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MIDDLE EAST MEDIEVALISTS

About

Middle East Medievalists (MEM) is an international professional non-profit association of scholars interested in the study of the Islamic lands of the Middle East during the medieval period (defined roughly as 500-1500 C.E.). MEM officially came into existence on 15 November 1989 at its first annual meeting, held in Toronto. It is a non-profit organization incorporated in the state of Illinois. MEM has two primary goals: to increase the representation of medieval scholarship at scholarly meetings in North America and elsewhere by co-sponsoring panels; and to foster communication among individuals and organizations with an interest in the study of the medieval Middle East. As part of its effort to promote scholarship and facilitate communication among its members, MEM publishes al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā (The Journal of Middle East Medievalists).

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Letter from the Editors


We are pleased to present the new issue of *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* (*UW*). As announced in our preceding issue (*UW* 23, 2015), we have expanded the role, format and content of the journal: the transition to an online, open access, peer-reviewed publication is complete. Our aim is to provide a venue for up-to-date scholarship across the variety of fields in Islamic, Arabic and Middle East studies, while remaining a source of news and information on developments in these same fields.

We would be remiss in not acknowledging our debt of gratitude to a number of colleagues for their willingness to act as reviewers. We thus continue where we left off in our previous issue in publishing a set of high-caliber and original research articles. Fred Donner—a former president of Middle East Medievalists (MEM) and a long-time editor of *UW*—argues in his contribution for a reconsideration of the well-known term *fatḥ*, drawing on his considerable work on the early Islamic period and the Arab/Islamic conquests in particular. Sean Anthony, a member of the MEM board, considers the difficult question of whether Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī, the third/ninth-century historian and geographer, is properly to be considered a Shiʿite author. In his submission, Matthew Melvin-Koushki takes up the arguments regarding writing and written transmission in late medieval Arabic and Islamic scholarship with a discussion of the work of Ṣāʾin al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Turka Iṣfahānī (770-835/1369-1432). The fourth contribution is that of Theodore S. Beers. Turning to the later Persianate literary realm, Beers offers a close assessment of an unpublished manuscript text containing

(Photo of Antoine Borrut by Juliette Fradin Photography)

the earliest documentation of the life and career of Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676).

We provide, alongside the four articles, two short notices (Jonathan Brown on Ibn ʿUqda, and Christian Mauder and Christopher Markiewicz on *majālis* in the Mamluk period) and a set of six book reviews covering a range of topics. The appearance of the new volumes under review only underscores the continued vitality of our respective fields. We would reiterate the point that, in its present format, *UW* offers the opportunity to produce extended reviews of this kind. It remains a significant goal of this journal to produce reviews of new works not only in European languages but those of the Middle East and North Africa as well. We urge you, our readers and colleagues, to continue sending us material of this kind.

We are also pleased to include in this issue detailed reports of three conferences held in 2015-2016; a remembrance by Sarah Eltantawi of our much lamented colleague, Shahab Ahmed; and the statement by Richard Bulliet (the recipient of the 2015 MEM Lifetime Achievement Award). We also take advantage of this letter to congratulate MEM's two new honorary members, Denise Aigle (École Pratique des Hautes Études) and Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (former director of the Egyptian National Library).

The editors also express their gratitude to Gabriella Hoskin, Alexis May, and Brett Savage, from the Institute for Advanced Study staff, for their help with the copy editing process of this issue of *UW*.

To make the point again, we are convinced that *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* provides the ideal venue in which to publish new and exciting scholarship on the history of the medieval Middle East. We invite you, our readers and colleagues, to participate by contributing your latest work.

We are also delighted to announce that the full run of *UW* is now available online. We have digitized all of *UW*'s back issues to facilitate access to this unique MEM archive and memory. Please visit our "volume index" page on our website:

http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/volume-index/

We will close with what will become a familiar note to faithful readers: we rely on your financial support. Our journal is now online, open access, and peer-reviewed, but it is certainly not free. To cover costs of publication and the work of our part-time managing editor, among other expenses, you provide valuable support by keeping your membership in Middle East Medievalists up to date. For information on membership and the fund, please proceed to the MEM home page at http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/ and click on "MEMbership."

Sincerely,

Antoine Borrut and Matthew S. Gordon

MEM Awards

Remarks by the Recipient of the 2015 MEM Lifetime Achievement Award
Given at the Annual Meeting of Middle East Medievalists
(Denver, 21 November 2015)

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I enrolled in Professor Giles Constable's seminar in twelfth-century European history in 1962, my first year of graduate study at Harvard. He told us to select a cartulary, which he told us was a term for a collection of medieval documents. We were to write a paper based on what we found there. I selected the cartulary of the Guillem family, the lords of Montpellier in southern France. I realized, given my haphazard memory of the Latin I had taken in high school, that I could not expect to read most of the documents. But I noticed that each document ended with a series of names of witnesses, and, the more important the document, the longer the list. Moreover, the names often included the witness' occupation and the name of his father. So I made the study of major witness families over a sequence of generations the core element of my paper.

Three years later, I decided to write my doctoral dissertation on medieval Nishapur, partly because my dissertation director, Professor George Makdisi, did not know or care much about the history of Iran. Professor Richard N. Frye, who would become the second reader of my dissertation, supplied me with manuscripts of the biographical dictionaries of Nishapur. The longest assemblage of names, however, was in a manuscript that was little more than an index of what had originally been a multi-volume work by al-Ḥākim al-Bayyiʿ al-Naysābūrī. So I had the full names, but no additional information about most of the individuals. It felt like a return to the witness lists in the Guillems cartulary.

By chance, during the preceding summer, my father, an electrical engineer, had enlisted my services gluing ads for electronic parts onto cards so that he could easily access items he might need. These were Royal-McBee Keysort cards, which had holes all around the sides. I never learned how my father coded and used the cards, but it occurred to me that if I copied every Nishapur biography onto such a card, I could code salient pieces of

information by turning holes into notches with a special punch. When I wanted to retrieve some bit of information, I simply had to run a knitting needle through a stack of cards, and the ones that had notches instead of holes fell out.

Computers, at that point, were still in a primitive stage but even if I had had access to a mainframe and knew how to use it, it would have required me to transliterate the Arabic into Latin letters. With the Keysort cards, I could copy the Arabic onto the card and not worry about transliteration. When I had finished copying and coding, I had thousands of cards that could be rearranged in any pattern I chose by the application of my knitting needle. Today, half a century later, I still use the cards to follow up on new thoughts as they occur to me. Without really intending it, in other words, I had created a large searchable database at a time when no one else was doing that sort of thing.

Professor Makdisi, who had taken over thesis direction in Islamic studies at Harvard after Professor H.A.R. Gibb suffered a stroke, never asked me how or what I was doing, nor did he express much interest in my work. We disagreed repeatedly on the origin of the *madrasa*, me favoring Khurasan and he insisting on Baghdad. Looking back, I realize that Gibb's forced retirement and Makdisi's unexpected succession as advisor created the opportunity for me to follow my own inclinations and devise my own research techniques.

Not having a mentor, or even a professor particularly interested in my research, would work to my disadvantage at critical points in the coming years. But the privilege of working entirely on my own, both methodologically and substantively, made up for those difficult moments. I was to make use of my cards and the coding system, which I extended to Isfahan and Jurjan, to write four books and a dozen articles.

It was in the summer of 1967, after returning home to Rockford, Illinois after an invaluable summer seminar at the American Numismatic Society, that I found myself drawing a blank when trying to remember the classical Arabic word for wheel. At first I was irritated at forgetting such a basic word, but then I thought that perhaps I had never encountered the word. How could that be? It then occurred to me that perhaps there had been no wheeled transport in the medieval Middle East (hence no formal term). But since oxcarts and chariots were well attested in antiquity, that would mean that the wheel had been abandoned sometime before the Arab conquests.

I shared the suspicion that I was onto something important with a senior colleague at Harvard. He replied that, were he not a friend, he would have stolen the idea. Thank goodness for friendship. I wrote an article arguing that wheeled transport had indeed been abandoned in favor of a more efficient means of hauling heavy loads in the form of the pack camel. To explain how this occurred as it did, I reconstructed a history of camel use based primarily on the evolution of saddle design.

Just as the Keysort cards on Nishapur kept me focused on the quantifiable aspects of Arabic biographical dictionaries, *The Camel and the Wheel* propelled me into a broader study of animal domestication and the technology of transportation. *Hunters, Herders, and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships* and

The Wheel: Inventions and Reinventions were the books that summarized my thoughts in these two areas. In *Cotton, Climate, and Camels in Early Islamic Iran: A Moment in World History*, I combined technology, camels, and the quantitative approach that I had pioneered in writing about Nishapur. I also published a number of articles on these subjects.

At this point, it seems proper to note that in pursuing these two widely diverse areas of research, I had departed irrevocably from the sort of Islamic studies I had been trained to carry out. By 1976, when I arrived at Columbia University, I had come to see classical Oriental studies as a scholarly enterprise that was long on painstaking perusal of classical texts but short on innovative thought. I benefited from the works of the Orientalists, of course, but quantitative history and the history of technology were wide open fields where I could ask new and important questions and hope to find answers.

The positive side of my pre-Columbia research and teaching was the freedom I had to go my own way. The negative side was the lack of mentorship and an awareness that the work I was publishing did not appeal to other scholars in the field. A member of the Columbia search committee who opposed my hire wrote in a private communication I happened across: "Bulliet has never written any real history and probably never will." Fortunately, the search committee as a whole disagreed. As for the dissenting opinion, it may not have been so far off for the time period. I find it ironic that my work is cited far more often today, when I am 75 years old, than it was in the twentieth century.

I resolved, on undertaking graduate instruction at Columbia, that my students would have carte blanche to follow their own inclinations in terms of subject matter and methodology, but that I would provide them with strong and active mentorship. I believe I have lived up to both commitments, but one consequence has been that I seldom schooled anyone in my approach to quantitative history, animal history, or history of technology. Of the forty-five doctoral theses that I have supervised at Columbia, about half dealt with topics before 1700 and half with later periods of history.

World history was a different story. I became an enthusiastic advocate. My involvement began in the 1970s in a still-born project to coauthor a world history textbook. The cash advance made the effort worthwhile, but the main payoff came when world history took off as a robust new disciplinary subfield in the 1980s.

The failed project had given me the experience to make the most of this trend. A successful co-authored textbook, *The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History*, provided tangible success. But I also came up with the idea of a history of the twentieth century that would be topical and global rather than a rehash of World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War. *The Columbia History of the Twentieth Century* did not sell many copies, but it was a tremendously exciting project. Subsequently, I made a more strenuous effort to school my students on global history than I ever had on Nishapur, camels, or wheels.

Since my work did not fit the mold of old school Orientalism, I did not get carried away by the arguments for and against the celebrated redefinition of Orientalism developed by Edward Said, my colleague at

Columbia. Nevertheless, the dozen years I spent directing the university's Middle East Institute tarred me with the Orientalist brush. Said's strongest supporters felt that universities had no legitimate business studying policy matters or interacting with off-campus political and business entities. To their way of thinking, Middle East Area Studies was a tool for turning universities into havens of American neo-imperialism. Their hostility led to my removal from the directorship of the Middle East Institute in 2000. Though heartbreaking at the time, it freed me to do more writing and research. I also decided, before anyone had thought up the acronym MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), to archive the final presentations of my standard lecture courses and make them available for free on the Internet.

Looking back over my Middle East career, from first entering a classroom to hear Professor Robert Bellah lecture on Islamic Institutions in 1959 to the present day, I have few regrets concerning the lines of inquiry that I chose to pursue. But I do regret that the fields of Islamic Studies and Middle Eastern History have changed so little from where they were when I started out. True, tens of thousands of books have been authored, and no one today can possibly hope to keep up with these fields as they could in the 1960s. But the innovative methodologies that are showing such promise in the study of most other parts the world, such as quantitative history, climate history, and material history in general, are still little explored with respect to the Middle East. The Saidian attempt to slay the dragon of Orientalism produced a maelstrom of controversy, but it failed to open up viable alternative ways of doing business.

Alas, what failed to kill Orientalism has made it stronger.

Arabic *Fatḥ* as 'Conquest' and its Origin in Islamic Tradition[1]

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Abstract

The Arabic term fatḥ (*pl.* futūḥ) *is often translated as "conquest," but this meaning is not intrinsic to the root f-t-ḥ either in Arabic or in other Semitic languages. Rather, the word was applied to episodes in the expansion of the early Islamic state by later Muslim writers who described these events following a particular use of the word* fatḥ *in the Qur'ān, where it referred to an act of God's grace that was favorable for the community. This might include instances of actual conquest, but could also be applied to other ways in which an area came into the state, such as by treaty agreement. The rigid translation as "conquest" is therefore potentially misleading.*

Scholarship on the rise of Islam routinely translates the Arabic word *fatḥ* (pl. *futūḥ*), when used in the context of the first expansion of the Believers' movement, as "conquest."[2] In this, it follows classical Arabic usage, which offers "conquest" as one of the secondary meanings of *fatḥ*, and used the term to refer to that extensive genre of accounts--called the *futūḥ* literature--that described the Islamic state's seemingly inexorable expansion during its first century or so.[3] From classical Arabic, the term was

1. I am grateful to Carel Bertram, George Hatke, Ilkka Lindstedt, Jens Scheiner, and especially *UW's* anonymous reviewers for many helpful comments on the draft of this article.

2. Several other scholars have discussed the meanings of the word *fatḥ*. See in particular Rudi Paret, "Die Bedeutungsentwicklung von arabisch *fatḥ*," in J. M. Barral (ed.), *Orientalia Hispanica sive studia F. M. Pareja dicata* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), I, 537-41; G. R. Hawting, "al-Ḥudaybiyya and the conquest of Mecca. A reconsideration of the tradition about the Muslim takeover of the sanctuary," *JSAI* 8 (1986), 1-23; Hani Hayajneh, "Arabian languages as a source for Qurʾānic vocabulary," in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān in its historical context, 2* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011), 117-146, at p. 144 on f-t-ḥ; and Chase F. Robinson, "Conquest," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*. General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Brill Online 2015. Referenced 25 February 2015. In the nature of things, there is much overlap in the discussion among these four articles and the present one.

3. On the *futūḥ* literature, see Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historiographical*

adopted into other Islamic languages in the sense of "conquest;" thus it forms part of the etymology, for example, of the Ottoman Turkish term *fatḥ-nāme*, or official announcement of a military victory.[4] The present note considers how the word *fatḥ* became associated with these events and the appropriateness of translating it as "conquest."

As mentioned already, "conquest" is a secondary meaning of *fatḥ* in Arabic; as is well known, the basic meaning of the verb *fataḥa* in Arabic is "he opened," with the verbal noun *fatḥ* meaning "opening." In this respect, Arabic is consistent with cognate languages in the northwest Semitic group, in which the primary (and sometimes the only attested) meanings from the root *f/p-t-ḥ* have to do with the concept of "opening" (e.g., "to open;" "door, gate, entrance;" etc.).[5] In these languages, meanings related to "conquest" occur sparingly and, one might say, tangentially: in the northwest Semitic inscriptions, for example, the form *nptḥt* is attested with the meaning "to be thrown open, said of an army camp,"[6] and one can imagine that in any language, it might be said that a city "was opened" when it yielded to an invader, but this is not the same as giving the active form of the verb the meaning "to conquer." The only exception among the northwest Semitic languages is Syriac, where in addition to the basic meaning "to open" the verb *ptaḥ* can mean "to conquer," as in Arabic. This Syriac usage is, however, likely a borrowing from the Arabic, and occurs almost exclusively in the works of later authors such as Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), Michael the Syrian (d. 1199), and Elias of Nisibis (d.1046).[7] Most of the earlier Syriac chronicles, such as the anonymous *Chronicle up to 724* and the anonymous *Chronicle up to 846*, seem to use other words when describing events such as the Sasanian and early Islamic conquests in the Near East: *kbash* or *ethkbash*, "to conquer/be conquered;" *qrab*, "to fight," or *qarbā*, "a battle;" *ḥrab*, "to devastate, lay waste;" *npaq*, "to invade;" *nḥat*, "to descend upon, march against."[8] *Ptaḥ* with the meaning of "to capture" is found once in the context of the Islamic conquests in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* (written *ca.* 775), but generally

Tradition: A Source-Critical Study (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994); Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the beginnings of Islamic historical writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 174-82; Lawrence I. Conrad, "Futūḥ," in Julie S. Meisami and Paul Starkey (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)," I: 237-40.

4. On these see *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.), "Fatḥnāme" (G. L. Lewis).

5. E.g. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), s.v.; G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartin, *Diccionario de la Lengua Ugarítica* (Barcelona: Ausa, 1996-2000), 358; J. Haftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 948-51; M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic* (Leuven & Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2015), 344-45.

6. Haftijzer and Jongeling, 950.

7. Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin; Correction, Expansion and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, and Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 1265-66, provides references. I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers for clarifying the Syriac references for me.

8. These two texts are found in Ignatius Guidi, E. W. Brooks, and J. B Chabot (eds.), *Chronica Minora* (= *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Scriptores Syri, Textus, Series tertia, tomus IV) (Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae and Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1903-5), e.g. pp. 145-47, 232-35.

it uses other words for "conquer/conquest.".[9] This suggests that the Arabic use of the root *f-t-ḥ* for "conquest" was not yet current in Syriac when these texts were compiled.[10] In sum, Arabic *f-t-ḥ* in the sense of "to open" is fully consonant with the northwest Semitic evidence, but it seems that we must look elsewhere for an explanation of Arabic *f-t-ḥ* in the sense of "to conquer."

Surprisingly, the root *f-t-ḥ* has not (yet) turned up as a common noun or verb in pre-Islamic North Arabian inscriptions; *ptḥ* is attested as a personal name in Ḥismaic and Safaitic, but this cannot provide any guidance on the meaning of the root.[11]

Sabaic (one of the Epigraphic South Arabian languages) seems, at first glance, particularly promising as a possible source for the meaning "to conquer" in Arabic, because the dictionaries state that in South Arabian the verb *ftḥ* can mean "to conquer" or "to lay waste."[12] (Surprisingly, Sabaic does not seem to know the meaning "to open" with this root.) This might be taken as evidence that Arabic *fataḥa* "to conquer" is a loan-word from South Arabian, an idea that seems even more plausible in view of the fact that the military terminology of classical Arabic contains some loan-words from South Arabian, such as *khamīs*, "army" (from Sabaic *ḫ̲ms*, "army, infantry").[13] One assumes that these terms became current in Arabic in the centuries before the rise of Islam, when the South Arabian kingdoms and their culture exercised significant political and cultural influence over areas to the north, including the Ḥijāz.[14]

There are, however, reasons to question whether Arabic *fatḥ* with the meaning "conquest" actually does have a South Arabian etymology. For one thing, the dictionaries' attestations of Sabaic *ftḥ* are few, and often seem amenable to other meanings, opening

9. *Incerti auctoris chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum* (ed. J.-B. Chabot, Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1933), 151.3 [=*CSCO,* Scriptores Syri, Series Tertia, Tomus II, Textus], on the conquest of Dara; cf. *The chronicle of Zuqnīn*, *Parts III and IV, A.D. 488-775,* translated by Amir Harrak (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 143. Note that the same text (*Incerti auctoris...*), p. 149, line 13, referring to the conquest of Palestine, uses the word *kbash;* p. 151 line 7, referring to the conquest of Caesarea, again *kbash;* p. 151 line 24, referring to the conquest of Arwād, *ethkbash;* etc. Sokoloff, *Syriac Lexicon*, also lists a single reference to *ptaḥ* in the Syriac translation of the lost Greek *Chronicle* of Zacharias Rhetor, who died in the mid-6th century; but the translation may be of considerably later date.

10. Some Arabic words were, however, borrowed into Syriac early in the Islamic era, evidently from Umayyad-era Arabic texts; see Antoine Borrut, "Vanishing Syria: Periodization and Power in Early Islam," *Der Islam* 91:1 (2014), 37-68, at 49; see also *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn,* 25-28, for a discussion of Arabisms in the chronicle (dated to 775).

11. I thank Ilkka Lindstedt for this information (email, 28 July 2015).

12. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982 [=Harvard Semitic Studies, no. 25], p. 412-13; A.F.L. Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters, and Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982), p. 47.

13. The dependence of Muḥammad's community on South Arabian (Ḥimyarite) military practices is emphasized by John W. Jandora, *The March from Medina. A Revisionist Study of the Arab Conquests* (Clifton, N.J.: Kingston Press, 1990), esp. 50-51. Jandora's Appendix B, p. 131, provides a list of military terms in Arabic that he considers of South Arabic origin; the list does not, however, include *fatḥ.*

14. On Ḥimyar's military and political expansion northward into the Arabian Peninsula, see Christian Julien Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and *Arabia Deserta* in Late Antiquity. The Epigraphic Evidence," in Greg Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 127-71, esp. 137-39.

the possibility that the translation "to conquer" proposed by the modern lexicographers was influenced by their knowledge of the Arabic usage. Moreover, it is indisputable that the primary meaning of South Arabian *fṯḥ* is "to render judgment" or "to decree;" in this it seems closely cognate with the Ethiopic (Geʿez) root *f-t-ḥ*, which shows no trace of any meaning related to "conquest."[15]

The easy assumption of a South Arabian origin for Arabic *fataḥa*, "to conquer," is rendered even more dubious by the evidence of the Qurʾān. Since the Qurʾān is the oldest surviving monument of Arabic literature and seems to hail from a west-Arabian milieu,[16] one would expect to find the South Arabian meaning of *fatḥ* as "conquest" reflected in its vocabulary if, in fact, this was the origin of the later Arabic usage. However, although the word *fatḥ* and other words derived from the root are used almost forty times in the Qurʾān in a variety of ways, in no case does *fatḥ* in the Qurʾān obviously mean "conquest."[17] This suggests that if South Arabian *fatḥ* did mean "conquest," such a meaning was not known to the Arabic represented by the Qurʾān. On balance, then, it seems that the association of the South Arabian root *f-t-ḥ* with the concept of "conquest" is dubious and should be held in reserve, at least until new evidence comes to light. It also suggests that the development of the meaning "conquest" for *fatḥ* must be a development within the evolution of Arabic itself, and not a meaning derived from some earlier Semitic language.

The Qurʾānic data, then, must be examined in more detail, because it offers the earliest literary examples of Arabic usage of words from the root *f-t-ḥ*.[18] We can classify the Qurʾān's use of words from the root *f-t-ḥ* into four categories, which we shall call groups A, B, C, and D:

A. A first group of Qurʾānic passages clearly has *fataḥa* (or related words) with the regular northwest Semitic meaning of "to open" (such as "opening the gates of heaven.") They include, at least, Q. 7 (al-Aʿrāf): 40; Q. 12 (Yūsuf): 65; Q. 15 (al-Ḥijr): 14; Q. 23 (al-Muʾminīn): 77; Q. 38 (Ṣād): 50; Q. 39 (al-Zumar): 71 and 73; Q. 54 (al-Qamar): 11; and Q. 78 (al-Nabaʾ): 19. These need not detain us further here.

B. Another group of Qurʾānic passages seems to use *f-t-ḥ* in the sense of "to decide

15. Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987), 170. The meanings for the Ethiopic verb *fatḥa* cluster around the concepts of "to open, loosen, set free, absolve" and "to judge, decide, pass judgment."

16. On the date and locale of the Qurʾān text, see F. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the beginnings of Islamic historical writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), ch. 1; Nikolai Sinai, "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Qurʾan reach closure? Part 1," *BSOAS* 77 (2014), 273-92.

17. See the discussion in Robinson, "Conquest."

18. I have set aside here a search of the corpus of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, in view of the fact that it is all transmitted to us by authors of the Islamic period. Some recent studies, however, have profitably utilized the poetry to reveal shifting meanings of certain key words, going back to the pre-Islamic era: Peter Webb, "*Al-Jāhiliyya:* Uncertain Times of Uncertain Meanings," *Der Islam* 91:1 (2014), 69-94, and Suzanne Stetkevych, "The Abbasid Poet Interprets History: Three Qaṣīdahs by Abū Tammām," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 10 (1979), 49-64 [both on *jāhiliyya*]; Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs. Arab identity and the rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), esp. ch. 2 (60-109) [on *ʿarab*]. See also Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity. A critique of approaches to Arabic sources* (Berlin: Gerlach, 2014), 101-11.

between" two parties or "to render judgment."[19] These include Q. 7 (al-Aʿrāf): 89, 26 (al-Shuʿarāʾ):118, and 34 (al-Sabaʾ):26 and (as we shall see below**)** probably a number of others. Q. 7: 89, for example, reads (in part); "[...] Our Lord, decide/judge between us and between our people with truth; You are the best of deciders/judges" [*rabba-nā ftaḥ bayna-nā wa bayna qawmi-nā bi-l-ḥaqqi wa anta khayru l-fātiḥīna*]. As was pointed out long ago by J. Horovitz, this usage seems to be derived from or cognate with the Ethiopic *feṭḥ*, "judgment, verdict, decision;"[20] it might be considered even more likely that this signification came into both Arabic and Ethiopic from the South Arabian, which as we have seen above also uses the verb *ftḥ* with the meaning "to obtain a judicial order; initiate a lawsuit; give judgment."[21]

C. Several verses seem to use *fataḥa*, with the preposition *ʿalā*, in ways that extend semantically the sense of "to open." Two verses (Q. 6 [al-Anʿām]: 44 and Q. 7 [al-Aʿrāf]: 96) use *fataḥa ʿalā* to mean "to bestow upon" or "to grant" (a meaning perhaps not semantically too distant from the basic idea of "to open;" cf. the English "open-handed."). Q. 7: 96, for example, says "And if the people of the villages had believed and been God-fearing, We would have opened/bestowed upon them blessings from the heavens and the earth..." [*wa-law anna ahla l-qurā āmanū wa-ttaqaw la-fataḥnā ʿalay-him barakātin min al-samāʾi wa l-arḍi...*]. A third verse (Q. 2 [al-Baqara]: 76) uses the same construction but evidently with the meaning of "to reveal or disclose" previously hidden things. This meaning, too, is not very distant from the basic meaning of "to open:" "[...] Do you talk to them about what God has opened/revealed to you...?" [*...a-tuḥaddithūna-hum bi-mā fataḥa llāhu ʿalay-kum...*].

D. There remain, however, several Qurʾānic passages that use the verbal noun *fatḥ* (or other words from the root *f-t-ḥ*) in which the exact meaning is more difficult to discern. They include Q. 2 (al-Baqara): 89; Q. 4 (al-Nisāʾ): 141; Q. 5 (al-Māʾida): 53; Q. 8 (al-Anfāl): 19; Q. 14 (Ibrāhīm): 15; Q. 32 (al-Sajdah): 28 and 29; Q. 35 (al-Fāṭir): 2; Q. 48 (al-Fatḥ): 1, 18, and 27; Q. 57 (al-Ḥadīd): 10; Q. 61 (al-Ṣaff): 13; and Q. 110 (al-Naṣr): 1. The word *fatḥ* in these verses seems to refer to some momentous event that is good for the Believers, but its exact nature is not clear, or seems different in different verses.[22] Q. 35:2 speaks of the "mercy that God opens (? grants? reveals?) to the people" [*mā yaftaḥi llāhu li-l-nāsi min raḥmatin*]. Some of these verses suggest that the meaning of *fatḥ* may be something like "judgment," thus making them similar to group B, or they may imply that *fatḥ* refers to some kind of victory or success, although its exact nature remains elusive.

The word *istaftaḥa*, "to ask for a *fatḥ*," usually against the unbelievers or other opponents, occurs in some of these verses and would fit either meaning—i.e., *fatḥ* as

19. Paret, "Die Bedeutungsentwicklung," emphasizes this meaning in particular, as does Hayajneh, "Arabian languages,"144.

20. Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1926), 18, note 2; see also Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 221-2; Rudi Paret, *Der Koran. Kommentar und Konkordanz* (2nd ed. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977), 167. See in particular Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez*, 170.

21. Biella, *loc. cit.*; Beeston, *loc. cit.*

22. Paret, "Bedeutungsentwicklung," links such events with a "decision" by God (meaning C here).

"judgment" or as "victory." (Q. 2: 89; Q. 8: 19; Q. 14: 15). A few verses seem to associate or equate *fatḥ* with *naṣr*, "aid" or "assistance," presumably from God (Q. 61: 13; Q. 110: 1, and more distantly, Q. 48: 1-3). In these last cases, it may be that *fatḥ* is used in a sense akin to that in section C above, "a bounty bestowed by God."

The context at the end of *sūra* 32, in which there is much mention of the Last Judgment, might tempt us to infer that *fatḥ* there is a reference to the Last Judgment itself (verses 25-32)--the word *fatḥ* is even used in the phrase *yawm al-fatḥ*, "the day of the *fatḥ*," which has a ring of finality to it (Q. 32: 29). References to *fatḥ qarīb*, "a near *fatḥ*" (Q. 48: 18; Q. 61: 13) might also be taken to suggest a connection with a Day of Judgment presumed to be imminent, but still in the future. Q. 5: 52 states, "Perhaps God will bring the *fatḥ* or a command from Him..." that will make opponents repent [*fa-ʿasā llāhu an yaʾtiya bi-l-fatḥi aw amrin min ʿinda-hu...*], suggesting that it is something in the future. On the other hand, Q. 8: 19, Q. 48 verses 1, 18, and 27, and Q. 57: 10 all state that the *fatḥ* has already come, and is not something in the future: for example, Q. 8: 19 reads, "if you ask for a *fatḥ*, indeed the *fatḥ* has already come to you" [*in tastaftiḥū fa-qad jāʾa-kum al-fatḥu*]. So, all things considered, the temptation to understand *fatḥ* as a reference to the Last Judgment seems ill-founded.

This thicket of seemingly inconsistent or contradictory meanings of *fatḥ* and related words in the Qurʾān resulted in different glosses being supplied by the commentators, depending on what the context seemed to require: so the word *fatḥ* is explained as meaning not only "opening" but also "judgment," "victory," or "assistance," or sometimes all together.

The commentaries on *sūra* 48 (*sūrat al-Fatḥ*) are especially instructive. In the first verse of this *sūra*, "Verily, We have granted (?) you a clear *fatḥ*" [*innā fataḥnā laka fatḥan mubīnan*], the words *fataḥa* and *fatḥ* are usually construed by modern translators to mean something like "victory."[23] In doing so, they follow the medieval commentators, who for the most part explain this verse as a reference to Muḥammad's agreement with Quraysh at al-Ḥudaybiya.[24] Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* provides a variety of reports arguing that in this verse *fatḥ* means *ḥukm* (a judgment) against those who opposed Muḥammad and in support of those who backed him; in summarizing, he paraphrases the verse to mean, "We gave a verdict of assistance (*naṣr*) and victory (*ẓafr*) against the polytheists (*kuffār*) and with you." So al-Ṭabarī offers both the meanings of "judgment" and "victory/assistance" as glosses. Moreover, almost all the traditions about this passage cited by al-Ṭabarī link it to

23. The translations of Pickthall, Arberry, Dawood, Muḥammad ʿAlī, ʿAbdullāh Yūsuf ʿAlī, Fakhry and Droge all translate as "victory." Bell renders the verse "Verily We have given thee a manifest clearing-up," which seems to draw mainly from the meaning of the adjective *mubīn* and leaves the meaning of the verb and noun *fataḥa* and *fatḥ* unclear. Paret translates the verse as "Wir haben dir einen offenkundigen Erfolg beschieden," thus giving the sense of "success" to *fatḥ*. Droge translates "victory," but in a footnote says that the literal meaning is "we have opened for you a clear opening."

24. This association is noted by U. Rubin, "The Life of Muḥammad and the Islamic Self-Image. A Comparative Analysis of an Episode in the Campaigns of Badr and al-Ḥudaybiya," in Harald Motzki (ed.), *The Biography of Muḥammad. The issue of the sources* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 3-17, at p. 4, and by Hawting, "Al-Ḥudaybiyya and the Conquest of Mecca."

al-Ḥudaybiya, where the verse is according to some commentators supposed to have been revealed.[25]

The *Tafsīr* of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767)--one of the earliest extant commentaries--also links this verse to the al-Ḥudaybiya episode. According to Muqātil, the verse was revealed by God upon Muḥammad's return from al-Ḥudaybiya to Medina, and he glosses it as meaning "We rendered for you a clear judgment in your favor, i.e., Islām."[26]

Despite a certain confusion surrounding the exact meaning of *fatḥ* in the Qurʾān, howevr, one thing is immediately clear: nowhere in the Qurʾān does the word *fatḥ* seem to mean "conquest." The equation of *fatḥ* with "victory" by some commentators comes perhaps nearest to the idea of conquest, but this signification ("victory") seems to be no more than an intelligent guess at the meaning of *fatḥ* based on its context; several other possible meanings seem equally apt ("assistance", for example) and, in any case, "victory" is not the same thing as "conquest." The commentators' association of *fatḥ* in Q. 48 with the incident at al-Ḥudaybiya is instructive here. The commentators may have considered the al-Ḥudaybiya episode a moral victory for the prophet in his struggle against the polytheists of Mecca, but it certainly could not in any way be considered a "conquest." The Islamic tradition of later times considered the armistice that the prophet concluded with the Meccans at al-Ḥudaybiya to be a diplomatic *coup*; Ibn Isḥāq states baldly, "No previous victory (*fatḥ*) in Islam was greater than this."[27] But the import of this victory does not seem to have been immediately clear to many of Muḥammad's close followers, who according to some reports complained that he had conceded too much to the Meccan negotiators and were disappointed to be unable to perform the pilgrimage.[28] In military terms, the "raid" was a complete flop, for Muhammad and his followers were required to turn back without attaining their stated objective of performing pilgrimage. It is very difficult, therefore, to consider the al-Ḥudaybiya episode, consistently described by the commentators as a *fatḥ*, in any way a "conquest," even if it may be considered a "victory."[29] Hawting argues that al-Ḥudaybiya was called a *fatḥ* because it resulted in the "opening" of the Meccan sanctuary;[30] but Muḥammad and his followers were only allowed to visit the sanctuary a year later, so this argument seems a bit far-fetched. Paret, going against the majority of the commentators, suggests that *fatḥ* in *sūra* 48 [*sūrat al-fatḥ*] refers not to al-Ḥudaybiyya at

25. Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* (30 vols., Cairo: al-Matbaʿa al-maymanīya, 1321/1903), XXVI, 42-5.

26. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr* (ed. Aḥmad Farīd, 3 vols., Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmīya, n.d. [ca. 2003?]), III, 244.

27. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīra al-nabawīya* (ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen: Dieterich, 1858-60), 751. The translation is that of A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad. A translation of Ibn Isḥāq's* Sīrat Rasūl Allāh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 507.

28. E.g., Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīra al-nabawīya* (ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen: Dieterich, 1858-60), 746-53.

29. Paret, "Bedeutungsentwicklung," opines that the association of *fatḥ* with "conquest" derives from the *fatḥ Makka*, but it seems more likely that this phrase is itself a back-formation of later *sīra* -tradition; it does not occur in the Qurʾān, nor does the Qurʾān contain any explicit reference to the event. Moreover, the occupation of Mecca by Muḥammad's forces is only slightly more plausibly considered a "conquest"—"surrender" would be a more apt description.

30. Hawting, "Al-Ḥudaybiyya and the conquest of Mecca."

all, but to *fatḥ Makka*, the conquest of Mecca.[31]

What, then, did the Islamic historiographical tradition intend when it drew on the term *fatḥ* and its plural *futūḥ* to designate that genre of reports that related to the expansion of the early Islamic state? Since, as we have seen, *fatḥ* in the Qurʾān does not seem to mean military conquest, and since there were other available Arabic roots (such as *gh-l-b* or *q-h-r* or *ẓ-f-r*, all known to the Qurʾān) that did convey more unequivocally the meaning of conquest, it seems that the key point of designating collections of such reports with the label "*futūḥ*" must have been something other than the military dimension of these events. Nor was the object merely to collect and tabulate evidence for the expansion of the early Islamic state and community, although that was doubtless a significant secondary consideration. The main goal, rather, seems to have been to show that this expansion was an act of God's favor, a divine blessing bestowed upon his prophet and those faithful Believers who followed him. To make this point, the traditionists who collected reports of battles and treaty-agreements and compiled them to form the *futūḥ* literature selected from the Qurʾān a term or usage that specifically made the expansion a sign of God's grace--a *fatḥ* in the sense of the two Qurʾānic verses cited in section C above, in which God bestows some blessing or benefit upon (*fataḥa ʿalā*) the Believers (Q. 6:44 and Q. 7:96). In the conquest accounts we sometimes find exactly the phrase "God bestowed [a place X] upon [the conqueror Y]," *fataḥa llāhu [X] ʿalā [Y]*;[32] in such passages, the emphasis is clearly not on the exact manner of a place's submission, but rather on the fact that it was overcome with God's help. Each place that came to be absorbed into the expanding Islamic state--whether by conquest, or by treaty agreement, or by voluntary affiliation--could thus be seen as a *fatḥ*; God had "bestowed it upon" the Muslim community and state, as an act of divine grace.[33] Indeed, even in modern colloquial Arabic when one wishes to invoke God's blessings on someone, one may say *yiftaḥ Allāh ʿalayk*." This terminology is thus part of the salvation-historical agenda of nascent Islamic historiography, with its emphasis on how God directed historical events to realize his designs for mankind and for his favored community, the community of Muḥammad and his followers.[34]

The designation of reports about the expansion of the early community of Believers as *futūḥ* seems to be part of a broader process by which Muslim traditionists in the second and later centuries AH sought out Qurʾānic words or phrases to designate institutions or phenomena that, in earlier years, had been referred to by other, non-Qurʾānic, words--a

31. Paret, "Bedeutungsentwicklung."

32. For example, al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-maghāzī* (ed. Marsden Jones, London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 636, 655, dealing with the seizure of certain fortresses at Khaybar.

33. B. Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 93-4, is right to state that "Underlying this usage [of the term *futūḥ*], clearly, is a concept of the essential rightness or legitimacy of the Muslim advance...," but he seems not to emphasize the idea that the expansion is an act of God's grace and stresses rather the presumed illegitimacy of those regimes overthrown.

34. On the salvation-historical character of Islamic historiography, see John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historiograhical Tradition*; Donner, *Narratives*.

process I have elsewhere called the "Qurʾānicization" of Islamic discourse.[35] The object of this process was, of course, to legitimize the renamed institutions in Islamic, i.e. Qurʾānic, terms. The best-attested example is the shift in the term for head of state from *amīr al-muʾminīn* (the term found in all early documents so far discovered) to *khalīfa* (a Qurʾānic term which seems first to be used in this sense by ʿAbd al-Malik in his coinage, near the end of the first century AH). The development of the terminology of *futūḥ* offers another example; the term *futūḥ* seems gradually to supplant (or to augment) earlier terms, such as *ghazwa*, *maghāzī*, or *sarīya* that were already in use.[36]

Our reflections leave us with some questions. The first is whether we should continue to translate *fatḥ* in these contexts simply as "conquest." Is a suitable alternative term available? Could we, for example, refer to al-Balādhurī's famous *Futūḥ al-buldān*, usually translated as "The Conquest of the Nations," by something like "The Divine Bequeathing of the Lands" or "The Regions Bestowed by God's Grace"? These seem rather clumsy; something like "The Incorporation of the Nations" might be smoother, but then it lacks the crucial component in the term *fatḥ*, its reference to the working of divine grace.

A second question is whether our facile equation of *fatḥ* with conquest has caused us to overemphasize the importance of military action—conquest—in the expansion of the early Islamic state, and in so doing to neglect or ignore the degree to which the Islamic state may have expanded by means of compromise with, cooperation with, and even concession to the so-called "conquered" peoples.[37] A purely military model cannot adequately explain the long-lasting expansion of the early Islamic state, and its eventually successful integration of millions of new people. Recent research by a number of scholars has helped clarify the ways in which the Arabic-speaking populations of the desert fringes of Syria and Iraq were integrated into the realms of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires.[38] Some townsmen of the Ḥijāz appear to have had close commercial ties with Syria, or to have owned property

35. Fred M. Donner, "The Qurʾāncization of Religio-Political Discourse during the Umayyad Period," in A. Borrut (ed.), *Écriture de l'histoire et processus de canonisation dans les premiers siècles de l'islam. Hommage à Alfred-Louis de Prémare*, *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerrannée* 129 (2011), 79-92.

36. It is difficult to prove this without undertaking a comprehensive examination of all existing reports, and in any case all reports we have are found in later compilations that may have edited earlier reports to insert the later terminology. However, it is worth noting that one of the earliest extant chronicles, the *Taʾrīkh* of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ (d. 854) seems to use the word *futūḥ* mainly (but not exclusively) in section headings rather than in the text of reports contained in these sections, suggesting that the word was part of the compilation process and not found in the earlier reports themselves. Interestingly, the *Taʾrīkh* of Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī (d. 893) uses the word *futūḥ* only once, in a report according to which someone told the *amīr al-muʾminīn* that the killing of the Qadarite Ghaylān (d. 749) was *min futūḥ allāh*, "one of God's blessings."

37. On this possibility see Fred M. Donner, "Visions of the Early Islamic Expansion: Between the Heroic and the Horrific," in Nadia Maria El Cheikh and Sean O'Sullivan (eds.), *Byzantium in Early Islamic Syria* (Beirut: American University of Beirut and Balamand: University of Balamand, 2011), 9-29.

38. See, for example, the essays in Greg Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and His People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Robert G. Hoyland, "Arab Kings, Arab Tribes and the Beginnings of Arab Historical Memory in Late Roman Epigraphy," in Hannah M. Cotton, Robert G. Hoyland, Jonathan J. Price, and David J. Wasserstein (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam. Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) pp. 374-400.

there.[39] All this suggests that the inhabitants of the Arabian fringes, and even of the towns of western Arabia, were on familiar terms with the people of Syria and Iraq, and vice-versa, which could have provided conditions for cooperation between the Arabians and those they knew in Syria and Iraq. Muʿāwiya, when he became governor of Syria in 18/639 established close relations with the powerful Syrian tribe of Kalb—if these ties had not already been made shortly after he arrived in Syria with his brother and predecessor, Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān, in 13/634;[40] and we know that the Umayyads after him maintained close ties with the Kalb and other Syrian tribal groups. This suggests that the process we usually call the conquests, while it certainly involved military confrontations, should not be seen solely in military terms. In this context, our concern over the meaning and proper translation of *futūḥ* can be seen as more than a mere quibble over terminology. Rather, by misunderstanding the semantic content of the term *fatḥ*, we may have allowed ourselves to misconstrue the character of the process of expansion to which it refers.

39. Michael Lecker, "The Estates of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ in Palestine: Notes on a new Negev Inscription," *BSOAS* 52 (1989), 24-37.

40. *EI (2)*, "Kalb b. Wabara, II—Islamic Period" [A. A. Dixon]; Gernot Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der zweite Bürgerkrieg (680-692)* (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, in Komm. bei Franz Steiner, 1982,) 128-29.

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Was Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī a Shiʿite Historian? The State of the Question*

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Abstract

The works of the third/ninth-century historian and geographer Ibn al-Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī have long served as an indispensable source in the modern study of Islamic historiography, but nagging questions about al-Yaʿqūbī's purportedly Shiʿite identity have continued to bedevil modern attempts to interpret his works. This essay re-visits the question of al-Yaʿqūbī's Shiʿite identity in of light of new data and a re-evaluation of the old, and it questions what evidence there exists for considering him a Shiʿite as well as what heuristic value, if any, labeling him as a Shiʿite holds for modern scholars who read his works.

Modern historians of early Islam have read, studied, and relied upon the third/ninth-century Arabic chronicle known today as *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī* (Eng. *The History of al-Yaʿqūbī*) for nearly a century and a half, yet throughout the modern study of early Islamic history, a rather persistent question has haunted the work. Namely, is the chronicle written by a Shiʿite author? And is its portrait of early Islamic history 'Shiʿite'? For the most part, the view that Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* offers a Shiʿite take on Islamic history has prevailed in modern scholarship on Muslim historical writing since the first printed edition of the text was published in the late-nineteenth century. In truth, the very question of a Shiʿite bias is a tedious one - though often asserted, only rarely does one find the implications of the assertion, if there are any, explicitly spelled out. Yet, given how tenacious of a hold this question of the putative Shiʿite bias of al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* continues to have on scholarship, this essay seeks to revisit the issue. But we begin with restating the question in clearer terms: What does it mean to say that al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle is a Shiʿite work? Does it mean simply that the author was himself Shiʿite, or does it mean that the author uses history to vindicate Shiʿite

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beliefs? What use, if any, does answering this question serve when reading this chronicle?

Although the view that al-Yaʿqūbī harbored Shiʿite beliefs attained axiomatic status in the century following the publication of his *History*, modern scholarship has failed to reach a consensus as to what his putative Shiʿite beliefs mean for how his chronicle ought to be read. Hence, one may rightly wonder whether one gains any insight at all by categorizing al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle as a Shiʿite one—identifying the sectarian loyalties of an author hardly nullifies the value of his works as historical sources. Labelling al-Yaʿqūbī as a Shiʿite historian has indeed been a hindrance to historians taking his *History* seriously in the past, as some notorious examples clearly demonstrate.[1] In a relatively recent, iconoclastic essay, Elton Daniel pursued the question of al-Yaʿqūbī's purported Shiʿite bias farther than any of his predecessors, even going so far as to challenge the certainty with which twentieth-century scholars read al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle for its putative Shiʿite bias. Daniel rejected the long-standing justifications for labelling al-Yaʿqūbī as a Shiʿite author as dubious at best and tendentious at worst. He rightly warned that preemptively labelling al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* does more to hinder than facilitate our understanding of the text.[2]

Nevertheless, evaluating al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* as a Shiʿite account of Islamic history boasts a hoary pedigree and remains an entrenched scholarly legacy with which one must still contend, notwithstanding Daniel's critique. The inception of this view can be traced to the publication of M. J. de Goeje's 1876 missive on the Cambridge manuscript, in which he extols the importance al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* as the work of "a full-blooded Shiʿite."[3] The manuscript's editor, M. Th. Houtsma, recapitulated de Goeje's verdict on the chronicle in the preface to the printed edition published by E.J. Brill in 1883,[4] and over a century of scholarly opinion ratified this evaluation of the chronicle, albeit with the usual nuances that distinguish one scholar's approach from another.[5] Al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* thus gained a reputation for being a distinctively Shiʿite reading of early Islamic history that stood out from the work of other Abbasid-era historians, such as Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), and Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).

1. The most infamous example is Goitein's dismissive attitude towards al-Yaʿqūbī's account of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān's construction of the Dome of the Rock as sheer Shiʿite, anti-Umayyad polemic. Contrary to Goitein's suspicions, al-Yaʿqūbī's account, as Amikam Elad has demonstrated, originated not with his Shiʿite bias but, rather, with the non-Shiʿite sources his chronicle drew upon. See A. Elad, "Why did ʿAbd al-Malik build the Dome of the Rock? A re-examination of the Muslim sources," in *Bayt al-Maqdis: ʿAbd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, eds. J. Raby and J. Johns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 241-308 and, more recently, idem, "ʿAbd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: A Further Examination of the Muslim Sources," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 35 (2008): 167-226.

2. E. Daniel, "al-Yaʿqūbī and Shiʿism Reconsidered," in *ʿAbbasid Studies: Occasional Paper of the School of ʿAbbasid Studies, Cambridge, 6-10 July 2002*, ed. J.E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 209-231.

3. M. J. de Goeje, "Ueber die Geschichte der Abbâsiden von al-Jakûbî," in *Travaux de la troisième session du Congrès international des orientalistes*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1876) 156-57, "[W]eil uns hier die Islamische Geschichte erzählt wird von einem Vollblut-Schî'iten, der wahrheitsliebend ist, obgleich in der Wahl der Berichte unter dem Einflüsse seiner Verehrung für das Haus Alî's steht."

4. "Praefatio," in Th. Houtsma, ed., *Ibn Wāḍiḥ qui dicitur al-Jaʿqūbī Historiae* (Leiden: Brill, 1883), I, ix-x.

5. Daniel cites a few outliers (ibid., 212-13), but rarely do they go as far as to deny al-Yaʿqūbī's Shiʿite inclinations outright.

Most of the scholarship on the relationship between Shiʿism and Yaʿqūbī's chronicle in the decades following Houtsma's edition remained impressionistic, and few scholars delved into a detailed analysis of al-Yaʿqūbī's work and the specific ways in which his putative Shiʿite perspective shaped its content. This situation changed for the better beginning in the 1970s. Two scholars, William G. Milward[6] and Yves Marquet,[7] published watershed studies of al-Yaʿqūbī's oeuvre that simultaneously confirmed and nuanced de Goeje's and Houtsma's views. Milward's and Marquet's respective work was considerably more thorough than that of their predecessors.

Milward in particular argued that, although recognizably Shiʿite in disposition, al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle was neither parochial nor insular but, much like the work of other historians of the Abbasid era, drew upon a diverse swathe of sources that exhibited no conspicuously sectarian biases. Yves Marquet's analyses, albeit occasionally tendentious, also demonstrated that, while broadly Shiʿite in outlook, al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* did not espouse a perspective that could be easily identified with any one Shiʿite community from among the multitude of Shiʿite movements of the early Islamic period. Inasmuch as Shiʿism remained a fissiparous phenomenon in the Abbasid period, al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle did not promote the parochial interests of any single Shiʿite community and, therefore, defies any strict categorization.[8]

As argued below, the precise communal locus of al-Yaʿqūbī's sectarian loyalties remain unknowable barring future discovery of new data concerning his biography. That being said, the chronicle does contain a wealth of material that one can use to demonstrate that he favored a staunchly rejectionist, or 'Rāfiḍī', Shiʿite view of early Islamic history. This essay argues, in other words, that, despite Daniel's critique, a reading of al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* that views the work as one animated by a staunchly Shiʿite view of history remains not only justifiable but also imperative. In particular, al-Yaʿqūbī's narratives of the succession to the Prophet and the first Civil War (*al-fitna al-kubrā*) are staunchly pro-ʿAlid and pro-Hāshimid while simultaneously being profoundly hostile not only to controversial Companions, such as the caliph Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, but also to the likes of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.

Such textual posturing, of course, does not mean that one can automatically infer that al-Yaʿqūbī espoused this or that ideology or assume that every account in his chronicle ought to be read through the lens of Shiʿite sectarianism. Islamic historiography is replete with histories that relate contradictory and even mutually exclusive accounts and versions of events.[9] Yet, as will be seen below, what grants the presence of such sectarian narratives particular significance is when, as in al-Yaʿqūbī's case, a chronicler rarely (or never) takes

6. M. Milward, *A Study of al-Yaʿqūbī with Special Reference to His Alleged Shīʿa* [sic] *Bias*, unpublished Ph.D., Princeton, 1962; idem, "The Adaptation of Men to Their Time: An Historical Essay by al-Yaʿqūbī," *JAOS* 84 (1964): 329-344; idem, "Al-Yaʿqūbī's Sources and the Question of Shīʿa [sic] Partiality," *Abr-Nahrayn* 12 (1971-72): 47-75.

7. Y. Marquet, "Le Šīʿisme au IXe siècle à travers l'histoire de Yaʿqūbī," *Arabica* 19 (1972): 1-45, 103-138.

8. Cf. *EI*2, art. "al-Yaʿḳūbī" (M.Q. Zaman).

9. Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source Critical Study*, tr. Michael Bonner (Princeton: Darwin, 1994), 7-10.

any measures to temper their net effect on the reader by providing alternative narratives. Unlike many of his peers, al-Yaʿqūbī dispenses with the method of compiling narratives out of discrete and disparate reports (*akhbār*) and, instead, usually opts for a single narrative voice. Thus does al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle clearly stack the narrative deck in favor of one particular sectarian viewpoint—in his case, that of a Rāfiḍī Shiʿite?

But, this being said, I also follow Daniel's basic instinct that reading al-Yaʿqūbī as "merely Shiʿite" has its limitations, too. As such, this essay seeks a nuanced reading of al-Yaʿqūbī's work as a 'Shiʿite chronicle'. Two lines of inquiry elucidate the challenges posed by al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* and why the place of Shiʿism in the work remains such a difficult question. The first relates to the difficulty of reconstructing al-Yaʿqūbī's biography. The available data about al-Yaʿqūbī is not only sparse, it is also fraught with ambiguities and contradictions, raising the question as to whether any of the data point to his sectarian loyalties. The second line of inquiry pursues a more complicated question: What exactly would a Shiʿite history from the Abbasid period look like?

This second line of questioning draws on a recognition of the internal diversity of Shiʿism in the 3rd/9th-century Abbasid empire without losing sight of the unifying features of Shiʿism broadly conceived. Thus, a narrative that espoused a Shiʿite view of history can be expected, at a minimum, to uphold the view that the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) enjoyed a particular claim to political and religious leadership. This constitutes the rudiments of a view that even non-Shiʿite scholars of the Abbasid period, particularly among the staunchly Sunnī *ḥadīth* folk, broadly termed 'good' or 'benign Shiʿism' (Ar. *tashayyuʿ ḥasan*). A more hardline – a so-called Rāfiḍī or 'rejectionist' - view would contend that *only* the Prophet's family, whether defined as the Prophet's kin (either defined broadly as the Hāshim clan or more narrowly as ʿAlī and his progeny), could rightfully claim this leadership. The rejectionist view also entails the belief that those who deny this leadership have gravely sinned, including even such prominent Companions of the Prophet as Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, since they refused to recognize ʿAlī's rights from the outset and even thwarted their realization. It is this later view, I contend, that one finds in the chronicle of al-Yaʿqūbī, and inasmuch as his chronicle espouses this view of the succession to Muḥammad, one can justifiably regard him as a Shiʿite author.

The Biographical Data

Al-Yaʿqūbī's family history and personal biography have long been recognized as difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct. In a rare and fragmentary autobiographical note that begins his geographical work, the *Kitāb al-buldān*, al-Yaʿqūbī gives us our best insight into his life, portraying himself as follows (*Buldān*, 232-33):[10]

> In the prime of my youth and during the occupations of adulthood I dedicated the keenness of my intellect to the study of the stories of various lands and the distances between them, for I had travelled from a young age. My travels continued and my foreign sojourns never ceased. When I encountered someone from these lands, I

10. Ed. M.J. de Goeje, *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum* (Leiden: Brill, 19272), VII, 231-373.

> would ask him about his homeland and cities …and afterwards I would verify what he reported to me from the most trustworthy testimony. I posed queries to person after person until I had questioned a great multitude of the learned in and out of season as well as Easterners and Westerners. Thus did I write down their reports and transmit their reports … for a long time.

All of this he states, however, without informing his readers what course these journeys traced or whence he began them. A little later on, he begins his treatise with a detailed and adulatory account of Baghdād, a decision he justifies in part because his ancestors once resided in Baghdād and because one of them even helped manage its affairs[11]—likely a reference to his ancestor Wāḍiḥ, an Abbasid client who served the caliphs as a court steward (*qahramān*). He does not, however, claim to have been born there himself. Hence, these comments might give us the sense of a figure who was curious, intrepid, and well-travelled, but they settle little else.

The longest biographical notice for al-Yaʿqūbī appears in Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī's (d. 626/1229) biographical dictionary of belletrists, and Yāqūt draws his account almost entirely from information recorded by the Egyptian historian Abū ʿUmar al-Kindī (d. 350/961). Yāqūt's entry is exceedingly laconic and makes no explicit statement regarding al-Yaʿqūbī's sectarian loyalties. The entry includes Yaʿqūbī's name and lineage (*nasab*); notes that he was a client (*mawlā*) of the Banū Hāshim (i.e., the Prophet's clan of Quraysh); lists his works;[12] and records his death as transpiring in the year 284/897.[13]

Yāqūt's account is also problematic: the date he gives for al-Yaʿqūbī's death is certainly erroneous—citations of al-Yaʿqūbī's poetry on the fall of the Ṭūlūnid dynasty[14] and the death of the Abbasid caliph al-Muktafī prove that he must have lived beyond 295/908 (see below). To further muddy the waters, the death date that Yāqūt gleans from al-Kindī also appears associated with a similarly named figure in the biographical dictionaries of the scholars of *ḥadīth*. They record a minor Egyptian traditionist by the name of Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad ibn Isḥāq ibn Wāḍiḥ ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn Wāḍiḥ al-ʿAssāl ('the honey merchant'), a *mawlā* of the Quraysh. They report his death date as Ṣafar 284/March-April 897—a date matching exactly the death date Yāqūt records for al-Yaʿqūbī.[15]

The *ḥadith* literature places *this* Aḥmad ibn Isḥāq ibn Wāḍiḥ al-ʿAssāl within the orbit

11. *Buldān*, 226.12-13, "*li-anna salafī kānū* [*min*] *al-qāʾimīn bihā wa-aḥadahum tawallā amrahā.*"

12. The works Yāqūt lists are: *Kitāb al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, *Kitāb asmāʾ al-buldān*, *Kitāb fī akhbār al-umam al-sālifa*, and *Kitāb mushākalat al-nās li-zamānihim*. Arguably, all of these works can be regarded as extant in some way if one regards the *Kitāb fī akhbār al-umam al-sālifa* as referring to the first volume of the work known today as *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*.

13. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ (Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb)*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), II, 557.

14. See Gaston Wiet, tr., *Les Pays de Yaʿḳūbī* (Cairo: IFAO, 1937), viii; Ḥusayn ʿĀṣī, *al-Yaʿqūbī: ʿaṣruh, sīrat ḥayātih, wa-manhajuhu l-tārīkhī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 50-51; Daniel, 209 and n. 2 thereto.

15. ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad al-Samʿānī, *al-Ansāb* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1962-82), IX, 291 (citing the *Kitāb Ghurabāʾ* of the Egyptian scholar Ibn Yūnus al-Ṣadafī, d. 347/958); Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-aʿlām*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2003), VI, 668.

of the Egyptian *ḥadīth* scholars. He appears, for example, as a minor *ḥadīth* scholar and an authority in the works of Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī (260-360/873-970), wherein he transmits traditions from the Egyptian scholar Saʿīd ibn al-Ḥakam Ibn Abī Maryam (d. 224/839)[16] and Ḥāmid ibn Yaḥyā al-Balkhī (d. 242/857), a scholar who resided in Tarsus (Ṭarsūs) but who had a large number of Egyptian students.[17] In addition to al-Ṭabarānī's works, Aḥmad ibn Isḥāq ibn Wāḍiḥ al-ʿAssāl also makes scattered appearances as a *ḥadīth* transmitter in the works of the Mālikī scholar of al-Andalus Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071). Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr transmits these traditions from the Egyptian *ḥadīth* scholar ʿAbdallāh ibn Jaʿfar Ibn al-Ward (d. 351/362),[18] who cites Aḥmad ibn Isḥāq ibn Wāḍiḥ as an authority for reports from Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889), the compiler of the famous *Sunan*,[19] as well as two Egyptian scholars named Saʿīd ibn Asad ibn Mūsā al-Umawī (d. 229/843-44)[20] and Muḥammad ibn Khallād al-Iskandarānī (d. 231/845).[21] The impression left by this material is certainly not of the scholarly networks cultivated by a Shiʿite but rather a minor *ḥadīth* scholar known locally among Egyptian traditionists. But is he to be identified with al-Yaʿqūbī the historian? I believe not, but to see why we need to broaden the scope of our analysis.

Most of the other biographical details available to modern historians must be gleaned from the scattered references to and citations of al-Yaʿqūbī's writings in the works of other medieval authors, and all of these recommend against identifying the author of the so-called *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī* with Aḥmad ibn Isḥāq ibn Wāḍiḥ al-ʿAssāl. Al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle was scarcely known to medieval authors—the earliest known citation of the *History* appears in a treatise on Qurʾānic exegesis by the famed theologian Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), who cites his account of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's

16. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1983-1992), x, 393. Cf. these traditions in al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī ibn ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1983-), II, 73 (al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī on the *witr* prayer); VII, 70 (Abū Bakr's prayers during Ramaḍan); IX, 99 (pietistic wisdom of Ibn Masʿūd); X, 26-27 (on the most excellent good works) and 191 (proscription of smacking cheeks and lacerating chests); and XII, 47 (the Prophet's recitations Friday mornings) and 91 (the Prophet's prayers at night). See also idem, *Musnad al-shāmiyyīn*, ed. Ḥamdī ibn ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1983), IV, 365 (on reciting al-Fātiḥa during prayer).

17. Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-ṣaghīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983), I, 25 (ʿĀʾisha on cleaning semen from the Prophet's clothing); cf. Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, V, 325-27 for Ḥāmid ibn Yaḥyā's Egyptian pupils.

18. Originally from Baghdād, Ibn al-Ward settled in Egypt later in life; see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ *et al.* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1996), XVI, 39.

19. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd li-mā fī l-Muwaṭṭaʾ min al-maʿānī wa'l-asānīd* (Rabat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa'l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya, 1967-1992), VII, 142 (Sufyān al-Thawrī's interpretation of Q. 57:4).

20. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Tamhīd*, XVII, 416 (biographical notice on ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Maʿmar, a *muḥaddith* and *qāḍī* of the Umayyad period); idem, *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, c. 1960), IV, 1620 (the Prophet's admonition to Abū Juḥayfa against gluttony).

21. Idem, *al-Intiqāʾ fī faḍāʾil al-thalātha al-aʾimma al-fuqahāʾ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1997), 79 (on an Alexandrian's dream about Mālik ibn Anas). On Muḥammad ibn Khallād al-Iskandarānī, see Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 2002), VII, 118-19.

collection of the Qurʾān (on which, see below).[22] By contrast, scholars such as Ibn al-ʿAdīm (d. 660/1262), al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283), and al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) cited al-Yaʿqūbī's geographical work, *Kitāb al-buldān*, rather frequently by comparison. [23] These medieval authors call him by many names: Aḥmad ibn Wāḍiḥ, Ibn Wādiḥ, Ibn Abī Yaʿqūb, and Aḥmad al-Kātib (i.e., Aḥmad 'the scribe')—though they never refer to him by the *laqab* 'the honey merchant' (*al-ʿassāl*).[24] Indeed, even the designation of this scholar as 'al-Yaʿqūbī' is a modern phenomenon based on the version of his name that appears on the colophons of the extant manuscripts of his works. Most notably, al-Yaʿqūbī's contemporary and fellow geographer Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī (d. *c.* 289-90/902-3) cites the author of the *Kitāb al-buldān* as 'Ibn Wādiḥ al-Iṣfahānī', indicating that the author was at one point in his career known for being of Iranian rather than Egyptian extraction.[25] Daniel too hastily dismisses Ibn al-Faqīh's reference as isolated; in fact, it is not. Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1039) also ranks "Aḥmad ibn Wāḍiḥ" among a long list of literary elite who hailed from Iṣfahān.[26]

Although it is unlikely that the Egyptian honey-merchant named 'Aḥmad ibn Isḥāq ibn Wāḍiḥ' known to the *ḥadīth* scholars is the same 'Aḥmad ibn Abī Yaʿqūb ibn Wāḍiḥ' who authored the *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī* and *Kitāb al-buldān,* the honey-merchant *ḥadīth* scholar may, however, have been the author of the *Kitāb mushākalat al-nās li-zamānihim* conventionally attributed to al-Yaʿqūbī, insofar as the work differs so starkly in style and content from the work known as *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī.*[27] This is mostly speculative. What

22. *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābiḥ al-abrār*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Ādharshab (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2008), I, 24 ff., calling the work *Tārīkh Ibn Wāḍiḥ*. Earlier citations of the *Tārīkh* might be found in the Leiden manuscript of an anonymous history of the Abbasids called *Dhikr Banī ʿAbbās wa-ẓuhūrihim* (Leiden Or. 14.023), which cites Yaʿqūbī's *Tārīkh* directly. See Qāsim al-Sāmarrāʾī, "Hal kataba l-Tanūkhī kitāban fī l-tārīkh?" *al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī* 50 (1975): 531. For a description of the manuscript, see Jan Just Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden* (Leiden: Ter Lugt, 2006-2016), 15: 11

23. Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī tārīkh Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), I, 88, 107-8, 123, 141, 150, 156, 173, 219, 263, 265, 478; Zakariyāʾ ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī, *Āthār al-bilād wa-akhbār al-ʿibād* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 187 (citing Yaʿqūbī, *Buldān*, 333-34). See Daniel, 216 n. 43 for references to al-Yaʿqūbī's *K. al-Buldān* in al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ*

24. For these variants, see M.J. de Goeje, ed., *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum* (Leiden: Brill, 19272), VII, 361-73.

25. Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, in de Goeje, ed., *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum*, V, 290-92; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977), I, 161. This is a passage that no less exhibits the extensive familiarity with the pre-Islamic history of the Persian Sasanid dynasty that characterizes al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle. Shiʿite sources know of an Aḥmad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Iṣfahānī, but he is a figure of the mid-fourth/tenth century who died in 354/965 and, therefore, too late to be identified with the author of al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle. See al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), VI, 479-80; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1956-72), XLV, 105, LXXXVIII, 267.12, and XCII, 225.-8.

26. *Yatīmat al-dahr wa-maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: al-Saʿāda, 1956-58), III, 299 (citing the lost *Kitāb Iṣfahān* of Ḥamza ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Iṣfahānī, d. between 350/961 and 360/970).

27. The praise of Abū Bakr as "the most ascetic of the Muslims" is incongruent with the portrayal of Abū

remains indubitable is that al-Yaʿqūbī did in fact have a long tenure in Egypt as well.

Some indications of al-Yaʿqūbī's time in Egypt are subtle. For instance, the reliance of the early sections of his *History* on an early Arabic translation of *Cave of Treasures*—a source also utilized by the Coptic historian Eutychius of Alexandria (d. 940 CE)—suggests a common Egyptian milieu shared by the two authors.[28] However, other indications of his tenure in Egypt, especially his familiarity with the affairs of the Ṭūlūnid dynasty, are far more decisive. In fact, the 4th/10th-century Egyptian historian Ibn al-Dāya knows al-Yaʿqūbī as an administrator of the land-tax (*kharāj*) for Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn in Barqa (modern-day al-Marj in northeastern Libya) during the rebellion of Ibn Ṭūlūn's son al-ʿAbbās in 265/878.[29] Al-Yaʿqūbī's entry on Barqa in his geographical work survives and is not insubstantial, a fact which would seem to confirm Ibn al-Dāya's assertion. Further evidence suggests that al-Yaʿqūbī fondly remembered his tenure with the Ṭūlūnids and ultimately lived to see the dynasty's collapse. The historian al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) ends his account of the Ṭūlūnid dynasty with an anecdote about how, on the night of ʿĪd al-Fiṭr in 292 AH (5 August 905), Aḥmad[30] ibn Abī Yaʿqūb found himself pondering what had befallen the Ṭūlūnids as he fell asleep. In his sleep, he heard a spectral voice (*hātif*) declare, "Dominion, its pursuit, and honor departed when the Ṭūlūnids vanished (*dhahaba l-mulk wa-l-tamalluk wa-l-zīna lammā maḍā Banū Ṭūlūn*)." [31] These sentiments towards the Ṭūlūnids are affirmed in several lines of poetry an earlier Egyptian historian, al-Kindī, attributes to al-Yaʿqūbī in his *K. al-Wulāt*:[32]

If you ask about the glory of their dominion,
  then wind and wander the Great Square, now overgrown
And behold these palaces and all they encompass
  and take delight in the bloom of that garden
If you contemplate, there too will you find a lesson
  Revealing to you just how the ages change

Although nostalgic perhaps for the glory days of the Ṭūlūnids, by the poem's end al-Yaʿqūbī seems to welcome the Abbasid assault that brought the Ṭūlūnid reign to an end.

Bakr in the *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī* (see below). The chronological scope of this short work also fits well with the chronological scope of Aḥmad ibn Isḥāq al-Miṣrī's lifespan. For an English translation of the text, see W.G. Milward, "*The Adaptation of Men to Their Time*: An Historical Essay by al-Yaʿqūbī," *JAOS* 84 (1964), 329-44 (the passage about Abū Bakr is on p. 333).

28. Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scripture of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 186.

29. Ibn Saʿīd, *al-Mughrib fī ḥulā l-Maghrib*, ed. Z. Hassan *et al.* (Cairo, 1953), 122, *kāna yatawallā kharāj Barqa*.

30. Read "Aḥmad" for "Muḥammad" in the printed text—a reading supported by Kindī's *Kitāb al-wulāt* cited below.

31. Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (London: Muʾassasat al-Furqān, 2002), I.2, 112 and n. 1 thereto.

32. Abū ʿUmar Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Kindī, *The Governors and Judges of Egypt (Kitāb al-wulāt wa-Kitāb al-quḍāt)*, ed. Rhuvon Guest (Leiden: Brill, 1912), 250.

On this Abbasid victory, he declares:[33]

> So [the factions] rushed to embrace the Dynasty of Prophecy and Guidance [i.e., the Abbasids]
>
> And wrested themselves free of the Partisans of Satan

The laudatory manner in which al-Yaʿqūbī describes the Abbasids as 'the dynasty of prophecy and guidance' is the sole hint of al-Yaʿqūbī's Shiʿite inclinations outside the *History.* However, one should not overestimate the importance of this evidence: al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. early 5th/11th century) cites verses attributed to al-Yaʿqūbī where he seems to welcome the death of the caliph al-Muktafī (r. 289-95/902-8), stating "when [the caliph] died, his affliction lived on (*lammā māta ʿāsha adhāhu*)."[34]

There are, however, other indications of his abiding interest in the Hāshimites that could be broadly construed as pious reverence for the Prophet's clan and its descendants. Abū l-Ḥasan al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) lists among the sources he relied upon to write his *Murūj al-dhahab* a *Kitāb al-Tārīkh* of a certain Aḥmad ibn [Abī?] Yaʿqūb al-Miṣrī "concerning the stories of the Abbasids (*fī akhbār al-ʿAbbāsiyyīn*)."[35] It is tempting to view this as a clear attestation to al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle. Houtsma succumbed to the temptation and thus attempted to identify the author of al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* with the individual cited by al-Masʿūdī ("Praefatio," vi).

But the evidence works against Houtsma's identification. First, the work that modern scholars know as *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī* is by no means so narrow that one would characterize it as primarily about the Abbasids—al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle is a universal, not a dynastic, history. Al-Maqrīzī also knows of a certain Aḥmad ibn Abī Yaʿqūb al-Kātib who composed a *K. al-buldān* and "a book on the history of Hāshimites, which is large (*kitāb fī tārīkh al-hāshimiyyīn wa-huwa kabīr*)."[36] Furthermore, Ibn al-Dāya likely quotes extensively this same history mentioned by al-Masʿūdī and later al-Maqrīzī,[37] yet none of Ibn al-Dāya's quotations from Aḥmad ibn Abī Yaʿqūb's work on the Abbasids resemble any passage found in al-Yaʿqūbī's *History*—whether in content or style. Whereas al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* mostly adopts a detached and economical style of narrative prose, the passages of the work that Ibn al-Dāya quotes are often anecdotal, highly personal, and related on the authority of Aḥmad ibn Abī Yaʿqūb's ancestor Wāḍiḥ, a *mawlā* of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr and a

33. Ibid. Cf. *EI2*, art. "Ṭūlūnids" (M. Gordon) and Thierry Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt from Ibn Ṭūlūn to Kāfūr, 868-969," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 107-8.

34. *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ wa-muḥāwarāt al-shuʿarāʾ wa-l-bulaghāʾ*, ed. (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1961), II, 534.

35. *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhwar*, ed. Ch. Pellat (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmiʿa al-Lubnāniyya, 1965-79), I, 16.

36. *K. al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1991), I, 738.

37. See Ibn Dāya, *al-Mukāfaʾa wa-ḥusn al-ʿuqdā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1900), 45-48, 61-62, 66, 83-85, 119-20, 144-45; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ʿUmar ibn Ghurāma al-ʿAmrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995-2000), LXVIII, 209.

household steward (*qahramān*) of the Abbasid court, via his father, Abū Yaʿqūb ibn Wāḍiḥ.[38]

Taken together, the many references to al-Yaʿqūbī leave the impression that he was deeply enmeshed in the bureaucratic circles of the Abbasid era. Yet these notices also offer us little by way of insight into al-Yaʿqūbī's religious views. Staunch Shiʿite loyalties would certainly not have precluded al-Yaʿqūbī from enjoying such a career, as the history of the famously Shiʿite Nawbakhtī family amply suggests.[39] The only hint of a Shiʿite interest one finds in this biographical material comes from al-Yaʿqūbī's lost work on the Hāshimids and Abbasids, but his interest in the scions of the Hāshim tribe can just as easily be attributed to his family's political attachment to the Abbasids as it can to any purported sectarian allegiances. In summary, the surviving biographical data on al-Yaʿqūbī are too paltry and too indeterminate to be of much use in describing his sectarian loyalties.[40] There is little information about the author of the *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī* other than what occurs in the chronicle itself, and what information we can glean from other sources is not only fragmentary but also bereft of any indications that al-Yaʿqūbī harbored Shiʿite loyalties.

Evidence from the *History*

If research into Yaʿqūbī's biography yields little by way of insights into his sectarian identity, then we are forced to examine the text of the *History* itself. Two strategies have been adopted to deduce al-Yaʿqūbī's Shiʿite inclinations from his chronicle to date with uneven results.

The first strategy is the least successful and relies on a rather shallow analysis; it focuses on the chapter headings al-Yaʿqūbī employs in his *History*. Previous scholars have sought to see these headings as a window into his sectarian biases inasmuch as al-Yaʿqūbī conspicuously designates only the reigns of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his son al-Ḥasan with heading 'the caliphate of … (*khilāfat …*)', whereas the reigns of other rulers simply appear under the rubric of "the days (*ayyām*) of *x*." The idea is that, by using these different rubrics, al-Yaʿqūbī discriminates between the legitimacy of ʿAlī and al-Ḥasan and the illegitimacy of other rulers and, thus, reveals his Shiʿite bias.

Elton Daniel has convincingly undermined the viability of this superficial reading. Daniel first questions whether such rubrics can justifiably be regarded as work of al-Yaʿqūbī's authorial hand or if such rubrics merely result from the vicissitudes of the text's transmission. Indeed, such textual minutiae and adornments are rarely immutable features

38. As Daniel (217-21) convincingly demonstrates, this Wāḍiḥ is not the notorious Wādiḥ al-Maskīn, slave-client (*mawlā*) of the Abbasid prince Ṣāliḥ ibn al-Manṣūr, whom the chronicles often denounced as a "vile Shiʿite (*rāfiḍī khabīth*)" and who was beheaded and crucified for betraying the Abbasids by aiding the ʿAlid rebel Idrīs ibn ʿAbd Allāh to escape to the distant Maghrib. See Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. II, ed. Wilferd Madelung (Beirut: Klaus Schwarz, 2003), 540-41; Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901), 3: 560-61; cf. Najam Haider, "The Community Divided: A Textual Analysis of the Murders of Idrīs b. ʿAbd Allāh (d. 175/791)," *JAOS* 128 (2008): 459-75. This Wāḍiḥ turns out to have been a eunuch (Ar. *khaṣī*) and, hence, could not possibly have been al-Yaʿqūbī's ancestor.

39. Cf. *EIr*, art. "The Nawbakti Family" (S. W. Anthony)

40. Daniel, 217-21.

of a text during its transmission history over the centuries. Rather, these textual features tend to be subject to erasure and expansion—dependent, in other words, on the whimsy of copyists. Houtsma's 1883 edition of al-Yaʿqūbī's *History*, the basis for all subsequent re-printings of the chronicle in the Arabic-speaking World and beyond, relied solely on a single, late Cambridge manuscript, copied in Shiʿite-dominated, Ṣafavid Persia in Rabīʿ I 1096/February-March 1685. Since the publication of his edition, an earlier, albeit undated, manuscript has come to light in the John Rylands Library in Manchester.[41] Any comparison of the Cambridge and Rylands manuscripts reveals that, although the two manuscripts descend from a common template (even the textual lacunae are the same), such headings, rubrics, and pious formulae following the names are far from immutable; rather, they are subject to erasure, expansion, and revision in the course of textual transmission and are often the product of the whims of a copyist.[42]

Moreover, as Daniel further noted, al-Yaʿqūbī provides his readers with some indication in the preface to the second section of his *History* that '*ayyām*', or 'days', will indeed serve as a rubric for organizing his history, suggesting that the term is void of sectarian valence. Hence, al-Yaʿqūbī states that, after recounting the Prophet's death, he will relate, "the stories of the caliphs after him and the conduct of each caliph one after another (*sīrat khalifatin baʿda khalīfatin*), as well all his conquests and all that he achieved and transpired during his days (*fī ayyāmih*)" (*Tārīkh*, II, 3). Thus does al-Yaʿqūbī in a single breath refer to each of the Prophet's successors as *caliphs* and specify that the stories of the caliphs' reigns will be subsumed under accounts of each of their "days (*ayyām*)." Al-Yaʿqūbī extends this pattern to most of the caliphs' reigns, beginning each section with "then *x* ruled as caliph (*thumma 'stakhlafa*)"; he only makes an explicit exception for the Umayyads, each of whom, he says rather, "reigned as king (*malaka*)."[43]

There is, finally, a long-standing tendency in the scholarly literature to overemphasize the importance of al-Yaʿqūbī's use the heading '*wafāt*' to mark off entries for the deaths of certain Imams of the Twelver Shiʿa. Two points are worth highlighting here. The first is that, while al-Yaʿqūbī does devote considerable attention to the deaths of some of the earlier Imams of the Twelver Shiʿa as well as their teachings, he does not do so in every case. In the case of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and ʿAlī al-Riḍā, the *wafāt* headings that mark off their obituaries in the printed text are Houtsma's own insertions (II, 499, 550), present neither in the Cambridge nor the Rylands manuscripts.[44] While their lengthy death notices certainly reveal that the imams of the Imāmi-Shiʿa are an important interest for al-Yaʿqūbī, this interest unquestionably wanes the closer the chronicle comes to al-Yaʿqūbī's own era. Hence, his obituary for the eighth Imam ʿAlī al-Riḍā (II, 550), who died under mysterious

41. T. M. Johnstone, "An Early Manuscript of Yaʿḳūbī's *Taʾrīḫ*," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 2 (1957): 189-95, re-affirming reaffirms Mingana's dating of the manuscript, for paleographic reasons, to the mid-14th century.

42. Johnstone, 195; Daniel, 225 ff.

43. Daniel, 223. Notably, the only Umayyad whose rise to power Yaʿqūbī describes in terms of assuming the caliphate (*al-istikhlāf*) is ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (*Tārīkh,* II, 186). For a recent analysis of Yaʿqūbī's hostile portrayal of Yazīd ibn Muʿawiya, see Khaled Keshk, "How to Frame History," *Arabica* 56 (2009): 393-95.

44. Cf. Daniel, 226-27, 230.

and controversial circumstances, is neither partisan nor sensational and seems remarkably brief compared to previous obituary notices on al-Riḍā's predecessors.[45] His death notices on subsequent imams are either non-existent, as in the case of the ninth Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād (II, 552-53) and the eleventh Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (II, 615), or terse and unremarkable, as in the case of the tenth Imam ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Hādī (II, 591-92, 614). Furthermore, while al-Yaʿqūbī devotes extended obituaries to the Imams ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (II, 363-65), Muḥammad al-Bāqir (II, 384-85), Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (II, 458-60), and Mūsā al-Kāẓim (II, 499-500) that prominently feature their teachings and virtues, he also accords similar treatment to ʿAlī ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbbās (II, 355-56). The attention lavished on these figures is more easily explained with reference to al-Yaʿqūbī's interest in the descendants of the Hāshim clan of the Quraysh, about whom he composed a large history that is apparently no longer extant.[46]

Attempting to explain this pattern in al-Yaʿqūbī's treatment of ʿAlī's descendants, Houtsma and Brockelmann put forward a hypothesis (subsequently entertained by Marquet as well) that al-Yaʿqūbī belonged to the Wāqifa, or Mūsawiyya, trend of the Shiʿa[47]— i.e., those Shiʿa who believed that the line of imams stopped with Mūsā al-Kāẓim and that he defied death, entering into occultation in 183/799.[48] An argument in support of this hypothesis but not yet adduced is that, contemporary with al-Yaʿqūbī's tenure with the Ṭūlūnids in Egypt during the late 3rd/9th century, many Mūsawiyya Shiʿa, such as the followers of ʿAlī ibn Warsand al-Bajalī, were migrating westward from Baghdad into North African and the Maghrib.[49] But there's reason to challenge this hypothesis as well. If al-Yaʿqūbī's loyalties lay with those partisans of Mūsā al-Kāẓim who refused to recognize any of his successors, his account of Mūsā's death during the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd becomes quite puzzling. Indeed, as noted by A.A. Duri, if al-Yaʿqūbī's account of Mūsā's death aligns with any view, it would not be that of Mūsā's partisans, but rather that of the Abbasid court, which exculpated the dynasty of any wrongdoing in Mūsā's death.[50]

The foregoing has argued that the established readings of the structural characteristics of al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* aimed at discerning his sectarian loyalties have produced unreliable results. How, then, does one begin to evaluate al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle as representative of a 'Shiʿite' view of history in any meaningful sense?

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45. For insightful analysis of just how far afield Yaʿqūbī's account of ʿAlī al-Riḍā's death from the hagiographical accounts of the Twelver-Shiʿa, see Deborah Tor, "An Historiographical Re-Examination of the Appointment and Death of ʿAlī al-Riḍā," *Der Islam* 71 (2001): 112 and n. 77 thereto, 126 n. 100.

46. Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, I, 738.

47. Houtsma, "Praefatio," I, ix; *EI*1, "al-Yaʿḳūbī" (Carl Brockelmann); Marquet, 136.

48. On this sect, see E. Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya," *BSOAS* 39 (1976): 529 ff.; M. Ali Buyukkara, "The Schism in the Party of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and the Emergence of the Wāqifa," *Arabica* 47 (2000): 78-99.

49. Wilferd Madelung, "Notes on Non-Ismāʿīlī Shiism in the Maghrib," *Studia Islamica* 44 (1976): 87-91; Wadād al-Qāḍī, "al-Shīʿa al-Bajaliyya fī l-Maghrib al-aqṣā," *Acts of the First Congress on the History of the Civilization of the Maghrib* (Tunis: University of Tunis CERES, 1979), 1: 164-94.

50. *The Rise of the Historical Writing among the Arabs*, ed. and tr. L.I. Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 67.

Rather than identify al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle with a specific, historical community of Shiʿa, one can adopt a second approach by starting with a workable, historical definition of the general features of Shiʿite beliefs in al-Yaʿqūbī's era. With such a working definition, one can then subject al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle to a 'Shiʿite litmus test' of sorts. The next section of the essay does just this by exploring al-Yaʿqūbī's treatment of ʿAlid legitimism during the so-called era of the 'Rāshidūn' caliphs. Granted, any delineation of the parameters of Shiʿism risks running afoul of the circular reasoning against which Daniel warns: namely, "using material from the history to claim that al-Yaʿqūbī was Shiʿite, but also using the premise that al-Yaʿqūbī was a Shiʿite to justify a Shiʿite reading of the text."[51] Yet, the reading proposed here is a historical one, rooted in what Muslims of al-Yaʿqūbī's era and subsequent times would recognize (or even virulently denounce) as a Shiʿite perspective on Islamic history, inasmuch as Rāfiḍī narratives and views on the controversies of early Islamic history had become an entrenched and debated feature of the sectarian landscape at least a century before the *History* was written. (As a result, such debates are also broadly attested.)[52] How, then, does al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle stack up?

Evaluations of the merits or demerits of Abū Bakr's succession to Muḥammad and the merits and rights of ʿAlī serve as the locus classicus for early sectarian debates over legitimate leadership in Islam. They provide an ideal arena for exploring the sectarian proclivities of al-Yaʿqūbī as a chronicler. Key to the rift that emerged between the Sunni and Shiʿi memories of the succession to Prophet were, respectively, the affirmation of the legitimacy of Abū Bakr's leadership as the Prophet's worthy successor and the dissenting objections against the legitimacy of his leadership in favor of the Prophet's son-in-law ʿAlī. Narratives rejecting the legitimacy of Abū Bakr's leadership emphasized that the oath of allegiance to him at the portico (*saqīfa*) of the Sāʿida clan had been too hastily rendered and invalidated the allegiance rendered to Abū Bakr due to the absence of the Prophet's kinsfolk, the Hāshim clan, from the proceedings. Hence, according to the dissenting view, Abū Bakr's appointment was illegitimate because it was an *ad hoc* decision (Ar. *falta*)[53] and had alienated the rights of the Prophet's household. Even a cursory reading of al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle will reveal that he eschews all arguments in favor of Abū Bakr's legitimacy, choosing rather to fill his narrative of Abū Bakr's succession with episodes that expose the ambition of Abū Bakr and his supporters and that underscore the truth of Hāshimid and ʿAlid legitimist claims to the Prophet's legacy. Al-Yaʿqūbī viewed Abū Bakr's rise to leadership over the Prophet's community as a combination of travesty and tragedy.[54]

Al-Yaʿqūbī lays the groundwork for his objections to Abū Bakr's caliphate early on in his chronicle with two set pieces, each essential to a distinctively Shiʿite view of early Islamic

51. Daniel, 210.

52. Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991-97), I, 308-12.

53. Even non-Shiʿite narratives portray Abū Bakr's appointment as ad hoc, but they do not see that fact as mitigating the legitimacy of his claim to the caliphate. E.g., see Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions (Kitāb al-maghāzī*), ed. and tr. S.W. Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 194-95 (xxi.1, 2).

54. My reading here contrasts with that of T. Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Masʿūdī* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), 127, whose characterizations of these narratives I find to be quite far off the mark.

history: the incident at Ghadīr Khumm and the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* (II, 125). Al-Yaʿqūbī affirms that, on 18 Dhū l-Ḥijja 10/ 10 March 632, the Prophet delivered a sermon outside Medina near Ghadīr Khumm during which, having taken ʿAlī's hand in his own, the Prophet proclaimed, "Whoever regards me as his protector (*mawlā*), ʿAlī too is his protector. O Lord be a friend to those who befriend him and an enemy of all those who spread enmity against him!"[55] Al-Yaʿqūbī then has the Prophet utter the so-called *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*. The Prophet admonishes his followers that he will precede them all to the eschatological Basin (*al-ḥawḍ*) where, gathered on the Day of Judgment, he will ask them concerning "the two precious items (*al-thaqalayn*)" that will safeguard their salvation until the Day of Judgment. When the Prophet's followers ask what the two items are, he answers: "God's Scripture (*kitāb Allāh*) and my kinsmen, the people of my household (*ʿitratī ahl baytī*)."

Although of weightier importance to the Shiʿa, neither the Ghadīr Khumm tradition nor the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* are foreign to authoritative Sunni collections of *ḥadīth*.[56] They are not, in other words, *prima facie* evidence of a rejectionist Shiʿi perspective. Indeed, in a version of the traditions attributed to the Companion Zayd ibn Arqam, also widespread in Sunni *ḥadīth* collections, the two pronouncements even appear in juxtaposition as they do in al-Yaʿqūbī's text.[57] Arguably, then, the presence of the traditions in the *History* might display the so-called 'benign Shīʿism (*tashayyuʿ ḥasan*)' that populates Sunni *ḥadīth* concerned with the merits and virtues of ʿAlī just as much as more hardline Shiʿite literature. More telling, however, is al-Yaʿqūbī's utilization of the two traditions. He does not feature these traditions, for example, alongside the Prophet's appointment of Abū Bakr to lead the prayers during his last illness or litanies of Abū Bakr's bounty of virtues as one of the Prophet's most trusted Companions—the most important indications of Abū Bakr's superior merits and worthiness to succeed the Prophet in Sunni narratives. Indeed, al-Yaʿqūbī excludes the Prophet's appointment of Abū Bakr as prayer leader entirely. Thus, his mention of the Ghadīr Khumm incident and the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* is no innocuous notation of the merits of ʿAlī. Al-Yaʿqubī mobilizes these two traditions to set up a far more scandalous narrative of Abū Bakr's accession to the caliphate following the Prophet's death.

Initially, al-Yaʿqūbī arranges the narrative set pieces for Abū Bakr's succession in the conventional manner: After the Prophet's passing, his Medinan followers, the Helpers, gather in the portico of the Sāʿida clan to appoint Saʿd ibn ʿUbāda their new leader, and the Hāshim clan retreats to prepare Muḥammad's corpse for burial. Abū Bakr, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and other Qurashī Emigrants hear word of the Helpers' plans to appoint a

55. *Man kuntu mawlāhu fa-ʿAlī huwa mawlāhu allāhumma wāli man wālāhu wa-ʿādi man ʿādāhu.*

56. For an analysis of these traditions, see *EI*3, art. "Ghadīr Khumm" (M.A. Amir-Moezzi); Maria M. Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shiʿite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), ch. 2; and Me'ir Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī-Shiism* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 39 ff. Dakake's odd (and probably careless) assertion that al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* gives this tradition "a brief mention, not a narrative account" and ranks among those works that "underplay" the importance of the event (*Charismatic Community*, 36, 38) ought to be rejected.

57. E.g., al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II, 114-15; Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Vaduz: Thesaurus Islamicus, 2000), II, 1032 (*k. faḍāʾil al-ṣaḥāba*, no. 6378) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, ed. Shuʿayb Arnaʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1993), XXXII, 10-12.

leader of their own and rush in order to stop the proceedings. In the tense deliberations that ensue, ʿUmar and Abū ʿUbayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ nominate Abū Bakr as the community's most worthy leader; the Helpers and Emigrants present agree to render him their oath of allegiance.

Al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle frames the conflict between the Helpers and the Emigrants in terms of the respective merits of the Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe, versus those of the Helpers. In this way, al-Yaʿqūbī prepares the reader for a parallel debate to ensue when the Prophet's kin from the Hāshim clan make their entrance. Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and Abū ʿUbayda speak with one voice when they aver, "The Messenger of God came from us [the Quraysh], thus are we the most deserving to occupy his place (*aḥaqqu bi-maqāmih*)" (II, 137)—but, conspicuously, fail to see how such logic applies to their absent, fellow tribesmen from the Hāshim clan. The Emigrant ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf likewise admonishes the Helpers to submit to the leadership of the Quraysh, declaring, "There is none equal to Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿAlī in your midst," but clumsily let slip mention of ʿAlī. In a revealing passage, the Helper al-Mundhir ibn Arqam pounces on ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's mention of ʿAlī retorting, "Indeed, there is one man, were he to pursue this matter, none would contest him over it (*law ṭalaba hādhā l-amr lam yunāziʿhu fīhi aḥad*)" (II, 137).

When the Helper al-Barāʾ ibn ʿĀzib tells the Hāshim clan of Abū Bakr's successful bid for the leadership of the community, the Prophet's kin are aghast, leading one of their number to gainsay the whole affair as invalid given their absence. The Prophet's uncle al-ʿAbbās utters a cry of disbelief at what he considers a debacle. Most outspoken is his son al-Faḍl ibn al-ʿAbbās, who exclaims, "O company of Quraysh! The caliphate does not become your right by virtue of guile (*bi-l-tamwīh*)! We [the Hāshim clan] are the household of the caliphate before you (*ahluhā dūnakum*) and our kinsman [ʿAlī] is far more deserving of it than you (*ṣāḥibunā awlā bihā minkum*)" (II, 138).

After this scene, al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle portrays ʿAlī's response as forbearing and, hence, key to letting cooler heads prevail. The chronicle also provides a list of Emigrants and Helpers who remain loyal to ʿAlī and refuse to give Abū Bakr their allegiance. Here, too, his chronicle seizes the opportunity portray Abū Bakr's supporters as animated by crude ambition to exclude the Hāshim clan from the caliphate. Abū Bakr turns to ʿUmar, Abū ʿUbayda, and al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba for their advice, whereupon they recommend bribing the Prophet's uncle al-ʿAbbās with a share (*naṣīb*) for himself and his progeny in the rule of community in order to convince him to cajole the Hāshim clan into accepting Abū Bakr's leadership. The four plead with al-ʿAbbās to accept the Believers' choice of Abū Bakr as unanimous. The reply of the Prophet's uncle is damning: How can they claim the consensus of the Believers' when the Hāshimites dissent? How can they offer al-ʿAbbās a share in the community's rule if leadership rests on the Believers' consensus?

Matters worsen further still for Abū Bakr and his cadre when the Umayyad clan voices its support for ʿAlī. When the early Umayyad convert, Khālid ibn Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ, returns to Medina, he calls a gathering of Medinans together, summoning them to swear allegiance to ʿAlī "heads shaved (*muḥallaqīn al-ruʾūs*)" in repentance. Though only three persons step forward, the event suffices to spur ʿUmar and Abū Bakr to rush to Fāṭima's residence, which, aided by others, they begin to demolish. ʿAlī exits the house with sword in hand

and confronts ʿUmar. They wrestle until, at last, ʿUmar breaks ʿAlī's sword. Facing eviction from her home, the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima shrilly rebukes Abū Bakr and his supporters: "Will you expel me from my home? Or should I expose my hair and cry out to God in fury?" Al-Yaʿqūbī concludes the imbroglio remarking that, though one by one ʿAlī's supports rendered their allegiance to Abū Bakr, he withheld giving his for six months (II, 141).[58]

Al-Yaʿqūbī's narrative is a far cry from the irenic narratives that come to populate the emerging Sunni historical canon and must account, at least partially, for his exclusion from that canon. Medieval readers would likely find his narratives of Fāṭima and ʿAlī's opposition to Abū Bakr sectarian as well as invidious.[59] The Sunni historian al-Ṭabarī, although he does not entirely conceal the discontents of ʿAlī and the Hāshim clan in his annals, turns to the narratives composed by the notoriously anti-Shiʿite historian Sayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamīmī (fl. late 2nd/8th century) to dilute their impact. Sayf ibn ʿUmar, for example, rather incredulously portrays ʿAlī as so eager to pledge allegiance to Abū Bakr that he accidently leaves home without being fully dressed.[60] Compared against an author of pious fictions like Sayf, al-Yaʿqūbī's effort to inveigh on behalf of pro-ʿAlid legitimist claims are unmistakable.

By the time al-Yaʿqūbī's narrative arrives at ʿAlī's bid for the caliphate in the wake of ʿUthmān's assassination, the Shiʿite subtext becomes all the more conspicuous. The comparably early Muslim chroniclers—such as Ibn Saʿd, al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī—wring their hands over the intractable controversies surrounding these events: Was ʿAlī complicit in ʿUthmān's murder? Did ʿAlī's sympathies lie with rebels who murdered ʿUthmān? Did Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr willingly offer ʿAlī their allegiance (*bayʿa*) or were they compelled by force of threat? While by no means uninterested in these issues, al-Yaʿqūbī bypasses these issues and, instead, seems to exult in ʿAlī's accession to the caliphate where these other chroniclers do not. His narrative teems with praise for ʿAlī's merits vaunted by the tongues of the Helpers and ʿAlī's loyal partisans. Thus does Khuzayma ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī publicly declare to ʿAlī that, among all the Prophet's followers, "you possess all that they can claim and they lack all that you can claim (*laka mā lahum wa-laysa lahum mā laka*)." "You have exalted the caliphate and made it resplendent," proclaims ʿAlī's Kūfan acolyte Ṣaʿṣaʿa ibn Ṣūḥān, "but it has added naught to you, for it is more in need of you than you of it." Most striking of all, however, is the declaration of Mālik al-Ashtar: "Listen people! This man is the legatee of the legatees (*waṣī al-awṣiyāʾ*) and the inheritor of prophets' knowledge" (II, 208).

This last statement attributed to al-Ashtar contains two especially important ideas that appear elsewhere throughout al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle. First, al-Ashtar assigns the

58. Al-Yaʿqūbī also notes the minority report that ʿAlī delayed his *bayʿa* to Abū Bakr a mere forty days. The refusal of ʿAlī along with the rest of the Banū Hāshim to proffer their *bayʿa* to Abū Bakr is standard in non-Shiʿite narratives as well. Cf. Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 248-51 (xxvii.3); Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II, 14.

59. Cf. Verena Klemm, "Die frühe islamische Erzählung von Fāṭima bint Muḥammad: Vom *ḫabar* zur Legende," *Der Islam* 79 (2002): 78-80.

60. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I, 1825. Sayf's narratives, although indispensable to Ṭabarī's construction of Sunnī view of early Islamic history, represents the viewpoint of the ʿUthmāniyya. See S. W. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Sabaʾ and the Origins of Shiʿism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 101-6.

title *waṣī al-awṣiyāʾ* to ʿAlī. The appellation was widely regarded as a touchstone of the type of language that exposed one as a Rāfiḍī, or rejectionist, Shiʿite. Thus did the Imāmī traditionist Jābir al-Juʿfī fall out of favor with the Kufan *ḥadīth*-folk when overheard citing a tradition on Muḥammad al-Bāqir's authority by saying, "the legatee of the legatees reported to me ... (*ḥaddathanī waṣī al-awṣiyāʾ*)."[61] Second, and more important, is the ideological underpinning of designating ʿAlī as Muḥammad's *waṣī*. This designation implies that ʿAlī inherited a sacred bequest (*waṣiyya*), and hence his legitimacy, from the Prophet based on kinship—a claim of inheritance that neither Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, nor ʿUthmān could boast.

As an argument in favor of ʿAlī's unique legitimacy as the Prophet's successor, the notion of ʿAlī as the Prophet's *waṣī* stands among the very earliest put forward in philo-ʿAlid and Shiʿite historiography. Thus, for example, does ʿAlī's loyal acolyte, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, write to rebuke Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān for defying ʿAlī's bid for the caliphate, "Woe to you for comparing yourself to ʿAlī, who is the inheritor (*wārith*) of God's Messenger, his *waṣī*, the father of his progeny (*abū waladih*), and first of all to follow him."[62] The idea appears also in the earliest poetry extolling the rights of ʿAlī, as in the following lines of the Shiʿite poet Abū l-Aswad al-Duʾalī (d. 69/688):[63]

I love Muḥammad with the deepest love
  and ʿAbbās and Ḥamza and the *Waṣī* [i.e., ʿAlī]
Sons of the Messenger's uncle and each near relative
  Most beloved of people each and all to me

Closely tied with the pro-Hāshimid and pro-ʿAlid legitimism that pervades—indeed drives—al-Yaʿqūbī's narrative is the notion that ʿAlī as the *waṣī* also inherits not merely a political right to rule the community's affairs but also the Prophet's knowledge. This idea emerges clearly in the *bayʿa* scene recounted above where the affirmation of ʿAlī's status as Muḥammad's *waṣī* not only underscores ʿAlī's legitimacy as the ruler of the *umma* but also undercuts the claims to legitimate leadership put forward by his predecessors, especially Abū Bakr and his cohort, who could not themselves lay claim to the title. When rendering his allegiance to ʿAlī upon assuming the caliphate, Mālik al-Ashtar simultaneously identifies ʿAlī as the Prophet's true *waṣī* and "the inheritor of the prophets' knowledge (*wārith ʿilm*

61. Abū Yūsuf al-Fasawī, *K. al-Maʿrifa wa-l-tārīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿUmarī (Medina: Maktabat al-Dār, 1989), II, 716. That in referring to *waṣī al-awṣiyāʾ* Jābir al-Juʿfī refers not to ʿAlī but rather his descendent, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, is made apparent by a tradition recorded in Ibn Bābūyah, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, 1984), I, 288. Writing in the late-eighth century, the Kufan *akhbārī* Sayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamīmī likewise attributes the invention of the title *khātam al-awṣiyāʾ* for ʿAlī as originating in the invidious view of the heresiarch Ibn Sabaʾ; see Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*, 82 ff.

62. Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadītha, 19622), 119. Cf. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 13-15 and M. Yazigi, "Defense and Validation in Shiʿi and Sunni Tradition: The Case of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr," *Studia Islamica* 98-99 (2004): 67-68.

63. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbas, Ibrāhīm al-Saʿāfīn, and Bakr ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2008), XII, 232.

al-anbiyāʾ)." Mālik al-Ashtar's *bayʿa* is also not the first time that al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle introduces the idea that ʿAlī possessed a measure of preternatural, prophetic knowledge thanks to his close kinship to the Prophet and the favor the Prophet bestowed upon him. These ideas first manifest in poetry composed by the Prophet's bard Ḥassān ibn Thābit during the dispute over Abū Bakr's assuming the leadership of the community. Ḥassān praises ʿAlī as follows (II, 144):

> You preserve for us God's Messenger; and his testament
> is yours—and who is nearer in kinship to him? Who?
> Are you not declared his brother? Are you not his legatee (*waṣī*),
> And of the Fihr tribe the most knowledgeable of the Scripture and Sunna?

These verses provide one of the clearest and earliest expressions of ʿAlī's superior merits in al-Yaʿqūbī's *History.* That the ideas of ʿAlī's legitimacy as the Prophets true successor, his legatee (*waṣī*), and therefore an inheritor of prophetic knowledge reappear again at ʿAlī's assumption of the caliphate is of paramount importance for understanding al-Yaʿqūbī's historical perspective.

Sometimes al-Yaʿqūbī manifests his exalted view of ʿAlī only subtly, as when the caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān's collection of the Qurʾān creates an opportunity for al-Yaʿqūbī to highlight ʿAlī's unrivaled authority on the Qurʾān. As ʿAlī is the most learnèd of the Quraysh, al-Yaʿqūbī lists in extended detail the unique features of ʿAlī's neglected codex in an account that overshadows his treatment of the caliph ʿUthmān's famous collection (II, 152-54).[64] Implicit in al-Yaʿqūbī's account seems to be the widespread Shiʿi view that ʿAlī was the most learned of the Companions, but although he compiled the Qurʾān and presented it the *umma*, the Prophet's recalcitrant Companions rejected his codex (*muṣḥaf*) for ʿUthmān's recension nonetheless.[65] Yet, the idea that ʿAlī inherits the knowledge of God's prophets from Muḥammad as his *waṣī* also features prominently, too. These ideas appear in a striking scene from the caliphate of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān that features ʿUthmān's most strident, piety-minded critic: Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī. For al-Yaʿqūbī, Abū Dharr represents not merely the dissent of the piety-minded against the abuses of political power or the corruption of wealth during ʿUthmān's caliphate,[66] he is also staunchly partisan and

64. Cf. Th. Nöldeke, F. Schwally, G. Bergsträßer, and O. Pretzl, *The History of the Qurʾān*, tr. W.H. Behn (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 220 (II, 9-11). Yaʿqūbī's account of the arrangement of the *sūra*s in ʿAlī's Qurʾān codex is, to my knowledge, unique; cf. Shahrastānī, *Mafātiḥ al-asrār*, I, 24-28. Other accounts assert, rather, that ʿAlī organized his codex according to the order of revelation; see Arthur Jeffery, *Two Muqaddimas to the Qur'anic Sciences* (Cairo: al-Khaniji Booksellers, 1943), 14-16. On Shiʿite views of ʿAlī's Qurʾān more generally, see Etan Kohlberg and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification: The* Kitāb al-qirāʾāt *of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 25-27.

65. Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1968-71), II, 633; cf. H. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 2-4. It is worth noting that ʿAlī's enemies denied that he possessed exceptional knowledge of the Qurʾān and rejected any notion that his insight into the revelation was anything more than even ordinary Companions; see ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-ʿUthmāniyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1955), 92-93.

66. A topic that features in *Mushākalat al-nās li-zāmanihim* as well; see Tayeb El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics*

loyal to ʿAlī. With unbridled conviction, Abū Dharr declares (II, 198):

> Muḥammad inherited the knowledge of Adam and that which exalted the prophets, and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is the legatee of Muḥammad and the inheritor of his knowledge.

This idea that ʿAlī inherits the prophets' knowledge as the Prophet's successor is not unique to al-Yaʿqūbī by any means. It is striking that Abū Dharr's declaration fits quite well with the saying of the fifth Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, who related that, when ʿAlī reported that he could hear Gabriel's voice and see light (*al-ḍawʾ*), the Prophet replied:

> Were I not the Seal of the Prophets, then you would share prophecy with me. Were it not so, you would be a prophet. Rather, you are to be the executor and inheritor of a prophet's legacy, chief of the executors and Imam of the God-fearing.[67]

Yet, do such pronouncements on ʿAlī's superior merits, his preternatural knowledge, and his unassailable rights as the sole legitimate successor to Muḥammad reflect al-Yaʿqūbī's own Shiʿite vision of Islamic history? Confirmation that indeed they do can be found in the very organization of his chronicle. On the one hand, these are the utterances of his narrative's most heroic and praiseworthy protagonists. On the other, al-Yaʿqūbī's account of ʿAlī's caliphate is bereft of criticism one finds of his predecessors and ends with a lengthy treatment of the pious sayings and wise maxims ʿAlī bequeathed to his partisans. These take up nine pages in Houtsma's edition of the Arabic text (II, 242-51)—this is quite a sizeable amount relative to his chronicle's scope that is without parallel within its pages. No other figure receives such treatment at al-Yaʿqūbī's hands—let alone any of the other so-called 'Rāshidūn' caliphs. Abū Bakr, by contrast, faces his death with naught but regret and a litany of deathbed confessions of his wrongdoings (II, 155-56),[68] whereas ʿAlī offers bezels of wisdom and timeless guidance.

Conclusion

If one is to find any indication of al-Yaʿqūbī's putatively Shiʿite perspective on Islamic history, one must look to his treatment of the controversies over the succession to the Prophet where such views are most conspicuously manifest. As seen above, al-Yaʿqūbī's

in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 6-7.

67. Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (repr. Beirut: Dār al-Sāqiya li-l-ʿUlūm, 2001), XIII, 163: *law lā annī khātam al-anbiyāʾ la-kunta sharīkan fī l-nabuwwa fa-in lā takun nabiyyan fa-innaka wasiyyu nabiyyin wa-wārithuh bal anta sayyidu l-awṣiyāʾ wa-imāmu l-atqiyāʾ*.

68. Sunnī scholars such as al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) attributed the forgery of Abū Bakr's deathbed confessions to a certain ʿUlwān ibn Dāwūd [ibn Ṣāliḥ] al-Bajalī (d. 180/796-97), who appears as the common link for all versions of the tradition cited; cf. Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.), III, 108-10. The tradition is indeed cited by scholars of the Shiʿa in anti-Sunni polemics; e.g., see (Ps.)-Faḍl ibn Shādhān, *al-Īḍāḥ*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī al-Armawī al-Muḥaddith (Tehran: Dānashgāh-ye Tehran, 1984), 518 and Ibn Bābūyah al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), *al-Khiṣāl*, 171-73. However, the longest, best-preserved versions appear in Sunni works. See Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I, 2139-41; Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, I, 62-63; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq*, XXX, 417-23.

narrative of the succession to the Prophet and his celebration of the survival of the pro-ʿAlid cause and its realization during the caliphate of ʿAlī—despite all the tragedies inflicted upon the cause subsequently—leave little doubt about the Shiʿite perspective put forward in his chronicle. At its seminal stages, Islamic historiography never split into merely two hostile binaries, with the Sunni cult of the *ṣaḥāba* at one end and the Shiʿite exaltation of the Prophet's household and damnation of their rivals on the other. As Scott Lucas has compellingly argued, the Rāfiḍī position cultivated by certain Shiʿa and the cult of the *ṣaḥāba* espoused by the *ḥadīth* folk were, rather, two extreme poles of a spectrum that accommodated a panoply of perspectives on the Prophet's Companions (ʿUthmānī, Murjiʾī, Zaydī, Ibāḍī, Muʿtazilī, etc.)[69]—albeit historiographical perspectives that proved less durable than the two that came to predominate in the ensuing centuries. Yet, a careful reading of the narratives al-Yaʿqūbī recounts in his chronicle allows one to easily discern his place at the 'rejectionist', or Rāfiḍī, Shiʿite end of this spectrum.

Hence, any attempt to underplay how trenchantly pro-ʿAlī al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* is or to minimize its hostility towards Abū Bakr and ʿUmar will miss an important point about the chronicle. The narratives honed in Yaʿqūbī's chronicle are simply irreconcilable even with the so-called 'benign Shiʿism (*tashayyuʿ ḥasan*)' tolerated among the *ḥadīth* folk. He belongs in an entirely different genus of scholars than those scholars who were famous for espousing the benign Shiʿism tolerated by the *ḥadīth* folk. Partiality towards ʿAlī indisputably features in the writings of such giant *ḥadīth* scholars as al-Nasāʾī (d. *c.* 303/915), who may have even died for his dedication to ʿAlī,[70] and al-Ḥākim al-Naysāpūrī (d. 405/1014), who courted controversy for his staunch criticism of Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān;[71] yet, even given what little we know about the precise Shiʿite community to which al-Yaʿqūbī belonged, the chronicle signals to us that he stands apart from figures such as these. None of these figures nor their likes would have tolerated or espoused the portrayals and characterizations of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar that one finds in al-Yaʿqūbī's *History.*

Finally, if one does *not* read al-Yaʿqūbī's *History* as a Shiʿite chronicle, one must ponder what is lost. Specifically, one loses perspective of al-Yaʿqūbī's own authorial self-awareness and the stakes at play for him in the process of crafting the narratives of his chronicle. Al-Yaʿqūbī is but one of many Abbasid-era historians writing in a tumultuous sea of contested historical memory, but his authorial vision for his chronicle sets him apart from his contemporaries in palpable ways. Al-Yaʿqūbī's chronicle is no mere receptacle of older, disparate accounts. As Chase Robinson has noted, al-Yaʿqūbī chronicle is an 'iconoclastic'

69. Scott C. Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Saʿd, Ibn Maʿīn, and Ibn Ḥanbal* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 221-85. Cf. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*, 101-6 and W. Madelung, "al-Haytham b. ʿAdī on the offences of the caliph ʿUthmān," in *Centre and Periphery within the Borders of Islam: Proceedings of the 23rd Congress of l'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisantes*, ed. G. Contu (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 47-51.

70. Christopher Melchert, "The Life and Works of al-Nasāʾī," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 59 (2014): 403-5.

71. S. C. Lucas, "al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and the Companions of the Prophet: An Original Sunnī Voice in the Shīʿī Century," in *The Heritage of Arabo Islamic Learning: Studies Presented to Wadad Kadi*, eds. Maurice Pomerantz and Aram Shahin (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 258-71.

one that sails against the prevailing winds the emerging Sunni historiography;[72] certainly his Shiʿite perspective factors into this iconoclastic perspective. Hence, to lose sight of the extent to which al-Yaʿqūbī filled his chronicle with narratives crafted to resonate with the vision of the early Islamic community cultivated by the Shiʿa causes modern readers to lose sight of how he navigated this sea of historical memory. Losing sight of al-Yaʿqūbī's Shiʿi perspective blinds us to his authorial vision and, therefore, a key contribution of his chronicle to Islamic historiography.

72. *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36, 132-33.

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Of Islamic Grammatology: Ibn Turka's Lettrist Metaphysics of Light*

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Abstract

As Derrida charged, Plato's famous declaration of speech's superiority to writing would seem to have resonated with inheritor cultures similarly transitioning from orality to literacy, and especially the Islamicate; despite the explosion of writerly culture from the 2nd/8th century onward, Arabic scholarship continued to evince a categorical, if increasingly rhetorical, mistrust of writing. In the 8th/14th century, however, as the age of encyclopedism dawned throughout the Islamicate heartlands, the superiority of writing to speech was formally and categorically asserted by Arabic and Persian encyclopedists, including most prominently Ibn al-Akfānī (d. 749/1348) of Mamluk Egypt and Shams al-Dīn Āmulī (d. after 787/1352) of Ilkhanid Iran. It is hardly coincidental in this connection that the same century also witnessed the burgeoning popularity among scholarly and ruling elites of lettrism (ʿilm al-ḥurūf)*, kabbalah's coeval cognate—the occult science that posited the cosmos itself as a text to be read, even rewritten. Synthesizing these literary and occult-scientific currents, in the early 9th/15th century a network of Muslim neopythagoreanizing lettrists—chief among them Ibn Turka of Isfahan (d. 835/1432)—developed the first formal metaphysics of writing.*

This article analyzes Ibn Turka's unprecedented valorization of writing over speech in terms both epistemological and ontological, as well as the sociocultural ramifications of this move throughout the post-Mongol Persianate world. Letter-number, he argued, is a form of light *eternally emanated from the One; hence* vision*, that faculty of light, must be the sense most universal; hence* visible text *must be the form of the One most manifest. In support of this thesis, he synthesized the Avicennan-Ṭūsian doctrine of the transcendental modulation of being* (tashkīk al-wujūd) *with its illuminationist upgrade, the transcendental modulation of light* (tashkīk al-nūr)*, to produce his signature doctrine of* tashkīk al-ḥarf*: letters of light as uncreated, all-creative matrix of the cosmos, gradually descending from the One in extramental, mental, spoken and finally written form. Far from being a peculiar intellectual rabbit trail of no enduring significance, I argue that Ibn Turka's lettrist metaphysics of light was embraced by subsequent thinkers in Iran as the most effective means of conceptualizing and celebrating Islamicate writerly culture; these include the famed philosophers Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502) and Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1630), founder of the so-called school of Isfahan. Nor was its*

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influence limited to Aqquyunlu-Safavid philosophical circles; I further argue that Ibn Turka's system informed the explosion of Persianate book culture *more generally, and by extension Persianate* visual culture*, from the early Timurid period onward. A telling example in this context is the emergence of the album preface as a new genre of art history-theory in early Safavid Iran, a phenomenon that has been well feted and studied by art historians; but they have wholly elided high lettrism as the genre's most immediate philosophical context. This principle may be extended to the Persian cosmopolis as a whole: two of the most seminal discourses on writing developed in the Ottoman and Mughal contexts, by Taşköprüzāde (d. 968/1561) and Abū l-Fażl ʿAllāmī (d. 1011/1602) respectively, are demonstrably Ibn Turkian.*

Like Derrida was to do half a millennium later, in sum, early modern Muslim lettrists rejected Plato's speech-writing hierarchy; unlike Derrida, for whom writing can have no ontological edge, they put forward a profoundly humanistic neopythagorean ontogrammatology *as core of the* philosophia perennis*—and that so trenchantly that it served to shape Islamicate intellectual and aesthetic culture alike for centuries. The modern ideologues of East-West rupture notwithstanding, moreover, I propose this cosmology as a major node of Islamo-Christianate cultural continuity even to the present.*

* * * *

> The pen is the most powerful of talismans, and writing its [magical] product.[1]
>
> —Apollonius of Tyana

> The one who will shine in the science of writing will shine like the sun.[2]

> [T]he science of writing—*grammatology*—shows signs of liberation all over the world, thanks to decisive efforts.[3]
>
> —Jacques Derrida

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato famously declared speech superior to writing, that bastard child of the soul.[4] Yet he made this declaration *in writing*; and so it has reverberated to the present. This paradox expresses the central anxiety in cultures transitioning from orality to literacy, in this case Greek: Does writing diminish our humanity—or enhance it? Does it denature philosophic or moral authority—or preserve it intact over time? Is not the divine *fiat lux* eternally spoken, not written? More worryingly, once writing, that Pandora's box, attains to cultural hegemony, can we ever again think or speak beyond its seductive strictures? Can there be any escape from logocentricity graphemically embodied? Certainly not, says Derrida, while diagnosing a terminal metaphysical distrust of writing in Western culture, from Plato to the present, and epitomized by Saussure's Platonic damnation of writing as a perversion of speech, as tyranny.[5] But Derrida upends

1. *Al-qalam al-ṭilasm al-akbar wa-l-khaṭṭ natījatu-hu*. This line is attributed to Apollonius (*Balīnās*) in al-Tawḥīdī's (d. 1414/1023) treatise on calligraphy (Rosenthal, "Abū Ḥaiyān al-Tawḥīdī on Penmanship," 25).

2. This ancient Egyptian description of a scribe, taken from the 1963 colloquium essay *L'écriture et la psychologie des peuples*, opens *Of Grammatology* (3).

3. Ibid., 4.

4. *The Works of Plato*, tr. Jowett, 322-27.

5. It should here be borne in mind that a distrust of writing is common to ancient Greek, Zoroastrian and

this hoary hierarchy and bids us obey our perverting tyrant. For writing writes us; the world is a litter of its hieroglyphs of light.[6]

What of Islamicate culture, then, half Western, heavily Hellenic, just as thoroughgoingly logocentric, and reputedly even more phonocentric? Did it too fail to develop a grammatology?

The answer, quite simply, is no: Derrida's diagnosis is inapplicable to Islam.[7] As I argue, despite the high degree of genetic continuity between Christianate and Islamicate cultures, Muslim scholars came to valorize writing over speech to a greater degree than many of their counterparts to the west, such that by the 9th Islamic century (15th century CE) a formalized neoplatonic-neopythagorean *metaphysics of writing* had become hegemonic from Anatolia to India—precisely as printing was emerging in Renaissance Europe. Like Derrida, these thinkers inverted the semiotic hierarchy;[8] unlike Derrida, they asserted written language to be superior to spoken both epistemologically and ontologically, universal in its reliance on the comprehensive faculty of vision: written letters as forms of light fully descended from the all-emanating One. The latter, in short, were hardly the forerunners of Derridean hyperstructuralism, yet propounded—and that with remarkable success across much of the early modern Afro-Eurasian ecumene—a semiological physics-metaphysics that may be styled hyperstructuralist with equal justice.[9]

Vedic and Rabbinic Jewish contexts—in the latter two writing was even considered ritually impure (Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting," 462).

6. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*; idem, "Plato's Pharmacy"; Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 111. Most significantly for the purposes of this study, for Derrida *writing precedes being* "insofar as writing conditions history and all genesis"; hence his term *arche-writing* (Lawlor, "Eliminating Some Confusion," 84). It must be emphasized, however, that his definition of writing, *écriture*, is far broader than the standard empirical one. As Geoffrey Bennington summarizes: "[T]he concept of writing [for Derrida] exceeds and comprehends that of language ... Writing or text in Derrida's sense is not discourse or any other recognizable determination of language, but the beginning of the in-determination of language into the absolute generality of the trace-structure." As such, he is "primarily concerned to bring out the conditions of *impossibility* of any grammatology" ("Embarrassing Ourselves," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 20 March 2016 <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/embarrassing-ourselves>).

7. To be clear: I invoke Derrida here as somewhat of a straw man; his project to fundamentally deconstruct Western culture pointedly excludes Islam—precisely because Western modernity itself depends on the recasting of Islam as the eternal, oriental *tout autre*—, and is not historiographical in the slightest. (His perplexing contention that Islam, like Judaism, is not *logocentric*—a qualification he reserves for Christianity alone—stems from his idiosyncratic definition of the term as referring to the essential independence of reason, *logos*, from linguistic mediation (Lawlor, "Eliminating Some Confusion," 79).) That proviso notwithstanding, I conclude this study with an attempt to put Derrida in conversation with the Islamo-Judeo-Christian lettrist-kabbalist tradition, and particularly its Ibn Turkian formulation, of which his deconstructionist project is curiously reminiscent. On the theme of Derrida and Islam see Almond, "Derrida's Islam"; Anidjar, *Semites*.

8. This similarity, of course, is merely terminological; Derrida "does not wish to reverse a binary opposition" between speech and writing, but to disappear that opposition altogether by redefining language, whether written or spoken, as a necessary absence, a mark whose structure "has the attributes often given to writing" (personal communication from Gil Anidjar).

9. Derrida's project has been variously described as poststructuralist, antistructuralist, ultrastructuralist and hyperstructuralist (see e.g. Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, 2/17-31). The handle hyperstructuralist has

A growing number of studies investigate the social and literary aspects of the development of Islamicate *writerly culture* during the "classical" and "postclassical" eras both, though focusing almost exclusively on the arabophone Abbasid and Mamluk contexts, and art historians have thoroughly explored the physical and metaphysical ramifications of *calligraphy* as the Islamic art of arts. But the specific mechanics of this Islamicate metaphysics of writing shaped by and shaping such social and aesthetic phenomena have yet to be schematized. The present article is a preliminary offering in this direction. For reasons of space I limit myself to a representative case study of one of the most influential metaphysicians of writing in Islamic history, Ibn Turka of Isfahan, this as prompt to further research; examples could easily be multiplied.

I introduce our thinker below. But first, some context: When did Islamicate writerly culture emerge and reach maturity? And why has its contemporary metaphysical framework been largely ignored in the literature to date?

From Prophetic Orality to Encyclopedic Textuality

Following in the footsteps of its Greek exemplar, burgeoning Arabic-Islamic culture, centered in Abbasid Baghdad, underwent the transition from orality to literacy from the 2nd/8th century onward; by the middle of the 3rd/9th century books had become a full-blown obsession.[10] A technological revolution in papermaking and the concurrent Abbasid translation movement together gave *visual* form to an Arabic *philosophia perennis*, the surviving, recorded wisdom of the Greek, Egyptian, Hebrew, Persian and Indian ancients.[11] At the same time, many scholarly exponents of this new, synthetic Arabic-Islamic culture, predicated in the first place on the explicitly oral revelation that is the Quran and the vaster corpus of Hadith, resisted this seachange, continuing to assert the superiority of speech over writing in all matters doctrinal and legal, and by extension grammatical, medical and philosophical—presuming, that is, in increasingly anachronistic fashion, a strict and permanent equivalency between Arabic-Islamic culture and oral *isnād* culture.[12] As Gregor Schoeler observes:

> [I]n Islam in particular, scholars upheld the idea—or sustained the fiction—that writing should have an auxiliary function at most in the transmission of learning (and in establishing legally valid proof). Until the time in which literary books as we

similarly been applied to Lacanian psychoanalytical theory.

