.

⁶³¹ Also of interest regarding reactions to these Western Sufis are H. Laoust, “Une fetwa d’Ibn Taymiyya sur Ibn Tumart,” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 59 (1960): 157–84; Joel L. Kraemer, “The Andalusian Mystic Ibn Hud and the Conversion of the Jews,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1992): 59–73; Brown, “Andalusī Mysticism”; Steven Wasserstrom, “Jewish-Muslim Relations in the Context of Andalusian Emigration,” in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Change*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies 8 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

While, given these appointments he certainly can be counted as a member of the class of secondary elites discussed thus far in this chapter, he was outspokenly critical of what he regarded as the declining religious standards of his own time, and spent numerous stints in prison for taking unpopular positions. Indeed, he was a prisoner in the Citadel at the time of his death in 728/1328.⁶³²

Ibn Taymīyah clashed regularly with Aʿsharite thinkers, who accused him of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), but some of his fiercest disputes were with regard to Sufism and the veneration of saints, the latter of which he regarded as outright *bidʿah* (‘unwarranted innovation’). He was particularly opposed to the followers of Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ibn Sabʿīn, and others of the Western Sufi cohort of which al-Būnī was a member, and he famously clashed with the Shādhilite *shaykh* Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī, the lead disciple of Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, who, as discussed previously, supposedly studied lettrism under al-Būnī. As Michot notes, Ibn Taymīyah to some degree regarded the ‘new’ Sufis from the West as partaking of the same poison cup, doctrinally speaking, as the Ismāʿīlites. In one polemic he refers to “groups of esotericists... Shīʿī esotericists like the authors of the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* and Sufi esotericists like Ibn Sabʿīn, Ibn ʿArabī, and others.”⁶³³

Ibn Taymīyah’s brief and highly critical mention of al-Būnī arises in a *fatwā* on prayer. It does not link him directly to Ibn al-ʿArabī or others of their cohort. This perhaps is unsurprising given that, as discussed below, there are reasons to think he knew of al-Būnī by word of mouth but had not actually read him. As we will see, the only work by al-Būnī he mentions is “*al-Shuʿlah al-nūrānīyah*,” an erroneous or alternate title for *al-Lumʿah al-nūrānīyah* (*shuʿlah* is a synonym for *lumʿah*, but I have come across no evidence of the work having circulated under that name). The *fatwā* as a whole begins with a discussion of what Ibn Taymīyah argues is the absolute requirement that all sane Muslims undertake the five daily prayers, with the ancillary point—though one suspects it is really the main point—that anyone claiming to have attained a degree of sanctity that allows them to dispense with the daily prayers is an infidel (*kāfir*). This progresses into a discussion of the effect of madness on this

⁶³² H. Laoust, *EI2*, s.v. “Ibn Taymiyya.”

⁶³³ Michot, “Misled and Misleading,” 146, quoting Ibn Taymīyah’s *Kitāb al-Radd alā al-mantiqiyīn*.

requirement, and Ibn Taymīyah argues—entirely conventionally—that the mad, like children, are excused from praying. He is not so forgiving, however, of those who are driven mad through unwarranted spiritual exercises such as Sufi ‘listening’ (*samāʿ*) and ‘dance’ (*raqs*) or other ways of seeking ‘unveiling’ (*kashf*, *mukāshafah*), since those who do so render themselves susceptible to possession by the evil spirits (*shayātīn*) which may overwhelm their intellects. Unlike those born mad or who fall helplessly to madness, he declares, those who effectively have invited it are among the *kāfirs*. He is particularly strenuous on the point that those who claim to have gained the power to produce marvels (*karāmāt*) through such exercises categorically cannot be saints. In the passage below Ibn Taymīyah connects the potential for spirit-possession to types of supererogatory prayer, including supplications to the saints, the angels, and the spiritual forces of the stars. It is the latter exercise that he associates particularly with al-Būnī:

والذين يعبدون الشيطان أكثرهم لا يعرفون أنهم يعبدون الشيطان بل قد يظنون أنهم يعبدون الملائكة أو الصالحين كالذين يستغيثون بهم ويسجدون لهم فهم في الحقيقة إنما عبدوا الشيطان وإن ظنوا أنهم يتوسلون ويستشفعون بعباد الله الصالحين قال تعالى ﴿وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَؤُلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مِنْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ ولهذا نهى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم عن الصلاة وقت طلوع الشمس ووقت غروبها، فإن الشيطان يقارنها حينئذ حتى يكون سجود عباد الشمس له وهم يظنون أنهم يسجدون للشمس وسجودهم للشيطان وكذلك أصحاب دعوات الكواكب الذين يدعون كوكباً من الكواكب ويسجدون له ويناجونه ويدعونه ويصنعون له من الطعام واللباس والبخور والتبركات ما يناسبه كما ذكره صاحب السر المكتوم المشرقي وصاحب الشعلة النورانية البوني المغربي وغيرها فإن هؤلاء تنزل عليهم أرواح تخاطبهم وتخبرهم ببعض الأمور وتقضي لهم بعض الحوائج ويسمون ذلك روحانية الكواكب

Most of those who worship Shayṭān do not know that they worship Shayṭān. Rather they imagine that they are worshipping the angels or the saints [*al-sāliḥīn*], such as those who seek intercession from them and prostrate themselves to them. Understand that in truth they are worshipping Shayṭān, even though they imagine that they are praying to and asking intercession from God’s servants, the saints. God said, ‘And [mention] the day when He will gather them all and then say to the angels, Did these [people] used to worship you? They will say, Exalted are You. You, [O Allāh], are our master [*walīnā*] not them. Rather, they used to worship the jinn; most of them were believers in them.’⁶³⁴ For this reason the Prophet forbade prayer at the time of the sunrise

⁶³⁴ Q 34:41-42.

and the time of its setting, for the Shayṭān merges with it [*scil.* prayer] at that time such that the prostration of sun-worshippers is made to him. They imagine that they are worshipping the sun but their worship is to the Shayṭān. Likewise the masters of invocatory prayer to the stars, who invoke a star from among the stars and worship it and converse with it and invoke it and fabricate [things] for it from foodstuffs and costume and incense and praise such as are appropriate to it [*scil.* the star], as is mentioned by the author of *al-Sirr al-maktūm*, the easterner, and the author of *al-Shu'lah al-nūrānīyah*, al-Būnī the westerner, and others. Verily the spirits descend to communicate with them and inform them on certain matters, and to [*scil.* the spirits] carry out certain objectives for them. They call that the spiritual science of the stars [*ruḥānīyat al-kawākib*].⁶³⁵

It is not possible to know precisely when Ibn Taymīyah pronounced this *fatwá*, though it may well have been during or after the period when he was banished to Alexandria for several months in 709/1309-10. He is reported to have clashed there with followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ibn Sab‘īn⁶³⁶ many of whom probably were from among the population of Maghribī and Andalusī émigrés residing there,⁶³⁷ and this is an environment in which he likely could have heard of al-Būnī for the first time. Given that he seems to associate al-Būnī particularly with astral magic practices, it seems noteworthy that al-Būnī is not mentioned in the series of three *fatwás* against astrologers Ibn Taymīyah issued in Damascus.⁶³⁸ As for his assessment of *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* as being concerned with astral magic: while there are astrological elements to the timing of the prayers given in that text, Ibn Taymīyah’s description of incenses, costumes, *et cetera*, is far more fitting of *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* than of any of al-Būnī’s authentic works. The notion that Sufis make themselves vulnerable to spirit-possession through their exercises, perhaps even intentionally, was hardly original to Ibn Taymīyah; al-Ḥallāj reportedly was accused of trafficking with spirits, as were other Sufi masters of the classical period.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁵ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmu‘*, 10/251.

⁶³⁶ Akasoy, “What Is Philosophical Sufism,” 229.

⁶³⁷ As Laoust has suggested; “Une fetwa d’Ibn Taymiyya.”

⁶³⁸ Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology.”

⁶³⁹ Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallāj*, I/189 ff.

How common was this view of al-Būnī in the early the eighth/fourteenth century? Ibn Taymīyah’s *fatwá* is our only testament to such an attitude, and, given Ibn Taymīyah’s rough treatment at the hands of his contemporaries, his views often seem to have been outside the norm during his lifetime. Nonetheless, he had an enduring impact. Knysh notes that “Ibn Taymiyya’s major legacy to posterity was a tightly knit group of loyal followers, some of whom were to become leading scholars of the age.”⁶⁴⁰ His greatest intellectual descendants, such as the traditionist-historians al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348 or 753/1352-53) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) were largely Damascus-based, and thus removed from Cairo—the true hotbed of Būnian thought. While they generally did not pursue an anti-Būnian polemic (though they rigorously critiqued Ibn al-‘Arabī), and perhaps this physical distance was one reason why, at least one figure only a few steps removed from Ibn Taymīyah did.

4.2.2.2 *Ibn al-Naqqāsh on al-Būnī*

One of the most virulent critiques of al-Būnī from the Mamlūk period comes from a less well-known figure, Shams al-Dīn Abū Imāmah Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. al-Naqqāsh (d. 763/1361-2), a promising Shāfi‘ite scholar and preacher who died young, around thirty-nine or forty years of age. He is said to have studied first in Cairo, then in Damascus, in the latter attaching himself to Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. of the plague ca. 769/1368), who himself was an “intimate friend” of Ibn Taymīyah’s follower al-Dhahabī.⁶⁴¹ At some point after having studied with al-Subkī, Ibn al-Naqqāsh entered the service first of some *amīrs*—i.e. military elites—and then of the Qalāwūnid sultan al-Nāṣir Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ḥasan (r. 748/1347-762/1361, with an interruption in 752/1351). He apparently flourished in the latter position for a period, but then was engaged in a public dispute after having issued a *fatwá* the reasoning of which, as Ibn Ḥajar puts it, “diverged from the Shāfi‘ite school” (*takhālaḥa madhhab al-Shāfi‘ī*). The case eventually went before the *qāḍī* ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn

⁶⁴⁰ Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 60.

⁶⁴¹ Mohamed Ben Cheneb and J. de Somogyi, *EI2*, s.v. “al-Dhahabī.”

Jamā'ah (d. 767/1365-6)—whose grandson, 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Jamā'ah we will meet later in this chapter—and was decided against Ibn al-Naqqāsh, so that he was barred from issuing further *fatwās*.

A number of works are credited to him, at least two of which are extant. A work of his that seems not to have survived was his *tafsīr* entitled *al-Sābiq wa-al-lāḥiq*, which apparently was highly original in that, utterly uncharacteristically of works of that genre and of Mamlūk-era scholarship generally, it quoted no predecessors. Though lost, a passage said to be from the work is found in al-Sakhāwī's anti-Akbarian polemic *al-Qawl al-munbī'an tarjamat Ibn al-'Arabī*, and it begins with a fascinating and scathingly negative description of al-Būnī and his followers. I begin the excerpt here with al-Sakhāwī's brief introductory comment:

ومنهم العلامة شمس الدين ابو إمامة محمد بن علي بن عبد الواحد بن النقاش الشافعي مات في ربيع الاول سنة ثلاث وستين وسبعائة فذكر ابن ابي حجلة نقلاً من تفسيره يعني المسمى بالسابق واللاحق انه قال:

ظهرت امة ضعيفة العقل نزره العلم اشتغلوا بهذه الحروف وجعلوا لها دلالات واشتقوا منها الفاظاً واستدلوا بها على مدد وسموا انفسهم بعلماء الحروف ثم جاءهم شيخ وقع من جملة العالم يقال له البوني ألف فيها مؤلفات واتى فيها بطامات وادعى فيها دعاوى لا يهتدي الناظر فيها بمنار ولا يرضى غاية معرفتها بمعتقدتها إلا النار ومن الحروف دخلوا للباطن وان للقرآن باطناً غير ظاهره بل للشرائع باطن غير ظاهره ومن ذلك تدرجوا إلى وحدة الوجود وهو مذهب الملحدين كابن عربي وابن سبعين وابن الفارض والقونوي والتلمساني وامثالهم ممن يجعل الوجود الخالق هو الوجود المخلوق

Among them is the learned Shams al-Dīn Abū Imāmah Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. al-Naqqāsh al-Shāfi'ī, who died in Rabī' al-Awwal of 763. Ibn Abī Ḥajalah mentioned—quoting from his [*scil.* Ibn al-Naqqāsh's] exegetical work, meaning the one called *al-Sābiq wa-al-lāḥiq*—that he said:

There appeared a weak-minded community of little knowledge who busied themselves with these letters. They contrived meanings with them and derived formulations from them and drew conclusions from them regarding appointed times, and they called themselves scholars of the letters. Then there came to them an impudent *shaykh*, one of the ignorant ones of the world, called al-Būnī. He composed writings on them [*scil.* the letters] and produced rubbish⁶⁴² and fabricated claims regarding them. Even a lighthouse could not guide the one who looks into them [*scil.* the letters], and, for one who believes in them, there is no end-point to knowledge of them except the fire. From the letters they [*scil.*

⁶⁴² Lit. the rubbish and scum that accumulates on flood-waters; Lane's *Lexicon*, s.v. "طم."

the scholars of the letters] took up the practice of esoteric interpretation [*al-bāṭin*], as if the Qurʾān has an esoteric meaning but no apparent one, and even [interpreted] God’s laws [as if they had] an esoteric meaning but no apparent one. From that they progressed to ‘the unity of being’, which is the school of heretics like Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Sabʿīn, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, al-Qūnawī, al-Tilimsānī and their like among those who would make the Being of the Creator as unto that of the created.⁶⁴³

Ibn al-Naqqāsh’s assessment of al-Būnī and the ‘community’ (*ummah*) of lettrists partakes in large part of a standard criticism of esotericism qua *bāṭin*-ism: that practitioners of it ignore entirely the exoteric meanings of the Qurʾān and the holy laws by favoring esoteric interpretations. It is a point of interest that he links lettrism to matters of exegesis, as it suggests at least a passing familiarity with lettrist thought. Most important, however, is that he identifies lettrism as a kind of ‘gateway’ heresy that leads to adherence to the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*, i.e. the ideas that came to be associated with the new Sufism of the Western *shaykhs* and their followers. Knysh notes that Ibn al-Naqqāsh’s comments on Ibn al-ʿArabī suggest he had actually read some of *al-shaykh al-akbar*’s works (unlike many of his most vocal critics), and that he “anticipates Ibn Khaldūn in linking Ibn ʿArabī to... al-Būnī.”⁶⁴⁴ Ibn al-Naqqāsh’s linking of al-Būnī to Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *et alii*, is important in that, as Knysh, Homerin, and others have discussed, these figures and their texts were at the center of numerous major controversies among factions of secondary elites over the course of the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries, such that military elites sometimes felt the need to intervene in order to preserve public order. As we will see, Ibn al-Naqqāsh was not the last to suggest this link, and Ibn Khaldūn picks up not far from where Ibn al-Naqqāsh left off, though the former links al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī far more closely.

4.2.3 Ibn Khaldūn’s critique of al-Būnī and the science of letters

The lengthiest and most complex Mamlūk-era critique of al-Būnī, lettrism, and the place of lettrism in the Sufism of the period comes from the historian, judge, and theologian ʿAbd al-Raḥmān

⁶⁴³ al-Sakhāwī and Mudrik, “al-Qawl al-munbī,” II/317.

⁶⁴⁴ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 219–220.

Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406). In comments appearing across two of his works, *Shifā' al-sā'il li-tahdhīb al-masā'il* and the multivolume 'Introduction'—*Muqaddimah*—to his universal history *Kitāb al-'Ibar*, he combines many of the argumentative elements discussed thus far, utilizing a scheme for the classification of the sciences that associates lettrism with the least reputable of the 'foreign' sciences—sorcery (*sihr*), astrology, *et cetera*—while also linking lettrism to the Western Sufi *shaykhs* and their followers, whom he regards as 'extremists' (*al-ghulāh min al-mutaṣawwifah*) and the lead representatives of a dangerous, 'modern' or 'recent' Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf al-muta'akhhir*). Though it is difficult to gauge how effective Ibn Khaldūn's critique was during his lifetime at discouraging the reading of al-Būnī's works, it certainly has contributed greatly to the image of al-Būnī as a magician in modern Euro-American scholarship.

Like al-Būnī, Ibn Khaldūn was of Ifrīqiyan origin, having been born in Tunis in 732/1332 to a family of Andalusian bureaucrats and scholars. Losing his parents to the Black Death at the age of seventeen, he relocated to Fez and received his first bureaucratic appointment there before he was twenty. He spent the next twenty-five years serving a succession of rulers engaged in the bloody struggles among Ḥafṣids and Marīnids for control of North Africa. Moving a number of times between Fez, Bougie, and Granada, he frequently was embroiled in dangerous intrigues and barely escaped political life alive. It was during this time that he formed a lasting, if sometimes severely strained, friendship with the older Granadan vizier and historian Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 776/1375), whose writings, as we will see, were important to Ibn Khaldūn's ideas on al-Būnī and related topics. Swearing off politics shortly after Ibn al-Khaṭīb's murder at the hands of political opponents, Ibn Khaldūn retreated to the castle of Ibn Salāmah near present-day Frenḍa, Algeria from 776/1375 to 780/1379, writing much of what would become his great *Muqaddimah*. He then returned briefly to Tunis but, drawn into court intrigues again, he soon decided to abandon the West altogether. On the pretext of going on the *ḥajj* he departed for Egypt in 784/1382, never to return. In Cairo he taught Mālikī *fiqh* and was briefly the chief Mālikī *qāḍī* at the behest of the sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq. For a time he was head of

the *khānqāh* of Baybars, then a major institution, and also taught *ḥadīth* at the *madrasah* of the *amīr* Ṣarghatmish for a number of years beginning in 791/1389. Indeed, he may still have been a teacher at the latter institution when one of the copies of *ʿAlam al-hudá* discussed in chapter two, Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590, was collated there in 798/1396, though there is no reason to suspect he was aware of that particular instance of the innumerable book practices that would have been taking place each day at the *madrasah*.

Ibn Khaldūn reached his intellectual maturity while yet living in the West, composing parts of his most famous work there, including some—though not all—of those sections that deal with al-Būnī. Even while in Cairo he maintained correspondence with some individuals in the Maghrib and al-Andalus. Thus before turning to Ibn Khaldūn’s own comments on al-Būnī I will first look briefly at the spread of al-Būnī’s works in the West and at some comments on him by two major intellectuals of Ibn Khaldūn’s lifetime: the Granadan scholar Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Shāṭibī, and the aforementioned Ibn al-Khaṭīb.

4.2.3.1 *al-Shāṭibī on al-Būnī*

The Granadan scholar Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī’s brief comment on al-Būnī appears in his book on unwarranted religious innovations (*bidʿah*), *Kitāb al-Iʿtiṣām*, much of which is aimed at Sufi practices of his day that he considered beyond the pale of *sharʿiyyah*. “The ‘litanies’ [*adhkār*] and invocatory prayers [*adʿiyah*] that the scholars claim are constructed according to the science of letters,”⁶⁴⁵ he says, belong to the category of “real innovation” (*bidʿah ḥaqīqīyah*), which is to say that which is wholly alien to God’s law.⁶⁴⁶ He portrays lettrism—which he associates primarily with astrology-tinged precatory practices—as a form of Hellenistic philosophy (*falsafah*), with al-Būnī being the sole proponent of the science whom he names. He is the only of al-Būnī’s critics to deny the practice and its

⁶⁴⁵ al-Shāṭibī, *Kitāb al-Iʿtiṣām* (Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, n.d.), 323.

كالأدكار والأدعية بزعم العلماء أنها مبنية على علم الحروف

⁶⁴⁶ As opposed to “relative innovation,” *al-bidʿah al-idāfiyah*. On this distinction see Asep Saepudin Jahar, “Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī’s reformulation of the concept of Bidʿa: A study of his *al-Iʿtiṣām*” (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1999), 56 ff.

epistemological/cosmological any efficacy or validity, and he argues that practitioners of it will falsely claim that any outcome of a matter for which an operation was conducted was that which they intended:

فإن ذلك العلم فلسفة أطف من فلسفة معلمهم الأول وهو أرسطاطاليس فردّوها إلى أوضاع الحروف وجعلوها هي الحاكمة في العالم . وربما أشاروا عند العمل بمقتضى تلك الأذكار وما قصد بها إلى تحري الأوقات والأحوال الملائمة لطبائع الكواكب ليحصل التأثير عندهم وحياً فحكّموا العقول والطبائع كما ترى وتوجهوا شطرها ، وأعرضوا عن رب العقل والطبائع وإن ظنوا أنهم يقصدونه اعتقاداً في استدلالهم لصحة ما انتحلوا على وقوع الأمر وفق ما يقصدون فإذا توجهوا بالذكر والدعاء المفروض على الغرض المطلوب حصل سواء عليهم أنفعاً كان أو ضرراً وخيراً كان أم شراً وبينون على ذلك اعتقاد بلوغ النهاية في إجابة الدعاء أو حصل نوع من كرامات الأولياء كلا ليس طريق ذلك التأثير من مرادهم ولا كرامات الأولياء أو إجابة الدعاء من نتائج أورادهم ، فلا تلاقي بين الأرض والسماء ، ولا مناسبة بين النار والماء

Verily that science is a [form of] philosophy more subtle than the philosophy the first teacher of which was Aristotle. They have related it [*scil.* philosophy] to the positions of the letters, and made them [*scil.* the letters] out to be the ruling force in the cosmos. Sometimes, with regard to the use of those litanies and their application, they indicate specific times and states agreeable to the innate natures of the stars, such that one can elicit an effect, which according to them is divinely sent. Thus they command the intelligences and innate natures, as you see. They turn in the direction of them and turn away from the Lord of the intellect and innate natures [i.e. God], even though they think they appeal to Him faithfully. They cite any outcome of a matter as evidence of the soundness of that to which they adhere, and as in accordance with what they intended. When they apply the litanies and invocatory prayers necessary to achieve the desired goal—whether it turns out to be beneficial or harmful for them, good or evil—they announce in regard to it the conviction that the result was reached in answer to the prayer, or that a type of saintly marvel was achieved. No! The outcome was not from their intention. Nor were saintly marvels or answers to prayer among the outcomes of their litanies, for there is neither any correspondence between the earth and the heaven nor any sympathetic connection between fire and water.⁶⁴⁷

Al-Shāṭibī presumably might, like some of the Mamlūk encyclopædists, have classified lettrism as part of the foreign sciences, except that he refuses to concede that such practices are in any way valid or effective. He thus denies the fundamental occult-scientific principle of sympathetic relationships between heaven and earth, the letters and the elements, *et cetera*.

⁶⁴⁷ al-Shāṭibī, *Kitāb al-I'tisām*, 323–324.

The linking of al-Būnī and lettrism to philosophy is of interest in that Ibn Taymīyah accused Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ibn Sab‘īn of polluting Sufism with philosophy, even referring to them as the ‘Sufis of the philosophers’ (*mutaṣawwifat al-falāsifah*) and ‘Sufi philoplayers’ (*mutafalsifat al-ṣūfiyah*). At first glance, Ibn Taymīyah and al-Shāṭibī’s reasons for this accusatory linking of Sufism and philosophy seem rather different. As Akasoy has discussed, Ibn Taymīyah was specifically concerned with what he perceived to be a similarity in the metaphysics of Ibn Sīnā and the propagators of *waḥdat al-wujūd*—as well as that of the Almohad *mahdī* Ibn Tūmart—regarding claims of God’s ‘absolute existence’ (*wujūd muṭlaq*), which Ibn Taymīyah understood as a heretical denial of God’s attributes.⁶⁴⁸ Al-Shāṭibī, on the other hand, seems instead to have been concerned with debunking the natural-philosophical notion of ‘sympathies’ that was common to Neoplatonic thought and that certainly was in play in the ideas of al-Būnī, Ibn ‘Arabī, and others of their cohort. However, there are similarities in their negative linking of Sufism and philosophy. As Akasoy points out, Ibn Taymīyah regarded the Westerner Sufis as “particularly suspicious because of their ideas of sainthood which challenged orthodox concepts of prophecy—something the Sufis shared with the philosophers who undermined prophecy from a rationalist perspective.”⁶⁴⁹ Al-Shāṭibī’s adamant denial that lettrism and precatory practices derived from it should in any way be associated with the saints and their miraculous powers perhaps bespeaks a similar drive to protect the status of the saints and their marvels from philosophical intrusion. In short, though inhabiting the quite different milieux of Naṣrid Granada and Mamlūk Damascus and Cairo, both al-Shāṭibī and Ibn Taymīyah were concerned with combating what they saw as Sufis’ miscegenation of Islamic and philosophical discourses in ways that bolstered Sufi claims to spiritual authority while muddying the intrinsic clarity of God’s revealed law.

Although al-Shāṭibī was a major scholar of his time and region, his views cannot be considered to have been predominant. Indeed, he wrote *Kitāb al-I’tiṣām* in part to defend himself from charges of

⁶⁴⁸ Akasoy, “What Is Philosophical Sufism,” 230 ff.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 234.

bid'ah regarding his legal methodology. To what degree he may have influenced Ibn Khaldūn's thought on these Sufis is an open question. Ibn al-Khaldūn certainly was aware of al-Shāṭibī, as the former's *Shifā' al-sā'il li-tahdhīb al-masā'il* was contrived as an (unsolicited) response to questions al-Shāṭibī had posed to the learned men of Fez and the Marīnid capital regarding the aforementioned controversy as to whether Sufism could be learned from books, or if it was necessary that the Sufi aspirant "follow an *imām* or *shaykh*, listen to his directions, imitate him, and act on his instructions."⁶⁵⁰ As we will see, Ibn Khaldūn's complaints regarding al-Būnī resonate to some degree with al-Shāṭibī's, though Ibn Khaldūn is far more inclined to believe in the efficacy of lettrism, even if he agrees as to its impermissibility.

4.2.3.2 *Ibn al-Khaṭīb on al-Būnī*

An actor whose views of al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī unquestionably impacted Ibn Khaldūn's thinking was his mentor and friend Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb. Ibn al-Khaṭīb mentions al-Būnī twice in his *Rawḍat al-taʿrīf bi-al-ḥubb al-sharīf*, a lengthy treatise on divine love written as a refutation of a work on the frustrations of earthly love by the Tlemcen-born *cum* Cairene poet and Sufi Ibn Abī Ḥajalah (d. 776/1375). The latter was a fierce detractor of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and, as noted above, was al-Sakhāwī's source for the passage from Ibn al-Naqqāsh regarding al-Būnī.⁶⁵¹ Ibn al-Khaṭīb quotes from a wide range of Sufi and other sources on issues of divine realities, taking care to distance himself from the most risqué of them. Nonetheless, the work was exploited by his enemies at court as a pretext for his undoing, and the events leading to his imprisonment and murder began with charges that he had embraced the "monistic heresy" of Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ibn Sabʿīn, *et alii*. As Knysh puts it: "One may say that Ibn al-Khatib fell victim to his imprudent use of controversial Sufi sources, most notably the writings of Ibn ʿArabi and other mystical thinkers of dubious credentials."⁶⁵²

⁶⁵⁰ Mahdi, "The Book and the Master," 4.

⁶⁵¹ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 176–177.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, 180.

Ibn al-Khaṭīb's first mention of al-Būnī appears in a section on *sīmiyā'*, a topic he introduces as a body of knowledge "some of which is rotten and some of which remains useful."⁶⁵³ He begins by quoting an unnamed master of the science who views the cosmos as something created and maintained through God's names, which manifest in the cosmos as angels/astral forces rooted in the letters of the alphabet:

[قال] ان اسماء الله التي جعل مظاهرها الصور الروحانية وهي الملائكة وهي ارواح الافلاك والكواكب وسكان العالم الاعلى وعمرة السماوات واسباب كل فعل هي وسائط الله في كل امر وخلق مما يقع في العالم باذنه وحكمته وبتنزيلاتها احاطت حكمته العوالم كلها وبلغت ما تحت الثرى واصولها ايضاً الحروف وطبيعتها سارية في تلك الكلمات الاسمائية

[He says] that the names of God are those the manifest forms of which He made to be the spiritual images, and these are the angels. They [*scil.* the angels] are the spirits of the celestial spheres and the stars, the population of the superior world, the civilization of the heavens, and the causes of every action. They are the intermediaries of God with regard to every command and creation among what occurs in the cosmos in accordance with His permission and wisdom. By sending them down His wisdom encompasses all the worlds and even reaches that which is beneath the earth. Their essences are also the letters, the natures of which pervade the perfections of the names.⁶⁵⁴

That this unnamed master is al-Būnī is all but proven by what follows: essentially an uncredited précis of al-Būnī's cosmological discourse in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, sometimes with only slight rephrasings.⁶⁵⁵ It begins with a description of the supernal intellect within which is the single, primordial *alif*, and from which the rest of the worlds unfold. The passage then moves on to a description of the creation of Ādam beginning with *al-ikhtirā' al-awwal* and the Cloud (*al-'amā'*), where the letters are sown into his constitution, and so on through the other three major worlds of al-Būnī's cosmology (i.e. those of *al-ikhtirā' al-thānī* and the spirit, *al-ibdā' al-awwal* and the soul, and *al-ibdā' al-thānī* and the heart and body,

⁶⁵³ Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rawḍat al-ta'rīf bi-al-hubb al-sharīf*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kattānī (Casablanca: Dār al-Thaqāfiyah, n.d.), 324.

وهو الاصل الذي عفن بعضه وبقي الانتفاع ببعضه

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 324–325.

as discussed in chapter three). Summarizing the notion of the human microcosm that runs throughout al-Būnī's cosmology, it is noted that, as a result of this infixing of the letters into Ādam at each phase of his creation, “the correspondences between human actors [*ashkhāṣ al-insānīyah*] and astral actors [*ashkhāṣ al-falakīyah*] are established.”⁶⁵⁶ Ibn al-Khaṭīb also addresses the notion of drawing nearer to God through ritual recitation of the divine names:

فمن تقرب بتلك الاسماء او باجزائها هي الحروف على مقتضى الادعية المرتبة إلى تلك الذات الاقدس التي عنها تنزلت وبسررها سرت على شروط مذكورة من التهيؤ لها بانواع مخصوصة من الرياضة والطهارة تعلقاً ثم تخلفاً ثم تحققاً كان جديراً أن يفتح له بحسب استعداده ومناسبة سره لسر ما تعلق به وبما يظهر على خلقه من اخلاق الاسم يكون قرب الفتح او بعده إذا وافق عناية ربه

He who draws near—through those names or their parts, the letters, and by means of sequential invocatory prayers—to that holy essence from which they [*scil.* the names and/or letters] descend and through the mystery of which they are spread, with the aforementioned preparation of special types of exercises and purification, and through the stages of devotion, adoption, and realization, then he will become worthy of it being opened to him. In proportion to his readiness and the [sympathetic] correspondence of his innermost being to the mystery of that to which attaches itself to him, and in accordance with that of the virtues of the name which manifest in his personal disposition, he will become closer to the opening or further from it, if his Lord affords him His solicitude.

