The Occultist Encyclopedism of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bistāmī

In modern scholarship, the Antiochene muḥaddith, occultist, and littérateur ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bistāmī (d. 858/1454) is better known to Ottomanists than Mamlukists, thanks to the influence his voluminous writings exerted in Ottoman courtly milieux during and after his lifetime.¹ In what follows, however, he is discussed mainly in a Mamluk context, with regard to an account he penned of his education and initiation into the occult “science of letters and names” (ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmāʾ) as a young man traveling in Cairo, Alexandria, and Damascus and environs during the first decades of the ninth/fifteenth century; and with reference to his book on that science entitled Shams al-āfāq fi ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq. It is argued that Shams al-āfāq is an “encyclopedic” work similar in spirit to much Mamluk-era literary production, and was an effort to make the forbiddingly...
esoteric science of letters more accessible to the cosmopolitan learned classes and political elites of the period. Its occult content, however, imposed special requirements on the author regarding his qualifications to synthesize such knowledge—requirements he attempted to satisfy through an account of his occult training that combines attention to formal book-transmission practices and descriptions of various visionary encounters with the Prophet and other spiritual figures. More broadly, it is argued that al-Bisṭāmī’s writings indicate that the Mamluk cities of the late eighth/fourteenth and early ninth/fifteenth centuries were home to a thriving occult scene that recently was being transformed by elite patronage and increased interest among cosmopolitan intellectuals, and that his account of his own readerly initiation into lettrism reflected the new, decidedly bookish occultism that had been taking root in the learned culture of the period. The conclusion discusses the importance of these developments in relation to other trends in the late-Mamluk intellectual scene, particularly with regard to manuscript culture, and to the longer history of the occult sciences in Islam.

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

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

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


9See footnote 1, supra.

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ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bīstāmī

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muhammad ibn Ṭūlūn ibn Ahmad—al-Ḥanafī madhhabūn al-Bīstāmī mashrabūn, as he often styled himself—was a child of Antioch who sought an education in the cities of Bilād al-Shām and Egypt, beginning in Aleppo. As a young man he joined the tariqah Bīstāmiyyah, less a formal Sufi order than a network of Sufi shaykhs and urban (largely Aleppan) intellectuals from notable families, and it is from this association that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān took the nisbah by which he is best known. Bīstāmī claims to have begun his occult education under the tutelage of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥalabī al-Ṭūlūnī (d. 807/1405), leader of the group, and occultism may have been a regular topic of interest to members. In addition to acquiring much in the way of hadith, theology, Sufism, Hanafī fiqh, and mathematics, Bīstāmī vigorously pursued further knowledge of the occult sciences, particularly from teachers in and around Damascus, Alexandria, and Cairo during the first part of the ninth/fifteenth century, as discussed below.

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

Al-Bīstāmī was a prolific author. Ismail Paşa credits him with forty-three works, and Brockelmann with thirty-six, but in his Durrat tāj al-rasāʾil wa-

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11 Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 3b.
13 Binbaş, Intellectual Networks, passim.
ghurrat minhāj al-wasāʾil—an intellectual autobiography al-Bistāmī penned in 845/1441–42—he claims to have authored more than 180 texts. Several of these must have been short treatises, though some of his surviving works are quite lengthy. No doubt all were written in the intensely florid, sajʿ-dominated Arabic interspersed with verse for which he was well known and admired. While he wrote on topics ranging from hadith, to poetry, to mathematics, to the manāqib of various Sufi figures, to medicine and the Black Death, he was best known during and after his lifetime for his works on the science of letters and names, eschatological predictions, and calendrics and historical cycles—topics that were deeply interrelated in the minds of al-Bistāmī and many of his contemporaries. As Fleischer has demonstrated, his writings on the latter topics would prove influential in Ottoman milieux well into the tenth/sixteenth century, particularly regarding attempts to ideologically position the Ottoman sultan Süleyman the Lawgiver (r. 926–74/1520–66) as a millennial sovereign destined to rule the world at the end of time.

Shams al-Āfāq fī ʿIlm al-Ḥurūf wa-al-Awfāq as an “Encyclopedic” Work

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

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


17 Fleischer, “Mahdi and Millennium” and “Ancient Wisdom,” both passim.

18 For the colophon and the ijāzah see Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 151b.

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

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

Ibid., fol. 32a.

For recent scholarship on the relationship between the Shi`ī and Sufi iterations of lettrism, see Michael Ebstein, Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn Al-ʿArabī and Ismā`īlī Tradition (Leiden, Boston, 2014).
These elements are familiar from earlier lettrist writings, particularly al-Bûnî’s, on which al-Bîstâmî draws heavily.  

Much as in Kabbalah, esotericism had been central to the Western-Sufi lettrism of Ibn al-ʿArabî and al-Bûnî’s generation as both a bâṭînî hermeneutics and a social practice, and both those masters had stressed the need for utmost discretion in transmitting what they viewed as initiated understandings of scripture and powerful praxes for spiritual achievement and transformation of the manifest world that would be destructive in the hands of the vulgus. The present author has argued elsewhere that, in Egypt and Bilâd al-Shâm, early readers of al-Bûnî’s works—which were far more explicit than Ibn al-ʿArabî’s with regard to occult-practical aspects of lettrism such as talismans—heeded al-Bûnî’s wishes by mostly restricting the circulation of his texts to secretive circles of Sufi adepts for roughly a century after his death, such that only in the eighth/fourteenth century did his writings begin to become available to other communities of readers, becoming increasingly popular through the ninth/fifteenth. 

The writings of Ibn al-ʿArabî, in which lettrism is a persistent theme, of course became immensely popular and influential during the same period. This gradual emergence of lettrism from the confines of esotericist Sufi reading communities was an important condition of possibility for the creation of Shams al-āfāq, and indeed for al-Bîstâmî’s career as a courtier-occultist. It cleared the way for him to undertake the project of reframing lettrism for the cosmopolitan learned and courtly classes of the later Mamluk period, a project that entailed realignments of both the epistemic and social bases of lettrism.

That the proliferation of lettrist texts in the Mamluk cities in the lead-up to al-Bîstâmî’s time was not limited to al-Bûnî and Ibn al-ʿArabî’s writings is clear from a major list of books on lettrism that al-Bîstâmî includes in the introduction to Shams al-āfâq. The list includes 238 titles of books he claims to have read on the science of letters and names or matters related thereto (see Appendix). It comprises numerous works by figures al-Bîstâmî cites frequently throughout Shams al-āfâq, such as al-Bûnî and the turn-of-the-ninth/fifteenth-century shaykh...
Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī (about whom more below); famous works on magic such as Ghāyat al-hakīm (Picatrix) and the book of Tum-Tum al-Hindī; works attributed to luminaries of the early Islamic period such as Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Thābit ibn Qurrah, and of the Hellenistic past such as Plato, Alexander the Great, et alia; several books (asfār) attributed to prophets, e.g., Sifr Ādam, Sifr Idrīs, Sifr Nūḥ, etc.; and scores of other titles. These works were “little to be found” at the time, al-Bisṭāmī asserts, but however rare the individual volumes, their sheer number suggests that there was already a considerable audience in the Mamluk cities for occult-scientific literature.