10. The famed bibliomaniac and litterateur al-Jāḥiẓ is here a case in point; see e.g. Montgomery, *Al-Jāḥiẓ*, 4. On the burgeoning of Abbasid writerly culture more generally see Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr*.

11. The authoritative study here is Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. Saliba has proposed an earlier beginning to the translation movement, i.e., in the Umayyad period (*Islamic Science*, 27-72); whether or not his argument holds, the importance of writing already under the Umayyads has likely been underestimated (my thanks to Antoine Borrut for this observation).

12. Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 11. On legal debates over the *materiality* of the Quran as text—including its magical-medical and talismanic applications from the 2nd/8th century onward—see Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting."

know them emerged, and even beyond that time, the true transmission of knowledge remained oral, from person to person—at least in theory.[13]

But as sociocultural realities change, so must theory. Social historians have shown that the initial explosion of writerly culture in the Abbasid caliphate in particular only gained in intensity and scope in the arabophone west with the rise of the Ayyubid and then Mamluk Sultanate, such that the heart of the Arabic cosmopolis shifted definitively from Iraq to Egypt and Syria.[14] Most notably, during the transformative 7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries, which saw the mass immigration of Maghribi and Mashriqi scholars alike in the face of invasion and plague, Mamluk Cairo and Damascus emerged as Islamdom's intellectual center of gravity, which had theretofore been in Iran; the Mongol conquest on the one hand and the Reconquista and general political turbulence on the other forced a mixing of eastern and western intellectual traditions that had been developing semi-independently for centuries.[15] This Arabo-Persian synthesis in turn generated an Islamic cultural florescence more explicitly and thoroughgoingly *textual* than any that had preceded it: the age of encyclopedism had begun.[16]

It is hardly surprising, then, that the encyclopedic classifications of the sciences (sg. *taṣnīf al-ʿulūm*) produced during this period testify precisely to this definitive triumph of writing over speech as preeminent vehicle of scholarly authority in Islamic culture. That is, while the fictitiousness of writing's status in Arabic letters as mere auxiliary to speech had become patent long before, encyclopedists did not begin to assert its superiority to

13. Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written*, 85; see also Cook, "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition"; MacDonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment." The theory, or fiction, of speech's superiority to writing became increasingly and clearly rhetorical from an early period. Shiʿi hadith specialists, for instance, were privileging written elements in collected traditions and wisdom sayings already in the 2nd/8th century (see Crow, "The Role of *al-ʿAql*"). It should be noted that Europeanists have investigated this theme at much greater length; see e.g. Patrick Geary, "Oblivion between Orality and Textuality." (My thanks to Antoine Borrut and an anonymous reviewer for the latter references.)

14. Hirschler's *The Written Word* is the definitive study on the Mamluk context; and see now his *Medieval Damascus*. On Arabic book culture more generally see e.g. Rosenthal, *Muslim Scholarship*; Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*; Bloom, *Paper before Print*; Leder, "Spoken Word and Written Text"; Atiyeh, ed., *The Book in the Islamic World*; Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam*; Günther, "Praise the Book!"; and see now the two volumes of *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* (4/1-2 (2016) and 5/1 (2017)), edited by Maribel Fierro, Sabine Schmidtke and Sarah Stroumsa, dedicated to Islamicate book cultures, from the Fatimids and the Cairo Geniza to 18th-century China and 20th-century Egypt.

15. It should be noted that this larger process was first set in motion by a 4th-5th/10th-11th-century climate change event. As Richard Bulliet has shown (*Cotton, Climate, and Camels*), the Big Chill wrecked the cotton industry in Iran (a primary basis of the ulama's wealth), creating a diaspora of persophone scholars—whence the vast Persian cosmopolis; it also precipitated the epochal mass Turkish migration south- and westward. Both developments transformed the face and sociopolitical structure of Islamicate civilization and eventually shifted its cultural center of gravity back to the eastern Mediterranean, where it remained until the rise of the great Turko-Mongol Perso-Islamic empires of the early modern era. Ibn Turka is here representative: like a host of his fellow persophone elites, the Isfahani scholar completed his education—and was transformed into a *lettrist*—in Mamluk Cairo.

16. See Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 19; Muhanna, "Encyclopædism in the Mamlūk Period"; idem, "Encyclopaedias, Arabic," *EI*3; Gardiner, "Esotericism," 276.

speech *categorically* until the 8th/14th century. Ibn al-Akfānī (d. 749/1348), for instance, succinctly asserts in the first section of his *Guidance for Seekers of the Sublimest of Goals* (*Irshād al-Qāṣid ilā Asnā l-Maqāṣid*), an immensely influential Arabic instance of the genre that served as model for the subsequent Mamluk-Ottoman encyclopedic tradition:

> The benefit [of writing (*kitāba*)] is manifest; for this science, together with [the science of reading (*qirāʾa*)], is trained on a single purpose: to provide knowledge of how writing signifies speech. Know that all things that can be known can only be made known in three ways: by gesturing (*ishāra*), speaking (*lafẓ*) or writing (*khaṭṭ*). The first requires one to be directly witnessed [by the addressee]; the second requires the addresse's physical presence and their ability to hear; but writing requires nothing, for it is the most universal and the most excellent [form of communication], and the only one exclusive to humankind.[17]

Though he declined to elaborate, the Cairene physician-alchemist could not be clearer in his verdict: writing not only far outstrips speech in practical terms (a principle that had been held since the High Abbasid period), but is also the only means whereby we can *realize our humanity*.[18]

Nor are such assertions of humanistic textual universalism exclusive to the Mamluk Arabic tradition; contemporary Persian encyclopedists take the same point further. Most notable among them is Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Āmulī (d. after 787/1352), Ibn al-Akfānī's cognate in Ilkhanid Iran, who proposes in his equally influential and far more comprehensive *Jewels of Sciences Delightful to Behold* (*Nafāyis al-Funūn fī ʿArāyis al-ʿUyūn*) a wholesale epistemological restructuring of the religious and rational sciences—one in which writing alone stands as the foundation of the edifice of human knowledge.[19] Like Ibn al-Akfānī, he devotes the first section of his encyclopedia to the literary sciences

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17. *Irshād al-Qāṣid*, 26-27. On this encyclopedia see Witkam, "Ibn al-Akfānī." In the *K. al-Ḥayawān* (1/33-34), al-Jāḥiẓ identifies four modes of communication—speech (*lafẓ*), writing (*khaṭṭ*), gesturing (*ishāra*) and finger counting (*ʿaqd*)—, and notes that some authorities count five.

18. Al-Jāḥiẓ's famous section in his *K. al-Ḥayawān* in praise of books suggests the same humanistic conclusion, although it is not stated so clearly or succinctly; see Montgomery, *Al-Jāḥiẓ*. But as he rhetorically asks: 'What could be of greater benefit, or a more assiduous helper, than writing?' (*K. al-Ḥayawān*, 1/48). Similarly, Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī (d. after 442/1050) opens his celebrated *Taḥqīq Mā li-l-Hind* with praise for writing that is yet tellingly qualified (1):

> Truly has it been said: second-hand reporting cannot compare to direct observation (*laysa l-khabar ka-l-ʿiyān*). For observation entails the immediate perception by the eye of the observer of that observed in a single moment and place. But were reporting not subject to the buffetings of ill circumstance, its virtue would exceed that of observation; for the latter is restricted to the moment of perception, and cannot extend to other moments in time, whereas reporting encompasses all moments equally, whether those past or future, and indeed all that exists and does not exist. And writing (*kitāba*) might almost (*yakādu*) be [judged] the noblest of all types of reporting: for how could we learn of the histories of nations (*akhbār al-umam*) were it not for the pen, whose traces perpetually endure?

19. On the *Nafāyis al-Funūn* and its status as model for most subsequent Persian encyclopedias see Vesel, *Les encyclopedies persanes*, 38-41; Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One."

(*ʿulūm-i adabī*); unlike his Egyptian peer, however, who despite his valorization of writing does not give it explicit pride of place in this section,[20] Āmulī formally classifies it as the first of his 15 literary arts (*fann*)—he is the first encyclopedist in the Islamicate tradition as a whole to do so[21]—and argues for writing's epistemological supremacy with proofs both traditional and rational. Given its status as watershed Persian statement on this theme, I translate the relevant passage in full:

> The first art of the first discourse of the first section of this book, *Jewels of Sciences Delightful to Behold*, is the science of writing (*ʿilm-i khaṭṭ*), meaning the knowledge of graphically representing utterances with the letters of the alphabet, the manner of their construction and the conditions that pertain thereto. This is a craft most esteemed and a science most instructive; through it beauty and elegance is perennially achieved, and all hold it in the highest respect. In every place it presents itself boldly; for every group it is the keeper of secrets. It is always the engine of fame and honor; the tyrannical cannot overmaster it. It is recognized in all lands and leaves its imprint on every edifice. Indeed, the magnitude of its excellence is epitomized by the declaration of the Lord of Lords, His Names be sanctified, in His revelation most true: *N. And by the Pen, and what they inscribe* (Q 68:1). And again: *Recite: And your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught by the Pen, taught man what he knew not* (Q 96:3-5).
>
> The Pen that produced the Book suffices for all honor
> to the end of time: for God has sworn by the Pen.
>
> Said [ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib] (upon him be peace): "Write beautifully, for it is a source of provision."[22] And said a certain sage: "Writing is a form of spiritual geometry (*al-khaṭṭ handasa rūḥāniyya*) manifested by means of a physical instrument."[23] It has also been described as "the breeder of thought, the lamp of remembrance, the language of distance, the life of the seeker of knowledge." Jāḥiẓ declared: "Writing is the hand's tongue, the mind's emissary, the repository of secrets, the exposer of reports, the rememberer of achievements past."[24] It has further been said: "Writing is black to sight but white to insight."[25] Again: "Excellent speech recorded in beautiful

20. Under the rubric of *ʿilm al-adab* Ibn al-Akfānī gives equal treatment to speech and writing as vehicles of communication, with emphasis on poetry and rhetoric, treating sequentially of *lugha*, *taṣrīf*, *maʿānī*, *bayān*, *badīʿ*,*ʿarūḍ*, *qawāfī*, *naḥw*, *qawānīn al-kitāba*, *qawānīn al-qirāʾa* and *manṭiq* (*Irshād al-Qāṣid*, 22-29).

21. See Vesel, *Les encyclopedies persanes*.

22. *ʿAlay-kum bi-ḥusn al-khaṭṭ fa-inna-hu min mafātīḥ al-rizq*. This and many of the following dicta in praise of writing are also found in, for example, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's treatise on the subject, translated and transcribed in Rosenthal, "Abū Ḥaiyān al-Tawḥīdī."

23. Al-Tawḥīdī attributes this statement to Euclid (ibid., 15/25 no. 56): *al-khaṭṭ handasa rūḥāniyya ẓaharat bi-āla jasadiyya*.

24. This sentence is not present in modern editions of the *K. al-Ḥayawān*, suggesting it as a later addition.

25. Al-Tawḥīdī attributes this statement to one Hāshim b. Sālim (Rosenthal, "Abū Ḥaiyān al-Tawḥīdī," 13 no. 42).

writing is delightful to the eye, sweet to the heart and fragrant to the spirit." [In sum], it is [universally] held that writing is superior to speech: for writing, unlike speech, profits those near and those far alike.[26]

Scholars disagree as to who invented writing. Some are of the opinion that when the Real Most High *taught Adam all the names* (Q 2:31)—that is, taught Adam (upon him and our Prophet be peace) the names of every thing and the virtues of each—he also taught him about the virtues of the pen, and Adam then communicated this to Seth, who invented writing. Other scholars cite the saying *The first to write* (khaṭṭa) *and sew* (khāṭa) *was Enoch* (Idrīs) to argue in favor of Enoch's (upon him and our Prophet be peace) status as the inventor of writing (and sewing).

It is also transmitted from ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr and ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr al-ʿĀṣ that Adam, a hundred years before his death, assigned a language to each of his children [and their offspring] as a separate group; [to this end], he inscribed on a mass of small sheets like rosepetals the script appropriate to each language and its basic rules, then baked them [for preservation]. But the sheet for the Arabic language was lost in Noah's Flood, and its people forgot how to write and speak it until the time of Ishmael (upon him be peace). Ishmael, having made his home in Mecca and there acceded to the honor of prophethood, dreamed one night that a treasure was buried on Abū Qubays mountain [outside the city]; on the morrow he therefore arose and walked around that mountain, searching it assiduously until he discovered the sheet. But because it was tall and wide and filled with strange markings, he was greatly confused. He therefore called out: "O God! Teach me its secret!" The Real Most High accordingly sent to him Gabriel (upon him be peace) to provide instruction in the matter; and so Ishmael came to know the Arabic language and its script. ʿAbd Allāh ʿAbbāsī (God be pleased with him) has similarly transmitted that the first person to establish Arabic and its script was Ishmael.

It is transmitted from [Hishām] Kalbī, however, that [Arabic] writing had three inventors: Marāmir b. Marra [or Marwa], Aslam b. Sidra and ʿĀmir b. Jadhra.[27] The first invented the letterforms; the second invented their conjunctions and separations; the third invented their diacritical points.

Still others hold that members of the Ṭasm clan invented Arabic writing; they were the rulers of Midian during the lifetime of Seth (upon him and our Prophet be peace). Their kings were [six], named as follows: Abjad (*ABJD*), Hawwaz (*HWZ*), Ḥuṭṭī (*ḤṬY*), Kalman (*KLMN*), Saʿfaṣ (*SʿFṢ*) and Qarshat (*QRShT*). They put these names into graphic form, and to them added two further constructions from the remaining letters, termed auxiliary: Thakhadh (*ThKhDh*) and Ḍaẓagh (*ḌẒGh*).[28] [For his part], Abū Jaʿfar Ṭabarī transmitted from Zayd b. Arqam and Żaḥḥāk that these six are rather the names of the six days of creation wherein the Real Most High created the

26. Cf. ibid., 11 no. 27, where the same principle is attributed to one Ibn al-Tawʾam.

27. Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 12, where slightly different versions of these names are given.

28. I.e., the original 22 Hebrew letters plus six additional Arabic ones. The same is report is transmitted in Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 11.

> heavens and the earth—hence the fact that all instruction must needs begin with the *ABC*s (*Abū Jād*).
>
> Of all the well-known scripts, including Arabic, Greek, Uyghur, Indian and Chinese, the Arabic script is the loveliest and most elegant; [the techniques] whereby it is refined and beautified are firmly established. In former days, the standard script among the Arabs was the Maʿqilī script, after which the Kufic script was developed. As for the type that is now most common, some say Ibn Muqla developed it; others credit [ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib], Commander of the Faithful. The latter say [in this regard] that when [ʿAlī] was teaching ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās [how to write] he instructed him: "'ʿAbd Allāh, widen the space between each line, bring the letters close together, preserve the correspondence between their forms and give each letter its due."[29] Thereafter a group of those who strove to further refine this craft, including Ibn Bawwāb and others, created a diverse range of calligraphic styles, including *muḥaqqaq*, *thuluth*, *naskh*, *riqāʿ*, *ʿuhūd*, *tawqīʿ*, *taʿlīq*, *rayḥānī*, *manshūr*, *mudawwar*, *ṭūmār*, *musalsal*, *muthannā*, *ghubār*, *habāʾ*, and so on.[30]

This celebration of writing draws heavily on Abbasid bibliophilic precedent, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) and Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990) in particular, including in the first place its valorization of textuality over orality. But Āmulī's case for an Islamic textual universalism goes beyond earlier formulations to fully textualize revelation itself; and textualized revelation as a perpetual historical process in turn constitutes the genesis and basis for a sacralized, universal intellectual history: the *philosophia perennis*. Writing is the primordial prophetic act; men are to wield pens as God wields the Pen. Literacy, that is, is here elevated to a sacred calling, and writing to a metaphysical category. It is an embodied *spiritual geometry*, says the sage—and so an aperture onto supernal realities.

In short, encyclopedists like Ibn al-Akfānī and Shams al-Dīn Āmulī are far past the orality-textuality tension that defined early Islamicate scholarship; by the mid-8th/14th century writerly culture reigned supreme in Mamluk Egypt and Ilkhanid Iran alike.[31] This did not entail the obsolescence of oral methods of transmitting knowledge, to be sure, especially in the context of education or with respect to disciplines more esoteric or elite; but the epistemological hierarchy that prevailed in the first centuries of Islam was now inverted: textuality had become primary and orality auxiliary—the preferred mode, at least ostensibly, for *keeping secrets*.[32]

29. Al-Tawḥīdī gives a different version of this saying (Rosenthal, "Abū Ḥaiyān al-Tawḥīdī," 18-19 no. 88).

30. *Nafāyis al-Funūn*, 1/22-24. For similar treatments see Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, 112 n. 113.

31. Symptomatic of this definitive textual turn is the fact that early legal debates over the medical and magical potencies of the quranic text and their application as part of Prophetic medicine (*al-ṭibb al-nabawī*)—practices strongly favored, for example, by Abū ʿUbayd b. Sallām (d. 223/838) in his *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, but just as strongly rejected by contemporary scholars—finally gave way to a consensus in favor of such practices in the 7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries, exemplified by jurists like al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) (Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting," 465-66).

32. Works on the occult sciences serve as the best index of this epistemological textuality-orality inversion. Even during the great florescence of occultism that swept the Islamicate heartlands from the late 8th/14th century onward, whereby the production and copying of occult-scientific texts was increasingly

As a majority of scholars now recognize, the so-called postclassical era (a polemical misnomer) was in no way one of cultural decadence and stagnation, but rather scene to a remarkable cultural florescence, one intensely textual in orientation; book production massively increased and new commentarial practices and arts of the book were born.[33] The sheer mass of surviving texts—at least 90% of them unpublished and still more unstudied—is indeed overwhelming;[34] previous generations of orientalists, perpetuating colonialist declinism, accordingly found it more convenient to dismiss "postclassical" Islamicate intellectual and cultural history out of hand as derivative, baroque and sterile than to risk drowning in that immense textual ocean.[35] Over the last decades, however, specialists have begun the rehabilitation process on many fronts, from philosophy, poetry, painting and law on the one hand to political and social history on the other, such that some now identify the post-Mongol era not simply as one of equal brilliance to the formative high caliphal period but indeed as the era of Islam's greatest cultural, political and economic flourishing, its apogee of henological imperial-intellectual universalism. The studies cited

heavily patronized by ruling and scholarly elites, such texts still feature the formulaic injunctions against revealing their contents to the unworthy, lest powerful techniques fall into the wrong hands and cause the breakdown of society, that had long been standard; yet the burgeoning of an occultist writerly culture would seem to render the traditional preference for oral transmission obsolete. As Noah Gardiner has shown ("Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture," 78-160), books themselves became teaching and initiatic instruments within the "esotericist reading communities" that coalesced around the letter-magical writings of Aḥmad al-Būnī (on whom see below) in Mamluk Egypt during the 7th/13th century; in this context, the primary technique for keeping secret the occultist lore the sufi mage divulged in his works was no longer oral transmission, but rather *intertextuality*. That is to say, his reliance on *tabdīd al-ʿilm*, the 'dispersion of knowledge,' whereby the keys to understanding any individual work were scattered across his corpus as a whole, rendered mere possession of a single Būnian text by the uninitiated an insufficient condition for mastering its contents. Rather, it was only through membership in an esotericist reading community that had access to and mastery of the corpus that one could understand each of its components.

By the 9th/15th century, then, when books emerged in Mamluk-Timurid society as "standalone sources of knowledge" (159) and the de-esotericization of occultism was rampant, it was precisely intertextuality, not orality, that served as the primary means of keeping occultist secrets for the protection of society. On this orality-textuality tension in Shiʿism see Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight"; on the same in Jewish kabbalah see Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*; Wolfson, "Beyond the Spoken Word."

33. On the illegitimacy of the term "postclassical" in an Islamicate context see e.g. Bauer, "In Search of 'Post-Classical Literature'"; on the later Islamicate commentary culture see e.g. Ingalls, "Subtle Innovation," 1-31.

34. Estimates of the current number of surviving Arabic manuscripts only (to say nothing of Persian or Turkish) range from 600,000 to several million—these, of course, representing a small fraction of what was originally produced (Gardiner, "Esotericism," 17). The first estimate is far too low, moreover; until recently almost 400,000 manuscripts were preserved in Timbuktu alone.

35. Fuat Sezgin (b. 1924) is here representative. His magisterial *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (1967-) is not merely positivist in approach, but blatantly triumphalist, eurocentric and whiggish, and pointedly excises what he deems the religio-intellectual cancer that is occultism by acknowledging only the achievements of valiant Muslim thinkers laboring to preserve "real" science—Greek, not eastern (Persian and Indian), and certainly not occult; thus only was Arabic science able to transmit the torch of the classical Greek heritage to Europe, subsiding into irrelevance after 430/1038 (for further examples see Lemay, "L'Islam historique").

above on the explosion of writerly culture in the Arabic heartlands during the Middle Period are here cases in point.[36]

Yet there persists in the literature that peculiarly modern penchant for divorcing sociopolitical currents from their intellectual-spiritual contexts and vice versa, a reflexive insistence on decoupling manifest from occult, *ẓāhir* from *bāṭin*—a strategy that does great violence to our sources and renders the worldview of our historical actors illegible.[37] This problem is most acute precisely with respect to the period 1200-1900, and to disciplines now considered intellectually illegitimate, including in the first place the *occult sciences* themselves; the intellectual and social history of mainstream, heavily patronized, natural-mathematical disciplines like astrology, alchemy or geomancy has yet to be written.[38] Needless to say, such scholarly vivisectionism but perpetuates the Enlightenment- and especially Victorian-era attempt to separate out "science," "magic" and "religion" as distinct categories, this in order to valorize the first, damn the second, quarantine the third

36. While "Middle Period" is much preferable to "medieval," the eurocentric adjective most frequently used in the literature for post-1100 Islamicate developments, its implication as to the "postclassicalness" of phenomena so described makes it problematic. Nevertheless, I use it here for the sake of convenience, while holding that alternate periodizations like "High Persianate," spanning the 8th/14th century to the 13th/19th and in some regions the 14th/20th, are more neutral and appropriate for the post-Mongol context (for a discussion of this term see Melvin-Koushki and Pickett, "Mobilizing Magic").

37. Shahzad Bashir's recent *Sufi Bodies*, for instance, exemplifies the analytical benefits that accrue from recoupling *ẓāhir* to *bāṭin* in the study of Islamicate societies. On this theme more generally see now Shahab Ahmed's posthumous masterpiece, *What Is Islam?*, which argues for *contradiction* and *ambiguity* as primary structuring principles of Islamicate civilization, and especially its Persianate or Balkans-to-Bengal subset; and Mana Kia's forthcoming *Sensibilities of Belonging: Transregional Persianate Community before Nationalism*.

38. The standard Arabic term for the occult sciences more generally, including astrology (*aḥkām al-nujūm*), alchemy (*kīmiyā*) and a variety of magical and divinatory techniques, is *ʿulūm gharība*, meaning those sciences that are unusual, rare or difficult, i.e., elite; less frequently used terms are *ʿulūm khafiyya* and *ʿulūm ghāmiḍa*, sciences that are hidden or occult. These terms are routinely used in classifications of the sciences, biographical dictionaries, chronicles, etc. Its 19th-century European flavor notwithstanding, the term "occultism" is used here simply to denote a scholarly preoccupation with one or more of the occult sciences as discrete natural-philosophical or mathematical disciplines. *Occultism* is thus to be strictly distinguished from *sufism* and *esotericism*, for all that scholars from Corbin onward have habitually and perniciously disappeared the former into the latter.

A number of scholars are beginning to address this gaping lacuna with respect to Islamicate occultism in the post-Mongol period: on Ottoman astrology see, for example, Şen, "Reading the Stars"; on Mughal astrology see Orthmann, "Circular Motions"; on Mamluk alchemy see Harris, "Better Religion through Chemistry," and on its Ottoman continuation see Artun, "Hearts of Gold"; on Ilkhanid-Timurid-Mughal-Safavid geomancy (*ʿilm al-raml*) see Melvin-Koushki, "Persianate Geomancy"; on Mamluk lettrism see Gardiner, "Esotericism," and Coulon, "La magie islamique"; on its Timurid continuation see Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest"; on Ottoman lettrism and geomancy see Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom"; on Ottoman astrology, lettrism and geomancy see Şen and Melvin-Koushki, "Divining Chaldiran"; on Ottoman talismanic shirts and oneiromancy (*ʿilm al-taʿbīr*) see Felek, "Fears, Hopes, and Dreams"; on Deccan Sultanate talismanic shirts see Muravchick, "Objectifying the Occult"; on Ottoman physiognomy see Lelić, "*ʿIlm-i firāsat*"; on Safavid oneiromancy and various divinatory practices see Babayan, "The Cosmological Order"; on Safavid bibliomancy see Gruber, "The 'Restored' Shīʿī *muṣḥaf*"; on Safavid geomancy, lettrism and alchemy see Melvin-Koushki, "The Occult Sciences"; and on Mangit lettrism see Melvin-Koushki and Pickett, "Mobilizing Magic."

and disappear the sociopolitical context of all three. Many critical theorists have shown, of course, that this project was the primary theoretical engine of European colonialism, a natural extension of its (wildly successful) *divide et impera* strategy—and hence worthless as a heuristic for studying human societies, past and present, east and west, civilized and savage: for it is the *mission civilisatrice* itself that orientalizes and savages.[39]

Why then are scientistic positivism and occultophobia still so sorcerously hegemonic in academe generally and the study of Islam specifically? Why are the Islamicate "positive sciences" such as astronomy still studied in strict isolation from their immediate sociopolitical and intellectual contexts? Why do we not speak of a metaphysics of empire?[40] Why has no history of the *practice* of Islamicate philosophy been written?[41] And as for the great Middle Period explosion of writerly culture here in view, the social, literary and aesthetic aspects of this transformation have been and are being masterfully explored;[42] but should we not also seek for a metaphysics of writing?

As noted, this article proposes to complement the social, literary and aesthetic history of Islamicate writerly culture during the 7th-10th/13th-16th centuries by supplying its original *letter*-metaphysical context. In so doing, it constitutes a historical-philological extension and correction of the seminal studies of Annemarie Schimmel and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the metaphysics, or spirituality, of Islamicate calligraphy,[43] and a confirmation and refinement of the more recent work of Gülru Necipoğlu and David Roxburgh on Persianate visual theory.[44] I argue that Ibn al-Akfānī's celebration of textuality as the key to our humanity and Āmulī's renewed emphasis on writing's status

39. See e.g. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*; Taussig, *The Magic of the State*; Bracken, *Magical Criticism*; Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*; Styers, *Making Magic*; Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*.

40. On this theme see Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire."

41. Rizvi, "Philosophy as a Way of Life"; this question is pursued in Melvin-Koushki, "World as (Arabic) Text."

42. On its literary aspects see e.g. Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī*; Bauer, "Mamluk Literature."

43. These include Schimmel's *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* and *Deciphering the Signs of God* (particularly the chapter "The Word and the Script") and Nasr's *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. While these studies are broad in scope, they overwhelmingly focus on sufism to the detriment of occultism, often disappearing the latter into the former, and hence do not discern the increasingly *philosophically systematic* valorization of writing over speech in Islamicate culture for which I argue here. Most problematically, Ibn Turka, chief among Muslim metaphysicians of writing, is wholly absent from Schimmel's account, while Nasr does indeed cite him in passing—but only as a *sufi* thinker. The latter even acknowledges Ibn Turka's signature doctrine of the three levels of the letter (*Islamic Art*, 32-33); but because it is excised from its original philosophical context, Ibn Turka's fundamental point that written language is *ontologically superior* to spoken is lost. Cf. Samer Akkach's reading of Islamicate architecture in Ibn ʿArabian terms (*Cosmology and Architecture*) and Carl Ernst's discussion of a Timurid sufi treatise on calligraphy ("Sufism and the Aesthetics of Penmanship"), as well as Oliver Leaman's general introduction to the topic (*Islamic Aesthetics*).

44. In his *Prefacing the Image*, for instance, Roxburgh surveys its theoretical and literary-historical context, with some attention to physics-metaphysics; Necipoğlu focuses on the latter aspect in her recent and magisterial programmatic article "The Scrutinizing Gaze," wherein she updates her findings in *The Topkapı Scroll* (1995) to argue for an early modern Islamicate *hyperrealism* (over against Renaissance naturalism) predicated on the emergent theoretical primacy of "sight, insight, and desire," this by way of a synthesis of neoplatonic, aristotelian and sufi discourses on beauty and the power of imagination and vision.

as spiritual geometry are in no way mere rhetorical conceits or mystical gushings, but rather directly informed by contemporary philosophical developments in Mamluk Egypt and Ilkhanid Iran; they must be taken seriously as such. Doing so will not only enhance our understanding of this major social transformation, but also bring to light cultural connections and discourses that have been largely or wholly occluded in the literature to date. Quite simply: restoring the *bāṭin* of Arabo-Persian textuality to its *ẓāhir* reveals a rather different picture of Islamicate culture during this pivotal period—one more *occult* than is usually acknowledged.

To illustrate the interdependence of social and intellectual history posited above, then, I offer a brief case study of an outstanding thinker active in late Mamluk Egypt and early Timurid Iran: Ṣāʾin al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Turka Iṣfahānī (770-835/1369-1432), longtime resident of Cairo, Shafiʿi chief judge of Isfahan and Yazd and the most influential occult philosopher of the 9th/15th-century Persianate world. Most significantly for our purposes here, Ibn Turka appears to be the first in the Arabo-Persian philosophical tradition as a whole to propose and systematize, in expressly neopythagorean-neoplatonic terms, what may be called a *lettrist metaphysics of light*. He did so, moreover, explicitly to lionize and explain the explosion of Islamicate textual culture as vehicle of the *philosophia perennis*: for only writing can constellate that golden chain that is intellectual-prophetic history; only *light*—and by extension the human faculty that perceives it, *sight*—is universal; hence only *written text* can fully manifest the One. As I argue, this is the most relevant theoretical context for understanding the unprecedented degree of text-centrism in Middle Period Islamicate culture, exemplified by encyclopedists like Ibn al-Akfānī and Āmulī and their heirs. The warm reception of Ibn Turka's system in philosophical circles in Iran, from the Aqquyunlu-Safavid period through the late Qajar, as well as its reverberations in Mughal India and Ottoman Anatolia, further suggests it as perhaps the most successful Islamic metaphysics of writing to have ever been developed.

Reading the Two Books in Islam: Lettrism

The study of later Islamicate societies remains in its infancy; yet even so, that those metaphysicians most obsessed with understanding the *world as text*—lettrists—have been systematically elided in studies of Islamicate writerly culture to date is an irony particularly striking, and a classic symptom of the vivisectionist, occultophobic bias identified above. Compounding this irony, the same bias has now been largely retired in the study of early modern Christianate culture, particularly that of the Renaissance and the so-called Scientific Revolution; the cosmological doctrine of the Two Books, scripture and nature, is widely feted by specialists as the basis for the emergence of "scientific modernity"—the upshot of Europeans (and no one else) reading the world as text. The kabbalistic decoding of this text becomes *science*; its recoding, originally by way of magic, becomes *technology*.

Yet contemporary Muslim neopythagorean-occultists were no less committed to reading the world as (Arabic) text, including in the first place Ibn Turka and his colleagues and heirs; but because their brand of kabbalist hermeneutics did not lead to scientific

modernity, did not *progress* beyond its literalist-transcendentalist-magical reading of the world, they may be safely disappeared from this hallowed teleology. This remains the case even for those scholars and theorists who have successfully shown "modernity" to be a profoundly logocentric and illusory, even *sorcerous*, construct.[45] But eurocentrism in this respect is unavoidable: the almost total absence of scholarship on relevant Muslim thinkers makes it impossible for nonspecialists to account for cognate developments in Islam.

Christian kabbalah is here a case in point. First advanced by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (d. 1494) as the core of his humanistic philosophy—indeed as the best means of divinizing man, of finally marrying Plato and Aristotle—, this Hebrew-cum-Latin science is now widely recognized to have been a central preoccupation of and inspiration for later heroes of the European Renaissance, including Giordano Bruno (d. 1600) and John Dee (d. 1608), major exponents of the Two Books doctrine and devoted kabbalists; they in turn laid the groundwork for the "Scientific Revolution" (more properly a mathematical revolution, being largely confined to astronomy and physics) as spearheaded by committed neopythagorean-occultists like Johannes Kepler (d. 1630) and Isaac Newton (d. 1727), whose *Principia Mathematica* then became the basis for scientific modernity.[46] Yet *lettrism*, kabbalah's coeval Arabic cognate, enjoyed a similarly mainstream status in the Islamicate world during precisely this period, rendering the Two Books doctrine equally salient to Muslim metaphysicians—but not a single study to date has acknowledged, much less attempted to analyze, this striking intellectual continuity.

It is therefore imperative that the double standard that still prevails among historians of science be retired, whereby Pico's or Dee's obsession with kabbalah, and Kepler's self-identification as a neopythagorean, heralds the modern mathematization of the cosmos, but Ibn Turka's obsession with lettrism heralds but Islamic decadence and scientific irrelevance: for Islam produced no Newton. (It also produced no Oppenheimer.) Most perniciously, this double standard elides a major problematic in global history of science and philosophy. Triumphalist teleologies notwithstanding, that is, it is remarkable that, in the absence of direct contact, the quest for a universal science was universally pursued along neopythagorean-kabbalist lines throughout the Islamo-Christianate world during the early modern period—a trend that became mainstream significantly earlier in the Persianate context, where the cosmos was first mathematized.[47]

In sum: If we seek a formal Islamicate metaphysics of writing, it is to the lettrists we must turn. Given how thoroughly lettrism has been occulted in the literature, however, a definition and brief historical overview of its development are first in order.[48]

While the Arabic 'science of letters' (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*), like its Hebrew cognate,[49] is properly

45. See n. 39 above.

46. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter*.

47. Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One."

48. An adequate survey of lettrism's development over 14 centuries is of course well beyond the scope of this article; for a fuller treatment see Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 167-283.

49. See e.g. Wasserstrom, "Sefer Yeṣira and Early Islam"; Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*; Anidjar, "*Our Place in al-Andalus*."

an umbrella category covering a wide range of theories and techniques, some of them being transformed or shed over time, the term (sometimes in the form *khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*, 'the active properties of letters') is nevertheless regularly used in the sources to identify a discrete science from the 3rd/9th century onward. As such, lettrism encompasses the two modes of applied occultism as a whole in its basic division into letter magic (*sīmiyāʾ*) on the one hand and letter divination (*jafr*) on the other. Letter-magical techniques include most prominently the construction of talismans (sg. *ṭilasm*), usually defined as devices that conjunct celestial influences with terrestrial objects in order to produce a strange (*gharīb*) effect according with the will (*niyya*, *himma*) of the practitioner.[50] The engine of a talisman is usually a magic square (*wafq al-aʿdād*), which may be populated with letters or numbers relevant to the operation at hand; these are designed to harness the specific letter-numerical virtues of personal names, whether of humans, jinn or angels, phrases or quranic passages, or one or more of the Names of God. (The latter operation, it should be noted, is a typical example of the sufi-occultist practice of 'assuming the attributes of God,' aka *theomimesis* (*takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allāh*)—hence the divine Names as a major focus of lettrism, often termed for that reason *ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-asmāʾ*, or even simply *ʿilm al-asmāʾ*, 'the science of names.') Letter divination, for its part, includes most prominently the construction of a comprehensive prognosticon (*jafr jāmiʿ*), a 784-page text containing every possible permutation of the letters of the Arabic alphabet.[51] From such a prognosticon may be derived the name of every thing or being that has ever existed or will ever exist, every name of God in every language, and the knowledge of past, present and future events—especially political events—to the end of time. This divinatory aspect of lettrism is associated in the first place with the mysterious separated sura-initial letters in the Quran (*muqaṭṭaʿāt*), similarly held to contain comprehensive predictive power, and to have inspired the basic lettrist technique of *taksīr*, separating the letters of words or names for the purposes of permutation. Most letter-magical and letter-divinatory operations are profoundly astrological in orientation, moreover; careful attention to celestial configurations is essential for the success of any operation, and letter magic often involves the harnessing of planetary spirits (*taskhīr al-kawākib*) (together with angels and jinn). Fasting, a vegetarian diet, seclusion and maintenance of a state of ritual purity are also regularly identified as conditions of practice in manuals on these subjects.

Among the occult sciences that became permanently intertwined with Islamicate culture from its very inception, including in the first place astrology and alchemy, it is lettrism that underwent the most complex evolution. Most significantly, it eventually emerged as the most *Islamic* of all the occult sciences, this despite its explicitly late antique, non-Islamic parentage—or rather because of it. That is to say, lettrism's reception as an essential component of the *philosophia perennis*, this through its association with

50. This is the definition standard from Ibn Sīnā onward. See e.g. his *R. fī Aqsām al-ʿUlūm al-ʿAqliyya*, 75; and Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Durrat al-Tāj*, 155-56.

51. A completed comprehensive prognosticon has 784 pages, with 784 cells and 3,136 letters per page, resulting in 87,808 cells and 2,458,624 letters in total (Fahd, *La divination arabe*, 221 n. 1; note that a misprint gives the incorrect figure 2,458,424).

the prophet-philosopher-king Solomon and a host of other ancient prophets and their sage disciples, especially Hebrews like Daniel, Greeks like Pythagoras and Plato, Egyptians like Hermes, Persians like Zoroaster and Indians like Ṭumṭum and Sāmūr, mirrored the status of the Quran itself as the culmination of prophetic history.[52]

Historically, lettrism first entered the Islamic tradition by way of two main vectors: 1) the symbolical cosmogonical speculations and sorcerous proclivities of so-called extremist (*ghulāt*) Shiʿi circles of 2nd/8th-century Iraq, largely inspired by late antique Hellenic "gnostic" movements;[53] and 2) the divinatory texts associated with the House of the Prophet, including the original Comprehensive Prognosticon (*al-jafr wa-l-jāmiʿa*) and the Codex (*muṣḥaf*) of Fāṭima.[54] It is the second vector in particular that prepared the way for lettrism's definitive *islamicization*, with ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq being routinely identified in later lettrist tradition as the science's supreme exponents for the Islamic dispensation. It then underwent a progressive *philosophicization* within a neoplatonic-neopythagorean framework, particularly on display in the 3rd/9th-century Jābir b. Ḥayyān corpus and the 4th/10th-century *Rasāʾil* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ; during this phase lettrism became associated with Ismaʿilism in North Africa, which combined its cosmogonical and magical-divinatory applications as eclectically explored during the fraught emergence of Shiʿism. (The semi-Ismaʿili *Epistles* famously declare magic, together with astrology, alchemy, medicine and astral travel (*ʿilm al-tajrīd*), the queen of all sciences and ultimate goal of philosophy.[55]) Seminal Maghribi grimoires like Maslama al-Qurṭubī's (d. 353/964) *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*, enthusiatically received in the Latinate world as the *Picatrix*, were direct products of this Ikhwānī philosophical-spiritual current.[56]

During the same period and primarily in the same place—North Africa and al-Andalus—lettrism underwent a process of *sanctification*, this entailing its recasting in specifically sufi terms rather than either natural-philosophical or Shiʿi. This move was part of the larger sufi challenge to Shiʿism, whereby sufis began to position themselves as rival claimants to the Shiʿi category of *walāya*, the 'sacral power' peculiar to the Imams; this category was therefore massively expanded by sufi theoreticians to designate Islamic sainthood in general. Most notably for our purposes here, and perhaps due to residual Ismaʿili influence, the same sufi theoreticians elevated lettrism to the dual status of science of the saints (*ʿilm al-awliyāʾ*) and science of divine oneness (*ʿilm al-tawḥīd*) *par excellence*: simultaneously a tool for cosmological speculation and for controlling creation, as well as vehicle of mystical ascent or return to the One.

52. See e.g. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 318-28; van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*.

53. See Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians*. The handle "gnostic," of course, is an almost unusably flabby one (my thanks to Dylan Burns for clarifying this point); see Smith, "The History of the Term Gnostikos." On late antique gnosticizing and platonizing Christian number symbolism see Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic*.

54. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 4-5, 18-19.

55. *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: On Magic I*, 95-96.

56. See e.g. de Callataÿ, "Magia en al-Andalus"; Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus"; Saif, *The Arabic Influences*.

This sanctification process began in the late 3rd/9th century and came to full flower in the work of two authorities in particular: Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225?), the greatest mage of Islam, at least in his later reception, representing applied lettrism (i.e., letter magic); and Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), the greatest mystical philosopher of Islam, representing theoretical lettrism (i.e., letter metaphysics). The oeuvres of both authorities together thus represent the definitive synthesis of all the preceding lettrist currents; in their hands lettrism became the most quintessentially Islamic of sciences, yet without losing any of its old occult potency—indeed, that potency was amplified, now combining both philosophical-scientific and spiritual-religious legitimacy. In short, by the 7th/13th century lettrism was emerging as a universal science, the marriage of ancient and modern, Hellenic and Islamic, the ideal vehicle for neoplatonic-neopythagorean philosophy on the one hand and the performance of sainthood on the other.

Significantly for our purposes here, the suficization of lettrism was accomplished by "esotericist reading communities," as Noah Gardiner has called them, that coalesced around the writings of al-Būnī in Mamluk Cairo and those of Ibn ʿArabī in Mamluk Damascus over the course of the 7th/13th century.[57] While these reading communities were highly secretive (hence the handle esotericist), at some point in the 8th/14th century al-Būnī's lettrist treatises in particular suddenly exploded on the Cairene scene as favorite objects of elite patronage; production of manuscript copies of his works sharply increased in the second half of that century and remained relatively high through the end of the 9th/15th.[58] In other words, the unprecedented elite reception precisely of *suficized lettrism* played a crucial role in the explosion of Mamluk writerly culture; and Cairo's new status as intellectual hub of the Islamicate world (as well as Damascus to a lesser extent) meant that this western Būnian-Ibn ʿArabian science was rapidly propagated eastward by the many persophone scholars who came to the Mamluk realm to study—including, of course, Ibn Turka. Having initially come to Cairo to study law, the Isfahani scholar there became the star student of Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī (d. 799/1397), Kurdish Tabrizi lettrist-alchemist and personal physician to Sultan Barqūq (r. 784-92/1382-90). While his own surviving writings on lettrism are scattered and piecemeal, Akhlāṭī nevertheless stands as the greatest occultist of his generation, pivot to a vast occultist network operative between Anatolia and Iran via Cairo. Most notably, he was responsible for training the two most influential and prolific occultist thinkers of the early 9th/15th century: ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 858/1454), chief architect of Ottoman occultist imperial ideology;[59] and Ibn Turka, who sought to fill the same role for the Timurids.[60]

This, then, was the context in which Middle Period encyclopedists like Ibn al-Akfānī and Shams al-Dīn Āmulī constructed their writing-centric classifications of knowledge. That of the former, a Cairene physician-alchemist who perished in the Black Death epidemic of the

57. Gardiner, "Esotericism," 43-46, 78-160.

58. Ibid., 263-70, 347-50.

59. Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom"; Gardiner, "Esotericism," 329-40.

60. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 16-18, 47-49. I examine the political-imperial ramifications of this lettrist revolution in my forthcoming *The Occult Science of Empire in Aqquyunlu-Safavid Iran: Two Shirazi Lettrists*.

mid-8th/14th century,[61] is accordingly heavily occultist in tenor, this despite its Avicennan framework; it posits an astrology-talismans-magic continuum[62] as the very backbone of natural philosophy, running the epistemological-ontological gamut from celestial simple bodies to terrestrial or elemental composite bodies, and allowing the competent philosopher-scientist experiential control of the cosmos.[63] Despite his clear letter-magical proclivities, however, Ibn al-Akfānī's highly succinct treatment of these sciences does not directly reflect the burgeoning popularity of specifically sufi lettrism; but that of his Ilkhanid colleague does. As noted, Āmulī's encyclopedia offers a far fuller and more comprehensive treatment of the religious and rational sciences; the theory of knowledge and classificatory scheme it advances is unprecedented in the Arabo-Persian encyclopedic tradition as a whole.

What makes the *Nafāyis al-Funūn* truly pivotal in the present context, however, is its status as the first encyclopedia to register a) the rise of sufism to sociopolitical hegemony, and b) the sanctification of occultism. Āmulī flags these twin developments by first elevating the science of sufism (*ʿilm-i taṣavvuf*) to the status of supreme Islamic science, equal in importance to all the other religious sciences (including jurisprudence, hadith and theology) combined, then designating lettrism the supreme sufi science.[64] At the same time, he retains the category of *sīmiyā*, letter and talismanic magic, as an applied natural science, further classifying it as one of the 'Semitic sciences' (*ʿulūm-i sāmiyya*)—i.e., positing a connection to Hebrew kabbalah.[65] Yet even there he stipulates that proficiency in *sīmiyā* is predicated on, among other things, a mastery of astronomy (a mathematical science) and astrology (a natural science).[66] Āmulī's sophisticated and nuanced classification here thus signals the emergence of lettrism as a simultaneously Islamic, natural and mathematical science—that is to say, a *universal* science—and a defining feature of the religio-intellectual landscape of the Islamicate heartlands from the mid-8th/14th century onward.

61. It should here be noted that the sudden explosion of elite interest in Būnian lettrism occurred in tandem with the Black Death catastrophe, followed by recurring plague outbreaks and consequent famines for decades thereafter. This was hardly coincidental; I suggest that the apocalyptic conditions that prevailed in Mamluk Cairo, where half of the population perished virtually overnight, are precisely what created this elite demand for books on letter magic, presumably in a bid to establish a measure of control over a world politically, socially, economically and biologically in flux.

62. Respectively, *ʿilm aḥkām al-nujūm*, *ʿilm al-ṭilasmāt* and *ʿilm al-siḥr*.

63. See Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One."

64. *Nafāyis al-funūn*, 2/91-110.

65. *Nafāyis al-funūn*, 3/183. Ibn al-Akfānī gives an etymology of the term *sīmiyāʾ* (> Gr. *sēmeia*) as deriving from the Hebrew *shem Yah*, 'the name of God,' indicating the science's association with the divine names as loci of magical power (*Irshād al-Qāṣid*, 51).

66. *Nafāyis al-funūn*, 3/191.

Seeing the Text: Ibn Turka's Lettrist Metaphysics of Light

> The supernal Pen is made of light and extends from heaven to earth.[67]
> —Ḥusayn Vāʿiẓ Kāshifī

> The eye, that is the window of the soul, is the principal way whence the common sense may most copiously and magnificently consider the infinite works of nature.[68]
> —Leonardo da Vinci

> [V]ision is tele-vision, transcendence, crystallization of the impossible.[69]
> —Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Such was the state of the art when a young Ibn Turka left his native Iran around 795/1393 to study Shafiʿi law in Cairo—and there was so intellectually captivated by sanctified Ibn ʿArabian lettrism that he made it the focus of his life's work.[70] Unlike the Andalusian master, however, his prime exemplar, Ibn Turka sought to formally *systematize* this lettrist tradition so as to open it to philosophical-scientific-imperial use; to this end, he drew on his broad mastery of Avicennan and illuminationist philosophy on the one hand and theoretical sufism on the other to synthesize a wholly unprecedented lettrist metaphysics of light. Integral to this new system was Ibn Turka's categorical assertion, equally unprecedented in the lettrist tradition, of the epistemological and ontological superiority of writing to speech, which he explicitly advanced as a framework for explaing the rise of Islamicate writerly culture as culmination of the *philosophia perennis*.

For all his reliance on mainstream Avicennan-illuminationist philosophy, however, Ibn Turka sought to fundamentally undercut it by delegitimizing its exponents' preoccupation with such concepts as existence (*wujūd*) or quiddity/essence (*māhiyya*). In several of his lettrist works he advances the premise that drove his intellectual project as a whole: these faux-universal concepts of Avicennan-illuminationist philosophical speculation notwithstanding, only the letter (*ḥarf*) encompasses all that is and is not, all that can and cannot be; it alone is the *coincidentia oppositorum* (*taʿānuq al-aḍdād*); hence lettrism is the only valid form of metaphysics.[71]

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67. This assertion is part of Kāshifī's explication, in his popular Quran commentary *Mavāhib-i ʿAliyya*, of God's swearing by the Pen in Sūrat al-Qalam (4/320): *Ḥaqq subḥāna-hu sūgand yād farmūd bi davāt u qalam va bi qalam-i aʿlā ki az nūr ast va ṭūl-i ū mā bayn al-samāʾ va-l-arż.* Ḥusayn Vāʿiẓ Kāshifī (d. 910/1505), Sabzavari polymath extraordinaire, Naqshbandi sufi and chief preacher of Herat, was the most important writer on lettrism and the other occult sciences of late Timurid Iran, and author of the first thoroughgoingly lettrist tafsir, *Javāhir al-Tafsīr*, unfortunately unfinished, which features Ibn Turka as a source (see Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 261-67). On Kāshifī's *Asrār-i Qāsimī*, a grimoire that became hugely popular in the Safavid period, see Subtelny, "Sufism and Lettrism" (my thanks to Professor Subtelny for sharing a working draft of this article).

68. Quoted in Summers, *Judgment of Sense*, 73.

69. *The Visible and the Invisible*, 273.

70. As noted, his teacher in Cairo was Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī, who dispatched his star student and fellow persophone scholar back to Iran to promulgate lettrism among Timurid elites.

71. That is to say, letter-number, as the *coincidentia oppositorum*, renders the immaterial material; unites

At the same time, the Isfahani occult philosopher commandeers the distinctive Avicennan doctrine of *tashkīk al-wujūd*, the transcendental modulation of existence, as the basic framework for his lettrist metaphysics. This doctrine was first proposed, in a form unknown to Hellenic philosophy, by Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) in his *Mubāḥathāt* as a means of avoiding the conclusion that the essence (*dhāt*) of God, defined as the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), is composite of and dependent on the two concepts existence and necessity, which violates the principle of absolute divine oneness (*waḥda*) and self-sufficiency (*istighnāʾ*).[72] It should be noted, however, that by *tashkīk al-wujūd* the Shaykh al-Raʾīs means only the transcendental modulation of the *concept* of existence (*tashkīk fī mafhūm al-wujūd*), not the *reality* of existence (*tashkīk fī ḥaqīqat al-wujūd*).[73] In his upgrade of Avicennism, Suhravardī (d. 587/1191) accordingly enlarged the scope of this concept, proposing rather the doctrine of *tashkīk al-nūr*, the transcendental—and *real*, not conceptual—modulation of Light, the ground of all being, as the basis for his essentialist answer to Ibn Sīnā.[74] But it is only with Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) that the levels of such transcendental modulation, whether of existence or light, are formally identified as *semantic*; *writing* thus becomes the level of being furthest from extramental reality. In his seminal commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, an expansion of Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī's (d. 606/1209) commentary on the same, Ṭūsī asserts the following in explication of the *ishāra* on the relation between a term (*lafẓ*) and its meaning (*maʿnā*) as it pertains to logic:[75]

> *Because there is a certain connection between a term and its meaning.* I say: Things possess being in extramental reality (*al-aʿyān*), being in the mind (*al-adhhān*), being in [spoken] expression (*al-ʿibāra*) and being in writing (*al-kitāba*). Writing thus signifies [spoken] expression, which in turn signifies a meaning in the mind. Both [writing and speech] are conventional signifiers (*dalālatān waḍʿiyyatān*) that differ as conventions differ, whereas mental meanings signify external [realities] in a natural manner that is always and everywhere the same. Thus between a spoken utterance (*lafẓ*) and its meaning only an artificial connection obtains; hence his statement

Occult (*bāṭin*) with Manifest (*ẓāhir*), First (*awwal*) with Last (*ākhir*); makes the One many and the many One; marries heaven and earth. The verse *He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Occult* (Q 57:3) is hence the central motto of Ibn Turka and his lettrist colleagues.

72. Treiger, "Avicenna's Notion," 329.

73. Eshots, "Systematic Ambiguity of Existence."

74. On the place of Ibn al-Haytham's (d. ca. 430/1039) theory of optics in Islamicate discourses on vision see Necipoğlu, "The Scrutinizing Gaze," 34-40; on the metaphysics of light in its European receptions see e.g. Cantarino, "Ibn Gabirol's Metaphysic of Light"; Lindberg, "Kepler's Theory of Light."

75. The *ishāra* in full (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt: al-Manṭiq*, pt. 1, 53-56):

> Because there is a certain connection between a spoken word (*lafẓ*) and its meaning, such that the modalities of its utterance may affect those of its meaning, the logician must therefore be sure to deploy a term in its absolute sense, as it is in itself, undelimited by the usage (*lugha*) of any one group.

> *a certain connection*, for the only true connection (*al-ʿalāqa al-ḥaqīqiyya*) is that between a [mental] meaning and its extramental reality.[76]

Here Ṭūsī reiterates, in short, the standard conventionalist definition of writing as signifier of a signifier. (Saussure would be pleased.) As Sajjad Rizvi has shown in his monograph on the subject, it is this Avicennan-Suhravardian-Ṭūsian fourfold schema of the semantics of being that Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1635) drew on in formulating his signature doctrines of *tashkīk al-wujūd* and *aṣālat al-wujūd*, the two cornerstones of his radically existentialist philosophy. In his logical epitome, *al-Tanqīḥ fī-l-Manṭiq*, for instance, the Safavid sage restates Ṭūsī's formulation essentially verbatim: 'The being of a thing is extramental (*ʿaynī*), mental (*dhihnī*), uttered (*lafẓī*) or written (*katbī*).'[77]

The celebrated Sadrian synthesis, usually taken to represent the culmination of all preceding philosophical and mystical currents in Islam, Sunni and Shiʿi alike, would thus seem to provide for an adequate metaphysics of writing. Yet we are still far from a properly lettrist metaphysics—necessarily radically anticonventionalist—wherein letters transcend the very categories of existence and essence themselves. We have seen that lettrism had become intellectually mainstream in Iran by the Ilkhanid period; given that philosophy was emphatically not a hermetically sealed discipline in the way it is in the Euro-American academy, and philosophers were often acclaimed as powerful occultists in service of state and society (Suhravardī, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī and Ṭūsī all being cases in point), we might therefore expect it to have been incorporated into philosophical discourse on the nature of writing during the three-century interval between Ṭūsī and Mullā Ṣadrā.

Enter Ibn Turka. As I argue, his emanationist-creationist lettrist system may be said to pivot on the twin doctrines of *aṣālat al-ḥarf*, the ontological primacy of the letter, and *tashkīk al-ḥarf*, the transcendental modulation of the letter in written, verbal, mental and extramental form.[78] That is to say, Ibn Turka sought in his challenge to philosophy to replace the Avicennans' *wujūd* and the illuminationists' *māhiyya* and *nūr* with *ḥarf* in all respects, and found *tashkīk* a concept eminently suited to this end.[79] Ibn Turka was clearly a master of the philosophical curriculum standard by the early 9th/15th century; his doctrine of *tashkīk al-ḥarf* should thus be considered an innovative critique of and formal alternative to the Avicennan-Suhravardian-Ṭūsian model of the semantics of being, whose conventionalism it utterly rejects. In Ibn Turka's reading of the world as text, letter-number is the uncreated, all-creative matrix of reality, transcending both being and essence—and hence the only conceivable subject of metaphysics. More to the point: letter-number, he argues, is a form of *light* eternally emanated from the One—and so his *tashkīk al-ḥarf* is equally *tashkīk al-nūr*, the signature illuminationist doctrine now reformulated in explicitly occultist-lettrist terms.

76. Ibid., 53-54. See Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, 1.

77. *Al-Tanqīḥ fī-l-Manṭiq*, 19; trans. in Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, 1-2 (slightly modified here).

78. The Isfahani lettrist nowhere uses the terms *aṣālat al-ḥarf* and *tashkīk al-ḥarf*, though the connotation of each matches his philosophical position precisely; I suggest them here as useful heuristics.

79. Mullā Ṣadrā himself may be said to have simply replaced *nūr* with *wujūd* in his own formulation and reinforced the proofs offered by Suhravardī (Eshots, "Systematic Ambiguity," 2).

Of Letters

Ibn Turka's lettrist metaphysics of light, then, is entirely predicated on this fourfold *tashkīk* schema; the latter accordingly structures his most important lettrist works. For reasons of space only two will be examined here.

His earliest such work is the Persian treatise *Of Letters* (*R. Ḥurūf*), written in Shiraz in 817/1414 for the Timurid (occult) philosopher-king Iskandar Sulṭān (r. 812-17/1409-14), grandson of Temür (r. 771-807/1370-1405) and main competitor with Shāhrukh (r. 807-50/1405-47) for control of Iran.[80] The *R. Ḥurūf* divides lettrists into two broad camps: the *ahl-i khavāṣṣ*, concerned with the practical applications of the science, associated with al-Būnī in particular; and the *ahl-i ḥaqāyiq*, concerned with its theoretical basis, associated with Ibn ʿArabī in particular; the treatise provides for its royal patron a survey of the latter approach.[81] The author then proceeds to lay out his core doctrine of the three (or rather four) descending levels of the letter, which alone constellate the Chain of Being in its emanation from the One, and allows for the ascent and descent thereof: spiritual-mental (*maʿnavī lubābī*), spoken-oral (*lafẓī kalāmī*) and written-textual (*raqamī kitābī*). (The fourth and highest extramental (*ʿaynī*) level is not assigned a separate section here, but is clearly operative.) As he states in the introduction:

> Now three loci of self-manifestation (*majlā*) have been created for the letterform, through which it manifests and reveals the end and the essence of every thing. The first is the faculty of sight (*baṣar*), to which the *ʿayn* in the word *ʿabd* (*ʿBD*, servant) refers; the second is the heart (*qalb*), to which the *bā* in *ʿabd* refers; the third is the faculty of hearing (*samʿ*), to which the *dāl* in *ʿabd* refers. By this measure, then, the letter may be divided into three categories (*qism*):
>
> > 1) The written-textual (*raqamī kitābī*) form, which through the agency of fingers and hands is given form upon the open spread of white pages and reveals realities to both sight (*abṣār*) and insight (*baṣāyir*) as its proper loci; the exponents of this mode are *those possessed of hands and vision* (*ūlū l-aydī wa-l-abṣār*) (Q 38:45).[82]
> >
> > 2) The verbal-oral (*lafẓī kalāmī*) form, which through the agency of the tongue and the various points of articulation that modify the breath is embodied and

80. While he lost this contest to his more conservative, Sunnizing uncle, Iskandar Sulṭān nevertheless stands as an early and important model for the new forms of universalist Islamicate kingship, explicitly predicated on occult-scientific principles, that were developed in the post-Mongol Persianate world; see Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire."

81. On this treatise see Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 88-90; an edition and translation are provided at pp. 463–89. In it Ibn Turka refers to a major lettrist work in progress, likely to be identified with his *K. al-Mafāḥiṣ*. He also refers to his important commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, unique among the host of commentaries on this text in its overtly lettrist approach, and completed in 813/1411, presumably for Iskandar Sulṭān as well (ibid., 112-13).

82. Cf. *R. Shaqq-i Qamar*, 111, 116, where this phrase refers to the Imams as repositories of all occult knowledge.

> expresses realities to the hearing (*asmāʿ*) and to reason (*ʿuqūl*) as its proper loci; its exponents are *the folk of verbal remembrance* (*ahl al-dhikr*) (Q 16:43, 21:7).
>
> 3) The spiritual-mental (*maʿnavī lubābī*) form, which through the agency of the rational and imaginative faculties (*quvvat-i ʿāqila u mutakhayyila*) is analyzed within the broad realm of meaning with the heart as its proper locus; its exponents are *those possessed of minds* (*ūlū l-albāb*) (Q 2:179, etc.): *He gives wisdom to whomever He will, and whoso is given wisdom has been given much good; yet none remembers save those possessed of minds* (Q 2:269).