Only slightly later in that section does Ibn al-Khaṭīb mention al-Būnī by name, expressing his concern that the work he refers to as al-Būnī's *al-Anmāt*—almost certainly *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, as discussed previously—contains occult elements of which the average reader may be unaware, such that he will think the effects of the prayers are from the prayers alone, an impression that will be bolstered by his peers. In other words, he would seem to regard *sīmīyā'* as a practice that is effective but not widely known or understood. And he is clearly concerned that it could be mistaken for normal religious practice:

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 328.

والدعوات التي رتبها على الايام ودرس فيها عند تركيبها جميع ما يحتاج اليه بحسب الصناعة وقرن بها الوقت فمن لا يعرف القصد ظن ان الإعتماد منه على الدعاء فقط ووقع بها التصريف حسب ما اخبر به الكثير من معاصر وغيره

As for the invocatory prayers that he arranged according to the days, he has inserted into them, in terms of their composition, everything he wants by way of the occult art, linking them to the time [i.e. to certain times]. One who does not know the purpose [of all this] imagines that it depends on prayer only, and that the effect proceeds from this, in accordance with what many of his contemporaries and others [of the past] have reported to him.

Ibn al-Khaṭīb's second mention of al-Būnī comes in a later section on the group of Sufi thinkers he classifies as the "Accomplished [mystics] who consider themselves to be perfect" (*min al-mutammimīn bi-za'mihim al-mukammalīn*).⁶⁵⁷ This group includes al-Būnī, Ibn al-'Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn Sawdakīn al-Dimashqī (d. 646/1248, a disciple of Ibn al-'Arabī), and Ṣa'd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. 700/1300-01, a student of Ibn al-'Arabī's foremost disciple Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī). It also includes some of the key Western Sufis of the generation prior to al-Būnī: Ibn Barraḡān, Ibn al-'Arīf, and Ibn Qasī. Though the implication is that all these Sufis participate in a shared tradition, the section is primarily a discussion of Akbarian metaphysics. As Knysh has discussed, Ibn al-Khaṭīb criticizes these Sufis for mixing 'traditional' Islamic teachings with Neoplatonism, and "[t]he end result of this admixture is, in Ibn al-Khaṭīb's view, dubious, if not outright heterodox."⁶⁵⁸ His critique is thus superficially similar to those of al-Shāṭibī and Ibn Taymīyah, though Ibn al-Khaṭīb gives the impression of having engaged with the texts and ideas of al-Būnī and Ibn al-'Arabī in far more depth than those two. As we will see, elements of Ibn al-Khaṭīb's thought on al-Būnī and these other Sufis greatly influenced Ibn Khaldūn's views.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 583 ff; Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 179 ff.

⁶⁵⁸ Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 182.

4.2.3.3 *Ibn Khaldūn's comments on al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī*

As noted above, Ibn Khaldūn's comments on al-Būnī appear across two of his works: *Shifā' al-sā'il li-tahdhīb al-masā'il* and the *Muqaddimah*. There is significant textual overlap in the discussions of al-Būnī in these two works, though each contains material on al-Būnī not found in the other. As the order in which they were composed and/or redacted is uncertain, the dates at which these comments were composed are difficult to ascertain. The issue is not merely of pedantic interest, but rather, as discussed below, may have bearing on issues of Ibn Khaldūn's motivations in some of his declarations about al-Būnī. His comments on al-Būnī fall into what can be distinguished as two discourses, elements of which appear in both works: 1) a discussion of al-Būnī and a familiar cast of other Sufis whom Ibn Khaldūn refers to as the *aṣḥāb al-tajallī* ('the people of divine self-manifestation'); and 2) a critique of the science of letters, with al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī being put forward as the foremost masters of that discipline. In the *Shifā'* these two discourses follow more or less immediately upon one another, whereas in the *Muqaddimah* they are in two distinct sections. In what follows I focus on the *Muqaddimah*; how Ibn Khaldūn utilizes, in that work, the classification of the sciences as one element of his theological critique of lettrism and of 'modern' Sufism is a point of particular interest.

The *Muqaddimah*—the multivolume introduction to Ibn Khaldūn's universal history *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*—is an encyclopædic historical-philosophical treatise on the rise and fall of civilizations. As James Morris puts it, Ibn Khaldūn's "first and most obvious interest" in the work "is discovering the essential preconditions for lastingly effective political and social organization." Secondly he seeks "the effective reform of contemporary education, culture, and religion in directions that would better encourage the ultimate human perfection of true, scientific, philosophic knowing."⁶⁵⁹ The Sufism of his time was, as Morris argues, an "absolutely central target" of Ibn Khaldūn's reform program, as he considered it a site of considerable social, intellectual, and spiritual dangers owing to its valorization of nonempirical,

⁶⁵⁹ James Morris, "An Arab Machiavelli? Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Politics in Ibn Khaldun's Critique of Sufism," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 8 (2009): 242.

intuitive/inspired forms of knowledge, and its cultivation of charismatic—even messianic—forms of authority.⁶⁶⁰

His comments on al-Būnī appear in the sixth part (*bāb*) of the *Muqaddimah*, a discourse on “the various kinds of sciences” organized according to Ibn Khaldūn’s rendition of *taṣnīf al-‘ulūm*. After acknowledging the necessity of acquiring the Arabic linguistic sciences as a prerequisite to advanced learning, his list begins with the ‘transmitted, conventional sciences’ (*al-‘ulūm al-naqlīyah al-waḍ‘īyah*), which he gives as: the Qur’ānic sciences, the *ḥadīth* sciences, jurisprudence, disputational theology (*kalām*), the science of Sufism (*‘ilm al-taṣawwūf*), and dream interpretation. The list is clearly hierarchical, with the Qur’ān and *ḥadīths* being the most secure sources of knowledge, and jurisprudence being presented as a vital arena for the resolution of differences of scholarly understanding with regard to the content and application of God’s law. He takes a rather dim view of *kalām*, however, closely following al-Ghazālī in regarding it as a science that attempts, mostly haplessly, to apply the limited human intellect to metaphysical matters inherently beyond its ken, such as the true nature of God’s unity (*tawḥīd*) or the divine attributes.⁶⁶¹ That Sufism is ranked after *kalām* is indicative of Ibn Khaldūn’s rather low estimation of it as a source of knowledge, though this should not be taken to suggest that his evaluation of Sufism was entirely negative. Indeed, his inclusion of it as an independent religious science is somewhat extraordinary—even al-Ghazālī had subsumed it under the science of ethics (*‘ilm al-akhlāq*).⁶⁶² Ibn Khaldūn treats Sufism as legitimately rooted in the piety of the early Muslims and as admirable with regard to practitioners’ skills of introspection and personal ethics. What he vigorously denounces, however, is the notion that the spiritual states achieved by Sufis and perceptions gained thereby can be sources of authoritative, communicable knowledge.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 245.

⁶⁶¹ For an overview of his critique of *kalām*, see Zaid Ahmad, *The Epistemology of Ibn Khaldūn* (London: Routledge, 2003), 50–63.

⁶⁶² Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts, 1998), 203–226.

‘Unveiling’ (*kashf*), he argues, is a genuine category of experience that results from Sufi spiritual practices, but one that the early Muslims and Sufis of the first few centuries—a category he shorthands as those “who are mentioned in the *Risālah* of al-Qushayrī”⁶⁶³—did not strive after or valorize epistemologically. He cautions that *kashf* is not necessarily a result of divine solicitude, and that similar experiences, though inferior ones, are achieved by Christian ascetics and even sorcerers. Most importantly, ‘knowledge’ gained through *kashf* is not, to Ibn Khaldūn’s mind, of a sort that can validly be passed on, as it is not empirically verifiable. His critique of ‘modern’ Sufism, then, begins with those Sufis “who have occupied themselves with this kind of removal (of the veil)” and who “talk about the real character of the higher and lower *existentia* and about the real character of the (divine) kingdom, the spirit, the (divine) throne, the (divine) seat, and similar things,”⁶⁶⁴ in other words, those Sufis who, like al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī, make cosmological and other claims on the basis of their visionary experiences. The relatively low rank of Sufism in his hierarchical classification of the sciences—only just above that of dream interpretation—is reflective of what considers to be the illegitimate status of knowledge gained in this way.

It is in the context of this critique of Sufis focused on *kashf* that Ibn Khaldūn raises the issue of those he refers to as the *aṣḥāb al-tajallī* (‘the people of divine self-manifestation’), a grouping in which he includes al-Būnī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn Sawdakīn, Ṣa’d al-Dīn al-Farghānī, Ibn Barraḡān, and Ibn Qasī. This is almost the same list as Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s grouping of ‘accomplished mystics who consider themselves to be perfect’.⁶⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldūn names al-Būnī as a member of this group only in *al-Shifā*; however, in both that text and the *Muqaddimah* his consideration of these Sufis clearly is based largely on Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s description of the ‘accomplished mystics’. The discussion is concerned primarily with the cosmology those Sufis allegedly share, and how their vision of, as Knysh puts it, “the unique

⁶⁶³ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 82.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Shifā’ al-sā’il li-tahdhīb al-masā’il: ma’a dirāsah taḥlīlīyah lil-‘alāqah bayna al-sulṭān al-rūḥī wa-al-sulṭān al-siyāsī*, ed. Abu Yaarub Marzouki, Maṣādir al-falsafah 4 (Tunis: al-Dār al-‘Arabīyah li-al-Kitāb, 1991), 212.

Absolute Existence” of God is made to “unfold into the empirical multiplicity of the material world.”⁶⁶⁶

Ibn Khaldūn carefully points out the lack of any sound scriptural or empirical basis for the elaborate, notionally *kashf*-derived cosmology of these Sufis who, he complains, add “obscurity to obscurity” in their discourses.⁶⁶⁷

His critique is not merely epistemological, but also heresiological. Ibn Khaldūn asserts that this valorization of *kashf* is symptomatic of ‘modern’ Sufism’s having been tainted by Ismā‘īlite thought, with the Sufis having replaced the Shī‘ite *Imāms* with their ‘poles’ (s. *quṭb*), their ‘chief gnostics’:

The early (Sufis) had contact with the Neo-Isma‘īliyah Shi‘ah extremists [i.e. Nizārī Ismā‘īlites] who also believed in incarnation and the divinity of the imams, a theory not known to the early (Isma‘īliyah). Each group came to be imbued with the dogmas of the other. Their theories and beliefs merged and were assimilated. In Sufi discussion, there appeared the theory of the ‘pole’ (*quṭb*), meaning the chief gnostic... The theory of (successive ‘poles’) is not confirmed by logical arguments or evidence from the religious law. It is a sort of rhetorical figure of speech. It is identical with the theory of the extremist Shi‘ah about the succession of the imams through inheritance. Clearly, mysticism has plagiarized this idea from the extremist Shi‘ah and come to believe in it.⁶⁶⁸

As discussed in the previous chapter, and as Ebstein has explored at length, there is certainly some truth to the notion of Ismā‘īlite thought having greatly impacted Western Sufism—or at least some strains of it—though the accuracy of Ibn Khaldūn’s assertion that it was specifically Nizārī Ismā‘īlite ideas that these Sufis absorbed is more difficult to credit. However, as Morris notes, Ibn Khaldūn’s evocation of the “handy scapegoat” of Shī‘ism is reflective less of his intellectual-genealogical analysis of this school of Sufism, than a signal of what he felt were “the dangerous practical social and political effects” of its popularity: the real social power that Sufi *shaykhs* were coming to have in Cairo and

⁶⁶⁶ Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 190–191.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 87; *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*, 617.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 92–93; *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*, 619 ff.

environs.⁶⁶⁹ These dangers, in Ibn Khaldūn's view, were attached particularly to the messianic/mahdist leanings among Sufis and their followers, and more broadly to a general undermining of the traditional bearers of socioreligious authority and their rational, discursive intellectual practices. In other words, Ibn Khaldūn's polemic is an expression of alarm at the success of the esotericist Sufis and their followers in establishing themselves as alternative socioreligious authorities, ones whose claims to sanctity and inspired knowledge were being taken seriously by a broad cross-section of Mamlūk society, both elite and popular.

Ibn Khaldūn's second discourse concerning al-Būnī is specifically with regard to the science of letters. Within the hierarchical classification of the sciences in the sixth *bāb* of the *Muqaddimah*, this discourse occurs significantly later in the text after the subchapter on Sufism, deep in the section on the second and inferior overarching category of sciences that Ibn Khaldūn recognizes: the 'intellectual sciences' (*al-'ulūm al-'aqlīyah*). These are the sciences that "are natural to man,"⁶⁷⁰ which is to say that they are arrived at without the aid of divine revelation. They include the mathematical sciences, astronomical observation and calculations, logic, physics (*'ilm al-ṭabī'iyāt*, here meaning the study of motions in the Aristotelian sense), medicine, agriculture, and metaphysics (*'ilm al-ilāhīyāt*)—the last of which he holds in quite low regard for much the same reasons as he does *kalām*. It is in the ranks of the sciences below metaphysics that we find the sciences of magic and talismans (*'ulūm al-siḥr wa-al-ṭīsamāt*), which he argues are real but forbidden, and the science of letters (*'ilm asrār al-ḥurūf*). Following them are philosophy (*falsafah*, here meaning Aristotelian reasoning from particulars to abstract principles), alchemy, and astrology, each of which he refutes at length. Thus Ibn Khaldūn places great distance between Sufism proper and lettrism, nesting the latter among the least reputable of the intellectual sciences.

While it follows the discussion on magic and talismans, and is thus a subcategory of that topic, Ibn Khaldūn's discussion of lettrism in the *Muqaddimah* is also an extension of his critique of the *aṣḥāb*

⁶⁶⁹ Morris, "An Arab Machiavelli?," 254.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 111; *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*, 629.

al-tajallī. This can be seen clearly in the *Shifā'*, where roughly the same text follows almost immediately upon his discussion of the *aṣḥāb al-tajallī*. His discussion of lettrism in the *Muqaddimah* as one of the 'intellectual' sciences seems intended, then, to emphasize its alien-ness to Sufism proper. In his introductory comments to the subchapter on lettrism he emphasizes its late origin relative to Islam, linking it to the development mentioned in the subchapter on Sufism regarding when some mystics—here referred to as 'the extremist Sufis' (*al-ghulāh min al-mutaṣawwifah*)—came to value *kashf* for its own sake. His comments on the relationship between the names, the letters, the spirits of the spheres and stars, and the created things clearly are adapted from Ibn al-Khaṭīb's discourse on *sīmiyā'* discussed above. Indeed, the mention of the 'first origination' (*al-ibdā' al-awwal*) here is unquestionably a product of Ibn Khaldūn's having borrowed from Ibn al-Khaṭīb's paraphrase of parts of al-Būnī's *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*:

This science originated in Islam after some time of (its existence) had passed. When the extremist Sufis appeared, they turned to the removal of the veil of sense perception, produced wonders, and were active in the world of the elements. At that time, they wrote systematic works on (Sufism) and (Sufi) terminology. They believed in the gradual descent of existence from the One. They believed that the perfection of the [divine] names was manifested in the spirits of the celestial spheres and stars, and that the natures and mysteries of the letters permeate the names, while the names in turn permeate the created things. The created things have been moving in the different stages of (creation) and manifesting its secrets in Arabic [i.e. in the Arabic language] since the first origination [al-ibdā' al-awwal]. These (Sufi beliefs) caused the science of the secrets of the letters to originate. It is a subdivision of the science of *sīmiyā'* [...]. It is an unfathomable subject [*lā tūqaf 'alā mawdū'ihī*] with innumerable problems. Al-Būnī, Ibn al-'Arabī, and others in their wake wrote numerous works on it.⁶⁷¹

Ibn Khaldūn engages in a discussion of the attribution of the letters to the elements, and their use in accentuating or diminishing the effect of a given planetary or elemental influence. He also briefly discusses the role of numerical proportions in relationships between the letters, presenting it as

⁶⁷¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 171–172; *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*, 664. Here, and in some of the quotes that follow, the translation is Rosenthal's except for the underlined portions, which I have re-translated for clarity and consistency. In this quote the Arabic text for the underlined portion is as follows:

وزعموا ان الكمال الاسمائي مظاهره ارواح الافلاك والكواكب وان طبائع الحروف واسرارها سارية في الاسماء فهي سارية في الاكوان على هذا النظام والاكوان من لدن الابداع الاول تنتقل في اطواره وتعرب عن اسرارها

a school of lettrist thought distinct from that which associates the letters with the elements. His primary concern seems to be to demonstrate that the science is incoherent, or at least impenetrable to normal discursive apperception. In the passage below, he adduces a statement attributed to al-Būnī regarding the inspired nature of lettrist knowledge. Though not an exact quote, it is quite similar to a statement of al-Būnī's from the end of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* that is quoted and discussed in the previous chapter of this study (at the end of section 3.2). Despite the unfathomability of lettrism—and although, as we will see, he is fundamentally skeptical of al-Būnī's claim of divine inspiration—Ibn Khaldūn concedes lettrism's operational efficacy:

The real significance of the relationship existing between letters and natural humors and between letters and numbers is difficult to understand. It is not a matter of science or reasoning. According to the (authorities on letter magic), it is based on mystical experience and the removal (of the veil). Al-Būnī said, 'One should not think that one can get at the secret of the letters with the help of logical reasoning. One gets to it with the help of vision and divine aid'. The fact that it is possible to be active in the world of nature with the help of the letters and the words composed of them, and that the created things can be influenced in this way, cannot be denied. It is confirmed by continuous tradition on the authority of many (practitioners of *sīmiyā*).⁶⁷²

Ibn Khaldūn then attempts to distinguish the difference between lettrists and those who work with talismans—an art which, he has explained in the previous section, is a form of sorcery (*siḥr*) and therefore forbidden by God's law. He arrives at the proposition that “[t]he activity of people who work with talismans consists in bringing down the spirituality of the spheres and tying it down with the help of pictures or numerical proportions,” whereas “[t]he activity of the masters of the names [*aṣḥāb al-asmā*], on the other hand, is the effect of the divine light and the support of the Lord which they obtain through exertion and the removal (of the veil),” such that “nature is forced to work (for them) and does so willingly with no attempt at disobedience.”⁶⁷³ While this seems a positive appraisal of lettrism, he quickly complicates and undermines this distinction, noting that many lettrists rely on established

⁶⁷² Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 174; *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*, 666.

⁶⁷³ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 175; *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*, 666–667.

practices rather than on their own mastery of *kashf*, and that “there is no difference between such a person and the people who work with talismans.” Furthermore, he notes that lettrism is often combined with the talismanic arts, as he claims al-Būnī has done in his *Kitāb al-Anmāṭ* (a title Ibn Khaldūn almost certainly got from Ibn al-Khaṭīb):

The master of the names may mingle the powers of the words and names with the powers of the stars. He may then set certain times for mentioning the beautiful names of God or the magic squares composed of them or, indeed, any word. These times must be under the propitious influence of the star that is related to a particular word. That was done, for instance, by al-Būnī in his book entitled *al-Anmāṭ*.⁶⁷⁴

This charge against al-Būnī and the so-called *Kitāb al-Anmāṭ* is key to Ibn Khaldūn’s attack on lettrism and the Sufis he associates with it, which is to say the *aṣḥāb al-tajallī*. Because, in his view, true mastery of the names can only come through the divine solicitude of *kashf*, and because *kashf* is not generative of knowledge that can be transmitted validly to others, the lettrism in the books of al-Būnī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, and others of their ilk necessarily is not a licit, theurgical science of the saints, but rather a form of sorcery, a blending of traces of genuine knowledge of the names with forbidden talismanic practices. In an important sense, then, he is seizing on the problem of books on lettrism discussed in the second chapter of this study: the notion that knowledge of operative lettrism—a science of the spiritual elect—cannot be transmitted in writing without degradation. To whatever extent Ibn Khaldūn is willing to entertain the notion that there may be a genuine, sanctified science of letters, he is unwilling to admit that this science—which is inseparable from *kashf*—can be conveyed in books, or by human teachers for that matter, without degenerating into sorcery. The implication is that if there is a genuine science of letters, then in Ibn Khaldūn’s view it can only be something granted by God to his saints rather than something which can be taught or learned. His final judgment on the matter is that the science—as it has been promulgated by the modern Sufis, who of course authored books about it—can only be a form of sorcery, even if it is facilitated through practices which in themselves are

⁶⁷⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 176–177; *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*, 667.

permissible, such as *dhikr* and other forms of supererogatory prayer. Thus, regarding people who would make themselves masters of the science, he declares that, whatever their attempts to stay within the bounds of God's law, they are guilty of gravely transgressing it:

They wanted to obtain the (ability to be magically active) in a way that would have nothing to do with any involvement in unbelief and the practice of it. They turned their exercise into one that was legal according to the religious law. It consisted of *dhikr* exercises and prayers [*ṣubuḥāt*] from the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions. They learned which of these things were appropriate for (their particular) need from the aforementioned division of the world with its essences, attributes, and actions according to the influences of the seven stars. In addition, they also selected the days and hours appropriate to the distribution of (the influences of the stars). They used this kind of legal exercise as a cover, in order to avoid having anything to do with ordinary sorcery, which is unbelief or calls for unbelief. They kept to a legal (kind of) devotion because of its general and honest character. That was done, for instance, by al-Būnī in his *Kitāb al-Anmāt* and other works of his, and by others. They called this approach *sīmiyā'*, since they were very eager to avoid the name of sorcery. In fact, (however,) they fall under the idea of sorcery, even though they have a legal (kind of) devotion. They are not at all free from the belief in influences by (beings) other than God. These people also want to be (magically) active in the world of existing things. That is something forbidden by the Lawgiver (Muḥammad). The miracles performed by the prophets were performed at God's command. He gave the power to perform them. The miracles of the saints were performed, because by means of the creation of a necessary knowledge, through inspiration or something else, they obtained (divine) permission to perform them. They did not intend to perform them without permission. Thus, the trickery of the people who practice *sīmiyā'* should not be trusted. As I have made it clear, *sīmiyā'* is a subdivision and kind of sorcery.⁶⁷⁵

4.2.3.4 The context of Ibn Khaldūn's attack on lettrism

Of course, all this raises the question of why Ibn Khaldūn devoted such efforts to this attack on lettrism and the Sufis who practiced it. Knysh argues that he was motivated by “sociopolitical rather than theological considerations,” and that his comments “should be seen against the background of the turbulent Maghribi history that was punctuated by popular uprisings led by self-appointed *mahdis* who supported their claims through magic, thaumaturgy, and occult prognostication.”⁶⁷⁶ Taking a different

⁶⁷⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 180–181. Note that these passages do not appear in all Arabic editions of the text, due to redactions Ibn Khaldūn made to the text while in Cairo, as discussed below.

⁶⁷⁶ Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 195.

tack, Morris asserts that Ibn Khaldūn’s accusations were neither theological nor social critiques so much as strategic elements in an intentionally hyperbolic rhetorical offensive aimed at the elimination of “any suspicion of an intellectually and philosophically serious alternative to Ibn Khaldūn’s own understanding of the proper forms and interrelations of Islamic philosophy and religious belief.”⁶⁷⁷ Without entirely disagreeing with either analysis, I would put forward the proposition that, at least with respect to his attack in the *Muqaddimah* on al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī as promulgators of the science of letters, Ibn Khaldūn was responding in part to the tangible and immediate threat of the growing popularity of lettrism and related discourses among educated Cairene elites, and even among military elites. More specifically, I think that, with his strenuous attacks on lettrism in the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn may have been reacting to a lettrist clique—one associated with the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ discussed in previous chapters—at the court of his first and most important patron in Cairo, the Mamlūk sultan al-Zāḥir Barqūq.

This hypothesis might seem to be contradicted by the fact that Ibn Khaldūn composed the *Muqaddimah* prior to coming to Cairo; however, as Denis Gril has noted, the section on *‘ilm asrār al-ḥurūf* does not appear in Redjala Mbarek’s edition of the version of the work that Ibn Khaldūn completed while still in the Maghrib, suggesting that it was added in Cairo.⁶⁷⁸ Much of the material on lettrism does appear in the *Shifā’*, which, if one accepts Muhsin Mahdi’s findings, was completed in the Maghrib just prior to the early draft of the *Muqaddimah*.⁶⁷⁹ However, while this certainly would indicate that Ibn Khaldūn was aware of al-Būnī while still in the Maghrib—and we would expect no less given his relationship with Ibn al-Khaṭīb—it still does not account for all the material in the section on lettrism as it appears in Cairene redactions of the *Muqaddimah*. Most importantly, the *Shifā’* does not include the last section quoted above, in which Ibn Khaldūn unequivocally condemns lettrism as a form of sorcery.

⁶⁷⁷ Morris, “An Arab Machiavelli?,” 256.

⁶⁷⁸ Gril, “The Science of Letters,” 143; Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima: ar-riwaya al-ulà Al-manshurah bi-al-Mashriq*, ed. Mbarek Redjala (Aix-en-Provence: Universitaires, Presses du G.I.S. Méditerranée, 1983).

⁶⁷⁹ Mahdi, “The Book and the Master,” 4.

This section apparently appears for the first time in Cairene copies of the work. It is found in Süleymaniye MS Damad Ibrahim 863, a two-volume copy of the work produced in 797/1394 for the library of Barqūq, in which Ibn Khaldūn went so far as to re-title of the work to include a reference to the sultan's name. It is also found in Süleymaniye MS Yeni Cami 888, a copy made in 799/1397 and signed by the author, and into which are inserted slips of paper with revisions of certain parts, including a slightly different—though no less condemnatory—version of the final passages quoted above.⁶⁸⁰ Thus it is my working hypothesis, given the present evidence, that Ibn Khaldūn significantly sharpened his arguments against al-Būnī and other lettrists during his years in Cairo. The reason for this, in my view, is that it was an attempt to wield his position to stem the rising popularity of 'post-esotericist' lettrism that was spreading among communities of Mamlūk military elites and their close advisers.

4.2.3.5 *Were al-Būnī's works censored?*

That Ibn Khaldūn was not averse to attempts to enforce his views on the dangers presented by the teachings of the *aṣḥāb al-tajallī* is clear from the *fatwá* he issued while in Egypt that called for the destruction by fire or water of books by Ibn al-'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn, Ibn Barrajān, and their followers, on the grounds that they were "filled with pure unbelief and vile innovations, as well as corresponding interpretations of the outward forms [of scripture and practice] in the most bizarre, unfounded, and reprehensible ways."⁶⁸¹ Although al-Būnī's works are not specified in the *fatwá*, it seems clear from Ibn Khaldūn's statements in the *Muqaddimah* that they would be included in this general category. Of course, a *fatwá*'s issuance hardly guarantees that it was carried out, and I am aware of no evidence that suggests action was taken on Ibn Khaldūn's injunction to any degree sufficient to actually interdict the circulation of the condemned works. This raises the fascinating question of whether or not codices

⁶⁸⁰ See Rosenthal's notes regarding the manuscript copies of the *Muqaddimah* from which he worked, *The Muqaddimah*, I.

⁶⁸¹ Morris, "An Arab Machiavelli?," 249. Morris' translation.

containing Būnian works were ever the targets of organized destruction or suffered the status of legally hazardous objects, a status that books of magic often faced in other cultural milieux.

The Damascene *mudarris* and *khaṭīb* Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) dictated in his *Muʿīd al-niʿam* that booksellers were forbidden from peddling works by heretics or astrologers.⁶⁸² The subject is not touched upon in Ibn al-Ukhūwah's (d. 729/1329) acclaimed guide to supervision of the public markets, *Maʿālim al-qurba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba*, and neither is anything else pertaining to the supervision of booksellers by city authorities, which suggests that enforcement of such dictates via the *muḥtasib* was uncommon in this period.⁶⁸³ To the best of my knowledge there is no record in the literary sources of organized destruction of Būnian works having occurred. What is more, numerous surviving Būnian codices are finely wrought objects with signed colophons, ownership notices, patronage statements, *et cetera*. This hardly suggests they were works that were regularly subject to legal interdiction.

As for how they were obtained, some of his works were certainly copied by those who wanted to own them, but certain data suggest that, at least in the latter part of the Mamlūk period, it was sometimes possible to purchase/have produced copies of Būnian works through a bookseller in the *sūq*. Süleymaniye MS Hafid efendi 198 is a copy of *Shams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif* rendered in a highly readable Syro-Egyptian *naskh* in 855/1451 by one Muḥammad b. Ḥajjī al-Khayrī al-Shafīī. As this name is rather distinctive, it is almost certain that this is the same Muḥammad b. Ḥajjī al-Khayrī al-Shafīī who, in 870/1465-66, produced a copy of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī's commentary on al-Subkī's own *Jamʿ al-jawāmiʿ fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Chester Beatty MS 3200). While it is possible that al-Khayrī copied both al-Būnī's work and this volume on *fiqh* for his own use, it is at least as likely that he worked as a professional copyist, producing both codices under commission. Another example, albeit one so late as to be of only slight possible relevance, is two complete copies (i.e. not the two halves of a set) of *Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā* produced in Jerusalem, Süleymaniye MSS Hekimoğlu 534, copied in 1118/1707, and Hekimoğlu

⁶⁸² Maya Shatzmiller, *EI2*, s.v. "Tidjāra."

⁶⁸³ Ibn al-Ukhūwah does deal with astrologers operating in the *sūq*, although his directives regarding them are fairly mild. See Michot, "Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology," 280.

537, copied in 1119/1708, both of which were copied by one Muḥammad Nūr Allāh *al-ḥāfiẓ li-kalām Allāh*. This suggests, to whatever extent we can retroject book practices from one period into another, that *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* was part of Muḥammad Nūr Allāh's standard repertoire, and, especially given the technical difficulties involved in the rendering of complex talismans found in the text, it is quite conceivable that some earlier copyists also may have 'specialized' in Būnian works to the extent of including them in their regular offerings. Of course it is also quite possible that some scribes refused to do such work on moral grounds.