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


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

Lettrism had not been entirely overlooked by encyclopedist writers prior to al-Bistāmī, thanks in large part to the growing availability of al-Būnī’s works. Ibn Manẓūr briefly praises al-Būnī in the introduction to Lisān al-ʿarab, and even claims to have successfully experimented with lettrist procedures. Writing within esotericist restraints, however, he refrains from going into detail, on the grounds that the secrets of the letters are too dangerous for those whose minds are not prepared. Al-Nuwayrī includes in Nihāyat al-ʿarab some brief excerpts from al-Būnī’s major lettrist opus Latāʿif al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyāt, though he relegates them to the final subsection of the fourth out of five books that comprise his work. The primary topic of the fourth book is plants, and the excerpts from al-Būnī appear as part of a subchapter on “What can be done using occult properties” (fīmā yufʿal bi-al-khāṣīyah). The Bunian material—instructions for a few simple talismans—is entirely denatured, divorced from the elaborate Sufi cosmology that it grows out of in the original, and is treated as little more than a curiosity. Al-Būnī is also mentioned by al-Bistāmī’s older contemporary al-Qalqashandi, in a subchapter of Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā on “The knowledge of book collections and the types of sciences” (maʿrifah bi-khazāʾin al-kutub wa-anwāʾ al-ʿulūm), and under the further subheadings of “The sciences current among the learned, the best-known books regarding them, and their authors” (dhikr al-ʿulūm al-mutadawwalah bayna al-ʿulamāʾ wa-maṣḥūr al-kutub al-muṣannafah fīhā wa-muʿallifuhā), “the natural
science” (al-ʿilm al-ṭabīʿī), and “the science of sorcery and the science of the letter and magic squares” (ʿilm al-siḥr wa-ʿilm al-harf wa-al-awfāq). He names three of al-Būnī’s works alongside Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Al-Sīr al-maktūm, the Ghāyat al-ḥakīm, a Kitāb al-Jamharah attributed to one al-Khawārazmī, and the Timaeus (which he attributes to Aristotle rather than Plato).36 That al-Qalqashandi associates lettrism so closely with sorcery (siḥr)—typically a term of severe disapprobation in Sunni discourse—suggests that he may have had a rather low opinion of the topic.

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

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

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

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

36 Al-Qalqashandi, Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā (Cairo, 1908–19), 1:465. Incidentally, the Kitāb al-Jamharah is no. 198 on al-Bisṭāmī’s list of books on lettrism. He does not list the other works al-Qalqashandi mentions, though no. 20, Al-Sīr al-manẓūm fī al-Sīr al-maktūm, is likely a commentary on al-Rāzī’s work.

37 Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 2b.
name—and these are but a drop of its superabundant sea, a dribble from the raincloud.\textsuperscript{38}

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39}Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 2b–3a.

\textsuperscript{40}For al-Būnī’s most explicit discussions of talismans based on mathematical magic squares see his \textit{Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-ʿulwīyāt} (as found in numerous MSS, e.g., BnF MS arabe 2657, BnF MS arabe 2658, Berlin MS or. Fol. 80, and others), passim.

\textsuperscript{41}Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 2b.

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al-tahqiq), which is to say inspired knowledge. As discussed below, he grounds the general claim of Muhammadan inspiration in a series of specific events and spiritual experiences in the narrative of his initiation into letrism included in the second recension of the work. The claim is important insofar as it grounds a theme that runs through Shams al-afāq of book-learning and mystical inspiration as the twin pillars of occult knowledge, an innovative notion relative to prior letrists such as al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī. The prophetic agency that he claims propels the project also points to the eschatological implications of the unveiling of letrist knowledge that al-Bīstāmī aims to achieve in his work.

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

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

Ibid.
and the healing invocations and the all-encompassing remedies, it would be as if it were shouted from a distant place and behind a curtain of iron.\textsuperscript{43}

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

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

\textsuperscript{43} Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 7a.

\textsuperscript{44} Numerous transmissions and variants of the hadith can be found. See, for example, \textit{Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī}, nos. 3650 and 3651 (the second and third entries in \textit{Bāb fadāʾil aṣḥāb al-nabī}).


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

\textsuperscript{47} Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom,” 238.
Al-Bištāmī’s efforts were a crucial part of the transitioning of lettrism from the confines of esotericist Sufi reading communities into a broader readership among the Mamluk era’s new class of scholar-bureaucrats—who often also were involved in Sufism as well, whether from standpoints of literary curiosity or active involvement in then-consolidating Sufi tariqahs such as the Shadhiliyyah or Qadiriyyah—and even into the courts of ruling military elites. It is important to note, however, that Shams al-āfāq represents a culmination of that process rather than its inception. It is clear from al-Nuwayrī and al-Qalqashandi’s mentions of al-Būnī and lettrism that the science had already gained a degree of visibility among learned audiences. As for ruling elites, al-Bištāmī himself testifies to the sultan al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq’s (r. 784–801/1382–99, with a brief interruption in 791/1389) interest in lettrism, noting that a number of lettrists at the sultan’s court had dedicated books on the topic to the sultan, presumably in return for his patronage. In Naẓm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk, al-Bištāmī states:

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

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

Among them [the books] were Kitāb al-Kanz al-bāhir fī sharḥ ĥurūf al-Malik al-Zāhir by our shaykh and imam, the shaykh, the imam, the master of his age and singular one of his time Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī al-Mālikī, may God sanctify his innermost being. Kitāb Lawāmiʿ al-burūq fī salṭanat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Barqūq by the shaykh, the imam, the master Abī Muḥammad Makhlūf ibn ʿAlī ibn Maymūn al-Ḥintawī(?) al-Jannātī al-Mālikī, may God enlighten his innermost being. And

⁴⁹ The vocalization of al-Ḥintawī is uncertain. The present author has been unable thus far to locate this figure in the standard biographical sources, even despite the unusual combination of
the shaykh and great master Sayyid ʿIzz al-Dīn Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī, may God enlighten his innermost being, wrote for him [Barqūq] a comprehensive book [kitāban jāmiʿan], though I never examined it with satisfactory care despite the length of my stay in Cairo and my familiarity with many of its exquisite qualities. Among them [Akhlāṭī’s books] were Kitāb al-Kanz al-makhzūn and other such among so many that if I mentioned them all the book would grow in length and we would abandon brevity for length and logorrhea.⁵₀