Each of these categories is specific to one of the three primary human faculties, to wit, the heart, the hearing, and sight. It is in this respect that quranic verses typically refer to all three together, usually giving precedence to either the heart (as in the verse *Surely in that there is a reminder to him who has a heart, or will give ear with a present mind* (Q 50:37), and the verse *There is nothing His like; He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing* (Q 42:11)) or to the hearing (as in the verse *And He appointed for you hearing, and sight, and hearts* (Q 16:78, 9:32, 67:23)). The first order reflects the fundamental and essential precedence of the heart with respect to the other members, and indeed with respect to all things in existence, whereas the second order reflects hearing's precedence at the moment of creation, inasmuch as it was the faculty singled out to receive the [spoken] command *Be!* (*kun*) from among the various members and faculties of perception. However, because the accepted usage in teaching (*taʿlīm*, *tafhīm*) involves giving precedence to that which is the most manifest (*aẓhar*)—as for example in the verse *How well He sees! How well He hears!* (Q 18:26)—it is here more appropriate and useful to treat first the written form of the letters. (Indeed, the fact that the imperative form is used in the verse just cited suggests precisely the objective of teaching.) Yet it must be noted that despite the fact that its written form is more manifest and its spiritual form more occult (*akhfā*), the first is not self-evident and must be learned, whereas knowledge of the second need not be; that is to say, knowledge of the numbers and their degrees is innate, in contrast to knowledge of the written form of the letters and their shapes, which cannot be understood until they are learned. This is so because of a basic principle of divine oneness (*tawḥīd*), as those who have studied this know.[83]

Here Ibn Turka, in short, overturns lettrist precedent by promoting the written form of the letters over the oral, which had long been awarded epistemological precedence in the tradition due to its association with prophetic revelation[84]—including by the Ikhwān

83. *R. Ḥurūf*, 478-79.

84. A similar dynamic long obtained among Jewish kabbalists; as Elliot Wolfson observes in his magisterial *Language, Eros, Being* (78):

> In spite of the persistent claim on the part of kabbalists to the oral nature of esoteric lore and practice—a claim always made in written documents—at least as far as historians are concerned there is little question that kabbalah as a historical phenomenon evolved in highly literate circles wherein writing was viewed as the principal channel for transmission and embellishment of the

al-Ṣafāʾ themselves;[85] his *tashkīk* schema even departs from Ibn ʿArabī, who is aware of the Ṭūsian formulation but assigns it little importance.[86] Most significantly, this new theoretical framework allows the Isfahani lettrist to associate prophethood (*nubuvvat*) strictly with the spoken level of the letters, and sacral power or sainthood (*valāyat*), its actualization, with the written and mental both; Ibn Turka's innovation here is his bold assertion of the superiority of written to spoken, of *walāya* to *nubuwwa*, to the same degree that vision is superior to all other physical senses: for light (*nūr*), unlike sound, is incorruptible and universal, the directest aperture onto the One. In so doing, he is giving lettrist form to the infamous Ibn ʿArabian doctrine of the superiority of sainthood to prophethood.[87] This lettrist physics-metaphysics of light in turn explains ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's status as primary vector of *walāya* during the Islamic dispensation, for he was responsible for perfecting the written shapes of the 28 (or 29) Arabic letterforms, matrix of the uncreated Quran, which alone allow for the transmission of words through time and space—and also inventor of the prognosticative mathematical science of *jafr*, which allows us to *write the history of the future*.[88]

In other words, Ibn Turka posits writing as simultaneously an exclusively Alid patrimony and primary vehicle of the *philosophia perennis*, from Adam to the end of history. At the same time, he holds number (*ʿadad*)—the mental-spiritual form of the letter—to represent the core of the prophetic revelation as actualized by the elite among the saints in every generation, including in the first place Pythagoras as foremost disciple of Solomon.[89] Yet here too Ibn Turka designates this perennial doctrine a special patrimony of the House of the Prophet. As he states:

> [T]he ancient sages held the science of number to be the alchemy in whose crucible

traditions.

85. As Necipoğlu summarizes ("The Scrutinizing Gaze," 31-32):

> The Brethren regard hearing and sight as "the best and noblest of the five senses," reminding their audience of the Koranic affirmation that God endowed humans with the gift of "hearing, sight and hearts" (Koran 23:78). Nonetheless, their Neoplatonic view of mimesis (recalling the Parable of the Cave) accords a superior status to hearing: the species that inhabit this world are only representations and likeness of forms (*ṣuwar*) and beings of pure substance that inhabit the higher world of the celestial spheres and heavens, "just as the pictures and images [*al-nuqūsh wa-l-ṣuwar*] on the surface of walls and ceilings are representations and likenesses for the forms" of animate beings of flesh and blood.

86. It should be noted that Ibn ʿArabī offers no such consistent lettrist schema; in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, for instance, the Andalusian master refers twice in merest passing to Ṭūsī's formulation (1/45, 4/315).

87. See e.g. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 147, 155-60.

88. *R. Ḥurūf*, p. 481. I have discussed elsewhere the *imamophilia* intrinsic to the Sunni lettrist tradition, especially in the Timurid context (Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 69-77). It must also be emphasized in this connection that lettrist theory is necessarily predicated on the doctrine of the uncreatedness of the Quran; Ibn Turka accordingly bemoans the contemporary popularity of Zamakhsharī's (d. 538/1144) *Kashshāf*, singling out his failure to recognize the intrinsic ontological majesty of the quranic letters for special censure (Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 59, 54, 76, 116, 342).

89. See Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 315-20.

> all other sciences are produced and the elixir [productive] of all manner of rarities and marvels. The holy Imam Jaʿfar [al-Ṣādiq] (upon him be peace) also greatly vaunted this science, and those who cleave to the threshold of his *walāya* have penned numerous works on the subject.[90]

But celestial-mathematical realities cannot be preserved except in written—which is to say, talismanic—form.[91] Ibn Turka accordingly identifies the greatest exponents of the perennial philosophy, the Imams and the ancients, together with their disciples in every age, with the quranic phrase *ūlū l-aydī wa-l-abṣār*: *those possessed of hands and vision*, or *men of main and vision*—to wit, the coterie of inspired thinkers who have preserved for posterity prophetically revealed neopythagorean-neoplatonic philosophy in written form. Evidence suggests that from Ibn Turka onward this phrase entered common usage as a designation of sages and philosophers in general.[92]

The *Book of Inquiries*

Shortly after completing *Of Letters*, and again almost certainly at the instance of Iskandar Sulṭān, Ibn Turka began writing his *magnum opus*, the *Book of Inquiries* (*K. al-Mafāḥiṣ*): the first Arabic *summa* of Islamic neopythagoreanism. This book, completed in 823/1420 and revised and expanded in 828/1425, represents the fullest expression of his lettrist metaphysics.[93] As such, it massively expands on the fourfold schema first proposed in his earlier treatise, treating of the meanings of the letters according to their three forms, numerological (*iḥsāʾī*), symbological (*kitābī*) and phonological (*kalāmī*), as well as the letters as they are in themselves (*fī anfusi-hā*). As Ibn Turka elsewhere states, knowledge of these three forms is the sole preserve of the companions and true heirs of the Prophet (*aṣḥāb al-khātam wa-warathatu-hu*)—i.e., those *men of main and vision* occupying the highest rank in his intellectual hierarchy, the Imams and their lettrist followers.[94]

The primary purpose of this work, the author asserts, is to demonstrate the roots of

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90. *R. Ḥurūf*, 472. The alchemical references are here significant; Ibn Turka has in mind Jābir b. Ḥayyān in particular, whose Science of the Balance (*ʿilm al-mīzān*), the basis of Jābirian alchemy, is fundamentally lettrist in approach (Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 180-82, 353).

91. In her discussion of calligraphy in *Deciphering the Signs of God*, Schimmel emphasizes the talismanic and divinatory applications of the quranic text (152-54); and Nasr observes (*Islamic Art and Spirituality*, 30): "Since the verses of the Quran are powers or talismans, the letters and words which make possible the visualization of the Quranic verses also play the role of a talisman and display powers of their own."

92. In Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī's *Munshaʾāt* (85), for instance, *ūlū l-aydī wa-l-abṣār* is used in a letter written for Ibrāhīm Sulṭān b. Shāhrukh (d. 838/1435) to denote the leading lights of the Muslim community charged with the preservation and transmission of the Quran. Similarly, in his popular *Akhlāq-i Jalālī* (320-21) Davānī applies the phrase to the 'famed sages' (*ḥukamā-yi nāmdār*), and in his *R. Khalq al-Aʿmāl* (68) to the *al-aʾimma al-kibār*, here meaning the leading theologians and philosophers (*man mārasa ṣināʿataya l-ḥikma wa-l-kalām*) who have dealt with the subject of the creation of human actions. It should be noted in this context that the Shirazi philosopher, following Ibn Turka, also explicitly associates the written form of the letters with the *men of main and vision* (*R. Tahlīliyya*, 65).

93. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 97-99, 330-78.

94. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 315-20.

all manifestation in the One and schematize the mechanics of multiplicity's derivation therefrom. This information, in turn, will allow the adept to manipulate the letters—the uncreated, creative matrices through which the One self-manifests—to access and control every epistemological and ontological level of the cosmos, thus constituting a continuum from ultra-rarefied letter theory to purely practical letter magic. The supreme dignity of its object necessarily renders lettrism the supreme science:

> The subject of the science we have here in view is the One (*al-wāḥid*) insofar as it is one, regardless of the form in which it manifests in all the variety of its significations. The all-pervasive, all-encompassing nature of One with respect to existence being obvious, this science is therefore necessarily superior to all other sciences by an order of magnitude.[95]

He proceeds to make an invidious comparison between the object of lettrism and the concept of absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), the standard focus of Avicennan philosophy; because this concept is only relevant to things that exist, and is forever relativized by its opposite, it can hardly serve as the object of a universal metaphysical science. Only the letter encompasses all that is and is not, all that can and cannot be; it alone is the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the intellect's only vehicle of return to the One.[96] (It should be noted in this context that the Isfahani lettrist is here updating the Ibn ʿArabian concept of the creative imagination (*khayāl*) as all-encompassing faculty, making explicit what the Andalusian master left relatively implicit by privileging the role of the letters with respect to the creative imagination's mechanics and outworkings.[97])

In the exordium that opens the *Mafāḥiṣ*, Ibn Turka therefore flatly declares metaphysics the supreme science, and lettrism—that branch of metaphysics focused on the One rather than existence or essence—the only valid form of metaphysics:

> The metaphysical sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ilāhiyya*), in all their methodological varieties and with all their programmatic differences, represent the highest object to which [human] ambition aspires and the ultimate point to which the chargers of generous natures are led. But it is only a science that admits of not the slightest insinuation of doubt that can truly show the [different] rankings [of its practitioners] as the finest riders compete on its racing grounds for the palm: [the science of letters] … It is this [science] that God has spread out in the abode of His Islam as groundcloth for the

95. MS Majlis 10196 f. 53b.

96. See e.g. MS Majlis 10196 ff. 55a, 58b, 76a; Ibn Turka cites the concept of the marriage of opposites variously as *taʿānuq ḍiddayn*, *taʿānuq al-aṭrāf*, *majmaʿ li-l-ṭarafayn wa-muʿtanaq li-l-mutaqābilayn*, etc. The Latin term was coined, intriguingly, by Ibn Turka's later contemporary Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464); on the latter's equally thoroughgoingly neopythagorean project see Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*. More generally, on the *coincidentia oppositorum* as a pivotal concept in the History of Religions movement see Wasserstom, *Religion after Religion*.

97. That is to say, letters, as the most fundamental of images, represent the atoms of the imaginal realm (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) (personal communication with William Chittick). On the similar importance of the creative imagination to thinkers in late medieval and early modern south India, for example, see Shulman, *More than Real*.

> repast of His Speech, favoring His servants with the varieties of growth that sprout forth from the ground of their aptitude at the banquets of His *Lawāmīm*, feeding them so as to strengthen them and bring them to maturity with the delicacies of the doves of His *Ḥawāmīm*, giving them to drink of [the water of] Tasnīm so as to revive them to an everlasting life from the cups of His *Ṭawāsīn*.[98]

He then classifies lettrist metaphysicians as historically belonging to one of three camps: 1) those focused on speech; 2) those focused on writing; and 3) those focused on number, the heirs of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, inventor of *jafr*. While all access a measure of supernal truths with their chosen method, writing is far superior to speech, and number far superior to both—yet it has been curiously neglected. Ibn Turka therefore issues a call for scholars to return, in effect, to the neopythagorean project of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, who in their *Rasāʾil* likewise found all of human knowledge on the science of number. At the same time, he updates and fully islamicizes their model by synthesizing it with the Ibn ʿArabian theory of *walāya*, then giving the whole a distinctively imamophilic-perennialist cast:[99]

> How often have consummate and vigorous [thinkers] among the leading figures of this community sought to acquire [this science]; driven by the burning cravings of their aspiration, they were not willing to settle for the toughened, jerked meat left by those who have gone before but rather strove to reach ripe and succulent truths from the boughs of each second of each hour, from now to eternity. Such individuals include those who make for the East of expansiveness and manifestation (*basṭ*, *ẓuhūr*) and succeed in picking the ripe fruits from the crown of the tree of His manifestation by way of speech (*kalāmī*), limiting their diet to this and seeking nothing further. They also include those who rather make for the West of constriction and occultation (*qabḍ*, *khafāʾ*) and are fortunate enough to amass priceless pearls from the submerged hoards of His manifestation by way of writing (*kitābī*)—and upon my life, it is the latter who inherit the choicest truths (*khaṣāʾiṣ*) from the holy Seal (*al-ḥaḍra al-khatmiyya*).[100] These include the oral (*matluwwa*) wealth he passed down

98. MS Majlis 10196 f. 52a. The *muqaṭṭaʿāt* references here stand metonymically for lettrism as a whole.

99. While Ibn Turka's Sunni identity is not in doubt, it is testament to his lettrist-imamophilic proclivities that he breaks with Ibn ʿArabī's identification of the *khātam al-walāya al-muṭlaqa/al-ʿāmma* as Jesus, in this appearing to follow the Shiʿi mystical philosophers ʿAlī b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī (d. ca. 670/1271), Maytham b. Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d. after 681/1282) and Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385), who similarly awarded this status to ʿAlī as part of their project to synthesize Ibn ʿArabian theory with Twelver theology (see al-Oraibi, "Rationalism in the School of Bahrain," 333-34).

100. The theme "west is best" similarly runs through Ibn ʿArabī's writings, and particularly in the *ʿAnqāʾ Mughrib*, where he identifies the Mahdi, for example, with the 'sun rising in the west' (*shams al-maghrib*) as sign of the Last Hour (see Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 163-95). As Ibn ʿArabī states in his *R. al-Intiṣār* (trans. in ibid., 175):

> For the spiritual Opening of the West (*fatḥ al-maghrib*) is unrivalled by any other Opening, since its allotted existential time is the Night (*al-layl*), and [the Night] precedes the Daytime (*al-nahār*) in the Glorious Scripture in every passage. In [the Night] the 'Night-Journey' (*al-isrāʾ*) takes place for the Prophets, and therein the spiritual Benefits (*al-fawāʾid*) arise [for the Saints], and the Self-Revelation of the Real shall come to pass for His Servants ... For the 'Virgin-Secrets' (*abkār al-asrār*)

to his heirs (*aqrabīn*), having himself inherited it from his noble forefathers, i.e., the preeternal Speech (*al-kalām al-qadīm*) *taught him by one terrible in power, very strong, [who] stood poised* (Q 53:5-6), as well as the new rarities he possessed, ripe fruits [unique] to the Seal's garden, i.e., the temporally-originated Speech (*al-kalām al-ḥadīth*) that he read from the [eternal] Tablet of *He revealed to His servant what He revealed* (Q 53:10). God reward these [pioneers] on our behalf with the greatest reward.

However, in restricting the path of superabundance to these two nodes, both among the Seal's most prized possessions, and making them the [only] path, [the leading scholars of the community] neglected the third [node], which is the rarest and choicest and serves to strengthen [the first two].[101] It is through this last that the gate of veriest truth (*ʿayn al-ṣawāb*)[102] is opened, and behind this gate are the treasuries of the Seal's glory and the protected space of his intimacy (*qurb*) which contain necklaces of precious jewels (*ʿuqūd farāʾid al-jawāhir*) and all else laid there in store. [The Seal] collected all this and provisioned therewith his son [ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib], the Seal of Sacral Power (*walāya*) and standard-bearer of understanding and guidance. These necklaces (*ʿuqūd*) are numerical knottings (*al-ʿuqūd al-ʿadadiyya*), the spiritual-intellectual form of the Book that was sent down from the highest Pen to the noble Tablet. Number (*ʿadad*), then, is the best means of acquiring sciences of great benefit and numerous as grains of sand, the primordial mine preserving the gems [at the core] of all the standard and mainstream sciences.[103]

As noted, the *Book of Inquiries* as a whole is structured according to the fourfold schema Ibn Turka first deployed in his *Of Letters*; but now the *substance* (*mādda*) of the letter is identified as *light*, which alone makes possible his revolutionary lettrist valorization of writing over speech. Space does not here permit a full analysis of this extremely dense and complex work—naturally still unpublished and unstudied despite its status as a seminal work for centuries.[104] For the purposes of the present study, however, a paraphrase of the introductory subsection of each of the four levels of the letter provides an adequate outline of Ibn Turka's unprecedented lettrist metaphysics of light:

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are only 'deflowered' with us [in the West]. Thereafter, they emerge before you in your East (*mashriqu-kum*) as 'Divorcees' (*thayyibāt*) who have ended their period of waiting. Then you marry them at the horizon of the Orient. For we share equally in the pleasure of 'marriage,' but we [in the West, particularly] win the pleasure of 'deflowering'!

101. Cf. Q 36:14: *When We sent unto them two men, but they cried them lies, so We sent a third as reinforcement* (*fa-ʿazzaz-nā bi-thālithin*).

102. *Ṣawāb* (*ṢWAB*) = 99.

103. MS Majlis 10196 ff. 52a-b. Note that *ʿadad*, translated here as 'number,' is also the standard term for arithmetic as part of the quadrivium.

104. A preliminary analysis is offered in Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 330-78. I am currently preparing a critical edition and translation of the *Mafāḥiṣ*.

Section 1: On the mental form of the letters

In order to analyze the cosmos at the macro level it is necessary to use the most general, comprehensive categories possible; hence the use in metaphysics of such concepts as existence (*wujūd*), oneness (*waḥda*), quiddity (*māhiyya*), etc. Philosophers hold absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) to be the most comprehensive of all such general concepts. Yet even by the philosophers' own standard this concept cannot be all-encompassing, since it, like most philosophical concepts, is offset and relativized by its opposite, in this case forms of absolute nonexistence (*al-aʿdām al-muṭlaqa*); forms of relative existence are likewise counterbalanced by forms of relative nonexistence (*al-aʿdām al-muḍāfa*). In short, every positive category is twinned with its negative inversion. The sole exception to this rule is the concept of *waḥda*, the state of being one; because it cannot be thusly relativized, the One alone is all-encompassing. That is to say, every other concept, even multiplicity (*kathra*) itself, may be understood in terms of its singularity—it is *a* concept.

It is the One that necessitates, qualifies and constitutes the Many (*al-kathīr*); it alone is capable of being united with its opposite without impairing its essential integrity. Furthermore, the concept of One and its ascending numerical degrees is wholly self-evident (*badāha*), unlike the concept of existence, whose supposedly self-evident status nevertheless requires demonstration. This is why all the revealed prophetic books dwell exclusively on the One, not on existence as such.

Let the researcher therefore set aside his various misconceptions and inquire into the matter of number, for it is the fountainhead of all the sciences, the quarry of all realities, an ocean of insights both manifest and occult.[105]

Section 2: On the written form of the letters

The written form is the most manifest (*ajlā*) of the letterforms and the most fixed in its manifestation. The author first counterposes the view that this distinction belongs rather to the spoken form of the letters, in that speech is more universal than writing—indeed, even animals communicate through sound—, whereas only the educated elite of humanity, very few in number (*shirmidha khāṣṣa min aṣnāf al-insān*), become capable of expressing themselves through writing after years of training and laborious effort, and must spend further years developing the methods of critical thought. Ibn Turka states in response to this that two considerations obtain here:

1) The prophetic mission must indeed rely on the spoken form of language in order to reach the greatest number of people, especially as its point is to exhort them to physical acts of piety; spoken words may also powerfully affect listeners

105. MS Majlis 10196 f. 56a-b. Ibn Turka is here restating almost verbatim the declaration of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ at the beginning of their *Rasāʾil*: 'the science of number is the root of the sciences, the essence of wisdom, the foundation of knowledge and the [principal] element of all things' (*Rasāʾil*, 1/21–22; trans. in Endress, "Mathematics and Philosophy," 133).

precisely because they are fleeting. Spoken letterforms are thus most appropriate to the prophetic mission.

2) By contrast, the responsibility to guide laid upon those possessed of sacral power (*walāya*) is far better suited to the written form of language, since it is only through this medium that the full complexity of that contained implicitly within the prophetic mode may be expounded, this in a form that endures and is capable of communicating to each generation the central revelatory truths (*al-ḥaqāʾiq al-kashfiyya*).

The written form also has the distinction of being that form that fully intermixes (*imtizāj*) with the perception of it to the point of total identification (*ittiḥād*), unlike any other sensible form. This is because written letterforms are communicated to the light of vision (*nūr al-baṣar*) by light (*ḍiyāʾ*), and the meeting of separate rays of light results in total union rather than mere conjunction. Thus one can see two clashing colors at the same time without either being denatured (*fasād*) by the other, unlike all other types of sensory data such as sounds, smells, textures and tastes, wherein clashing instances are mutually denaturing when they occur simultaneously; if one hears two inharmonious sounds at once, for example, one cannot make out either, since their medium is air rather than light. In other mediums discrete sensory data must follow in succession to be perceived properly, whereas visible things may be seen simultaneously and still maintain their integrity. Written letterforms are thus not bodies and cannot clash, and for this reason they stand unique among sensory objects in their abstraction (*tajarrud*) from denaturing and obscuring material constraints (*al-mafāsid al-hayūlāniyya wa-qādhūrāti-hā l-ẓulmāniyya*). By the same token, spoken letterforms as communicated through airwaves (*al-tamawwujāt al-hawāʾiyya*) that pass with the elapsing of each moment are susceptible to such denaturing by virtue of their medium.

In addition, the more descended (*anzal*) such forms are, the more they are complete, encompassing and comprehensive of special characteristics (*akmal wa-ajmaʿ li-l-khaṣāʾiṣ wa-ashmal*).[106]

Section 3: On the spoken form of the letters

While it is the written form of the letter alone that remains imprinted on the pages of time across the ages, all peoples from ancient times to the present laboring to record and preserve the choicest insights of humanity in the form of various sciences, the spoken form of the letter, for its part, encompasses every mode of expression, both rational and irrational, that gives voice to the consciousness of man and animal. The final level of descent from existential oneness (*al-waḥda al-wujūdiyya*)—itself the shadow of the true or divine oneness (*al-waḥda al-ḥaqīqiyya*)—down through the chain of being that comprehends all is described

106. MS Majlis 10196 ff. 72b-73b.

by the technical term of oneness of genus (*al-waḥda al-jinsiyya*). This level in turn involves descent through levels of its own through which its fullness is expressed, this descent terminating in the low genus (*al-jins al-sāfil*), its fifth and final stage ... This lowest level, moreover, is reflected in another type termed oneness of species (*al-waḥda al-nawʿiyya*), the category comprising man as microcosm (*al-kawn al-jāmiʿ*). When this process of descent is complete, the last level becomes host to the divine Name the Living (*al-ḥayy*) and site of the manifestation of its properties, as well as those of all the Names subsidiary thereto. The first thing that is engendered from this blessed union (*jamʿiyya*) is a perfect existential form that discloses the contents of consciousness termed the voluntary voice (*al-ṣawt al-ikhtiyārī*); this is what first manifests from an animal upon birth ...

Now it may be asked: How can vocal expression (*ṣawt*) be existential, for it is clear that it is but a transitory accident, a fleeting engendered thing? I answer: This refers only to the voluntary voice associated in the first place with the animal; it is evident that voice is necessarily attributable to existence when it constitutes a reality expressive of what is contained in the hidden levels of existence, yet remains an engendered accident insofar as it is borne to the hearing by soundwaves. The two properties are not mutually exclusive. This is the view of the speculative [philosophers and theologians] (*ahl al-naẓar*); in terms of sapiential insight (*al-wajh al-ḥikmī*), however, the voice is a corporeal representational form (*ṣūra jasadāniyya mithāliyya*) subsisting existentially in itself, regardless of the fact that it manifests through airwaves, in this respect being similar to light (*ḍawʾ*) (which topic was discussed in the section on the written form of the letter). For this reason the philosophers hold contradictory views on the subject, with some being of the opinion that the two are separate bodies. It is, however, clear to the intelligent that it cannot be a body qualified by flowing and moistness (*ruṭūba*) and subject to superficial alterations.

Given this premise, then, know that the spoken form of the letter is an accidental form pertaining to the voice and compounded of parts and vocalizations that serve to distinguish [utterances] according to context. This may be known from the fact that air, due to its subtle and balanced nature, is uniquely fitted to enter the kingdom of the human constitution as servant, there to wait upon its caliph, the holy secret (*al-laṭīfa al-qudsiyya*), and withdraw upon its command arrayed in robes of light. Thus no majlis or other gathering is worth the name if luminous words be lacking. The quranic reference here: *Surely good deeds will drive away evil deeds; that is a remembrance unto the mindful* (Q 11:114). That is to say, good things—the light of existence—must needs drive away evil things—the darkness of nonexistent engendered beings.

Insofar as the spoken form of the letter represents speech, then, it conveys the holy lights that negate the darkness of the material realms. It is for this reason that most of the religious duties God imposes on His servants have to do with this spoken

form, such as ritual prayer and other forms of worship—this fact alone suffices to indicate its great dignity.[107]

Section 4: On the letters as they are in themselves, i.e., the material substance (mādda) *underlying the letters' three forms as discussed above*

Having discussed the three aspects of the letters together with the properties, effects, accidents and concomitants of each—this discussion representing the choicest intellectual fruits of the age and providing the framework for extracting exalted types of wisdom from the revealed heavenly letters—, we must now turn to the letters themselves to explicate their supreme eminence in the sensible realms of engendered existence; for the letters are the straight path for all seekers.

Every fixed substance and transient accident that exists in the visible world falls into one of two categories. The first comprises those that are luminous (*nūrānī*), i.e., those which are apparent in themselves and manifest other objects through their effects, such as the sun. The second comprises those that are dark (*ẓulmānī*), i.e., those which are nonapparent in themselves and obscure other objects, such as gross bodies (*ajrām kathīfa*). Given this premise, it will be clear to anyone with a modicum of discernment that only things that are in the first category may serve to provide us new information about what is unknown.

However, the first category comprises many subcategories, since substances and accidents differ widely in the extent to which they furnish such information. Some things only illuminate their immediate surroundings, such as a lamp, while others illuminate all sensible objects, such as the sun and moon. Despite their difference in degree, however, these two instances do not fundamentally differ in that both reveal objects to the perception without themselves perceiving; this category therefore represents the first level of light (*nūr*).

The second level of light comprises those things that are capable of perceiving objects in their own right as well as making the same objects perceptible to other things, such as the light of vision (*nūr al-bāṣira*) with respect to colors and luminosities. This level is superior to the first, yet is still incapable of fully expressing the category of light: for such things cannot perceive themselves nor occulted or absent objects, and those objects they do perceive they frequently perceive inaccurately—moving things as motionless, large things as small, etc.

The third level of light comprises that which is capable of perceiving itself as well as all other existents, whether sensory or immaterial, present or absent, occult or manifest, and of making such objects perceivable to others: this is the intellect or reason (*al-ʿaql*). Yet it too, despite its great facility in revealing objects as they are, suffers from a certain incapacity in fully expressing the divine name Light (*al-Nūr*), since by its nature it tends towards what is interior (*buṭūn*) and hence is best able to perceive universals and the categories of transcendence and incomparability (*taqdīs*, *tanzīh*); when it attempts to analyze that which is external (*ẓāhir*), however,

107. MS Majlis 10196 f. 83a-b.

involving rather a comprehensive awareness (*jamʿiyya*) of engendered particulars and the category of similarity (*tashbīh*), it is incapable of doing so directly and must rely upon other faculties. Given the necessity of such reliance, reason cannot but fall prey to various types of ambiguity and confusion (*talabbus*, *tashawwush*) and thereat hesitate and vacillate (*taraddud*, *tadhabdhub*). This is because the faculties upon which reason relies are often at cross purposes with each other, which leads to conflicting and contradictory data (*taqābul*, *taʿāruḍ*). More, in seeking the assistance of these faculties reason's own power is compromised and it cannot maintain its control over them; they rather interfere even in the arenas proper to reason and confuse its perception, such that it is rarely able to carry out its office free of doubt.

Finally, the fourth level of light comprises that which is able to reveal things as they are in an absolute sense, and pertains solely to the revealed heavenly form which is wholly unsusceptible to error from within or without: this is the letter. To it alone belongs the all-comprehensive sublimity (*al-ʿuluww al-iḥāṭī*) that allows it to transcend all dichotomies (*mutaqābilāt*), through it alone are the scales of judgment preserved from any deviation or irregularity of measurement proper to most engendered beings. For every nature (*ṭabīʿa*), excepting the letter itself, must needs occupy one of two opposed categories (*mutaqābilayn*). The letter therefore stands to all dichotomies in the manner described by the verse: *Praise be to God Who has sent down upon His servant the Book and has not assigned unto it any crookedness* (Q 18:1). For this reason the letter is uniquely capable of making perceptible not only things that exist (*mawjūdāt*) but also things that do not or cannot exist (*maʿdūmāt*, *mumtaniʿāt*), and this in equal measure. It alone may reveal the Absolute (*al-iṭlāq*) that otherwise transcends all perception and thought. The preeminence of the letters is such that God has included them (i.e., the *muqaṭṭaʿāt*) among those holy substances He sent down to His servants by way of His prophets to guide them to felicity. The letter is the enlightening elixir (*al-iksīr al-munīr*); were a drop of it to strike the vaults of dark bodies that fill the realms of contingency (*al-ʿawālim al-imkāniyya*), it would forthwith dispel their intrinsic darkness and transform their substance from base to noble, rendering those gross bodies pure light to illumine the dark realms of matter and becoming.[108]

As Ibn Turka argues, in sum, every level of the letter is a construct of eternally emanated divine light, both ontologically and epistemologically—even speech. Yet writing is its most manifest form, for it alone is apprehended by vision, that human faculty proper

108. MS Majlis 10196 ff. 88b-90a. After citing these demonstrative analogies and rhetorical-poetical proofs as to the ontological and epistemological supremacy of the letter, Ibn Turka proceeds to list selected quranic verses and hadiths that support his point, followed by sayings from the Companions and Successors (including ʿAlī and Ḥusayn) and from the righteous *salaf*, such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and al-Shāfiʿī. The author ends the opening section of part four by singling out Zamakhsharī's failure to recognize the intrinsic majesty of the quranic letters for special censure. The remainder of part four pursues this theme by applying it in various ways to the three forms of the letters established above. It treats successively the supreme Name Allāh (*ALH*), the *basmala*, and various grammatical and rhetorical considerations, ending with an examination of the ontological and epistemological status of prosody.

to light and hence most universal.

For all that Plato is lionized by lettrists like Ibn Turka as preeminent exponent of the *philosophia perennis*, then, and original model of the theosized sage, in the early 9th/15th century they finally called his Phaedrean bluff: far from being the guarantee of philosophical integrity, speech is metaphysically *the least reliable form of the letter*; but its written-numerical form—epitomized by the quranic *muqaṭṭaʿāt*—is the very key to the cosmos.[109]

Lettrism and Sociocultural History

Needless to say, Ibn Turka's revolutionary metaphysics of writing was hardly worked out in vacuum, but rather reflective of equally sweeping sociocultural and political changes taking place in the Islamicate heartlands during the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries—including in the first place the burgeoning of Arabo-Persian writerly culture. Tabulating such changes is of course well beyond the scope of this article, which simply proposes Ibn Turkian lettrism as their relevant metaphysical context. Nevertheless, the pairing of intellectual history with sociocultural or political history I called for above has the potential to enrich, perhaps even transform, many current scholarly lines of inquiry. Though their ramifications cannot be pursued here, those relevant to the study of Middle Period Islamicate writerly culture include:

Post-Mongol Imperial Ideology

I have elsewhere argued at length that Ibn Turkian lettrism, together with astrology, was an essential component in the construction of a Timurid universalist imperial ideology; this dual astrological-lettrist platform in turn served as template for the Aqquyunlu, Safavid, Mughal and Ottoman versions of the same. That is to say, post-Mongol Islamicate imperialism, to a far greater degree than its pre-Mongol iterations, was heavily occultist in tenor. This political transformation began under the Ilkhanids, as reflected, for instance, in Āmulī's *Nafāyis al-Funūn*, but only became systematized in the early 9th/15th century. Ibn Turka played a pivotal role in this process: he almost certainly wrote his *Of Letters* and began his *Book of Inquiries* for Iskandar Sulṭān, his first Timurid patron, who despite an abortive reign came to stand as model of *universal (occult) philosopher-kingship*, a status pointedly claimed by the millennial sovereigns of the early modern Persianate world. As such, the theory and practice of post-Mongol Islamicate imperialism simply cannot be understood without reference to lettrism.[110]

Furthermore, the sharp increase in elite patronage of occultist texts during this period significantly impacted writerly and manuscript culture: works on lettrism and the other occult sciences constitute as much as ten percent of the massive corpus of surviving

109. This is not to imply a direct reception of the *Phaedrus* in Arabic, which does not appear to have occurred (Gutas, "Greek Philosophical Works," 811).

110. I develop this theme in Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire."

manuscripts, still almost wholly untapped.[111]

Ibn Turka's philosophical-scientific works on lettrism aside, even those of his treatises that are more strictly literary in tenor stand as index of this dramatic shift in post-Mongol imperial ideology—as well as the unconscionable neglect in scholarship to date of sources of the closest pertinence to this theme. His *Debate of Feast and Fight*, naturally still unpublished and unstudied, is here representative. Completed in 829/1426 for the Timurid prince-calligrapher Bāysunghur b. Shāhrukh (d. 837/1434), the *Munāẓara-yi Bazm u Razm* is an ornate Persian work that expressly imperializes the venerable feast vs. fight (i.e., court vs. military) trope within a lettrist-literary framework. For the first time in the centuries-old Arabo-Persian *munāẓara* tradition, that is, which had never before allowed a debate's resolution, Ibn Turka *marries the opposites* in a manner clearly meant to be instructive to his Timurid royal patron: he is to perform the role of Lord Love (*sulṭān ʿishq*), transcendent of all political-legal dualities.[112] This lettrist mirror for princes is thus not simply unprecedented in Persian literature, a typical expression of the ornate literary panache of these scientists of letters, but also serves as key to Timurid universalist imperial ideology itself in its formative phase.[113]

History of Science

Ibn Turka and his student and friend, Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī (d. 858/1454), the Timurid dynastic historian and mathematician, were friends and colleagues to the preeminent astronomer Qāżīzāda Rūmī (d. 835/1432), first director of Ulugh Beg's (r. 811-53/1409-49) Samarkand Observatory; Yazdī even worked there for a time. Now historians of science acclaim Qāżīzāda, together with his student ʿAlī Qūshchī (d. 879/1474), as being responsible for the revolutionary mathematization of astronomy by ridding it of aristotelian physics—the freeing of astronomy from philosophy, as Jamil Ragep has summarized their project.[114] The same scholar has argued that this newly mathematized astronomy served in turn as a primary inspiration for Copernicus.[115] These remarkable findings aside, the current historiography of science nevertheless wholly abstracts these Timurid astronomers from their lived, sociopolitical context—a context in which lettrists and mathematician-astronomers appear to have professed a common, expressly neopythagorean purpose, maintaining a correspondence with one another and sharing their treatises to this end. In

111. See Melvin-Koushki and Pickett, "Mobilizing Magic."

112. It is here significant that al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/418)—Ibn Turka's contemporary and fellow resident of Cairo—penned for one Amir Abū Yazīd al-Dawādār al-Ẓāhirī, favorite of Sultan Barqūq and like Bāysunghur a skilled calligrapher, a debate on the variant theme of sword vs. pen (*mufākharat al-sayf wa-l-qalam*) that rather concludes with both parties formally making peace of their own accord and declaring their perfect equivalence (*Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 14/231-40). Barqūq, of course, was likewise Akhlāṭī's patron, and seems to have had a keen interest in the occult sciences in general and lettrism in particular.

113. For an edition and translation of this work see my forthcoming *The Lettrist Treatises of Ibn Turka*; for an analysis see my forthcoming "The *Coincidentia Oppositorum* Imperialized: Ibn Turka's *Munāẓara-yi Bazm u Razm* (1426) as a Lettrist Mirror for Timurid Princes."

114. "Freeing Astronomy."

115. Saliba advances a similar thesis in his *Islamic Science*.

such a context, in other words, it was only natural for a neopythagorean like Qāżīzāda—or Kepler after him—to seek to mathematize the cosmos; and his warm friendship, from childhood, with Ibn Turka cannot but have shaped his thinking.[116] It will be recalled that the Isfahani lettrist began pushing precisely for a return to a *mathematical* cosmology, this in his *Mafāḥiṣ*, in 823/1420: number as key to the cosmos and highest expression of *walāya*. In the same year construction of the Samarkand Observatory was begun. There is thus every reason to suspect that Qāżīzāda had read and taken inspiration from the *Book of Inquiries*, and his letter thanking Ibn Turka for sending him a copy of the latter's lettrist *Sharḥ al-Basmala*, dedicated to Ulugh Beg, is extant.

Indeed, there survives a great deal of Ibn Turka's correspondence with the spiritual, intellectual and political elites of his day, which allows for a reconstruction of the sociopolitical networks in which he and his colleagues and students moved—an Islamicate republic of letters, as Evrim Binbaş has called these networks.[117] The explosion of Islamicate writerly culture, in short, also entailed an upsurge in epistolary culture; we may therefore speak of scientific-philosophical networks in the Islamicate world, just as later emerged in Europe. Such social networks, then, are the proper context for studying mathematical astronomers like Qāżīzāda Rūmī—together with their lettrist colleagues.

Comparative Intellectual History

I noted above the remarkable degree of intellectual continuity between the Islamicate and Christianate realms in the early modern period, with lettrism/kabbalah as a major vector. Why the sudden obsession with world as text in 15th-century Iran and Italy?

Scholars have yet to explain this signal cultural shift, common to the Mediterranean zone, or identify its mechanics. While a few European scholar-occultists, like Ramon Llull (d. 1316), did know some Arabic, there is no evidence of direct east-west transmission before the 17th century,[118] and certainly not Persian-Latin (though perhaps Persian-Greek); rather, Islamic and then Reconquista Spain would seem to be the pivot.[119] That Ibn ʿArabī, the greatest lettrist theoretician in Islam to that point, was himself an Andalusi is telling in this context. Although very little research has been done on the relationship

116. Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One." On Kepler as neopythagorean see e.g. Hallyn, *The Poetic Structure of the World*.

117. See his *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran*, which focuses on Yazdī as Timurid historian and committed lettrist.

118. Exceptionally, the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher (d. 1680), "the last man who knew everything," devotes a full chapter of his celebrated *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1652-54, 2.1/361-400) to *Cabala Saracenica et Agarena*, Saracenic-Hagarenic (i.e., Islamic) kabbalah, subtitling it *de superstitiosa Arabum, Turcarumque Philosophia hieroglyphica*; it immediately follows a chapter on Hebrew kabbalah (*Cabala Hebræorum*) (my thanks to Liana Saif for alerting me to this text; see Stolzenberg, *Egyptian Oedipus*).

119. The eastern Byzantine-Ottoman connection was presumably also an important vector for the transmission of Islamicate occultism, and perhaps even lettrism, to (Greek) Christendom, though this possibility has been little studied. Most notably, Gemistos Plethon (d. 1452) himself, the great Byzantine paganizing neoplatonist, seems to have become acquainted with the New Brethren of Purity during his purported sojourn in Ottoman territory; see Siniossoglou, "Sect and Utopia."

of kabbalah to lettrism, the two currents seem to have coevolved from the beginning of the Islamic period, reaching maturity together in 6th/12th-century Islamic Spain.[120] With the Reconquista, however, and the ultimate expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain, kabbalah was carried north and east to France and Italy, while lettrism was carried due east to Egypt and Syria, and thence the Persianate world. (Ibn Turka, again, became a lettrist in Cairo.) The sudden presence of Jewish kabbalists in Italy in particular led to the invention of Christian kabbalah by Pico in the late 15th century, which neopythagorean discipline would go on to inspire the most feted thinkers of early modern Europe—as well as, in some part, the doctrine of *sola scriptura* itself, war-cry of the Protestant Reformation.

It is just as well that Hebrew kabbalah and not Arabic lettrism was transmitted to Europe; unlike the other Arabic occult sciences received so eagerly in the Latinate world, by the 7th/13th century lettrism—the most *Islamic* of the occult sciences—was wholly predicated on the ontological supremacy of the Quran. This would clearly have been a sticking point for Christian occultists, had they been aware of lettrism as a science; they therefore turned to the Hebrew Bible instead as key to the cosmos. This slight divergence notwithstanding, the fact remains: *something* happened in Islamic Spain to engender the common lettrist-kabbalist cosmological doctrine of the Two Books, which by the 10th/16th century was espoused by thinkers as far afield as Delhi and London, Paris and Shiraz.

Literary Culture

The 9th/15th century likewise saw the florescence of highly "artificial" Persian poetic genres in Iran, including in the first place the *muʿammā* or logogriph and the *qaṣīda-yi maṣnūʿ*. Although both have long been cited by scholars as proof of Timurid-Turkmen cultural decadence, Paul Losensky in particular has shown them to rather epitomize the period's structuralist-textualist turn, bent on the codification and amplification of the whole of the Persian poetic tradition.[121] But whence this new obsession with the *written* form of poetry, this ubiquitous interest in *names*? To what extent was the 'fresh style' (*ṭarz-i tāza*) then emergent in Persian poetical practice and dominant by the Safavid-Mughal period informed by the new lettrist-semiological sensibility sweeping the persophone world? Whence many of its literary stars' determination to 'speak the new' (*tāza-gūʾī*)—and render it in complex *visual* form?[122]

I have observed elsewhere that the *muʿammā* in particular, far from being an empty pastime for vapid litterateurs, was reconfigured by Ibn Turka's student and friend Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī in his seminal treatise on the subject, *Embroidered Robes* (*Ḥulal-i Muṭarraz*), which explicitly presents the logogriph as a useful skill in the lettrist's technical repertoire—an immediate, poetic means of analyzing a person's name in order to discern their character, perhaps even their fate.[123] (Similarly, chronograms, properly constructed, offer insight into the texture of history.) Logogriphs were most commonly deployed as

120. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*; Anidjar, "*Our Place in al-Andalus*."

121. *Welcoming Fighānī*, 154-64.

122. Ibid., 198-205, *et passim*.

123. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 379-89; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 48, 81-89.

social calling cards, to be sure; but their extreme popularity testifies to a broader social consciousness, informed by influential Timurid lettrists like Ibn Turka and Yazdī, that the world is *semantic*, and hence deconstructable—and reconstructable—at a formal level. The same observation may be extended to contemporary Mamluk Arabic literary culture, wherein a preoccupation with the formal also prevailed as expression of a general Mamluk "linguistic consciousness" that achieved the "poetization of everyday life."[124] It is hardly an accident in this context, then, that Ibn Turka himself was a leading exponent of the hybrid Mamluk-Timurid ornate literary culture of the early 9th/15th century.[125]

Arts of the Book

As is well known, patronage of the arts of the book, especially calligraphy and painting, boomed under the Timurids. Responding to this cultural transformation, by the end of the Timurid period historians began to pay far more attention to calligraphers and painters, from the reign of Shāhrukh onward, than had ever before been merited; and in the 10th/16th century, under the successor Safavids, an entirely new art-historical genre was born: the album preface.[126] This genre is naturally of primary importance for understanding Timurid-Safavid writerly-artistic culture, and has been celebrated by Islamic art historians as such; I accordingly look briefly at two Safavid album prefaces in the next section to gauge the extent to which their discourse on writing exhibits lettrist influences.

For now, however, I will simply observe that lettrists have here again been wholly elided in the historiography on Timurid-Safavid arts of the book; for reasons that should now be obvious, they must not be. The abovementioned Timurid prince Bāysunghur b. Shāhrukh, for instance, achieved renown as a calligrapher; he also commissioned one of Ibn Turka's most important lettrist treatises, *Query of Kings* (*R. Suʾl al-Mulūk*), wherein the Isfahani thinker lays out his vision for a Timurid occultist imperialism (as in his *Debate of Feast and Fight*, written for the same prince). Ibn Turka's valorization of the category *ūlū l-aydī wa-l-abṣār*, *men of hands and vision*, would also seem to be highly significant in this calligraphic context. By the same token, Ibn Turka's unprecedented declaration of the epistemological-ontological superiority of sight to hearing, on strictly lettrist grounds, can be read as a

124. Bauer, "Mamluk Literature," 109, 130.

125. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 379-407. Ibn Turka's *Sharḥ-i Naẓm al-Durar* is a case in point: it represents the first Persian adaptation of the new Mamluk anthology-as-commentary genre first developed by Ibn Nubāta (d. 768/1366) and emulated by al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) and Ibn Ḥijja al-Ḥamawī (d. 837/1434), the Isfahani lettrist's contemporary. It is also significant in this connection that the *Mafāḥiṣ* ends precisely with a discussion of prosody (*ʿarūḍ*). Most notably, Malik al-Shuʿarāʾ Bahār (d. 1370/1951) presents Ibn Turka as one of the greatest stylists of ornate Persian prose (*naṯr-i fannī*) of the 9th/15th century, and identifies him as the first Arabic and Persian writer to use an ornate literary (*adabī*) style for scientific (*ʿilmī*) subjects (*Sabk-shināsī*, 3/352; he devotes a separate section to Ibn Turka at 3/233-34).

126. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, 125, *et passim*. It bears noting that the album preface derives from the *taẕkira* preface as parent genre, and so the latter is of equal salience here. Nor is it incidental in this connection that Dawlatshāh Samarqandī's (d. 900/1494 or 913/1507) *Taẕkirat al-Shuʿarā*—the model for most subsequent instances of the genre—valorizes Ibn Turka and Yazdī as the two most prominent intellectuals of Shahrukhid Iran (Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 17).

preface most appropriate to the burgeoning of Persianate visual culture from the Timurid period onward. That is: it is hardly an accident that the advent of Ibn Turkian lettrist hyperstructuralism directly preceded that culture's embrace of *hyperrealism*.[127]

Popularization

As Konrad Hirschler has shown, textualization and popularization were interdependent processes in the arabophone west from the 7th/13th century onward.[128] The same happened, of course, in the persophone east—and within the high occultist tradition itself. That is to say, the esotericist reading communities that coalesced around the writings of al-Būnī in Cairo and Ibn ʿArabī in Damascus during the 7th/13th century gave way to increasing levels of elite patronage for the production of copies of occult-scientific texts from the mid-8th/14th century onward; responding to this elite interest, lettrists like Ibn Turka and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī wrote their most influential works in a Persian or Arabic style accessible and attractive to their royal patrons. Both al-Bisṭāmī's Arabic works on lettrism, encyclopedic in the signature Mamluk style, and Ibn Turka's Persian and Arabic treatises on the same, pellucidly clear and systematic, fly in the face of the perennial injunction to secrecy pervading the Islamicate occultist tradition to that point.[129] In other words, over the course of the 8th/14th century and especially the early 9th/15th occultism was effectively *de-esotericized* to an unprecedented extent.[130] I suggest that this remarkable development was part and parcel of the textualization-popularization process taking place in the Mamluk-Timurid realms during this period.[131]

Moreover, in *Sharḥ-i Naẓm al-Durar*, his hybrid Mamluk-Timurid ornate Persian commentary on the *al-Tāʾiyya al-Kubrā* of Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), a major teaching text of the Ibn ʿArabī school, Ibn Turka applies his *tashkīk al-ḥarf* schema to the question

127. On the neoplatonic, aristotelian and sufi discourses increasingly used to celebrate and promote this visual culture see Necipoğlu, "The Scrutinizing Gaze." Her usage in this context of the term *hyperrealism*, as *versus* European Renaissance *naturalism* (see n. 44 above), is not to be confused with, for example, its application to the critical theory of Jean Baudrillard (d. 2007), who posited history as simulation model (see e.g. *The Illusion of the End*, 7). On the tired theme of Islamic iconoclasm, Nigār Ẕaylābī has recently argued that early Islamic prohibitions on painting had solely to do with its association with the manufacture of idols on the one hand and *talismans* on the other, and hence did not hinder the development of Persian book painting in particular ("Payvand-i Ṭilismāt u Ṣūratgarī dar Islām"). I here argue, however, that it was precisely the *occultist* renaissance in the Islamicate world from the 8th/14th century onward that partially inspired and informed emergent Persianate visual culture.

128. *The Written Word*, 112.

129. Where al-Bisṭāmī seeks to present the lettrist tradition as exhaustively as possible, however, Ibn Turka mentions but few authorities (Ibn ʿArabī, Saʿd al-Dīn Ḥamuvayī, Jābir b. Ḥayyān), and is far more concerned to rationalize and systematize the tradition for philosophical-scientfic-imperial use.

130. Gardiner suggests the descriptor "post-esotericist," given that the formerly esoteric nature of the occult sciences only added to their prestige during this period ("Esotericism," 55); see n. 32 above.

131. Similar arguments have been made with respect to the later impact of mass printing on language and literary practice and form (my thanks to Mana Kia for this observation). On printing's transformation of traditional scholarship in the late 13th/19th and early 14th/20th century, for example, see El Shamsy, "Islamic Book Culture."

of popularization. He there summarizes his arguments as presented above, arguing for the primacy of sight vis-à-vis hearing: the latter is biased toward the spiritual realm and therefore cannot render a wordform in its fullness, unlike vision, which registers spiritual and physical objects with equal accuracy.[132] At the same time, the faculty of hearing is the only means whereby the illiterate masses may be spiritually enlightened—hence the orality of prophecy. Ibn Turka therefore deems the recent explosion in production of sufi poetry to herald a new age of human development: for the masses, who constantly listen to this poetry performed to music, now have access to accurate knowledge of the structure of reality, which is therefore no longer the preserve of the intellectual and spiritual elite.[133]

Aqquyunlu and Safavid Receptions

The implications of incorporating Ibn Turkian lettrism into the sociocultural and political historiography of Persianate societies are thus far-reaching indeed. What, then, of post-Timurid intellectual history? Did Ibn Turka have heirs in the later Islamicate philosophical tradition? And to what extent was his metaphysics of writing mainstreamed in Persianate scholarly culture as a whole?

To understand the receptions of Ibn Turka in the Persianate world in the centuries after his death, we must first bracket out his receptions in 20th-century scholarship, Iranian and Euro-American alike, which have served only to occlude and elide his occult philosophy as sketched above. In the influential reading of Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ibn Turka is but a *sufi-Shiʿi* thinker serving as a modest, nondescript link in the intellectual chain of ascent from Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī to Mullā Ṣadrā; as I have shown in detail elsewhere, such a designation radically misrepresents the Isfahani lettrist's project—he was certainly neither sufi nor Shiʿi.[134] Similarly, ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981) celebrates Ibn Turka in his *al-Mīzān* as a preeminent synthesizer of Avicennan philosophy and theoretical mysticism (*ʿirfān*), ranking him in this regard with Fārābī and Suhravardī; that is to say, he recognizes him as a neoplatonist, but not as a neopythagorean, and in no way an occultist.[135] Departing somewhat from this consensus, the late Muḥammad-Taqī Dānishpazhūh (d. 1417/1996), while more willing to acknowledge Ibn Turka's lettrist commitments, declared him rather the 'Spinoza of Iran.'[136] (ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb (d. 1420/1999), in response, took issue with this title as being misrepresentative of Ibn

132. *Sharḥ-i Naẓm al-Durr*, 38-39.

133. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 401. Note that in early modern Persian *taẕkira*s poets are routinely portrayed as having access to supernal truths (my thanks to Mana Kia for this observation). Cf. Thomas Bauer's proposal that Mamluk literature represents a shift to a *participational* aesthetics away from the monumental representationalism standard in the Abbasid period ("'Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī!'").

134. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 6-8.

135. *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 5/282-84. His association of Ibn Turka with Suhravardī is not entirely inappropriate, however, given that, as I argue, the former commandeered the latter's doctrine of *tashkīk al-nūr* for lettrist purposes.

136. "Majmūʿa-yi Rasāʾil-i Khujandī," 312; specifically, he asserts Ibn Turka to be the 'Spinoza of Iran' to rhetorically underscore the necessity of publishing and studying his works. Needless to say, it is a rather ironic choice, given Spinoza's own project, essentially antithetical to Ibn Turka's, of biblical criticism.

Turka's mystical and lettrist concerns.[137]) All such readings are well-intentioned, to be sure, but err in their assumption that lettrism forever remained a minor subset of sufism—in this ignoring a massive body of evidence to the contrary, including the Arabo-Persian encyclopedic tradition itself. For Ibn Turka's project is expressly revolutionary: he sought to demote sufism and philosophy both from their wonted positions at the top of the epistemological hierarchy and install his lettrist metaphysics-physics in their place.[138]

For all that this basic point is lost on modern scholars, it was manifestly clear to his contemporaries and heirs throughout the Persianate world; and these include a number of thinkers far more feted in the scholarship than Ibn Turka himself. Indeed, the best index of the centrality of lettrism to Ibn Turka's project is the fact that he was received *solely* as a lettrist until the 13th/19th century.[139] Nor was the scope of his influence limited to Iran during his own lifetime and after; in one later work, for instance, he declares himself

> a seeker of knowledge whose writings are borne abroad by the north and east winds and are well received in all regions and on all shores, with travelers from India (*Hindustān*) and Anatolia being dispatched in search of copies of his treatises and books, and whose students come to him from all lands, including Shiraz, Samarkand, Anatolia and India (*Hind*).[140]

In other words, Ibn Turka's lettrist corpus, like al-Būnī's before it, quickly emerged as an important node in the explosion of Persianate manuscript culture; many early copies of his *Mafāḥiṣ* may indeed be found as far afield as Istanbul,[141] and lettrist treatises like the *R. Ḥurūf* were equally popular—it is included, for instance, in MS Fatih 5423 (TIEM 2054), a gorgeous, deluxe collection of Ibn Turka's works copied in 1439 for an elite Ottoman patron.[142] This would seem to be an unsually fitting fate for works that advance, for the first time in the Islamicate context, a systematic metaphysics of writing.

Here again, a full account of Ibn Turka's students and heirs is beyond the scope of this article; but I offer a few select examples to show that his lettrist metaphysics remained current in philosophical circles in Iran through at least the early 11th/17th century—whence it permeated scholarly understandings of the nature and epistemological-ontological supremacy of writing throughout the Persianate world, from Anatolia to India, during the same period.

The philosophers of Aqquyunlu-Safavid Iran most openly indebted to Ibn Turka are

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137. *Dunbāla-yi Justujū dar Taṣavvuf-i Īrān*, 142.

138. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 330-33.

139. On Ibn Turka's reception in Safavid and Qajar Iran see Melvin-Koushki, "World as (Arabic) Text."

140. *Nafṣat al-Maṣdūr-i Duvvum*, 209-10. Note that *Hind* variously designates those regions of the Subcontinent under Muslim rule, the Subcontinent as a whole, or the Indo-Gangetic region of north India only (my thanks to Mana Kia for this observation).

141. For a preliminary list of surviving manuscript copies in Iran and Turkey see Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 97-98.

142. My thanks to Maria Subtelny for examining this *majmūʿa* on my behalf. For a preliminary list of surviving manuscript copies in Iran and Turkey see Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 88-89.

two: Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502) and Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1630). Both are widely acknowledged in the literature to be both pivotal figures in their own times and among the most influential philosophers in Islamicate intellectual history more generally. The latter, hailed as the Third Teacher (*muʿallim-i s̲ālis̲*) (i.e., after Aristotle and Fārābī), intimate of Shah ʿAbbās I (r. 995-1038/1587-1629) and mentor to Mullā Ṣadrā, is usually considered the founder of the so-called philosophical school of Isfahan; as such, most of his works have been published and studied extensively. This Safavid philosopher embraced Ibn Turka's lettrist metaphysics in at least three works, including his seminal *Firebrands and Meeting Stations* (*Jaz̲avāt u Mavāqīt*), a Persian summary of his philosophical system as a whole; citing the *R. Ḥurūf* in particular, Mīr Dāmād even adopts the fourfold *tashkīk al-ḥarf* schema analyzed above.[143] Given persistent scholarly occultophobia, however, this crucial fact has been flatly ignored in the literature to date.

For his part, Davānī is celebrated as an eclectic illuminationist-Ibn ʿArabian-Ashʿari thinker, the last major heir of Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, and together with his great rival Mīr Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī (d. 903/1498) and the latter's son Mīr Ghiyās̲ al-Dīn Dashtakī (d. 949/1542) accounted the most important source for Safavid philosophy.[144] Davānī's influence in India, whence hailed a number of his students, was similarly outsize, and likewise in Ottoman scholarly circles.[145] The Aqquyunlu philosopher penned two popular Persian lettrist works, one of which, *On the Declaration of Divine Oneness* (*R. Tahlīliyya*), effectively reasserts Ibn Turka's lettrist hierarchy of knowledge, whereby lettrism serves as supreme metaphysical science, superior to both Avicennan-illuminationist philosophy and sufi theory; and his presentation of this science follows Ibn Turka's to the letter—including, naturally, its signature *tashkīk al-ḥarf* schema.[146] Yet here too Davānī's embrace of Ibn Turkian lettrism has been wholly elided in the literature. Nevertheless, that two of the most influential philosophers of Iran, both in service to, respectively, Aqquyunlu and Safavid ruling elites, pointedly adopted Ibn Turka's metaphysics of writing suggests it to have been well-known and attractive to scholarly elites more generally; it should therefore be detectable as a cultural discourse well beyond philosophical circles.

I have argued elsewhere that Mīr Dāmād's reception of Ibn Turka, pivoting consciously on Davānī's, is the crucial context for understanding the striking *neopythagorean turn* in Safavid philosophy, whereby even Ibn Sīnā himself, the second Aristotle, was

143. *Jaz̲avāt u Mavāqīt*, 134, 143-34; see Melvin-Koushki, "World as (Arabic) Text."

144. On the formative Davānī-Dashtakī rivalry see Bdaiwi, "Shiʿi Defenders of Avicenna."

145. Rizvi, "Mīr Dāmād in India"; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 52.

146. Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 256-61. Davānī's summary of these levels is useful in this context (*R. Tahlīliyya*, 65-66): 1) Spiritual-mental, wherein the letters take form in the human mind before being expressed, in this corresponding God's knowledge of realities before their coming into being; these letters are called the high letters (*ḥurūf-i ʿāliyāt*) or thought letters (*ḥurūf-i fikriyya*). 2) Oral, wherein the letters are expressed in audible form; these are called the medial letters (*ḥurūf-i wusṭā*). 3) Written, wherein the letters are made visible to *men of might and vision* (Q 38:45); these are called the low letters (*ḥurūf-i sāfila*). Furthermore, letters have spirits, bodies and hearts. Their spirits represent their numerical values, their hearts their oral form, and their bodies their written form.

transmogrified into a neopythagorean-occultist;[147] I further suggest it here as an important factor in the equally striking florescence of Safavid *book culture*.[148] Most emblematic of Safavid perennialist bibliophilia, even bibliomania, is the sharply increased production of philosophical anthologies (which often feature lettrist texts), on the one hand, and the consolidation of a new genre of art history-theory, the album preface, on the other.

A telling example of the first is British Library MS Add. 16839, a classic 11th/17th-century Safavid anthology of philosophical and mystical texts that features a heavy lettrist emphasis; most significantly, it conjuncts a number of lettrist and other treatises by Ibn Turka, including the *R. Ḥurūf*, with Mīr Dāmād's *Jaẕavāt*, together with treatises by a range of other authorities, from Ibn Sīnā and Ṭūsī to Davānī and Mullā Ṣadrā.[149] A celebrated instance of the second is Qāżī Aḥmad's (d. after 1015/1606) *Rose Garden of Art* (*Gulistān-i Hunar*), an unprecedentedly comprehensive work of art historiography-biography completed around 1006/1598 (revised 1015/1606) and dedicated to Shah ʿAbbās. This is a curiously hybrid work, simultaneously a technical treatise on writing and a biographical dictionary of calligraphers, but also functioning, according to David Roxburgh, as a "gargantuan album preface."[150] I wish to call attention to two features of the *Gulistān-i Hunar* relevant to the present context.