4.3 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā', and post-esotericist lettrism

The Mamlūk-era commentators and critics of al-Būnī discussed thus far offer a range of reactions to al-Būnī from praise to condemnation, though with the possible exception of Ibn Manẓūr, none give any hint of having been an 'initiate' into the science of letters. The actors I discuss in this section, however, presented themselves as belonging to that category, though in doing so they constructed a novel image of what it was to be an initiate. The main actor I follow in tracing these developments will be the Antiochene Sufi, court intellectual, and member of the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā' whom we have already encountered a number of times in this study: 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī. As mentioned previously, al-Biṣṭāmī was certainly one of the most important commentators on and popularizers of al-Būnī, particularly in having played a significant role in introducing Būnian texts to the Ottoman courts. However, al-Biṣṭāmī's written corpus is so sizable, complex, and relatively unstudied, and the intertwining in his works of his own ideas with al-Būnī's and those of a host of other lettrists is so dense, that to discuss his comments on al-Būnī as I have discussed other authors in this chapter would pull us too far afield of this project's guiding interest in issues of 'manuscript culture'. Instead, then, in what follows I examine what, by the turn of the ninth/fifteenth century, seems to have been a flourishing lettrist scene in Cairo and Damascus in which great numbers of books on the topic circulated, including of course copies of al-Būnī's works. The reading communities that comprised this

scene were, in my view, the ‘descendants’ of the esotericist reading communities discussed in previous chapter, though ones that seem to have been transformed in at least two important ways. One, they intersected at points with some of highest echelons of Mamlūk learning and power. Two, some, perhaps many, participants had taken up what I have termed a ‘post-esotericist’ position. By this I mean that they seem to no longer have practiced a high degree of discretion in announcing their commitment to lettrism or in circulating lettrist works, and yet continued to draw on the one notion that, prior to their time, lettrism had been a secret science passed down from the prophets and saints. I begin with an account of al-Biṣṭāmī’s life and significance with regard to the Būnian corpus. I then move on to a discussion of his participation in the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā’. I end with a close examination of his account of how he came to be an initiate into the science of letters and names, and of ways that his telling of those events entails an enchanted, apocalyptic reimagining of the book and of texts as sources of knowledge and authority, while yet deriving its motive force from the aggregative, encyclopædist, cosmopolitan current that, as discussed previously in this chapter, drove so much literary activity of the period.

4.3.1 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī

Born in Antioch in or around 781/1380, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Ḥanafī was a scholar, belletrist, and initiate into the Syrian *ṭarīqah Biṣṭāmīyah*, which was said to have been founded on the basis of an *uwaysī* initiation from the famous Iranian Sufi Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 262/875).⁶⁸⁴ Having witnessed the sack of Aleppo by Tīmūr in 803/1401, he travelled to Cairo, where, as Cornell Fleischer puts it, “he established contact with the ‘Rumi’ (Rumelian and Anatolian) scholarly circles that had for several decades journeyed to the Mamluk capital for education and for the lively intellectual and spiritual life the city offered.”⁶⁸⁵ As discussed below, a significant portion of his time in Cairo and also in Damascus seems to have been spent acquiring knowledge of the science of letters and

⁶⁸⁴ Eric Geoffroy, *EI3*, s.v. “Biṣṭāmī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.”

⁶⁸⁵ Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences,” 232.

names by collecting and studying numerous works on the subject, including many Būnian works, and in many cases ‘reading’ those works—in the formal transmission sense of *qara’a ‘alá*—with teachers licensed to transmit them. Later in life he would settle in Bursa, then the Ottoman capital, where he “gained the favor of the court and the ‘ulamā’ elite.”⁶⁸⁶ Al-Biṣṭāmī authored a number of works, including, among others: a commentary on al-Būnī’s *al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah* entitled *Rashḥ adhwāq al-ḥikmah al-rabbānīyah fī sharḥ awfāq al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah*; a major work on the science of letters and names which draws heavily on al-Būnī, entitled *Shams al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*; an encyclopædia of the sciences (occult and otherwise) that, in an obvious nod to Ibn al-‘Arabī, is called *al-Fawā’ih al-miskīyah fī al-fawātiḥ al-Makkīyah*; and a collection of apocalyptic/mahdist accounts entitled *Miftāḥ al-jafr al-jāmi‘* that predicted the *mahdī*’s arrival in the 10th/16th century. As Fleischer has argued, in the century or so after al-Biṣṭāmī’s death in 858/1454 the latter work would come to be seen as a key resource for identifying the Ottoman sultan Sulaymān the Magnificent (r. 926/1520-974/1566) as that awaited savior-figure.⁶⁸⁷ Al-Biṣṭāmī’s works were highly popular in Ottoman courtly circles through the tenth/sixteenth century, and numerous copies of them survive. As noted previously, al-Biṣṭāmī seems to have been in the habit of promulgating numerous different versions of his works, such that his surviving manuscript corpus is quite complex and still requires a great deal of research; see Appendix D for a list of copies of his works noted during the research for this study.

A few global observations about al-Biṣṭāmī’s distinct breed of post-esotericist lettrism can be made that are of key importance in understanding his contribution to the late-Mamlūk-era reception of al-Būnī. In works such as *Shams al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*, al-Biṣṭāmī undertakes a creative synthesis of al-Būnī and many of the other esotericist Sufis of the seventh/thirteenth century whose names have populated previous chapters of this study, such as Ibn al-‘Arabī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarāllī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, and al-Shādhilī’s great disciple Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī. He draws heavily on

⁶⁸⁶ Geoffroy, “Biṣṭāmī.”

⁶⁸⁷ Fleischer, “Mahdi and Millenium,” 49; idem., “Shadow of Shadows,” 55 ff.

some figures much closer to his own time as well, particularly Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kūmī (fl. 810/1407), a *shaykh* from Tunis who seems to have been one of the lead lettrists of his generation and authored works on the science that included *Taysīr al-Maṭālib wa-rahbat al-Ṭālib* and *al-Īmā ilā ‘ilm al-asmā’ fī sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusná* (see Appendix D for a list of some surviving manuscripts of his works). We have already seen hints that actors in esotericist reading communities were synthesizing some of these thinkers’ teachings in the late-seventh/thirteenth-century compilatory codices discussed in chapter two (section 2.4.3), at least to the extent that they were reading their texts in combination with one another. And as noted earlier, Ibn Manẓūr—writing in roughly the same period as that during which those compilations were produced—refers to al-Būnī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, and al-Ḥarālī in the same breath, suggesting that he, and no doubt others, perceived their teachings to be essentially harmonious. Of course, critics of the esotericist Sufis also often viewed them as belonging to a single school, a perception that almost certainly was based in part on the statements of lettrists they had encountered. Al-Biṣṭāmī’s project, however, in keeping with the textual economy of his age, is encyclopædic in nature, though with the goal of demonstrating that numerous past had masters collectively revealed a unified science of the unseen realities governed by the letters and names, one that had been transmitted in secrecy over the centuries since the Prophet.

With regard to late-Mamlūk-era reception of al-Būnī, specifically the trend of al-Būnī’s works coming to circulate in the courts and households of military elites, al-Biṣṭāmī’s works can be seen as representative of efforts to translate the esotericist discourse on lettrism of al-Būnī and his Western Sufi cohort to a post-esotericist paradigm suited to a courtly milieu. A key aspect of this was, as Fleischer puts it, a reinscription of lettrism “as a rationally cultivable path to achieve the same knowledge of the divine and of the cosmos that was achieved by mystics through inspiration.”⁶⁸⁸ It was a reframing of lettrism that sought to bring it into the realm of the ‘rational’ sciences—including the

⁶⁸⁸ Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences,” 234.

traditional occult sciences—that had often been cultivated at Muslim courts,⁶⁸⁹ but one that preserved claims of lettrism’s prophetic origin and essential mystery. Thus his project was largely, though not entirely, dissimilar from some of the other encyclopædicist approaches to al-Būnī discussed earlier in this chapter. Al-Nuwayrī’s excerpts from *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* were a somewhat brute-force attempt to render parts of al-Būnī’s teachings comprehensible under the heading of *‘ilm al-khawāṣṣ*, though only at the expense of eliding the elaborate cosmology in which they were embedded. Al-Qalqashandī and Ibn Khaldūn both placed lettrism in the realm of the rational sciences, but placed it among the lowest rungs thereof while emphasizing its distance from the Islamic sciences—and in Ibn Khaldūn’s case outright condemning it. Al-Biṣṭāmī, however, writes as an initiate, but as one who is given a special dispensation to bring the science out from behind the veil. In doing so he announces lettrism to his patrons as the queen-science of a new, messianic age. His endeavors were not entirely innovative, but rather were a continuation of a synthesizing trend evident in earlier stages of the reception of al-Būnī’s works, and part of a collective millenarian and occult-philosophical project undertaken by various members of a community sometimes referred to as the (neo-) *Ikhwān al-ṣafā’*.

4.3.2 *Al-Biṣṭāmī and the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ of the 9th/15th century*

The community of prominent ninth/fifteenth-century intellectuals who referred to themselves as the “Brethren of Purity and Friends of Fidelity” (*ikhwān al-ṣafā’ wa-khullān al-wafā’*)⁶⁹⁰ has been the subject of a small but important body of recent scholarship, particularly that of I. Evrim Binbaş, Cornell Fleischer, Denis Gril, İhsan Fazlıoğlu, and Matthew Melvin-Koushki. As Fleischer describes this collective, it was “an extraordinary network of religious scholars, mystics, and intellectuals” connecting Mamlūk, Tīmūrid, and Ottoman courts of the late eighth/fourteenth through

⁶⁸⁹ Sonja Brentjes, “Courtly Patronage of the Ancient Sciences in Post-Classical Islamic Societies,” *Al-Qanṭara: Revista de Estudios Árabes* 29 (2008): 403–36.

⁶⁹⁰ Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences,” 232; cf. Denis Gril, “Ésotérisme contre hérésie: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, un représentant de la science des lettres à Bursa dans la première moitié du XVe siècle,” in *Synchrétismes et hérésies dans l’Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe-XVIIIe siècle): Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001* (Paris: Peeters, 2005), 186.

ninth/fifteenth centuries. No-one suggests that the group was actually ‘descended’ from the Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ of fourth/tenth-century Iraq in any sense of continuous corporate identity. Rather, as we find the neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ in the ninth/fifteenth century they are a coterie of cosmopolitan intellectuals whose ideas are loosely unified by shared interest in the occult sciences—especially the science of letters—millenarian speculation, and, though al-Biṣṭāmī and many others identified as Sunnites, reverence for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and other of the Shī’ite *Imāms* as recipients of a prophetic esoteric tradition.⁶⁹¹ Other figures who have been counted as participants in this neo-Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ include: the Tīmūrid thinker Ṣā’in al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (d. 835/1432), whose “stated goal” with regard to lettrism, as Melvin-Koushki puts it, “was to create a universal science that would encompass history and the cosmos and unify all of human knowledge under its aegis,” and who was forced to defend himself against charges of heresy a number of times;⁶⁹² Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (d. 858/1454), the Tīmūrid historian (and biographer of Tīmūr himself) who was also known as an expert in the occult sciences and cryptographic poetry (*mu‘ammā*); Molla Fenārī, (d. 834/1431), the first *shaykh al-islām* under the Ottomans and a keystone figure in Ottoman intellectual history;⁶⁹³ and Shaykh Badr al-Dīn al-Simāwī (d. ca. 821/1418), a well-known Ottoman judge and commentator on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works who ended his life as a leader of an ultimately unsuccessful rebellion fuelled by millenarian expectations that “shook the Ottoman State” in 819/1416.⁶⁹⁴

A key early figure in this fraternity seems to have been one Sayyid al-Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī (d. 799/1397), a physician, alchemist, and astrologer who lived in Cairo in the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century, having come to the city at the behest of al-Zāhir Barqūq in order to treat (unsuccessfully) the sultan’s ailing son. Al-Akhlāṭī is treated only tersely in the Arabic biographical

⁶⁹¹ Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences,” 232.

⁶⁹² Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science,” 2.

⁶⁹³ Binbaş, “Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī,” 100.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 144–145.

dictionaries, but is considered at greater length in Ottoman sources, which Binbaş discusses extensively. Nothing is certain regarding al-Akhlāṭī's early life.⁶⁹⁵ Ibn Ḥajar states that he was raised in Iran, and Binbaş raises the possibility that he was related to the Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī who attended one of the audition sessions for *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah* that was presided over by Ibn al-'Arabī in Damascus in 633/1235-6.⁶⁹⁶ Ibn Ḥajar reports that after arriving in Cairo he never left his house on the Nile but received many visitors there, including Barqūq himself, who spoke from atop his horse while al-Akhlāṭī responded from his rooftop, presumably a shockingly informal exchange. He further claims that al-Akhlāṭī was involved in alchemy and associated with Shīism (*al-rafḍ*), that he did not attend the Friday prayer, and that some of his followers believed he was the *mahdī*.⁶⁹⁷

Among his students/disciples in Cairo were visitors to the city such as the aforementioned Ṣā' in al-Dīn Turka, Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī, and Badr al-Dīn al-Simāwī, and perhaps al-Biṣṭāmī, though this is not certain. As we will see below, al-Biṣṭāmī's first visit to Cairo would seem to have occurred after al-Akhlāṭī's death, though al-Biṣṭāmī certainly would have known of al-Akhlāṭī through their mutual relationship with al-Simāwī. Ottoman sources, in which al-Akhlāṭī is remembered especially as al-Simāwī's teacher, relate numerous tales of his meetings with students at his house on the Nile, and many involve marvels of an apocalyptic nature, such as a visitor seeing the Nile first running with blood and then filled with a torrent of dismembered limbs.⁶⁹⁸ A few works on lettrism by al-Akhlāṭī in Persian survive in manuscript, which Binbaş describes as "rather short and instructive treatises instead of long theoretical pieces." Among them is *Risāla-yi jafr-i jāmi'a*, "a short manual on how to write a book of *jafr*," which is to say a prophetic-divinatory text that would be commissioned of a practitioner by a ruler, a process requiring "one thousand and one days in seclusion" and a strict regimen of fasting and

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 139–162.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 139–140; Yahia, *Histoire et classification*, 222–223.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Inbā' al-ghumr bi-abnā' al-'umr*, ed. 'Abd al-Mu'īd Khān (Deccan: Maṭbu'āt Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1967), III/336–338; Binbaş, "Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī," 140 ff.

⁶⁹⁸ Binbaş, "Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī," 143.

writing.⁶⁹⁹ Although to the best of my knowledge Ibn Khaldūn makes no specific mention of him, Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī is foremost in mind when I posit that Ibn Khaldūn was critiquing al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī as a means pushing back against the influence of apocalypticist visionaries who claimed the ability to perform *karāmāt* with the letters.

It remains obscure what relationship, if any, there was between the group of earlier-eighth/fourteenth-century Sufis mentioned in the collation statements of Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590 who referred to themselves as the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā’* and this remarkable turn-of-the-ninth/fifteenth-century collective rooted in al-Akhlāṭī. I consider it likely that the neo-*Ikhwān al-ṣafā’* were an esotericist reading community of the early eighth/fourteenth century that had maintained a sense of corporate identity through to al-Akhlāṭī and al-Biṣṭāmī’s time, though perhaps it simply was fashionable to refer to oneself that way if one was interested in lettrism. Whatever the case, it is highly likely that al-Akhlāṭī was a key actor in the process of synthesizing al-Būnī’s thought with that Ibn al-‘Arabī and others. Among al-Akhlāṭī’s disciples, Şā’in al-Dīn Turka saw al-Būnī’s and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s lettrisms as two sides of the same coin, and acknowledged the efficacy and legitimacy of Būnian praxis even as he positioned his own interest in the science of letters as serving philosophical rather than practical ends, and thus as being more Akbarian than Būnian.⁷⁰⁰ Indeed, it seems as if a dynamic had emerged in this period, possibly under the influence of al-Akhlāṭī, whereby the works of al-Būnī were understood to convey the practical application of the science of letters while those of Ibn al-‘Arabī were credited with propounding its philosophical/theoretical dimensions. As mentioned earlier, such a practice-and-theory merger of al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī may be a central reason why al-Būnī’s works that have less obvious operative material, such as *‘Alam al-hudá*, seem to have fallen out of favor with ninth/fifteenth-century readers. In sum, al-Biṣṭāmī’s efforts at synthesizing al-Būnī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Shādhilī, al-Kūmī, and others hardly come out of the blue. They are rather a culmination of trends that

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152–153.

⁷⁰⁰ Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science,” 17.

seem already to have been well under way, and that other actors, especially Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turkah, were pursuing simultaneously and in active conversation with al-Biṣṭāmī. Such an effort at synthesis of course is also encyclopædist to the core, even if it is pitched rather differently than the works of al-Nuwayrī and al-Qalqashandī.

4.3.3 *The apotheosis of the reader: al-Biṣṭāmī's initiation through books*

The aspect of al-Biṣṭāmī's project that I focus on in what follows is his altogether remarkable account of his own initiation into the science of letters, which appears near the beginning of his major lettrist opus *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-awfāq* (though only in post-826/1423 copies of it, as discussed below). Though al-Būnī is only mentioned in it briefly—and then only through the title of one of his works—the account, I will argue, is in many ways an enactment of al-Būnī's program of lettrism as the royal road to henosis and communication with the divine, one that echoes aspects of al-Būnī's experimentation with the book as initiatory instrument, namely with regard to central importance of book/text-transmission practices. Though it may seem that this emphasis on transmission practices would have been antithetical to developments in the Mamlūk textual economy discussed earlier in this chapter, we will see that al-Biṣṭāmī at once valorizes them as a vital link to past masters and asserts his own claim to have transcended the need for them.

This section of *Shams al-āfāq* functions as what is sometimes called a *fahrasah*, a sort of educational/initiatic autobiography; however, his use of this genre must be considered within the larger framework of the book. Al-Biṣṭāmī is greatly concerned with the lines of transmission of the lettrist knowledge he synthesizes in the work. This was hardly an unusual concern within Islamic intellectual culture, but, as we have seen, it was not a central topic in al-Būnī's written texts. The *isnād* al-Biṣṭāmī gives in this work for al-Būnī was discussed in the previous chapter, and, as mentioned there, al-Būnī is only one of many masters for whom *isnāds* are given. I would argue that, in al-Biṣṭāmī's case, this concern for *isnāds* is in the service of the encyclopædist aspect of his lettrist project, a way of tracing all of the threads that he is attempting to weave together and re-present to his fellow occultists

and elite patrons. Indeed, the *isnāds* he collects in the work are just one expression of his drive to document in seemingly exhaustive detail the sources of his own knowledge. In a section of *Shams al-āfāq* that bespeaks the efflorescence not just of al-Būnī's works in the context of Mamlūk manuscript culture but of lettrist texts generally, al-Biṣṭāmī includes a list of well over a hundred titles of lettrist works that he has seen.⁷⁰¹

Al-Biṣṭāmī begins his *fahrasah* with an introduction to a figure he held in special esteem, the Tunisian lettrist Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Kūmī. In an *isnād* much like he gives elsewhere for al-Būnī, Ibn al-'Arabī, al-Shādhilī, *et alii*, he traces al-Kūmī's initiatic line back to Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib by way of al-Shādhilī and one of al-Shādhilī's most important, masters, 'Abd al-Salām b. Mashīsh, the author of the famous poem in praise of the Prophet known eponymically as *al-Mashīshīyah*. Though their lives overlapped, it is unclear if al-Biṣṭāmī and al-Kūmī met, and it seems as if al-Biṣṭāmī's opening statement that he took from al-Kūmī "through the tongue of wisdom and 'tastings'" is a euphemism for not having studied with him directly:

أخذت علم الحروف والافواق بلسان الحكمة والاذواق عن استاذ الافاق الشيخ الإمام العارف بالله
والدال على الله ابي عبد الله محمد بن محمد بن يعقوب الكومي التونسي الملكي سقاه الله من حياض المنة
واسكنه في رياض الجنة وهو اخذ عن الشيخ ابي العباس الدهان وهو اخذ عن الشيخ ابي العباس
الخامي [؟] وهو اخذ عن الشيخ ابي العزائم ماضي وهو اخذ عن الشيخ القطب الغوث الفرد الجامع [؟؟؟]
ابي الحسن الشاذلي وهو اخذ عن الفرد الجامع ابي محمد عبد السلام ابن مشيش الحسني
[النارمي الفارمي؟] وهو اخذ عن الشيخ ابي محمد عبد الرحمن المدني وهو اخذ عن قطب بعد قطب إلى
الإمام حسن بن علي وهو اول الاقطاب وهو اخذ عن جده رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم

I took [knowledge of] the science of letters and cryptograms, through the tongue of wisdom and 'tastings', from the teacher of the horizons, the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the knower of God and sign unto God, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī al-Mālikī, may God give him to drink from the pools of kindness and make him to dwell in the gardens of Paradise. He took from the *shaykh* Abū al-'Abbās al-Duhhān. He took from the *shaykh* Abū al-'Abbās al-Khāmī [al-Jāmī?], and he took from the *shaykh* Abū al-'Azā'im Māḍī. He took from the *shaykh*, the pole, the helper, the unique one, the gatherer [???] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. He took from the *shaykh*, the pole, the helper, the unique one, the gatherer Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām b. Mashīsh al-Ḥasanī al-[Nārimī?]. He took from the *shaykh* Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān

⁷⁰¹ Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 1^a, ln. 14–fol. 3^b, ln. 3. Note that the MS is acephalous.

al-Madanī.⁷⁰² He took from pole after pole to the *Imām* Ḥasan b. ‘Alī. He was the first of the poles, and he took from his grandfather the Messenger of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him).⁷⁰³

Following this initial statement of al-Kūmī’s credentials, al-Biṣṭāmī then begins the account of his own *riḥlah* in search of knowledge of the science of letters. It begins with his arrival in Alexandria in 811/1408-9, and the first of three sets of readings he mentions are ones in which he ‘read’ (*qara’a ‘alā*) some of al-Kūmī’s works with someone who had read them in the presence of al-Kūmī:

ولما نزلت بساحة ثغر الاسكندرية ستة احدى عشرة وثمانمائة قرأت كتاب تيسير المطالب على الشيخ
الإمام ابي محمد عبد الرحمن المغربي إمام الجامع العربي بها وهو قرأه على مصنفه الشيخ الإمام العارف
العلامة استاذ عصره ولسان وقته ابي محمد عبد الله [بن] محمد بن محمد بن يعقوب الكومي التونسي قدس
الله سره

When I arrived on the scene in Alexandria in the year 811 I read the book *Taysīr al-maṭālib* in the presence of the *shaykh* the *imām* Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Maghribī, the *imām* of the al-‘Arabī Mosque there. He read it in the presence of its author the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the gnostic, the learned one, the teacher of his age and the tongue of his time Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh [b.] Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī, may God consecrate his innermost being.⁷⁰⁴

The fact that al-Biṣṭāmī places these two different types of transmission statements one after the other—one involving a line of face-to-face meetings between past masters reaching back to the Prophet, and the other documenting the transmission of books—is, I think, highly important. It is, in effect, a historiographical statement that reflects the passage of lettrist knowledge into books at a relatively late date, a shift between primarily oral/aural transmission and the composition of books. The passage is not absolute, of course, as al-Biṣṭāmī is still highlighting his participation in the

⁷⁰² Regarding ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Madanī (al-Zayyāt), a mostly unknown figure, see Mackeen, “The Early History of Sufism in the Maghrib Prior to Al-Shadhili,” 480. Mackeen notes that many modern scholars have assumed al-Madanī was a disciple of Abū Madyan, but that this “is not supported by any authority.” Ibn Mashīsh was regarded as a Ḥasanid *sharīf* via Idrīs II, which probably explains al-Biṣṭāmī’s rather vague chain connecting him back Ḥasan b. ‘Alī.

⁷⁰³ Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 9^a, ln. 18–fol. 9^b, ln. 2.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 9^b, lns. 2–6.

circulation of these texts between human and written media, but it is nonetheless important as marking a transition from an ancient way of transmitting knowledge into a newer one, a transition that renders legitimate al-Biṣṭāmī's own acts of appropriation and synthesis in *Shams al-āfāq*.

Al-Biṣṭāmī's narrative then jumps to 815/1412-13 in Damascus, where he again reads al-Kūmī at one step of remove. This time the transmitter is Musā'id b. Sārī al-Ḥawārī (d. of the plague 819/1416-17), an ascetic *shaykh* who spent the last part of his life in a village outside Damascus, where he received many visitors. This case differs from the previous reading, however, as it seems to precipitate, or at least coincide with, a sighting—perhaps a vision—of “the pole of the Levant,” as well as a dream of the Prophet. These details are, in my view, given to the readers as a sign that al-Biṣṭāmī's readings of al-Kūmī's texts were ‘working’, succeeding at their initiatic purpose:

في ستة خمس عشرة وثمان مائة لما دخلت مدينة دمشق حرسها الله سمعت من الشيخ الإمام العارف
 الفقيه الثقة بقية العلماء ابي عبد الله مساعد ابن ساري بن مسعود بن عبد الرحمن بن رحمة الحواري الحميري
 بقرية شعبا من المرج القبلي كتاب تيسير المطالب وكتاب الإيماء إلى علم الاسماء وكتاب سرّ الجمال وكتاب
 الكنز الباهر في شرح حروف الملك الظاهر وكتاب إظهار الرموز وإبداء الكنوز ورسالة الهو وهو قرأها على
 مصنفها الشيخ الإمام ابي عبد الله محمد الكومي وفيها رأيت قطب الشام ولقد رأيت رسول الله صلى الله
 عليه وسلّم ستة خمس عشرة وثمان مائة في المنام بدمشق وهو قائم يسرح ذقنه صلى الله عليه وسلّم وايضاً
 رأيت في تلك الليلة مرّة ثانية في المنام

In the year 815 when I entered the city of Damascus (may God protect it) I heard [i.e. auditioned] from the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the gnostic, the jurist, the trustworthy one, the continuator of the scholars, Abū 'Abd Allāh Musā'id b. Sārī b. Mas'ūd b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Raḥmat al-Ḥawārī al-Ḥimyarī,⁷⁰⁵ in the village of Sha'bā [?] in the southern pastures, the book *Taysīr al-maṭālib* and the book *al-Īmā' ilā 'ilm al-asmā'* and the book *Sirr al-jamāl* and the book *al-Kanz al-bāhir fī sharḥ ḥurūf al-malik al-zāhir* and the book *Izhār al-rumūz wa-ibdā' al-kunūz* and the treatise *al-Huwa*. He [scil. Musā'id] had read them in the presence of their author the *shaykh* the *imām* Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Kūmī. In it [scil. the village of Sha'bā?] I saw the pole of the Levant, and verily I saw the Messenger of God (God's blessings and peace be upon him) in the year 815 in a dream in Damascus: he was standing, combing his beard (God's blessings and peace be upon him). I also saw him a second time that night in a dream.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰⁵ al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, X/155.

⁷⁰⁶ Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 9^b, lns. 6-14.

Al-Biṣṭāmī's account then moves back in time to Cairo in 807/1404-5. I can only surmise that he breaks chronology this way in order to emphasize his closeness—as in *qurb*—to al-Kūmī, whom he claims as his prime initiator, by grouping the prior readings together. He undertakes two readings in Cairo. One is a work by one Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Nadrūmī,⁷⁰⁷ which he reads in the presence of the author (who is recorded elsewhere as having died that same year). The other book, of prime interest for this study, is al-Būnī's *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*:

ولما كنت بالقاهرة حرسها الله تعالى من سطوته القاهرة في سنة سبع وثمانمائة قرأت على الشيخ الإمام أبي عبد الله عز الدين محمد بن جماعة الكناي الشافعي الدمشقي رحمه الله كتاب قبس الانوار وجامع الاسرار وهو قرأه على مصنفه الشيخ العارف بالله جمال الدين يوسف الندروي وايضاً قرأت على الشيخ عز الدين بن جماعة كتاب اللعة التوراتية في الاوراد الزبانية وغير ذلك من العلوم العجيبة واللطائف الغريبة

When I was in Cairo (may God Most High protect it from His overpowering punishment) in the year 807 I read, in the presence of the *shaykh* the *imām* Abū 'Abd Allāh 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Jamā'ah al-Kinānī al-Shāfī'ī al-Dimashqī (may God have mercy on him), the book *Qabas al-anwār wa-jāmi' al-asrār*. He read it in the presence of its author the *shaykh* the knower of God Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Nadrūmī. I also read, in the presence of the *shaykh* 'Izz al-Dīn b. Jamā'ah, the book *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah fī al-awrād al-rabbānīyah* and others like that of the wondrous sciences and strange subtleties.⁷⁰⁸

The identity of the *shaykh* before whom al-Biṣṭāmī read *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* is noteworthy. 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Jamā'ah (d. 819/1416-17) was a scion of the Ibn Jamā'ah scholarly 'dynasty', and his immediate forebears had served for three generations in some of the highest civilian offices of Mamlūk Cairo and Jerusalem, and also were known for their devotion to Sufism. 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad's great grandfather, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 733/1333), served as the Shāfī'ī grand *qāḍī* of Cairo and *shaykh al-shuyūkh* of the Sufi collectives on and off between 690/1291 and 727/1327, and his grandfather, 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 767/1366), and paternal uncle, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (d.

⁷⁰⁷ Kâtip Çelebi (Hâjjī Khalīfah), *Kitab Kashf Al Zunūn*, no. 1315.

⁷⁰⁸ Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 9^b, lns. 14-20.

790/1388), had similarly illustrious careers.⁷⁰⁹ Notably, ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad also was one of Ibn Ḥajar’s important teachers, and thus may be the route through which Ibn Ḥajar was familiar enough with al-Būnī’s life to falsify al-Maqrīzī’s *tarjamah*. Is it conceivable that Ibn Ḥajar too read al-Būnī with ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad? Although the Ibn Jamā‘ah family’s power in Cairo waned during ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad’s lifetime, the Syrian branch of the family maintained a high standing in Damascus and Jerusalem well into the Ottoman period under the *nisba* al-Nābulusī. ‘Abd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), one of the great interpreters of both Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ, was in fact a distant relation of ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad.⁷¹⁰ Notably, as Knysh has documented, Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘ah issued an extremely harsh condemnation of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s esotericist masterpiece *Fuṣūs al-ḥikam*, denying the great *shaykh*’s claim that the text was divinely inspired, declaring that Iblīs was its true source, and “advis[ing] the ruler that all copies of the *Fusus* and other writings containing similar statements be destroyed in order to protect the community from a great temptation.”⁷¹¹ Though hardly probative in itself, the contrasting attitudes of the two Ibn Jamā‘ah’s—over the space of a few generations—stands as one piece of evidence of a shift during that time toward the wider acceptance of al-Būnī and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings.