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

Two of the lettrist authors al-Bisṭāmī mentions as having been at Barqūq’s court are of particular interest. The first is Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Kūmī (fl. 810/1407⁵²), a Sufi lettrist from Tunis a number of whose works are still extant in manuscript.⁵³ As we will see below, al-Bisṭāmī is particularly at pains to affiliate himself with al-Kūmī, whom he discusses and praises at length in Shams al-āfāq. The second is Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Akhlāṭī (d. 799/1397), a physician, alchemist, and lettrist who loomed large in the occult scene of late eighth/fourteenth-century Cairo, but who is not much discussed in Shams al-āfāq, and whom al-Bisṭāmī seems to distance himself from somewhat in the excerpt above from Durrat āṭ taj al-rasāʾīl.

names Makhlūf ibn ‘Ali ibn Maymūn.
⁵² Per Carl Brockelmann, Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur, S2:358.
⁵³ See, for example, al-Kūmī’s “Taysīr al-maṭālib wa-raghbat al-ṭālib” (Süleymaniye Küütüphanesi MS Laleli 1594/1); “Risālat al-Hū” (Süleymaniye Küütüphanesi MS Resid efendi 608/3); “ʿAl-Īmā’ ilā ‘ilm al-asmāʾ fi sharḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā (Dâr al-Kutub MS 1524 Taṣawwuf).
Al-Akhlāṭī lived in Cairo in the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century, having come to the city at the behest of Barqūq in order to treat (unsuccessfully) the sultan’s ailing son. He is dealt with only tersely in the Arabic biographical dictionaries, but is considered at greater length in Persian and Ottoman-Turkish sources, which Binbaş discusses in detail. 44 Nothing is certain regarding al-Akhlāṭī’s early life. Ibn Ḥajar states that he was raised in Iran, and Binbaş raises the possibility that he was related to the Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Husayn al-Akhlāṭī who attended some audition sessions for Ibn al-ʿArabi’s Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah that were presided over by the great shaykh himself in Damascus in 633/1235–36. Ibn Ḥajar reports that after arriving in Cairo al-Akhlāṭī never left his house on the Nile but received many visitors there, including Barqūq himself, who spoke from atop his horse while al-Akhlāṭī responded from his rooftop—a shockingly informal exchange judging by Ibn Ḥajar’s tone. He further claims that al-Akhlāṭī was involved in alchemy and associated with Shi’ism (al-rafḍ), that he did not attend the Friday prayer, and that some of his followers believed he was the mahdī. 45 Among al-Akhlāṭī’s disciples in Cairo were such visitors to the city as the aforementioned Ṣāʾin al-Dīn Turkah, Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, and Badr al-Dīn al-Simāwī—the latter of whom he seems to have had a particularly significant impact on. Though al-Bisṭāmī arrived too late to have studied with al-Akhlāṭī, he certainly would have known of him—and other occultists at Barqūq’s court—through his own relationships with al-Akhlāṭī’s students, his fellow ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ.

A few works in Persian by al-Akhlāṭī on lettrism and alchemy survive in manuscript, which Binbaş describes as “rather short and instructive treatises instead of long theoretical pieces.” 46 Among them is Risālah-yi jafr-i jāmiʿah, “a short manual on how to write a book of jafr,” a prophetic-divinatory text that would be commissioned of a practitioner by a ruler to enable him to have knowledge of things to come. The crafting of such a powerful book was no small affair. Only a sayyid (a descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad) could accomplish it, per al-Akhlāṭī, and doing so required “one thousand and one days in seclusion” and a strict regimen of fasting and writing. 47 The kitāban jāmiʿan that al-Bisṭāmī refers to al-Akhlāṭī having written for Barqūq indeed may have been such a book of jafr, though perhaps it was merely a rendition of the instructions for making one. In either case it seems strange, at first glance, that al-Bisṭāmī goes out of his way to mention that he never took the time to truly read this book, despite his lengthy stay(s) in

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46 Binbaş, Intellectual Networks, 152.
47 Ibid.
Cairo. The explanation may lie in the fact that al-Akhlāṭī’s star pupil, Badr al-Dīn al-Simāwī, who at one time was chief judge for the Ottoman army, was a spiritual leader of a millenarian rebellion against the Ottoman state, resulting in his execution in 818/1416. Fleischer suggests that al-Bisṭāmī’s close association with Badr al-Dīn necessitated that he retreat to the Mamluk territories during these troubles to escape any negative repercussions. A similar sense of caution may have inspired him to de-emphasize his relationship to al-Akhlāṭī, and to instead favor a narrative of himself as an inheritor and interpreter of al-Kūmī and other Sufis’ teachings on the science of letters and names.

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

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

60 Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 16bff.
I took [knowledge of] the science of letters and magic squares, through the tongue of wisdom and tastings, from the teacher of the horizons, the shaykh, the imam, the knower of God and sign unto God, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya’qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī al-Mālikī, may God give him to drink from the pools of kindness and make him to dwell in the gardens of Paradise. He took from the shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Duhhān. He took from the shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Khāmī [or al-Jāmī], and he took from the shaykh Abū al-‘Azā’im Māḍī. He took from the shaykh, the pole, the helper, the unique one, the gatherer ... Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhili. He took from the shaykh, the pole, the helper, the unique one, the gatherer Abū Muḥammad Ṭālib ibn Šāhi al-Raḥmān al-Madanī. He took from pole after pole to the Imam Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī. 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).\(^61\)

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

When I arrived on the scene in Alexandria in the year 811 I read the book Taysīr al-maṭālib in the presence of the shaykh the imam Abū Muḥammad Ṭālib al-Raḥmān al-Maghribī, the imam of the al-ʿArabī Mosque there. He read it in the presence of its author the shaykh, the imam, the gnostic, the learned one, the teacher of his age and the tongue of his time Abū Muḥammad Ṭālib Allāh [ibn] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya’qūb al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī, may God consecrate his innermost being.\(^62\)

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

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\(^{61}\)Ibid., fol. 9a.

\(^{62}\)Ibid., fol. 9b. Though al-Biṣṭāmī’s use of akhadhtu implies face-to-face contact with al-Kūmī, it is possible that his claim to have “taken” from al-Kūmī “through the tongue of wisdom and tastings” implies that their meeting was spiritual rather than physical.
absolute, of course, as al-Bisṭāmī is still highlighting his participation in book-transmission practices featuring the circulation of texts between human and written media, but it marks a transition from an ancient way of transmitting knowledge to a more recent one, a transition that renders legitimate al-Bisṭāmī’s further acts of appropriation and written synthesis in *Shams al-āfāq*.