First, Qāżī Aḥmad opens his work by copying and slightly reworking the beginning of Shams al-Dīn Āmulī's section on writing as translated above—a borrowing not previously noticed. That the *Nafāyis al-Funūn* is drawn on so prominently as a source for emulation is of special significance here: it implies that Qāżī Aḥmad was well aware of its status as the first Persian encyclopedia of the sciences to a) formally valorize writing over speech, and b) elevate sufism, and by extension lettrism, to the status of queen of the Islamic sciences. As I argue, these two departures from precedent are intimately connected, and would presumably have been understood to be so by a consummate scholar like Qāżī Aḥmad. His opening assertion of the supremacy of writing, moreover, like Āmulī's, is categorical: 'It is evident to the minds of those with insight that the finest thing a person can possess is excellence and skill (*faẓl u hunar*), and that no [skill] is finer than the ability to write beautifully (*ḥusn-i khaṭṭ*).'[151]

Second, Qāżī Aḥmad, like all other Safavid album preface writers of the 10th/16th century, places great store by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's status as inventor of the Kufic script, as well as inspirer, through a dream vision, of Ibn Muqla (d. 328/940), the Abbasid vizier universally considered to be responsible for codifying the 'six scripts' (*al-aqlām al-sitta*, *shish qalam*)[152] derived from Kufic and hence the patron saint of Arabic calligraphy as such.[153] (Qāżī Aḥmad also expands on this theme to praise Imam Ḥasan and Imam Zayn

147. Melvin-Koushki, "World as (Arabic) Text."

148. See e.g. Endress, "Philosophische Ein-Band-Bibliotheken."

149. Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts*, 2/833-35.

150. *Prefacing the Image*, 2.

151. *Gulistān-i Hunar*, 4.

152. I.e., *thuluth*, *tarqīʿ*, *muḥaqqaq*, *naskh*, *rayḥān* and *riqāʿ*.

153. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, 188; on the reforms of Ibn Muqla see Tabbaa, "The Transformation."

al-ʿĀbidīn ʿAlī as potent calligraphers and copyists of the Quran in their own right.) Of Imam ʿAlī he declares:

> That script (*khaṭṭī*) that, like kohl, salved and illumined the eyes of *men of vision* (*ūlū l-abṣār*) in communicating the divine inspiration and commands and prohibitions vouchsafed the holy Messenger (God bless and keep him and his House) was the Kufic script. There survive to this day some of the letters (*arqām*) produced by the miraculous pens of the holy Shah of Sacral Power (*shāh-i valāyat-panāh*) (the peace of God be upon him)—how richly do they illuminate the eye of the soul and burnish the tablet of the mind! None has written more beautifully than that holy eminence (the blessings and peace of God be upon him), who produced the finest examples of the Kufic script ever written ... Masters [of this art] therefore identify that holy eminence (the blessings of God be upon him) as the originator (*sanad*) of that script and trace its chain of transmission back to him.
>
> The first to marry beautiful writing to beautiful conduct
> was Murtażā ʿAlī, and that mightily.
>
> For this reason said [the Prophet] (God bless and keep him and his House): *Writing is half of all knowledge* (*al-khaṭṭ niṣf al-ʿilm*). That is, for whomever writes well, it is as though he has mastered half of all sciences.
>
> Whose writing did the chief of the prophets,
> in his knowledge and wisdom, declare the *half of all knowledge*?
> The Prophet declared it
> of the writing of Murtażā ʿAlī.
> Murtażā was truly the king of all saints (*shāh-i awliyā*);
> but when the caliphs usurped [his right]
> he made seclusion his practice,
> for a time eschewing all intercourse,
> preferring rather to copy the Quran (*kitābat-i muṣḥaf*)—
> hence the great honor and majesty that redounds to writing!
> For how could writing like his be within human power?
> His script was beyond human, his writing *other*.[154]

Given the imperial Twelver Shiʿi context in which Qāżī Aḥmad and his fellow album preface authors were writing during the 10th/16th century, most scholars have reflexively assumed such encomiums for ʿAlī as simultaneously the inventor of Kufic and "king of the saints" to be both *historical fictions* and quintessentially, uncontestably *Shiʿi*. But such a conclusion is rash and unwarranted, especially if our goal is to recover the

It is significant in this context that Āmulī simply reports that scholars differ in crediting the invention of Kufic to either ʿAlī or Ibn Muqla, without supplying, like Qāżī Aḥmad, a dream-vision narrative to resolve the attribution in favor of ʿAlī.

154. *Gulistān-i Hunar*, 13-14.

Safavid metaphysics of writing. For Ibn Turka—a committed *Sunni* imamophile—appears to have been the foremost authority in Safavid Iran on matters letter-metaphysical, as we have seen; and his metaphysics of writing is founded on the doctrine that writing and mathematics are the directest expressions of *walāya*, whose preeminent exponent during the Islamic dispensation is ʿAlī—inventor, Ibn Turka says, of the Kufic script and *jafr* both. Such a neat congruency between Ibn Turka's pneumatic-grammatic theory and Qāżī Aḥmad's rhetoric is thus hardly coincidental. That is to say: lettrism was the Sunni intellectual current most utilizable by Shiʿi scholars seeking to construct a new imperial Safavid Shiʿi culture; any account of the transformative *shiʿization* of Iran that elides Timurid-Aqquyunlu lettrist precedent must therefore remain incomplete.

But the *Gulistān-i Hunar* does not explicitly employ the neoplatonic-neopythagorean schema systematized by Ibn Turka in Ibn ʿArabian terms; for this we must turn to the most famous of the Safavid album prefaces, that of Dūst Muḥammad (d. after 972/1564), written for the album prepared for Bahrām Mīrzā (d. 957/1549), brother of Shah Ṭahmāsb (r. 930-84/1524-76). The ornate opening passage of this preface has been analyzed masterfully by David Roxburgh in particular;[155] but no art historian has yet noted its overtly *lettrist* framework.[156] It begins:

> The noblest writing ... is praise of the Creator, by Whose Pen are scriven and by Whose tracing are limned the High Letters (*ḥurūf-i ʿāliyāt*) and the supernal forms (*ṣuvar-i mutaʿāliyāt*). According to the dictum *The Pen exhausted its ink with [writing all] that will be until Doomsday*, the coalesced forms and variegated shapes of the entifications (*aʿyān*) were—according to the dictum *I was a hidden treasure*—secreted in the treasury of the unseen beyond time; then—according to its continuation *I craved to be known, so I created creation in order to be known*—He snatched with the fingers of destiny the veil of nonbeing from the countenance of being, and with the hand of mercy and grace and the pen of *The first thing God created was the Pen* painted them masterfully on the canvas of existence.
>
> [It is praise of] the Maker, Who in the workshop of *God created Adam in His form* rendered the totality of the human form—a microcosm (*ʿālam-i ṣānī*) in its all-comprehensiveness of forms and meanings—upon the page of creation in the most beautiful guise, wiping the dust of nonexistence from the tablet of his being with the polish of favor, then [set him to] ascend the levels of *Assume the attributes of God* [by] making the mirror of creation the site of manifestation of His Names and traces.

155. *Prefacing the Image*, esp. 189-98.

156. As Roxburgh notes (ibid., 165), while

> most scholars agree that the content of Dust Muhammad's preface is particularly remarkable ... [i]ts turns of phrase and figures of speech were thought to be hackneyed (and incapable of signifying anything other than their life as literary devices), and the narrative content of its stories were considered topoi, the product of pure rhetoric, and never taken seriously. Without thoroughgoing analysis of the preface, its immediate meaning—viz. the licitness of depiction—and rationale—a justification for depiction and explanation of Safavid art in the present—came across to some scholars as somewhat flimsy, perhaps even as anachronistic.

> [It is praise of] the Almighty, Who embellished the seven heavens—which are inimitable on the model of the Seven Repeated (*sabʿ al-maṯānī*),[157] nay, by way of organization and stellation (*tanjīm*)[158] on the model of the pages of the Quran [as a whole]—with the verse-signs (*āyāt*) of the gorgeous stars and the tenth and the fifth [markers] that are the Sun and the Moon,[159] and, having made rulings with the lines of light rays (*khuṭūṭ-i shuʿāʿī*), with the white ink of dawn and the vermilion of sunset established on the azure page of the celestial sphere a template for the four Tablets.[160]

Most significantly, Dūst Muḥammad here invokes the doctrine of *tashkīk al-ḥarf*: he posits the Pen as first existent, whence are first produced extramental forms (*aʿyān*), which coalesce downward into the High Letters (*ḥurūf-i ʿāliyāt*)—Davānī's technical term for the mathematical-mental level of the letter—,[161] until finally their physical-elemental reality, which is to say the written form of the letter (and by extension painting), is manifested. It is striking that he ignores the level of speech altogether—creation is here entirely the product of the Pen, not the divine utterance *Be!* Of similar significance is his poetic equation of the cosmos to the Quran; this, of course, is a classic expression of the Two Books doctrine. A few decades later, Mīr Dāmād restated this doctrine in strictly philosophical terms in his *Jaẕavāt*: the totality of macrocosm and microcosm together constitute the Book of God, inscribed by the Pen or Universal Intellect, with all existents being letters, words, sentences, verses and suras in that cosmic scripture.[162] Finally, Dūst Muḥammad associates the neoplatonic doctrine of man as microcosm with the Ibn ʿArabian-Būnian doctrine of the cosmos as manifestation of the infinite Names of God (*asmāʾ Allāh*), whereby human beings can reascend to the One, can self-divinize or achieve *theosis* (*taʾalluh*), by way of *theomimesis* (*tashabbuh bi-l-bāriʾ*)—fully incarnating the Names through lettrist *praxis*.

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157. I.e., the Fātiḥa.

158. This term usually denotes astrology.

159. In illuminated manuscript copies of the Quran, every fifth verse (*khams*) is marked with a gold rosette or Kufic *H*, equal to 5, and every tenth with a gold medallion containing the word ten (*ʿashr*) (Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition*, 22, 54).

160. Dūst Muḥammad's preface, preserved as Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi H.2154, is transcribed and translated in Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 4-17; the translation here, which renders the technical terminology more accurately, is mine. The four Tablets are identified by ʿAbd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 730/1330) in his *Taʾwīlāt* as follows (trans. in Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 155):

> There are four tablets: The tablet of precedent decree [*qaḍāʾ*] towers beyond obliteration and affirmation. It is the First Intellect. The tablet of measure [*qadar*] is the Universal Rational Soul, within which the universal things of the First Tablet become differentiated and attached to their secondary causes. It is named the Guarded Tablet. The tablet of the particular, heavenly souls is a tablet within which is inscribed everything in this world along with its shape, condition, and measure. This tablet is called the 'heaven of this world.' It is like the imagination of the cosmos, just as the first [tablet] is like its spirit, and the second [tablet] is like its heart. Then there is the tablet of matter, which receives the forms of the visible world. And God knows best.

161. See Davānī's definition of the four levels in n. 146 above.

162. *Jaẕavāt*, 21-24; see Melvin-Koushki, "World as (Arabic) Text."

By lettrist praxis I mean, of course, letter or talismanic magic, which, tellingly, was hugely popular in Safavid Iran.[163] Now it will be remembered that lettrism was first sanctified by Ibn ʿArabī and al-Būnī precisely through their fusion of neoplatonic-neopythagorean cosmology with the sufi doctrine of Names—hence lettrism's alternate designation as *ʿilm al-asmāʾ*, and hence Āmulī's reclassification of lettrism as the supreme sufi science. (Any technical reference to the Names of God after the 7th/13th century, such as in Dūst Muḥammad's preface, can therefore be safely assumed to have a lettrist resonance.) As a consequence, the practice of magic overwhelmingly became the practice of Būnian sufi-letter magic, focused in the first place on the divine Names, and by extension the names of angels, jinn, or any other being or thing in existence; a given Name is made operational by mathematically processing its letters in a magic square, which then becomes the engine of a talisman, to be engraved or written on an appropriate medium. A talisman, in short, represents the marriage of text and number, of celestial and terrestrial; it epitomizes Ibn Turkian *walāya*. It is thus hardly surprising that Persian writers on writing increasingly cast their subject in magical terms. A representative example is, once again, Qāżī Aḥmad. In his work's introduction he indites in praise of the pen:

> [The pen] is a skilled worker, and finely sees,
> accomplishing its work with the might of its right hand;
> Its art is the miracle of a mage (*muʿjiza-yi sāḥirī*):
> it is now a Moses, now a Samaritan (*sāmirī*).[164]

Ottoman and Mughal Receptions

So far the Aqquyunlu-Safavid metaphysics of writing; to what extent did Ibn Turka's lettrist system inform scholars in the broader Persianate world? A considerable one, it would seem. Two examples must here suffice, one Ottoman, one Mughal.

As Cornell Fleischer in particular has shown, Ottoman imperial culture under Sultan Süleymān Kanuni (r. 926-74/1520-66) was profoundly occultist in orientation, and especially lettrist. This outlook was rooted in the first place in the voluminous occultist-apocalypticist corpus of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī of Antioch, Ibn Turka's fellow heir of Akhlāṭī and contemporary cognate in Anatolia. Most notably, al-Bisṭāmī's *Key to the Comprehensive Prognosticon* (*Miftāḥ al-Jafr al-Jāmiʿ*) appears to have served as Ur-text in the construction of Ottoman imperial identity; it is primarily on its basis that the Ottoman self-understanding as Last World Empire was formed.[165] Given the great currency of Bisṭāmian lettrism, then, we may assume there was a eager market for Ibn Turka's lettrist works as well; and indeed, the latter's claim that his writings were popular in Anatolia is borne out by the presence of many surviving copies thereof in Ottoman archives—the *Mafāḥiṣ* chief among them. While al-Bisṭāmī was rather more prolific on topics occult, his

163. See Melvin-Koushki, "The Occult Sciences in Safavid Iran."

164. *Gulistān-i Hunar*, 9. In the quranic narrative, a Samaritan was responsible for magically animating the golden calf for the Israelites to worship in Moses's absence (Q 20:83-97).

165. Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom."

lettrism is equal parts Ibn ʿArabian-Būnian—that is to say, half theory and half praxis—and not philosophically systematic; his Isfahani colleague's *magnum opus*, by contrast, represents the first systematic treatment of lettrist metaphysics in the Islamicate tradition, as well as the fullest expression of Ibn Turka's signature *tashkīk al-ḥarf* schema.

It is therefore striking, but not surprising, to find this schema adopted by Muṣṭafā Taşköprüzāde (d. 968/1561), the greatest Ottoman encyclopedist of the 10th/16th century. His seminal Arabic classification of the sciences, *Key to Felicity and Lamp to Mastery* (*Miftāḥ al-Saʿāda wa-Miṣbāḥ al-Siyāda*), is closely modeled on Ibn al-Akfānī's *Irshād al-Qāṣid*, but expands on it massively—especially with respect to the occult sciences, including lettrism.[166] It served in turn as model for Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1657) and other subsequent Arabic encyclopedists.[167] Like Āmulī, moreover, but unlike Ibn al-Akfānī, Taşköprüzāde formally valorizes writing over speech as the foundation of all human knowledge by classifying it as the first science of the first section (*dawḥa*) of his work. Also like Āmulī, he adds to the core humanistic maxim as to the superiority of writing (to wit, that it trumps speech because the latter is fleeting and local but the former is durable and portable, and is the only means by which we can historically realize our humanity) a selection of standard traditional and rational proofs in corroboration:

> *On the virtue of writing, our need for it and the circumstances of its invention*
>
> As for its virtue according to tradition:
>
> [In the first place], the saying of the Most High: *Recite: And your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught by the Pen, taught man what he knew not* (Q 96:3-5). He further attributed the teaching of writing to Himself, graciously bestowing it on His servants—which alone should suffice to prove its excellence: *N. And by the Pen, and what they inscribe* (Q 68:1). Thus did He swear by *what they inscribe*. It is transmitted from Ibn ʿAbbās (God be pleased with him) that he explicated His saying *or a trace of a science* (Q 46:4) to refer to writing (*al-khaṭṭ*). It is further transmitted that Solomon (upon him be peace) asked an afrit as to the nature of speech. The latter replied: "A passing wind." Said Solomon: "Then what can bind it?" Said he: "Writing." ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās described it thus: "Writing is the hand's tongue." Jaʿfar b. Yaḥyā: "Writing is the string of wisdom (*simṭ al-ḥikma*): thereon are its pieces set off [to greatest effect] and its dispersed parts brought into order." Said Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Shaybānī: "Writing is the hand's tongue, the mind's glory, the intellect's emissary, thought's legatee, knowledge's weapon; it confers fraternal intimacy during separation and

166. See Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One."

167. Interestingly, Khaled El-Rouayheb has shown that Ottoman scholars of the 11th-13th/17th-19th centuries identified less with Taşköprüzāde and his contemporaries and more with Persian scholars like Davānī (*Islamic Intellectual History*, 52)—a fact that may be significant in lettrist terms, given Davānī's status and Safavid reception as an exponent of the Ibn Turkian brand of the science. That the Shirazi philosopher's reception was equally warm in Mughal India during the same period suggests a continued familiarity with his lettrist writings there as well. More generally, El-Rouayheb has argued for the emergence of a more impersonal, *text-based* transmission of knowledge in Ottoman scholarly culture from the 10th/16th century onward ("The Rise of 'Deep Reading'").

allows brothers to speak over great distances; it is the repository of secrets and the record of all things."

As for [its virtue] according to reason:

Even were the excellence of writing to be testified to only by the fact that God Most High revealed it to Adam (or Hūd, upon them both be peace), and that He sent down written codices to His prophets, and that He gave inscribed tablets to Moses (upon him be peace), that would be sufficient. Yet [its excellence as rationally construed is universal]: for anything that one can mention as to passing thoughts, intellectual inclinations, intimations of understanding, limnings of imagination or sensory perceptions can be entrusted to writing, which orders it and expresses it truly.

Nor can any community depend on another in this respect, or any nation exempt another [of the responsibility to patronize writing]. For writing allows us to realize our very humanity; it distinguishes us from all other animals, gives us the ability to preserve intact sciences over time, to transmit information from age to age, to transport secrets from place to place.

Furthermore, writing guarantees rights and discourages rebellion among rational individuals by compelling them with recorded testaments and correspondence between people over great distances, ensuring far more accuracy than can be attained by the bearer of a message or through an interaction in person even if the individuals in question remember perfectly and express themselves with the greatest eloquence. Therefore has writing been declared superior to speech: for speech informs those present only, while writing informs those present and those not.[168]

Taşköprüzāde's treatment of writing would thus seem to be little more than a modest embellishment on Arabic and Persian bibliophilic precendent; needless to say, the simple fact that he is strongly pro-occultist does not necessarily entail a familiarity with high lettrist theory.

But familiar he certainly was: for the Ottoman scholar breaks with Āmulī, Ibn al-Akfānī and every other exponent of the Arabo-Persian encyclopedic tradition to propose a radically new hierarchy of knowledge as his primary structuring device for the work as a whole—*tashkīk al-ḥarf*. The first four sections of his encyclopedia, of seven, are thus as follows:

1) On the sciences of writing (*fī bayān al-ʿulūm al-khaṭṭiyya*)
2) On the sciences connected with speech (*fī ʿulūm tataʿallaq bi-l-alfāẓ*)
3) On the sciences that investigate mental objects (*fī ʿulūm bāḥitha ʿammā fī l-adhhān*)

168. *Miftāḥ al-Saʿāda*, 1/79-80. It must here be emphasized that in Islamicate political theory the power to maintain personal connection despite absence is considered a primary foundation of social order—hence the great virtue and necessity of *adab*, simultaneously a system of writing conventions and a code of ethics (see Kia, "*Adab* as Literary Form and Social Conduct").

4) On the science connected with extramental realities (*fī l-ʿilm al-mutaʿalliq bi-l-aʿyān*)[169]

This *khaṭṭ-lafẓ-dhihn-ʿayn* series, of course, is unmistakably Ibn Turkian. Taşköprüzāde's innovation here is his recognition of the inadequacy of the large set of traditionalist and rationalist proofs, relatively stable from the Abbasid period onward, for the task of demonstrating the *ontological* supremacy of writing to speech. In the *Miftāḥ al-Saʿāda*, in other words, we have a conservative reiteration of the text-centric perennialist-traditionalist culture already long entrenched in the Islamicate heartlands by the 8th/14th century—yet by the 10th/16th century its epistemological-philosophical context had profoundly changed. That is to say, Taşköprüzāde does not flag the new lettrist context for his otherwise standard valorization of writing over speech; but he certainly expected it to be obvious to his fellow *men of main and vision*.[170]

What of Mughal India? Although much further research remains to be done on Ibn Turka's reception in the Subcontinent (not to mention his reception in general), it would appear his lettrist metaphysics of light received just as warm a scholarly welcome there as in the far west of the Persianate world. Certain Safavid and Ottoman scholars, as we have seen, drew eclectically on his lettrist theory, each to their own ends. The former emphasized his imamophilic doctrine of writing-number as vector of *walāya*, especially

169. The last three sections, in sequential order, are on practical philosophy (*fī l-ḥikma al-ʿamaliyya*), on the religious sciences (*fī l-ʿulūm al-sharʿiyya*) and on the interior or spiritual sciences (*fī ʿulūm al-bāṭin*).

170. In a recent article ("Writing, Speech, and History"), Ali Anooshahr has applied Derrida to Taşköprüzāde's *Miftāḥ al-Saʿāda* to analyze the latter's metaphysics of orality and writing; he argues that Taşköprüzāde was responsible for overturning the initial valorization of speech over writing in Ottoman historiography of the 9th/15th century. This suggests, in effect, that Ottoman scholarship locally reprised the transition from speech-centric to text-centric that had already taken place centuries before throughout the Islamicate heartlands. While a compelling thesis, it is unfortunately weakened by Anooshahr's failure to situate the *Miftāḥ al-Saʿāda* within the Islamicate encyclopedic tradition itself, which leads him to claim a revolutionary status for Taşköprüzāde on very different, and mistaken, grounds. That is, he presents the Ottoman encyclopedist's assertion of the superiority of writing to speech as being unprecedented, and describes his concluding statement—"Therefore has writing been declared superior to speech: for speech informs those present only, while writing informs those present and those not"—as both "remarkable" and "outstanding" (59). As we have seen, however, this statement was already standard in Arabic and Persian encyclopedias both by the early 8th/14th century; it represents Taşköprüzāde's strict fidelity to precedent, and especially to Ibn al-Akfānī's *Irshād al-Qāṣid*, and is not revolutionary in the slightest. As I argue, it is rather Taşköprüzāde's importation of Ibn Turka's *tashkīk al-ḥarf* schema that is unprecedented in the tradition.

In other words, Anooshahr's approach here shows the dangers of reading Ottoman scholarship in isolation from its original Arabo-Persian context in general and its Timurid-Mamluk context in particular, as is still regrettably the rule. But the fact that Taşköprüzāde found it necessary to import Ibn Turka's metaphysics of writing to counter earlier Ottoman historiographical trends only serves to strengthen Anooshahr's larger thesis, and especially his contention that the great 10th/16th-century scholar was responsible for reformulating Ottoman history in a manner that destabilizes all dualisms, that obliterates all "binary opposite pairs" (44). Which is to say: Taşköprüzāde would seem to be applying the lettrist principle of the *coincidentia oppositorum* to dynastic historiography itself—a strategy that is indeed both remarkable and outstanding.

useful to the Safavid project of shiʿizing Iran; the latter found his *tashkīk al-ḥarf* schema crucial for bringing a final *Ottoman* organization to the great mass of human knowledge, the *philosophia perennis*, in preparation for the end of history. Their Mughal counterparts, by contrast, responding to different imperial needs, chose rather to highlight the post-illuminationist *tashkīk al-nūr* component of Ibn Turka's system.

Perhaps the most manifestly Ibn Turkian treatment of writing produced in India is that by Abū l-Fażl ʿAllāmī (d. 1011/1602), vizier to Emperor Akbar (r. 963-1014/1556-1605) and chief architect of the new Mughal imperial culture. The famous section on writing and painting in his monumental *Akbarian Institutes* (*Āʾīn-i Akbarī*) (which, like its Safavid counterparts, treats the second as being strictly derivative of the first) opens as follows:

> In truth, [writing (*khaṭṭ*)] is for those who love beauty the site of manifestation of delimited light (*nūr-i muqayyad*), for the farsighted the undelimited world-reflecting cup (*jām-i gītī-numā-yi muṭlaq*). The talisman that is writing is a form of spiritual geometry from the Pen of creation (*ṭilism-i khaṭṭ rūḥānī handasaʾī-st az qalam-i ibdāʿ*), a celestial writ from the hand of fate (*āsmānī kitābaʾī az dast-i taqdīr*). It is the secret-bearer of speech; it is the hand's tongue. Speech (*sukhan*) communicates the heart's potency to those present only; writing informs those near and far alike. Were it not for writing, speech would be lifeless, the heart ungifted by those who have gone before.
>
> Those who see only bodies think [writing a mass of] mere inky shapes; but the servants of spirit (*maʿnā*) deem it the radiant lamp of knowledge (*charāgh-i shināsāʾī*). It is darkness despite its million rays for the pupils; it is a light with a black mole against the evil eye. It is the limner of intelligence, the loamy farmlands feeding the capital of meaning (*savād-i shahristān-i maʿnā*). It is a sun to night-pitchy [ignorance], a dark cloud heavy with [enlightening] knowledge. It is a mighty talismanic seal (*shigarf ṭilismī*) on the treasury of sight. Though mute, it speaks; though immobile, it travels; though fallen, it soars.
>
> [The mechanics of its manifestation are thus:] From the fullness of divine knowledge shines a ray into the rational [human] soul (*nafs-i nāṭiqa*); the heart then communicates this onward to the realm of the imagination (*khayāl*), the intermediate plane (*barzakh*) between the immaterial (*mujarrad*) and material (*māddī*), where its immateriality is tempered with materiality and its undelimitedness with delimitation; and so it becomes manifest. If this occurs by way of the tongue, it enters the ear by aid of air; there it delivers itself of its burden, then flees back whence it came. But if that celestial traveler (*musāfir-i āsmānī*) journeys by aid of the fingers, traversing the lands and seas that are pens and ink visible to the eye (*nūr-dīda*), it finally sets down its burden in the pleasure-houses that are pages and retires from the highway of vision (*dīda*).[171]

This passage has been rightly celebrated by art historians: as a treatment of calligraphy it is unique in the Arabo-Persian encyclopedic tradition, for it adds to the standard tropes

171. *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, 1.1/111-12.

and maxims a simultaneously poetic and precise metaphysics-psychology of light. What has not been recognized, however, is the fact that Abū l-Fażl is manifestly relying on a specifically *Timurid* lettrist doctrine to this end.[172] Following Ibn Turka, either directly or via Davānī, he asserts the letter to be a form of light emanated by the divine essence down through the four levels of being, from most occult to most manifest—the only cosmological model that explains the epistemological-ontological superiority of writing to speech: for only writing engages vision, that faculty of light, that highway to heaven.

Nor is his categorical equation of writing and talismans a rhetorical conceit, but rather a definition expressly *scientific*.[173] As textual letter-magical devices based on number, talismans allow their maker to harness light at the celestial level for terrestrial purposes, to marry heaven to earth, to operationalize the cosmic aporia; this, Abū l-Fażl argues, is precisely what writing does—"though fallen, it soars." The same applies to his bold oppositional light-dark imagery: the inky, calligraphed letter, deepest Endarkenment, is the royal road of Enlightenment. This, of course, is but a poetic expression of Ibn Turka's signature doctrine of the letter as *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Abū l-Fażl's unprecedented modification of the Euclidean dictum *Writing is a form of spiritual geometry*, constantly repeated by encyclopedists from al-Tawḥīdī onward, is thus of great philosophical-scientific significance; that is to say, it is surely the pithiest index of the intellectual and cultural seachange that transpired in the Persianate world between the 8th-10th/14th-16th centuries, during which period Muslim scholars began to take this ancient concept of writing—a spiritual geometry manifested by means of a physical instrument—very seriously indeed.[174] "The talisman that is writing is a form of spiritual geometry from the Pen of creation," declares Abū l-Fażl, by which he means: written letter-number, simultaneously operative on the elemental and mathematical levels of being, can alone crystallize light, constellating the *philosophia perennis*; it alone is the gate of *walāya*, the ladder of theosis; it alone allows ascent back to the originary, all-writing One.

And as for the imperial needs this indefatiguable Mughal vizier was here serving: Akbar understood himself as a talismanic being, a divine avatar of the Sun, a holy body of light;[175] what better prop to his claim to Indo-Timurid millennial kingship, then, than a Timurid lettrist metaphysics of light?

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172. It should be noted that Blochmann's own translation of this passage (*The Ain i Akbari by Abul Fazl ʿAllami*, 1/97-98), frequently cited by specialists, is in places quite inaccurate, further obscuring its intellectual context. Yael Rice observes that overreliance on Blochmann's mistranslation has also given rise to the false notion that Abū l-Fażl deems writing far superior to painting ("Between the Brush," 149).

173. Abū l-Fażl similarly calls painting (*taṣvīr*), an extension of writing in his treatment (if a lesser subset), a mighty magical operation (*jādūkārī shigarf*) (*Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, 1.1/116).

174. Cf. the dictum attributed to Apollonius (*Bālīnās*) by al-Tawḥīdī (and to Plato by Qāżī Aḥmad), "The pen is the most powerful of talismans, and writing its product" (Rosenthal, "Abū Ḥaiyān al-Tawḥīdī," 25).

175. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 137-46; Truschke, "Translating the Solar Cosmology."

Conclusion

> Being is a Grammar; … the world is in all its parts a cryptogram to be constituted or reconstituted through poetic inscription or deciphering.[176]
>
> —Jacques Derrida

This article does not pretend to be an "Islamic answer to Derrida," or deconstruct deconstructionism: that is the task it has set itself. My approach here has rather been strictly historiographical and philological.[177] But any *history* of Western grammatology that elides, that *writes off*, its mainstream Islamicate formulations—as is still regrettably and perniciously the default—is at best half complete.

To supply this major historiographical lacuna, I have therefore presented a range of textual evidence for the emergence and persistence over centuries of a systematic Islamic metaphysics of writing, an alternative Western grammatology, this in response to the great Middle Period burgeoning of writerly culture throughout the Islamicate world—a phenomenon that has been studied to date in strict isolation from its original *occult*-philosophical context. Such an occultophobic, vivisectionist strategy, I argue, has occluded connections crucial for understanding the cultural, political and intellectual transformation of Islamicate societies between the 7th-11th/13th-17th centuries. But if we *read it carefully*, the world Muslims so fully wrote into being in the post-Mongol era appears to be far more interconnected—far more intertextual—than has yet been appreciated. Hence the hegemony of *commentary culture* and *encyclopedism* on the one hand and *literary ornateness* and *speaking the new* on the other, hence the fateful push to *read the Two Books*, to *mathematize the cosmos*: all pivot on the supremacy of the written, not spoken, word in Islam. While this basic principle was first formulated by the bibliomaniacs of the High Abbasid period, they did not supply a metaphysics to sustain and enforce it; but the occult philosophers produced by the Mamluk-Timurid burgeoning of writerly culture did. The metaphysics of writing the latter developed seems to have spread like wildfire, moreover, such that by the 10th/16th century Islamicate discourses on writing, however literary, scientific or art-historical their context, came to bear an unmistakable lettrist stamp.

Such is the narrative that must now be recuperated as integral to the history of Western grammatology, which (post-Enlightenment colonialist-orientalist chauvinism notwithstanding) has long been and continues to be Hellenic and Islamic, Jewish and Christian, in equal measure, and a primary basis for the metaphysics of early modernity, modernity and postmodernity alike. At the same time, it must be emphasized that this science, for all its coherence as a Western tradition from Pythagoras and Plato to the present, was and is a hotly contested site of cultural convergence and divergence, a pendulumic barrage of con- and contradiction, a permanent *complexio* of oppositions—

176. "Edmond Jabès," 94.

177. Cf. Paul de Man's observation that deconstruction is simply a form of philology ("The Return to Philology," 24): "[I]n practice, the turn to theory occurred as a return to philology, to an examination of the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces."

making its comparative study equal parts hazardous and historiographically, even morally, pressing.[178]

To hazard a brief comparison of the science's signal 15th- and 20th-century iterations, Ibn Turkian and Derridean respectively (assuming, for the nonce, that grammatologists as radically culturally different as Ibn Turka and Derrida can legitimately and profitably be approached as members of the same Western tradition):

Like Derrida, it is true, if only terminologically, lettrists like Ibn Turka sought to prove writing's superiority to speech;[179] but unlike Derrida, they hailed text not as tyrant but as theosizing talisman: inlibration as illumination, as salvation from the dark realms of matter and becoming.[180] Ibn Turka's doctrine of *tashkīk al-ḥarf* thus erects the neopythagorean ladder of return to the One. It is precisely this doctrine against which Derrida categorically railed half a millennium later:

> *The trace is the difference* which opens appearance and signification. Articulating the living upon the nonliving in general, origin of all repetition, origin of ideality, the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and *no concept of metaphysics can describe it*. And as it is *a fortiori* anterior to the distinction between regions of sensibility, anterior to sound as much as to light, is there a sense in establishing a "natural" hierarchy between the acoustic imprint, for example, and the visual (graphic) imprint? The graphic image is not seen; and the acoustic image is not heard. The difference between the full unities of the voice remains unheard. Invisible also the difference in the body of the inscription.[181]

According to Derrida's aporetic logic, that is, there can be no *ontological* superiority of writing to speech as empirically construed; he collapses the hierarchy to make transcendence of the text—and hence a grammatological metaphysics—impossible. And number figures not at all, light is a mere thud on the sensorium. There is no One, only the Many; and they babble (Babel) on forever. Yet he collapses this semiotic hierarchy of being precisely to confine us in *text*. Is our French-Algerian post-Jewish deconstructionist then simply a latter-day renegade kabbalist?

Perhaps so.[182] As that may be, however, Ibn Turkian deconstruction was itself rather

178. As Christopher Lehrich notes (*The Occult Mind*, 46):

> Comparative methods, which always uncomfortably mingle the synchronic and the diachronic, are thus not only useful but necessary. There is no way to avoid them. When we study people of other cultures or times, we ipso facto make comparison to ourselves, if only negatively or under the aegis of translation. To be sure, the claim that comparison implies identity, the Eliade-Yates reactualization, annuls important difference. But the pseudohistorical claim against comparison as intrinsically bad method is bigotry masquerading as rigor.

179. With the proviso, again, that Derridean *écriture* is not to be understood in an empirical sense (see n. 8 above).

180. The term "inlibration" was coined by Harry Wolfson (*The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 244-62).

181. *Of Grammatology*, 70.

182. Elliot Wolfson argues that the kabbalistic features of Derrida's work are a product of convergence, not

renegade in its own day, as we have seen, and like Derrida's attacked the very basis of Western metaphysics. The former's neopythagorean doctrine of letter-number as *coincidentia oppositorum* undercut and transformed neoplatonized aristotelianism like the latter's hyperstructuralist-antistructuralist doctrines of *écriture* and *différance* undercut and transformed structuralism. Whether performed in French or Persian, Hebrew or Arabic, deconstruction, quite simply, seeks to marry all opposites through perpetual revolution, eternal textual play, universal aporia.[183] Derridean writing thus conceptually corresponds not to Ibn Turkian writing, but to the neopythagorean letter-number itself.

So much for theory; what of praxis? Unlike its poststructuralist successor, which has unaccountably disowned magic, lettrist-kabbalist deconstruction made the marriage of opposites *experimentally operational* (and thus perennially attractive to scholarly and ruling elites): the prognosticon, the talisman. That is to say: it is also *reconstructionist*, for in place of the physics-metaphysics terminally deconstructed it supplies a new one most useful for working in and on the world, especially imperially.[184]

To accomplish his subversion of the metaphysics of modernity, in sum, Derrida took Western language conventionalism—common from Aristotle onward and embodied in the 20th century by Saussurian linguistics—to its furthest extreme; his lettrist and kabbalist forebears went to the opposite extreme. Not only did they posit a radically anticonventionalist theory of language (based in the first place on the traditionalist doctrine of the *uncreatedness* of the Quran or the Torah),[185] but asserted that language, carrier of consciousness and body of light, constellates a metaphysics-mathematics-magic continuum that marries heaven to earth and the One to the Many. In practical terms, letter-number—because it alone constructs and orders every level of being eternally emanating from the One, thereby erecting time and space—must contain within it the knowledge of past, present and future (hence the prognosticon), must allow for the changing, by means of human consciousness, of physical reality itself (hence the talisman)—and that in measurable, falsifiable, *scientific* fashion.[186] Indeed, that magic—like Islam—remains a stumbling-block for latter-day deconstructionism, wherein it figures merely as *not-science* and *not-religion*, of use only for mocking metaphysicians,

direct influence ("Assaulting the Border"); Moshe Idel rather posits "a certain residue of Kabbalistic thought" in deconstruction, and characterizes Derrida as "a thinker who has been influenced by Kabbalistic views of the nature of the text" (*Absorbing Perfections*, 77, 83).

183. A classic example here is Derrida's deconstruction of the term *pharmakon* in "Plato's Pharmacy," signifying both "poison" and "antidote" (as well as "charm" or "spell"), which he uses to symbolize writing as constituting "the medium in which opposites are opposed," and therefore allowing for the exploding of Plato's construction of binaries (127).

184. On this theme see my *The Occult Science of Empire*. Cf. Ian Almond's comparative study of Derrida and Ibn ʿArabī (the latter, of course, being a primary source for Ibn Turka's lettrism), *Sufism and Deconstruction*.

185. See n. 88 above.

186. Naturally, I here use "scientific" and "experimentalist" in the much broader early modern sense of these terms.

is strategically unfortunate.[187] For to take the explicitly experimentalist claims of lettrist-kabbalist deconstruction-reconstruction seriously is to fatally subvert modernity in general and the scientistic disciplines of the modern academy in particular; it is to write a different West in a way that might fairly rejoice Derridean cockles.[188]

Derrida himself, of course, made no pretense of being a historian: thus his diagnosis as to the superiority of speech to writing in Western culture—and crypto-kabbalistic, aporetic overturning thereof—is as historically inapplicable to Islam as it is to Judaism. This is despite the fact that Islamicate civilization was, as it were, strongly Western in its Orientation; Ibn Turka styled himself a *Pythagoras redivivus*, disciple of Solomon and ʿAlī. More problematically for his deconstruction of Western culture, Derrida's diagnosis likewise elides the Christian kabbalists of Renaissance Europe (and their Jewish teachers), who from the late 9th/15th century onward sought to reconcile the Socratic and the Hebraic;[189] their success in this project heralded in some measure "scientific modernity." But a hundred years earlier, their lettrist peers to the south and east, living under the banner of post-Mongol universalist-perennialist Islam—the religio-imperial *coincidentia oppositorum* that had long since married Hellenic and Abrahamic, Shiʿi and Sunni, Persian and Arab, nomad and settled, east and west—, established lettrism as the occult-manifest center of Islamic knowing, the Solomonic-Imamic Pythagorean-Platonic core of the *philosophia perennis*, constellatable only through *writing*.

I must here again emphasize the astonishing degree of Islamo-Christianate intellectual continuity during the 15th and 16th centuries, and that largely in the absence of direct contact. Equally astonishing is the fact that this phenomenon is still essentially unstudied. That the upshot of Christians—relying on Jews—reading the world as mathematical text was scientific modernity, but that of Muslims doing the same was not, cannot be cited (though it continues to reflexively be) as proof of the decadence, the *weak reading*, of the latter, or the inherent, eternal *medievalness* of Islam. To state the obvious, that is, this outcome was simply a consequence of different cultural priorities as pursued within the strictures of different sociopolitical structures. Triumphalist, whiggish backreading, to be sure, posits a great divergence, at the culture-genetic level, whereby (in Spenglerian

187. For Derrida, magic, for all that it does haunt his discourse, in the end can but be "a cheap deconstructionism, an ill-informed Derrideanism, a false show of deconstructive elegance and insight that blinds itself to its impotence … But it may nevertheless act as a liberator by its protest against the deceptive demand for presence and truth with which magic's various opposites (science, religion) mystify their operations" (Lehrich, *The Occult Mind*, 171, 176).

188. Wouter Hanegraaff in particular has argued for esotericism (including occultism in the sense I use it here) as the primary Other upon whose undead frame Western modernity has been and continues to be constructed (*Esotericism and the Academy*, *passim*; see also von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge*, 200). Taking a more strictly theoretical-critical approach, Lehrich holds that "magic may be seen as a kind of prophecy of a structural thought yet unborn"; while it "cannot be defined as differance," magic "often plays the part of its sign or, to be more precise, coexists with the thinking of or toward differance …." As such, and despite his own inadequate definitions of the term, "Derrida offers us the best analytical tools for thinking (about) magic. It is by standing upon Derrida's perhaps unwilling shoulders that we can learn to evade through recognition the destructive effects of magic as an object of thought" (*The Occult Mind*, 166, 175, 177).

189. Cf. Derrida, "Edmond Jabès," 89.

terms) Apollonian-Faustian Christian linearity, a genius for division, for rupture, outpaced Magian Islamic circularity, a genius for wholeness, for synthesis, for ambiguity, for continuity.[190] Yet for all Europe's infatuation with Aristotle and his materialist creed (via Arabic *astrology*, ironically),[191] it was largely the disciples of a semiticized Plato, a Solomonic Pythagoras, who emerged as the philosophical-scientific elite of early modern Islamdom and Christendom alike; and most espoused a *constructionist ontogrammatology*. Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, in other words, is as intrinsically an Arabic text as it is a Latin; and Pico found he could only marry Plato and Aristotle via kabbalah. Its irreducible Islamicness aside, Ibn Turka's *Book of Inquiries* would have been perfectly legible as a *Liber Quaestiones* had it made the further crossing from Anatolia to Italy.

But there was no Enlightenment in Islam—and so no equal and opposed Endarkenment—, which is to say: no divorce of reason from revelation, occult from manifest, magic from science, heaven from earth, mind from body, man from nature, man from man. For Enlightened materialist-positivist Europeans, writing, that talisman of light, now went dark—whence the Endarkenment of the Romantics, occultists all: the *incoincidentia oppositorum*. The same did not happen for Muslims until much later, and then only in the wake of the largely externally-imposed cultural rupture that was colonialism (made possible by the collusion of Muslim scripturalists, to be sure).[192] Manuscript culture, a significant subset of it lettrist, hence persisted in most parts of the Islamicate world through the early 14th/20th century; it persists in pockets even now. Ibn Turka's ontogrammatology, his lettrist metaphysics of light, is thus emblematic of the cultural continuity, not rupture, that defined Islamicate civilization from its inception.[193] Staunchly perennialist in its own right, this synthetic Alid-Pythagorean-Solomonic doctrine became, as we have seen, broadly influential from the early 9th/15th century onward, from India to Anatolia, and endured as a mainstream philosophical discourse in Iran until at least the 13th/19th.

So much for divergence; what of reconvergence? Surprisingly, or perhaps not, forms of what may be styled *neo-neopythagorean ontogrammatology* are coming back into vogue in Euro-American culture, high and popular alike, pockets of which have continued to have fits of pique with the Enlightenment for locking it away in the prison of dark matter—and claiming to have thrown away the key. It was precisely the mid-20th-century linguistic turn in critical theory, moreover, culminating in Derrida's curiously kabbalistic hostility

190. The organic continuity of Arabic literature, for instance, as well as other great literary traditions, including Persian, Sanskrit and Chinese, stands in sharp contrast to the "catastrophic" and rupturous form of change unique to European literary history (Bauer, "Mamluk Literature," 112). Expanding on this argument, Bauer has recently shown that the synthesizing ethos of Islamicate civilization also entailed a high tolerance for ambiguity—legal, social, sexual, philosophical, etc.—, this, again, in sharp contrast to Christendom (*Die Kultur der Ambiguität*). The same is a central thesis of Shahab Ahmed's *What Is Islam?*

191. See Lemay, *Abu Maʿshar and Latin Aristotelianism*.

192. For a case study see Melvin-Koushki and Pickett, "Mobilizing Magic."

193. Islamicate civilization was not simply the greatest heir of late antique Eurasian cultures, that is, and especially the Hellenic, Persian and Abrahamic, but rather their direct continuation and culmination (Bauer, "In Search of 'Post-Classical Literature,'" 142; Fowden, *Before and after Muḥammad*).

to and subversion of modern structuralist metaphysics, that effectively cleared the way for the emergence in the academy of a new-old Western physics-metaphysics pivoting on language and consciousness.

A number of recent developments are here especially suggestive: Peircean semiotics—wherein every existent is a sign—has become a cottage industry in philosophy;[194] geneticists persist in speaking of chemical life in textual terms;[195] and some cognitive scientists have mathematically hypothesized a monistic-panpsychist *conscious realism*, whereby perception alone erects time and space and quantum-mechanically codes what we take to be physical reality.[196] The latter trend in particular derives from the new discipline of physics—which long since displaced metaphysics, including its kabbalist/lettrist branch, as queen of the sciences in the West—now burgeoning: the *physics of information*.[197] This ontogrammatological turn is epitomized by Princeton physicist John Wheeler's famous 1989 dictum *It from bit*—that is to say, "all things physical are information-theoretic in origin and this is a *participatory universe*."[198] Most strikingly, this emergent cosmology

194. As Peirce (d. 1914) summarizes the central position of his pragmaticist semiotics ("The Basis of Pragmaticism," 394): "The entire universe … is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs."

195. See e.g. von Stuckrad, "Rewriting the Book of Nature." The American geneticist Francis Collins (b. 1950), past director of the Human Genome Project and current director of the NIH, is an avowed Christian kabbalist; see e.g. his *The Language of God*.

196. As Donald D. Hoffman, cognitive scientist at the University of California, Irvine, and author of *Visual Intelligence* (1998), summarizes this model in his "Hoffman's Law":

> Hoffman's First Law: A theory of everything starts with a theory of mind.
>
> > Quantum measurement hints that observers may create microphysical properties. Computational theories of perception hint that observers may create macrophysical properties. The history of science suggests that counterintuitive hints, if pursued, can lead to conceptual breakthroughs.
>
> Hoffman's Second Law: Physical universes are user interfaces for minds.
>
> > Just as the virtual worlds experienced in VR arcades are interfaces that allow the arcade user to interact effectively with an unseen world of computers and software, so also the physical work one experiences daily is a species-specific user interface that allows one to survive while interacting with a world of which one may be substantially ignorant.

He elsewhere reiterates the Planckian doctrine of mind as matrix of matter ("Consciousness is Fundamental"):

> I believe that consciousness and its contents are all that exists. Spacetime, matter and fields never were the fundamental denizens of the universe but have always been, from their beginning, among the humbler contents of consciousness, dependent on it for their very being … If matter is but one of the humbler products of consciousness, then we should expect that consciousness itself cannot be theoretically derived from matter. The mind-body problem will be to physicalist ontology what black-body radiation was to classical mechanics: first a goad to its heroic defense, later the provenance of its final supersession.

197. See e.g. Vedral, *Decoding Reality*.

198. "Information, Physics, Quantum," 5. The passage in full:

> *It from bit*. Otherwise put, every it—every particle, every field of force, even the space-time continuum itself—derives its functions, its meaning, its very existence entirely—even if in some contexts indirectly—from the apparatus-elicited answers to yes or no questions, binary choices, *bits*. It from bit symbolizes the idea that every item of the physical world has at bottom—at a very

requires us to recognize the universe as a "metareality of information structures," and the unidirectional flow of time and the strict limits of space as human constructs; hence the ability of human consciousness, *logos* processor that it is, to quantum-mechanically change physical reality by the mere act of observation, even in the past.[199] Information structures, of course, are *embodied*, are a form of writing; and observation is a *vision of light*. Evolutionary theologians have seized upon this new physics of information in turn as the only workable means of reconciling the Christian doctrine of creation with Darwinian evolution (shades of Pico's embrace of kabbalah in pursuit of a project equally paradoxical): the universe as meaning-generating device.[200]

All of which sounds suspiciously *talismanic*; Ibn Turka would have grounds to be smug. *Pace* Derrida, then, Western lovers of writing, Muslim or Christian, and however devoted to Plato, have roundly called and do call foul on the *Phaedrus*.

deep bottom, in most instances—an immaterial source and explanation; that what we call reality arises in the last analysis from the posing of yes-no questions, and the registering of equipment-evoked responses; in short, that all things physical are information-theoretic in origin and this is a *participatory universe*.

Echoing Bauer's observation as to a similar transition in Mamluk literature (see n. 133 above), as well as Hanegraaff's theorization of a modern "disenchanted magic" ("How Magic Survived"), perhaps we can speak of a turn in physics from the cold representationalism of the Newtonian model to the more intimate participationalism promised by the physics of information?

199. Vallée, "A Theory of Everything (Else)."

200. For examples see Davies and Gregersen, eds., *Information and the Nature of Reality*; Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest," 447-48.

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Taẕkirah-i Khayr al-bayān: The Earliest Source on the Career and Poetry of Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676)

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Abstract

In this article, I describe a source which represents by far *our earliest documentation of the career and poetry of Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676), and which has gone largely unaddressed in scholarship. It occurs in a still-unpublished biographical dictionary* (taẕkirah) *of poets entitled* Khayr al-bayān, *written by Malik Shāh Ḥusayn Sīstānī and known to survive in several manuscripts. The oldest, and possibly the only complete copy, is MS Or. 3397 at the British Library.*[1] *Shāh Ḥusayn wrote this* taẕkirah *between 1017/1608–9 and 1036/1627; the section containing the notice on Ṣā'ib was added in 1035/1625–6. Significantly, Or. 3397 was copied in 1041/1631 by a scribe named Muḥammad Mīrak b. Khwājah Mīr Farāhī. This means that the* text *of the passage on Ṣā'ib dates to shortly after his emigration to Kabul (thence to India) in 1034/1624–5, while our* manuscript *dates to shortly before he left Kashmir to return to Iran in 1042/1632.*

The source thus falls entirely within the period of young Ṣā'ib's seven-year adventure on the Indian Subcontinent, and represents a rare vignette of the beginning of an illustrious career. Since it is important that we treat taẕkirahs *as valuable and multifaceted works in their own right, this article begins with an overview of the* Khayr al-bayān *(which has seen little use by researchers thus far) and basic information about its author. I then describe the material on Ṣā'ib in detail, including several important features of the manuscript itself. Finally, I review the implications of the text for Ṣā'ib's biography, with particular regard to the origin of one of his nicknames, "Mustaʿidd Khān." The source also has bearing on the study of his work, since eleven of his poems, quoted in the* Khayr al-bayān, *may now be dated to the earliest part of his career. This all comes at a time of growing academic and popular interest in Ṣā'ib, who is increasingly recognized as one of the preeminent* ghazal *poets of the classical tradition. To assist the reader in following the more detail-oriented parts of this article, I append photographs of the relevant pages in Or. 3397.*[2]

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1. My research at the British Library was generously supported by a grant from the Nicholson Center for British Studies at the University of Chicago. I am further grateful to Profs. Michael Cook and Franklin Lewis, and to my colleagues Mohamad Ballan, Usman Hamid, Samuel Hodgkin, Matthew Keegan, and Christian Mauder for their help and comments. The anonymous reviewers chosen by the journal also provided crucial feedback. Romanization of Persian and Arabic words in this paper follows the Library of Congress standard. Dates are generally provided in both the lunar Islamic (AH) and Gregorian (CE) calendars.

2. A high-resolution color photograph is provided for the most important page, 374a. Due to expense

Both the *Khayr al-bayān,* and MS Or. 3397 in particular, have been known for some time. Charles Rieu wrote a concise description of the codex and its contents for his 1895 *Supplement.*[3] Later, C. A. Storey included information on both of the surviving works of Shāh Ḥusayn Sīstānī in the first volume of his bio-bibliographical survey of Persian literature, the publication of which began in 1927.[4] And Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī provides a further assessment in his reference work on the history of the Persian *taẕkirah,* which first appeared in 1969–71.[5] How could it be that such a well-recognized text contains a historically significant passage on a poet as famous as Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī, and yet it has not been attended to in scholarship? This was my question after I stumbled upon the source, while working with Persian manuscripts at the British Library as part of a different project.

My initial review of the published literature on Ṣāʾib turned up no mention of the *Khayr al-bayān.* I checked the most frequently-cited works: Muḥammad Qahramān's six-volume edition of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*;[6] Ẕabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā's *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt dar Īrān*;[7] ʿAzīz Dawlat'ābādī's *Sukhanvarān-i Āẕarbāyjān*;[8] Ḥusām al-Dīn Rāshidī's *Taẕkirah-i shuʿarāʾ-i Kashmīr*;[9] and Gulchīn-i Maʿānī's *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʾib.*[10] Paul Losensky's *Encyclopædia Iranica* article on Ṣāʾib, which is currently the best overview available in English, also gives the impression that the information provided in the *Khayr al-bayān* has not yet been incorporated into the standard narrative of the poet's life.[11] (As we will see below, at least a couple points in his biography ought to be revisited upon consideration of this source.) Having found nothing about the *Khayr al-bayān* in prior scholarship, I began writing a paper to describe the *taẕkirah* and its implications for the study of Ṣāʾib's career and works.

Well into the process of revising the article, I discovered that one earlier researcher had remarked, if only briefly, on the relevant passage in the *Khayr al-bayān*: the same Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī. Although he was not aware of the text when *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʾib* was first published in 1985–6, he must have seen it at some point toward the end of the 1980s. (Or. 3397 was evidently microfilmed at the British Library around this time, and so

constraints, the remaining pages—374b, 375a, and the colophon (467a)—have been scanned from microfilm.

3. Charles Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum,* London, 1895, no. 108, pp. 76–8. There is also a description of Shāh Ḥusayn's other surviving work, a local history of Sīstān entitled *Iḥyāʾ al-mulūk,* MS Or. 2779. See no. 97, pp. 65–6.

4. C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey,* London, 1927–, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 364–5. Shāh Ḥusayn's other work, the *Iḥyāʾ al-mulūk,* is discussed in greater detail below.

5. Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Tārīkh-i taẕkirah'hā-yi Fārsī,* 2 vols., Tehran, 1969–71, vol. 1, pp. 605–9.

6. *Dīvān-i Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī,* ed. Muḥammad Qahramān, 6 vols., Tehran, 1985–91.

7. Ẕabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt dar Īrān,* 5 vols. in 8, Tehran, 1956–91. For the section devoted to Ṣāʾib, see vol. 5, pt. 2, p. 1271ff.

8. ʿAzīz Dawlat'ābādī, *Sukhanvarān-i Āẕarbāyjān: az Qaṭrān tā Shahriyār,* 2 vols., Tabrīz, 1998, vol. 1, pp. 472–84.

9. Ḥusām al-Dīn Rāshidī, *Taẕkirah-i shuʿarāʾ-i Kashmīr,* 4 vols., Karachi, 1967, vol. 2, p. 518ff.

10. Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʾib,* first ed., 2 vols., Tehran, 1985–6. (As is explained below, I did not discover the second edition of this book until quite a bit later.)

11. Paul Losensky, "Ṣāʾeb Tabrizi," *Encyclopædia Iranica.*

copies would have become available to scholars in Iran and elsewhere.) In one of his last and most influential works, *Kārvān-i Hind,* which appeared in 1990-91, Gulchīn-i Maʿānī surveys over 700 Persian poets who migrated to the courts in India during the Safavid period. He includes a section on Ṣāʾib, which is adapted from the more extensive discussion of the poet in the introduction of *Farhang-i ashʿār*—at points almost verbatim. But here he also mentions the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān*, citing a facsimile *(nuskhah-i ʿaksī)* of a manuscript belonging to the British Museum (though held at the Library), which clearly refers to Or. 3397.[12]

Gulchīn-i Maʿānī does not offer substantial comment on the text. He simply quotes Shāh Ḥusayn's biographical sketch of Ṣāʾib, and his primary concern is the controversy over one of the poet's nicknames, "Mustaʿidd Khān" (addressed in detail below). The impression is that Gulchīn-i Maʿānī had not yet worked in depth with the pages in the *Khayr al-bayān* concerning Ṣāʾib. A few years later, in 1994, a little-known second edition of *Farhang-i ashʿār* was published.[13] (Only three copies are held at research libraries in North America, and scholars have continued to cite the more widely available first edition, perhaps unaware that any other exists.) In this updated version of the standard reference work on Ṣāʾib, Gulchīn-i Maʿānī again includes a couple paragraphs about the *Khayr al-bayān,* quoting Shāh Ḥusayn's biographical sketch without discussing it in detail.[14] It may be that Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, who was at the end of his career by this point, never had an opportunity to address in earnest the implications of the *Khayr al-bayān* for the study of Ṣāʾib's life and works. As this article will demonstrate, there are multiple ways in which our sense of the poet's career might change in light of the new source, which have yet to be appreciated in scholarship. There is also the issue of the verses of poetry by Ṣāʾib which are quoted in the *Khayr al-bayān,* and which most likely represent some of his earliest work. Here, for the first time, those excerpted lines are matched with poems still found in published editions of the *Dīvān.*

We are left, therefore, in a situation in which an important contemporary source on Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī has been commented upon in print, but only fleetingly, and not in the most obvious places. This article is intended both to draw wider attention to the existence of the passage on Ṣāʾib in the *Khayr al-bayān,* and to provide a more thorough treatment of the source and the issues that it raises. It is hoped that this will serve as a modest contribution to the scholarly conversation around Ṣāʾib, which has grown in recent years along with a general expansion of interest in Persian literature of the Safavid-Mughal period.[15]

The *Taẕkirah*

The *Khayr al-bayān* is an example of what Gulchīn-i Maʿānī has labeled the "general

12. Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Kārvān-i Hind,* 2 vols., Mashhad, 1990/91, vol. 1, pp. 700–01.

13. Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʾib,* second ed., 2 vols., Tehran, 1994.

14. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 13–14.

15. Currently active researchers in this field include Paul Losensky, Sunil Sharma, Rajeev Kinra, and Prashant Keshavmurthy, to name a few.

taẕkirah" of poets *(taẕkirah-i ʿumūmī).*[16] That is, it contains biographical notices and selected verses for all kinds of poets, from all eras up to the time of its composition. This places the work solidly in the tradition established by Sadīd al-Dīn ʿAwfī's *Lubāb al-albāb* (comp. ca. 618/1221) and Dawlatshāh Samarqandī's *Taẕkirat al-shuʿarāʾ* (comp. 892/1487).[17] Since the *Khayr al-bayān* has not been edited for publication, and has not received sustained attention from researchers, it is unclear precisely how many biographical notices it contains. I have spent enough time working with the manuscript, however, to know that the number must be at least a few hundred, and that the work covers the entire sweep of the history of Persian poetry up to the early seventeenth century CE. (This is not to suggest that the author managed to discuss every noteworthy poet, but he certainly does not omit many of them, and he includes at minimum a representative sample from every period and region.) The oldest, and perhaps the only complete surviving manuscript of the *Khayr al-bayān,* British Library MS Or. 3397,[18] comprises 467 folia—each with two sides, each side with nineteen lines of text. If an edition is ever published, it will likely run to well over 500 pages, not including any scholarly apparatus. We can thus classify the *Khayr al-bayān* as a *taẕkirah* of poets that is comprehensive in scope and, speaking a bit subjectively, above average in length, though not monumental.

To provide a full assessment of the contents of the *taẕkirah* and their import would be difficult, given that this manuscript can only be accessed in the reading rooms of the British Library and photography is currently not permitted. (A mediocre black-and-white microfilm is available, but it would be frustrating to use for anything more than the occasional reference.) Going into great depth about the *Khayr al-bayān* would also take us beyond the intended scope of this article. It is a task that probably should be left to whichever scholar eventually prepares a critical edition of the work for publication. However, it may be useful to provide some basic details about the contents of the book, the process of its composition, the background of its author, and how it fits in the historical moment at which it was produced, with particular regard to developments in the *taẕkirah* genre. We are fortunate that Rieu has already drawn up a fairly informative description of the *Khayr al-bayān.*[19] Or. 3397 was acquired in 1886 by Sidney J. A. Churchill, who served as "Persian Secretary to Her Majesty's Legation at Teheran" from 1884 to 1894.[20] This is one of the many valuable Persian manuscripts that Churchill purchased, and which remain part of the collections of the British Library.

Two general features of the *Khayr al-bayān* are worth emphasizing. First, there is evidence in the text that the author was making a serious effort to produce a *taẕkirah* as

16. This term is used throughout his *Tārīkh-i taẕkirah'hā-yi Fārsī.*

17. For the *Lubāb al-albāb,* see the edition of Saʿīd Nafīsī (Tehran, 1957). For the *Taẕkirat al-shuʿarāʾ,* see the recent edition of Fāṭimah ʿAlāqah (Tehran, 2007).

18. There are at least a few other copies, with varying degrees of deficiency. See Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Tārīkh,* vol. 1, p. 605. One of the manuscripts that he mentions, which was then (ca. 1969) held in the private library of Muḥammad Ṣadr Hāshimī, may also be complete. Up to this point, no thorough codicological study of the *Khayr al-bayān* has been carried out.