Al-Biṣṭāmī then proceeds to the following year, 808/1405-6, and gives an account of reading—or in one case auditioning—three more works, presumably still in Cairo. With the *shaykh* Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ya‘īsh b. Ibrāhīm b. Yūsuf b. Sammāk al-Umawī al-Andalusī. He again seems to mark the transition between oral/aural and book transmission, this time tracing the *isnād* from Ya‘īsh back through a classic ‘Irāqī Sufi line that includes such figures as ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī, Junayd, Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and of course the Prophet:

⁷⁰⁹ Kamal Salibi, “The Banū Jamā‘a A Dynasty of Shāfi‘ite Jurists in the Mamlūk Period,” *Studia Islamica* 9 (1958): 97–103.

⁷¹⁰ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, “Whatever Happened to the Banū Jamā‘a? The Tail of a Scholarly Family in Ottoman Syria,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (2001): 55–64.

⁷¹¹ Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 123–124.

وفي ستة ثمان وثمان مائة سمعت كتاب كيفية الإتيان في تركيب الاوفاق على الشيخ الإمام ابي الطاهر محمد المصري وهو قرأه على مصنفه الشيخ الإمام العالم العلامة يعيش المغربي وسمعت كتاب كيفية الإتيان في تركيب الاوفاق وكتاب لوامع التعريف في مطالع التصريف وكتاب المواهب الزبانية | في اسرار الروحانية وكتاب الاستنطاقات الذي هو مستخرج من كتاب كثر الاسرار ودخائر الابرار على مصنف هذه الكتب الشريفة الشيخ الإمام العلامة ابي عبد الله يعيش بن ابراهيم بن يوسف بن سناك الاموي الاندلسي قدس الله سره وهو اخذ عن الشيخ العارف بالله والتال على الله ابي يعقوب جمال الدين يوسف بن عبد الله بن عمر الكوراني وهو اخذ عن حسن الشمسيري [الششتري؟] وهو اخذ عن نجم الدين محمود الإصهاني وهو اخذ عن بدر الدين الطوسي وهو اخذ عن نور الدين عبد الصمد النظيري وهو اخذ عن نجيب الدين علي بن برغوش الشيرازي وهو اخذ عن الشيخ شهاب الجين عمر السهروردي وهو اخذ عن ابي النجيب السهروردي وهو اخذ عن القاضي وجيه الدين السهروردي وهو اخذ عن محمد السهروردي وهو اخذ عن احمد الدينوري وهو اخذ عن ممشاد الدينوري وهو اخذ عن جنيد البغدادى وهو اخذ عن سري السقطي وهو اخذ عن معروف الكرخي وهو اخذ عن داوود الطائي وهو اخذ عن حبيب العجمي وهو اخذ عن الحسن البصري وهو اخذ عن علي بن ابي طالب وهو اخذ عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم

In the year 808 I heard the book *Kayfiyat al-ittifāq fi tarkīb al-awfāq* in the presence of the *shaykh* the *imām* Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad al-Miṣrī. He read it in the presence of its author the *shaykh* the *imam* the learned one Yaʿīsh al-Maghribī. I heard the book *Kayfiyat al-ittifāq fi tarkīb al-awfāq* and the book *Lawāmiʿ al-taʿrīf fi matālīʿ al-taṣrīf* and the book *al-Mawahhib al-rabbānīyah fi asrār al-ruhānīyah* and the book *al-Istinṭāqāt* (which is excerpted from the book *Kanz al-asrār wa-dhakhāʾir al-abrār*) in the presence of the author of those sublime books the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the learned one Abū ʿAbd Allāh Yaʿīsh b. Ibrāhīm b. Yūsuf b. Sammāk al-Umawī al-Andalusī (may God consecrate his innermost being). He took from the *shaykh*, the knower of God and sign unto God Abū Yaʿqūb Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar al-Kūrānī. He took from Ḥasan al-Shamsīrī [al-Shushtarī?]. He took from Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Iṣbahānī. He took from Badr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. He took from Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad al-Naẓīrī. He took from Najīb al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Barghūsh al-Shīrāzī. He took from the *shaykh* Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī. He took from Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī. He took from the judge Wajīh al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī. He took from Muḥammad al-Suhrawardī. He took from Aḥmad al-Dīnawarī. He took from Mimshād al-Dīnawarī. He took from Junayd al-Baghdādī. He took from Sārī al-Saqāṭī. He took from Maʿrūf al-Karkhī. He took from Dāwūd al-Ṭāʾī. He took from Ḥabīb al-ʿAjāmī. He took from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. He took from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. He took from the Messenger of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him).⁷¹²

⁷¹² Ibid., fol. 9^b, ln. 20-fol. 10^a, ln. 14.

Still in 808/1405-6, he then lists a welter of books and authorities, giving the impression of ceaseless learning/initiatic activity. Notably, one of the books seems to be in praise of al-Akhlāt's patron, al-Zāhir Barqūq:

وايضاً قد اخذت كتاب غاية المغنم في الاسم الاعظم وكتاب كثر الدرر في حروف اوائل السور وكتاب سير الصرف في سر الحرف وكتاب تاء التصريف وحلة التعريف من مؤلفها الشيخ العالم العلامة تاج الدين ابي الحسن علي بن محمد بن الدرهم الموصلي قدس الله سره وايضاً قد اخذت كتاب الكشف والبيان في معرفة حوادث الزمان وكتاب الباقيات الصالحات في بروز الامهات وكتاب السر المصون والعلم المكنون على الشيخ شرف الدين البغدادي وهو اخدها عن مصنفها الشيخ الإمام ابي عبد الله محمد بن منكلي العلمي رحمه الله وايضاً قد اخذت كتاب لوامع البروق في سلطنه الملك الظاهر برقوق عن مؤلفها الشيخ الإمام العالم ابي محمد مخلوف بن علي بن ميمون الجفني وايضاً قد اخذت كتاب كشف الاشارات الصوفية ونشر البشارات الاسمية المحمدية وكتاب المنح الوهبية الربانية في الملح الاسمية المحمدية عن مؤلفها الشيخ الإمام العالم العلامة ابي عبد الله محمد بن محمد بن حامد الدمشقي وهو اخدها عن ابي عبد الله محمد الكومي وايضاً قد اخذت كتاب عجائب الانفاق في غرائب الاوفاق عن مصنفها الشيخ الإمام العالم العلامة ابي عبد الله محمد بن ابراهيم الحنفي القدسي رحمه الله والله الحمد والمنة

I also took the book *Ghāyat al-Mughnim fī al-ism al-a‘zam* and the book *Kanz al-durar fī hurūf awā’il al-suwar* and the book *Sayr al-ṣarf fī sirr al-ḥarf* and the book *Tā’ al-taṣrīf wa-ḥallat al-ta’rīf* from their author [or compiler] the *shaykh*, the scholar, the learned one Tāj al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Darīhim al-Mawṣilī⁷¹³ (may God consecrate his innermost being). Verily I also took the book *Kashf al-bayān fī ma’rifat ḥawādith al-zamān* and the book *al-Bāqiyāt al-ṣāliḥāt fī burūz al-ummuhāt* and the book *al-Sirr al-maṣūn wa-‘ilm al-maknūn* in the presence of the *shaykh* Sharaf al-Dīn al-Baghdādī. He took them from their author the *shaykh*, the *imām* Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Minkalī al-‘Alamī (may God have mercy on him). Verily I also took the book *al-Lawāmi‘ al-burūq fī salṭanah al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq* on the authority of its author the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the scholar Abū Muḥammad Makhlūf b. ‘Alī b. Maymūn al-Jafnawī. I also took the book *Kashf al-ishārāt al-ṣūfiyah wa-nashr al-bishārāt al-ismīyah al-muḥammadiyah* and the book *al-Manḥ al-wahhābīyah al-rabbānīyah fī al-milḥ al-ismīyah al-muḥammadiyah* on the authority of their author the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the scholar, the learned one Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥāmid al-Dimashqī. He took them from their author the *shaykh*, the *imām*, the scholar, the learned one Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥanafī al-Qudsī (may God have mercy on him). The blessing and kindness are to God.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹³ On ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Darīhim, d. 762, and this work see KZ II/1194

⁷¹⁴ Chester Beatty MS 5076 (*Shams al-āfāq*), fol. 10^a, ln. 14-fol. 10^b, ln. 5.

Finally, al-Biṣṭāmī again complicates his chronology by returning to 807/1404-5, also in Cairo. In this instance the jump in time has a dual narrative purpose. On the one hand, the story is clearly the dramatic culmination of the long-term initiatic process he is describing throughout this discourse. On the other, the initial and concluding events in this final story are themselves separated in time, with the climax occurring at the end of 826/1423. The events in question are a series of initiatic text/book-transmission experiences, three of which occur in the *mundus imaginalis* of dreams, and one in the world of flesh. Notably, all four seem to occur in Cairo, that city of books and initiations. In the first event, in 807/1404-5, he dreams that he attends a reading of al-Shādhilī's great "supererogatory liturgy,"⁷¹⁵ *Ḥizb al-baḥr*, which has long been credited with having various powers of healing and benediction. The reading is presided over by the *shaykh* Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh al-Kūrānī and occurs at a site in dream-Cairo, the *miḥrāb* at Qanāṭir al-Sabā'. When he awakes he has memorized the poem and "witnessed the power of its secrets." From that point forward his soul longs to audition the poem in a line of transmission back to al-Shādhilī. It seems that he remains nineteen years in this state of longing—indeed, the longing is a key narrative device—until "the hand of divine wisdom and eternal gnosis" guides him to a meeting with one Tāj al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī al-Shādhilī. He broaches the subject of auditioning the *Ḥizb* with this master, and the *shaykh* produces for him a codex bearing a certificate in the hand of Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī (who, al-Biṣṭāmī has told us elsewhere in the book, took the science of letters from al-Būnī), recording his having read/heard the work with al-Shādhilī. He then auditions the work from that codex, and thus joins the chain of transmission. Soon thereafter, in the final month of 826/1423, he has a dream in which he sees the Prophet sitting in a house in dream-Cairo. He asks the Prophet to speak to him about *Ḥizb al-baḥr*. The Prophet points to the letter *bā'*, and in that moment al-Biṣṭāmī comprehends the Mystery of union with divine, and loses himself in the beauty and luminosity of the Prophet's face. He then separates from the Prophet, and—still in the dream—encounters "one of the Shādhilī *shaykhs*," and informs the *shaykh* that the Prophet has given him permission to speak on behalf of the Shādhilīs. The *shaykh* replies: "I shall write for you a

⁷¹⁵ D.B. MacDonald, *EI2*, s.v. "Ḥizb."

proclamation [*manshūr*],” which is to say a certificate, a license to transmit. Only then does al-Biṣṭāmī awake, in flesh and stone Cairo, and in that moment realizes he has taken complete knowledge of the science of letters and names, a knowledge he explains in an ecstatic series of paired rhymes to which my translation can do no justice, and which culminates in the assertion that his knowledge of the science was transmitted on the authority of “He who unveiled the structure of the letters prior to the coming into being of the cosmic conditions of existence”:

وفي سنة سبع وثمان مائة لما كنت بالقاهرة رأيت في المنام شيخ السالكين وإمام الناسكين العالم العلامة ابا يعقوب يوسف بن عبد الله الكوراني وهو جالس في محراب زاويته بقناطر السباع وحوله جماعة فقروا حزب البحر للشيخ ابي الحسن الشاذلي فاستيقظت من النوم وانا قد حفظته ولقد شاهدت من بركات اسراره العجب العجاب حتى ان مراراً عديدة اعمى الله عني ابصار الظلمة ببركة متابرتي على قراءته وكانت النفس مدة مديدة مترقبة إلى اخذه بطريق السماع إلى الشيخ ابي الحسن الشاذلي إلى ان قادتني يد الحكمة الإلهية والمعرفة الازلية إلى الإجتماع بالشيخ تاج الدين ابراهيم بن محمد المصري الشاذلي فسألته عن سلسلة الشاذلية وعن حزب البحر وغير ذلك فاخرج لي كتاباً وعليه خط الشيخ ابي العباس المرسي بالقاهرة على الشيخ ابي الحسن الشاذلي فتسلسلت معه بالسماع واحازني إجازة مطلقة لجميع مروياته ولله الفضل والمنة في عقيب ساعي لهذا الحزب الجسيم رأيت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في الواقعة بمحروسة القاهرة في العشر الاخر من ذي الحجة سنة ست وعشرين وثمان مائة وهو جالس في صدر بيت فلما رأته قلت يا رسول الله اتكلم على لسان الشاذلية فاشار إلى باء ملح اشارة وافصح عبارة ان تكلم ففهمت عنه انه صلى الله عليه وسلم اشار إلى باء يصل سر الحال بسر القال فانشرح صدري وانبسط قلبي من سناء طرته الشهية وضياء غرته البهية التي هي قبلة الحاجات وكعبة المناجات فلما اخرجت من عنده صلى الله عليه وسلم رأيت بعض مشايخ الشاذلية فقلت له ان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قد اذن لي بالكلام على لسان الشاذلية فقال لي ساكتب لك منشوراً فاستيقظت من النوم وانا مستوراً جعله الله تاويلاً صادقاً ولسان حق ناطقاً وهذه العلوم الجليلة والاسرار الجميلة قد اخذت لطائفها الحرفية ووافاقها العددية ومنافعها الزوجية وتصارتفها الفردية والزوجية وغير ذلك من عوايد الفوائد وزوائد المقاشد بحروف كلامها وطروف كمالها وإشارات رموزها ودلالات كنوزها وسور اياتها وصور غياتها عن شيخ الشيوخ الثابت لقواعد في الرسوخ الذي كشف ابنية الحروف قبل وجود كونية الظروف

In the year 807 when I was in Cairo I saw in a dream the *shaykh* of the wayfarers and *imām* of the ascetics, the scholar, the learned one Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Kūrānī. He was sitting in the prayer niche in Qanāṭir al-Sabā‘ and surrounding him was a group and they were reading *Ḥizb al-Baḥr* by the *shaykh* Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. I awoke from the dream and verily I had memorized it [*scil.* the prayer] and verily I had witnessed the beneficent powers of its secrets—the wonder of wonders—such that a number of times God made me blind to the sight of darkness through the blessing of [??] by the reading of it. And for a very long time the soul [i.e. ‘my soul’] was in anticipation of acquiring

it [*scil.* the text of *Ḥizb al-Baḥr*] by means of audition [through a line of transmission leading back] to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, until the hand of divine wisdom and eternal gnosis guided me to a meeting with the *shaykh* Tāj al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī al-Shādhilī. I asked him about the Shādhilī chain [*silsilah*], and about *Ḥizb al-Baḥr* and other such things, and he showed me a book upon which was the signature [i.e. on an audition certificate] of the *shaykh* Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mursī in Cairo [having auditioned the work] in the presence of the *shaykh* Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. I was joined to the chain with it [*scil.* the book, or with him, i.e. Ibrāhīm] through audition and he licensed me with a comprehensive license for everything that he could transmit. To God belongs grace and charity. In the wake of my auditioning of that mighty *ḥizb* I saw the Messenger of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him). It was in Cairo in the last part of Dhū al-Ḥijjah of 826. He was seated prominently in a house, and when I saw him I said, O Messenger of God, speak of the discourse [*lisān*, lit. ‘tongue’] of the Shādhilīs [i.e. *Ḥizb al-Baḥr*]. And he pointed to [the letter] *bā’* as a symbolic learning [*mīlḥ*] and it was a more eloquent explanation than if he had spoken. And I understood that he alluded [lit. pointed] to *bā’* as the union of the mystery of the spiritual state and the mystery of the speaker. And I was filled with joy [lit. ‘my breast opened’] and my heart expanded from the sublime beauty of his delicate brow and the luminosity of his splendid complexion that is the *qiblah* of all desires and the *ka’bah* of all fervent prayers. When I parted from him (God’s blessings and peace be upon him) I saw one of the Shādhilī *shaykhs* and I said to him, Verily the Prophet (God’s blessings and peace be upon him) has given me leave to speak on behalf of the Shādhilīs [*adhana lī bi-al-kalām ‘alā lisān al-Shādhilīyah*]. And he said to me, I shall write for you a proclamation. I awoke from the sleep blameless. God had made of it [*scil.* the sleep/dream] a genuine *ta’wīl* and a truthful discourse. And those sublime sciences and beautiful mysteries—verily I took [the knowledge of] their [*scil.* the sciences and mysteries] letterist subtleties, numerical cryptograms, combinatory benefits, isolated and combinatory workings [i.e. working with single letters or conjoined ones], and other such things from among the advantageous uses and greater goals. [All this] by means of the letters of their speech, the clues to their puzzles and the signposts to their treasures and the chapters of their verses and the forms of their outermost limits. [All this] on the authority of the *shaykh* of *shaykhs*, the basis of the firmly-rooted foundations (*al-thābit li-qawā’id al-rusūkh*), He who unveiled the structure of the letters prior to the coming into being of the cosmic conditions of existence (*wujūd kawnīyat al-zurūf*).

Thus al-Biṣṭāmī, through his readings in authorized lines of transmission of books by al-Kūmī, al-Būnī, and the other *shaykhs* and gnostics, achieves *henosis*, or at least a kind of melding with the beauty of the Prophet’s face (though whether the one “who unveiled the structure of the letters” is God or some form of the Muḥammadan Light is not entirely clear). The final image, of the letters being unveiled prior to the making of the cosmos, is of course familiar from the Ismā’īlite and Sufi cosmologies discussed in the previous chapter, a letterist vision of the innermost workings of the Creation.

The experiences al-Biṣṭāmī is claiming are extraordinary but hardly unprecedented in Sufi thought: a beatific vision of the Prophet, an experience of utter and total *kashf*, or at least as total as one can experience and live. More extraordinary, however, are the meeting with the dream-*shaykh* after the encounter with the Prophet and the certificate the *shaykh* promises. Indeed, it is al-Biṣṭāmī's attention to book-transmission and practices as the route to this experience, and his claim to have 'returned' from the experience with not only knowledge of the science of letters but also a license to transmit it, that deserves our attention here. He is making precisely the sort of claim for communicable-knowledge-through-*kashf* that Ibn Khaldūn decried and denounced, and then certifying it with the ritual bureaucracy of the audition session. It is a veritable *apotheosis* of the reader in an age of readers such as the Muslim world had never seen before.

This account, given early in the text of *Shams al-āfāq*, is the claim al-Biṣṭāmī proffers to anchor his authority to author a book that attempts to aggregate and synthesize, in good Mamlūk-era encyclopædist fashion, the teachings of all the lettrists that came before.⁷¹⁶ The account is his license not only to transmit what he has learned, but to reveal it to the world and its rising rulers. I take it as a stopping place in this discussion of the Mamlūk-era Būnian corpus not because I have exhausted the material from the period (far from it), but because it testifies to the ongoing creativity and daring of the lettrists who came after al-Būnī as they continued to experiment with the book as an aperture through which the secrets of God's cosmos could be glimpsed, even as they could never be contained between its covers.

⁷¹⁶ Incredibly, there is an holograph copy of *Shams al-āfāq* (Süleymaniye MS Hekimoğlu 533) that al-Biṣṭāmī completed at the end of Rabī al-Ākhir of 826/1423, which is to say about seven months prior to the occurrence of the experience described above. I have not compared the text of it against that of Chester Beatty MS 5076, except to confirm that the entire section discussed here is absent from it. However, many parts of the text dealing with the actual lettrist techniques seem quite similar. The matter of course will require a careful study.

Conclusion

Following the manuscripts

“Books,” Ibn Khaldūn tells us, “live forever.”⁷¹⁷ Out of context it sounds like an optimistic statement, particularly from a man whose views on the durability of human society could be seen as fundamentally cynical. In fact, however, it arises in the context of a complaint about those “worthless persons” who feel compelled to study the books of intellectual traditions the living representatives of which have long since died out. Lest the reader think they detect self-recrimination, I am happy to report that—despite Ibn Khaldūn’s best efforts—lettrism is alive and well today, at least among those who have escaped or ignored the insistence of us moderns (when we are at work, anyway) that the manifest world is not a living book read aloud by angels.

As I imagine is clear by now, this dissertation is centrally concerned with books whose producers are long since dead and whose readers by and large would hardly have considered the possibility that the world was anything but the concrete speech of God. Indeed, a guiding maxim of this project almost since its inception has been to ‘follow the manuscripts themselves’ in examining the history and impact on late-medieval Islamic thought and culture of the lettrist Aḥmad al-Būnī and the corpus of works attributed to him. The phrase is a play on the well-known injunction of the French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour to “follow the actors themselves.”⁷¹⁸ As taken up in the school of ‘Actor-Network Theory’ (ANT) Latour helped found, the phrase implies a commitment to refraining from preemptive impositions of categories and metrics of evaluation on the messy, irreducible mass of

⁷¹⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, III/6. See Rosenthal’s fn 173; the operative word is *mukhallad*.

⁷¹⁸ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 11–12 and passim.

interactions between actors—human and nonhuman, natural and artifactual—through which ‘the social’ is continuously generated and transformed. My substitution of ‘manuscripts’ for ‘actors’ was meant to call particular attention (mainly my own, until now) to the roles that physical books and practices surrounding their production and transmission often played in the alliances that actors in the medieval Islamic world were constantly making and unmaking over the course of what we call Islamic intellectual/cultural history.⁷¹⁹ The phrase is also meant to embody an assertion that, where possible, historians of medieval Islamic thought and culture should never rely solely on ‘editions’ of medieval texts, critical or otherwise. Instead they should return continually to the vast array of sometimes beautiful and often befuddling material texts that make up the Islamic manuscript inheritance for signs of how medieval actors read, shared, commented on, decorated, mutilated, and otherwise engaged with particular books and the texts they contain. To not do so is to risk the genuinely grave methodological error Michael Chamberlain calls attention to in observing: “Books are such universal cultural artifacts that scholars often take them for ‘blank’ objects that differ little from society to society,”⁷²⁰ an impression that could hardly be more incorrect. Indeed, it has come to be my position—more or less borrowed from a number of ‘New Philologists’ before me—that a medieval text cannot be effectively grasped as an expression of historical actors’ thought or experience without some understanding of the circumstances of its life in manuscripts, of how it was read and by whom. Historians will of course do as they see fit. For myself, however, I have found it useful in closing this phase of the project to review my fidelity to this self-imposed maxim, and to discuss briefly what I see as some of the successes and failures of the manuscript-centric approach I have taken. This will, I hope, be of use to other researchers considering similar strategies.

⁷¹⁹ I am aware of the irony that I may be breaking the first rule of ANT in pre-emptively focusing on manuscripts; however, I make no claim to meet the standards that Latour and his adherents established for that brand during its heyday. On said standards see, for example, Bruno Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications,” *Centre for Social Theory and Technology*, 2007.

⁷²⁰ Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, 134.

One of my main goals in conducting an extensive survey of the manuscript corpus was to reconstruct the communities of readers in which Būnian works circulated. In paying close attention to names in paratexts and other elements, I had hoped to be able to identify key individuals and groups who had been responsible for the spread of the corpus at various phases in its history. My purpose in doing so was not merely to satisfy a fascination with the minutiae of manuscripts (though, like many a manuscript studies scholar, I admit to being somewhat possessed of that⁷²¹). Rather I sought to test the notion that charting the make-up of those communities and their various social and intellectual commitments would facilitate an understanding of al-Būnī that could move beyond such tiresome and, in my view, ultimately unproductive questions of whether or not al-Būnī and those who read him were ‘magicians’ (or, as has recently been argued, ‘theurgists’⁷²²), or whether or not al-Būnī’s teachings are ‘Islamic’ or ‘Islamicized’, ‘rational’ or ‘superstitious’.

With regard to reconstructing these communities, the results have been mixed. Discovering the cluster of paratexts that document al-Būnī’s audition sessions in the Qarāfah cemetery, for example, was revelatory with regard to how al-Būnī interacted with his Cairene audience. And the fleeting mention of the (neo-) Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.1 is, I think, an important clue in understanding the transition of his works into wider circulation, as actors in the esotericist reading communities in which they originally were read moved from the fringes of Mamlūk society toward its center. That said, it must be admitted that I was unable to reach the level of detail I had hoped to attain with regard to identifying key actors in the history of the corpus, particularly because I found almost no instances (and none in the medieval period) in which an actor’s name was present in more than one paratext, and precious few instances in which actors were identified by *nisbahs* that would place them in a distinct confessional or professional grouping (such as ones linking them to

⁷²¹ In this vein, see Andrew Taylor’s provocative and entertaining essay, “The Manuscript as Fetish,” in *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 97–208.

⁷²² E.g. Martin, “Theurgy in the Medieval Islamic World,” *passim*.

certain Sufi orders, or even locales); thus my hopes of tracing lines of transmission between individuals or various first-order groupings were largely quashed. Indeed, the very notion of ‘reading communities’ as I have come to employ it arose initially as a kind of compromise with the paucity of iterative paratextual data, an abstraction to fill in gaps in the evidence. However, these initial frustrations led ultimately to positive developments. On the one hand because the idea of ‘esotericist reading communities’ has, in keeping with purposes of ‘microhistorical’ investigation, assisted in being able to infer wider trends from small bits of evidence, but even more because the idea has allowed me to put patterns found in the manuscript data into conversation with the contents of al-Būnī’s works (i.e. his statements about the need for protecting lettrist knowledge from the ‘vulgar’) and with the broader history of book-practices such as audition. Indeed, perhaps the more interesting development methodologically speaking has been the ways that ‘gaps’ in paratextual data have compelled me to examine more closely the relationships of the form and content of the texts to the circumstances of their design and circulation as books—such relationships being at the heart of my argument regarding al-Būnī’s use of *tabdīd al-‘ilm*, as well as other issues that I have termed ‘textual-economic’. More broadly, such gaps have forced me to think more carefully about the reasons for which medieval actors wrote—or did not write—various kinds of paratexts, and thus about the webs of ethical obligations in which medieval readers were enmeshed in their interactions with books.

A second set of issues regarding the reconstruction of reading communities arose with the efflorescence of the corpus in the second century of the Mamlūk period onward. It became difficult to distinguish changes in the ways that Būnian works were circulated and read from the much broader changes in patterns of reading and book production over the course of the latter part of the Mamlūk period, changes that were at least partly the result of increasing numbers of readers in the Mamlūk cities, as well as the increasingly catholic tastes of those readers. In other words, the fact that Būnian works were just one small subset of books that flourished at a time when many different kinds of books were undergoing rendered it challenging to speak specifically to the significance of the great increase

in the number of Būnian works being produced. However, such difficulties were again productive. The efforts of certain encyclopædist writers to classify and ‘de-esotericize’ al-Būnī’s thought would have stood out less sharply without this backdrop of a rapidly expanding readership of secondary elites. Similarly, the anti-Būnian fulminations of actors such as Ibn al-Naqqāsh and Ibn Khaldūn might have seemed mere casuistry were it not for what, to these critics, was the dark specter of the growing popularity of al-Būnī’s works among the learned. Relatedly, without an awareness of the general decline of audition practices in the ninth/fifteenth century, the implications of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī’s efforts to assign metaphysical importance to his own book-transmission activities would have been far less apparent.

What, finally, was the utility of these methods in bettering our understanding of al-Būnī and the reception of Būnian works? If I had to identify a single, over-arching contribution, it would be that the readerships for Būnian works can be seen to have changed significantly even over the relatively short period of the centuries between his death and the end of the Mamlūk period. What began as a fringe knowledge-tradition among a subset of largely foreign Sufis moved quite close to the centers of Mamlūk power by around the turn of the ninth/fifteenth century, much to the alarm of some ‘conservative’ observers. And importantly, with regard to past scholarship on al-Būnī, his works can now definitely be said to hardly have belonged to ‘popular Islam’, at least insofar as that term typically is associated with the undereducated masses. Rather, Būnian lettrism was largely an ‘elite’ discourse, though the types of elites who engaged with it expanded greatly during the period. Of course, numerous questions have been left unanswered. Some of the most pressing relate to pseudepigraphy, though, to my mind, they are less about which works were authentic to al-Būnī—though there are still things to debate in that regard, particularly concerning the numerous minor works—but rather about the practice and ethics of pseudepigraphy. Who was motivated to engage in it, and why? And what efforts were made to police it? I strongly suspect that the production of the pseudepigraphical works was in large part a result of the new audience of elites for Būnian works from

the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century forward and the lucrative opportunities that audience presented, but the competition for less tangible benefits, such as spiritual authority, obviously was a factor as well. Beyond that, the Ottoman career of the corpus begs attention, too, particularly the events surrounding the creation of *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*. For that matter, the pre-history of al-Būnī's ideas in the West also calls for further investigation, as does the extent of the overlap between his teachings and those of contemporaries such as Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Ḥarāllī.

In closing, I would note that it is my (admittedly optimistic) projection that al-Būnī studies has only of late begun in earnest. An indelible sign that the field is moving into a new stage is that the production of scholarly editions of Būnian works has commenced with the efforts of Cordero and Coulon. This is for the good, as such editions will make his works accessible to a larger pool of researchers and no doubt greatly advance and expand the field. I would, however, express the hope that this will not result in the large corpus of Būnian manuscripts becoming neglected once again. I would like to think that this study will be counted as an important opening salvo in this new phase of al-Būnī studies, but also that it will help encourage a continuing array of fresh eyes and more sophisticated methodologies being brought to bear on the vast Būnian manuscript corpus, as would no doubt reveal all manner of insights that have been overlooked thus far. Indeed, many areas of Islamic medieval studies would, in my view, benefit greatly from a turn/return to the manuscripts, and I hope this study can serve as an example of some of what can be accomplished by doing so.