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

In the year 815 when I entered the city of Damascus (may God protect it) I heard—from the shaykh, the imam, the gnostic, the jurist, the trustworthy one, the continuator of the scholars, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Musā‘id ibn Sārī ibn Mas’ūd ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Raḥmat al-Ḥawārī al-Ḥimyarī, 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-Ẓāhir* and the book *Iẓhār al-rumūz wa-ibdāʿ al-kunūz* and the treatise *Al-Hū*. He [Musā‘id] had read them in the presence of their author the shaykh the imam Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad al-Kūmī. In it [the reading session, the village?] I saw the Pole of the Levant. And I saw the Messenger of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him) in the year 815 in a dream in Damascus: he was standing, combing his beard (God’s blessings and peace be upon him). I also saw him a second time that night in a dream.65

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


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

65Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 9b.

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

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

When I was in Cairo (may God Most High protect it from His overpowering punishment) in the year 807 I read, in the presence of the shaykh the imam Abū ʿAbd Allāh ʿIzz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Jamāʾah al-Kinānī al-Shāfiʿī al-Dimashqī (may God have mercy on him), the book Qabs al-anwār wa-jāmiʿ 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 ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn Jamāʾah, the book Al-Lumʿah al-nūrānīyah fī al-awrād al-rabbānīyah and others like that of the wondrous sciences and strange subtleties.67

The identity of the shaykh who presided over the readings is noteworthy. ʿIzz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Jamāʾah (d. 819/1416–17) was a scion of the Ibn Jamāʾah scholarly dynasty, and his immediate forebears had served for three generations in some of the highest civilian offices of Mamluk Cairo and Jerusalem, and also were known for their devotion to Sufism. ʿIzz al-Dīn Muḥammad’s great-grandfather, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 733/1333), served as the Shafiʿi grand qadi of Cairo and shaykh al-shuyūkh of the Sufi associations on and off between 690/1291 and 727/1327, and his grandfather, ʿIzz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz (d. 767/1366), and paternal uncle, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (d. 790/1388), had similarly illustrious careers.68 He was also an important teacher of the noted historian Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852/1449). Although the Ibn Jamāʾah family’s power in Cairo waned during ʿIzz 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

67 Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 9b.
the *nisbah* al-Nābulusī. ʿAbd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), one of the great interpreters of both Ibn al-ʿArabī and the mystic poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ, was in fact a distant relation of ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad.⁶⁹ Notably, as Knysh has documented, Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamāʿah once issued an extremely harsh condemnation of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s esotericist masterpiece *Fuṣūs al-ḥikam*, denying the author’s claim that the text was divinely inspired, declaring that Iblīs was its true source, and “advis[ing] the ruler that all copies of the Fusus and other writings containing similar statements be destroyed in order to protect the community from a great temptation.”⁷⁰ The contrasting attitudes of the two Ibn Jamāʿahs—over the space of a few generations—is credible evidence of a shift during that time toward the wider acceptance of al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī’s teachings.

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

When al-Bistāmī’s account in *Shams al-āfāq* proceeds to 808/1405–6, we find him, presumably still in Cairo, reading four works with the shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allâh Yaʾish ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yusuf ibn Sammāk al-Umawī al-Andalusī, *Kayfiyat al-ittifāq fī tarkīb al-awfāq*, *Lawāmiʿ al-taʿrīf fī maṭāliʿ al-taṣrīf*, *Al-Mawahhib al-rabbānīyah fī asrār al-rūḥānīyah*, and *Al-Istinṭāqāt*; he also notes having heard *Kayfiyat al-ittifāq* with Yaʾish’s disciple Abū ṭāhir Muḥammad al-Miṣrī. Again marking the transition between oral/aural and book-transmission, he traces the *isnād* from Yaʾish back through a classic Iraqi Sufi line that includes such figures as ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī, Junayd, Maʿrūf al-Karkhī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and of course the Prophet. Though the Andalusī Yaʾish serves as al-Bistāmī’s


⁷²Ibid., fol. 25a, for example.
point of entry to this chain, its function in terms of al-Bistāmī's attempts to position himself as an inheritor of Sufi knowledge may be to establish his bona fides with regard to the “sober,” shariʿah-minded Sufi tradition associated with figures such as Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) and al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910). This tradition had long been dominant in Egyptian Sufism, and by the ninth/fifteenth century existed in an sometimes-uneasy relationship with the western strain of Sufism represented by figures such as Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Shādhili, with which lettrism was most strongly associated.

Al-Bistāmī goes on to list a welter of further books and authorities with whom he interacted in 808/1405–6, giving the impression of ceaseless learning and initiatic activity. He seems to claim to have taken a number of books from Tāj al-Dīn Ibn al-Durayhim: Ghāyat al-mughnim fī al-ism al-aʿẓam, Kanz al-durar fī ḥurūf awāʿil al-suwar, Sayr al-ṣarf fī sīr al-ḥarf, and Tāʾ al-taṣrīf wa-ḥallat al-taʿrīf. This assertion is problematic, however, given that Ibn al-Durayhim—who indeed is remembered as a master of lettrism, among other topics—is commonly recorded to have died in 762/1361; such that perhaps he means to say that he took these books from one of Ibn al-Durayhim’s students. With one Sharaf al-Dīn al-Baghdādī he reads three books by Sharaf al-Dīn’s teacher Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Mīnkālī al-ʿAlāmī, Kashf al-bayān fī maʿrifat ḥawādith al-zamān, Al-Bāqīyāt al-ṣāliḥāt fī burūz al-ummahāt, and Al-Sīr al-maṣān wa-ʿilm al-maknūn. He furthermore reads the aforementioned work written for Barqūq by Abū Muḥammad Makhlūf ibn ‘Alī ibn Maymūn al-Hintawī, Al-Lawāmiʿ al-burūq fī salṭanat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Barqūq, which he reads with its author. Finally, on the authority of the shaykh Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid al-Dimashqī, he reads two works by al-Dimashqī’s teacher Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥanafi al-Qudsī, Kashf al-ishārāt al-ṣūfīyah wa-nashr al-bishārāt al-ismīyah al-muḥammadiyāh and Al-Manḥ al-wahhābīyah al-rabbānīyah fī al-milḥ al-ismīyah al-muḥammadiyāh.