19. Rieu, *Supplement,* no. 108, pp. 76–8.

20. Rieu, *Supplement,* pp. v–vi.

thorough and comprehensive as possible. Shāh Ḥusayn apparently wrote a complete first draft of the work between 1017/1608–9 and 1019/1610. According to his own account, his friends had often asked him to collect his extensive knowledge of Persian poetry in a *taẕkirah,* and he took the occasion of a journey to the Ḥijāz to carry out this task, finishing it upon his return to Harāt. (Although he was originally from Sīstān, Shāh Ḥusayn spent long stretches of his adult life in other areas of Safavid Iran, due in part to political instability. Further information on his biography is provided below.) Some fifteen years later, in 1035/1625–6, Shāh Ḥusayn carried out a round of extensive revisions and additions to the *Khayr al-bayān.* He did this, too, at Harāt, while he was being treated for an illness and was temporarily housebound. It was at this stage that he added the notice on Ṣāʾib, just a year or so after the poet had left for Kabul.

Finally, in 1036/1627, the author inserted a new section of about ten folia, containing selected verses from Indian poets, albeit without biographical sketches. Shāh Ḥusayn claims that he added this material after seeing two anthologies *(jung*s*)* of poetry by "talented Indians" (*ahl-i istiʿdād-i Hindūstān*), which had been sent to the ruling family of Sīstān—*i.e.,* his own family. Each *jung* is alleged to have contained about 150,000 verses. This section may deserve closer examination by an Indo-Persian specialist. In any event, its inclusion in the *Khayr al-bayān* also speaks to the author's desire not to leave any category of poets unrepresented. Another example of this fastidiousness is Shāh Ḥusayn's insertion of a brief addendum to his section concerning early Persian poets, in which he quotes a few verses by individuals whose biographies, he admits, are completely shrouded in mystery—*e.g.,* Kisāʾī and Munjīk (both d. ca. 1000 CE).[21] The *Khayr al-bayān* comes across as a carefully constructed work of literary biography and anthology, written by a scholar who was also a respected political historian (see below for details on his *Iḥyāʾ al-mulūk*), and it will pay dividends to modern researchers who study it. The clearest value of the *taẕkirah* is that it contains unique documentation of the careers of poets who were alive at the time of its composition—including, prominently, Ṣāʾib.

The second feature of the *Khayr al-bayān* that should be highlighted is that it is organized on a loosely chronological basis, and *not* in the order in which its individual parts were written. This is made clear by a brief inventory of the sections of the *taẕkirah,* from start to finish. The book begins with a general preface, written in ornate prose, which expresses typical sentiments of praise to God, followed by the author's discussion of his own biography and the work at hand, for instance, the reasons for its composition, its organization, and so on.

An introduction (*muqaddimah*) follows, starting on fol. 9b, in which Shāh Ḥusayn summarizes the lives of the Prophet Muhammad and the Twelve Imams, and the history of the Safavid Dynasty up to 1033/1623–4.[22] (Since this is of little relevance to the main content of the *taẕkirah,* it might be worth investigating what purpose such a section is

21. See J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Kesāʾi Marvazi," and Ehsan Shavarebi, "Monjik Termeḏi," in *Encyclopædia Iranica.*

22. We know, therefore, that the *muqaddimah* was written, or at least expanded, as part of the revisions that Shāh Ḥusayn carried out in 1035/1625–6 and 1036/1627.

intended to serve.) The work then begins in earnest. It is divided into two parts (*faṣl*s), with the first reserved for notable poets of the past (*mutaqaddimīn*), and the second for more recent and contemporary figures (*mutaʾakhkhirīn*). Notably, the first *faṣl,* which opens on fol. 41b, provides entries on several early Arabic poets before continuing to Rūdakī (d. ca. 329/941) and the other tenth-century pioneers of New Persian. In this arrangement, Shāh Ḥusayn is clearly following Dawlatshāh's *Taẕkirat al-shuʿarāʾ* (comp. 892/1487).[23]

The first *faṣl* continues in *very* approximate chronological order, ending with ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492). This suggests the same classical/post-classical division of the Persian poetic tradition that survived into the modern period and has only recently fallen into disfavor in scholarship. We read at the end of the chapter that it was completed in 1018/1609 (fol. 214a). But there is at least one passage in the middle of the first *faṣl* that was written at a considerably later date: the selections of poetry by "talented Indians," which were added in 1036/1627 and begin on fol. 130a. The manuscript of the *Khayr al-bayān* preserves evidence of a process of composition and emendation that differs considerably from the order in which the material was ultimately arranged. We should expect this to be true of any large-scale project; less often does specific documentation survive.

Matters become more complicated in the second *faṣl*, which opens with a short introductory paragraph (fol. 215b) and is divided into four chronological subsections (*aṣl*s). The first *aṣl,* starting on fol. 216a, concerns poets who were active from the end of the reign of the Timurid Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bāyqarā (d. 911/1506) until the end of the reign of Shah Ismāʿīl (d. 930/1524). The second *aṣl,* starting on fol. 224b, addresses poets from the first half of the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb, *i.e.,* approximately 1524–50 CE. The third *aṣl,* starting on fol. 236b, continues with poets who flourished from the middle of Ṭahmāsb's reign (ca. 1550 CE) up to the accession of Shah ʿAbbās in 995/1587. The fourth *aṣl,* starting on fol. 279b, provides notices on poets who were active during ʿAbbās' reign, up to the time of the *taẕkirah*'s composition. It is here that Shāh Ḥusayn probably made the most substantial changes during the round of edits and additions that he carried out in 1035/1625–6. He inserts a note in the middle of this section (fol. 304a-b) in which he discusses those revisions.

The fourth *aṣl* is in many ways the centerpiece of the *taẕkirah.* About 130 (double-sided) folia are devoted to the biographies and selected verses of poets who worked during a period of just thirty years, whereas almost the entire sixteenth century CE is covered in half as much space. Unsurprisingly, this is also the part of the *Khayr al-bayān* that will be of greatest historical interest. Shāh Ḥusayn documents the work of poets who were his contemporaries, providing, in some cases, unique information. What is likely the earliest reference to Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī occurs here (foll. 374a–375a). We also find an exceptionally early notice on Kalīm Kāshānī (d. 1061/1651) (fol. 400a–b), and a curious entry on the historian Iskandar Bēg Munshī, author of the *ʿĀlamʾārā-yi ʿAbbāsī* (comp. 1038/1629), starting on fol. 378b.[24] Shāh Ḥusayn and Iskandar Bēg knew each other, having both accompanied

23. *Taẕkirat al-shuʿarāʾ,* ed. ʿAlāqah, p. 33ff.

24. See Daniela Meneghini, "Kalim Kāšāni," and Roger M. Savory, "Eskandar Beg Torkamān Monši," in

Shah ʿAbbās on campaigns; and our author, presumably writing in 1035/1625–6, claims to have seen a copy of the *ʿĀlam'ārā,* which must then have been in draft form or in an early recension. There may be other notices of special historical interest; we will not know until this source has been exploited more fully by researchers. Shāh Ḥusayn closes the fourth *aṣl* of the second *faṣl,* and, in turn, the main body of the *taẕkirah,* with an entry on himself, starting on fol. 407a. His pen name (*takhalluṣ*) is Hādī.

The *Khayr al-bayān* ends with two further sections: a conclusion (*khātimah*), and a "conclusion of the conclusion" (*khatm-i khātimah*), which we might treat as an epilogue. In the *khātimah,* which begins on fol. 410b, Shāh Ḥusayn provides notices on kings and princes who were reputed to have composed poetry, from the Seljuks through the Jalāyirids. The *khatm-i khātimah* starts on fol. 431b and is divided into two subsections, the first of which offers information on a number of prominent scholars who had verses attributed to them but were not primarily considered poets. These include Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĀmilī (d. 1030/1621), who is given the first notice in this chapter, beginning on fol. 431b; and Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), starting on fol. 434b.[25] Given that Bahāʾ al-Dīn had only recently died when Shāh Ḥusayn completed his *taẕkirah,* and that Mīr Dāmād was still alive, these notices may be worth examining. Finally, on fol. 445b, we reach the true concluding piece of the *Khayr al-bayān,* in which Shāh Ḥusayn quotes a number of *aḥādīth* and pious sayings. The very end comes on foll. 466b and 467a—the latter being the colophon—where the author reports that he completed his work at Harāt on the last day of Ramaḍān in the year 1019 AH (mid-December, 1610 CE). (Of course, this should be understood as the date of the first draft of the second *faṣl,* which would be followed by one or two rounds of emendation.) At the bottom of the colophon we find the signature of the scribe, a certain Muḥammad Mīrak b. Khwājah Mīr Farāhī, who finished his copy on 20 Rabīʿ al-Awwal 1041 (October 16, 1631).

Much more could, and should, be said about the *Khayr al-bayān.* Sadly, historians of Persian literature operate in a field in which even the most famous *taẕkirah*s have rarely been subject to detailed analysis, and lesser-known, unpublished works like this may go ignored for long stretches of time.[26] The best that can be offered here, in addition to the preceding rough summary of the *Khayr al-bayān,* is brief commentary on how it compares to other *taẕkirah*s of poets that were produced around the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries CE.

What we find, upon reviewing the ways in which the genre was transforming at that time, is that there is little on the surface level to distinguish Shāh Ḥusayn's contribution. It might help to highlight three trends in the development of the *taẕkirah* as examples. First, toward the end of the sixteenth century, these works began, if only occasionally, to be produced on a truly monumental scale. The *Khulāṣat al-ashʿār* of Taqī al-Dīn Kāshānī

Encyclopædia Iranica.

25. See E. Kohlberg, "Bahāʾ al-Din ʿĀmeli," and Andrew J. Newman, "Dāmād, Mir(-e), Sayyed Moḥammad Bāqer," in *Encyclopædia Iranica.* The death year cited in scholarship on Mīr Dāmād varies a bit; Newman provides 1041/1631.

26. Gulchīn-i Maʿānī cites a number of biographical notices from the *Khayr al-bayān* in *Kārvān-i Hind,* but otherwise it has received only passing attention.

(comp. 1016/1607–8) quotes roughly 350,000 verses of poetry—that is, seven times the number of verses contained in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāmah*—and will run to a least a couple dozen volumes if it is ever published in its entirety.[27] The *ʿArafāt al-ʿāshiqīn* of Taqī al-Dīn Awḥadī (comp. 1024/1615) provides notices on a staggering number of poets, around 3,500.[28] The *Khayr al-bayān* looks rather modest next to these works, although, as was mentioned earlier, it is probably still above average in size when compared to Persian *taẕkirah*s in general.

A second trend worth highlighting is the appearance, starting in earnest in the mid-sixteenth century, of what might be called "special interest *taẕkirah*s." These are texts that focus on certain categories of poets, rather than on the entire tradition going back to Rūdakī. Examples include the *Javāhir al-ʿajāʾib* of Fakhrī Haravī (comp. 963/1556), which concerns female poets, and the *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī* of the Safavid prince Sām Mīrzā (comp. ca. 957/1550), which deals almost exclusively with recent and contemporary figures, leaving the great masters of the past unaddressed.[29] Around this time the broader *taẕkirah* genre in Persian, which had historically focused on poets and religious figures, also began to be applied to new groups of people. In this vein we might highlight the *Gulistān-i hunar* of Qāżī Aḥmad Qumī (comp. 1006/1597–8), an influential biographical dictionary of calligraphers and painters.[30] When Shāh Ḥusayn wrote the *Khayr al-bayān,* there was nothing especially groundbreaking about compiling another "general *taẕkirah*" of poets on the model of Dawlatshāh.

Finally, it bears pointing out that all of the major organizational schemes that would be used for *taẕkirah*s had already been developed by the early seventeenth century. The idea of categorizing poets based on their social class went back as far as ʿAwfī's *Lubāb al-albāb* (comp. ca. 618/1221) and had been followed by ʿAlī Shēr Navāʾī in his Turkish *Majālis al-nafāʾis* (comp. 896/1491) and Sām Mīrzā in his aforementioned *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī,* among others.[31] A rough chronological organization, as we find throughout much of the *Khayr al-bayān,* had been used by Dawlatshāh as well. Taqī al-Dīn Kāshānī chose to group the poets in the largest section of his *Khulāṣat al-ashʿār* according to their geographic origin. And Taqī al-Dīn Awḥadī opted for a combination of chronological and alphabetical organization in his *ʿArafāt al-ʿāshiqīn.* In short, many approaches had been tested, and it seems unlikely that anything about the format (or even content) of the *Khayr al-bayān* would have leapt out at contemporary readers. It was, if considered superficially, just another *taẕkirah* of poets.

27. Several sections have appeared already, including three edited by ʿAbd al-ʿAlī Adīb Barūmand and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīrī Kahnamūʾī and published by Mīrāṡ-i Maktūb: *Bakhsh-i Kāshān* (2005), *Bakhsh-i Iṣfahān* (2007), and *Bakhsh-i Khurāsān* (2014). A few other parts that have come out in recent years, under different editors, are listed in the bibliography.

28. Two editions have recently been published: one by a team of four editors (8 vols., Mīrāṡ-i Maktūb, 2010), and another by Muḥsin Nājī Naṣr'ābādī (7 vols., Asāṭīr, 2009). The former is reputed to be more reliable.

29. See *Taẕkirah-i Rawżat al-salāṭīn, va Javāhir al-ʿajāʾib, maʿa Dīvān-i Fakhrī Haravī,* ed. Ḥusām al-Dīn Rāshidī, Hyderabad, 1968; and *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī,* ed. Rukn al-Dīn Humāyūn Farrukh, Tehran, n.d.

30. See the edition of Aḥmad Suhaylī Khwānsārī, Tehran, 1973/74.

31. Ali Şîr Nevaî, *Mecâlisü'n-nefâyis,* ed. Kemal Eraslan *et al.,* 2 vols., Ankara, 2001.

But this is *not* to suggest that the book may be disregarded. Any text that records details about contemporary individuals and events should be valued by historians; and we would be fortunate indeed if we had even a rudimentary *taẕkirah* of poets to represent each generation and region in the pre-modern Persianate world. (Instead, we struggle with confounding gaps in the written record.) Gulchīn-i Maʿānī has already demonstrated, at least preliminarily, the usefulness of the *Khayr al-bayān* as a source on poets who migrated to Mughal India in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. And it remains an untapped resource in other ways, some of which have been outlined above. The case of the *Khayr al-bayān* stands as a reminder that valuable historical information may be found in unexpected places.

The Author

Malik Shāh Ḥusayn b. Ghiyāṡ al-Dīn Muḥammad was, as his name reflects, a member of one of the dynasties of Maliks that had ruled Sīstān intermittently since the Mongol period.[32] His family claimed descent, which is not possible to verify, from the Saffarids all the way down to ʿAmr b. al-Layth (d. 289/902). Thus they considered themselves the traditional and proper rulers of Sīstān going back several hundred years.[33] By the time of Shāh Ḥusayn's birth, in 978/1571, he and his family were vassals of the Safavids. He grew up in comfort and received a traditional courtly education, but his life was later upended by political turmoil. First, his relative and protector, Malik ʿĀqibat Maḥmūd, was executed in 998/1590 for alleged anti-Safavid activity. The following year, 999/1591, brought an invasion of Sīstān by the Abū al-Khayrid Uzbeks, which compelled Shāh Ḥusayn and his family to flee to Qandahār. He would later return to his homeland, if only occasionally, after it was reconquered by Shah ʿAbbās toward the end of the 1590s. For the most part, however, Shāh Ḥusayn led a semi-itinerant lifestyle. He took on the role of scholar-courtier and accompanied ʿAbbās on several of his campaigns, including the expeditions into Eastern Georgia that began in late 1022/1613.[34]

Two of Shāh Ḥusayn's prose works are extant. There is the *Khayr al-bayān,* a draft of which, as we have seen, was finished at Harāt in 1019/1610. The second work is the *Iḥyāʾ al-mulūk,* a local history of Sīstān from the earliest times up to about 1031/1622.[35] (Shāh Ḥusayn completed almost all of the work by 1028/1619, at which point he was staying in

32. His name is occasionally recorded as Shāh Ḥusayn b. Ghiyāṡ al-Dīn *Maḥmūd*—including once by Rieu (*Supplement,* p. 76), and also in Storey, *Persian Literature,* vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 364. (Storey does mention the other possibility for the name in a footnote.) This seems to be a simple error. According to our author's own works, his full name is Shāh Ḥusayn b. Ghiyāṡ al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Shāh Maḥmūd, etc.

33. The standard English-language work on the confusing history of this region in the middle periods is C. E. Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz,* Costa Mesa, Calif., 1994. For information on Shāh Ḥusayn's biography, see especially pp. 27–9.

34. Further details are found in the autobiographical passages of the *Iḥyāʾ al-mulūk.* See the edition of Manūchihr Sutūdah (Tehran, 1966), which includes a useful introductory chapter. For those who read Russian, there is also a partial translation, with scholarly commentary, by L. P. Smirnovoĭ (Moscow, 2000).

35. For more on the dating of this work, see Grigol Beradze and Lydia P. Smirnova, "*Iḥyāʾ al-mulūk* va tārīkh-i taʾlīf-i ān," *Iran Nameh* 6.3 (1988): 417–34.

Iṣfahān. He appears to have added to it during his travels over the next few years.) It is unclear when and where Shāh Ḥusayn died. In fact, almost everything that we know about the author comes from his own books, both of which contain autobiographical passages. The most that we can say, therefore, is that he was still alive in 1036/1627, when he last added to the *Khayr al-bayān.* It seems likely that he survived through the end of Shah ʿAbbās' reign, spending these later years mainly in Harāt.

Shāh Ḥusayn produced a body of poetry in addition to his prose works; he quotes a number of his own verses in the *Khayr al-bayān.* He was also recognized as a poet in at least two other *taẕkirah*s. Taqī al-Dīn Awḥadī, in his *ʿArafāt,* speaks respectfully of Shāh Ḥusayn, whom he claims to have met personally, and he reports that our author composed an imitation *(tatabbuʿ)* of the *Tuḥfat al-ʿIrāqayn* of Khāqānī (d. ca. 1199 CE).[36] (We should keep in mind that Shāh Ḥusayn was still alive when Awḥadī completed his *taẕkirah* in 1024/1615.) A brief but similarly respectful notice is provided in the *Riyāż al-shuʿarāʾ* of Vālih Dāghistānī (comp. 1161/1748).[37] Incidentally, the fact that Vālih, who tends to be quite thorough, does not mention a death date, suggests that this bit of information may have been lost in the sands of time.

It would be something of an exaggeration to say that Malik Shāh Ḥusayn of Sīstān left a major legacy. We have his two substantial works, but not by much: the *Iḥyāʾ al-mulūk* apparently survives in just one manuscript. As for the *Khayr al-bayān,* perhaps the highest compliment ever paid to it came from Riżā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, who mentions the work in the preface of his landmark *Majmaʿ al-fuṣaḥāʾ* (comp. 1284/1867–8) as one of the authorities upon which he relied.[38] In the final assessment, Shāh Ḥusayn was a notable but not especially famous author, and a member of an increasingly marginal local dynasty in the changing landscape of Safavid Iran during the reign of Shah ʿAbbās. Both his history of Sīstān and his *taẕkirah,* however, remain valuable for their documentation of events and individuals not covered in other sources.[39]

The Manuscript

We turn here to our central concern: the notice on Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī in the *Khayr al-bayān.* One more ancillary issue, however, should first be addressed. The significance of the passage on Ṣāʾib depends in part upon characteristics of MS Or. 3397, in addition to the text itself. It is important for us to consider, then, the circumstances under which this copy was produced, and the presence of substantial marginalia, much of which was added by unidentifiable hands and cannot be dated.

Several of the basic features of the manuscript have been laid out above. It was

36. *ʿArafāt,* ed. Nājī Naṣr'ābādī, vol. 3, p. 1996.

37. See the edition of Muḥsin Nājī Naṣr'ābādī, 5 vols., Tehran, 2005/06, vol. 2, p. 1089.

38. As reported in Rieu, *Supplement,* p. 78. For the original, see Riżā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, *Majmaʿ al-fuṣaḥāʾ,* ed. Maẓāhir Muṣaffā, 2 vols. in 6, Tehran, 1957–61, vol. I/1, p. xi.

39. While this article was under review, an entry on Shāh Ḥusayn was added to *Encyclopædia Iranica.* See Kioumars Ghereghlou, "Sistāni, Mirzā Šāh-Ḥosayn." Ghereghlou provides further details about the author's life and works.

copied in 1041/1631, after the work itself had been produced through a lengthy process of intermittent drafting and emendation between 1017/1608–9 and 1036/1627. The authorship of the notice on Ṣāʾib, as we have seen, should most appropriately be dated to 1035/1625–6. Or. 3397 contains a total of 467 double-sided folia, with nineteen lines of text on each side—with some exceptions, as at the beginning or end of a chapter. Rieu gives the dimensions of each folio as 10.75 by 6.5 in., and the length of each line of text as 3.5 in.[40] The scribe, Muḥammad Mīrak b. Khwājah Mīr Farāhī, wrote in a fairly small, neat *nastaʿlīq.* The main text of the manuscript is in black ink, while headings are in red (a common choice). When we look at the notice on Ṣāʾib, it will be important to remember that the *text* dates to 1035/1625–6, which is after the poet migrated to Kabul in 1034/1624–5; and that our *copy* dates to 1041/1631, which is before Ṣāʾib left India to return to Iran in 1042/1632. We are dealing with a source that was produced entirely during the poet's formative sojourn in Mughal lands.

This picture is complicated by the large number of marginal comments, additions, and corrections found throughout Or. 3397, including on the folia relating to Ṣāʾib. The marginalia can be divided into two categories. A minority of them, but still a substantial number, appear to have been inserted by the scribe himself, in handwriting indistinguishable from that of the main text. At several points the scribe either added a word or two that must have been omitted by accident, or corrected a small error (*e.g.*, foll. 63a, 163a, 293b, and 330b); or he noted a variant of a given hemistich *(miṣrāʿ)* (*e.g.,* foll. 234b, 246a, and 384a). The scribal marginalia were all penned with care, as befits a clean, professionally-produced copy. Most of the marginal comments in the manuscript, however, fall into our second category. They were left by some number of later owners or readers, nearly all of them unidentifiable, and they cannot be dated securely. This will be among our most important considerations as we examine the notice on Ṣāʾib: there is the original text, whose circumstances are clear; and a correction and copious marginalia, apparently in two different hands, which could have been added at any later juncture.

Most of the non-scribal marginal comments in Or. 3397 consist of additional verses by a given poet, added next to the biographical notice and selected verses already provided for that poet by Shāh Ḥusayn. This occurs, for example, on foll. 106a, 261a, and 302b. The impression is that a later owner would read the notice on a poet, think of other favorite verses by him, and then add those in the margin. One comment that does *not* fit this pattern is found on fol. 223a, next to the entry on Sharīf Tabrīzī (d. 956/1549). The note consists of several lines written in a *shikastah nastaʿlīq* hand which is quite difficult to decipher, but it seems to relate to the well-known controversy over Sharīf's disrespect of his mentor, Lisānī Shīrāzī (d. ca. 941/1534–5).[41] In any event, this is the only clearly signed marginal note in the entire manuscript. It was left by one ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Zunūzī.[42]

The pages concerning Ṣāʾib (374a–b and 375a) have been modified in two different ways,

40. Rieu, *Supplement*, p. 76.

41. For an explanation of this issue, see Ṣafā, *Tārīkh,* vol. 5, pt. 2, pp. 639, 671–2.

42. There seems to have been an early-nineteenth-century (CE) scribe who went by this name, though I have not been able to find any solid information on him.

apparently by two different hands. (Here and elsewhere, it will help the reader to refer to the appended images.) First, the heading of the notice (fol. 374a), which reads "Ẕikr-i Mustaʿidd Khān Ṣāyib [*i.e.,* Ṣāʾib] Tabrīzī" in red ink, has been defaced. Someone has used black ink to strike through "Mustaʿidd Khān" and to write above it "Muḥammad ʿAlī," which we know to have been Ṣāʾib's actual given name. This is the only heading in Or. 3397 that has been altered in such a way. The handwriting of "Muḥammad ʿAlī" looks somewhat different from that of the scribe, and the words appear to have been written more quickly, with less care, than we see throughout the body of the manuscript. It is also worth noting that the scribe places his own corrections in the margin, rather than immediately above crossed-out words. The most likely explanation is that a reader, at some later date, saw the notice on Ṣāʾib and decided to rectify his name. As is explained below, the story that the poet was once known under the title of "Mustaʿidd Khān" has been a subject of controversy.

Apart from the modified heading, the notice on Ṣāʾib features some of the densest marginalia found in the whole manuscript. The main text columns on both sides of fol. 374 are surrounded by numerous selected verses of Ṣāʾib, added by what appears to be yet another hand (an elegant quasi-*shikastah*).[43] This material is easier to interpret, since it is qualitatively similar to the marginal additions that accompany a number of other entries in the *taẕkirah*—although few of them are so heavily annotated.

The Notice on Ṣāʾib and His Excerpted Poetry

The pages relating to Ṣāʾib consist of four elements: the heading; the short biographical paragraph by Shāh Ḥusayn; the verses that were originally quoted; and the extra verses added in the margins. We have already considered the heading, which, in its unaltered version, refers to the poet as "Mustaʿidd Khān Ṣāyib [*i.e.,* Ṣāʾib] Tabrīzī."

The following is a translation of the biographical sketch, which immediately follows the heading and continues to the bottom of fol. 374a: "He is originally from Tabrīz, and early in his life, having come from Āẕarbāyjān to ʿIrāq, he would spend most of his time in Iṣfahān. There, with the literati of that province, he set himself upon the task of composing poems. One day he was in a gathering of friends, when a dervish named Ḥaqq Allāh came into their presence, and that dervish addressed Mawlānā Ṣāʾib with the title 'Mustaʿidd Khān.' He became widely known under this name. Truly, he has a great poetic talent, and hopefully

43. Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, in his brief commentary on these pages of Or. 3397 in *Kārvān-i Hind* (vol. 1, p. 701) and in the second edition of *Farhang-i ashʿār* (vol. 1, p. 14), speculates that both the correction to the name *and* the surrounding marginalia on fol. 374 were left by Ṣāʾib himself. If this could be proven, then it would be an extraordinary discovery and might justify a separate article. Unfortunately, Gulchīn-i Maʿānī does not cite any evidence to support the idea. It may be that he saw the script in the margins of fol. 374 and thought that it appeared similar to attested examples of Ṣāʾib's writing. Indeed, if we look at the facsimile publication of Ṣāʾib's *Safīnah* (Iṣfahan, 2006/07)—an anthology of choice verses by other poets that he recorded in his own hand—there is a clear resemblance. This issue must be set aside for the time being, but it raises tantalizing questions. Did Ṣāʾib personally annotate a *taẕkirah* notice about himself? If so, then when, and where, and for what purpose? It would be difficult to think of a comparable document in the history of classical Persian poetry.

he will become worthy *(mustaʿidd)* and well-engaged in the realm of eloquence. In the year 1034, he resolved to move to India. The following several verses, from among his agreeable verses, were recorded by the author of this book…"

In reviewing the excerpted poems of Ṣāʾib, it will be best to go through those that are provided in the main text column before turning to the marginal additions. This is important because any poem quoted by Shāh Ḥusayn can be dated confidently to the earliest part of Ṣāʾib's career. In fact, it is most likely that these selections represent verses that Ṣāʾib composed before he left for India, and certainly *long* before he became famous as the unparalleled master of his day. As for the poetry written in the margins, we can make no such historical claim. Nevertheless, in case it might prove of interest to other researchers, I have identified and matched all of the poems in both groups with their complete versions, as found in Muḥammad Qahramān's edition of the *Dīvān.*[44]

Shāh Ḥusayn excerpts the following poems, in order, on fol. 374b: two verses of *ghazal* no. 1612 (pp. 797–8); three verses of *ghazal* no. 3633 (p. 1752); three verses of *ghazal* no. 3655 (pp. 1761–2); the entirety (two verses) of no. 395 of the *mutafarriqāt* (p. 3519, ll. 3–4);[45] three verses of *ghazal* no. 1704 (p. 839); three verses of *ghazal* no. 6989 (p. 3407);[46] the entirety (two verses) of no. 252 of the *mutafarriqāt* (p. 3500, ll. 12–13); three verses of *ghazal* no. 3912 (pp. 1883–4); the entirety (two verses) of no. 509 of the *mutafarriqāt* (p. 3527, ll. 20–21); and the beginning of no. 374 of the *mutafarriqāt,* which continues on to fol. 375a and is quoted in its entirety (two verses).

He excerpts the following poems, again in order, on fol. 375a: the remainder of no. 374 of the *mutafarriqāt* (p. 3511, ll. 5–6); and two verses of *ghazal* no. 4013 (p. 1931).

The poetry snippets added in the margins will be listed page by page, but otherwise *in no particular order,* since they wrap around the main text column and are written at various angles. On fol. 374a, we find the following: one verse of *ghazal* no. 2644 (pp. 1290–91); one verse of *ghazal* no. 5542 (pp. 2675–6); one verse of *ghazal* no. 5107 (pp. 2457–8); two verses of *ghazal* no. 5693 (pp. 2748–9); two verses of *ghazal* no. 3088 (p. 1498); six verses constituting a mixture of *ghazal* nos. 2906 and 2907 (p. 1414), which share the same meter, rhyme, and *radīf* and may not have been known as separate poems by the marginal commentator; and three verses of *ghazal* no. 5759 (p. 2780).

On the margins of fol. 374b, the following poems are excerpted: one verse of *ghazal* no. 837 (pp. 407–8); five verses of *ghazal* no. 1496 (pp. 743–4); three verses of *ghazal* no.

44. To avoid a mess of footnotes, page numbers for all poems in these lists are cited in parentheses. Pagination is continuous across the six volumes of Qahramān's edition.

45. See below for discussion of this category of poems in Ṣāʾib's *dīvān.*

46. This poem is still considered by some to be among the greatest that Ṣāʾib ever composed. It seems to be especially famous for the final line *(maqṭaʿ)*, in which the poet addresses himself: "If you weren't a lover, Ṣāʾib, then what would you do with this lifetime?" The website Ganjoor, which is one of the largest and most widely used online repositories of classical Persian poetry, provides both the full *dīvān* of Ṣāʾib, and a selection of 180 of his best-known *ghazal*s *(guzīdah-i ghazalīyāt)*. This one is included. It seems remarkable that a poem dating to the earliest part of Ṣāʾib's career, and highlighted by his first biographer, would still stand out from his enormous œuvre after centuries of critical reception. We might also wonder about a perennial question in the study of *taẕkirah*s: what role did these works play in canon formation? In this case, were literati like Shāh Ḥusayn helping to define the "Quintessential Ṣāʾib" even before the poet had fully established his career?

2193 (pp. 1071–2); three verses of *ghazal* no. 3361 (pp. 1625–6); one verse of *ghazal* no. 441 (pp. 219–20); one verse of *ghazal* no. 3585 (p. 1731); and three verses of *ghazal* no. 1612 (pp. 797–8), apparently intended to supplement the two already quoted in the main text column.

In total, we have eleven poems by Ṣāʾib which were, as far as we can tell, highlighted by Shāh Ḥusayn in 1035/1625–6. Even if one were to argue that the poetry selections changed after the initial authorship of this passage, the manuscript itself dates to 1041/1631. It could then be hypothesized that we have early *verses* by Ṣāʾib, whereas the full *ghazal*s to which they now belong may have been finalized later in the poet's career. But this seems far-fetched. Ultimately, there is little way around the conclusion that we can now identify eleven of the earliest poems ever composed by Ṣāʾib. (We should remember that he built an œuvre of more than 7,000 *ghazal*s by the end of his career.) The question of whether this discovery has any real significance may be left to researchers who specialize in the analysis of Ṣāʾib's poetry *per se*.[47] In addition to the verses excerpted by Shāh Ḥusayn, we have selections from a further fourteen *ghazal*s that were subsequently added in the margins (not counting the supplemental lines from no. 1612).

A few more general comments on the poetry extracts are in order. First, it is noteworthy that all of the verses can be traced easily to poems that we still have in published editions of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān.* He did not die until ca. 1087/1676, and the selections in the *Khayr al-bayān* date to at least fifty years prior, but none of this early work was lost.

Second, beyond the fact that all of these poems can be cross-referenced with the *Dīvān,* it is remarkable that there are almost no differences in word choice between the lines quoted by Shāh Ḥusayn and the versions that have come down to the present day. Only the most trivial discrepancies can be found, such as the use of *mā* vs. *man* in the first hemistich of no. 395 of the *mutafarriqāt.*[48] The consistency reflected here should strengthen our impression that the work of Ṣāʾib is, in the words of Paul Losensky, "perhaps better preserved than that of any other major poet of the classical tradition."[49] There are a few instances in which Shāh Ḥusayn places lines in a different order than we find in current editions, but this is an omnipresent issue in pre-modern Persian poetry and should not be considered significant here. Indeed, as a rule, it is more surprising to find a classical *ghazal* whose manuscript tradition does *not* include some variation in the ordering of its verses.

Third, there is the question of the conflation of *ghazal* nos. 2906 and 2907 by the marginal commentator, who gives the impression of being unaware that he is mixing

47. As Losensky describes in his *Encyclopædia Iranica* article, "Ṣāʾeb Tabrizi," we do have copies of various versions of the poet's *dīvān* which date to his lifetime, and which were in some cases produced under his supervision or in his own hand. There may even be a manuscript that Ṣāʾib dedicated to his patron in India, Ẓafar Khān, which would imply an early date. Some of Ṣāʾib's *qaṣīdah*s are also known to have been composed near the beginning of his career. And so it is uncertain how much unique insight might be added by the quotation of seven early *ghazal*s and four *mutafarriqāt* in the *Khayr al-bayān.*

48. This poem is found near the top of the main text column of fol. 374b in Or. 3397, and on p. 3519, ll. 3–4 in Qahramān's edition of the *Dīvān.*

49. Losensky, "Ṣāʾeb Tabrizi," *Encyclopædia Iranica.*

verses from two different poems.[50] But should we be surprised to find this type of confusion in the reception of Ṣāʾib's works? Again, he has roughly 7,000 *ghazal*s, many of them on similar themes. Even though he drew on an extremely large number of possible meters, rhymes, and *radīf*s, there are plenty of cases in which he used the same combination twice. (One other example is *ghazal* nos. 4627 and 4628,[51] both of whose lines end with *-āb-i digar.*) We might wonder how people's engagement with Ṣāʾib's poetry was affected by the overwhelming number and occasionally repetitive nature of his *ghazal*s, especially considering how often his work must have been *heard* and exchanged at literary salons rather than *read* in book form.

Fourth, and finally, we should make some comment on an unusual section in Ṣāʾib's *dīvān,* called the *mutafarriqāt,* or "scattered items." At least a few of these poems are *qiṭʿah*s and would ordinarily be categorized as such. In most cases, however, the *mutafarriqāt* look like the first two or three lines of a *ghazal* that was never finished (the standard minimum number of verses in that form being five). This is not a conventional category in the collected works of Persian poets—which, again, typically contain a section for *qiṭʿah*s—but the *mutafarriqāt* number nearly 700 in Ṣāʾib's *dīvān.*

Qahramān provides further commentary on this grouping of poems in the introduction of his edition.[52] One of his statements is of particular relevance here. He speculates that the *mutafarriqāt* may comprise snippets of poetry from early in Ṣāʾib's career that he liked well enough to preserve as part of his written œuvre. Given that four of the eleven poems selected by Shāh Ḥusayn in 1035/1625–6 belong to this category, there may be something to Qahramān's claim. Any further analysis of these excerpted poems may be carried out by specialists. For the purposes of this article, it is enough to catalogue the contents of the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3397, which stands as a uniquely early source on both the biography and the poetry of Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī.

Ṣāʾib's Biography and the Title "Mustaʿidd Khān"

The final issue for us to address is Ṣāʾib's biography as presented in the *Khayr al-bayān.* In order to have a basis for comparison, we should begin by summarizing the standard narrative of the poet's life that has coalesced in modern scholarship. The most concise account in English is provided by Paul Losensky in *Encyclopædia Iranica.*[53] We do not know the exact year of Ṣāʾib's birth, but it was probably around the last decade of the sixteenth century CE. What is certain is that he was born into a family of wealthy merchants in Tabrīz, and his given name was Muḥammad ʿAlī. At a relatively young age, he moved with his family to the new Safavid capital city of Iṣfahān, as part of one of Shah ʿAbbās' initiatives to relocate certain economically important groups of people from the northwest, where they were under threat of Ottoman incursions. It is not clear precisely when Ṣāʾib's

50. Of course, we would need a different interpretation if it turned out that the margnialia were added by Ṣāʾib himself. See footnote 43 above.

51. *Dīvān,* ed. Qahramān, p. 2232.

52. *Dīvān,* ed. Qahramān, vol. 1, pp. xi–xii.

53. Losensky, "Ṣāʾeb Tabrizi," *Encyclopædia Iranica.*

family went to Iṣfahān, but it must have been in the years following 1012/1603, when ʿAbbās finally reconquered Tabrīz and a new round of intermittent Ottoman-Safavid wars began (to end with the Treaty of Sarāb in 1027/1618).

It was in Iṣfahān that Ṣāʾib received his education and launched his career as a poet. Indeed, with the benefit of the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān,* we can now state with confidence that Ṣāʾib developed a considerable reputation in his young adulthood, before he ever left Iran. In 1034/1624–5, however, he set off to seek wealth and career advancement in Mughal lands. He did not need to go any further than Kabul. There he became confidant and court poet to the local governor, Mīrzā Aḥsan Allāh Ẓafar Khān, with whom he would spend the next several years. Ṣāʾib apparently accompanied Ẓafar Khān on a visit to the Mughal court in 1038/1628, when the latter was summoned to pay his respects to the recently-enthroned Shāh Jahān. This is a point in Ṣāʾib's biography that would later become muddled. A number of *taẕkirah* authors claimed that he in fact attended Shāh Jahān's coronation, composed a celebratory poem for the occasion, and was rewarded with a lavish payment and the title of "Mustaʿidd Khān."

Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, whose study of the poet's biography (in the introduction to *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʾib*) remains by far the most thorough to appear to date, devotes several pages to a detailed explanation of the ways in which the story of the alleged encounter with Shāh Jahān is illogical.[54] He points out, for example, that we have no record of any panegyric addressed to the ruler in Ṣāʾib's otherwise well-documented collected works. There is also no mention in Mughal sources of his having been granted the rank of *khān.* Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, followed by other scholars, considers the entire anecdote to be an exaggeration by later biographers, who were writing decades after the fact and recognized Ṣāʾib as a poet of extraordinarily high stature. The title "Mustaʿidd Khān" itself has been deemed an invention of the *taẕkirah* tradition—although Gulchīn-i Maʿānī admits that it is perplexing how many sources agree on this detail. (By the time *Kārvān-i Hind* and the second edition of *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʾib* were published, he had seen the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān,* which answers the question.) Of course, this entire issue may be revisited in light of our new source.

After a few more years of travel and adventure in India, Ṣāʾib found an opportunity to move back to Iran in 1042/1632, when Ẓafar Khān was transferred to the governorship of Kashmir. It seems that the poet decided to return to Iṣfahān at least in part because his aging father wanted him at home. From this point, we may as well say that the rest is history, particularly given that the *Khayr al-bayān* has no bearing on it. Ṣāʾib mostly stayed in Iṣfahān for the remainder of his life. His family's wealth and social position obviated any need for him to cultivate a close relationship with the Safavid House, although he remained on fine terms with the court, composing *qaṣīdah*s in honor of Shah Ṣafī (r. 1038–52/1629–42), Shah ʿAbbās II (r. 1052–77/1642–66), and Shah Sulaymān (r. 1077–1105/1666–94). Ṣāʾib probably died in 1087/1676, although this is another point clouded by uncertainty.[55]

One of the salient features of Ṣāʾib's biography, as it has typically been constructed in

54. See the section starting on p. xxv of vol. 1 in Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Farhang-i ashʿār,* first ed.

55. See Losensky, "Ṣāʾeb Tabrizi," *Encyclopædia Iranica.*

scholarship, is that it is based upon sources written late in the poet's life or in the decades following his death. Gulchīn-i Maʿānī provides an overview of these *taẕkirah* notices in his aforementioned study.[56] The earliest three are the *Qiṣaṣ al-khāqānī* of Valī Qulī Bēg Shāmlū, written between 1073/1662–3 and 1085/1674–5, with the passage on Ṣāʾib apparently dating to 1076/1665–6; the *Taẕkirah-i Naṣr'ābādī* of Muḥammad Ṭāhir Naṣr'ābādī, whose notice on Ṣāʾib, according to Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, dates to 1083/1672–3; and the *Muẕakkir al-aṣḥāb* of Malīḥā of Samarqand, comp. 1093/1682. All of these are valuable sources, but even the *Qiṣaṣ al-khāqānī* postdates the *Khayr al-bayān* by about forty years.

Upon consideration of Shāh Ḥusayn's much earlier notice, our sense of Ṣāʾib's career should change in at least two ways. First, as noted earlier, there is evidence that the poet was far from an obscure neophyte at the point when he decided to seek his fortune in India. He had made enough of an impression in Iṣfahān to merit inclusion in a *taẕkirah* that was written hundreds of miles away, in Harāt—although we know that Shāh Ḥusayn traveled throughout Safavid Iran and could have learned about up-and-coming poets in any number of ways. Furthermore, the biographical sketch in the *Khayr al-bayān* expresses high hopes for Ṣāʾib's future success as a poet. This is not an everyday trope in the *taẕkirah* tradition. It recalls Sām Mīrzā's discussion of a young Muḥtasham Kāshānī (d. 996/1588) in the *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī* (comp. ca. 957/1550): "Since he is young, hopefully he will develop to his potential."[57] Only rarely are we afforded a glimpse of the beginning of a great poet's career, when he has demonstrated unusual promise but has yet to rise to fame. Ṣāʾib may now be added to the list of these precocious figures.

Second, we are due for a reinterpretation of the issue of his nickname. In the end, the story that a random dervish wandered into a poetry gathering in Iṣfahān and chose for some reason to address Ṣāʾib as "Mustaʿidd Khān," after which the name stuck, is hardly more credible than the tale involving Shāh Jahān. We probably will never know just how or why our poet ended up with this title. But we may at least be confident that it was not invented out of whole cloth by later biographers, and that its origin lies early in Ṣāʾib's career, prior to his sojourn in India.

We might also consider a new explanation for the development of the Shāh Jahān story in the biographical tradition: that later commentators sought to rationalize an unusual nickname which looked suspiciously like an official Mughal title.[58] *Taẕkirah* authors working in the late seventeenth century would also have been intimately familiar with the trope of the Iranian poet who travels to the great court in India, recites verses before the emperor, and is rewarded with his weight in gold. This archetype had been firmly established since the time of Akbar (r. 963–1014/1556–1605).[59] In fact, given that most of

56. This refers to the first edition of *Farhang-i ashʿār-i Ṣāʾib*. As has been explained above, the second edition adds a brief passage about the *Khayr al-bayān.*

57. *Tuḥfah-i Sāmī,* ed. Humāyūn Farrukh, p. 373.

58. Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, for his part, checked multiple Mughal sources for any indication that Ṣāʾib was given a *khān*-level title. See his *Farhang-i ashʿār,* first ed., vol. 1, pp. xxviii–xxix.

59. The issue of Iranian poets' search for wealth and fame at the Mughal courts has been treated extensively, in works such as Shiblī Nuʿmānī's *Shiʿr al-ʿajam* (originally published in Urdu, 5 vols., Aligaṛh, 1909–21) and Gulchīn-i Maʿānī's aforementioned *Kārvān-i Hind.*

the key biographical notices on Ṣāʾib date to the reign of Awrangzēb (1068–1118/1658–1707), those authors may have looked back with some nostalgia on the heyday of the Iranian poets' migration to India in preceding generations. The apparent exaggeration of Ṣāʾib's relationship with Shāh Jahān is not difficult to explain, even if the origin of the title "Mustaʿidd Khān" remains a mystery.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this article fall into three categories. First, the notice in the *Khayr al-bayān* enables new insight into aspects of Ṣāʾib's biography, as has just been summarized. Second, we have eleven poems by Ṣāʾib—enumerated and cross-referenced with the published *Dīvān*—which may now be dated to the earliest part of his career.

Third, and most broadly, I would reiterate the appeal that I made, in an earlier article on the biography of Vaḥshī Bāfqī (d. 991/1583), for continued scholarly attention to be paid to the Persian *taẕkirah*s of poets, particularly those written in the first half of the Safavid-Mughal period.[60] Some potentially important representatives of the genre still have not been edited for publication. Quite a few more have been published, but not studied thoroughly by researchers. There is still much to be gained by working with these sources. It is in this spirit that I have provided a comprehensive introduction to the *Khayr al-bayān* and its author, rather than addressing the notice on Ṣāʾib alone. As I indicated above, researchers who are concerned with the poet Kalīm Kāshānī (d. 1061/1651), the historian Iskandar Bēg Munshī (d. after 1038/1629), the theologian Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĀmilī (d. 1030/1621), the philosopher Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), and possibly other important figures of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries CE, might profit from examining this *taẕkirah*.

In closing, I would note that the perceived significance of this article's findings may depend in part upon the reader's estimation of Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī himself. Most serious students of classical Persian poetry, at least in the current generation, would probably count him among the greatest practitioners of the art form. Certainly he was one of the most prolific and inventive composers of *ghazal*s, and his name belongs on any short list of the key figures who lived after Jāmī (d. 898/1492). This paper has been written with the implicit understanding that Ṣāʾib is such an important poet that we should be delighted to gain any new perspective on his biography. But others may judge for themselves.

60. Theodore S. Beers, "The Biography of Vahshi Bāfqi (d. 991/1583) and the *Tazkera* Tradition," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 8 (2015): 219–20.

Appendix: *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3379

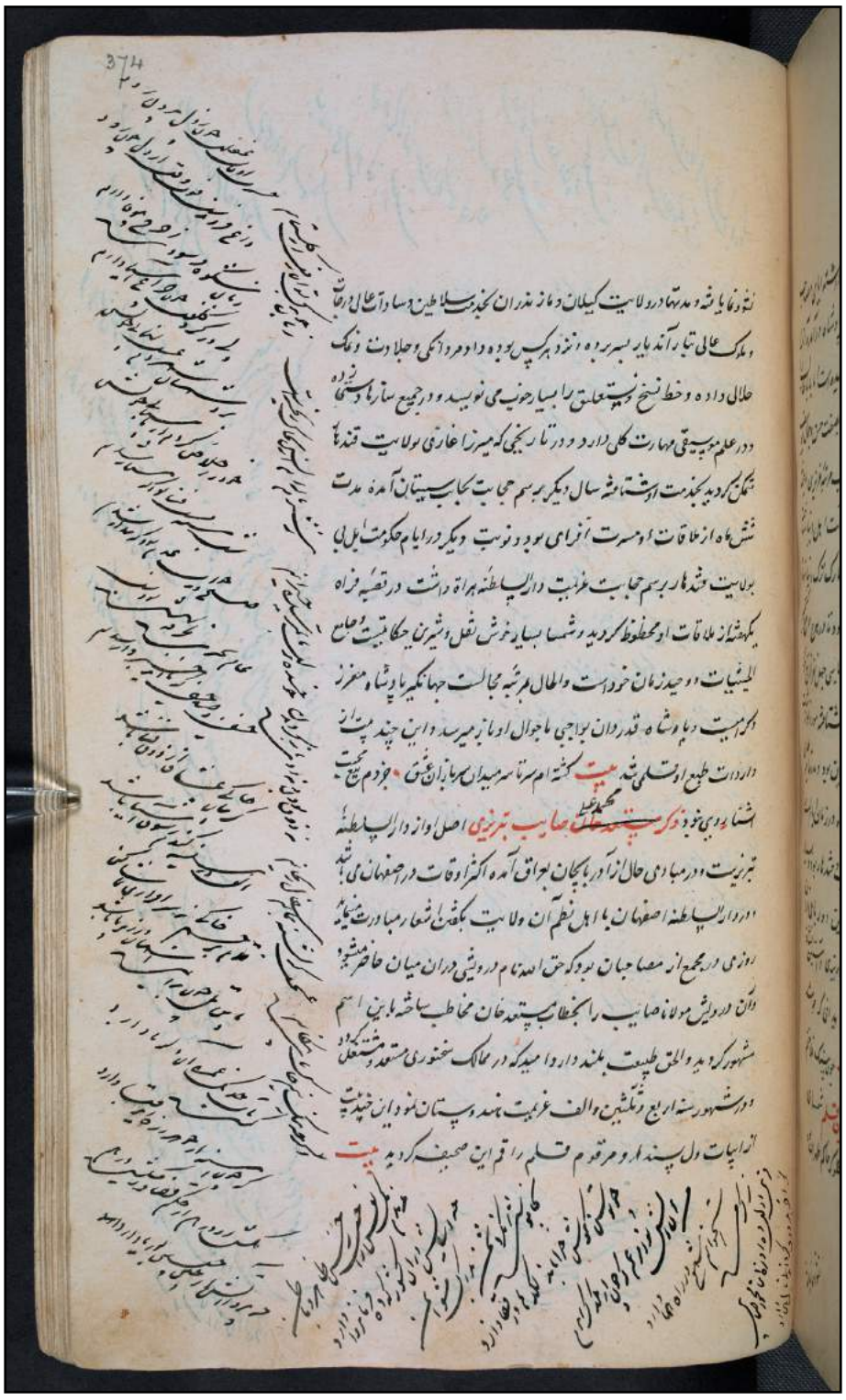

Fig. 1: Page 374a from *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3379.

Fig. 2: Page 374b from *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3379.

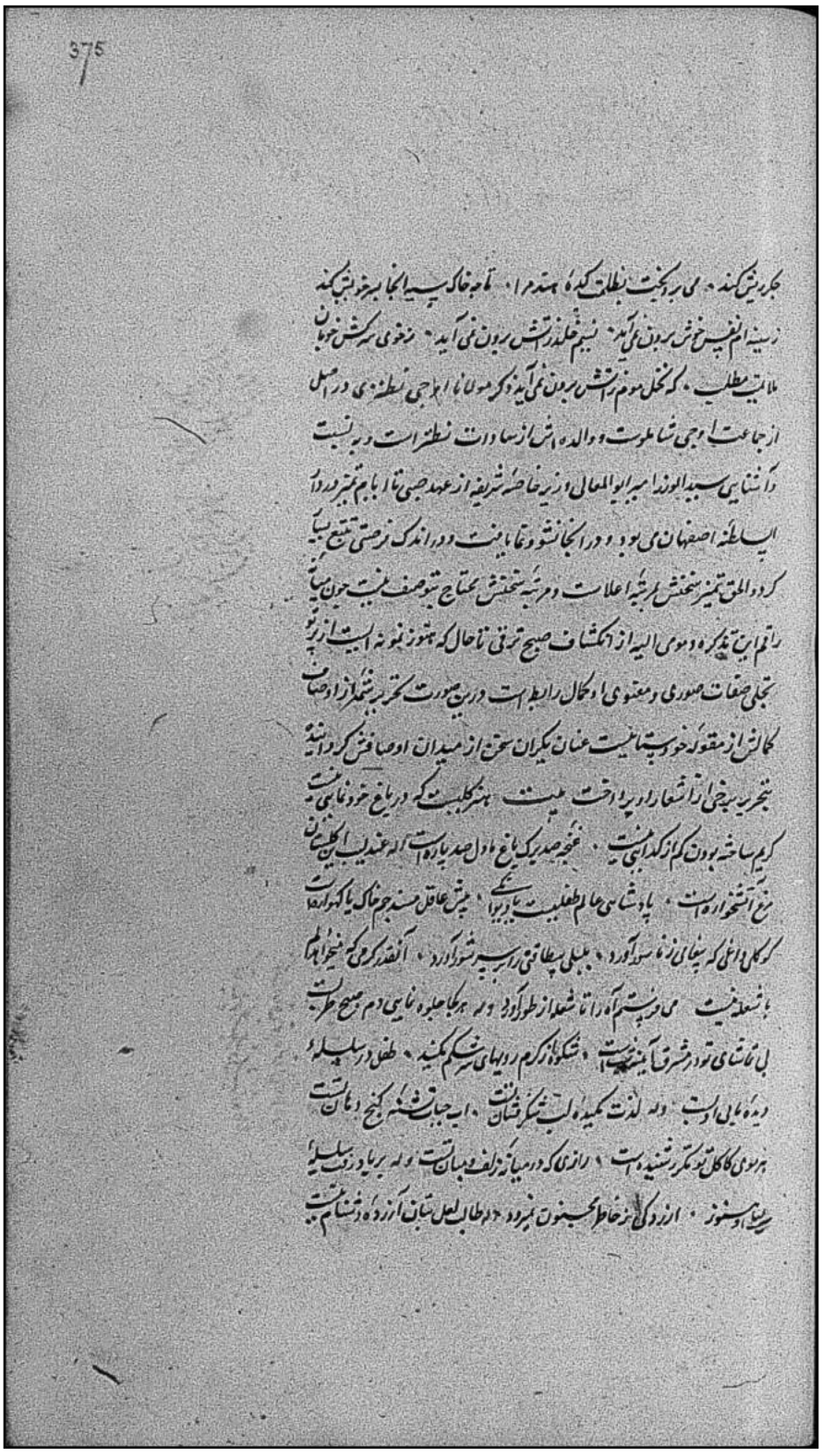

Fig. 3: Page 375a from *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3379.

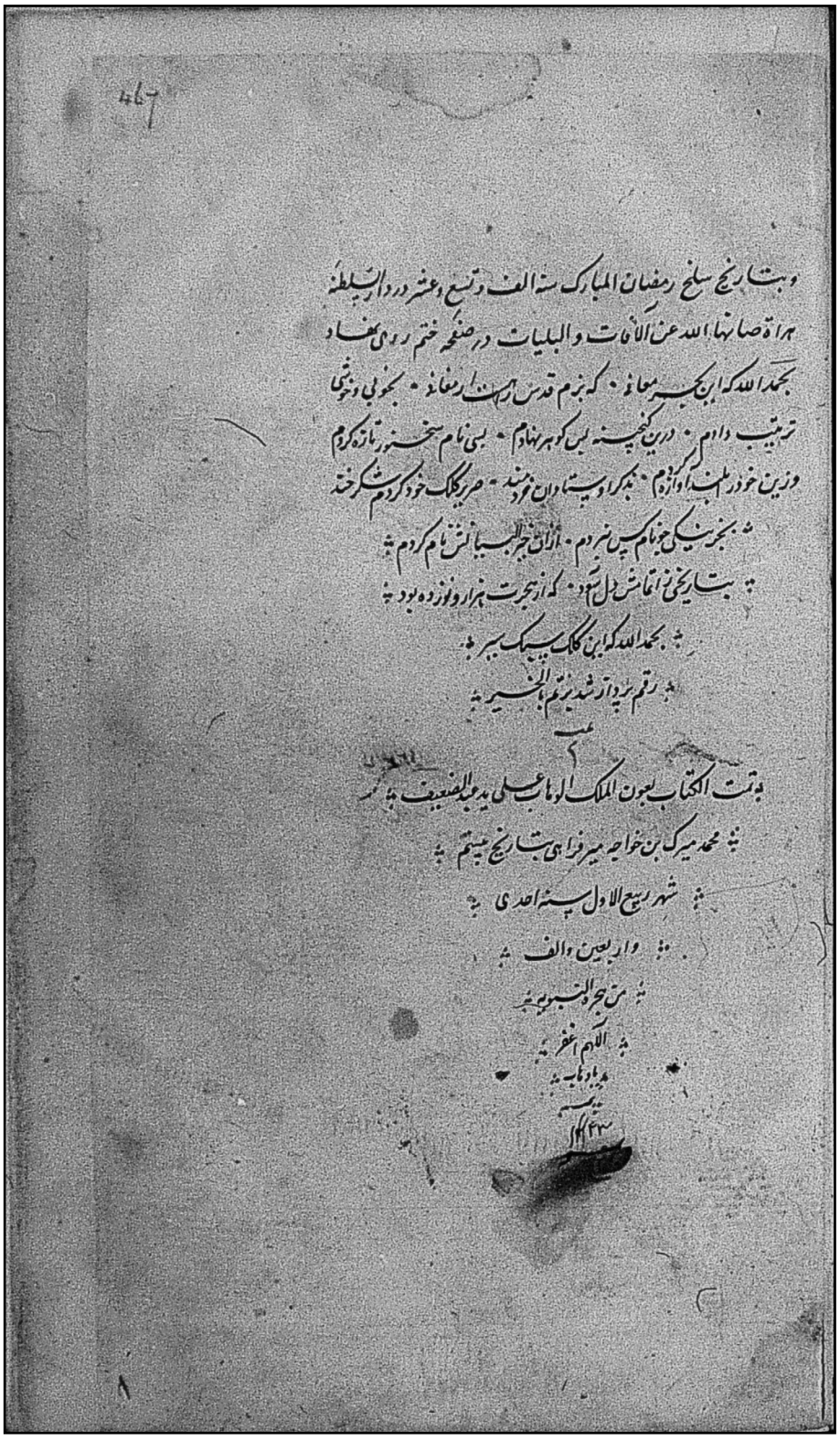

Fig. 4: Page 467a (the colophon) from *Khayr al-bayān* MS Or. 3379.

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Notes and Brief Communications

A Man for All Seasons: Ibn ʿUqda and Crossing Sectarian Boundaries in the 4th/10th Century

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Editor's Note

A previous version of this article was published in al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā *20/2 (2008), 55-58. For unknown reasons, however, the published text was a draft version of the article that contained errors. Prof. Jonathan Brown offers here a revised and slightly expanded version of his article.*

It is well known that the sectarian boundaries of classical Islam had not formed in the first, second or even third centuries AH – it was not until the dawn of the fourth century that we can say that the major boundary markers had been set. By the early 300/900's, Ibn Ḥanbal and his cohort had established the central tenets of the *Ahl al-sunna wa al-jamāʿa*,[1] with scholars such as Abū al-al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-6) beginning to integrate rationalism and speculative theology into the expanding Sunni tent. Between 260/874 and 329/941 the final occultation of the twelfth Imam transpired, providing the defining element of Imami Shiism.

During the first two centuries of Islam, it was therefore not at all unusual for scholarly interactions and influences to occur that would seem impossible in the sectarian milieu of later classical Islam. Early scholars and ḥadīth transmitters later seen as pillars of Sunni Islam could be seen receiving ḥadīths from or studying with Shiite or Kharijite teachers, for example. Sometimes such common

1. The earliest datable mention of the phrase *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamāʿa* that I have found is in the writing of Ḍirār b. ʿAmr (d. 200/815), who uses the phrase "*ṣāḥib sunna wa jamāʿa*" dismissively to refer to what seems like early Sunnis, and he writes of the sultan supposedly thanking him for saving him from the "*ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamāʿa*"; Ḍirār b. ʿAmr, *Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*, ed. Hüseyin Hansu and Mehmet Keskin (Istanbul: Sharikat Dār al-Irshād; Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2014), 104, 130. The earliest datable usage by someone identifying with the term comes from al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*: *kitāb al-zakāt*, *bāb mā jā'a fī faḍl al-ṣadaqa*.

ground was explained through necessity. The second/eighth century Kufan ḥadīth scholar Jābir al-Juʿfī (d. 128/745-6) was so deeply ensconced in the often-extremist moil of early Shiite thought that even later Imāmī Shiites preferred to keep their distance from him.[2] But he appears in major Sunni hadith collections, such as the *Sunan*s of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah. As the prominent second/eighth-century Sunni scholar Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812) said, "If not for Jābir al-Juʿfī, the people of Kufa would be without ḥadīths."[3] Other times Sunni scholars believed that a Shiite's sectarian leanings did not affect his overall probity and reliability – Ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/848) says of one ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Sāliḥ: he may be a Shiite, but "he would rather fall from the sky than lie about half a word."[4]

Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad Ibn ʿUqda, the subject of this article, is a fascinating case. A native of Kufa who died in 332/944, we need not attempt to determine his actual character or trace his life story. Suffice it to say that he was widely esteemed by all for his colossal memory (being in command of a corpus of at least 500,000 narrations) and his astounding library (600 camel loads).[5] Most importantly for us, Ibn ʿUqda represents a vestigial tract of common ground after the Islamic sectarian boundaries had reified. The Sunni, Imami Shiite and Zaydi Shiite traditions all accorded him great respect as a transmitter of revealed knowledge and as an architect of formalized Muslim scholarship; this despite their recognition of his strong sectarian leanings.