Charts

Chart 1: No. of copies of Būnian works in MS by century, including colophonically dated works and estimated dates, 7th/13th-13th/19th centuries

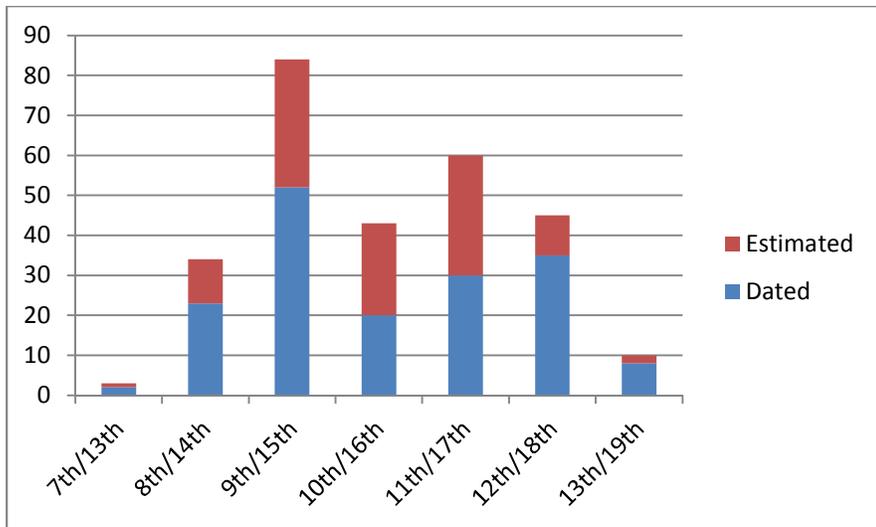


Chart 2: No. of copies of colophonically dated Būnian works in MS by half-century, 650-1000 A.H.

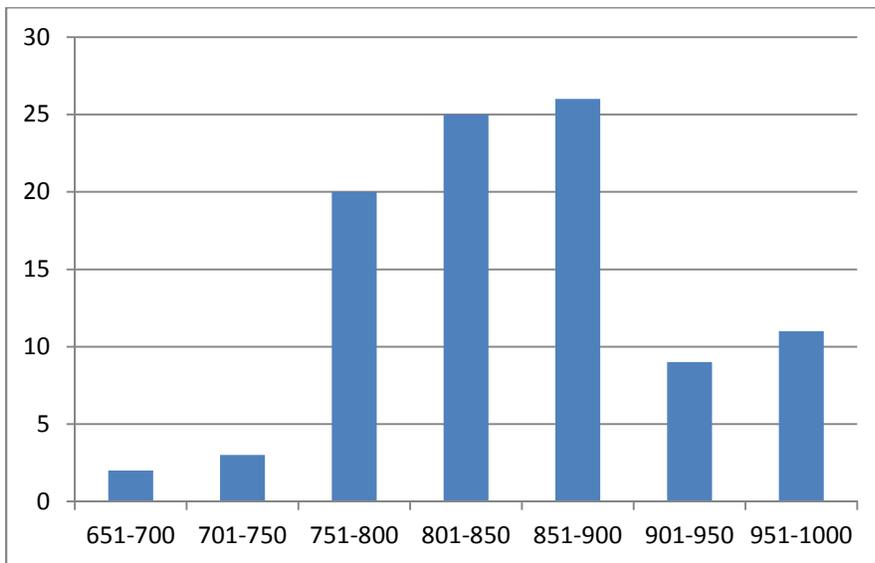


Chart 3: All 8th/14th & 'long' 9th/15h-c. (i.e. through end of the Mamlūk period) Būnian works in MS, by work.

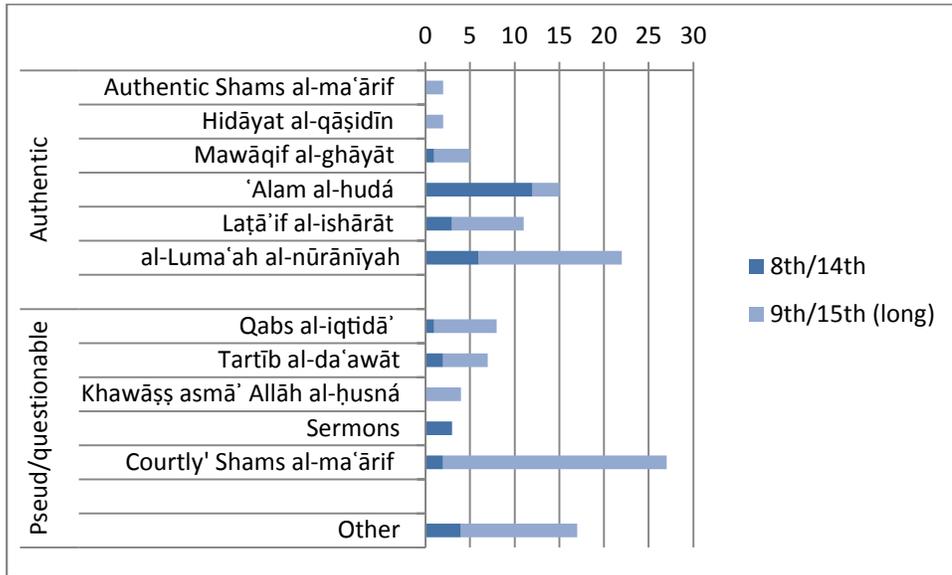


Chart 4: Dated 8th/14th & 'long' 9th/15h-c. Būnian works in MS, by work.

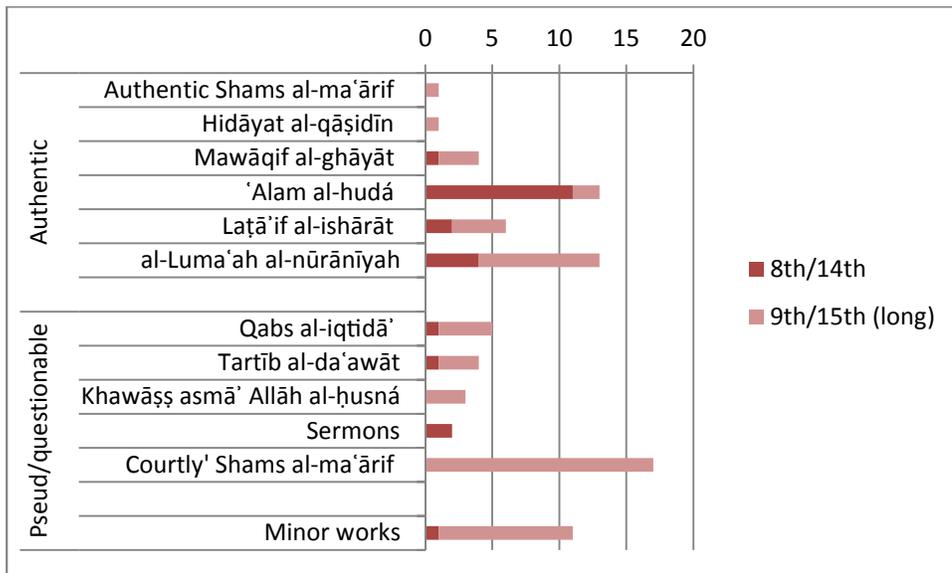


Chart 5: Frequency by century (AH) of auditions recorded in BnF MSS, based on Vajda's data.

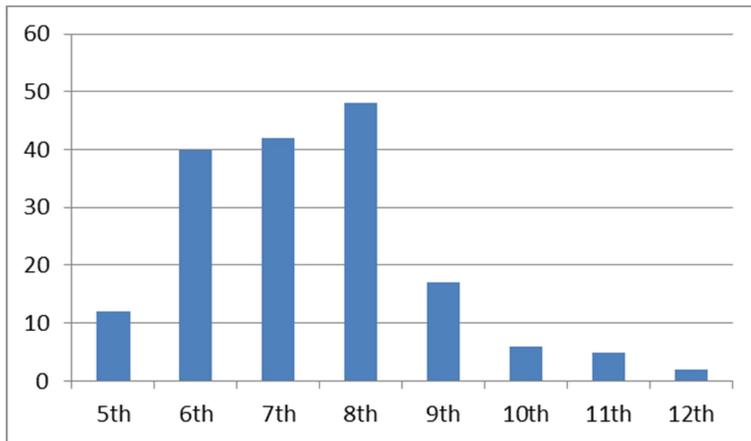


Chart 6: Locations of auditions recorded in BnF MSS, based on Vajda's data.

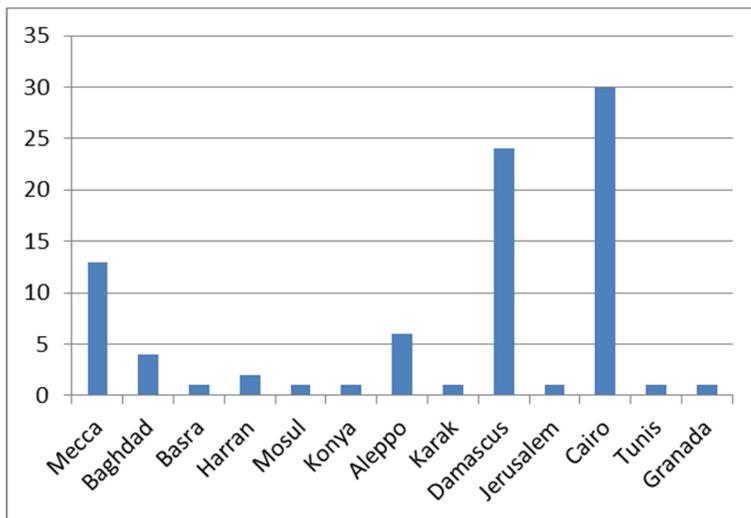
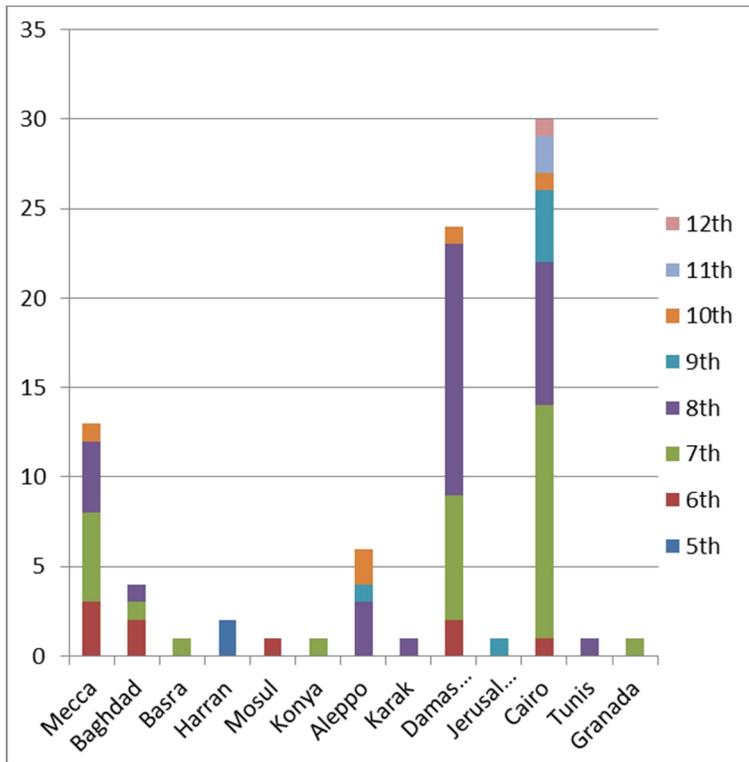


Chart 7: Auditions in BnF MSS by location and century (AH), based on Vajda's data.



Tables

Table 1: Būnian works in manuscript surveyed for this study, by work and century. Numbers without parentheses indicate the number of dated copies from each century. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of undated copies, the dates of which I have estimated. N.B. stands for ‘no basis’, meaning those MSS for which I had no basis to estimate a date. Much of the data in this is more immediately apprehensible in Charts 1-4, supra.

	7th/13th	8th/14th	9th/15th	10th/16th	11th/17th	12th/18th	13th/19 th +	N.B.
Authentic <i>Shams al-ma‘ārif</i>			1 (1)					
<i>Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn</i>	(1)		(1)	1				
<i>Mawāqif al-ghāyāt</i>		1	2 (1)	2		3		2
<i>‘Alam al-hudá</i>		11 (1)	2 (1)	3 (2)	1 (1)	2		2
<i>Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt</i>	1	2 (1)	4 (4)	1 (2)	1 (2)			2
<i>al-Luma‘ah al-nūrānīyah</i>	1	4 (2)	9 (7)	3 (4)	1 (3)	6		5
<i>Qabs al-iqtidā‘</i>		1	4 (3)	(1)	1	1		2
<i>Tartīb al-da‘awāt</i>		1 (1)	3 (2)	2 (1)	(1)		1	2
<i>R. fi Khawāṣṣ asmā‘ Allāh ta‘ālá</i>			2 (1)	1 (3)		(1)		2
Sermons		2 (1)						1
Courtly <i>Shams al-ma‘ārif</i>		(2)	16 (8)	4 (6)	3 (4)	1	1	9
Minor works		1 (3)	9 (3)	3 (3)	5 (2)	5 (4)	2 (1)	25
<i>al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābīṭ</i>				(1)	3 (1)	1 (1)	1	3
<i>R. fi Faḍā‘il al-basmalah</i>					1 (6)	3	1	3
<i>Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā</i>					14 (10)	13 (4)	2 (1)	9

Table 2: First comparison of chains from al-Biṣṭāmī and *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 930, fol. 6 ^b -7 ^a	MS Beşir Ağa 89, fol. 213 ^b	Witkam 2007, "Pedigree C"
ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib		
Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī	Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī	Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī
Habīb al-ʿAjāmī	Habīb al-ʿAjāmī	Habīb al-ʿAjāmī
Dāwūd al-Ṭāʿī	Dāwūd al-Ṭāʿī	Dāwūd al-Jabalī
Maʿrūf al-Karkhī	Maʿrūf al-Karkhī	Maʿrūf al-Karkhī
Sarī al-Saqāṭī	Sarī al-Saqāṭī	Sarī al-Dīn al-Saqāṭī
Junayd al-Bağhdādī	Junayd al-Bağhdādī	Junayd al-Bağhdādī
Mimshād al-Dīnawarī	Mimshād al-Dīnawarī	Hammād al-Dīnawarī
Aḥmad al-Aswad	-	Aḥmad al-Aswad
Akhī Faraj al-Zinjānī	-	-
Aḥmad al-Ghazālī	Aḥmad al-Ghazālī	Muḥammad al-Ghazālī
Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī	Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī	Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī
Quṭb al-Dīn al-Abhārī	Muḥammad al-Suhrawardī	-
Rukn al-Dīn al-Sajāsī(?)	-	-
Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Shirāzī	Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Shirāzī	Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Shirāzī
ʿAbd Allah al-Balyānī	ʿAbd Allah al-Balyānī	ʿAbd Allah al-Bayānī
Qāsim al-Shirāzī	Qāsim al-Shīrjānī(?)	Qāsim al-Sarjānī
Qawwām al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Biṣṭāmī	Qawwām al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Biṣṭāmī	ʿAbd Allah al-Biṣṭāmī
Alāʾ al-Dīn al-Biṣṭāmī	Alāʾ al-Dīn al-Biṣṭāmī	
Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allah Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Aṭʿānī	Abū ʿAbd Allah Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Aṭʿānī	Abū ʿAbd Allah Shams al-Dīn al-Isfahānī
ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Biṣṭāmī	Al-Būnī	Al-Būnī

Table 3: Second comparison of chains from al-Biṣṭāmī and *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

MS Carullah 1543.1, fol. 5 ^b -6 ^a	MS Beşir Ağa 89, fol. 213 ^{a-b}	Witkam 2007, "Pedigree A"
Al-Biṣṭāmī	Al-Būnī	Al-Būnī
Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kūmī	Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ya'qūb al-Kūmī	Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ya'qūb al-Fakūnī
Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Duhhān(?)		
Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Jāfi(?)	Abū al-'Abbās al-Khāfi	
Abū al-'Azā'im Māḍī b. Sulṭān	Abū al-'Azā'im Māḍī	Māḍī al-'Azā'im
Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī	Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Abī al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Khawārazm	Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Abī al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ḥirzhum
Pole after pole to... (<i>Wa-hūa akhadha 'an quṭbin ba'da quṭbin ilā...</i>)	Abū Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. Bayḍā' (?) b. ??? al-Dukkānī al-Mālikī	Abū Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. 'Aqbān al-Qākilī al-Mālikī
-	Abū Madyan Shu'ayb b. al-Ḥasan al-Andalusī al-Ishbīlī	Abū Madyan Shu'ayb b. al-Ḥasan al-Andalusī al-Ishbīlī
-	Abū Yī'zā al-Hashkūrī(?)	Abū Shu'ayb Ayyūb b. Ṣa'īd al-Ṣanhājī
-	Shu'ayb Ayyūb b. Ṣa'īd al-Ṣanhājī	Abū Ya'zā al-Ma'arrī
-	Ibn Muḥammad Tubūr(?)	
-	Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Jalīl b. Majlān(?)	Abū Muḥammad b. Manṣūr
-	Abū 'Abd Allah b. Abī Bishr	Abū al-Faḍl 'Abd Allah b. Abī Bishr
-	Musá al-Kaẓīm	Musá al-Kaẓīmī
-	Abī Ja'far al-Ṣādiq	Abī Ja'far al-Ṣādiq
-	Ja'far al-Ṣādiq	
-	Muḥammad al-Bāqir	Muḥammad al-Bāqir
-	Zayn al-'Ābidīn	Zayn al-'Ābidīn
Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who took from his grandfather...	Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib	Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib
-	'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib	'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib
Muḥammad	Muḥammad	Muḥammad

Table 4: The intertexts in the core works (columns are works referred to)

	<i>Shams al-ma'arif</i>	<i>Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn</i>	<i>Mawāqif al-ghāyāt</i>	<i>'Ilm al-hudá</i>	<i>Laṭā'if al-ishārāt</i>	<i>Asrār al-adwār</i>	<i>Mawāqīt al-baṣā'ir</i>	No. ref's made in
<i>Shams al-ma'arif</i>								-
<i>Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn</i>	1							1
<i>Mawāqif al-ghāyāt</i>	3	2		1				6
<i>'Ilm al-hudá</i>	8	1	5		2			16
<i>Laṭā'if al-ishārāt</i>	7			8		1	1	17
No. ref's made to	19	3	5	9	2	1	1	40 total

Table 5: The eight throne-bearing angels

Number	Name	Correspondence
1	ا	Intellects, <i>al-'uqūl</i>
٢	بجد	Spirits, <i>al-arwāḥ</i>
٣	هوزح	Souls, <i>al-nufūs</i>
٤	طیکل	Hearts, <i>al-qulūb</i>
٥	منصع	Heat, <i>al-ḥarārah</i>
٦	فضقر	Cold, <i>al-burūdah</i>
٧	سنخ	Moisture, <i>al-ruṭūbah</i>
٨	ذطفش	Dryness, <i>al-yubūсах</i>

Table 6: Planetary and elemental spheres

Extended value of inferior letter	Extended value of Superior letter	Basic value of inferior letter	Basic value of Superior letter	Inferior letter	Superior letter	Sphere
130	111	70	1	ع	أ	فلك العقل
81	3	80	2	ف	ب	فلك الكرمي
95	53	90	3	ض	ج	فلك زحل
181	35	100	4	ق	د	فلك المشتري
201	6	200	5	ر	هـ	فلك المريخ
360	13	300	6	س	و	فلك الشمس
401	18	400	7	ت	ز	فلك الزهرة
501	9	500	8	ث	ح	فلك عطارد
601	10	600	9	خ	ط	فلك القمر
731	11	700	10	ذ	ي	فلك الحرارة
801	101	800	20	ظ	ك	فلك الهواء
960	71	900	30	غ	ل	فلك الماء
1060	90	1000	40	ش	م	فلك الأكرة
	65		60		ص	فلك اللوح
	106		50		ن	فلك القلم

Figures

Figure 1: Audition certificate in Süleymaniye MS Şehit Ali Pasha 2813 (Ibn al-'Arabī's *Kitāb al-mīm wa-al-wāw wa-al-nūn*), fol. 18a.

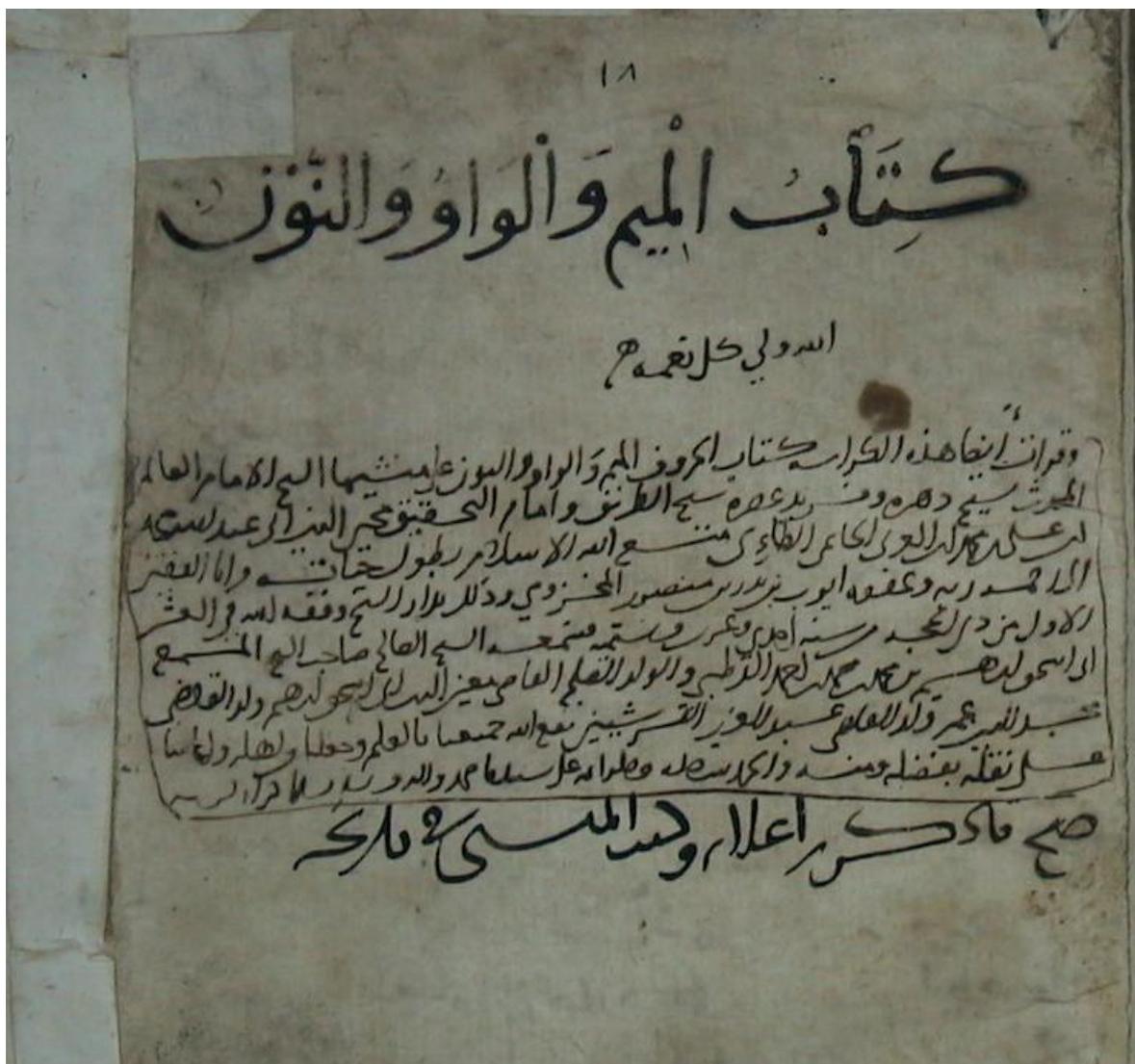


Figure 2: Collation statement in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.1 (AH), fol. fol. 64b.

بلغت مقابلة هذا الدفر من اوله الى آخره من نسخة صحيفة
مقابله مكتوبه في آخرها سطره اقل عبدا لله تعالى يحيى بن احمد
الخليلى الشافعى الصوفى وقابلها بنسخه علمها سماع المصنف
بخطه رحمه الله في رابع صفر سنة ثمان وثلثين وسبع مائة وكان حضره
الاخوة الصوفيه بالخانقاه المحنثيه بشغرا اسكندريه انتهى
وانفق الفراغ عن مقابلة هذا الجزء على النسخه المشار اليها اعلاه
على يد اضعف عبدا لله واحوجهم الى رحمه وغفرانه ايوب بن
تطلوبى الرومى الكنى عامله الله بلطفه الجلى والخفى
في جوار المدرسه الصيغثيه بقاهره مصر المحروسه
حماها الله تعالى عن الافات وحفظها عن العاهات
بتاريخ النبى عشر من شوال المبارك من شهر عام
ثمان ونسعين وسبع مائة هجره
حامداً ومصلياً
على نبى محمد وآله وصحبه
ومسلياً

Figure 3: Collation statement in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.2 (AH), fol. 130b.



Figure 7: Bibliographical and transmission statements in Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (AH), fol. 239b.

وَاللهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ، وَحَبِيبَهُ أَحْمَدَ بْنَ، وَأَرَادَ جِهَاتَهَا تَحْمِيدُهَا، وَشَاحَ أَنْ يَسْلُبَهَا ه
قَالَ أَبُو الْوَيْثَانَ مَوْجُودٌ فِيهِ رَجَاءُ اللَّهِ عِنْدَهُ انْتَدَاهُ فِي الْعَهْدِ الْأَوَّلِ فِي ذِي الْقَعْدِ مِنْ
 سَنَةِ إِجْرِي وَعِشْرِينَ وَسِتِّمِائَةٍ وَفَرْغَتْ مِنْ تَضَمُّنِهِ يَوْمَ الْأَيْتَنِ السَّابِعِ عَشْرَ مِنْ ذِي الْحِجَّةِ مِنَ السَّنَةِ
 الْمَذْكُورَةِ وَذَلِكَ بِنَظَرٍ مُبْهِرٍ حَرَّاهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَحَبَرِهِمْ كَثِيرًا
 وَوَفَّقَ الْفَرَاغَ مِنْ كُلِّ بَيْتٍ هَذَا فِي لَيْلِيهِ بِصِفَةِ جَمَاعَتِنَا الْأَجْمَعِ حَارِي وَعِشْرِينَ حَارِي الْأَوَّلِيَّةِ
 ٧٧٢ هـ عَيْرِي عَلَى صَاحِبِهَا أَفْضَلُ الصَّلَاةِ وَالسَّلَامِ بِرَبِّهِمْ وَرُحْمَتِهِمْ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَلَى كُلِّ رَاغِبٍ عَابِدٍ لَهُمْ
 إِلَى رَجْعَتِهِمْ عَلَى عَدْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِمْ كَرِيمًا لِقَوْلِهِمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ
 يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا مِنْ حَيْثُ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ مَخْرَجَ اللَّهِ لَظَهِيرٌ
 حَاشِيَةً عَلَى هَاتِلِ الْأَصْلِ الْمُتَقَوِّئَةِ
 وَمِنْ مُصَنَّفَاتِ الْوَلَفِ رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ
 كِتَابُ سَمْتِ الْعَارِفِ وَالطَّارِفِ الْعَوَارِفِ
 وَكِتَابُ مَوَاقِيتِ الْبَصَائِرِ وَالطَّارِفِ السَّرِيرِ
 وَكِتَابُ هِدَايَةِ الْعَاصِلِينَ فِي بَابِهَا الْوَأَصْلِينَ
 وَكِتَابُ تَوَاقُفِ الْعَايَاتِ فِي أَسْرِ الرِّيَاضَاتِ
 وَتَذَكُّرَاتِ مَقَالِ الْكَلْبِ وَقُرْآنِهِ مَلِيحِ مَوْلَايَ
 الْفَاضِلِ أَبِي الْفَضْلِ عَائِشِ الْغَارِيِّ نَفَعَ اللَّهُ
 وَلَقِيَ الْوَلَفَ فِي أَسْكَدَرِيَّةِ وَأَفَادَهُ فِي عَجَائِزِ
 الشَّوْكَ وَالرَّاسِ الْيَقِينِيَّةِ وَاسْتَفْتَى
 أَنَا مِنْ مَوْلَايَ عِبَّاسٍ وَبَدَّ إِسْمَ الْكَلْبِ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ
 حَارِ اللَّهِ لَدُنِّي بِمَقْضَعِهِ
 وَمِنْ مُصَنَّفَاتِهِ أَيْضًا
 كِتَابُ تَبْيِيهِ الْعَوَارِفِ فِي بَلِيغِ سَمْتِ الْعَارِفِ
 وَكِتَابُ أَسْرِ الْأَدْوَارِ وَتَشْبِيهِ الْأَنْوَارِ
 وَكِتَابُ بَابِ التَّصْفِي وَجِلَّةِ التَّعْرِيفِ
 وَرِسَالَةُ بَابِ الْوَأَوْقَافِ الْبَيَا وَالْعَيْنِ
 وَكِتَابُ اللَّعْنَةِ الْبُورَانِيَّةِ
 وَكِتَابُ اللَّطَائِفِ أَيْضًا الْعَشِيرَةِ
 وَكِتَابُ التَّعْلِيْقِيَّةِ فِي مَنَافِعِ الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ

Figure 8: The two *alif*s, Berlin MS or. Fol. 80 (LI), fol. 6a.

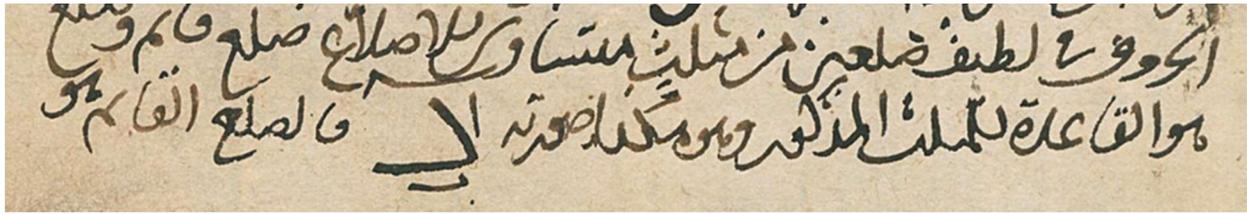


Figure 9: Triangle with correspondences, BnF MS arabe 2658 (LI), fol. 9a.



Figure 10: Square, world of composition, Berlin MS or. Fol. 80 (L1), fol. 9a.