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

73Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 10a–b.
74For example, the tarjama in Khayr al-Dīn Ziriklī, Al-ʿĀlām: Qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-al-nisāʾ min al-ʿarab wa-al-mustashriqīn (Beirut, 1980), 5:6.
In the first event, in 807/1404–5, al-Bistāmī dreams that he attends a reading of al-Shādhilī’s great supererogatory liturgy, Ḥizb al-bahr, which has long been credited with having various powers of healing and benediction. The reading is presided over by the shaykh Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Kūrānī (d. 768/1367)—a Sufi of Kurdish origin who was an important figure in Egyptian Sufism many decades before al-Bistāmī arrived—and occurs at a site in dream-Cairo parallel to the waking city, the miḥrāb at Qanāṭir al-Sabāʿ. When he awakes al-Bistāmī finds he has memorized the poem and “witnessed the power of its secrets.” From that point forward his soul longs to audition the poem in a line of transmission back to al-Shādhilī. It seems that he remains nineteen years in this state of longing, until “the hand of divine wisdom and eternal gnosis” guides him to a meeting with one Tāj al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad al-Miṣrī al-Shādhilī. Al-Bistāmī 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-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (who, al-Bistāmī has told us elsewhere in the book, took the science of letters from al-Būnī), recording his having read/heard the work with al-Shādhilī. He “hears” the work from that codex and thus joins the chain of transmission:

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

for everything that he could transmit. To God belongs grace and charity. \(^{76}\)

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

> In the wake of my auditioning of that mighty *ḥizb* I saw the Messenger of God (God’s blessings and peace be upon him). It was in Cairo in the last part of Dhū al-Ḥijjah of 826. He was seated prominently in a house, and when I saw him I said, “O Messenger of God, speak of the discourse [*lisān*] of the Shādhilīs [i.e., *Ḥizb al-baḥr*].” He pointed to [the letter] *bāʾ* emphatically, and it was as eloquent an explanation as if he had spoken. I understood that he alluded to *bāʾ* as the union of the mystery of being and the mystery of the *logos*. And my breast opened and my heart expanded from the sublime beauty of his delicate brow and the luminosity of his splendid complexion that is the *qiblah* of all desires and the *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 li bi-al-kalâm ‘alā lisān al-Shādhiliyah*].” And he said to me, “I shall write for you a proclamation.” I awoke from the sleep blameless. God had made of it [the dream] a genuine *ta’wil* and a truthful discourse. And those sublime sciences and beautiful mysteries—verily I took [the knowledge of] their lettrist subtleties, numerical cryptograms, combinatorial benefits, isolated and combinatorial

\(^{76}\)Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 10b.
workings [i.e., working with single letters or conjoined ones], and other such things from among the advantageous uses and greater goals. [All this] by means of the letters of their speech, the clues to their puzzles and the signposts to their treasures, and the chapters of their verses and the forms of their outermost limits. [All this] on the authority of the shaykh of shaykhs, the basis of the firmly-rooted foundations (al-thābit li-qawā'id al-rusūkh), He who unveiled the structure of the letters prior to the coming into being of the cosmic conditions of existence (wujūd kawniyat al-zurūf). 77

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

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

Conclusion

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

77 Chester Beatty MS 5076, fol. 10b–11a.
of Sufi adepts. That this redounded to his benefit as someone who made a career of advising on lettrism and related topics to Mamluk and Ottoman elites speaks only to his divine election to the role of revelator, or so al-Bisṭāmī would have us think. In a period replete with mahdīs, and with the hijrī millennium an impending—if not quite near—event, this was his small but significant part in the closing acts of the cosmic drama.

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

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


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

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

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

82 Hekimoğlu 533, fol. 151b.


Appendix: Al-Bistāmī’s Occult Booklist in Shams al-āfāq fi ‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq

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

1. Shams maṭāliʿ al-qulūb wa-badr ṭawālīʿ al-ghuyūb
2. Nūr anwār al-qulūb wa-asrār al-ghurūb (al-ghuyūb)
3. Kaʿbat al-asrār wa-ʿArafāt al-anwār
4. Al-Sirr al-khaṭf wa-al-jawhar al-ʿali
5. Sajanjal al-arwāḥ wa-nuqūsh al-alwāḥ
7. Al-Sirr al-khaṭf fī ‘ilm al-ātā (al-ʿilm al-ālī)
8. Qāf al-anwār wa-jīm al-asrār
9. Ṭilsam al-ashbāḥ fī kanz al-arwāḥ
10. Latāʾif al-asmāʾ fī ishārāt al-musammā
11. Sīn al-asrār wa-nūr al-anwār (Ṣīn al-asrār wa-nūn al-anwār)
13. Hall al-rumūz fī faṭḥ al-kunūz
15. Latāʾīf al-ʿayāt wa-nuqūsh al-bayyināt
16. Nayl al-ishrāq fī ‘ilm al-awfāq

*Confusingly, however, he mistakenly notes for many of them that they are mentioned by al-Būnī, by which he almost certainly means al-Bistāmī!*
17. Kanz al-alwāḥ fī sīr al-afrāḥ
18. Laṭāʾif al-khāfiyyah fī al-sārār al-ʿĪsāʾiyyah
19. Ḥadāʾiq al-asrār fī ḥaqāʾiq al-musammā al-ḥusnā
20. Al-Durr al-manẓūm fī al-sīr al-maktūm
22. Tanzil al-arwāḥ fī qawālib al-ashbāḥ
23. Sirr al-asrār wa-baṣāʾir al-anwār
24. Yāʾ (Tāʾ) fī al-taṣrīf wa-hullat al-taʿrīf
25. Sirr al-jamāl fī al-anwār al-jalāl
26. Al-Nasamāt al-fāʾiḥah fī asrār al-Fāṭihah
27. Fakk al-rumūz al-suryānīyah fī fatḥ al-kunūz al-furqānīyah
28. Al-Saʾd al-akbar fī al-sīr al-anwar
29. Al-Sirr al-rabbānī fī ʿālam al-jismānī
30. Tuḥfat al-abrār fī al-anwār wa-lumʿat al-abṣār
31. Al-Sirr al-asnā fī asrār al-Fāṭihah
32. Kaʿbat al-jamāl wa-ʿArafāt al-kamāl
33. Qalam al-asrār fī lawḥ al-anwār
34. Al-ʿIlm al-akbar wā al-sīr al-anwar
35. Rawdat asrār wa-nuzhat al-abṣār
36. Kanz al-alwāḥ fī sīr al-afrāḥ
37. Al-ʿIqd al-manẓūm wa-al-sīr al-maktūm
38. Al-Nasamāt al-fāʾiḥah fī asrār al-Fāṭihah
39. Qalam al-asrār wa-lumʿat al-anwār
40. Al-ʿIqd al-manẓūm wa-al-sīr al-maktūm (second title-element missing in CB 5076)
41. Al-Ḥāqiqat al-ṣāliḥāt fī burūz al-ummahāt
42. Al-Kibrīt al-aḥmar wa-al-tiryāq al-akbar
43. Al-Adwiyah al-shāfīyyah fī al-adwār al-kāfīyah
44. Barqat al-anwār wa-lumʿat al-asrār
45. Al-Kanz al-bāhir fī sharḥ ḥurūf al-Malik al-Ẓāhirī
46. Nūn (Nūr) anwār al-maʿārif wa-sīn (sanan) asrār al-ʿawārif
47. Qalam al-asrār wa-lumʿat al-anwār
48. Qalam al-asrār wa-lumʿat al-anwār
49. Washy al-asmāʾ fī al-anwār wa-lumʿat al-anwār
50. Al-Ḥāqiqat al-ṣāliḥāt fī burūz al-ummahāt
51. Ramz al-ḥaqāʾiq al-ʿibrānīyah wa-kanz al-maʿārif al-suryānīyah