Sunni scholars and ḥadīth critics of the fourth/tenth century onwards leveled serious but not uncommon critiques at Ibn ʿUqda: he was a Shiite who narrated ḥadīths insulting the Companions in dictation sessions, with one ʿAbdān al-Ahwāzī saying that "Ibn ʿUqda exited the boundaries of the *Ahl al-ḥadīth*, and he should not be mentioned as one of them." Another accusation was that he brought ḥadīth notebooks of highly dubious authenticity into Kufa and attributed them to Kufan teachers.[6]

These are noteworthy criticisms, but other Sunnis before and after Ibn ʿUqda (such as al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, d. 405/1014) were tarnished with comparably barbed accusations, and they remained none the worse for wear. What is salient about Ibn ʿUqda is that the criticisms about him were not limited to such clichéd and abstract accusations. They were tangible and highly objectionable. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) blames Ibn ʿUqda by name for circulating the forged hadith of the sun's reversing itself miraculously so that ʿAlī could make up a prayer.[7]

2. Hussein Modaressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 92.

3. *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*: *kitāb al-ṣalāt*, *bāb mā jāʾa fī faḍl al-adhān*. As the later Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Rajab pointed out, this is patently not true. Kufa enjoyed a slew of major ḥadīth transmitters in that era, such as al-Aʿmash and Abū Isḥāq al-Sabīʿī; Ibn Rajab, *Sharḥ ʿIlal al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr, 2 vols. (n.p.: n.p., 1398/1978), 1:69-70.

4. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh al-Baghdād*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1417/1997), 10:260.

5. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 1:264.

6. Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, 1:265.

7. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ʿUthmān, 3 vols. (Medina: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1386-88/1966-68), 1:356-7. Aside from *isnād* criticisms, Ibn al-Jawzī and others pointed to the supposed ḥadīth contradicting

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) notes that one severe Shiite (al-ʿAbbās b. ʿUmar al-Kalūdhānī, d. 414/1023) took unacceptable ḥadīths on the virtues (*faḍā'il*) of early Shiites narrated by Ibn ʿUqda and attributed them to the widely admired Sunni chief judge of Kufa, al-Maḥāmilī (d. 330/941).[8]

Yet Sunnis heaped praise on Ibn ʿUqda as well. In his dictionary of criticized ḥadīth transmitters, Ibn ʿAdī (d. 365/976-7) calls him "a master of knowledge and memory, at the forefront of this science (*ṣāḥib maʿrifa wa ḥifẓ wa muqaddam fī hādhihi al-ṣanʿa*)." He adds that, if not for his commitment to mentioning all impugned ad/ transmitters in the book, he would otherwise have left such an esteemed scholar as Ibn ʿUqda out. Abū Yaʿlā al-Khalīlī (d. 446/1054) calls Ibn ʿUqda "one of the ḥadīth masters *(min al-ḥuffāẓ*

another Prophetic saying that the sun was only ever reversed for Joshua (*lam turadd al-shams illā ʿalā Yushaʿ b. Nūn*). For versions of the ḥadīth of the sun being reversed for ʿAlī, narrated through Asmāʾ bt. ʿUmays and al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (*kāna rasūl Allāh fī ḥujr ʿAlī wa huwa yūḥā ilayhi fa-lammā surriya ʿanhu qāla yā ʿAlī ṣallayta al-ʿaṣr? fa-qāla lā, fa-qāla Allahumma innaka taʿlamu annahu kāna fī ḥājatika wa ḥājat rasūlika fa-rudd ʿalayhi al-shams fa-raddahā ʿalayhi fa-ṣallā wa ghābat al-shams / annahu ʿalayhi al-ṣalāt*), see Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dūlābī (d. 310/923, of Rayy then of Egypt), *al-Dhurriyya al-ṭāhira al-nabawiyya* (Kuwait: al-Dār al-Salafiyya, 1407/1986), 91-2. Another version of the ḥadīth comes through Jābir from the Prophet (*anna al-Nabī amara al-shams fa-taʾakhkharat sāʿatan min nahār*); Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ*, ed. Ṭāriq b. ʿAwaḍ Allāh al-Ḥusaynī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Ḥaramayn, 1415/1995), 4:224. The best amalgamation of these narrations was made by Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/932), *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ, 16 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1994), 3:92-104. Ibn al-Jawzī relied for parts of his criticism on al-ʿUqaylī (d. 323/934); Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍuʿafāʾ al-kabīr*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Amīn Qalʿajī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1404/1984), 3:337. For other scholars who considered this ḥadīth to be forged, see Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, [n.d.], reprint of 1963-4 Cairo ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī edition), 3:170; Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1606), *al-Asrār al-marfūʿa*, ed. Muḥammad Luṭfī Ṣabbāgh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1986), 213, 397-8 (though he notes that al-Ṭabarānī and others included this ḥadīth via a *ḥasan isnād*); Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999 CE), *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ḍaʿīfa wa'l-mawḍūʿa* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1400/2000), 2:395-402 (an extensive discussion of the *isnād* and *matn* flaws of the narrations). Many scholars, however, have considered this ḥadīth to be *ṣaḥīḥ*, for example al-Ṭaḥāwī (op. cit.), Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544/1149), *Kitāb al-Shifā* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2002), 177 (it is *thābit*); Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Laʾālīʾ al-maṣnūʿa fī al-aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿa*, ed. Ṣāliḥ Muhammad ʿUwayda, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1416/1996), 1:308-13 (he argues that, since no prophet was given a miracle without Muḥammad being given its like or better, and the sun was reversed for Joshua, then Muḥammad must have produced the same miracle); idem, *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ al-kubrā*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, reprint of 1320/1902-3 Hyderabad edition), 2:82 (here al-Suyūṭī claims some of the *isnād*s for this ḥadīth meet the criteria of *ṣaḥīḥ*); Ismāʿīl al-ʿAjlūnī (d. 1748-9 CE), *Kashf al-khafā*, ed. Aḥmad Qalāsh (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, n.d.), 1:255-6, 516 (following al-Suyūṭī's reasoning). Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791 CE) considered the ḥadīth to be reliable and offered rebuttals of Ibn al-Jawzī's criticism. He notes how one of Ibn al-Jawzī's objections is that once the prayer time ends the prayer is not admissible anymore even if sun returns. Al-Zabīdī presents scholarly opinions that, if the sun returns, then the time returns and performing the prayer becomes valid; Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn sharḥ Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1414/1994), 7:191-2. Abdallāh al-Ghumārī (d. 1993) says the ḥadīth is *ṣaḥīḥ*; al-Ghumārī, *Afḍal maqūl fī manāqib afḍal rasūl* (Cairo: Makatabat al-Qāhira, 2005), 24.

8. Al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 12:160.

al-kibār)," adding, "and he is the *shaykh* of the Shiites." Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), no lover of Shiites, calls Ibn ʿUqda "the ḥadīth master of his age and the oceanic ḥadīth scholar (*ḥāfiẓ al-ʿaṣr wa al-muḥaddith al-baḥr*)." Al-Dhahabī says he even devoted a small book to just his bio.[9]

In his biographical dictionary of the Shāfiʿī school of law, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) lists Ibn ʿUqda as one of "the ḥadīth masters of the Shariah,"[10] noting that vaunted Sunni ḥadīth scholars like al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995), Ibn al-Jiʿābī (d. 355/966) and al-Ḥākim all said, "I've never seen anyone with more mastery of ḥadīth than Ibn ʿUqda."[11] Al-Ḥākim used Ibn ʿUqda as a transmitter in his *Mustadrak*, a collection of ḥadīths he claimed met the lofty standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and al-Dāraquṭnī used him in his *Sunan*. In addition, other Sunni ḥadīth collectors such as al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) and al-Silafī (d. 576/1180) also included ḥadīths transmitted by Ibn ʿUqda in their works. One story in particular seems to epitomize the grudging respect that Sunnis paid Ibn ʿUqda for his expertise in ḥadīth. In his *Tārīkh*, Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Ḥāfiẓ tells that one Ibn Ṣāʿid narrated a ḥadīth the *isnād* of which Ibn ʿUqda rejected. Ibn Ṣāʿid, however, had powerful connections, and Ibn ʿUqda was dragged before the vizier to be interrogated about his insulting criticism. The vizier wanted to know who could settle the matter, and no less a vaunted expert than Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938) was called in to consult. He sided with Ibn ʿUqda.[12]

Furthermore, not only did leading Sunnis approve of Ibn ʿUqda as a ḥadīth transmitter, they accepted him as a ḥadīth *critic*. In other words, they accepted his opinions on the worthiness of *other* ḥadīth transmitters. Both al-Dhahabī and Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 897/1402) list him as one of the authoritative ḥadīth transmitter critics,[13] although al-Sakhāwī notes how he is an example of a critic whose opinions need to be considered in the light of his ideological/sectarian stances.[14] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) uses him as a critical source in at least three biographies in his *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*. The earliest surviving evaluation of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim comes from Ibn ʿUqda, and, in fact, he composed the earliest known *mustakhraj* on the basis of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*.[15]

Ibn ʿUqda is even used as an exemplar, and his scholarly works and opinions are cited as compelling precedent by later Sunnis. In his foundational work on the ḥadīth sciences, the *Jamiʿ*, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī employs Ibn ʿUqda as an

9. Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, ed. Zakariyyāʾ ʿUmayrāt, 4 vols. in 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1419/1998), 3:40-42.

10. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Hujr, 1413/1992), 1:314-6.

11. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:222.

12. Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, 1: 266.

13. Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, "al-Mutakallimūn fī al-rijāl," in *Arbaʿ rasā'il fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 6th ed. (Beirut: Maktab al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1419/1999), 111; al-Dhahabī, "Dhikr man yuʿtamadu qawluhu fī al-jarḥ wa'l-taʿdīl," *Arbaʿ rasā'il*, 207.

14. Al-Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ al-mughīth bi-sharḥ Alfiyyat al-ḥadīth*, ed. ʿAlī Ḥusayn ʿAlī, 5 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1424/2003), 4:363.

15. Al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 14:454; Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 127.

example of how it is acceptable for contemporaries to narrate from one another. In the anecdote provided by al-Khaṭīb, Ibn ʿUqda's Shiism is prominent. A scholar from Isfahan meets Ibn ʿUqda in Kufa and asks to hear ḥadīths from him. When Ibn ʿUqda discovered that the man was from Isfahan, he began railing against the city for being antagonistic to the Family of the Prophet and housing their enemies. To this the man replies that there are in Isfahan plenty of Shiites who love ʿAlī. Then Ibn ʿUqda examined in him on whom he had studied with in Isfahan, responding angrily when the man admitted that he had not heard from people that Ibn ʿUqda thought were superb. He was also upset that the man had not heard the *Musnad* of Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālisī (d. 204/820), since "its well spring is from Isfahan."[16]

In his seminal work on the ḥadīth sciences, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) uses Ibn ʿUqba's allowing the narration by *ijāza* as proof of its acceptability (along with other examples like al-Khaṭīb and Dāraquṭnī).[17] When Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404) rendered Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's book in poetic form, Ibn ʿUqda's name even graces a verse.

In the Zaydi Shiite ḥadīth tradition, Ibn ʿUqda is seen as a founding figure (he seems to have espoused the Jārūdī Zaydi view). His book listing and identifying those people who transmitted ḥadīths from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (some 4,000 in all) is seen by Zaydi scholars like Ṣārim al-Dīn al-Wazīrī (d. 915/1508) as the starting point of Zaydi ḥadīth scholarship.[18] Al-Wazīrī also notes that Ibn ʿUqda wrote a book on the ḥadīth of Ghadīr Khumm, in which Muḥammad commands his followers to take ʿAlī as their master, mentioning a total of 105 chains of transmission for the report.[19]

Moving further away from Sunnism, Imami Shiites also held Ibn ʿUqda in high esteem, this on the basis of his book on the students of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq as well as his commitment to preserving and transmitting the *uṣūl*, or the ḥadīth collections copied from the various Imams.[20] Etan Kohlberg notes that Imami Shiites respected him despite his Jārūdī Zaydi leaning. In fact, he was so prominent a transmitter in the four Shiite canonical ḥadīth collections that he was indispensable.[21]

Conclusion

It is not unusual to come across a major Sunni ḥadīth transmitter or prominent ḥadīth critic whose reputation was tarnished by *accusations* such as Shiism. But what is interesting about Ibn ʿUqda is that he actually *was* Shiite -no one ever debated that. This would have been acceptable two hundred or even one hundred years earlier, before the

16. Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Jamiʿ li-ikhtilāf al-rāwī wa ādāb al-sāmiʿ*, ed. Muḥammad Ra'fat Saʿīd, 2 vols. (Mansoura, Egypt: Dār al-Wafā', 1422/2002), 2:242.

17. Abū ʿAmr Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*, ed. ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1411/1990), 343.

18. He was a main source for later Zaydi scholars; ʿAbdallāh Ḥamūd al-ʿIzzī, *ʿUlum al-ḥadīth ʿind al-zaydiyya wa al-muḥaddithīn* (Ṣaʿda: Muʾassasat al-Imām Zayd b. ʿAlī, 1421/2001), 225.

19. Ṣārim al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīrī, *al-Falak al-dawwār fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth wa al-fiqh wa al-āthār*, ed. Muḥammad Yaḥyā ʿAzzān (Ṣaʿda: Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islāmī and Dār al-Turāth al-Yamanī, 1415/1994), 105.

20. Etan Kohlbergh, "Al-Uṣūl al-arbaʿumiʾa," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987): 130-1.

21. Kohlberg, "Al-Uṣūl al-arbaʿumiʾa," 130, 135.

categories of Sunni and Shiite had gelled. In the early to mid fourth/ninth century, however, Ibn ʿUqda's case is unique. That he became and remained a respected figure to three competing sectarian traditions (Sunnism, Zaydism and Imami Shiism), suggests that Muslim scholarly society had criteria for expertise that could transcend sectarianism. It is not unusual to come across a ḥadīth transmitter in major Sunni ḥadīth collections who was accused of Shiism but was nonetheless accepted. But Ibn ʿUqda, uniquely as far as I know, was accepted as a ḥadīth *critic*. It is interesting that we have no record that Ibn ʿUqda ever contested charges that he was a Jārūdī Shiite – he was indeed a man for all seasons.

Notes and Brief Communications

A New Source on the Social Gatherings (*majālis*) of the Mamluk Sultan Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī

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Since Mohammad Awad's pioneering work in 1940, the learned social gatherings *(majālis)* of the penultimate Mamluk Sultan Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906-922/1501-1516) have helped produce a small, but lively scholarship on the courtly life of the late Mamluk period.[1] Doubtless, such interest has been fueled largely by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAzzām's 1941 edition of two Arabic sources that focus on the *majālis*: *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya fī ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-Qurʾāniyya* (sic) of the little known author al-Sharīf Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī (*fl.* early 10th/16th c.), and *al-Kawkab al-durrī fī masāʾil al-Ghawrī* of unknown authorship.[2] Both texts include the purported proceedings of al-Ghawrī's *majālis* and focus primarily on learned discussions taken up at these gatherings pertaining to law, Quranic exegesis, history, literature, theology, philosophy and the natural sciences, among others. Given their rich and varied contents, these two texts have received considerable attention from numerous authors including Barbara Flemming, Jonathan Berkey, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Stephan Conermann, Robert Irwin and Yehoshua Frenkel.[3] Even so, they still await a

1. Awad, M., "Sultan al-Ghawri. His place in literature and learning (three books written under his patronage)," in *Actes du xxe Congrès International des Orientalistes, Bruxelles 5-10 Septembre 1938*, Leuven 1940, 321-322.

2. ʿAzzām, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (ed.), *Majālis al-sulṭān al-Ghawrī*, Cairo 1941.

3. Flemming, B., "Šerīf, Sultan Ġavrī und die „Perser"," *Der Islam* 45 (1969), 81-93; Flemming, B., "Literary Activities in Mamluk Halls and Barracks," in M. Rosen-Ayalon (ed.), *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, Jerusalem 1977, 249-60; Flemming, B., "Aus den Nachtgesprächen des Sultan Ġaurīs," in H. Franke et al. (eds.), *Folia Rara. Wolfgang Voigt LXV. Diem Natalem Celebranti*, Wiesbaden 1976, 22-28; Berkey, J., "The Mamluks as Muslims. The military elite and the construction of Islam in medieval Egypt," in T. Philipp and U. Haarmann (eds.), *The Mamluks in Egyptian politics and society*, Cambridge 1998, 163-173; Behrens-Abouseif, D., "Sultan al-Ghawrī and the Arts," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 6 (2002), 71-94;

thorough and comprehensive analysis as literary texts and historical sources on late Mamluk court life.[4]

In addition to these two relatively well known sources of Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī's reign, the Aya Sofya collection of the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul preserves another important *majālis* work in two volumes entitled *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya fī ʾl-nawādir al-Ghawriyya*. In early 2013, Christopher Markiewicz encountered these manuscripts while conducting research on the life and work of Idrīs Bidlīsī (861-926/1457-1520), an itinerant scholar and statesman best known as a historian of the Ottoman dynasty, who spent several months in Cairo in 918/1512. As Bidlīsī later recalled the scholarly and social gatherings of the Mamluk sultan to which he was invited, *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya*, with its near contemporaneous recounting of similar gatherings promised to offer an exceptional window into the court culture which Bidlīsī observed.[5] Working independently at the same time, Christian Mauder pursued a doctoral dissertation on this court culture through an examination of the extant oeuvre of *majālis* works from the reign of Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī. In late 2012, he came across a passing reference to *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya* in an earlier publication that described the text as a "universal history" written for al-Ghawrī and therefore decided to travel to Turkey to examine the manuscript in person.[6] We met in Istanbul in the spring of 2013, where we exchanged notes on several manuscripts, including *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya*.

This work is preserved in a unique two-volume manuscript held today in the Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, Turkey as MSS Aya Sofya 3312 and 3313. The title of the text is given in the introduction and in a slightly different form as *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya fī ʾl-maḥāsin al-dawla al-ashrafiyya al-Ghawriyya* at the beginning of the second volume.[7] According to their colophons, the first volume was finished in mid-Ṣafar 921/April 1515[8] and the second in mid-Rabīʿ al-Awwal 921/May 1515.[9] Neither of the two volumes of the work includes the names of its author or its scribe.

The paper of both volumes, which consist of 111 and 113 folios respectively, is finished, of creamy color and uniform in

Conermann, S., "Es boomt! Die Mamlūkenforschung (1992-2002)," in S. Conermann and A. Pistor-Hatam (eds.), *Die Mamlūken. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur. Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann (1942-1999)*, Schenefeld 2003, 1-69; Irwin, R., "The Political Thinking of the "Virtuous Ruler," Qānsūh al-Ghawrī," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12 (2008), 37-49; Frenkel, Y., *Is there a Mamlūk culture?*, Schenefeld 2014; Frenkel, Y., "The Mamluks among the nations. A medieval Sultanate in its global context," in S. Conermann (ed.), *Everything is on the move. The Mamluk Empire as a node in (trans-) regional networks*, Göttingen 2014, 61-79.

4. Christian Mauder is currently preparing a detailed study of these works and the wider culture of late Mamluk court life in his dissertation: "In the Sultan's Salon: Learning, Religion and Rulership at the Mamluk Court of Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501-1516)" to be defended at the University of Göttingen, Germany, in early 2017.

5. Christopher Markiewicz, "The Crisis of Rule in Late Medieval Islam: A Study of Idrīs Bidlīsī (861-926/1457-1520) and Kingship at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century," (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago), 2015, 170-180.

6. Eckmann, J., "The Mamluk-Kipchak Literature," *Central Asiatic Journal* 8 (1963), 310-311.

7. Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* I, fol. 4a; II, fol. 1b.

8. Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* I, fol. 111a.

9. Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* II, fol. 113a.

size. There are seventeen lines per page. Modern pencil foliation in Arabic script numerals has been added to both volumes from the second folio onwards. Catchwords are found in the lower left corner of every other page. The main text of the entire manuscript is written by a single scribe in a rather regular and clear *naskh*. *Thuluth* is used sparingly for the purposes of highlighting, especially at the beginning of both volumes. Most of the text is in black ink, while gold and red inks are used for textual dividers, rubrications and for words written in *thuluth*. The manuscript includes no painted decorations or illustrations. Secondary entries on its first folios indicate that the two volumes were bequeathed to Aya Sofya during the reign of Maḥmūd I (r. 1143-1168/1730-1754).[10]

As with the other works of this small genre, the anonymous author of *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya* organized his work around several topical gatherings (*majālis*): 1) on certain noble questions and the stories of the prophets, 2) on kings and sultans, 3) on the wisdom of the philosophers (*fī ḥikmat al-ḥukamāʾ*), and 4) on the schemes and duplicity of women.[11] The two extant manuscripts only cover the first two topics. While the presentation of these discussions places Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī – his questions, responses, and views – at the center of each subsection, the compiler, on a few occasions, mentions the sultan's interlocutors by name. The participants in the *majālis* occasionally reference authoritative sources, such as al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) or al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Nīsābūrī (d. 406/1015-16), yet, as a whole, the extant parts of the work present a kind of brief universal history of the world from creation up until the reign of Qānṣawh.[12] Accordingly, the noble matters taken up in the beginning of the first section often focus on basic cosmological and cosmographical questions such as whether light preceded dark, but include other basic investigations, such as whether Alexander is the same as Dhūʾl-qarnayn of the Qurʾān and the reason for the seven canonical readings of the Qurʾān.[13] These thorny matters are followed by a recounting of the lives of the prophets from Adam to Muḥammad, while the final folios of this first *majlis* are devoted to the caliphates of the first four caliphs and Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī.[14] The second *majlis* mentions the various kings and sultans who have ruled since the prophets. It begins with the caliphate of Muʿāwīya and the subsequent Umayyads, follows with the Abbasids, briefly mentions the Mamluk sultans of the Baḥrī period (*fī dhikr al-dawla al-turkiyya*), before offering relatively detailed discussions of all of the sultans of the Burjī period beginning with Barqūq (d. 801/1399).

Significantly, the work is a valuable resource for the biography and self-cultivated image of Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī. In a number of asides beginning in the section on the prophet Yūsuf, the compiler offers detailed discussion of the origins and history of the Circassians (*jarkas/jarākisa*) and the early life, career, and reign of

10. See chapter three of Christian Mauder's dissertation (as note 4) for a detailed codicological description of the manuscript and a reconstruction of its history.

11. Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* I, fol. 4a.

12. For mention of al-Ṭabarī, see Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* I, fol. 5a; for al-Nīsābūrī, see I, fol. 12b.

13. On the discussion of light and dark, see Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* I, fol. 4b; on Alexander, see I, fol. 7a; on the canonical readings of the Qurʾān, see I, fol. 8a.

14. Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* I, fols. 8b-66b,

the sultan himself.[15] Such details include the sultan's birth date (848/1444-1445), family background, and adolescence and offer valuable information for historians of the Mamluk period on the life of Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī.[16] Central to the presentation of this biography is the image of Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī as a divinely ordained ruler, the circumstances of whose life from its earliest moments offer parallels with prophets (especially Yūsuf) and indications of future greatness.[17]

In this regard, *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya* offers valuable insights into how al-Ghawrī and those around him sought to legitimize his rule. Noteworthy in this regard are *inter alia* al-Ghawrī's lofty titles enumerated in the introductory section of the work; in addition to forms of address typical for late Mamluk rulers, we find here formulas such as caliph of the Earth, inheritor of the rule of the prophet Yūsuf, commander of the faithful *(amīr al-muʾminīn)* and caliph of the Muslims *(khalīfat al-muslimīn)*.[18] These titles indicate that the author of *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya* – and possibly also al-Ghawrī himself – claimed for the Mamluk ruler a supreme religio-political status. Moreover, *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya* presents Sultan al-Ghawrī as caliph, thus crediting him with – at least juridically – the highest level of authority any Muslim ruler could aspire to. According to present knowledge, this step is without precedent in Mamluk political history and hence deserves intensive further study.[19] Finally, through references to al-Ghawrī as "*imām* of the tenth century" and citation of the prophetic *ḥadīth* on centennial religious renewal (*tajdīd*), *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya* also suggests al-Ghawrī's status as the centennial renewer (*mujaddid*).

These titles – most of which had garnered widespread usage in Timurid, Turkmen, and Ottoman domains over the course of the fifteenth century – as well as the participation of Bidlīsī in similar gatherings in Cairo a few years earlier, suggest the involvement and immersion of Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī's court in an ecumenical Islamicate cultural mode that, in some measure, cut across linguistic and ethnic boundaries. Indeed, the structure of the work reflects a universally recognized and cultivated cultural form, namely, the polite gatherings of refined and learned men, the etiquette and expectations of which were embraced across the lands of Islam. In this regard, further study of this work and related works of its genre promises not only to illuminate of the cultural impulses of late Mamluk Egypt, but to connect such impulses with the broader currents of a clearly discernible Islamicate ecumene in the sixteenth century.

15. On the origins of the Circassians, see Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* I, fol. 34b.

16. See especially, Anonymous, *al-ʿUqūd* II, fols. 51b-111a.

17. Markiewicz, "The Crisis of Rule," 178-179.

18. Anonymous, *ʿUqūd* I, fols. 2a-2b.

19. See chapter five of Christopher Markiewicz's dissertation (as note 5) and chapters five and six of Christian Mauder's dissertation (as note 4) for discussions of the context and the significance of the political and religious claims raised with regard to al-Ghawrī in *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya*.

Conference Report

Sessions on Slavery
The International Medieval Congress
(Leeds, 4-7 July 2016)

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Over the past few years, the International Medieval Congress (IMC), held at Leeds University each July, has grown immensely. Those of us interested in regions outside of Western Europe have found an ever-increasing range of sessions and scholars, coming from the rest of the world, and delving into subjects of Islamic and other non-western fields. The trend is positive, of course, allowing as it does opportunities for useful dialogue and cross-fertilization. It reflects a steady broadening of the range of scholarship being done on medieval topics.

The past few years have seen, specifically, a rapid and profound increase in scholarship surrounding questions of slavery in the medieval world. At the 2015 IMC, the number of papers treating slavery directly seemed to have reached a peak but, as usual in such a large conference, some conflicted directly with each other. Four of us, all scholars of medieval slavery, thought to organize an over-arching series of panels the following year.

The response to the call for papers was unprecedented: the effort resulted in the organization of ten panels on the study of slavery in the medieval world. The sessions took up the greater part of three days, with audiences of between thirty and sixty. One of the benefits of having so many people working on questions of slavery in the same place was that discussions were highly productive with many informed questions and comments in all the sessions.

The first day began with a panel on domestic slavery across time. It featured papers examining the metaphoric use of God as slaveholder in the sermons of Augustine of Hippo (Cassandra Casias, Emory); advice on relations between freeborn and enslaved youths in John Chrysostom (John Martens, St. Thomas); the appearance of slaves in the hagiographic writings of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (Sarah Bogue, Emory); and questions of paternity of children born to slave women in late medieval Florence

(Lynn Laufenberg, Sweet Briar).

The second panel looked at Scandinavian slave-trading. The first speaker (Matthew Delvaux, Boston College) argued that slavery and the slave trade were of greater significance than is usually thought in the Carolingian construction of power ,and that external Viking attack as well as internal social instability subverted Carolingian control of these institutions. The second paper (Daniel Melleno, Denver) discussed the role of the Viking slave trade in cross-cultural contact across northern Europe. The third (Michael Kræmmer, Museum Sydøstdanmark) turned to post-Viking Scandinavia and examined literary sources for slave-taking during the Baltic crusades.

The final panel of the day looked at manumission with papers on Anglo-Saxon processes of manumission at a crossroads (David A. E. Pelteret); the freeing of captives, slaves, and prisoners in the Crusade-era Levant (Aysu Dinçer, University of Warwick); and what it meant to be a slave in the Kingdom of Mallorca in the Thirteenth Century, (Larry J. Simon, Department of History, Western Michigan University). It was an impressive first day. The discussions inspired by the papers made clear that the field of medieval slavery studies has begun to collapse many long-held notions, including the idea that slavery was of only anecdotal importance in post-Roman Christian Europe.

A persistent view, even among scholars, is that slavery in the pre-modern world had a particular association with Islam. The second day of sessions (Wednesday) offered papers looking at slavery in the Medieval Islamic World. The question remains open as to whether the papers succeeded in challenging such a view. Certainly, though, the papers moved the topic substantially forward. The first paper extended Michael McCormick's arguments on the early medieval slave trade by examining Arabic sources that compliment his thesis (Matthew S. Gordon, Miami University); the second paper looked at the religious imperative behind the act of manumission in Islamic law (Cristina de la Puente, Departamento de Estudios Judíos e Islámicos, Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo (CSIC).

The papers of the second session looked at questions regarding the role of slaves in medieval Islamicate households. The first paper considered accounts of slaves (especially elite *ghilmān*) to determine the well-being of even the most privileged of slaves, using violence and peril to life, limb, and physical soundness as a standard of measurement (Deborah Tor, University of Notre Dame). The next paper also looked at elite slaves by focussing on Rasūlid and Najāḥid Yemen and the roles of eunuchs and others and their conflicts with high-status women (Magdalena Kloss, Austrian Academy of Sciences).

The third session of the day extended several of these themes. The first paper provided a look at domestic slavery in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Damascus by analysing names contained in reading certificates (*samāʿāt*) to show that the majority were themselves the first generation of slaves and that the rate of manumission was high (Jan Hagedorn, University of St. Andrews). A second paper took on the famously itinerant household of Ibn Battuta as a case-study in how the lives of slaves might be viewed more broadly (Marina Tolmacheva, Washington State University).

The final session, perhaps the most

focused, looked at concubinage and slavery. The first paper re-examined assumptions regarding the musical performances of enslaved women (Karen Moukheiber, Orient Institut Beirut), the second looked through the prism of medieval erotic literature (Pernilla Myrne, Göteborgs Universitet), and the final paper examined issues of gender, ethnicity, and slavery in the study of music in the medieval Muslim regions (Lisa Nielson, Case Western Reserve University).

Panels on the final day (Thursday) contained quite interesting papers that challenged long-held assumptions regarding medieval slavery. A first paper looked at length at Hungarian historiography on slavery under the Árpád kings (Cameron Sutt, Austin Peay State University). This was followed by a newly developed but extremely innovative discussion of the ethnonym "Slav" and the manner in which it replaced Latin terms inherited from antiquity in West European languages (Marek Jankowiak, University of Oxford). The paper that followed discussed the medieval Russian slave trade and (Russian) exploitation of neighbouring regions (Jukka Korpela, University of Eastern Finland). This was followed by a paper that challenged the 'Whig model' of the history of slavery and questioned whether reading medieval Europe as being free of slavery was mistaking exceptional cases for the normative (Thomas J. MacMaster, Morehouse College).

The final panel concerned the changing role of the unfree in the post-Roman west. A first paper considered the life of Eligius of Noyon and its depictions of the movement of the unfree (Courtney Luckhardt, University of Southern Mississippi). The paper that followed revisited arguments made by economists since the 1970s on the decisions underlying the use of unfree rather than free labour; the suggestion was made that while economic factors were significant, more weight should be given to the variables that acted to render individuals unfree (Judith Spicksley, University of York). The final paper focussed on Bavaria in the high medieval period, arguing that a large slave population remained present there throughout the medieval period (Samuel S. Sutherland, Department of History, Ohio State University).

The strong sense is that the study of slavery in the medieval world – long viewed either as of secondary importance or as largely settled – has taken on new life. Many of the presenters suggested that, in their own particular sub-specialties, the evidence base has barely been scratched and analysis only begun. The origins of this new ferment in the field of slavery studies is not as evident but it is obvious that interest is growing and scholarship expanding.

Conference Report

Regional and Transregional Elites: Connecting the Early Islamic Empire (Universität Hamburg, 7-8 October 2016)

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Website: https://www.islamic-empire.uni-hamburg.de/en/news-and-events/conferences/elite-conference.html

The conference was hosted by the ERC Advanced Grant Project, "The Early Islamic Empire at Work – The View from the Regions Toward the Center," under the direction of Stefan Heidemann. It has now entered its second phase, looking at the conceptualization and functioning of transregional and regional elites. The project is the first systematic attempt to explain the operation of the empire from a regional perspective, that is, by adopting the view from the provinces. It studies how elites, in the provinces and the caliphal center alike, contributed to the organization and management of the early Islamic empire. This regional perspective represents an important alternative to histories written from the perspective of the imperial center. The conference papers examined the myriad roles that regional and transregional elites played in governing the vast early Islamic Empire (7th10-th century CE).

In his introduction, 'Transregional and Regional Elites,' Stefan Heidemann (Hamburg) noted the current lack of any theoretical conceptualization of elites in our field and expressed the hope that the conference might address this shortcoming in scholarship. Heidemann began by offering a working vocabulary: he defined 'elites' as groups of people with an elevated (political, military, judicial, religious and/or economic) status that entitled them to power, wealth, influence, and other notable benefits. The status of

* This report was written with the team of the ERC project "The Early Islamic Empire." The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Program (FP7/2007-2013/ ERC grant agreement no. [340362].

elites depended on conceptions of merit, performance, ethnicity, ancestry, wealth, military prowess, religion, education, social capital, and forms of privilege.

Heidemann's presentation expanded upon the project's distinction between 'regional' and 'transregional' elites. Transregional elites operated across the regions of the empire, as in the case of Arab governors during the Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid period and Khurāsāni generals at the peak of ʿAbbāsid power. Transregional elites were vital for the maintenance of the empire. Regional elites largely were confined to specific provinces, and it was in these regions where their sphere of influence was most visible. Their influence often had pre-Islamic roots. However, there were occasions where regional elites evolved into transregional elites, and vice versa, as in the case of the Aghlabids, whose founder was a (transregional) Khurāsānī Arab commander, who built up a regional dynasty in North Africa/Ifrīqiya. The advantage of the use of these qualifiers over others – such as 'imperial' – is that they are measurable; prosopographical research into the careers of individuals can reveal their movements. A term such as 'imperial elites' is not synonymous with transregional elites, because it is too vague, but may refer to an entitlement by the caliphal administration.

By design, the project puts less emphasis on the important role of religion and ideology in elite formation. Summarising the current research of the group, the introduction further questioned the concept of territoriality of the provinces, except for Iraq and Egypt, and the notion of an imperial capital. Instead it hinted at a layered structure of authority within each province. Considering the projection of power from the imperial center through the appointment of a governor (usually from one of the entitled elites) and the establishment of a loyal garrison, the idea of the capital was dismissed in favour of imperial cities. Heidemann highlighted the exchange of military elites of different geographical and ethnic backgrounds after two to three generations as a feature that set the early Islamic empire apart from the Roman and Sasanian empires, both of which were characterised by a more evolutionary development of their elite structures. Under the Umayyads, for example, the military elite consisted almost entirely of Arabs; and under the ʿAbbāsids this military elite was replaced first by Khurāsānis, who themselves were displaced by Central Asian military elites. The question of military elites in the early Islamic empire was a recurrent theme in the conference papers. This prompted many of the participants to discuss the nature of the *mamlūk* institution and question whether the terminology used to describe them (*mamlūks* as slaves) should give way to new concepts such as bonded military.

Peter Verkinderen and Simon Gundelfinger (Hamburg), "Governors of the Early Islamic Empire – A Comparative Regional Perspective," analyzed the appointments of governors in Fārs and al-Shām on several levels. Due to the lack of a distinct hierarchical terminology in the sources, these individuals were classified using the terms governor, super-governor and sub-governor. Verkinderen and Gundelfinger identified patterns in the backgrounds of these officials that changed over time and noted that these patterns rarely applied in both provinces at the same time. They closed their paper

by highlighting, therefore, the need for a regional approach to the study of elites and government structures.

Fanny Bessard (Bristol), "The Twilight of the Late Antique Clerical and Landowning Elite and the Dawn of a Civilian Bourgeoisie," highlighted the shift from a pre-Islamic landowning elite to an urban landowning merchant elite (*tujjār*). She dates the emergence of this new elite to the beginning of the ninth century, when they began taking up government functions and developing a class consciousness. The discussion raised the question of overlapping or layered identities: were merchants also *ḥadīth* transmitters, land holders, etc.? A related question is whether the apparent rise of an urban merchant class might be related to the changing emphasis of the primary sources, and a shift in stress on the layers of identity. Finally, Bessard's presentation raised questions about whether the notion of a bourgeoisie serves as a useful heuristic for locating the rise of merchant elites in early Islamic society.

Amikam Elad (Jerusalem), "Preliminary Notes on the Term and Institution of al-Shākiriyya in Early Islam," addressed the problem of terminology in Arabic sources as it relates to the case of the *shākiriyya*. In a close examination of references to the *shākiriyya* in primary sources up to the reign of al-Mảmūn, he challenged current scholarship on the term. His view is that the term denotes different groups in varying contexts. Sometimes, '*shākiriyya*' refers to a group of people with a military character (as armed guards or as a fighting force on the battle field). In other contexts, no military connection is apparent, and the *shākiriyya* in question appeared to be simply servants or devoted followers. A certain link with Khurāsāni/Central-Asian practices seemed apparent, but Elad stressed how both an institution and the meaning of its name can change once they are transplanted to another context. The discussion raised, not for the last time during the conference, the question of military slavery and the tension between slave and elite status.

Cyrille Aillet (Lyon), "Connecting the Ibadi Network in North Africa with the Empire," focused on the Ibāḍī imamate of the Rustumids in Tahart and its economic and other connections with the rest of the Empire, especially Iraq. He noted how the Ibāḍī Rustumids drew on their alleged 'eastern' Persian heritage in an effort to create common ground with their Berber supporters against the rule of the 'Arab' ʿAbbāsids.

Petra Sijpesteijn (Leiden), "Establishing Local Elite Authority in Egypt Through Arbitration and Mediation," used Egyptian papyri to draw attention to jurisprudential matters in the period from the Arab/Muslim conquests through the early ʿAbbāsid period. She concluded that, on a local level, arbitration and mediation was sought from bishops, Islamic governors, and *qāḍīs* alike, regardless of the religion of the petitioner. Hence, it was via the authority of arbitration itself that local elite status was created and affirmed. Arbitration thus became an important tool for elites to maintain their standing even as their formal administrative authority declined. This can be seen first and foremost with Christian elites, who were gradually pushed out of administrative functions by the Arabs, and, in turn, during the early ʿAbbāsid period, with the replacement of the Arabs by Central Asians.

Yaacov Lev (Ramat Gan, Israel), addressed "The Civilian Ruling Elite of the Tulunid-Ikhshidid Period," in a first foray into contemporary terminology for elites. Among the most important sources he identified for ninth and tenth-century Egypt were the works by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (789-871), al-Kindī (897-961), and Ibn Yūnis (894-958), as well as the significantly later writings of al-Maqrīzī. Lev dealt with such terms as *aṣnāf*, *ʿawwām*, *ahl* (*al-dawla*) and *wujūh* (*al-dawla*), and their applications.

Matthew Gordon (Oxford, OH/Beirut), "Samarran Politics and the Abbasid provinces," set the career of Ahmad ibn Ṭūlūn in the context of what he termed 'Samarran politics.' Ibn Ṭūlūn conducted himself very much in the manner of his peers in the Samarran military elite, at the heart of whose efforts lay twin goals: the security of lucrative interests, including authority over appointments to Egypt, and an upper hand over the Abbasid court in Sāmarrāʾ. It is this combination that defined 'Samarran politics' at the provincial level, on the part of Ibn Ṭūlūn but other ranking members of the Turkic/ Central Asian military as well. As Gordon put it, Ibn Ṭūlūn "overplayed his hand" in trying to balance his interest in Sāmarrāʾ and his own powerbase in Syria and Egypt, until he became an enemy of al-Muwaffaq and his successors.

Philip Wood (London), "Christian Elite Networks in the Jazira, c.730-850," opened with a definition of aristocracy by Chris Wickham as individuals and groups possessing memory of ancestry, land, office, lifestyle, mutual recognition, and proximity to royal patronage. Wood considered the bishops of the Syrian Orthodox Church (the 'Jacobites') in the Jazīra as aristocratic elites. His main source was the chronicle of Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē (mid-9th century CE), whom he characterized as no less a patronage-seeking aristocrat than a cleric and patriarch. He postulated an 'Indian summer' of the late Roman Christian aristocracy between 580 to 720 CE, displayed among others by the building of churches and monasteries. Churchmen received diplomas for raising taxes, making them compliant in justifying the new Islamic rule as legitimate. However, the rise of the Islamic Empire also resulted in the disempowerment of Christian laymen, who were largely excluded from joining the army, and whose Syriac education was temporarily devalued by the increasing Arabization of the administration. The growing administrative apparatus and taxation in the Jazīra in the early ʿAbbāsid period curtailed some of the privileges enjoyed by wealthy Christian (ecclesiastical) elites. The period also witnessed increased caliphal involvement in church affairs and the election of bishops and patriarchs. Comments raised in the discussion compared the Jazīran bishops with the local aristocracy in other regions of the empire, including the *dihqāns* and the Bukhārān Bukhārkhudās.

Hannah-Lena Hagemann (Hamburg), "Muslim Elites in the Early Islamic Jazīra: The *qāḍīs* of Ḥarrān, al-Raqqa, and al-Mawṣil," argued that while information about governors in Jazīran cities is rather sketchy, the *qāḍīs* of the province are much better documented. Clear local differences were visible in the composition and dynamics of the juridical elite of the three cities used as case studies. The judges of Ḥarrān were a local elite having a local power base and

thus being significantly independent on patronage from the imperial court. The *qāḍīs* of al-Raqqa, on the other hand, mostly represented a transregional elite. They served in the caliphal residence city under Hārūn al-Rashīd, and later al-Raqqa became the administrative center of the western empire. The standing of judges in al-Mawṣil combined features of a regional elite with those of transregional incumbents. Affiliation with Arab tribes and involvement in *ḥadīth* transmission were the defining features of almost all *qāḍīs* examined in the paper.

Alison Vacca (Knoxville), "ʿAbbāsid Governors of the South Caucasus and Central Asia," utilized Armenian and Arabic sources in locating Armenia's position within the multilayered provincial structure of the empire. She also evaluated the movement of Khurāsāni elites in Armenian politics. A familiar pattern emerged in her presentation of a layered structure of the provincial region and the occasional projection of power from the caliphal center via garrisons. In Tbilisi, a Muslim elite emerged that was apparently not interested in royal patronage, but nevertheless was a part of the caliphal umbrella state.

Hugh Kennedy (London), "Creating an Imperial Elite: al-Manṣūr and the Formation of the Early ʿAbbāsid Ruling Class," took up the original question of the empire's (ex-)changing elites with a discussion of al-Manṣūr's creation of Khurāsāni military elite. He observed that in the early ʿAbbāsid caliphate, the inner core provinces, such as ʿIrāq, the Jazīra, and Syria, were reserved for members of theʿAbbāsid family, while the newly created class of *quwwād* went to the militarily threatened frontiers, Ifrīqiya, Armīniya, and Khurāsān. As an imperial elite, these men were geographically mobile, returning to Baghdad after their assignment, before again receiving provincial appointments. Their status was almost hereditary. Their leaders, such as Khuzayma b. Khāzim, served their retainers as conduits of royal patronage and influence. This newly created ʿAbbāsid elite of *quwwād* lasted at most three generations.

Noëmie Lucas (Paris), "Landowners in Lower-Iraq during the 8th century: Types and Interplays" analyzed social shifts in the landholding class of lower Iraq. The paper defined a number of types of landowners (local Jewish and Christian landowners alongside regional and trans-regional land-owners), and looked into the advancing concentration of land in the hands of large landowners, often members of the Baghdādi elite and ʿAbbāsid family members, at the expense of small, local landowners. In some cases, the process of transregional elites going regional can be observed. Lucas discussed the interactions between different types of landowning elites in regards to acquisition of land by purchase and protection, and conflicts over land and water. The discussion shifted to the nature of the local landowners and the maintenance of the irrigation system.

Jürgen Paul (Halle), "Who Were the *Mulūk Fārs*?," looked into a section of the elite that is usually difficult to pin down in the available sources: local lords in Iran. Using al-Iṣṭakhrī's discussion of the *mulūk Fārs* as a starting point, he laid out the characteristics of this class. As a case study, he presented the (Arab) family of Muḥammad ibn Wāṣil, who had moved to Fārs and had become part of the regional land-holding elite. Paul also corrected the

image of Ibn Wāṣil himself in the literature: he was not an adventurer, much less a Khārijite rebel, but a regional player who only aspired political power and patronage when his interests were threatened during the period of chaos in Sāmarrā.

Ahmad Khan (Hamburg), "Elites and Empire in Khurāsān: The View From the Archives," looked at documents from a family archive in southern Tukharistān from the time of al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī. Khan used these documents to construct a taxonomy of elites in the province of Khurāsān (from landowning elites to state officials). Despite almost all of these state officials being absent from the literary and historical sources, Khan argued that this small cache of documentary sources sheds light on exactly who administered the early Islamic empire in the province of Khurāsān and what their precise functions were. Above all, these documentary records exhibit the smooth and successful interaction between landowning elites in Khurāsān and provincial administrative elites. Finally, Khan examined how the circulation of money (*nafaqāt*) from the province to the imperial household of the caliph represented one important instance of how local tax paying elites were connected to the fortunes of the empire's supreme elites: the caliph and his imperial household.

Luke Treadwell (Oxford), "Muṭṭawwiʿī and Mamlūk: Military Elites in Samanid Central Asia and Beyond," treated the case of the Sāmānids, a family that emerged as a regional elite already in 205/820, when al-Mảmūn moved to Baghdād. In striking contrast to the Ṭūlūnids in Egypt, the Sāmānids never strove for caliphal patronage or positions at court. Just the opposite: when they became actual rulers of Transoxiana and Khurāsān, their geographical outlook differed tremendously from that of the ʿAbbāsid empire. They were focused north toward the steppes, and even their commercial enterprise reached via the Volga to the Baltic Sea. One reason for their seemingly atypical behavior might be that they were content with their status, viewing themselves almost as equals of the ʿAbbāsids, without challenging their position in Baghdād nor "stepping on their carpet" as clients.

The roundtable discussion that followed highlighted the importance of the conference in studying the provinces of the empire individually and within a comparative perspective. Studying a particular province in isolation carries with it the risk of neglecting how developments in one province affected other provinces, and broader patterns of imperial rule. An integrative approach promises insights into the structures and administration of the empire, especially as we deal with layered structures of authority in each province. This, in turn, brings into focus the role of elites and how their character and function varied from province to province. The roundtable closed with remarks about important research gaps in scholarship on early Islamic history. Questions of group formation and the identity of elites (as regards ethnicity, military assignments, economic patterns, landowning, and religious affiliations) have yet to be addressed comprehensively in our field.

The terminology currently employed to describe military elites and forms of service requires further deliberation. As one example, '*mamlūk*s' as 'slaves' is misleading because *mamlūk* denotes

a variety of forms of bonded labour and military and contractual service. The notion of elites, too, is still a poorly theorized one in the field of Islamic history, and the participants offered original perspectives on how the results of this conference could be placed in conversation with scholarship on elites in other empires and societies. We hope that the forthcoming conference volume will be an important first step towards addressing many of these questions and pioneering new research into elites in the early Islamic empire.

Conference Report

A Moveable Feast: "Food as a Cultural Signifier" (American University of Beirut, 12-14 May 2016)

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The American University of Beirut and its entire community were treated to an extraordinary feast on the occasion of the recent interdisciplinary conference "Insatiable Appetite: Food as a Cultural Signifier" held at AUB on May 12-14, 2016. The conference was a project of the Arab German Young Academy (AGYA) working group "Common Heritage and Common Challenges" in cooperation with the AUB and German Orient Institut. It was organized by Kirill Dmitriev (University of St Andrews), Julia Hauser (University of Kassel), and Bilal Orfali (American University of Beirut). The conference brought together researchers from several countries working in a variety of fields, such as Literature, Sociology, Psychology, History, Philosophy and Religious studies. They came to discuss the cultural traditions of food in the Mediterranean region, and to enjoy the celebrated delicious Lebanese cuisine, but they were also offered a dinner of specially prepared authentic dishes from the Abbasid period in Baghdad. Furthermore, they were treated to a day long *riḥla* to the Beqaa and a boat-trip on Qaraoun lake.

In all the presentations, a fine balance was achieved between historical and contemporary traditions, just as between theoretical aspects of the theme and its practical manifestations. A good measure of humor enlivened the discussions, although the scholarship itself was indeed serious and proved that the topic of food deserves a place of honor at the academic table. The conference demonstrated to what extent traditions surrounding food permit the exchange of enduring human values across national, religious, ethnic as well as class boundaries. An aspect of existence that is renewed each day, the cultural significance of food is often underestimated, unless it is lacking, when suddenly it is recognized as essential to both physical and social life.

The conference opened with a session entitled, "Food and Social Status" where Brigitte Caland (American University of

Beirut) presented a panoramic view of the significance of food among the rich and powerful from Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman times to that of the Abbasid period and beyond. Ms. Caland explained that abundant food was offered to the Gods and food was often featured in stories about them, as in the Gilgamesh epic. The Gods drank wine and used food the way humans do, as a means to acheive a desired goal. The Gods were served roast meats to keep them "happy"and favorable to mankind. Even the staples of bread and beer helped in the planning of projects.

As Ms. Caland noted, food and lavish festivities were used by monarchs and sundry elites as a means to celebrate important events such as weddings, military victories, architectural projects or the visits of dignitaries. But they were also used to project their own importance and guarantee their hegemony, at least among the upper classes. She cited examples of Sargon and other Akkadian rulers whose extravant banquets were able to feed thousands for several days. But she also explained that the ceremony of serving and consuming food became an essential social and political occasion for holding high-level commercial exchanges. And such occasions also favored the exchange of ideas and nourished various intellectual movements. Through these culinary occasions, food became instrumental in defining and demarcating civilized society. Indeed, it seems that the culture of food was a powerful source of spectacle and symbolism for royalty that rivaled that of other signs of wealth, perhaps because it also involved the virtues of hospitality and generosity.

In a talk entitled "The Ritualization of Food and Table-Talk in Arabic Traditions," Nuha Al-Shaar (American University of Sharjah) described the protocol surrounding banquet culture in the pre-Islamic and medieval Arabic periods. She affirmed that the rituals relating to meals were expressions of wealth and social standing, but the banquet table was also a space of literary expression. Descriptions of rituals relating to food have appeared in many Arabic literary sources, notably in the work of al-Jāḥiẓ, but also al-Tawḥīdī, Ibn Qutayba and Abu Nuwas. The *adāb al-māʾida* turned the banquet table into a transformative social event, a means to strengthen social and political bonds, but also a way to develop individual intellectual and ethical refinement through the lively exchange of ideas and concrete examples of such values as hospitality.

The question of abundance and scarcity as well as that of excess and restraint were at the center of banquet protocol, which can be seen in the frequent criticism of greed in relation to eating, a trait seemingly tied to a host of moral attributes that have social and political implications. Describing the ancient Persian kings, Ms. Al-Shaar explained that they excluded greedy persons from their gatherings, and believed that overeating lowered intelligence, hardened the heart, and made one vulnerable to disease. By contrast, hospitality included the laudable virtue of generosity, expressed succinctly by al-Jāḥiẓ in the phrase, "Put others before yourself."

In his presentation entitled "Social Dining, Banqueting and the Cultivation of a Coherent Social Identity: Damascene ʿUlamå in the Late Mamluk/Early Ottoman Period," Tarek Abu Hussein (Harvard University) explained that social dining

Conference participants at the American University of Beirut, May 2016.
(Photo courtesy of Bilal Orfali)

and banquets were forums for the scholarly elite to shape for itself a privileged identity, one that set it apart from other social classes. Despite the general paucity of sources on the period, Ibn Ṭūlūn wrote numerous works across several fields of scholarship, some of which speak of food, notably figs and fava beans, and which also tell us about the codes of etiquette of social dining in that era. The intellectual elite disdained the ostentatious gatherings of the merely wealthy, and used their own banquets as occasions for gaining political favor.

A second source, Badr al-Dīn al-Ghazzī, wrote primarily about what *not* to do at banquets, such as to offer food to servants, be over-eager, spit, scratch, grab bread and hoard it, stare at others' food, remain silent, or speak of vulgar subjects. The guests were obliged to yield to the host's desire to please them even if they were fasting. The host's obligations included doing whatever necessary to satisfy guests, maintaining a cheerful disposition, not being miserly with food, and not distracting guests with conversation that prevents them from eating. The manuals make clear that dining was not a simple, nor even 'natural' affair, but an elaborate, highly coded event in which no less than one's entire social reputation was at stake.

In his paper entitled "Food and Politics: Poltical Banquet Culture in Berlin in the 1920s and 30s," Norman Domeier (University of Stuttgart) described how the consumption of food functioned as an integral part of political culture, especially during the rise of Fascism. Recently opened archives have revealed the elaborate banquets of the German Press Club, which hosted international journalists for the "protection of common interests." The ultimate event was the Foreign Press Ball, which was attended by politicians, religious authorities, and "fat

cats," and served as a forum for political propaganda. As Mr. Domeier explained, the Ball featured a French menu, and encouraged the lavish consumption of luxury goods such as alcohol and cigarettes, as well as dancing as a kind of remedy for excess. The Ball was mediatized in photos where famous people could be observed, and often satirized as well. When Brünig stepped down in 1932, Goebbels expressed relief and excoriated the decadence of the Ball at a time of economic hardship. As Mr. Domeier clearly demonstrated, the culture of food must be examined as an integral part of social and political history.

In a paper entitled, "Peeling Onions, Layer by Layer," Yasmin Amin (University of Exeter) discussed the diverse functions and often contradictory meanings associated with onions and garlic since ancient times. In Egypt, garlic was believed to stimulate breathing in mummies, cure toothaches, and was found in Tutankhamun's tomb. The Israelites remembered it fondly after the exodus, and soldiers and pyramid builders were thought to be strengthened by it. Egyptians believed onions and garlic were gifts of God, and they were placed in infants' rooms to ward off the evil spirits. The Prophet is said to have eaten onions at his last meal, and to have advised people to eat onions when arriving in a new country to fend off its diseases. Garlic and onions were supposed to reduce phlegm and fever and increase sperm count, and in both Indian and Arabic treatises, were used in recipes for sexual potency.

But if garlic and onions were reputed to have remarkable benefits, they also inspired harsh criticism and even disgust for the effects of eating them raw, for they were associated with flatulence and bad breath. After Galen's *Kitāb* was translated in the 8th century, the science of "dietetics" examined their positive and negative benefits, and found that they had anti-bacterial properties and could be used to induce fever, cure ear and eye infections, aid in contraception, and even protect against epidemics. But according to codes of the *ẓurafāʾ*, they were socially inadmissible. Nonetheless, their positive attributes seem to have outnumbered the negative ones, as we see from the Egyptian proverb, "An onion offered out of love is worth a sheep."

In the session "Prohibitions and Prescriptions I," Karen Moukheiber (American University of Beirut) presented a paper entitled, "Beyond Halal: The Do's and Don'ts of Islamic Cookery in Urban Medieval Syria." In it she described the careful oversight and detailed attention paid to the preparation and sale of food, according to a 12th century *ḥisba* manual by Shayrazī, which introduced elaborate rules for the urban marketplace. Besides basic religious prescriptions and proscriptions, it provides a number of other instructions to guarantee hygiene and convenience that reflect a sophisticated sense of urban culture and its sensitivities. It stipulates the spatial organization of the different merchants, the ways in which they could display their produce, and asks that the daily delivery of materials such as flour be sufficient to provide bread for the community. It also says that food should be available on the roads outside the city for travelers. Their regulations for cleanliness were demanding, as were the rules for the use of utensils, but Ms. Moukheiber showed clearly that the purpose of the manual went far "beyond Halal," to contribute to the building of a society of

mutual respect and civility.

In the session entitled "Prohibitions and Prescriptions II," Mariam al-Attar (American University of Sharjah) presented a paper on "Food Ethics: The Debate over the Permissibility of Genetically Modified Food (GMO) in Contemporary Muslim Juridical Ethics." As she explained, the issue is controversial, but particularly challenging for Muslim cultures because the topic has not yet had the open public debate that it has in Europe and the U.S. Many believe that modified food is Halal, asssuming that the modification does not incurr any deleterious effects. Ms. Attar raised the question of whether political power may simply hand the matter over to religious authorities to decide. She also explained that certain profit-seeking corporations such as Monsanto exert undue pressure on the debate, and on the market as well, and that their farming practices may even contribute to food scarcity as well as unhealthy produce. But she emphasized that Muslims need to become more informed about the advantages and disadvantages of GMO food in order to make rational rather than purely law-based decisions about it.

The conditions of certification of Halal food was the subject of Shaheed Tayob's (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen) presentation, "Theoretical Reflections on Halal Food," which described how globalization and modern technology have complicated the process of certification. He mentioned the fact that the traditional trust that prevailed between communities and known individual authorities has become increasingly decentered, so that methods of certification may vary considerably between regions, just as between religious and ethnic groups. Intermediary factors such as transportation and storage may also affect Halal food. He also raised questions about the commercialization of the process and asked whether extra conditions of certification were always reasonable or based on selfish motives. And he raised local issues such as Lebanon's food crisis and the problem of corruption which naturally affects the conditions of certification. He made it clear that certification of Halal food has become so complex and diversified that its conditions are no longer governed by religious criteria alone.

In a session entitled "The Body," Christian Junge (University of Marburg) presented a paper entitled, "Food, Body, Society: Al-Shidyāq's 'Somatic Critique' of 19th Century Modernities." He analyzed Shidyāq's complex critique of European modernity and those aspects of Arabic modernity which sought to adopt 'distasteful' features of European culture. Mr. Junge explained that Shidyāq targets the reformists who would reduce Arabic to a language of utility, denying its extraordinary poetic and emotional power. Shidyāq celebrates the sensual pleasure of the Arabic language as he also celebrates the feminine in Arabic culture against the hegemony of masculine Islamic authorities. Mr. Junge described the way Shidyāq identifies the consumption of food with the physical and imaginative pleasures of using language, which were enjoyed as he moved from culture to culture and meal to meal around the Mediterranean, where he also critiqued the speech and table manners of foreigners. Mr. Junge presented the often paradoxical aspects of the text, suggesting that the reader must tread carefully, because Shidyāq

is a great ironist.

In her presentation, "Trapped in Eternal Servitude? Chocolate as a Racial Signifier and the Case of the German 'Sarotti Mohr'," Silke Hackenesch (University of Kassel) described the marketing of chocolate, a lucrative colonial product like coffee, in commercials featuring young black and brown-skinned men figured as signs of luxury and cosmopolitanism. As Ms. Hackenesch explained, racism as well as orientalism were common in German art of the 18th and 19th centuries, but Germany's humiliating defeat in World War I caused her to turn toward her African colonies. Ms. Hackenesch emphasized the paradox of the men who labored under punishing conditions in the tropics to produce the commodity of chocolate, and then were used as commodities to be consumed in advertisements that evoked a life of luxury they never knew. Ms. Hackenesch explained that these images were marketed especially to women and children, as if sweets, like illusions, were for the weak, when in fact it seems clear that Germany's need for illusions of purity and grandeur under Fascism was a sign of her own dependency which caused her to insist on an exaggerated distinction between herself and her "dark-skinned Others."

For the keynote lecture at the Orient-Institut, Eric Dursteier (Brigham Young University) presented a paper entitled "The 'Abominable Pig' and the 'Mother of All Vices': Pork, Wine, and Culinary Encounters in the Early Modern Mediterranean." He cautioned against the tendency to exaggerate differences in food consumption among different religious groups throughout in the Mediterraean, but spoke primarily about the Iberian Peninsula. He focused on the example of pork and wine among Moriscos in the 16th century, explaining that although the Spanish Inquisition had a vested interest in establishing firm distinctions between groups, in fact, the realities were much more complex, and many Muslims sincerely embraced the Christian faith and Christian habits. Some refrained from consuming pork simply out of distaste for it or because they were raised otherwise. In any case, consumption of meat decreased among all groups in that period, and Christians ate less pork and shifted from using pork lard to olive oil. And some Christians refrained from pork out of sympathy for Muslims, as did Copts and Melkites elsewhere. The Iberian Peninsula was the intersection of many cultures, a mingling of Christian, Arabic, Berber, African and New World traditions, and the various groups shared many of the same eating habits. Mr. Domeier's paper proved that while political or religious authorities often seek to emphasize differences between people, the culture of food serves to connect them.

In the session on "Intoxication," Bilal Orfali (American University of Beirut) presented a paper entitled "Wine and Humanism in Early Islam." He began by alluding to the ambiguous status of wine in Islam, which precludes any simple answer to the question of whether or not it is prohibited. It is often assumed to be so, but wine flows in the rivers of paradise, and references in the Qurʾān and Arabic poetry are often ambiguous. Mr. Orfali introduced the perspective of Islamic humanists such as the Moroccan Mohammed Arkoun and the Iranian ʿAbd al-Karim Soroush, who have encouraged the consideration of historical and contextual factors in understanding religious questions.