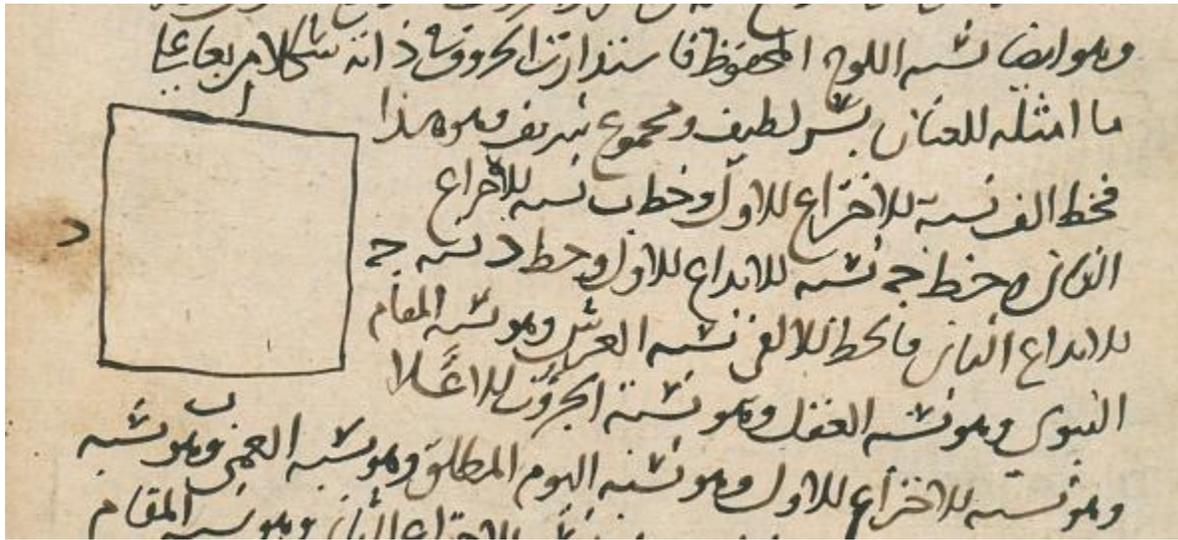


Figure 11: Cosmograph, BnF MS arabe 2658 (LI), fol. 13b.



Figure 12: Elemental letters table, BnF MS arabe 2657 (LI), fol. 13a.

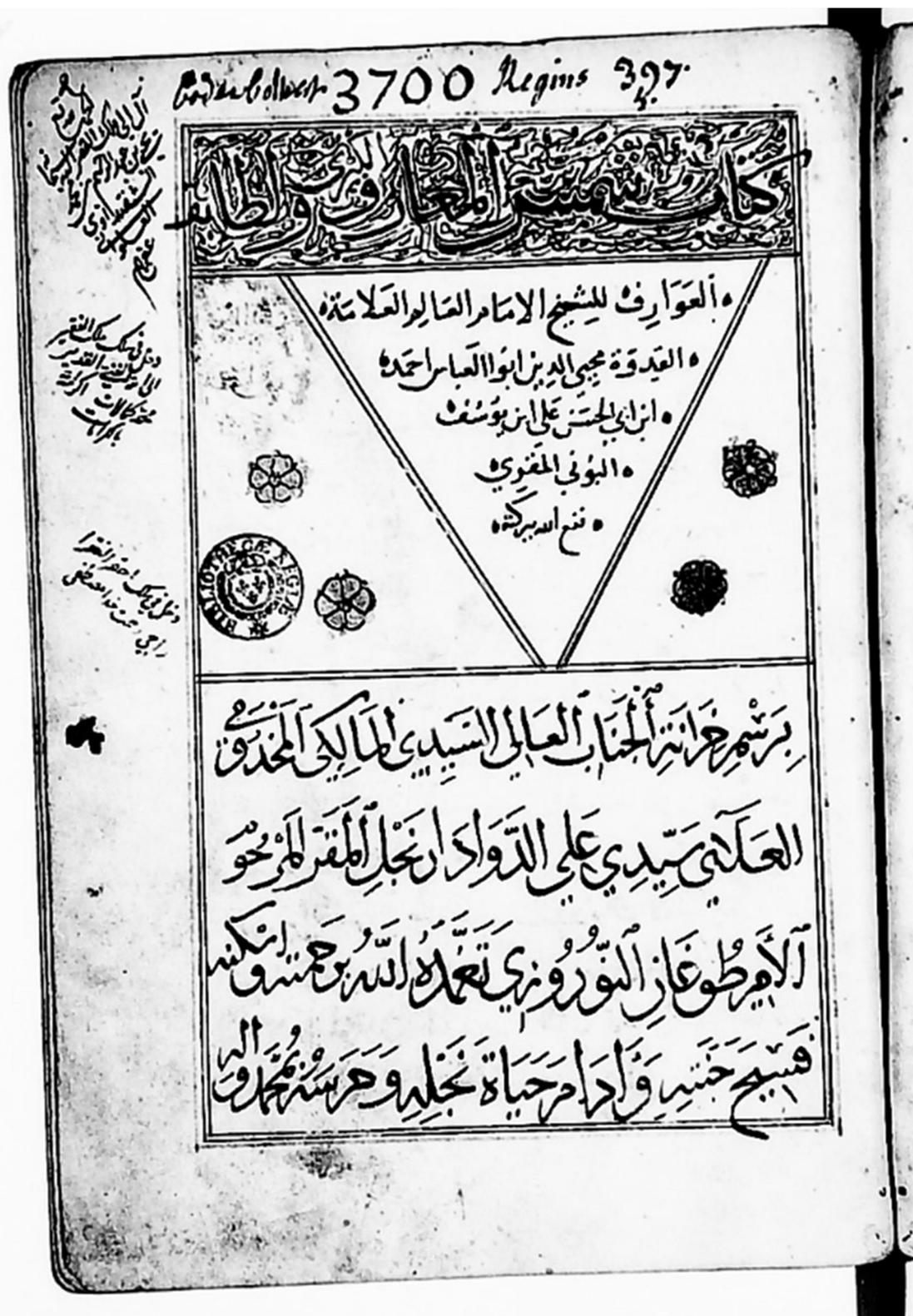
الاول	الثاني	الثالث	الرابع	الخامس
ا	ب	ج	د	هـ
و	ز	ح	ط	ث
ي	ك	ل	م	ن
ف	ق	ر	س	ص
ش	ت	ث	خ	د
ذ	ظ	غ	ش	ص

واعلم ان حروف الهمزة على انواع منها ما يُبدى وابد اليمين وهي حروف العرب ومنها ما

Figure 15: Ibn Hajar's gloss on al-Maqrizī's *tarjamah* for al-Būnī. Leiden MS or. 14.533 (*K. al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*), fol. 87a.

ابن زرق الله وابن عوانه وبيع في علم العلكة ثم رط إلى
 ريس ولفي أبا القسم السهمي وأبا القسم شكوان والقسم
 أبا العباس أحمد بن محمد بن كزرج السبتي وقدم إلى
 كزرجه وهو أبا فاطمة أبا الطاهر أحمد بن محمد السبتي وأبا الطاهر
 بن عوف الزهرية المالك وأمام القاهرة في أيام الخليفة
 يروى عنها اللمعة في وعاد طابيت المقدس ويوجد في
 مع ما كان خط إلى القسم عساكر وخط واسط ونداد و
 طاب النرج ابن الجوزية وروى إلى القدس وفتح منه متون
 اليمص فقبل به ألف كان سفيان هذا فاجير سفيان
 ما أبا مناهة مثله قبل وكيف ذاك قال بديناه سبت
 ختمناه به بيرة الحج عماد البوس ونام بها وكان يعمل
 بيان ويوم بسجده ترك تعلم الصغار واقبل على الوعظ
 في كوا من رعيه كتبها أبا منها كتاب في الوعظ سدا ولا
 ريلاد انرفقه كاسدا ولون كسب الحوزة ولا غناهم في
 الكرمية
 رهدد الدر من الساطع والنهور ما طاب وجهه ولحمات البر والطلح
 واسم الله لا يورثه وولد رفاة وحلته وساعة ولها من صفة
 لا حركتها ولا ولها من صفة غير اللمعة
 الكرمية
 رهدد الدر من الساطع والنهور ما طاب وجهه ولحمات البر والطلح
 واسم الله لا يورثه وولد رفاة وحلته وساعة ولها من صفة
 لا حركتها ولا ولها من صفة غير اللمعة
 الكرمية

Figure 17: Patronage statement, BnF MS arabe 2649 (Courtly *ShM*), fol. 2^a.



Appendix A: Būnian works in manuscript

What follows is a list of works in manuscript attributed to al-Būnī that were taken into account for this study, grouped by century. This is not a complete list of all Būnian works in manuscript, but to the best of my knowledge it is the most extensive list of them to date. In the case of the major works (i.e. those appearing in numerous copies) I have used a shortened ‘authority’ title, such that it may not match what appears in the codex or in the catalog. For minor works (see also Appendix C) I have utilized the title from the manuscript or catalog. Also noted is the library/shelfmark information, copying dates and places, if available, and some basic codicological information and comments. When possible a brief list of paratexts noted in the manuscript follows, with locations in the codex and dates when possible. For undated manuscripts which I have seen I have estimated a century of production. In a few cases where I have not seen the manuscript I have included an estimated date from the cataloger. All such estimates should of course be taken with a grain of salt. The final group of manuscripts are those for which I had no basis to estimate a date, usually because I was unable to see them, and was therefore relying entirely on information from a catalog or similar source.

7th/13th-c.

1. *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. fol. 80. Copied 0669/1270
69 fol., 20 lpp. 260x175 (220x145). Oriental laid paper.

Bibliographical gloss, 0669/1270
Colophon, 0669/1270
2. *Al-Lumʿah al-nūrānīyah*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 3168.5. Copied 0686/1287
30 fol. (96a-125a), 15 lpp. Compiled with 2 works by Ibn Masarraḥ and the *Risālat fī al-ḥurūf* of (pseudo?) Sahl al-Tustarī.

3. *Hidāyat al-qāsidīn*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 986.1. 13th-c.
6 fol. (1b-6a), 43 lpp. Maghribī hand. Compiled with numerous works by Ibn al-‘Arabī.

8th/14th-c.

4. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1550. Copied 0739/1339
255 fol., 21 lpp. 186x135. Blocky Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 255a, 0739/1339
5. *Al-Juz’ al-thānī min Kitāb al-Būnī* (Sermons)
British Library MS Or. 3195. Copied 0748/1347
132 fol., 17 lpp. 245x165 (195x115). Large naskh. Oriental laid paper (2 sets of 2 chainlines).

Colophon, 132a, 0748/1347
6. *Nasīm al-siḥr* (Sermons)
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Yeni Cami 1013. Copied 0750/1349
148 fol., 19 lpp. 195x255 (135x200). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Reading statement, 1a
Reading statement, 1a
Colophon, 149b, 0750/1349
Ownership statement, 1a, 1137/1724-5
7. *Al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Tasawwūf 1993. Copied 0765/1363-4
72 fol., 13 lpp. 245x173.

Colophon, 0765/1363-4
8. *Al-Tawassulāt al-kitābīyah wa-al-tawajjuhāt al-‘aṭā’īyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hamidiye 260.2. Copied 0772/1370
47 fol. (240a-287b), 21 lpp. 250x180 (180x120). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
9. *Tartīb al-da‘awāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hamidiye 260.3 . Copied 0772/1370, Damascus.
121 fol. (289b-410a), 21 lpp. 250x180 (180x120). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

10. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hamidiye 260.1. Copied 0772/1370, Damascus.
239 fol. (1b-239b), 21 lpp. 250x180 (180x120). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
11. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS Beyazid 1377. Copied 0773/1371
174 fol., 25 lpp. 263x175 (195x120).

Colophon, 178b, 0773/1371
12. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Esad efendi 1501. Copied 0773/1371-2
233 fol., 21 lpp. 259x182 (196x125). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 233a, 0773/1371
Ownership statement, 2a, 1164/1750-1
13. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwūf Ḥalīm 41. Copied 0777/1376, Damascus.
263 fol., 20-23 lpp. 19x14. Syro-Egyptian naskh. Oriental laid paper.
14. *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*
BnF MS ar. 6556. Copied 0781/1380
58 fol., 19 lpp. 175x135 (125x90). Small naskh.

Colophon, 0781/1380
15. *Al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah*
Berlin StaatsbiBritish Libraryiothek MS Lbg. 103. Copied 0782/1380
61 fol. (1a-61b). 243x183 (185x120).

Colophon, 0782/1380
16. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS A. Tekelioğlu 183. Copied 0787/1385, Cairo, Baghdad.
200 fol., 21 lpp. 190x130 (115x80). Acephalous.

Transmission certificate, 222b
Birth notice , 221b, 0808/1405
Colophon, 220b, 0787/1385
17. *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*
BnF MS ar. 2657. Copied 0788/1386, Makkah.
67 fol., 21 lpp. 250x180 (170x115). Naskh with Eastern tendencies. Oriental laid paper (2 sets
of 2 chainlines).

18. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Reisülküttab 1163.17. Copied 0789/1387, Damietta.
30 fol. (210a-239b), 17 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh. Compiled with works by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, al-Buṣīrī, et al.
19. *'Alam al-hudá*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4134. Copied 0789/1387
218 fol.. 270x180. "Good scholar's naskh".
- Colophon
20. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4284. Copied 0790/1388
74 fol.. 153x128. "Fine scholar's naskh".
21. *'Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 588. Copied 0792/1390
221 fol., 21 lpp. 265x182 (207x135). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh, vocalized.
- Colophon, 221a, 0792/1390
Bibliographical gloss, 221a
Ownership statement, 221a, 0840/1436
22. *'Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2875. Copied 0794/1391-2
255 fol., 21 lpp. Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh, vocalized.
- Colophon, 255a, 0794/1392
Ownership statement, 255b, 0801/1398-9
Ownership statement, 255b
23. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Private collection, Christie's auction notice 6497.1. Copied 0795/1393
- Colophon, 0795/1393
24. *'Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Resid efendi 590.1. Copied 0798/1396, Cairo.
65 fol. (1b-64b), 27 lpp. 260x184 (208x140). Blocky naskh.
25. *'Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Resid efendi 590.2. Copied 0798/1396, Cairo.
65 fol. (65a-130b), 27 lpp. 260x184 (208x140). Blocky naskh.

26. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
 Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Mq. 123. Copied 0800/1397
 5 fol. (76-81). 135x95. Maghribī hand.
 Colophon, 0800/1397
27. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
 Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aşir efendi 169. 14th-c.
 62 fol., 13 lpp. 160x110. Professional Syro-Egyptian or Eastern naskh. Oriental laid paper (2 sets of 3 chainlines).
28. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
 Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2803.1. 14th-c.
 72 fol. (1a-72a), 13 lpp. 190x125 (125x90). Oriental laid paper.
29. *Asrār al-ḥurūf wa-al-kalimāt*
 Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4650. 14th-c.
 110 fol.. 153x118. 'Good scholar's naskh'.
30. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
 BnF MS ar. 2647. 14th-c.
 148 fol., 17 lpp. 245x165 (200x130). naskh, Egyptian. illuminated titlepiece.
 Birth notice, 1a
31. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
 Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2800. 14th-c.
 71 fol., 27 lpp. 253x183 (205x130). Blocky naskh. Oriental laid paper (sets of 3 and 2 chainlines).
32. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
 Escorial MS Derenbourg 979. 14th-c.
 46 fol.. Maghribī (Andalusian?) hand.
33. *Manāfi' al-Qur'ān*
 Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Esad efendi 264. 14th-c.
 171 fol., 15 lpp. 184x135 (122x90). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
34. *Silk al-jawāhir wa-al-ma'ānī* (Sermons)
 Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Alex Mawa'iz 1048b. 14th-c.
 186 fol., 23 lpp. 275x185 (195x124). Oriental laid paper (2 sets of 2 chainlines).

35. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 4412Y.2. 14th-c.
43 fol. (39b-82a), 15 lpp. 173x130 (132x95). Oriental laid paper. The identification is tentative, probably a partial or variant text.
36. *'Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 966. 14th-c.
356 fol., 15 lpp. 358x254 (250x160). Syro-Egyptian naskh, vocalized.
37. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
BnF MS ar. 2658. Copied 0809/1406, Cairo.
93 fol., 17 lpp. 185x130 (140x100). Syro-Egyptian naskh. Oriental laid paper.
- Colophon, 90a, 0809/1406
Transmission certificate, 90a, 0622/1225

9th/15th-c.

38. *'Alam al-hudá*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 982. Copied 0811/1408
181 fol., 23 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh.
39. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
Leiden MS Or. 1233. Copied 0812/1409
170 fol.. Syro-Egyptian naskh.
- Colophon, 0812/1409
40. *'Alam al-hudá*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 1480. Copied 0813/1410-11, Cairo.
222 fol., 25 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh.
- Colophon, 222a
41. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1594.2. Copied 0818/1415-16
23 fol. (47a-72a), 15 lpp. 138x178 (90x123). Small Syro-Egyptian naskh.
42. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1594.5. Copied 0818/1415-16
11 fol. (93a-103a), 17 lpp. 178x138 (122x95). Small Syro-Egyptian naskh.

43. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2822. Copied 0824/1421
139 fol., 15 lpp. Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh. Chrysographed talismans throughout.

Colophon, 139b, 0814/1421
44. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. oct. 3928.4. Copied 0825/1422
33 fol. (100-132), 21 lpp. 230x155 (190x120). Oriental laid paper.
45. *Lawḥ al-dhahab fī kitāb al-ḥurūf*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. oct. 3928.3. Copied 0825/1422
14 fol. (86-99). 230x155 (190x120). Oriental laid paper.
46. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. oct. 3928.2. Copied 0825/1422
13 fol. (73b-85a), 21 lpp. 230x155 (190x120).
47. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. oct. 3928.1. Copied 0825/1422
72 fol. (2a-73b), 21 lpp. 230x155 (190x120). Oriental laid paper (2 sets of 2 chainlines).
48. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 1870.6. Copied 0828/1424-5
40 fol. (44a-84a), 17-18 lpp. 179x125 (127x90). Blocky naskh.
49. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 1870.7. Copied 0828/1424-5
21 fol. (84b-105a), 17 lpp. 179x125 (127x85).
50. *Asrār al-ḥurūf*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4891. Copied 0829/1426
59 fol.. 212x140.

Colophon, 0829/1426
51. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1895Y.1. Copied 0834/1430, Tripoli al-Shām. (1b-48b),
15 lpp. 186x183 (120x87). Small naskh, Maghribī pointing (?). Oriental laid paper.
52. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1895Y.3. Copied 0834/1430, Tripoli al-Shām.
6 fol. (67b-72b). 186x183 (120x87).

53. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1895Y.2. Copied 0834/1430, Tripoli al-Shām.
16 fol. (50b-65b), 15 lpp. 183x136 (120x87).
54. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 943. Copied 0837/1434, Safad.
199 fol., 19 lpp. Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Patronage, 1a, 0837/1434
Ownership statement, 1a, 0924/1518
Colophon, 100b, 0837/1434
55. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2804. Copied 0838/1434-5
96 fol., 19 lpp. Small Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 94b, 0838/1435
56. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf wa-al-asmā' Ḥalīm 7. Copied 0840/1436-7
82 fol., 13 lpp. 175x130. Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.
57. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
British Library MS Or. 9855. Copied 0843/1440
96 fol., 21 lpp. 270x180 (195x135). Oriental laid paper (2 vertical chainlines).

Colophon, 96b
58. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
BnF MS ar. 1225. Copied 0845/1441-2
59. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
BnF MS ar. 2648. Copied 0847/1443
137 fol., 17 lpp. 255x170 (200x120). Oriental laid paper. Acephalous.

Colophon
60. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2806 . Copied 0849/1445-6
126 fol., 19 lpp. 182x134 (129x85). cramped.

Colophon, 126, 0849/1445-6

61. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1576. Copied 0849/1445-6
142 fol., 17 lpp. 133x177 (102x135). 2 hands, Syro-Egyptian and Easterns naskhs.

Colophon, 142b, 0849/1445-6

62. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2810. Copied 0851/1447-8
96 fol., 11 lpp. 167x120 (105x75).

Colophon, 95a, 0851/1447-8
Waqf notice, ib

63. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Leiden MS Or. 666. Copied 0853/1449-50

Colophon, 0853/1449-50

64. *Qays (Qabas?) al-anwār*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 101. Copied 0853/1449-50
134 fol., 11 lpp. 214x156.

65. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1447. Copied 0854/1450-1, Cairo.
109 fol., 15 lpp. 260x170 (185x122).

Colophon

66. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hafid efendi 198. Copied 0855/1451
60 fol., 30 lpp. 250x170 (200x120). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 59b, 0855/1451

67. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Leiden MS Or. 336. Copied 0857/1453

Colophon, 0857/1453

68. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2799. Copied 0861/1456-7
45 fol., 25 lpp. 255x160 (185x115). Small naskh with Eastern tendencies.

Waqf, 1a
Colophon, 42a, 0861/1457

69. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kadızade Mehmed 335.1. Copied 0869/1464-5
92 fol. (1b-92b), 19 lpp. 270x180 (190x130). Naskh with Eastern tendencies.

70. *Al-Kanz al-bāhir wa-al-najm al-zāhir*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kadızade Mehmed 335.3. Copied 0869/1464-5
24 fol. (129b-153), 15 lpp. 270x180 (190x130).

Colophon

71. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 258Y. Copied 0873/1468
133 fol., 17 lpp. 179x132 (115x90). Oriental laid paper.

Colophon, 132a, 0873/1468

72. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 925. Copied 0873/1468, Mecca.
98 fol., 25 lpp.

Colophon

73. *Authentic Shams al-ma'arif*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwūf Mīm 147. Copied 0873/1468
70 fol., 13 lpp. 175x135.

Colophon

74. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1549.2. Copied 0881/1476-7, Aleppo.
8 fol. (113a-120b), 15 lpp. 185x138 (118x85). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

75. *Tafsīr asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1549.1. Copied 0881/1476-7, Aleppo.
113 fol. (1a-112a (127)), 15 lpp. 138x185 (85x118). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

76. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1446.1. Copied 0882/1477
61 fol. (1b-62b), 19 lpp. 183x138 (135x100).

Colophon

77. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 981. Copied 0886/1482
132 fol. (1a-132b), 15 lpp.

Ownership statement, 160b, 0992/1584
Colophon, 159b, 0886/1482
78. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 182. Copied 0887/1482-3
68 fol. (?), 25 lpp. 195x140.
79. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2801.1. Copied 0888/1483
108 fol. (1a-108b), 18 lpp. 185x130 (115x80). Syr-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon
80. *Al-Abyāt fī faḍā'il al-fātiḥah wa-barakatihā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 1611.9. Copied 0891/1486
1 fol. (181a-b), 13 lpp. 88x130 (58x90). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
81. *Fī manāfi' karīm rahīm*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 1611.10. Copied 0891/1486
2 fol. (180b-181b), 13 lpp. 88x130 (58x90).
82. *Afḍal laylá alsinat li-laylat al-qadr*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 2083.4. Copied 0893/1487-8
29 fol. (80b-109), 17 lpp. 180x135 (135x102). Syro-egyptian naskh.
83. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 2083.1. Copied 0893/1487-8
31 fol. (1b-31), 17 lpp. 180x135 (13x102). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
84. *Khawāṣṣ al-asmā' al-ḥusná*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 2083.3. Copied 0893/1487-8
16 fol. (64a-80), 17 lpp. 180x135 (135x102). Syro-egyptian naskh.
85. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 2083.2. Copied 0893/1487-8
33 fol. (31a-64), 17 lpp. 180x135 (135x102). Syro-egyptian naskh.
86. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Pm. 80.4. Copied 0900/1494
47 fol. (38-85).

87. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2835. Copied 0903/1498
99 fol., 21 lpp.

Colophon, 99a, 0903/1498
88. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
British Library MS IO Bijapur 429. 15th-c.
91 fol., 13 lpp. 230x145 (165x80). Professional naskh.
89. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 976Y.n2. 15th-c.
7 fol. (234b-239a), 21 lpp. 134x107 (102x80). Oriental laid paper. Excerpt/fragment.
90. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Ismihan sultan 333. 15th-c.
100 fol., 11 lpp. 180x135 (120x90). Large Syro-Egyptian naskh.
91. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Izmir 332. 15th-c.
51 fol., 15 lpp. Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.
92. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Amcazade Huseyn 348.1C. 15th-c.
3 fol. (13b-15b), 17 lpp. 175x131 (148x105). same. Abridgement.
93. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS Beyazid 1397.1. 15th-c.
130 fol. (1b-130b).
94. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 5297.2. 15th-c.
29 fol. (97-125).
95. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 944.1. 15th-c.
50 fol. (1b-50b), 30 lpp. Maghribī hand.
96. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2802. 15th-c.
75 fol., 23 lpp. 245x188 (190x115). Blocky naskh.

97. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 5297.1. 15th-c.
96 fol. (1-96).
98. *Majmū'ah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 380B. 15th-c.
99. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS We. 1733. 15th-c.
32 fol. (5-36). 210x155 (135x100). Vocalized.
100. *Mimmā wujida min taṣnīf al-shaykh al-'arīf Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Būnī*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Amcazade Huseyn 348.1b. 15th-c.
3 fol. (11b-13a), 17 lpp. 175x131 (148x105). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
101. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1380Y.1. 15th-c.
54? fol., 15 lpp. 180x136 (145x95). Oriental laid paper (2 sets of 4 chainlines?).
102. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Amcazade Huseyn 348.1a. 15th-c.
10 fol. (1a-10b), 20 lpp. 175x131 (148x105). Syro-Egyptian naskh. Oriental laid paper.
103. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 944.2. 15th-c.
45 fol. (51b-95a), 30 lpp. Maghribī hand.
104. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Süleymaniye 812. 15th-c.
100+18 fol., 15 lpp. 155x221 (100x150). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.
105. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1543.2. 15th -c.
146 fol. (6b-152a), 15 lpp. 208x145 (125x71). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.
106. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fatih 2803. 15th -c.
45 fol., 17 lpp. 206x124 (142x64). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
- Ownership statement, 1a

107. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Alte Fond 402c. 15th -c.
55 fol. (31b-84a), 15 lpp. 180x130 (140x105). Oriental laid paper.
108. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1449.1. 15th -c.
86 fol. (1a-86b), 21 lpp. Naskh with Eastern tendencies. Oriental laid paper (2 sets of 3 chainlines). Acephalous.
109. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2805. 15th -c.
109 fol., 17 lpp. 174x120 (140x105).

Waqf notice, ib
110. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2803.2. 15th -c.
3 fol. (73b-76b). 190x125 (125x90). Excerpt.
111. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hafid efendi 198M. 15th -c.
170 fol., 17 lpp. 215x155 (165x105).
112. *Hidāyat al-qāşidān*
Leipzig MS Voller 221.5. 15th -c.
30 fol. (83a-112b), 19 lpp. 200x130 (165x110).

Transmission certificate, 111a-112b
Other, 83b-84a
113. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1556.1. 15th -c.
61 fol. (4b-65a), 17 lpp. 177x130. Syro-Egyptian naskh. Acephalous.
114. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Alte Fond 402d. 15th -c.
114 fol. (86a-199a). 180x130 (140x105). Syro-Egyptian naskh. Acephalous.
115. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Alte Fond 402b. 15th -c.
19 fol. (12b-30b), 19 lpp. 180x130 (140x105).
116. *Shams al-ma'ārif* (but see note)
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 923.2. 15th -c.

55 fol. (30b-84b), 13 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh. Colophon matches Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 599, so possibly an abridgement of *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*.

117. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1532. 15th -c.
119 fol., 20+ lpp. 175x133. Syro-Egyptian naskh, replacement hand with Eastern tendencies.

Ownership statement, 1a, 1099/1687-8

118. *'Alam al-hudá*
Khalidi MS Ādab shar'īyah 921. 15th -c.
248 fol., 19 lpp. 220x160 (180x120).

10th/16th-c.

119. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
BnF MS ar. 2649. Copied 0913/1508, Cairo.
110 fol., 17 lpp. 265x180 (200x135). Oriental laid paper.

Patronage statement, 2a, 0913/1508
Colophon, 108b, 0913/1508

120. *al-Şarf fi 'ilm al-ḥarf*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2160.3. Copied 0914/1508-9 taq
16 fol. (81a-97), 13 lpp. 172x120 (128x80). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.

121. *Hidāyat al-qāşidīn*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2160.1. Copied 0914/1508-9 taq
40 fol. (1b-40a), 13 lpp. 172x120 (120x80). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.

122. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2160.2. Copied 0914/1508-9 taq
39 fol. (41a-80a), 13 lpp. 172x120 (128x80). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.

123. *R. fi khawāşş asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1452.1. Copied 0914/1508-9 taq
28 fol. (1b-28a), 15 lpp. 175x125 (125x90).

Colophon, 0914/1508-9

----- END OF THE MAMLŪK PERIOD -----

124. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Kütüphanesi MS 74. Copied 0921/1515-16
268 fol., 25 lpp. 210x145 (165x90). Watermarked European laid paper.
125. *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Halet efendi 736. Copied 0928/1521
114 fol., 13 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Ownership statement, 2a
Colophon, 113a, 0928/1521-2
126. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1113. Copied 0940
82 fol. (1a-82b), 13 lpp. 210x155 (140x95). Syro-Egyptian naskh, vocalized. watermarked.
127. *Tartīb al-da’awāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fatih 649.1. Copied 0950/1543-4 taq
85 fol. (1a-84b (11a-96b)), var lpp. 187x140.
128. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 57. Copied 0952/1545-6
129. *Al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1502. Copied 0957/
5 fol. (1b-55a), 17 lpp. 165x115 (140x90). Watermarked European laid paper.
130. *‘Courtly’ Shams al-ma‘ārif*
Bodleian MS Laud. or. 249. Copied 0959/1551
176 fol., 17 lpp. 290x200 (220x125). Watermarked European laid paper.
131. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS Beyazid 1362. Copied 0960
254 fol., 17 lpp. 213x155 (140x95). Naskh with Eastern tendencies.

Colophon, 254a
132. *Tartīb al-da’awāt*
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Alte Fond 162a. Copied 0963/1556, Valjevo?
96 fol., 19 lpp. 210x150 (160x105). Watermarked European laid paper.