86 By Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Kūmī al-Tūnisī; see p. 17 supra.

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52. Qabs al-iqtidā’ ilā wafq al-sa’ādah wa-najm al-ilhtidā’ ilā sharaf al-siyādah
53. Kayfiyat al-ittifāq fi tarkib al-awfāq
54. Hall al-rumūz fi faṭḥ al-kunūz
55. Sawātī al-anwār fi lawāmî al-asrār
56. Manba’a al-farā’id (al-fawā’id) wa-‘uyūn al-fawā’id (al-farā’id)
57. Al-Sirr al-abhar fi al-qamar al-anwar (al-azhar)
58. Suwar al-arwāh (al-riyāh) al-nūrāniyyah fi suwar al-ashbāḥ al-ẓulmāniyyah
59. Mawāqif al-ghāyat fi asrār al-riyādāt
60. Hidāyat al-qāsidin wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilin
61. Kanz al-qāsidin ilā asrār al-sa’ādah wa-ramz al-wāṣilin ilā anwār al-siyādah
62. Faṭḥ al-kunūz al-ḥarfīyah wa-fakk al-rumūz al-adadiyyah
63. Laṭā’if al-waqfīyah al-nūrāniyyah al-ma’ārif al-tadviyyah al-rūhāniyyah
64. Al-Lum’ah al-nūrāniyyah fi awrād al-rabbāniyyah
65. Al-Barqah al-rabbāniyyah fi al-asrār al-furqāniyyah
66. Mashriq al-anwār fi maghrib al-asrār
67. Fawātīḥ al-jamāl wa-rawā’īh al-kamāl
68. Miṭḥ al-kunūz fi ḥall al-rumūz
69. Majma’a al-aqlām al-rasmīyah wa-manba’ al-asrār al-ḥikmiyyah
70. Mawāhib al-Rahmān wa-‘atāyāh al-Mannān
71. Washy al-jamāl wa-hu’lu’ al-kamāl
72. Rawḍ al-ma’ārif wa-riyād al-latā’īf
73. Shams al-sa’ādah wa-qamar al-siyādah
74. Ghāyat al-maghnam fi al-ism al-a‘zam
75. Kanz al-anwār wa-ramz al-asrār
76. Rawḍ al-asrār al-‘adadiyyah wa-hawḍ al-anwār al-ḥarfīyah
77. Lawāmī’ al-burūq fi saṭṭānat al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq
78. ‘Arūs al-āfāq fi ‘īlm al-awfāq
79. Al-Nūr al-lāmi’ wa-al-sirr al-jāmi’
80. Al-Hay’ah al-jāmi’ah wa-al-barqah al-lāmi’ah
81. Shams al-asrār al-rabbāniyyah wa-qamar al-anwār al-‘irfāniyyah

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57. Al-Sirr al-abhar fi al-qamar al-anwar (al-azhar)
58. Suwar al-arwāh (al-riyāh) al-nūrāniyyah fi suwar al-ashbāḥ al-ẓulmāniyyah
59. Mawāqif al-ghāyat fi asrār al-riyādāt
60. Hidāyat al-qāsidin wa-nihāyat al-wāṣilin
61. Kanz al-qāsidin ilā asrār al-sa’ādah wa-ramz al-wāṣilin ilā anwār al-siyādah
62. Faṭḥ al-kunūz al-ḥarfīyah wa-fakk al-rumūz al-adadiyyah
63. Laṭā’if al-waqfīyah al-nūrāniyyah al-ma’ārif al-tadviyyah al-rūhāniyyah
64. Al-Lum’ah al-nūrāniyyah fi awrād al-rabbāniyyah
65. Al-Barqah al-rabbāniyyah fi al-asrār al-furqāniyyah
66. Mashriq al-anwār fi maghrib al-asrār
67. Fawātīḥ al-jamāl wa-rawā’īh al-kamāl
68. Miṭḥ al-kunūz fi ḥall al-rumūz
69. Majma’a al-aqlām al-rasmīyah wa-manba’ al-asrār al-ḥikmiyyah
70. Mawāhib al-Rahmān wa-‘atāyāh al-Mannān
71. Washy al-jamāl wa-hu’lu’ al-kamāl
72. Rawḍ al-ma’ārif wa-riyād al-latā’īf
73. Shams al-sa’ādah wa-qamar al-siyādah
74. Ghāyat al-maghnam fi al-ism al-a‘zam
75. Kanz al-anwār wa-ramz al-asrār
76. Rawḍ al-asrār al-‘adadiyyah wa-hawḍ al-anwār al-ḥarfīyah
77. Lawāmī’ al-burūq fi saṭṭānat al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq
78. ‘Arūs al-āfāq fi ‘īlm al-awfāq
79. Al-Nūr al-lāmi’ wa-al-sirr al-jāmi’
80. Al-Hay’ah al-jāmi’ah wa-al-barqah al-lāmi’ah
81. Shams al-asrār al-rabbāniyyah wa-qamar al-anwār al-‘irfāniyyah

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88 By Aḥmad al-Būnī. See, for example, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2160/1.
89 By Aḥmad al-Būnī. See, for example, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Aya Sofya 2160/2.
90 By Aḥmad al-Būnī. See, for example, Chester Beatty MS Ar. 3168/5.