Colophon, 93b, 0963/1556
133. *‘Courtly’ Shams al-ma‘ārif*
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 3091. Copied 0966/1558

- 119 fol., 13 lpp. 208x150 (140x105). Watermarked European laid paper.
134. *Shifā' al-ṣudūr wa-marātib al-ḥudūr*
Univ. of Michigan MS Isl. 505. Copied 0968/1561
22 fol. (72b-83b), 20-21 lpp. 212x159. Oriental laid paper.
135. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Bodleian MS Or. 443. Copied 0971/1564
77 fol., 13 lpp. 210x155 (150x100).
136. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Şehid Ali Paşa 2764.9. Copied 0976
50 fol. (131b-181a), 11 lpp. 175x135 (120x70). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
137. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Leiden MS Or. 736. Copied 0981/1573

Colophon, 0981/1573
138. *Al-Ta'līqah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 161. Copied 1005/1596-7
275 fol., 15 lpp. 205x140.
139. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Princeton University MS New Series no. 1703.1. 16th-c.
8 fol. (2a-10b). 198x120. Abridgement.
140. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 4412Y.1. 16th-c.
38 fol. (1b-38b), 15 lpp. 173x130 (132x95).
141. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
BnF MS ar. 1226. 16th-c.
142. *Al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4511.1. 16th-c.
38 fol. (1-38).
143. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2798.1. 16th-c.
162 fol. (1-162/221), 16 lpp. 290x190 (210x120). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.
Watermarked European laid paper.

144. *Kitāb al-wafq*
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 1363.4. 16th-c.
6 fol. (79b-84a), 13 lpp. 180x122.
145. *'Alam al-hudá*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 945. 16th-c.
175 fol., 25 lpp. Maghribī hand.

Authorial Colophon, 145a
146. *Al-Laṭā'if al-asharah*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1486.2. 16th -c.
2 fol. (26a-27a), 19 lpp. 178x138 (135x100).
147. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2843.1. 16th -c.
38 fol. (1b-37a), 15 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh.
148. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Bodleian MS Digby or. 14. 16th -c.
113 fol., 19 lpp. 285x180 (185x105). Illuminated.
149. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 45 Hk 1450.2. 16th -c.
88 fol. (41b-129a), 17 lpp. 212x155 (185x125). naskh, Syrian?. Watermarked European laid paper.
150. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1454.1. 16th -c.
42 fol. (5a-46a), 21 lpp. 183x130 (130x75). Watermarked European laid paper.
151. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 692. 16th -c.
121 fol., 21 lpp. 225x160 (165x90). Naskh with Eastern tendencies.
152. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Murad Buharı 236. 16th -c.
119 fol., 15 lpp. 305x205 (230x140). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh, vocalized..
- Ownership statement, ib, 1051/1641-2
Colophon, 118a
Birth notice, 119b, 1023/1614-5
Birth notice, 120a, 1026/1617

Birth notice, 120a, 1028/1619

153. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1445. 16th -c.
60 fol., 21 lpp. 205x125 (155x90). Oriental laid paper (sets of 3 and 2 chainlines).
154. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Resid efendi 599. 16th -c.
38 fol., 17 lpp. 198x140 (143x85). Abridgment?.
155. *Mishkāt qulūb al-'ārifīn*
Leipzig MS Voller 228. 16th -c.
55 fol.. 220x160 (150x95).
156. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Şehid Ali Paşa 427.2. 16th -c.
20 fol. (117a-136a), 19 lpp. 143x205 (83x145). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
157. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 4641.2. 16th -c.
25 fol. (29b-54a), 9 lpp. 210x150 (130x95). Syro-Egyptian naskh, vocalized.
158. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2745.1. 16th -c.
8 fol. (1b-8b), 13 lpp. 170x120 (115x75).
159. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 979. 16th -c.
39 fol., 13 lpp. 171x122 (116x73).
160. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
BnF MS ar. 2646. 16th -c.
60 fol., 15 lpp. 180x130 (145x100).
161. *Taysīr al-'awārif fī sharḥ Shams al-ma'ārif*
Escorial MS Derenbourg 946. 16th -c.
12 fol. (1a-12b), 25 lpp.
162. *'Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Şehid Ali Paşa 427.1. 16th -c.
115 fol. (1b-115b), 19 lpp. 143x205 (83x145). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

163. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Ahmed Paşa 336.16. Copied 1022/1613-4
1 fol. (80b-81a), 13 lpp. Excerpt.
164. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Ahmed Paşa 336.13. Copied 1022/1613-4
7 fol. (62b-68a), 13 lpp.
165. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kemankeş 316. Copied 1030/1620-1
180 fol., 15 lpp.

Ownership statement, 180a
Colophon, 179b, 1030/1621
166. *Shams al-ma'ārif* (but see note)
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1533.2. Copied 1037/1627-8, Aleppo.
69 fol. (193a-266b), 19 lpp. 205x150 (140x83). Syro-Egyptian naskh. Not any of the texts that
typically go under the title *Shams al-ma'ārif*.
167. *Sirr al-ḥikam wa-jawāmi' al-kalim*
BnF MS ar. 2595.6. Copied 1041/1631-2
168. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 159. Copied 1051/1641
217 fol., var. lpp. 240x140.
169. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Feyzullah 1304. Copied 1055
273 fol.
170. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 80. Copied 1057/1647
163 fol., 25 lpp. 210x150. Unseen, may be Kubrā.
171. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Beşir ağa 89. Copied 1057/1647, Constantinia.
215 fol., 43 lpp. Blocky naskh.

Colophon, 45a, 1058/1648

172. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Leiden MS Or. 8371.1. Copied 1057/1647
173. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
BnF MS ar. 2650. Copied 1058/1648
228 fol.. 290x200 (205x120). Watermarked European laid paper.
174. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
BnF MS ar. 2651. Copied 1058/1648
256 fol.. 290x200 (205x120). Watermarked European laid paper.
175. *Khafīyat al-Būnī fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf*
Bursa İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi MS 16 Or 348.1. Copied 1059/1648
4 fol. (1b-4a), 28 lpp. 200x145 (170x100). Watermarked European laid paper.
176. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 64. Copied 1061/1650-1
74 fol., 25 lpp. 185x135.
177. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 373Y.64. Copied 1061/1650-1, Istanbul.
3 fol. (314b-316a). 200x140. Fragment.
178. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2831. Copied 1064/1653-4
417 fol., 27 lpp. Small Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 417b, 1064/1654
179. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 721. Copied 1065/1654-5
135 fol., 19 lpp. 152x106 (126x77). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
180. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS Ze 188.6. Copied 1078
43 fol. (83a-126b), 19 lpp. 198x142 (155x100). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.
Watermarked European laid paper.
181. *Al-Uşūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Princeton University MS Third Series no. 557. Copied 1080-81/1670
76 fol., 18-19 lpp. 200x149.

Ownership statement, 1163/1750

182. *Al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
BnF MS ar. 2656. Copied 1086-7/1676
110 fol., 13 lpp. 155x110 (120x85). Watermarked European laid paper.
183. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4942. Copied 1092/1681
303 fol. (258-303). 195x140.
184. *Mafātīḥ asrār al-ḥurūf wa-maṣābīḥ anwār al-zurūf*
BnF MS ar. 2660. Copied 1096/1685
134 fol., 19 lpp.
185. *Manāfi' al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1469.3. Copied 1097
3 fol. (95a-98a), 23 lpp. 205x152 (147x80). Watermarked European laid paper.
186. *Al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fatih 5370.2. Copied 1098/1686-7
62 fol. (21a-82), 21 lpp. 202x143 (144x80). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
187. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 535. Copied 1099/1687-8
507 fol., 25 lpp. 301x196 (225x122). Illuminated headpiece.

Colophon, 506a, 1099/1688
188. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS We. 1210. Copied 1100/1688
231 fol.. 290x185 (185x105).

Colophon, 1100/1688
189. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 192. Copied 1104/1692-3
42 fol., 30 lpp. 285x190.
190. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Alex. Tasawwuf 3121j-2. Copied 1108/1696-7
191. *'Alam al-hudá*
Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Taşawwūf 3121jīm.1. Copied 1108/1696-7

314 fol., 21 lpp. 250x145 (145x95).

192. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1548. Copied 1111/1699-1700
287 fol., 29 lpp. 306x205. Blocky naskh.

Bibliographical gloss, 1a

Colophon, 287a, 1111/1699-1700

193. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*

British Library MS Or. 4326.2. 17th-c.
105 fol. (9b-114b), 19 lpp.

194. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1547.1. 17th-c.
115 fol. (1a-115b), 21 lpp. 198x145 (147x96).

195. *Latā'if al-ishārāt*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Ibrahim efendi 569. 17th-c.
45 fol., 22 lpp.

196. *Majmū'ah*

Princeton University MS New Series no. 328.10. 17th-c.
4 fol. (78b-82b). 206x142 (145x80).

197. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*

Princeton University MS Garrett no. 4602Y. 17th-c.
5 fol. (172b-176a), 19 lpp. 208x147 (150x84).

198. 'Alam al-hudá

Univ. of Michigan MS Isl. 534. 17th-c.
140 fol., 31 lpp. 278x190. Small naskh with Eastern tendencies. Watermarked European laid paper.

199. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Esad efendi 1693.11. 17th -c.
2 fol. (132b-133a), gl lpp. 212x131. Fragment.

200. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Lala Ismail 714.2. 17th -c.
8 fol. (7a-14a), 19 lpp. 177x102 (142x76). naskh. Excerpt or fragment.

201. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2841.12. 17th -c.
35 fol. (200a-234a), 15 lpp. Nasta'īq.
202. *Al-Uşūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Khalidi MS Mutafarriqāt 481. 17th -c.
30 fol., 17 lpp. 140x95 (110x60). Naskh.
203. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Selim Ağa 529. 17th -c.
92 fol., 25 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh. illuminated headpiece and gold talismans.
204. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Ahmed Paşa 350.3. 17th -c.
1 fol. (24b-25a). 149x295 (6x129). Nasta'īq and naskh. Excerpt.
205. *Latā'if al-ishārāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2841.15. 17th -c. , 15 lpp. Nasta'īq.
206. *Majmū'ah*
Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi MS H. 110. 17th -c.
16 fol. (1b-16a), 13 lpp. 150x105.
207. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aşir efendi 442.15. 17th -c.
2 fol. (78b-79b). 196x140. Watermarked European laid paper.
208. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 154.1. 17th -c.
16 fol. (1-16), 19 lpp. 201x153 (145x92). Blocky naskh.
209. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fatih 5321.6. 17th -c.
6 fol. (79a-85a), 13 lpp. 221x160 (148x85). Nasta'īq.
210. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 696.7. 17th -c.
4 fol. (177a-180b).
211. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. oct. 2452.2. 17th -c.
17 fol. (29b-43a). Watermarked European laid paper.

212. *Risālah al-Khaṭīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2841.13. 17th -c.
5 fol. (234b-238b), 15 lpp. Nasta'īq.
213. *Risālah fī khawāṣṣ al-ayāt al-karīmah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 540.6b . 17th -c.
23 fol. (98b-120b), var lpp. 293x173 (213x102). Naskh with Eastern tendencies. Excerpt.
214. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 4978.1. 17th -c.
400 fol., 27 lpp. 303x195 (215x130). Watermarked European laid paper, illuminated titlepiece.
215. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1448.1. 17th -c.
278 fol. (1b-278a), 21 lpp. 285x170 (165x130). Naskh with Eastern tendencies. Watermarked European laid paper.
216. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Esad efendi 3671.8. 17th -c.
7 fol. (69a-75b), 34 lpp. 210x115. Nasta'īq. Excerpt.
217. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Halet efendi 735. 17th -c.
501 fol., 25 lpp. Blocky naskh.
- Ownership statement, 1a, 1083/1672-3
218. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hamidiye 676. 17th -c.
343 fol., 31 lpp. 320x210 (215x120). Blocky naskh.
219. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 536. 17th -c.
224 fol., 25 lpp. 290x208 (209x128).
220. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2828. 17th -c.
172 fol., 35 lpp.
221. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2829. 17th -c.

282 fol., 39 lpp. Illuminated headpiece.

222. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2834. 17th -c.
210 fol., 35 lpp.

223. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fatih 2717. 17th -c.
430 fol., 27 lpp. 298x193 (227x130).

Ownership statement?, 1a, 1265/1848-9

224. *Sharḥ sawāqit al-fātīḥah*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 928. 17th -c.
81 fol., 15 lpp. 248x155. Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh, vocalized..

225. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 540.7. 17th -c.
44 fol. (124-167), 28+ lpp. 293x173 (213x102).

12th/18th-c.

226. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1577. Copied 1111
91 fol., 21 lpp. 210x150 (150x77). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Ownership statement, iiii
Reading, iiii

227. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*

Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 183. Copied 1113/1701-2
148 fol., 11 lpp. 255x175. Syro-Egyptian naskh.

228. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2842.1. Copied 1115/1703-4
49 fol. (1b-48a), 21 lpp. Nasta'liq.

229. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 534. Copied 1118/1706-7, Jerusalem.
514 fol., 21 lpp. Illuminated headpiece.

Colophon, 512a, 1118/1707

230. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1451. Copied 1119
68 fol., 17 lpp. 202x150 (153x95). Watermarked European laid paper.
231. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 537. Copied 1119/1707-8, Jerusalem.
519 fol., 31 lpp. 315x184 (232x100). Illuminated headpiece.

Colophon, 519a, 1119/1708
232. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2830. Copied 1122
372 fol., 29 lpp.

Colophon, 367a, 1122/1711
233. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
BnF MS ar. 2652. Copied 1122-3/1711
579 fol.. 375x240 (320x150). European hand. Includes interlinear Latin translation up to
123b.
234. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
BnF MS ar. 2653. Copied 1122-3/1711
605 fol..
235. *Al-Tawassulāt al-thanā'īyah wa-al-tawajjuhāt al-'atā'īyah*
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Akseki 144.2. Copied 1123/1710
23 fol. (pp 385-431), 23 lpp. 208x154 (157x102). Watermarked European paper.
236. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Akseki 144.4. Copied 1123/1710
21 fol. (pp 499-540), 23 lpp. 208x154 (157x102). Watermarked European laid paper.
237. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 50 Gül-Kara 14. Copied 1123/1711-12
234 fol., 33 lpp. 305x200 (200x110).
238. *Sayr nūr al-anwār wa-qabs sayr sirr al-asrār*
Dār al-Kutub MS Hurūf 75.2. Copied 1126/1714-5
239. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2832. Copied 1126

176 fol., 29 lpp. Small Syro-Egyptian naskh. illuminated headpiece.

Colophon, 176a, 1126/1714-5

240. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*

Princeton University MS New Series 1502. Copied 1126/1714 (5b-42a) Nasta'īq. Glazed European laid paper. Persian translation.

Other, 83a, 1126/1714

241. *Al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Yazma Bağışlar 706.1. Copied 1129
48 fol. (1a-47a), 21 lpp. 220x168 (158x95). Blocky naskh.

242. *Ḥijāb 'azīm*

Princeton University MS Garrett Additional no. 7. Copied 1132-3/1720
126 fol., 10 lpp.

243. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Selim Ağa 528. Copied 1140/1727-8
311 fol., 39 lpp. Illuminated headpiece.

Colophon, 311a, 1140/1728

244. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*

Dār al-Kutub MS 21576 Bā'. Copied 1147
61 fol., 21 lpp. 21.5 x 16.5.

245. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*

Dār al-Kutub MS Ṭasawwūf Khalīl Aghā 4. Copied 1147/1734-5
212 fol., 29 lpp. 320x210.

Colophon, 1147

246. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*

Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Spr. 892. Copied 1150/1737
40 fol.. 195x145 (150x95).

247. *'Alam al-hudá*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Beşir Ağa 368. Copied 1150/1737-8
159 fol., 19 lpp. Gold frames on first folia.

Ownership statement, 1a, 1158/1745-6

248. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Beşir Ağa 369. Copied 1150/1737-8
158 fol., 19 lpp. same.

Ownership statement, 1a, 1158/1745-6
Colophon, 148a, 1150/1738
249. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS H. Hüsnü Paşa 70.10. Copied 1162/1748-9
2 fol. (242b-243b), 23 lpp.
250. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Gotha MS Pertsch 55. Copied 1165/1751-2 (86b-??) 180x110 (130x85). Watermarked
European laid paper.
251. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwūf 187. Copied 1167/1753-4
34 fol., 21 lpp. 205 x 145.
252. *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hamidiye 677. Copied 1171/1757-8
379 fol., 21 lpp. 205x155 (150x70).

Patronage, 1a
253. *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hamidiye 678. Copied 1171/1757-8
395 fol., 21 lpp. 210x155 (150x70). Illuminated headpiece.

Colophon, 395a, 1171/1757
254. *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*
BnF MS ar. 2655. Copied 1188/1774
255. *Al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 2117.7. Copied 1198/1783-4
5 fol. (127-132). 216x157. Excerpt.
256. *Tuḥfat al-ashshāq bi-ṭarīq al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 2117.6. Copied 1198/1783-4 (87b-104a)
216x157.
257. *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā*
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS Ali Emiri Arabi 2820.1. Copied 1205/1790-1

- 59 fol. (1-58). Abridgement.
258. *Ta'bīr-i ru'yah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Mahmud efendi 6242.1. Copied 1206/1791-2
38 fol. (1b-37a), 13 lpp. A work in Turkish.
259. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Ahmed Paşa 120.7. Copied 1212/1797-8
16 fol. (127a-142b), 23 lpp. naskh.
260. *Majmū'ah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1166H. 18th-c.
261. *Majmū'ah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1147H. 18th-c.
262. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 4465Y. 18th-c.
3 fol. (?), 25 lpp. 212x150 (146x90).
263. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS We. 159. 18th-c.
20 fol. (30-49).
264. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
BnF MS ar. 2654. 18th-c.
348 fol., 29 lpp. 29x20.
265. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 4978.2. 18th-c.
228 fol., 27 lpp. 300x190 (215x135).
266. *Shams al-wāṣilīn wa-uns al-sā'irīn*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 4605Y. 18th-c.
103 fol., 21 lpp. 204x144 (144x83). Acephalous.
267. *Ad'iyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Esad efendi 3481.11. 18th -c.
2 fol. (84a-86b). 106x194. Nasta'līq.
268. *Al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1531. 18th -c.

36 fol. (1a-36b), 26 lpp. 206x146 (184x121).

269. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Pertevniyal 762. 18th -c.
344 fol., 31 lpp. 293x200. Illuminated headpiece.

Colophon, 345b

270. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Gotha MS Pertsch 1262. 18th -c.
139 fol.. Crude naskh. European laid paper.

13th/19th-c.

271. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Khalidi MS Ādāb Shar'īyah 775.1. Copied 1220/1806, Jerusalem.
12 fol. (3b-15a), 15 lpp. 150x100 (110x50). Excerpt.

272. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Çorum Hasan Paşa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 561.6. Copied 1265/1847
2 fol. (50b-52a), 23 lpp. 210x158 (175x102). Watermarked European laid paper.

273. *Risālah fī manāfi' al-Qur'ān*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwūf 1579. Copied 1274/1857-8
44 fol., 17 lpp. 204x149. Excerpts?.

274. *Ḥijāb 'azīm wa-ḥusn ḥusayn(?) li-daf' al-jinn wa-al-shayātīn*
BnF MS ar. 743.6. Copied 1282/1865

275. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Haşim Paşa 39. Copied 1312/1894-5
67 fol.. Modern hand.

276. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Murad Buharı 237. 19th -c.
309 fol., 35 lpp. 330x205 (230x125). Illuminated headpiece.

Colophon, 312a

14th/20th-c.

277. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'ārif*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 2250.4. Copied 1321/1903-4
21 fol. (33a-54), 16 lpp. Excerpt? Labelled 'al-wuṣṭá'.

278. *Al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 32. Copied 1330/1911-12
121 fol., 13 lpp. 170x110.

No basis to date

279. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Ali Emiri Arabi 2808. Copied 1291/1874-5 Identification is
uncertain.

280. *Ad'iyah*
Princeton University MS Third Series no. 864.
76 fol., 166x122 (142x92).

281. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Alex. Tasawwuf 5145 dāl.

282. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS 7965.4. (30b-62b)

283. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf wa-awfāq 252.
14 fol., var. lpp. 215 x 155. Excerpt(?).

284. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwūf 2003.
79 fol., 11 lpp. 20x13.5.

285. *Al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwūf Mīm 85.
65 fol., 13 lpp. 19.9 x 15.

286. *al-Mabādi' wa-al-ghāyāt fī khawāss al-aḥruf wa-al-ayāt*
Kastamonu İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2912.1.
2 fol. (2a-3a), 24 lpp. 262x180.

287. *Al-Risālah fī Ad'iyah al-ayyām*
Bursa İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi MS 347.2.
8 fol. (40a-48a), 15 lpp. 205x150 (205x150). watermarked.
288. *Al-Şahīfah al-mudhahhabah wa-al-awfāq al-mujarrabah*
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 2904.7.
3 fol. (73b-76b), 29 lpp. 210x145 (185x80). Watermarked European paper.
289. *Al-Sirr al-karīm al-khafī 'an al-ta'līm fī faḍl bi-ism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 70.2.
290. *Al-Uşūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Dār al-Kutub MS Wāw 6028.
95 fol., 15 lpp. 28x49.
291. *Al-Uşūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 2.
35 fol., 25 lpp. 19.5 X 14.5.
292. *Al-Uşūl wa-al-dawābiṭ*
Dār al-Kutub MS Wafq 3.
94 fol., 15 lpp. 18 x 13.5.
293. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Diyarbakır İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 772.
128 fol., 21 lpp. 210x157 (150x45). Watermarked European laid paper.
294. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Kastamonu İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 3172.
47 fol., 29 lpp. 270x182 (197x127).
295. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Zeytinoğlu İlçe Halk Kütüphanesi MS 230.
126 fol.. Turkish translation of the 'courtly' Shams.
296. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 201.
154 fol. (?), 19 lpp. 243x173.
297. 'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif*
BN Tunis MS 6711.

298. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
BN Tunis MS 7401.
299. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 60.1.
300. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Dār al-Kutub MS Makhṭūṭāt al-Zakīyah 278.
186 fol., 15 lpp. 19.5X12.5.
301. *'Courtly' Shams al-ma'arif*
Dār al-Kutub MS Wafq 140.
40 fol., 15 lpp. 18X13.5.
302. *Fawā'id ismihi ta'ālā al-Laṭīf*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 18.
303. *Hizb al-Būnī*
Dār al-Kutub MS Fawā'id 118.20.
304. *Jawāhir al-ḥurūf*
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Elmalı 2900.4.
3 fol. (55b-58b), 20 lpp. 205x140 (155x100).
305. *Khawāṣṣ ayāt kāf ḥā yā' 'ayn ṣād*
Çorum Hasan Paşa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 596.3.
7 fol. (130b-136a), 15 lpp. 200x140 (140x60). Watermarked European paper.
306. *Kitāb al-khawāṣṣ*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 10. Acephalous.
307. *Kitāb fī ma'rifat 'ilm al-uṣūl li-al-ḥurūf*
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Elmalı 2562.4.
20 fol. (135b-155b), 23 lpp. 208x150 (145x91). Watermarked European laid paper.
308. *Kitāb fī ma'rifat 'ilm al-uṣūl li-al-ḥurūf Jawāhir al-ḥurūf Risālat Shams al-ma'arif fī 'ilm al-ḥajar al-muntakhab min kitāb*
Princeton University MS Third Series no. 789. (115b-117b) Turkish.

309. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
Kastamonu İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 3505.
96 fol., 15 lpp. 270x180 (180x125). abadi.
310. *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*
BN Tunis MS 9755.
62 fol. (1-62).
311. *Majmū'at al-khawāṣṣ*
İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Atatürk Kitaplığı MS 262.
75 fol. (?), 35 lpp. 210x160 (200x130). Arabic and Turkish.
312. *Manāfi' al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1336.a.
16 fol. (1a-15a).
313. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Veliyüddin efendi 1821.7.
20 fol. (31b-49b).
314. *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt*
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS Ismail Saib I 2459.
315. *Qabas al-anwār*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 97.
120 fol.. 208x140.
316. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Çorum Hasan Paşa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2240.1.
8 fol. (1b-8b), 17 lpp. Excerpt(?).
317. *Qabs al-iqtidā'*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 84.
318. *Qūt al-arwāḥ wa-miftāḥ al-afrāḥ* (Sermons)
Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwūf 247.
28 fol., 19 lpp. 20.2 x 14.6.
319. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Burdur 1318.5.
3 fol. (60a-63b), 21 lpp. 205x150 (160x110). Watermarked European laid paper.

320. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 9.
7 fol., 18 lpp. 20.5x15.
321. *R. fī asrār al-basmalah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 79.
31 fol., 18 lpp. 20.5x15.
322. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Amasya Beyazıt İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1019.1.
71 fol. (1b-71b), 13 lpp. 178x133 (125x105).
323. *R. fī khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 38.
324. *R. fī manāfi' al-Quran*
Dār al-Kutub MS DK old 53.
325. *Risālah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Fawā'id 53.
326. *Risālah fī faḍl ayat al-kursī*
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS 7967.8.
4 fol. (133a-136b).
327. *Sadd(?) al-adhān 'an dhikr al-dukhān*
Dār al-Kutub MS Al-Ḥusaynī 105.
6 fol., 20 lpp. 22x16.
328. *Sawābiḡ al-ni'am wa-sawābiḡ al-karam*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwūf 90.
329. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
British Library MS Or. 4327.
330. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Konya Karahıay Yusufaḡa Kütüphanesi MS 6548.
287 fol., 31 lpp. 320x200 (230x120).
331. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Milli Kütüphanesi-Ankara MS 1517.
20 fol., 31 lpp. 305x200 (245x110). Watermarked European laid paper. Excerpt/fragment(?).

332. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 185.
93 fol., 15 lpp. 155x235. Acephalous.
333. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 140.
176 fol., 15 lpp. 240x170.
334. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 98.
216 fol. (?), 19 lpp. 250x151. Acephalous.
335. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Feyzullah efendi.
322 fol..
336. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Wafq 33.
41 fol., 19 lpp. 20.3X13.5. Excerpt or fragment.
337. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Wafq 32.
339 fol., 29 lpp. 30.5X20.5.
338. *Shams al-ma'ārif al-sughrā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 75.
205 fol., 27 lpp. 335X203. Unrelated(?) to other versions of Shams.
339. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf wa-awfāq 238.
39 fol., 15 lpp. 180x130.
340. *Tartīb al-da'awāt*
BN Tunis MS 9581.
34 fol. (1-33). Identification is uncertain.
341. *Tuḥfat al-aḥbāb wa-munyat al-anjāb*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwūf Mīm 99.
10 fol., 23 lpp. 188x142.

342. *Tuḥfat al-mulūk fi ‘ilm ta‘bīr al-ru‘yā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ma‘ārif ‘āmmah Tal‘at 189.
67 fol.. 205x150.
343. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Milli Kütüphanesi-Ankara MS 06 Hk 4604.
190 fol., 19 lpp. 209x151 (142x88). abadi.
344. *‘Alam al-hudá*
Dār al-Kutub MS Shīn 63.
28 fol. (1-19), 15 lpp. 145x100. Nasta‘līq. Excerpt/fragment.

Appendix B: Major Būnian works in manuscript by title

What follows are entries for each of the major works of the corpus, i.e. those which appear in numerous copies, and/or which al-Būnī mentions as his own. I have included an incipit for each work (not all copies will match exactly, of course). The list of MS numbers refers to Appendix A. See Appendix C for minor works attributed to al-Būnī.

Medieval works (authentic works given first)

‘Alam al-hudá wa-asrār al-ihtidá fī sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-husná

Alternate titles: *Sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusná; Mūdiḥ al-ṭarīq wa-quṣṭās al-taḥqīq*

Incipit: الحمد لله الذي رسم دقائق الحقائق في لطائف صحف الاسرار...

MSS nos. 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 36, 38, 40, 118, 124, 128, 131, 145, 162, 191, 198, 247, 248, 343, 344

Hidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāsilīn

Incipit: الحمد لله الذي فجر من اسرار العارفين...

MSS nos. 3, 112, 121

Laṭā’if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwīyāt

Alternate titles: Sometimes mistaken for *Shams al-ma‘ārif*

Incipit: الحمد لله الذي ادار بيد الاسرار لطائف افلاك الملكوتيات وبرز من خدر الغيب شمس المعارف...

MSS nos. 1, 14, 17, 32, 37, 65, 68, 76, 96, 97, 113, 114, 125, 153, 154, 176, 195, 205, 309, 310

Al-Lum‘ah al-nūrānīyah fī awrād al-rabbānīyah

Alternate titles: *Sharḥ al-ism al-a‘ẓam*

Incipit: احمد الله على حسن توفيقه...

MSS nos. 2, 7, 15, 18, 20, 27, 28, 41, 44, 48, 51, 56, 58, 62, 78, 83, 88, 89, 90, 91, 105, 106, 107, 129, 135, 136, 139, 140, 141, 147, 180, 199, 200, 201, 227, 228, 230, 240, 244, 255, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285

Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyāḍāt

Incipit: الحمد لله الذي رفع حجاب استار الاسرار عن حقائق بصائر المقرين...

MSS nos. 26, 52, 86, 99, 122, 126, 236, 246, 251, 313, 314

Authentic *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif*

Incipit: فهذا الكتاب الفناه من الكنايات فهو عمدة لذوي البصائر والعقول...

MSS no. 73. I have not had access to information on the MS Coulon identified in Damascus.

(Pseudepigraphic/questionable works)

Risālah fī Khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh ta'ālā

Alternate titles: *Al-Muntakhab al-rafi' al-asnā fī al-taṣrīfāt asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*

Incipit: اعلم ان اسماء الله تعالى لها خواص...

MSS nos. 47, 49, 103, 123, 157, 158, 159, 263, 322, 323

Qabs al-iqtidā' ilā wafq al-sāda wa-najm al-ihtidā' ilā sharaf al-siyādah

Incipit: اعلموا وفقنا الله تعالى وأياكم ان هذا الكتاب سميناه قيس الإقتداء إلى وفق السعادة...

MSS nos. 23, 42, 46, 53, 74, 101, 102, 115, 156, 190, 259, 316, 317

'Courtly' *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif*

Incipit: الحمد لله الذي اطلع شمس المعرفة من غيب الغيب...

MSS nos. 30, 31, 54, 55, 57, 59, 60, 61, 63, 66, 67, 69, 71, 72, 73, 77, 79, 87, 92, 93, 94, 95, 108, 109, 110, 111, 119, 130, 133, 137, 143, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 165, 170, 179, 193, 194, 203, 204, 226, 277, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301

Tartīb al-da'awāt fī talkhīṣ al-awqāt

Alternate titles: Numerous, the most common being *al-Ta'līqah fī manāfi' al-Qur'ān*

Incipit: الحمد لله الذي خلق من الماء بشراً...