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82. Mishkāt al-asrār wa-misbāḥ al-anwār
83. Sirr al-uns wa-al-jamāl wa-nūr al-baṣṭ wa-al-kamāl
84. Falak al-saʿādah wa-qutb al-siyādah
85. Al-Ramz al-ʿaʿzam wa-al-kanz al-muṭalsam
86. Kashf al-sirr al-maṣūm (al-maknūn) fi waṣf al-nūr al-makhzūn
87. Nārjis al-asmāʾ wa-yāsmīn al-musammā
88. Shawārīq al-anwār wa-bawārīq al-asrār
89. Taṣīr al-maṭālib wa-sakhīr(?) al-maʿārib
90. Fakhr al-asmāʾ wa-ṣubh al-musammā
91. Al-Durr al-munazzām fī sharḥ al-ism al-ʿaʿzam92
92. ʿUmdat al-ishrāq fī ʿilm al-awfāq
93. Al-Tīlsam al-maṣūn wa-al-luʾluʿal-makhzūn
94. Al-Latāʿif al-ʿulwīyah fī al-asrār al-ʿīsawīyah
95. Miṭāḥ al-raqq al-manṣūr wa-misbāḥ al-bayt al-maʿmūr
96. Badr riyāḍ al-maʿārif wa-shams saʿādahlayla al-latāʿif
97. Al-Nafkah al-qudsīyah wa-al-fayhah al-miskīyah
98. Shams ruqūm al-dawāʾir wa-qamar rusūm al-baṣāʾir
99. Mustawjibat al-maḥāmid fī sharḥ khātim Abī Ḥāmid
100. Al-Īmāʾ ilā ilm al-asmāʾ93
101. Kanz al-durar fī ḥurūf awāʾil al-suwar
102. Lawāmiʿ al-taʿrīf fī maṭāliʿ al-taṣrīf
103. Al-Kashf al-bayān fī al-maʿārif wa-ṣubh al-musammā
104. Risālat al-khafāʾ fīmā ẓahara wa-baṭana min al-khulafāʾ
105. Sirr al-jamāl wa-laṭāʿif al-kamāl
106. Al-Lawḥ al-dhahab fī sharḥ al-magāmiʿ fī al-makhtūm
108. Al-Īmāʾ ilā ilm al-asmāʾ93
109. Lumʿat al-anwār wa-barakat al-ʿawārif
110. Al-mabādīʾ wa-al-ghāyāt fī al-ḥawādith al-zamān
111. Sirr al-ṣawwān al-muḥammadanīyah al-nūrānīyah
112. Al-Sirr al-amjadi fī al-durr al-ḥumadi
113. Shifāʾ al-ṣudūr wa-al-abadān(?)(wa-al-aydhān) fī maṣāʾib fī al-Qurʾān
114. Badr riyāḍ al-maʿārif wa-shams iyyād (ghiyād) al-ʿawārif
115. Miṭāḥ al-asrār al-qamar rusūm al-muṣṭaḥ lūb
116. Hullat al-kamāl wa-hilyat al-jamāl
117. Izhār al-asrār wa-ibdāʾ al-anwār

92 Perhaps the work by Ibn ṭ alḥah, on whom see Masad, “The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition.”
93 By Abū ʿAbd Allāh Kūmī. See, for example, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah MS Taṣawwuf 1954.
118. Shams al-arwāḥ wa-qamar al-ashbāḥ
119. Mabhaj(? al-jamāl wa-manhaj al-kamāl
120. Al-Laṭā'īf al-latīfah
121. Kanz al-sa'ādah al-‘irfānīyah fī ramz al-siyādah al-rūḥānīyah
122. Al-Sirr al-jāmī' fī al-durr al-lāmi’
123. Sirr al-sa'ādah fī ‘ālam al-ghayb wa-al-shahādah
124. Al-Sirr al-khāfī al-maknūn wa-al-nūr al-‘ali al-makhzūn
125. Sirr al-jamāl al-bāhīr (al-zāhīr) wa-durr al-kamāl al-zāhīr
126. Shams al-jamāl wa-badr al-kamāl
127. Al-Sirr (al-ism) al-‘afkham fī al-ism (al-sirr) al-a’zām
128. Nasīm al-‘ishārāt al-ṣūfīyah wa-sirr al-‘ibārāt al-kashfīyah
129. Al-Hādīqah al-sundūsīyah wa-al-rawḍah al-narjisīyah
130. Al-Laṭā’īf al-‘afkham fī al-asrār al-muḥammadiyah
131. Rawḍat al-asrār al-zāhīrah wa-dawḥat al-anwār al-bāhīrah
132. Al-Adwiyah al-shāfīyah al-tāhīrah wa-al-ad’iyah al-kāfīyah al-zāhīrah
133. Shams al-asrār wa-ins al-abrār
134. ‘Ilm [‘Alam?] al-hudā fī asrār asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā
135. Qalam asrār al-ma’ārif wa-lawḥ anwār al-‘awārīf
136. ‘Alam al-hudā wa-asrār al-ibtidā’ī fī fahm sulūk ma’nā asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā
137. Al-Durr al-munazzām fī al-sirr al-a’zām
138. Kanz al-arwāḥ al-rūḥānīyah wa-sirr al-‘afkham al-nūrānīyah
139. Ḥall rumūz al-asmā’ wa-fakk kunūz al-musammā
140. ‘Ilm [‘Alam?] al-hudā fī sharh asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā
141. Al-Taraqqī ilā manāzil al-abrār fī kayfīyat al-‘amal fī al-layl wa-al-nahār
142. Washy al-asrār al-jamāliyah wa-naqsh al-āthār al-jalāliyah
143. Ma’ārif al-qulūb al-nūrānīyah wa-latā’īf al-ghuyūb al-rabbānīyah
144. Al-asrār al-shāfīyah al-rūḥānīyah wa-al-āthār al-kāfīyah al-nūrānīyah
145. Shams al-wiṣāl wa-ghurūs al-jamāl
146. Al-Haqā’iq al-subbuḥīyah wa-al-daqā’iq al-quddūsīyah
147. Al-Barqah al-nūrānīyah fī al-asrār al-sulaymānīyah
148. Bahār al-fawā’id al-ḥarfīyah wa-sirr al-fawā’id al-adadiyah
149. Zayn al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-awfāq
150. Bahjat al-āfāq fī ‘ilm al-awfāq
151. Al-Sirr al-‘afkham wa-al-kibrit al-ahmar
152. Mawāqīt al-baṣā’ir wa-laṭā’īf al-sarā’īr
153. Al-Laṭā’īf al-farīdah fī al-ma’ārif al-mufīdah
154. Al-Kanz al-bāhīr fī asrār ḥurūf al-ism al-zāhīr

94By Aḥmad al-Būnī. See, for example, Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260/1.
155. Durrat tāj al-saʿādah wa-barqat minhāj al-siyādah
156. Iżhār al-rumūz wa-ibdāʿ al-kunūz
157. Sirr al-jalāl
158. Al-Asrār al-khāfiyyah wa-al-risālah al-murdiyyah fi sharḥ duʿāʿ al-Shādilīyah
159. Sirr al-asrār wa muntahā ʿulūm al-abrār
160. Jāmiʿ al-laṭāʾif fi asrār al-ʿawārif
161. Lawāmiʿ al-anwār al-ʾirfānīyah wa-jawāmiʿ al-asrār al-rabbānīyah
162. Durrat al-āfāq fi asrār al-ḥurūf wa-al-awfāq
163. Munyat al-tālîb li-aʿazz al-maṭālib
164. Risālat al-hū*5
165. Al-Laṭāʾif al-rabbānīyah fi sharḥ al-asmāʿ al-nūrānīyah
166. Fawātīḥ al-asrār al-ilāhīyah wa-lawāʾiḥ al-anwār al-rabbānīyah
167. Asās al-ʿulūm
168. Kanz al-maʿānī fi asrār al-mathānī
169. Kashf asrār al-maʿānī wa-waṣf anwār al-maghānī
170. Shīfāʿ al-qulūb bi-liqāʾ al-maḥbūb
171. Kanz al-saʿādah fi sharaf al-siyādah
172. Shams al-jamāl
173. Kimiyāʿ al-saʿādah al-rabbānīyah wa-sīmīyāʿ al-rūḥānīyah
174. Laṭāʾif al-asmāʿ
175. ʿAjāʿib al-ittifāq fī sharḥ al-asmāʿ wa-ilm al-awfāq
176. Durrat al-maʿārif fi asrār al-ʿawārif
177. Ḥadāʾiq al-iḥdāq fī ʿilm al-awfāq
178. Al-Mabādīʿ wa-al-ghāyāt fi asrār al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmāʿ wa-al-daʿawāt
179. Al-Ghāyah al-faṣwī(?) fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmāʿ
180. Al-Maṭlah al-asnā fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmāʿ
181. Ghāyat al-adhwāq fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmāʿ
182. Al-Sīr al-ismī fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmāʿ
183. Al-Sīr al-akbar fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmāʿ
184. Zubdat al-muṣannafāt fī al-asmāʿ wa-al-sifāt
185. Al-Durr al-naẓīm fī al-Qurʾān al-ʿażīm
186. Kitāb al-Malakūt
187. Jawāhir al-asrār fī bawāhir al-anwār
188. Bahār al-wuqūf fī ʿilm al-awfāq wa-al-ḥurūf
189. Durrat al-asrār li-fakhr al-amṣār
190. Yawāqīt al-asrār fī mawāqīt al-anwār

*By Abū ʿAbd Allāh Kūmī. See, for example, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Resid efendi 608/3.
191. Al-Tawassulāt al-kitābiyah wa-al-tawajjuhāt al-‘aṭā’īyah
96
192. Shifā’ al-ma‘āni bi-la-tā’īf al-mathānī
193. Dhawāt al-dawā‘ir wa-al-ṣuwar
194. Kitāb al-Lawh wa-al-qalam
195. Kitāb al-Ajnās
196. Kitāb Shādhān
197. Kitāb Sirr al-sirr
198. Kitāb al-Jamharah
199. Kitāb al-Muṣḥaf al-khaﬁ
200. Kitāb al-‘Ahd al-kabīr
201. Kitāb Ghāyat al-ḥakīm
97
202. Kitāb al-Zurqān(al-Zaraqān?)
203. Kitāb Muṣḥaf al-qamar
98
204. Kitāb Kināss(Kanā‘is?) al-rūḥānī
205. Kitāb Ushūṭās
99
206. Kitāb al-Hādīṭūsh
100
207. Kitāb al-Afāliq(?)
208. Kitāb al-Tawāliq(?)
209. Kitāb al-Malāṭis
101
210. Kitāb Tūmtum al-Hindi
102
211. Kitāb Ṣaṣah(?) al-Hindi
212. Kitāb Īṣṭimākhīs
103
213. Kitāb Tankalūshā al-Bābīlī
104

96 A work probably falsely attributed to Aḥmad al-Būnī; see Gardiner, “Esotericism in a manu-
script culture,” 39; Coulon, “La magie islamique,” 506ff. See, for example, Sûleymaniye MS
Hamidiye 260/2.
97 The famous Picatrix, by Maslamah ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubi. See footnote 25 supra.
98 Manfred Ullmann discusses two works by this name; Die Natur- und Geheimwissensbar-
schaften im Islam (Leiden, 1972), 380 and 402.
99 Probably Kitāb al-Ustuṭās (also known as Kitāb al-Ustūwaṭas); see Burnett, “Arabic, Greek and
Latin Works,” 86. As discussed by Burnett, this is part of a complex of pseudo-Aristotelian Her-
metic works on astrological magic that includes Kitāb al-Īṣtimākhīs, Kitāb al-Īṣṭimṭatīs, Kitāb al-
Malāṭis, Kitāb al-Ḥadīṭūsh (al-Ḥadīṭūs), and perhaps the work attributed to Thābit ibn Qurrah, all
of which appear in al-Bistāmī’s list, infra.
100 See previous footnote.
101 On which see Burnett, “Arabic, Greek and Latin Works,” 86.
102 See footnote 25 supra.
103 See footnote 25 supra.
104 Tankalūshā = Teukros of Babylon (in Egypt). See Ullmann, Die Natur- und Geheimwissens-
schaften, 278-79; David King, A Survey of the Scientiﬁc Manuscripts in the Egyptian National Library
(Winona Lake, 1986), Author 23A and Plate LXXVIIa.

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214. Kitāb al-Qamar li-Baṭlimūs
215. Kitāb Taḥṣīr al-ruḥāniyyah li-Buqrāṭis
216. Kitāb Kazkah(?) al-Hindi
217. Kitāb Arsmīdis
218. Kitāb Wazdāsh(?) al-Fārisī
219. Kitāb Balīnās
220. Kitāb Samʿūn(?)
221. Kitāb Thābit ibn Qurrah al-Ḥarrānī
222. Kitāb Hunayn ibn Ishāq al-Ībādi
223. Kitāb Sharāshim al-Hindi
224. Kitāb al-İstımātīs
225. Kitāb al-Sirr al-khāfi li-Qālis(?)
226. Kitāb Hayāt al-nufūs
227. Kitāb al-Idhn
228. Kitāb Kharqīl
229. Kitāb Khafīyat al-Aflāṭūn
230. Kitāb Khafīyat Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq
231. Khafīyat Ḥirmis
232. Sifr ādam
233. Sifr Shīt
234. Sifr Idrīs

105 Baṭlimūs = Ptolemy.
106 Buqrāṭis = Hippocrates.
107 Arsmīdis (usually Arshmīdis) = Archimedes.
108 Balīnās = Pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana. This may refer to Kitāb Sīr al-khāliqah wa-ṣanʿat al-ṭabīʿah.
109 Thābit ibn Qurrah.
110 Hunayn ibn Ishāq.
111 Almost certainly the work more commonly known as Kitāb Sharāsīm al-Hindiyyah, an edition of which is currently under preparation by Jean-Charles Coulon of Institut de Recherche et d’Histoire des Textes, Paris.
112 On which see footnote 25 supra.
113 Qālis should perhaps be Wālīs, i.e., the astrologer Vettius Valens, on whom see Ullmann, Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften, 281ff.
114 Kharqīl = Dhū al-Kifl, i.e., Ezekiel.
115 Aflāṭūn = Plato. This may be Kitāb Nawāmis Aflāṭūn/Liber Vaccae, on which see Liana Saif, “The Cows and the Bees: Arabic Sources and Parallels for Pseudo-Plato’s Liber Vaccae (Kitāb Al-Nawāmis),” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 79 (2016): 1–47.
116 Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.
117 Ħirmis = Hermes.
118 Shīt = Biblical Seth.
235. Sifr Nūḥ
236. Sifr Ibrāhīm
237. Sifr Irmīyā119
238. Sifr Dhī Qarnayn

119 Irmīyā = the prophet Jeremiah.