MSS nos. 9, 35, 39, 43, 85, 104, 117, 127, 132, 160, 225, 275, 339, 340

Early modern works

Al-Uṣūl wa-al-dawābiṭ

Incipit: اما بعد فهذه الرسالة من اخ صادق النصح في المقال إلى الاخوان...

MSS nos. 142, 181, 182, 186, 202, 241, 268, 278, 290, 291, 292

Risālah fī faḍā'il al-basmalah

Incipit: الحمد لله الذي اودع سره المصون في عبادة المخلصون...

MSS nos. 164, 197, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 249, 250, 262, 272, 319, 320, 321

Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā

Incipit: شهادة ازل فمن نور هذه الشهادة اعترف المصطفون علماً...

MSS nos. 163, 168, 169, 171, 172, 173, 174, 177, 178, 183, 187, 188, 189, 192, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 229, 231, 232, 233, 234, 237, 239, 243, 245, 252, 253, 254, 257, 264, 265, 269, 270, 271, 276, 279, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337

Appendix C: Minor works attributed to al-Būnī

What follows are entries for seventy minor works attributed to al-Būnī, i.e. those which appeared in only one or two copies. The number of each manuscript refers back to Appendix A, where more information on each work can be found. I have also included an incipit when possible.

5. *Al-Juz' al-thānī min Kitāb al-Būnī* (Sermons)
British Library MS Or. 3195

الفصل السادس والعشرون الحمد لله الذي اقام خطيبا لاخترع...

6. *Nasīm al-siḥr* (Sermons)
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Yeni Cami 1013

اما بعد فان اسنا العلوم وأرفعها ما دل على الله سبحانه...

8. *Al-Tawassulāt al-kitābīyah wa-al-tawajjuhāt al-‘aṭā’iyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hamidiye 260.2

29. *Asrār al-ḥurūf wa-al-kalimāt*
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4650

33. *Manāfi‘ al-Qur’ān*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Esad efendi 264

الحمد لله الذي اجرى على السنننا الضعيفة كتابه الكريم...

34. *Silk al-jawāhir wa-al-ma‘ānī* (Sermons)
Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Alex Mawa'iz 1048b

الحمد لله مبدع الوجود...

45. *Lawḥ al-dhahab fi kitāb al-ḥurūf*
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. oct. 3928.3

50. *Asrār al-ḥurūf*

Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4891

64. *Qays (Qabas?) al-anwār*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 101

ولما فرغت من ذكر الاسماء الحسنی فلنرجع الى مفردات القرآن...

70. *Al-Kanz al-bāhir wa-al-naǧm al-zāhir*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kadızade Mehmed 335.3

الحمد لله الذي رسم ذقاتق النور... وبعد فاعلم ان الحروف سر من اسرار الله تعالى...

75. *Tafsīr asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1549.1

الحمد لله الكبير المتعال العظيم الذي بسط اسرار اسمائه الحسنی وصفاته العليا...

80. *Al-Abyāt fī faḍā'il al-fātiḥah wa-barakatihā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 1611.9

قيل انها العلي كرم الله اذا ما كتب مطلب الرزق...

81. *Fī manāfi' karīm raḥīm*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 1611.10

المحسن ثق بالذي خلق الخلائق كلها...

82. *Afḍal laylā alsinat li-laylat al-qadr*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 2083.4

84. *Khawāṣṣ al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 2083.3

الحمد لله المتوحد بعظمته وكبريائه المتفرد بعلمه المخزون المكنون من اسمائه...

98. *Majmū'ah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 380B

100. *Mimmā wujida min taṣnīf al-shaykh al-'ārif Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Būnī*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Amcazade Huseyn 348.1b

مما نقل من خط صاحب الامام قاضي القضاء ناصر الدين ابي عبد الله محمد...

116. *Shams al-ma'ārif* (unrelated to other works bearing that title)

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 923.2

بعد فاعلم ايها الاخ وفقك و ايانا لطاعته...

120. *al-Şarf fi 'ilm al-ḥarf*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2160.3

وهو حسنى الحمد لله الذي هदानا لهذا...

134. *Shifā' al-ṣudūr wa-marātib al-ḥudūr*

Univ. of Michigan MS Isl. 505

الحمد لله الذي امطر من سحائب رحمته على قلوب اوليائه مياة الحكم...

138. *Al-Ta'liqah*

Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 161

وقد فتح الله تعالى لي بالقيام على حل هذا المشكل وكشف الحجاب عن وجه الحق فيه...

144. *Kitāb al-wafq*

Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 1363.4

146. *Al-Laṭā'if al-asharah*

Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1486.2

هذا من تصنيف الشيخ ابو العباس احمد البوني مما نقل من خط الوزير تاج الدين بن المحدث...

155. *Mishkāt qulūb al-ārifin*

Leipzig MS Voller 228

وبعد فان جماعة من المحبين الصادقين الخالصين رغبوا الى ان ايبن لهم كيفية الرياضات...

161. *Taysir al-'awārif fi sharḥ Shams al-ma'ārif*

Escorial MS Derenbourg 946

الحمد لله الى ابداع انواع المخلوقات لما شاء من حكمته...

166. *Shams al-ma'ārif*

Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1533.2

الحمد لله الذي اطلع من مشارق ساء العارفين شمس المعرفة...

167. *Sirr al-ḥikam wa-jawāmi' al-kalim*

BnF MS ar. 2595.6

175. *Khafīyat al-Būnī fī ‘ilm al-ḥurūf*
Bursa İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi MS 16 Or 348.1

اعلم ان الحروف تنقسم الى ناري وهوائي ومائي وتراي...

184. *Mafātīḥ asrār al-ḥurūf wa-maṣābīḥ anwār al-zurūf*
BnF MS ar. 2660

الحمد لله الذي اطلع شمس المعارف في سماء العارف...

185. *Manāfi‘ al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1469.3

الحمد لله الذي اجرا على [؟] الضعيفة كتابه الكريم...

196. *Majmū‘ah*
Princeton University MS New Series no. 328.10

206. *Majmū‘ah*
Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi MS H. 110

212. *Risālah al-Khafīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2841.13

قال الشيخ المؤلف ابو العباس احمد البوني رحمة الله عليه سبيل عن [؟] علي بن ابي طالب...

213. *Risālah fī khawāṣṣ al-ayāt al-karīmah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 540.6b

فمن سورة البقرة قوله تعالى...

224. *Sharḥ sawāqīṭ al-fātīḥah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 928

اما بعد فريدة نبذة لطيفة ونسخة غريبة جمعتها لبعض اخوان الذين وصلان اليقين...

235. *Al-Tawassulāt al-ṭhanā‘īyah wa-al-tawajjuhāt al-‘aṭā‘īyah*
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Akseki 144.2

الحمد لله الذي رسم دقائق الاسرار والنورانيات والارواح المعارف الالهيات...

238. *Sayr nūr al-anwār wa-qabs sayr sirr al-asrār*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 75.2

242. *Ḥijāb ‘azīm*
Princeton University MS Garrett Additional no. 7

هذا حجاب عظيم...

256. *Tuḥfat al-ashshāq bi-ṭarīq al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 2117.6

258. *Ta‘bīr-i ru‘yah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Mahmud efendi 6242.1

اما بعد امدى معلوم اوله كه [؟] تعبير نامه...

260. *Majmū‘ah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1166H

261. *Majmū‘ah*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1147H

266. *Shams al-wāṣilīn wa-uns al-sā‘irīn*
Princeton University MS Garrett no. 4605Y

267. *Ad‘iyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Esad efendi 3481.11

273. *Risālah fī manāfi‘ al-Qur’ān*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwūf 1579

مما وجد من كلام الشيخ ابي العباس...

274. *Ḥijāb ‘azīm wa-ḥusn ḥusayn(?) li-daf‘ al-jinn wa-al-shayātīn*
BnF MS ar. 743.6

280. *Ad‘iyah*
Princeton University MS Third Series no. 864
286. *Al-Mabādi‘ wa-al-ghāyāt fī khawāss al-aḥruf wa-al-ayāt*
Kastamonu İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2912.1
287. *Al-Risālah fī Ad‘iyah al-ayyām*
Bursa İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi MS 347.2
288. *Al-Şaḥīfah al-mudhahhabah wa-al-awfāq al-mujarrabah*
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 2904.7
289. *Al-Sirr al-karīm al-khafī ‘an al-ta‘līm fī faḍl bi-ism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 70.2
302. *Fawā'id ismihi ta‘ālā al-Laṭīf*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 18
303. *Hizb al-Būnī*
Dār al-Kutub MS Fawā'id 118.20
304. *Jawāhir al-ḥurūf*
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Elmalı 2900.4
- اعلم ان النفس غير الروح والروح غير النفس...
305. *Khawāṣṣ ayāt kāf ḥā yā' ‘ayn ṣād*
Çorum Hasan Paşa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 596.3
- فقد سألتني بعض اصحابي اهل الرغبة [؟] من الطلبة عن السر الكرم...
306. *Kitāb al-khawāṣṣ*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 10

307. *Kitāb fī ma'rifat 'ilm al-uṣūl li-al-ḥurūf*
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Elmalı 2562.4

اعلم ان هذه الحروف فيها فرائد كثيرة...

308. *Kitāb fī ma'rifat 'ilm al-uṣūl li-al-ḥurūf Jawāhir al-ḥurūf Risālat Shams al-ma'ārif fī 'ilm al-ḥajar al-muntakhab min kitāb*
Princeton University MS Third Series no. 789

311. *Majmū'at al-khawāṣṣ*
İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Atatürk Kitaplığı MS 262

312. *Manāfi' al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1336.a

315. *Qabas al-anwār*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 97

كان سر الله تعالى في كتابه المبين انزل اسماء الحسنی...

318. *Qūt al-arwāḥ wa-miftāḥ al-afrāḥ (Sermons)*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwūf 247

الحمد لله الذي يتنزه في كماله غل التشبيه والتمثيل والمثال...

324. *R. fī manāfi' al-Quran*
Dār al-Kutub MS DK old 53

325. *Risālah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Fawā'id 53

326. *Risālah fī faḍl ayat al-kursī*
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS 7967.8

327. *Sadd(?) al-adhān 'an dhikr al-dukhān*

Dār al-Kutub MS Al-Ḥusaynī 105

328. *Sawābiḡ al-ni‘am wa-sawābiq al-karam*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwūf 90

338. *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-suḡhrá*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 75

فهذا شرح الاجوزة القهرمانية والاقاويل المبرهنة العزيزة...

341. *Tuḡfat al-aḡbāb wa-munyat al-anjāb*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taṣawwūf Mīm 99

اسرار الاسم الاعظم الحي القيوم ودعاية واية الكرسي...

342. *Tuḡfat al-mulūk fī ‘ilm ta‘bīr al-ru’yā*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ma‘ārif ‘āmmah Tal‘at 189

الرؤيا الصادقة على ثلاثة اوجه...

Appendix D: Al-Biṣṭāmī's works in manuscript

This list is of manuscript copies of works by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī that I encountered during the course of research for this project, and I include them here primarily for the purposes of facilitating future research. It is by no means a complete list of extant copies of al-Biṣṭāmī's works, nor are all the identifications certain. The reader will note that a handful of works are found in numerous copies. Al-Biṣṭāmī's commentary on al-Būnī's *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*, *Rashḥ adhwāq al-ḥikmah al-rabbānīyah* is nos. 360, 362, 370, 377, 378, and 395. Note that the texts here titled *Anmāṭ al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*—nos. 367, 368, 387, 389—may be related to *Rashḥ*. Other works in multiple copies are *Ad'iyah al-muntakhabah fī al-adwiyah al-mujarrabah*, nos. 350, 363, 364; *al-Durar al-fākhirah 'alá ramz al-shajarah al-nu'mānīyah*, nos. 357, 390, 391, 392, and 393; *Fawā'ih al-miskīyah fī al-fawātiḥ al-Makkīyah*, nos. 365, 366, and 383; *Mabāhij al-a'lām fī manāhij al-aqlām*, nos. 369, 376, and 394; and of course, al-Biṣṭāmī's letterist magnum opus, *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*, nos. 345, 352, 353, 356, 359, 372, 379, 380, 384, 385, and 386.

345. *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 533. Copied 0826/1423
151 fol., 25 lpp. 250x170 (185x118). **Autograph.**

Autograph Colophon, 151b, 0826/
Ijazah, 151b, 0837/

346. *Al-Zuhd al-fā'ih wa-al-nūr al-lā'ih*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf25.4. Copied 0829/1426

347. [*Al-Du'ā'*] *al-'Iddah li-kull bāsh wa-shaddah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 3503.2. Copied 0832/1428
7 fol. (40a-46b), 15 lpp. 177x133 (126x98). **Autograph.**

348. *Nazm al-sulūk fī musāmarah al-mulūk*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 3503.1. Copied 0832/1428
41 fol. (1b-40a). 177x133 (128x98). **Autograph.**
349. *Al-Ujālah fī ḥal al-anmāt al-ma'rūf bi-jam' Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Būnī*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 930.1. Copied 0836/1433, Cairo.
52 fol. (1a-52a), 25 lpp. 257x170 (195x1235). Syro-Egyptian naskh. Opening folia
damaged. Commentary on al-Būnī.

Colophon, 67b, 0836/1433
350. *Al-Ad'iyah al-muntakhabah fī al-adwiyah al-mujarrabah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Mahmud efendi 4228.1. Copied 0840/1436-7
38 fol. (1b-37b), 19 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh.
351. *Jannat al-ashbāḥ wa-tiryāq al-arwāḥ*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Mahmd efendi 4228.2. Copied 0840/1436-7
10 fol. (38b-47b), 19 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh.
352. *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2807. Copied 0841/1437, Cairo.
262 fol., 27 lpp. 175x100 (130x55). Syro-Egyptian naskh. Acephalous. Mentions that the
exemplar was audited before al-Biṣṭāmī in Cairo in 836/1432-3.

Colophon, 260a, 0841/1437
353. *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kadızade Mehmed 335/2. Copied 0869/1464-5 tpq
36 fol. (92b-129a), 19 lpp. 270x180 (190x130). Eastern naskh.
354. *Ka'bat al-asrār al-zāhirah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 1863/1. Copied 0869/1465 (1b-84a), 17 lpp.
180x120 (140x80). Small naskh with eastern tendencies.

Colophon, 84a, 0869/1465
355. *Risālah fī ma'rifat khawāṣṣ asmā' Allāh*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1446/2. Copied 0874/1469
16 fol. (64b-79b), 13 lpp. 183x138 (135x90). Bound with a copy of al-Būnī's *Laṭā'if al-
ishārāt.*
356. *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*

Chester Beatty MS Ar. 5076. Copied 844/1440
153 fol., 23 lpp. 243x178. Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 153a, 844/1440

357. *Al-Durar al-fākhīrah ‘alá ramz al-shajarah al-nu‘mānīyah*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1486.1. 15th-c.
22 fol. (1b-21a), 19 lpp. 178x138 (135x95). Syro-Egyptian naskh. Oriental laid paper.

358. *Al-Sirr al-makhzūn wa-al-‘ilm al-makhzūn(?)*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2954.4. 15th-c.
45 fol. (69b-103b), 19 lpp. 178x131 (145x93).

359. *Shams al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-hurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1556.4. 15th-c.
29 fol. (94b-122a), var lpp. 177x130. Excerpt/fragment.

360. *Rashh adhwāq al-hikmah al-rabbānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Kadizade Mehmed 333. Copied 0914/1509
151 fol., 15 lpp. 175x125 (120x75). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 151b, 0914/1509

361. *Fawā’ih al-miskīyah fī al-fawātih al-Makkīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Düğümlü baba 330. Copied 0949/1543
108 fol., 25 lpp. Naskh with eastern tendencies.

362. *Rashh adhwāq al-hikmah al-rabbānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1560. Copied 0952/1546
140 fol., 15 lpp. 230x160 (260x110). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 123b, 0952/1546
Patronage, 123b, 0952/1546

363. *Al-Ad‘iyah al-muntakhabah fī al-adwiyah al-mujarrabah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Ayasofya 3645.6. Copied 0966/1559
20 fol. (142a-161b), 25 lpp. 210x150 (136x95). Small naskh with eastern tendencies.

364. *Al-Ad‘iyah al-muntakhabah fī al-adwiyah al-mujarrabah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 377.3. Copied 0980
51 fol. (51a-101b), 17 lpp. 198x138 (146x87). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

365. *Fawā'ih al-miskīyah fī al-fawātiḥ al-Makkīyah*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 4963. Copied 0987, Istanbul.
151 fol., 23 lpp. 215x140 (155x80). Nasta'liq.
366. *Fawā'ih al-miskīyah fī al-fawātiḥ al-Makkīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 4160. Copied 0988/1580
97 fol., 19 lpp. 205x145 (125x80). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 97a, 0988/1580
367. *Anmāt al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 2095.23. Copied 0995/1586-7
3 fol. (156a-159a), 23 lpp. 280x1161 (185x82).
368. [*Anmāt*] *al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah* (?)
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 2095.22. Copied 0995/1586-7
10 fol. (146a-156a), 23 lpp. 280x161 (185x82). Eastern naskh.
369. *Mabāhij al-a'lām fī manāhij al-aqlām*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 540/3. Copied 1002/1593-4, Istanbul.
6 fol. (61b-65b), 35 lpp. 293x173 (213x102).
370. *Rashḥ adhwāq al-ḥikmah al-rabbānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 540.1. Copied 1002/1593-4, Istanbul.
61 fol. (1b-60b), 35 lpp. 293x173 (213x102). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
371. *Risālah fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hekimoğlu 540.4. Copied 1002/1593-4, Istanbul.
11 fol. (66a-96b). 293x173 (213x102).
372. *Shams al-āfāq fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fatih 3433.1. Copied 1051/1641-2 (or older)
111 fol., 21 lpp. 236x135 (175x86). Professional naskh. Illuminated headpiece.
373. *Al-Sharaf al-mujallad(?) fī bayān faḍl min ismihi Aḥmad wa-Muḥammad*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2745.3. 16th-c.
4 fol. (13b-16b), 13 lpp. 170x120 (115x75). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
374. *Fawā'ih(?) al-nuṣūṣ wa-jawāhir al-fuṣūṣ*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Nuruosmaniye 2843.2. 16th-c. Syro-Egyptian naskh.

375. *Khams rasā'il mu'tabarāh fi 'ilm al-jafr*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1443. 16th-c.
81 fol., 21 lpp. 255x155 (145x80). Nasta'liq. Acephalous.
376. *Mabāhij al-a'lām fi manāhij al-aqlām*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Yeni Cami 785.2. 16th-c.
24 fol. (81a-104b), 25 lpp. 273x173 (180x126). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
377. *Rashh adhwāq al-ḥikmah al-rabbānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1543.1. 16th-c.
3 fol. (3a-6b), 15 lpp. 208x145 (125x71). Professional Syro-Egyptian naskh.
Excerpt/fragment.
378. *Rashh adhwāq al-ḥikmah al-rabbānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Yeni Cami 785.1. 16th-c.
80 fol. (1a-80b), 25 lpp. 273x173 (180x126). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
379. *Shams al-āfāq fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1545. 16th-c.
186 fol., 27 lpp. 220x163 (165x86). Syro-Egyptian naskh. Acephalous.

Authorial Colophon, 180a, 0826/1422-3
380. *Shams al-āfāq fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Gotha MS Pertsch 1256. 16th-c. 208x155 (165x125).
381. *Sharḥ Hizb al-baḥr*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Sazeli tekkesi 93.1. 16th-c.
32 fol. (1b-33a), 19 lpp. Syro-Egyptian naskh.
382. *Shifā' al-mukhtār*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2745.2. 16th-c.
4 fol. (9b-13a), 13 lpp. 170x120 (115x75). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
383. *Fawā'ih al-miskīyah fi al-fawātiḥ al-Makkīyah*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1470. Copied 1009/1600-1
199 fol., 19 lpp. 203x125 (145x80). Naskh with eastern tendencies.
384. *Shams al-āfāq fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*

Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 23. Copied 1016/1607

385. *Shams al-āfāq fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1546.2. Copied 1064/1553-4
53 fol. (78b-131b), 25 lpp. 278x190 (185x125). Cramped naskh.
386. *Shams al-āfāq fi 'ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Carullah 1546.1. Copied 1064/1653-4
78 fol. (2a-78a), 25 lpp. 278x190 (185x125). Acephalous.
387. *Anmāṭ al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Ibni Mirza 42. Copied 1099/1688
8 fol., 19 lpp. 188x100 (145x63). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
- Authorial colophon, 7b, 0838/1435
Colophon, 8a, 1099/1688
388. *Al-farq bayn al-siḥr wa-'ilm al-ḥurūf*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Esad Efendi 3704.03. Copied 1149/1736-7
1 fol. (8a), 21 lpp. 191x136 (163x90). Naskh with eastern tendencies.
389. *Anmāṭ al-Lum'ah al-nūrānīyah*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Bağdatlı vehbi 985 . 18th-c.
16 fol., 23 lpp. 218x163 (160x97). Blocky naskh.
390. *Al-Durar al-fākhīrah 'alā ramz al-shajarah al-nu'mānīyah*
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 4035. Copied 1255/1838
113 fol., 15 lpp. 145x95 (110x65). Watermarked European paper.
391. *Al-Durar al-fākhīrah 'alā ramz al-shajarah al-nu'mānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 100.
20 fol., 18 lpp. 210 x 130.
392. *Al-Durar al-fākhīrah 'alā ramz al-shajarah al-nu'mānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 44.
32 fol., 21 lpp. 195 x 140.
393. *Al-Durar al-fākhīrah 'alā ramz al-shajarah al-nu'mānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ghaybiyāt Timūr 124.
140 fol., 21 lpp. 218 x 133.

394. *Mabāhij al-a'lām fī manāhij al-aqlām*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf50.

395. *Rashḥ adhwāq al-ḥikmah al-rabbānīyah*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 61.
158 fol.. 180x140.

Appendix E: Al-Kūmī's works in manuscript

The following is a list of of manuscript copies of works by Abū Ya'qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī that I encountered during the course of research for this project. It is by no means a complete list. I include it here to help facilitate future research on this figure who is obviously of great importance to the history of late-medieval lettrism. Two works are found in multiple copies: *Taysīr al-maṭālib wa-raqhbat al-ṭālib*, nos. 396, 397, and 399; and *al-Īmā' ilā 'ilm al-asmā' fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*, nos. 401, 402, and 403.

396. *Taysīr al-maṭālib wa-raqhbat al-ṭālib*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Laleli 1594.1. Copied 0818/1415-6
47 fol. (1a-46b), 15 lpp. 178x138 (123x90). Syro-Egyptian naskh.
397. *Taysīr al-maṭālib wa-raqhbat al-ṭālib*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Fatih 2600. Copied 0902/1496
69 fol., 17 lpp. 276x182 (200x128). Syro-Egyptian naskh.

Colophon, 69b, 0902/1496
398. *Risālat al-Huwa*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Resid efendi 608/3. 15th-c.
28 fol. (80b-108a), 19 lpp. 180x133 (136x104).
399. *Taysīr al-maṭālib wa-raqhbat al-ṭālib*
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 64. Copied 1061/1650-1
400. *Ḥāshiyah 'alā laṭīf al-ma'ānī fī 'ilm al-ḥurūf*
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2918.15. 17th-c.
23 fol. (157b-179b). 220x162. Nasta'liq.
401. *Al-Īmā' ilā 'ilm al-asmā' fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Hacı Ahmed Paşa 120.6. Copied 1212/1797-8
62 fol. (65a-126b), 21 lpp.

402. *Al-Īmā' ilá 'ilm al-asmā' fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwuf 1524.
57 fol., 21 lpp. 18x13.5.

403. *Al-Īmā' ilá 'ilm al-asmā' fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusná*
Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwuf 1954.
159 fol., 19 lpp. 210x150.

404. *Taysīr al-anwār wa-Jāmi' al-asrār*
Çorum Hasan Paşa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 596.1.
114 fol. (1b-114b), 15 lpp. 200x140 (140x60). Watermarked European paper.

Appendix F: Shelfmark/reference number directory

To cross-reference shelfmarks to the entries in Appendices A-E, simply find the shelfmark alphabetically (library name first) and then read across for the identifying number.

Amasya Beyazıt İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1019.1	322
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. fol. 80	1
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Or. oct. 2452.2	211
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS Spr. 892	246
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS We. 1210	188
Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS We. 159	263
Berlin Staatsbibliothek British Library MS Lbg. 103	15
Berlin Staatsbibliothek British Library MS Mq. 123	26
Berlin Staatsbibliothek British Library MS Or. oct. 3928.1	47
Berlin Staatsbibliothek British Library MS Or. oct. 3928.2	46
Berlin Staatsbibliothek British Library MS Or. oct. 3928.3	45
Berlin Staatsbibliothek British Library MS Or. oct. 3928.4	44
Berlin Staatsbibliothek British Library MS Pm. 80.4	86
Berlin Staatsbibliothek British Library MS We. 1733	99
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1336.a	312
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS 7965.4	282
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS 7967.8	326
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS Beyazid 1362	131
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS Beyazid 1377	11
Beyazid Halk Kütüphanesi MS Beyazid 1397.1	93
Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Alex Mawa'iz 1048b	34
Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Alex. Tasawwuf 3121j-2	190

Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Alex. Tasawwuf 5145 dāl	281
Bibliotheca Alexandrina MS Taṣawwūf 3121jīm.1	191
BN Tunis MS 6711	297
BN Tunis MS 7401	298
BN Tunis MS 9581	340
BN Tunis MS 9755	310
BnF MS ar. 1225	58
BnF MS ar. 1226	141
BnF MS ar. 2595.6	167
BnF MS ar. 2646	160
BnF MS ar. 2647	30
BnF MS ar. 2648	59
BnF MS ar. 2649	119
BnF MS ar. 2650	173
BnF MS ar. 2651	174
BnF MS ar. 2652	233
BnF MS ar. 2653	234
BnF MS ar. 2654	264
BnF MS ar. 2655	254
BnF MS ar. 2656	182
BnF MS ar. 2657	17
BnF MS ar. 2660	184
BnF MS ar. 6556	14
BnF MS ar. 743.6	274
BnF MS ar. 2658	37
Bodleian MS Digby or. 14	148
Bodleian MS Laud. or. 249	130
Bodleian MS Or. 443	135
British Library MS IO Bijapur 429	88
British Library MS Or. 3195	5

British Library MS Or. 4326.2	193
British Library MS Or. 4327	329
British Library MS Or. 9855	57
Bursa İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi MS 16 Or 348.1	175
Bursa İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi MS 347.2	287
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 3168.5	2
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4134	19
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4284	20
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4511.1	142
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4650	29
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4891	50
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 4942	183
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 5076	356
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 5297.1	97
Chester Beatty MS Ar. 5297.2	94
Çorum Hasan Paşa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2240.1	316
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Çorum Hasan Paşa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 596.1	404
Çorum Hasan Paşa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 596.3	305
Dār al-Kutub MS Al-Ḥusaynī 105	327
Dār al-Kutub MS DK old 53	324
Dār al-Kutub MS Fawā'id 118.20	303
Dār al-Kutub MS Fawā'id 53	325
Dār al-Kutub MS Ghaybīyāt Tīmūr 124	393
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 10	306
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 18	302
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 60.1	299
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 64	399
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 70.2	289
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 75.2	238

Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf 84	317
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 2	291
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 57	128
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 64	176
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 75	338
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 79	321
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Mīm 9	320
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 100	391
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 101	64
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 140	333
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 159	168
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 161	138
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 182	78
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 183	227
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 185	332
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 192	189
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 201	296
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 32	278
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Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 44	392
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Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 80	170
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 97	315
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf Ṭal'at 98	334
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf wa-al-asmā' Ḥalīm 7	56
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf wa-awfāq 238	339
Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf wa-awfāq 252	283
Dār al-Kutub MS Makḥṭūṭāt al-Zakīyah 278	300
Dār al-Kutub MS Ma'ārif 'āmmah Ṭal'at 189	342
Dār al-Kutub MS Shīn 63	344
Dār al-Kutub MS Tasawwūf 1993	7
Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwuf (Mīm?) 25.4	346
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Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwuf 1524	402

Dār al-Kutub MS Taşawwūf 1579	273
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Dār al-Kutub MS Wafq 140	301
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Dār al-Kutub MS Wafq 32	337
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Dār al-Kutub MS Wāw 6028	290
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Diyarbakır İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 772	293
Escorial MS Derenbourg 1480	40
Escorial MS Derenbourg 925	72
Escorial MS Derenbourg 943	54
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Escorial MS Derenbourg 944.2	103
Escorial MS Derenbourg 945	145
Escorial MS Derenbourg 946	161
Escorial MS Derenbourg 979	32
Escorial MS Derenbourg 981	77
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Gotha MS Pertsch 1256	380
Gotha MS Pertsch 1262	270

Gotha MS Pertsch 55	250
İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Atatürk Kitaplığı MS 262	311
Kastamonu İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2912.1	286
Kastamonu İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 3172	294
Kastamonu İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 3505	309
Khalidi MS Ādāb Sharʿīyah 775.1	271
Khalidi MS Ādab sharʿīyah 921	118
Khalidi MS Mutafarriqāt 481	202
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Akseki 144.2	235
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Akseki 144.4	236
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Burdur 1318.5 ..	319
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Elmalı 2562.4 ...	307
Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS Elmalı 2900.4 ...	304
Konya Karahtay Yusufağa Kütüphanesi MS 6548	330
Leiden MS Or. 1233	39
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Leiden MS Or. 8371.1	172
Leipzig MS Voller 221.5	112
Leipzig MS Voller 228	155
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1113	126
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1443	375
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1445	153
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1446.1	76
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1446/2	355
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1447	65

Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1448.1	215
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1449.1	108
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1451	230
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1452.1	123
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1454.1	150
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1469.3	185
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1470	383
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1486.1	357
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1486.2	146
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 1502	129
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2918.15	400
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 2954.4	358
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 45 Hk 1450.2	149
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 4963	365
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 4978.1	214
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS 4978.2	265
Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi MS Ze 188.6	180
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 06 Hk 4604	343
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 1363.4	144
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 1517	331
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 2904.7	288
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 3091	133
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 4035	390
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS 50 Gül-Kara 14	237
Milli Kütüphane-Ankara MS Ali Emiri Arabi 2820.1	257
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Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Alte Fond 162a	132
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Alte Fond 402b	115
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Princeton University MS Garrett Additional no. 7	242

Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1147H	261
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Princeton University MS Garrett no. 1380Y.1	101
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