As Mr. Orfali explained, wine's status in Islam ranges from being an object of scorn to being seen as the agent of mystical epiphanies. How we understand the status of wine depends on how it is defined in relation to the varied contexts of Islamic cultural history. The Arabic word for wine, *khamr,* was derived from the Aramaic, and is both masculine and feminine. The verb means to cover, but also to ferment. Like the noun *sakar,* it causes intoxication, which can be seen also as a 'covering' of the mind or obscuring of clear vision. While in the Qurʾān it appears at moments 'good' and at others 'dangerous,' in the prophetic texts its consumption is generally condemned, as are activities related to it, such as pressing, mixing, selling and serving it. It must be shunned in relation to prayer or religious rites, and it may be counted among the serious sins (*kabāʾir)*, probably because it was believed that wine clouds the mind and lowers resistance to temptation. As Mr. Orfali explained, there are rules which apply to the *Ahl al-kitāb,* and others to the *Dhimmī,* as well as special conditions of necessity, such as extreme thirst or medical need.

References to wine abound in historical texts and the *Sīra* where it may be perceived negatively, but is rarely condemned outright. In *Ayyām al-ʿArab,* wine was often served to celebrate success in battle, and Arabs were exposed to the habits of many non-Muslim kings of surrounding states who drank wine. In pre-Islamic poetry, wine was common, but it also continued to figure prominently afterwards. It appeared in classical *qaṣīda*s with themes of *madīḥ, hijāʾ* and *ḥikma*, and then developed into a genre of its own, *al-khamriyya,* made famous by such poets as Abū Nuwās who extended the topic to include the tavern, the beauty of the wine-pourer, the senuous properties of the wine and its symbolism.

Finally, Mr. Orfali described what might be termed the positive functions of wine in relation to eroticism, love, and spirituality. In hedonistic poets of the *ghazal*, such as ʿUmar b. Abī Rabīʿa, wine was equated with women and the mesmerizing effect of their charms, but it was also part of a new urban culture that celebrated pleasure. In mystical poetry, wine has a long tradition, especially in the work of Sufi poets such as Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ, where the intoxication of wine is associated with becoming free of the self to embrace divine love and wisdom. In relation to both love poetry and mysticism, wine offers access to ecstatic states of being, providing a marked contrast to the notion of wine as *miftaḥ kull sharr*, and confirming Mr. Orfali's opening assertion that it is impossible to define precisely the status of wine in Islam.

Danilo Marino (INALCO, Paris) presented a paper entitled, "Food and Hashish in Mamlūk Literature" in which he described the ambiguous status of hashish which was seen as a dangerous social indulgence but also a substance that inspires extraordinary visions.

Referring to Ibn Sūdūn's *Nuzhat al-nufūs*, Mr. Marino explained that most literary accounts of food tended to be humorous, and often expressed joy in times of scarcity, which he affirmed can also be found in European literature of the early Renaissance. He observed that this sort of paradox was especially evident when associated with the consumption of hashish. In his discussion of al-Badrī's 9th century anthology, *Kitāb rāḥat al-arwāḥ fī al-ḥashīsh wa-al-rāḥ*, he recounted an anecdote about a man addicted to hashish,

The dessert table at the conference banquet. (Photo courtesy of Bilal Orfali)

who, on hearing a voice telling him to do so, offers hashish to his brother, and than has elaborate dreams of an edible paradise, with a castle made entirely of confectionary delights, a sort of parody of the Islamic *janna.* When he asked for the owner of the castle, a voice told him that it was a reward for his generosity to his brother, whereupon he composed a poem. For most cultures, dreams express hidden desires, and are highly charged symbolically as is the food in them. As Mr. Marino explained, dreams of sweets connote joy and good luck and they are craved by those addicted to drugs like hashish. And the desire for food and sweets

"As Mr. Marino explained, dreams of sweets connote joy and good luck..."

(as well as sex) are the most powerful. But dreaming of a castle connotes anxiety and death, and is but a corrupted image of the pleasures of paradise.

Food was often figured in popular European literature after the 14th century. Mr. Marino described a text entitled "The Land of Cockaine" in which a vision of a paradise on earth is characterized as a realm where no effort was needed to satisfy desire, food lept into mouths, wealth was communally shared, sex was free, work forbidden and life eternal. It had fountains of gold, rivers of milk, houses made of pancakes, pies growing on trees, and roasted chickens running around with forks in them. As parodic as this exorbitant vision may seem, Mr. Marino explained that such images expressed a fear of death in times of extreme scarcity. Hence he concluded that hashish is closely associated with dreaming, and the discourse on hashish is divided between those who believe that it enhances creativity and imagination, and those like Ibn Taymiyya who see it as a dangerous substance that leads to an escape from reality and the loss of rational control.

In the session on "Abstention," Pedro Martins (University of Göttingen) presented a paper entitled "An Ontological Dispute in the Writings of Porphyry of Tyre: Discussions on Meat-Eating as a Battlefield for Different World-Views in Antiquity." Using a comparative study of ancient cultures, Porphyry builds an

ontological as well as ethical argument for becoming vegetarian. Mr. Martins affirmed that Porphyry's comparative study of cultures reflected his desire to interpolate between cultures of East and West. Raising the complex question of justice, he differentiates between two groups of traditions, notably those emphasizing hierarchy and clear distinctions in the tradition of Aristotle and the Stoics on the one hand, and those in the tradition of Pythagoras and the Neo-Platonists on the other. He gave examples from ancient cultures which ask us to question the idealized vision of classical Greek culture, where communal consumption may have been linked to an ethical decline. He explained that in Egyptian, Jewish, Minoan, Phoenician and Persian cultures, varying degrees of vegetarianism were intimately linked with their theories of the soul and often with non-violence. Some Eastern cultures sacrificed animals but refrained from eating them. If one considers all living things as having a similar soul, then one presumably cannot condone violence against animals, for they participate, albeit to a lesser degree than humans, in the sacred unity of being. If, on the other hand, one believes that the intelligent human soul is wholly distinct from that of other beings, then arguably animals may be used to nourish it. Interestingly, a certain paradox emerged relating to the question of justice and boundaries: the vegetarian traditions extend ontological boundaries to embrace all beings, but at the same time set ethical boundaries in advocating abstentionism.

Speaking on "Veganism and the Ethics of Medieval Authorship in Ma'arri's Personal Correspondance," Kevin Blankinship (University of Chicago) began by citing Walace Stevens' poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" to introduce the ways in which judgment is affected by differences in perception. Mr. Blankinship analyzed the correspondance between the blind poet al-Maʿarrī, living in Northern Syria, and al-Shīrāzī, an official state missionary in Fatimid Cairo, where Shiism (Ismaïlism) prevailed. Their exchange addressed questions of ethics and even theology, but Mr. Blankinship also saw in them implications for good governance. The document was already at least one or two removes from the actual exchange, but understanding the debate depends to some degree on a philological or literary interpretation. Al-Maʿarrī seems to argue for vegetarianism (and later veganism) based on his vision of the cyclical process of life and death, whereby the soul may be reborn in another species. Similar to that of certain Hindu precepts, al-Maʿarrī's is a rational argument based on respect for the continuity of being and argues against sharp hierarchical distinctions. His description of a mother sheep weeping at the loss of her lamb is an anthropomorphical and poetic image that invests animals with feelings similar to humans. As Mr. Blankinship explained, while it is very likely that al-Maʿarrī believed that veganism was part of an ethical committment that had ontological and perhaps political implications, we do not know precisely how this vision affected his notion of personal identity, except that we may presume that it differed from one that places man at the pinnacle of God's creation.

Julia Hauser (University of Kassel) presented a paper entitled, "Between Universalism and Exclusion: German and British advocates of Vegetarianism in

the Ottoman Empire and Egypt." In it she addressed the issue of Western narratives of modernity which tended to attribute positive aspects of modernity observed in the East to the influence of European culture, and to characterize the Oriental as an emotional being in contrast to the rational European. These narratives emphasize differences and boundaries between Europe and its others. A vegetarian organization in Prussia reported on eating habits in Ottoman Cairo, finding that meat was rare, but the report looked only at lower classes. The report was interested in the effects of meat abstention on health and physical strength, to find evidence that would suggest that Europeans could benefit from such a diet.

As Ms. Hauser explained, the report romanticized the constraints on food, on the one hand, but on the other, focused exclusively on health reasons and ignored the possibility of a different cosmology as a reason for abstention. Such ideas must have been widely known, however, because Britain had been familiar with Hinduism and the French with Sufism through their colonial experience. Yet in contrast to those beliefs, for whom non-violence and abstention were related to their vision of the cosmos and the continuity of being, as Ms. Hauser explained, the Germans' choice to abstain from eating meat was not inspired by a special affection for animals. An acknowledgement of the "the animal within" us might prompt a recognition of the many traits we share with animals and thus stimulate compassion, although the European's need to perceive himself as a supremely "rational being" might well hinder it.

In the session on "Scarcity and Humanitarianism," Lola Wilhem (The Graduate Institute, Geneva) spoke about "Local Histories of International Food Aid," emphasizing the contradictory effects of aid programs. She explained that we can look at the realities of hunger and starvation as in some ways natural phenomena, whereas humanitarian aid introduces an 'abnormal' or artificial situation which itself has consequences that are not always propitious. Ms. Willhelm affirmed that food aid has both a colonial and postcolonial history. In the 19th century positivist theories claimed that science could solve most of the world's social problems, and these ideas engendered experiments in social engineering. In the 20th century industrialized nations have sought to project their influence by means of humanitarian assistance such as food aid and this has included corporate as well as philanthropic donors. After WWII, Europe was rapidly rebuilt, but most of the "third world" lagged behind in development, even after decolonization. The FAO was founded in 1943 and the World Food Program started in 1963, intending to use the surplus markets of the U.S., Canada and Argentina to feed countries in need. But as Ms. Willhelm explained, the priorities and the development pathways of different nations varied, some supporting industrial development, as in the Maghreb and the Middle East, while others favored agriculture, as in some of the French African colonies, which seem to have been more successful. In addition, food aid programs, as all aid programs, are often subject to corruption, partly because they operate in countries where there is not always respect for the rule of law, but also because corporations in donor countries want to market their own products abroad even if they are not the most appropriate

for the situation at hand.

In her paper entitled, "Displacement, Food and Mealtimes: Syrian Refugees and Changing Food Regimes," Reem Maghribi (Sharq for Citizen Development) explained that bottom-up accounts of history, such as those based on oral history, are more accurate than other official accounts. Speaking of her work with Syrian refugees in urban and rural camps in Lebanon, she described the challenges they face as displaced people. Besides the difficulties for those who seek to obtain residency in Lebanon, they are constrained by the security in place to identify extremists, and fear harassment. When they can find work, they often work long hours in fields harvesting crops they cannot afford, and frequently are mistreated as well.

Against this vision of privation and suffering, Ms. Maghribi described her project to bring together refugees and their traditions from various regions of Syria in order to alleviate their isolation through the preparation and sharing of meals. She explained that they are able to exchange both memories and recipes and invent new ones, when certain ingredients are unavailable. And the interest in Syrian food in Lebanon, sometimes called "Lebanese" at first, can be an opportunity for business as well. Even men cook at these gatherings. Her project has proven that food can indeed be a language of peace.

In his paper, "Some Eat to Remember, Some to Forget," Taylor Brand (American University of Sharjah) described the way food functioned symbolically during the hardships of WWI, when staples were frequently unavailable, and when there were also periods of famine. Despite the shift in the orientation of research to psychological effects of the deprivations of war, Mr. Brand explained that information on details of daily experiences of war were scarce. Food choices were intimately linked to one's sense of identity and well-being, even one's social standing. The critical shortages of food caused a reconfiguring of priorities and values, not merely for physical survival, but also for moral and social survival. He described how the definition of "edible" evolved, becoming extended to include not only black bread, but pulverized bones and animal dung.

Mr. Brand explained that in such dire conditions, class differences naturally bred contention, in part because alterations in the social landscape caused upper and middle classes to experience a "fall from grace," although celebrations around food continued even among the lower classes. One imagines that sacrifices must have been great, but perhaps also a source of common purpose. When Syrian and Armenian relief began to come, and some sort of "normalcy" returned, the Ottomans were perceived as the villains, as if Europe and the U.S. had had no hand in the war's devastation.

In the session on "Food and Gender," Christan Sassmannshausen (Free University Berlin) presented a paper entitled, "Eating Up: Food and Status in Late Ottoman Greater Syria" in which he described the dramatic changes in lifestyle made possible by the speed of international transport and the appeal of modern European commodities, which were associated with a new refinement. He traced the changes in domestic life through examples of the diversification of domestic spaces in which rooms in the house acquired specific functions accommodating different furnishings and decor. The middle and upper classes were able to

purchase kitchenware and household accessories from Europe or beyond and the preparation and consumption of food was central to the family's modern identity. The new possessions were functional, but ultimately symbols of people's aspired social status. Although these changes in life-style affected primarily middle and upper classes, even lower-middle class families made partial conversions of their domestic space.

Mr. Sassmannshausen showed that the transformations of domestic life were keyed to an almost total revision of the family unit, involving all aspects of life, such as morality, education, manners and hygiene. It involved the decor of the house and the objects used in it, such as kitchenware and furniture, which was now heavier and permanent. The kitchen seems to have been the centerpiece of the household, and food and its preparation a critical part of the acquisition of a cosmopolitan modernity. The criteria and models of this social refinement were displayed in journals whose readership was at first primarily Christian, but which soon included Muslims as well and that reached an extremely diverse international audience. These journals showed what kinds of behavior and what household features were appropriate, and allowed readers to compare themselves to others. But they also presented agricultural innovations, advice about what to read, what to talk about at the table, and even how to sit. They contributed to the formation of an international community of refined tastes and social practices, in what might be called an age of incipient globalization.

In her presentation entitled, "Gender, Class and the Egyptian Kitchen," Anny Gaul (Georgetown University) described the rapid and dramatic changes in Egyptian society during the 1920s, 30s, 40s and 50s, by comparing the evidence found in four Egyptian novels and Egyptian cookbooks written by women trained abroad. Each of these provided new models of domestic life and showed the evolution of the modern housewife, who was the repository of new cultural imperatives. Inspired in part by Qāsim Amīn's *The New Woman,* published in 1899, where he advocated the education of women, primarily to make them better housewives, Egyptian society had begun to offer them opportunities, and some women of the middle and upper classes were sent to England to study domestic science. They were subsequently sent to teach throughout the British Empire, or returned to Egypt to write cookbooks and adapt European recipes to local tastes. They included many local dishes as well. Written in formal Arabic, these books adhered to European standards of efficiency, including information on menus, nutrition, how to organize the kitchen, how to set a table, and how to keep a budget.

A movement to promote modern cookery was formed, supported by the Minister of Education. As Ms. Gaul explained, the science of modern cookery was considered an art as well as a technique that demanded professional training, and the kitchen became a microcosm of modernity and the center of life for the new housewife, who was responsible for generating a new kind of happiness for her family through her preparation of meals. An example of the shift from traditional to modern customs may be seen in the way fat and butterfat, once celebrated in food as in women, became regulated as new models of beauty emerged.

Muzawwara, a traditional Abbasid dish made with fava beans.
(Photo courtesy of Bilal Orfali)

In her presentation, "The Quince: A Blessed Fruit that Enhances the Male's Sperm and Beautifies the Fetus in his Mother's Womb," Rania Alsayed (Aga Khan University) described the history and function of the quince, a fruit privileged by Ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as by the Prophet Muhammad, and mentioned frequently in both Shi'i and Sunni texts. Reputed to have originated in Northern Iran and then found in Mesopotamia, Crete, and ancient Greece, the quince figures in mythological, religious, and medical texts, sometimes under the name of "apple" or "pear," although in the hadiths the apple and quince are treated separately. In classical Greek mythology, the quince played a role in the causes of the Trojan War, after Hera, Athena and Aphrodite claimed the quince (also called "apple" in some versions) thrown into Zeus's celebration by Eris, Goddess of discord. Paris judged Aphrodite to be the fairest, because she promised him Helen of Sparta. Plutarch speaks of Solon of Athens saying that brides and grooms should eat quince in a prison, for it sweetens the breath and lovers' discourse and produces intelligent children.

In both Shi'i and Sunni texts the quince was reputed to increase sperm count and the fertility of both sexes, but also relieve heaviness of the chest and heart, and was considered a gift of Allah. Among the five heavenly fruits, the quince figures in descriptions of the garden of paradise. The Prophet is said to have enjoyed quince and advised lovers to exchange them, because of their power to increase the beauty and intelligence of children. In relation to some of the reputed medicinal properties ascribed to quinces, Ms. Alsayed raised the question of whether these were observations made by Muslims or whether they were based on the many translations of Greek scientific texts (such as those of Galen) by Arabic scholars during the 8th and 9th centuries. In any case, the quince

seems to have become firmly implanted in Islamic culture.

In addition to the conference's varied intellectual fare, the guests were treated to an Abbasid feast sponsored by Le Bristol Hotel Beirut and Chateau Kefraya entitled "Discovering Abbasid food – Encounters in Gastronomic History" where authentic medieval recipes were prepared with the expertise of Brigitte Caland and her team of volunteers. For Abbasid society, the art of cookery rivaled that of other arts, and was chronicled in the *Kitāb al Ṭabīkh* of al-Mahdī, the half-brother of Hārūn al-Rashīd, and that of al-Warrāq, whose text has come down to us, as well as many others. Unlike European cookbooks of the time, these contained related information on nutrition and even culinary esthetics. Many of the recipes had their origins in pre-Islamic Persia, but recipes from the Bedouin traditions were also included and adapted to medieval Arabic culture, and the combinations soon became known as Abbasid culinary accomplishments. In turn these were transmitted to al-Andalus by figures such as Ziryāb. Ingredients such as certain spices and vegetables and fruits were brought to Baghdad from as far as India and China, and the eggplant, initially from Asia, became the queen of vegetables at the Abbasid court.

The talented Ms. Caland prepared a veritable feast for the eye as well as taste and the guests were duly impressed even before sampling any of the 27 dishes. Ms. Caland does extensive research to prepare for such events, so that each stage of the preparation of the dishes conforms to the way they were produced in the medieval tradition. Combining meat and poultry with vegetables as well as nuts and fruits was common, as was the addition of small dishes to accompany the primary ones. Meats were often cooked inside pastry, and sauces often included fruits such as pomegranates, raisins or figs, and the *murrī* sauce has been compared to tamari or soy sauce. Even al-Hamadhānī's famous *al-Maḍīriyya* was among the riches offered, and as most of the dishes were naturally unknown to the guests, the evening proved to be full of delicious discoveries and a fine complement to the academic discussions about food as a cultural signifier.

Book Review

Denis Genequand and Christian Julien Robin (eds.), *Les Jafnides: des rois arabes au service de Byzance (VI^e^ siècle de l'ère chrétienne)* (Paris: éditions De Boccard, 2015), 293 pages. ISBN: 9782701804378, Price: €49 (Paperback).

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The volume under review revisits the Ghassānids, the famous Arab dynasty allied to Byzantium that has attracted considerable scholarly attention over a good century or more. This undertaking begins with a challenge to the very name granted to the dynasty: "Ghassānid" is indeed quite a misnomer. Names ending in –ids (-idès in Greek) imply a common ancestor and so one should more accurately refer to them as Jafnids, that is the descendants of one Jafna (80 and n. 2, 193). (The same applies to the Lakhmids who are more aptly named Naṣrids after their eponym Naṣr.)

The papers collected here are the outcome of a symposium held in Paris in 2008, one in a series of conferences on pre-Islamic Arabia and pre-Islamic Arabs.[1] Interest in these topics has grown considerably over the last number of years and continues with the recent surge of publications by, *inter alia*, Greg Fisher, Peter Webb, Aziz al-Azmeh, and Isabel Toral-Niehoff.[2] But if pre-Islamic Arabia and pre-Islamic Arabs have been much neglected in modern scholarship, such has not been the case with the Jafnids, the subject of continuous modern scholarly

1. See also the proceedings of another conference that took place at the same time published by Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and Christian Julien Robin (eds.), *Juifs et Chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e^ et VI^e^ siècles: regards croisés sur les sources* (Paris: Association des amis du centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010).

2. Greg Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empire Before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), on which, see Webb's review in *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 23 (2015), 149-53; Isabel Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra. Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), and reviewed by Michael Bonner in this issue of *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā*, 181-186.

attention from the nineteenth century to the present.

In the opening contribution to the volume ("Rethinking the Jafnids: New approaches to Rome's Arab allies," 11-36), Mark Whittow justifies this sustained interest in noting that "they were a non-Roman dynasty on the boundaries of the empire about whom there is an unusually large body of evidence, much of it relatively contemporary" (11). As Arabs, the Jafnids have also been seen as forerunners to the world conquerors about to emerge from the Arabian Peninsula, and as a significant source of evidence on the immediate pre-Islamic period. The Jafnids are also situated at the nexus of the Roman/Persian conflict, while "Jafnid history can be read as a prolegomenon to the epoch-defining fall of the Roman empire in the Levant" (12). This last point is reinforced by their adoption of Monophysitism, which "has often been seen as the very fault line that divided the sixth-century empire" (12). It is, therefore, not surprising that Armand-Pierre Caussin de Perceval and Theodor Nöldeke could be regarded as founding fathers of what might rightly be called the field of "Jafnid studies" already in the nineteenth century.[3] The field, as it were, generated a sustained body of scholarship arguably best exemplified by the extensive work of Irfan Shahîd.[4] The latter's arguments, in fact, are discussed throughout this volume. Several of the contributors to the present book see Shahîd's work as inextricably linked to Arab nationalism (5) and, thus, revisit his conclusions on the Jafnids and what they can tell us of Arab practices of power on the eve of Islam.

Such has been the effort to reconstruct Jafnid history that Whittow even suggests that the field may have become overworked (12ff.). He wonders, in other words, if new discoveries and interpretations have in fact dramatically changed our understanding of Jafnid history. After a thorough review of the source material, Whittow explores theoretical and comparative approaches most likely to shed new light. In particular, he underscores the importance of studies on "borderlands" and "middle ground," following the pioneering work of Herbert Eugene Bolton, which could lead to a more nuanced analysis of cooperation along the frontier zone.[5] Whittow also advocates for a more global approach to Roman frontiers, urging scholars to take into account more closely what he terms "African approaches" (27-29), especially in light of the field-changing contribution on

3. Armand-Pierre Caussin de Perceval, *Essai sur l'histoire des Arabes avant l'islamisme, pendant l'époque de Mahomet, et jusqu'à la réduction de toutes les tribus sous la loi musulmane.* 3 vols. (Paris: Librairie Firmin Didot frères, 1847-8) and Theodor Nöldeke, *Die ghassânischen Fürsten aus deam Hause Gafna's* (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1887).

4. See most recently his *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century.* Vol. 2, part 2 (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010).

5. Bolton's work has generated its own industry but see the classic discussion of David J. Weber, "Turner, the Boltonians, and the Borderlands," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 66-81. Weber's article should now be complemented by the recent contributions of Albert L. Hurtado, *Herbert Eugene Bolton: Historian of the American Borderlands* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012) and "Bolton and Turner: The Borderlands and American Exceptionalism," *Western Historical Quarterly* 44 (2013): 5-20. I am indebted to my colleague Chantel Rodriguez for these references.

the Moors of the late Yves Modéran.[6]

The parallel with North Africa suggested by Whittow is supported by Maurice Sartre's article ("Rome et les Arabes nomades: le dossier épigraphique de *Eeitha*," 37-51), which offers a fresh appraisal of the epigraphic corpus of Hīt (ancient Eeitha). Hīt's inscriptions indeed suggest that the Romans had developed a specific strategy to interact with nomads in the *ḥarra* (basalt desert), even though these policies are not as well documented as they are for North Africa (48). Epigraphy also helps Sartre identify family strategies: a remarkable family of Roman agents seems to have cultivated names evoking the memory of the age of Herod the Great to assert its cultural and social capital (42). Moreover, the village of Hīt/Eeitha produced a sizeable number of officials and agents that served in the Roman administration. This might be explained by the fact that the villagers had erected a temple dedicated to the imperial cult (43), and thus were rewarded for their support for the regime.

William and Fidelity Lancaster offer an anthropological approach to tribes in line with their previous work on the Ruwala bedouins from Jordan ("Concepts of tribe, tribal confederation and tribal leadership," 53-77). They settle on the following definition: "Tribe is a set of ideas about how people think about themselves as a series of social, economic and political groupings that provide livelihood and profits, and the development and defence of these, predicated on certain moral premises or givens, and which take account of geographical facts and historical events" (53). This may be a useful chapter to discuss the concept of tribe, but its relevance and applicability to a sixth century context remains unclear (as duly acknowledged by the authors themselves and by the editors in the general introduction to the volume, 6-7). Only the last sentence of the chapter suggests a potential parallel with the Jafnids, with regard to the effort by tribal leaders "to negotiate with central authorities for opportunities for tribespeople in service provision or for trade" (73). The combination of history and anthropology has proved remarkably fruitful and transformative over the past few decades,[7] but has not yet reached its full potential in the fields of Late Antiquity and early Islam, despite some important (and controversial) contributions.[8]

Christian Julien Robin, in his chapter, takes up literary and epigraphic evidence on Ghassān in Arabia ("Ghassān en Arabie," 79-120). Robin shows that the epigraphic evidence contradicts Werner Caskel's idea that Ghassān was not a real tribe but rather a "fictive community" (German: "fiktive

6. Yves Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique romaine (IVe-VIIe siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2003).

7. This is perhaps best exemplified by the evolution of the journal *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, which is not to say that the relationship between history and anthropology has not generated its share of debates. See for a recent discussion Elisa Brilli, Pierre-Olivier Dittmar and Blaise Dufal (eds.), *Faire l'anthropologie historique du Moyen Âge*, *Atelier du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 6 (2010) (available online: https://acrh.revues.org/1911, consulted on October 12, 2016).

8. See in particular Christian Décobert, *Le mendiant et le combattant: l'institution de l'islam* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1991); Jacqueline Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus: l'islam de Mahomet* (Paris: Noésis, 1997) and, most recently, *Les trois piliers de l'islam: lecture anthropologique du Coran* (Paris: Seuil, 2016).

Gemeinschaft") (95). Robin explores the origins of the Jafnids and the singularity of the Ghassān tribe in the Islamic tradition. Indeed, Ghassān is not integrated into the sprawling genealogical tree of Arab tribes, a specificity only shared by the Tanūkh (83). This is usually explained by the fact that Ghassān is not a man's name, but a place (a water hole located in Yemen) (83-84). But, since Ghassān is elsewhere attested as a personal name, Robin suggests that there might have been a deliberate strategy to classify them apart from traditional tribal groups (84). Ghassān is otherwise depicted in Muslim literary sources (especially in the works of Ibn al-Kalbī and Ibn Ḥazm) as a confederacy (*jimāʿ*) claiming Māzin b. al-Azd as a common ancestor, and subdivided in various branches among his descendants (83-92).

Interestingly, the apparent exceptionalism made by Muslim sources is contradicted by epigraphic sources prior to the fourth century. These sources depict Ghassān as an unremarkable sedentary (sabian: *sʾʿb*) Arabian tribe (95). Epigraphy shows that a territorial principality named Ghassān existed in Western Arabia, likely in the Ḥijāz, in the third and fourth centuries (101), probably centered around Yathrīb (97). This leads Robin to observe that Islamic historiography has preserved reliable material about the few decades prior to the rise of Islam, but that the deeper Arabian past is irremediably lost (79). Robin also debunks the classic parallel between the trajectories of Naṣrid and Jafnid history. The former lasted over 300 years and constituted a true political entity with a capital and an army, while the latter vanished after about 50 years and lacked such attributes (80). It is impossible to do justice to such a rich contribution in a brief review, but Robin also provides useful appendices, including a list of all dated references to Ghassān and of the relevant epigraphic texts (110-114).

Geoffrey Greatrex ("Les Jafnides et la défense de l'Empire au VI^e^ siècle," 121-54) suggests that the Jafnids concluded an agreement with the Roman Empire in the early sixth century, likely under Anastasius. This would explain their anti-Chalcedonian stance (123). Greatrex contends, *pace* Shahîd, that the Jafnids were allies (*symmachoi*) rather than *foederati* (126), and that al-Hārith was elevated to the status of *archiphylarchos* in 529 (123), in response to the growing threat posed by Naṣrid raids in Syria (129). This policy has to be understood in the broader framework of the reorganization of the Eastern frontier by Justinian in the context of war against Persia (131). The restructuring of the *limes* prompted economic and agricultural development and generated increasing rivalries among local power brokers and élites (135-7). The result was that the Jafnids eventually acquired, from the Roman perspective, too much authority over the course of the sixth century. This situation prompted the Romans, following a well-established practice, to topple them, and al-Mundhir was exiled to Sicily (123-4). It was normal practice for the Romans to remove allies' chiefs when they were not loyal enough or when they aspired to too great a degree of autonomy. The decision to exile al-Mundhir and his son, al-Nuʿmān, was therefore, relative to execution, not unduly harsh (139).

In his chapter on the likelihood of a Roman military strategy in the Levant ("Did the Roman Empire have a military strategy and were the Jafnids part

of it?", 155-92), Ariel Lewin challenges Edward Luttwak's famous theory. The latter posited a grand Roman military strategy for the defense of the frontiers (156-8). Lewin insists on the rise of Arab tribes in Late Antiquity that required new approaches and policies: Sasanians and Romans tended to rely on the tribes "to damage the interests of their rival". At the same time, "the Arab tribes exploited the warfare between the two empires for their own advantage" (159). Lewin concludes that Diocletian "conceived a large project of defensive works whose main purpose was to defend the eastern provinces from the Arab menace" (162). Yet, it is unclear whether this is precisely the system that the *Notitia Dignitatum* describes; it might in fact have emerged earlier.

Lewin then turns to the question of the role of Arab tribes in the defense of the Empire prior to Justinian (166-69) and during the initial years of his reign. This last period was marked by increasingly complex relationships with Arab tribes whose chiefs were gradually promoted to the phylarchate. This situation prompted the creation of a brand new position when al-Hārith was assigned authority over a large sector of the Near East, a form, one might say, of "superphylarchate" (169-74). At the same time, his brother, Abū Karib, was also a phylarch with enhanced authority. As many scholars have rightly pointed out, the two brothers exercised power over two different sections of the Near Eastern frontier: al-Ḥārith was given authority over *Phoenice* and *Arabia*, and probably *Syria* and *Euphratensis*, while Abū Karib controlled *Palestina* and the Hedjaz" (174). Despite the richness of the material examined here, one would have expected a more analytical discussion of the implications of these reforms.

Pierre-Louis Gatier looks at a small corpus of ten Greek inscriptions that mention Jafnid princes ("Les Jafnides dans l'épigraphie grecque au VI^e^ siècle," 193-222). This limited body of evidence provides important information but also underlines the need to resist the tendency to identify all or most extant sites with the Jafnids. Following Denis Genequand,[9] Gatier rejects the notion of a Jafnid architectural landscape as has been articulated by Shahîd and others. Gatier, in particular, seconds Genequand's argument that Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī was not a "Ghassānid construction," but, more likely, a Roman postal site prior to the construction of the monastery. The Greek inscription bears witness to the acclamation of Arethas/al-Ḥārith by the monastery authorities upon his arrival (198).

Gatier also challenges Robert Hoyland's interpretation that the dating under al-Ḥārith's phylarchate testifies to Jafnid control over the countryside (199). Gatier contends, instead, that the mention of the phylarch is not a sign of his independence but rather of his integration into the administrative and military imperial system (201). Al-Ḥārith's involvement in the construction of the monastery can be better understood in light of the "military importance" of the region and the need to control roads and itineraries (200-201). The other inscriptions discussed by Gatier point to Jafnid patronage and the evolving titles of Jafnid princes prior to and during their phylarchate. Their title

9. Denis Genequand, "Some Thoughts on Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, its Dam, its Monastery and the Ghassanids," *Levant* 36 (2006): 63-84.

as king is, however, not reflected in Greek inscriptions (217).

Greg Fisher's chapter revisits the eclipse of the Jafnids ("Emperors, politics, and the plague: Rome and the Jafnids, 570-585," 223-37). He suggests that their inability to "operate effectively in the top echelon of Roman politics, as well as their participation in the unstable ecclesiastical disputes of the sixth century" (223), were the main factors behind their demise. More specifically, al-Nuʿmān's revolt precipitated the exile of his father, al-Mundhir. The latter was released in 602, after which father and son seem to have vanished from the scene (225).

The Jafnids never managed to gain influence at the highest levels of imperial administration. "This left them critically exposed when events turned against them – al-Mundhir could not, when it counted, compete with the imperial networks of favour and patronage in the capital" (227). The degradation of Chalcedonian and Miaphysite relations also negatively affected the family, which proved unable to adjust to the "rapidly evolving political realities of the late sixth century" (228). Fisher also briefly considers the possible economic impact of the plague on the standing of the Jafnids (229). He then turns to comparative approaches, briefly considering examples such as the Naṣrids, the Ruwala bedouins in Ottoman-era Jordan, or the Sardar in modern Iran (231-33). These last two points offer useful elements of discussion but prove largely inconclusive. They simply suggest "that the experience of the Jafnids was by no means unique" (233).

Michaela Konrad offers an archaeological re-evaluation of the most famous Jafnid monument, the so-called *Praetorium* of Rūṣafa ("La frontière romaine au VI^e^ siècle et le bâtiment dit "*Praetorium* d'al-Mundhir" à Ruṣāfa – Sergiopolis," 239-57). The building has generated famously competing interpretations: Jean Sauvaget construed it as a *praetorium* and audience hall where the Jafnids interacted with local tribes, a view rejected by Gunnar Brands, who understood it to be a church. Elizabeth Key Fowden later sought to reconcile the two theories.

In her new assessment of the edifice, Konrad sees no obvious link between the building and the adjoining cemetery, thus undermining Brands' conclusions (243). Konrad instead understands the site as having had military and political strategic significance. Ruṣāfa was arguably the seat of Jafnid power for the northern Syrian *limes* (244), and the building bears witness to an "architectural language" that became common among the Arabs in the sixth century. It is likely that al-Mundhir used it to affirm his status vis-à-vis Byzantium (248). Konrad argues that the iconography inside the building was not necessarily that of a Christian church (250-1). She concludes that the evidence contradicts Brands' interpretation – that the structure was a church – and thus holds to Sauvaget's interpretation (251). Her main argument is that the edifice is remarkably consistent with other *principia* (251): it requires to be set firmly in a broader Late Antique context.

Hani Hayajneh and Mohammad I. Ababneh offer a brief discussion of a Ṣafaitic inscription found in 1999 at the Syrian-Jordanian border ("The 'God of the *Ġs*^{1}*n*' in an ancient North Arabian inscription from the Ḥarra region – northeastern Jordan," 259-76). The

inscription is remarkable because it lists a "unique and extraordinary collection of divine names" (270), and specifically mentions *Ġs¹n*. The identification of *Ġs¹n* with Ghassān remains conjectural but is regarded as the most likely option (267, 269).

The final paper is by Michael Lecker ("Were the Ghassānids and the Byzantines behind Muḥammad's *hijra*?", 277-93). It explores an intriguing hypothesis that links Heraclius' campaign (April 622), the ʿAqaba meeting between Muḥammad and the Anṣār (composed of Khazraj and Aws, June 622), and the subsequent *hijra* (September 622) (277). To demonstrate these connections, Lecker considers the long-term interest of the Khazraj in the "water resources of the Jews in Upper Medina," which they attempted but failed to capture around 617 at the battle of Buʿāth (278). Lecker assumes that the Khazraj had a "dominant role" in the ʿAqaba meeting (279) precisely because they were seeking support for the effort to seize those same lands. Lecker then turns to the links between the Khazraj and Ghassānids; he concludes that "the communication channels between the Khazraj and Ghassān were open, and hence the assumption that the latter played a role in the ʿAqaba meeting is not far-fetched" (287).

The Ghassān are also attested in the *umma* agreement (i.e., the so-called Constitution of Medina, ca. 623 CE): after listing Khazraj (§28-32) and Aws (§33), the list continues with the Banū Thaʿlaba (§ 34), the Jafna (§ 35), and the Banū al-Shuṭayba (§ 36). The three last groups were Ghassānids (or their clients). Lecker thus concludes that "the participation of three Ghassānid groups in the *umma* agreement suggests that, shortly after his arrival at Medina, Muḥammad was backed by the Ghassānids alongside their Byzantine overlords" (289). The argument, however fascinating, largely ignores the demise of the Ghassānids several decades earlier. It also undermines Jafnid agency at a time when their loyalty to Byzantium was far from obvious.

Lecker situates his hypothesis in a broader context, namely the Byzantine effort to replace the Jews of Medina, "longtime allies of the Sassanians, with a political entity friendly to Byzantium" (289). And thus the long-term goal of the Khazraj to seize Yathrīb/Medina was achieved by Muḥammad (290). Lecker is perfectly right to note "that Heraclius' fortune in his war against the Sasanians since 622 coincided with those of Muḥammad in his takeover of Medina and large parts of Arabia" (p. 290, n. 66). Again, the hypothesis is compelling. It will need much more research, however, to be fully convincing.

Edited volumes are inevitably uneven. Despite the insistence on the fact that "Jafnid" should be preferred to "Ghassānid," the usage proves quite inconsistent throughout the volume. The internal structure of the book itself would have been arguably clearer if the contributions had been arranged by their respective source material (e.g., epigraphy, literary sources, etc.). Some repetitions between various chapters could have been avoided with more internal references. In addition, contradictory arguments contained in several of the papers might have been at least partly resolved by greater engagement between the contributors. The occasional typographical error appears (see especially some of the

block quotes in Robin's article where spaces between words are almost nonexistent, e.g. p. 97). And the absence of an index is unfortunate, given the rich content of the volume, the epigraphic material in particular. These few caveats should not obscure the fact that this book will mark an important milestone in the study of the Jafnid dynasty and the pre-Islamic Arabs more broadly.

Book Review

Isabel Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra, Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext*, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts, ol. 104 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), xvii + 248 pages, appendix, indices, maps. ISBN: 9789004229266, Price: $133 (Cloth).

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When the phrase "late antiquity" appears today in scholarly publications on early Islam, it connotes a quest for continuity across time. That is, we expect that when authors use this phrase, they seek elements of continuity between the early Islamic world and the world that preceded it in the Near East. Until recently, however, and somewhat paradoxically, Arabia (geographically speaking, in the broadest sense) has often appeared outside this model. Arabia existed, of course, throughout the late antique period (however defined), but according to this view, its destiny and historical meaning were, first of all, for it to be remote from its imperial, bureaucratized, urbanized, and monotheistic neighbors; and second, for it to bring discontinuity and even rupture to Near Eastern history, precisely through the rise and spread of Islam. As a result, historians who have advocated for continuity between late antiquity and early Islam have often presented this as proceeding more or less independently of the coming of the Arabs and Islam. According to this approach, in other words, things mostly went on as before, *despite* the arrival of a new religion, language, and political system.

The book under review here, which features late antiquity in both its title and its content, provides occasion for reflecting on these matters. Its subject matter is at once familiar and strange. It is well known that the city of al-Ḥīra had an important place in the history of the Arabs before Islam, even though it was situated outside Arabia proper (at least in modern terms), not far from the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon in Iraq. However, modern guides to al-Ḥīra have not been plentiful. Beginning with Gustav Rothstein's detailed *Die Dynastie der Laḫmiden in al-Ḥīra*, now well over a century old, these have tended to focus on the Lakhmid dynasty and its role in international politics and warfare. Meanwhile, the Lakhmid court and its patronage loom large in the early history

of Arabic literature, especially poetry, but the connection between this court on the one hand, and the just-mentioned political and military role of the Lakhmids on the other hand, is historiographically tenuous. Moreover, when al-Ḥīra and its inhabitants appear in eastern Christian literature, they present an entirely different set of concerns, heroes, and villains. As Isabel Toral-Niehoff points out (p. 27), we can easily get the (erroneous) impression of dealing not with one city but several: in Arabic, a nurturing ground for poets and a stage for Arab kings; in Greek (and perhaps Persian), a source of allied troops for the imperial wars; and in Syriac and Christian Arabic, a breeding-place for bishops and saints engaged in theological controversies and in the conversion of the Arab nomads of the steppe land.

This book proposes to put these pieces together in a unified picture. This involves a focus on the city itself (or as often, "the oasis"); if the book foregrounds any particular group, this is the Christian Arab urbanites known as the *ʿibād*, rather than the Lakhmid (or Naṣrid) ruling house. The book also features late antiquity, and not as a matter of mere lip service. After all, al-Ḥīra was founded in or around the third century CE, and fell into eclipse after its conquest by the Arab Muslims in the seventh. The Christian sources relating to it are unmistakably products of late antiquity. But then, if we want to integrate the Islamic Arabic sources into this picture, we need to view them in a similar, or at least comparative light.

Isabel Toral-Niehoff has not achieved—and does not claim to have achieved—a completely unified picture of al-Ḥīra, but she has come as close to this goal as seems imaginable. Since the relevant source material is so vast, she restricts herself to outlines of certain issues and events, while entering more fully into others. The mode of presentation is thematic, rather than sequential and chronological. This means that readers who want, say, a full, detailed account of the Lakhmid princes, will find that, while this book has much to say on the topic, they may still want to consult Rothstein and more recent contributions (cited in the book's bibliography).

The book's chapters indicate its main thematic divisions as follows. The first chapter, on "Historical Background," deals with dynastic, urban, and tribal history, and with historiographical issues presented by the Muslim and Christian sources. It also considers the (unfortunately meager) archaeological and inscriptional evidence. The next chapter, on "The Natural Environment," provides a somewhat surprising view of al-Ḥīra, set in a pleasant upland location at some remove from the Euphrates, and founded at a time when technological advances had just made settlement of this area possible. Indeed, al-Ḥīra's climate was mild enough to permit the production of wine, provoking later disapproval among some of the area's inhabitants in the Islamic era, and bringing delight to pleasure-seeking tourists. The city was truly "Arab" in the sense that like Yathrib/Medina, it consisted of separate settlements, partly rural in character and linked together without external fortifications.

Then comes a chapter on the community's origins, including its relation to Palmyra and its trade, the Zenobia legend, and the possibility that al-Ḥīra may have played host to Manichaeans seeking refuge from Sasanid repression. (The author wonders if this could have

contributed to the later triumph of Christianity at al-Ḥīra, but this can only be speculation.) A treatment of "Al-Ḥīra and the Sasanians" follows, again not in chronological order, but with a focus on political and cultural relations. Then we have a discussion of "The City," including the structure of its settlement and royal palaces. A subsequent chapter discusses "The Population," divided ethnically among Arabs, Aramaeans, and Persians, although the latter are so rare in al-Ḥīra – apart from the ongoing presence of a unit of heavy cavalry – that we may wonder why they are included here at all. The Aramaean element is overwhelmingly Christian, rural, and of low social status. Meanwhile, the Aramaic language is entirely familiar to the Arabic-speaking urban elite (the *ʿibād*), though the written form of Aramaic most in use was Edessene, or Western Syriac. These *ʿibād* are, as already mentioned, this book's main protagonists. They were the ones who participated fully both in Arab life and culture and in the sophisticated urban life of late antiquity, for well over two centuries.

Toral-Niehoff follows with a discussion of al-Ḥīra's languages and the relations among them (*die sprachlichen Verhältnisse*). As just mentioned, she argues for an urban environment that in the case of the elite, is bilingual or even trilingual, as some of the *ʿibād* learned Persian during their education and travels. Their position as a "minority in the middle" enhanced their elite status, or even made it possible. The author cites Knauf's argument that this kind of "functional multilinguism" was characteristic of the Near East in late antiquity.[1] The idea deserves further consideration, as does also the question of continuity afterward under Islam.[2] "Subaltern" elements, meanwhile, are relegated to monolingualism: Aramaic for the rural peasantry, Arabic for the Arab "allies" (*aḥlāf*) recently arrived from the steppes.

A subsequent chapter takes up "The King and the Tribes." Like the royal house of Kinda, the Lakhmids were a dynasty and not a tribe, and their skill at tribal politics helps to explain their remarkable longevity. The author delves into their relations with Tamīm, Taghlib b. Wāʾil, and Bakr b.Wāʾil. In the chapter entitled "The King and his Court," we see the fascination that Lakhmid cultural production exerted over poets, prose writers, and audiences of the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid eras. Several interesting questions arise, for which full answers cannot be provided. For instance, did the corpus of pre-Islamic poetry really have its origins in the desert, where poets recited their compositions for the clan gathered around the campfire? Or should we view it, following Thomas Bauer, as a product of the "three courts" (Kinda, Ghassānids, Lakhmids, p. 86), at least as much as of the "campfire"; or similarly, following James Montgomery, as more "beduinizing" than "beduin"?[3]

1. Ernst Axel Knauf, "Arabo-Aramaic and ʿArabiyya: From Ancient Arabic to Early Standard Arabic, 200 CE-600 CE," in A. Neuwirth et al., eds., *The Qur'ān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 197-254, esp. 229-32 (on the Nabataeans) and 242-45 (the Ghassānids).

2. One implication of Knauf's work is that the diglossia (or as he thinks, triglossia) of Arabic could be an inheritance from late antiquity at least as much as from the Arabian *jāhiliyya*.

3. Thomas Bauer, "Die schriftliche Sprache im Arabischen," in *Schrift und Schriftlichkeit*, ed. H. Günther and O. Ludwig (Berlin and New York:

The chapter concludes by asking whether a truly Christian Arabic poetry existed in al-Ḥīra; the answer to this question is no, not by any strict definition of the term. However, we have an exception in ʿAdī b. Zayd, maker and baptizer of kings, able administrator, virtuoso polyglot, hapless victim of intrigue, and Arabic poet. (Why we should admit ʿAdī and no one else into this category is still not entirely clear.)

The longest chapter deals with "Christianity in al-Ḥīra." It describes the arrival of Christianity; relations and contacts with members of other faiths; the activities of ascetics and missionaries; and the life of the Ḥīran saint, John the Arab (Yoḥanan Ṭayāya). The author relates, in chronological order, the relations of al-Ḥīra's princes with the Christians and their institutions. These relations were hardly typical of the time, since the Lakhmids remained outside the faith nearly until the end. The conversion of al-Nuʿmān III b. al-Mundhir took place (largely through the machinations of ʿAdī b. Zayd), around a decade before his dethronement and the final destruction of the Lakhmid state. Nonetheless, from the fifth century onward al-Ḥīra figured as a Christian city, adhering to the "Persian" or "Nestorian" church. At the same time, it maintained contacts with Syria/Palestine, so that its monastic architecture came to bear traces of that world, while the conversion of the nomadic Arabs of al-Ḥīra's surrounding steppes tended toward Monophysite/ Miaphysite Christianity, rather than the Nestorianism of al-Ḥīra itself. The book concludes with a summary and conclusion.

So many themes and topics come up in this book—more than I have managed to list—that I can only comment on a few of them. The treatment of historiographical issues, though brief, holds considerable interest. One point strikes me especially, namely (p. 10) the fact that we still lack a full, systematic treatment of the Islamic Arabic sources for *pre-Islamic Arabia*, with regard to their literary forms and genres, their historicity, and the process whereby these narrative materials assumed written or literary form (*Literarizität*). I would add that Werner Caskel was probably the Arabist who went farthest in this direction during the past century. Since Caskel's death in 1970, however, a tremendous amount of work has been done on the sources for early Islam, including Arabia, especially regarding the genres of *sīra/ maghāzi* (life and campaigns of Muhammad and the earliest community) and of *akhbār* (historical narratives) on the era of the great conquests and the early Caliphate. And here, even though the contemporary profession has not arrived at consensus (and probably never will), we can still benefit from strong opposing arguments, each drawing on painstaking research. For pre-Islamic Arabia, however, we have nothing of the kind. From a literary and rhetorical point of view, should we think of *jāhiliyya* as a "primary theme" all by itself, along the lines of Albrecht Noth's thematic triad of *ridda*, *futūḥ*, and *fitna*? Or should we break these narrative materials down into genres or sub-genres such as *ayyām al-ʿArab* ("battle-days of the Arabs"); *aswāq al-ʿArab* ("markets and commerce of the Arabs"); monographic treatments of tribes (*Kitāb Tamīm*, etc.) and of royal

De Gruyter, 1996), 1483-91; James Montgomery, "The Empty Ḥijāz," in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy...in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. J. Montgomery (Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 2006), 37-97.

dynasties (Kinda, Lakhmids, etc.); and so on? Why did so accomplished and prolific a scholar as Ibn al-Kalbī devote himself to this material, and why do we have so much of it? Answers to this latter question are available,[4] but it remains a difficult area for historians.

Commerce, trade, and the economy writ large constitute another area of interest. The Arabic historical sources do not dwell on agriculture in al-Ḥīra, but then, they have little interest in peasants and agriculture overall (p. 39f.). Of course agriculture must have been important for al-Ḥīra, considering its favorable location, rich soil, relatively large population, and so on.

And what about trade? Al-Ḥira's early history involved both commerce and rivalry with Palmyra (p. 51). Coming closer to the Islamic era, its location must have made it a (or the) primary point for communication between eastern Arabia and Sasanid Iraq. Accordingly, modern historians often refer to al-Ḥīra as one of the two most important players (together with Mecca) in sixth-century peninsular trade, as it constituted the point of departure for Sasanid commerce with Yamāma, the Ḥijāz, Yemen, and so on (p. 52). But given the lack of archaeological evidence, how do we actually know this? The literary sources relate a late sixth-century episode involving a caravan (*laṭīma*) intended for commerce in South Arabian aromatics, dispatched by the Lakhmid ruler once each year. This episode recurs constantly in modern treatments of Arabian trade, including the one under discussion here (p. 52). But, in fact, it appears only once in the narratives transmitted by Ibn al-Kalbī, briefly describing the caravan's arrival at the annual fair of 'Ukāẓ.[5] Apart from this one episode, our sources have little to tell us about al-Ḥīra's place in sixth-century Arabian commerce as a whole.

Elsewhere, seeking to demonstrate the existence of commercial ties between Ḥīra and Yamāma, Toral-Niehoff refers to the well-attested fact that Christianity was present, or even dominant, in eastern Arabia from the fifth century onward. This point, which goes against the picture of an "idolatrous" Arabia on the eve of Islam, is worth emphasizing, but it hardly constitutes concrete proof of commercial relations between these two places (as Toral-Niehoff basically agrees, pp. 92-99). The author also includes al-Ḥīra (at p. 53) within the annual sequence of "markets of the Arabs," reported by Ibn al-Kalbī and others, which included sites throughout the entire peninsula. In fact, however, this narrative tradition does *not* include al-Ḥīra, just as it does not include several other obvious candidates including Yathrib and Mecca.[6] So in the end, "Ḥīran trade" remains, historiographically speaking, on thin ice. Again, there is no reason to deny al-Ḥīra a major role in sixth-century Arabian commerce. The problem is rather that "Ḥīran trade" has become subsumed

4. As in Nina Drory, "The Abbasid Construction of the *Jāhiliyya*: Cultural Authority in the Making," *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 33-49.

5. Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1927-), 19:75; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar* (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1941), 195, and other sources, all referring back to the same piece of information from Ibn al-Kalbī.

6. M. Bonner, "Commerce and Migration before Islam: A Brief History of a Long Literary Tradition," in *Iranian Language and Culture*, ed. B. Aghaei and M.R. Ghanoonparvar (Malibu and Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2012), 65-89, esp. 71-75.

into "Meccan trade," an argument which has seen little progress in the nearly thirty years since the appearance of Patricia Crone's book bearing that same title.

The author also assigns a central role to al-Ḥīra in the development of the Arabic language and literary culture. Again, the "intermediary" position of the *ʿibād*, together with the patronage of the Lakhmid court, led to an early blossoming not only of orally-transmitted poetry, but also of written prose, perhaps even in al-Ḥīra's chancery, and even resulting in an official court historiography by the turn of the seventh century (pp. 14, 114-18, 123, 234). This thesis rests on difficult evidence, but deserves further consideration. If all this is true, meanwhile, it would make eminent sense for Arabic writing to have been invented first in al-Ḥīra, as used to be commonly thought. Toral-Niehoff admits that the consensus of recent decades favors the Nabataeans as the originators of Arabic writing, but she rightly claims that al-Ḥīra's literate elite must have had a key role in the process nonetheless. It also appears now that the older view, in favor of al-Ḥīra, is gaining back some ground; certainly the evidence collected here would favor this view.

This book is written in a clear, accessible, academic German style. Readers who lack sufficient German to read it should consult an article in English by the same author, bringing together several of the book's arguments with a focus on its protagonists, the *ʿibād*.[7] The article appeared in a volume featuring the work of several important German-language scholars, here presented in English. English-speakers should be grateful for this effort. At the same time, we may hope that scholarly production in the German language, with its great tradition in our fields, will continue to prosper. This book, an illuminating, indeed eye-opening contribution to our knowledge, is an excellent case in point.

7. I. Toral-Niehoff, "The *ʿibād* in al-Ḥīra: An Arab Christian Community in Late Antique Iraq," in *The Qurʾān in Context* (see above, n. 1), 328-56.

Book Review

Thomas Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011), 463 pages. ISBN: 9783458710332, Price: €34.

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"This turns out to be one of the best books about Islam in ages and is set to become a classic of cultural studies on par with Edward Said's Orientalism*."*

- Stefan Weidner, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [1]

It is surprising that the book lauded here as being on a par with Said's seminal work *Orientalism* is still relatively unknown within Islamic studies, despite being published in 2011. Thomas Bauer's *Kultur der Ambiguität* seems to be one of those works that draws more attention and provokes more enthusiasm in the neighboring disciplines than in in its own field. So it still remains that this book, which has enjoyed great reception in the German media and has inspired several interdisciplinary workshops,[2] is still in need of critical evaluation within the field, particularly for a specialist readership outside Germany (an English translation is in the making[3]). I will first summarize by chapter this ambitious and comprehensive book. I will then assess Bauer's argumentation and analyze his underlying theoretical assumptions, as well as discuss the applicability of the concept he is introducing, i.e. the notion of 'cultural ambiguity' (*Kulturelle Ambiguität*).

The book is divided into ten chapters: the first two are introductory and methodological, the following seven chiefly thematic, covering a broad range

1. Quoted in the publisher's English version of the book's homepage: http://www.suhrkamp.de/buecher/the_culture_of_ambiguity-thomas_bauer_71033.html?d_view=english (accessed September 23, 2016).

2. E.g. the conference held in Erlangen in 2012: *Neue Fundamentalismen – Ambiguität und die Macht der Eindeutigkeit* (http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-19469) and the conference organized in Greifswald in 2013: *Ambiguität im Mittelalter. Formen zeitgenössischer Reflexion und interdisziplinärer Rezeption* (http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-4872; both webpages accessed on September 23, 2016).

3. See the book's English homepage mentioned in note 1. The only extensive review in a scientific journal is still that of Irene Schneider (in German), *Der Islam* 88 (2012), 439-448. She focuses in particular on his understanding of Islamic law and her assessment is rather critical.

of topics from the Qurʾān and Arabic literature to sexuality discourses and philosophy. The final chapter contains a concluding discussion. Bauer formulates the basic assumptions and purposes of the book in the first chapter (15-25):

> 1) There has been a radical shift in Islamic culture, from a broadly tolerant attitude towards 'cultural ambiguity' and plurality in pre-modern times to an increasing intolerance, as exemplified today by fundamentalist Islam. This change should be investigated.
>
> 2) The phenomenon called 'cultural ambiguity' is universal; however, there are important differences in the cultural attitude towards it. Some cultures are more prone to tolerate ambiguity (they are 'ambiguity-tolerant'), while others try to eradicate ambiguity (they are 'ambiguity-intolerant'). There is a need to investigate cultures from this perspective.
>
> 3) The book aims to establish a new narrative of Islamic history (*eine andere Geschichte des Islams*), by focusing on the aforementioned question on the basis of several key-texts merging from the lesser known post-formative period of Islam (in particular of the Ayyūbid and Mamluk period in Egypt and Syria between 1180 and 1500). Bauer assumes that this period represents that form of "Islamic culture", which came into contact with Western Modernity in the nineteenth century (24), that makes it particularly relevant to the topic.

In the second chapter (26-53), Bauer clarifies his understanding of the term 'cultural ambiguity', and introduces such terms as 'ambiguity tolerance', 'ambiguity anxiety', 'crisis of ambiguity' and 'domesticated ambiguity', all of which are essential to his argumentation. I will analyze this core chapter below in my critical assessment.

The third chapter (54-114) discusses the traditional field of *qiraʾāt* (i.e. the various canonical readings of the Quranic text) as a telling example for the capacity of post-formative Islamic culture to cope with ambiguity. Therefore, Bauer summarizes the thinking of Ibn al-Jazarī (751-833/1350-1429) on *qiraʾāt* and shows how this intellectual did not only accept the polyvalence of the Quranic text, but even regarded it as a particular richness that denotes God's presence therein. For al-Jazarī, multiplicity is a divine grace ("Vielfalt als Gnade," 86-94). Bauer then contrasts al-Jazarī's theories with those of the Wahhābī scholar, Ibn al-ʿUthaymīn (d. 2001), who pleaded for a unique, unified reading of the Qurʾān. Bauer further discusses the ideas of the liberal litterateur Tāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973) and those the of the Islamist al-Mawdūdī (1903-1973). According to Bauer, all three modern thinkers favored the idea of a unique, unambiguous reading of texts: in spite of their differing political ideas, they shared a common, modern and 'ambiguity-intolerant' attitude. As we will see, this will be a central argument in Bauer's thinking: modern liberal Islam and contemporaneous fundamentalist Islam are both equivalent offshoots of European modernity, and both are basically 'ambiguity-intolerant' (cf. also his schema, 60). In contrast, post-formative Islam was 'ambiguity-tolerant'

and parallels the postmodern world-view insofar that it emphasizes a multi-perspective idea of reality (112-114).

The fourth chapter (115-142) treats the traditional field of *tafsīr* (Quranic exegesis). As in the third chapter, Bauer contrasts the ideas of a post-formative, 'ambiguity-tolerant thinker', in this case, al-Māwardī (364-450/974-1058), who defended the richness of multiple interpretations of the Qurʾān, with those of a modern, 'ambiguity intolerant' one, the aforementioned Wahhābī writer, Ibn al-ʿUthaymīn. In a second section of the chapter, he argues again an excessive 'theologization' of Islam ("Theologisierung des Islams," 131-142). According to Bauer, Orientalist scholars have paid too much attention to the religious and theology-based aspects of Islamic culture, to the degree that they have failed to understand Islam's inherent 'ambiguity tolerance'. To illustrate his argument, he first discusses the term of *ʿilm ẓannī* (hypothetical truth) as used by jurists (whom he regards as the "archetypes of scholars," 133), a notion that contrasts the concept of *ʿilm qaṭʿī* (absolute truth) as used by the *kalām* theologians, which ultimately derives from logical argumentation. As a second example, Bauer refers to the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qurʾān (*iʿdjāz al-Qurʾān*), often misunderstood as untranslatability (in reality, it refers to the impossibility to capture the inapprehensible divine meaning of the Qurʾān), and summarizes its classical formulation by al-Zamakhsharī (467-538/1075-1144).

In the fifth chapter (143-192), Bauer turns his view to the traditional field of hadith studies. Therefore, he outlines the principles established by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (773-852/1372-1449), who classified prophetical hadith into different categories of reliability, within a scale of increasing plausibility, but excluding the possibility of absolute certainty. This peculiar understanding of truth leads Bauer to further elaborate the idea of the scholarly *ikhtilāf* (conflicting juridical opinions). Bauer notably refers here to the thinking of Abū al-Qāsim Ibn al-Juzayy al-Kalbī (693-741/1294-1340), that is based on the assumption that scholars only possess the capacity of hypothetical truth (*ʿilm ẓannī,* see chapter 3), what would explain the coexistence of diverse but still valid opinions. However, in order to reduce and 'domesticate' (*zähmen*) the resulting cultural ambiguity, Islam has developed the notion of the four law schools. In contrast, and in accordance with their characteristic 'ambiguity intolerant' world-view, the modern Wahhābī Ibn al-ʿUthaymīn and other contemporaneous fundamentalists and salafists oppose the idea of the diversity of law schools (*lā madhhabīya*).

The sixth chapter (192-223) is devoted to a more general theme: the relationship between the secular and religious spheres in Islamic culture. Bauer refers to the widely-held idea (192) that Islam does not differentiate between the two spheres, since religion pervades all aspects of life. As the differentiation between these sectors is considered a crucial asset of modernity (this common idea ultimately goes back to Luhmann's system theory), its absence would be a feature of Islam's backwardness. In the following, Bauer battles vehemently against this supposedly fatal 'Islamization of Islam' (*Islamisierung des Islams*) and points to several 'religion-free zones' (*religionsfreie Zonen*) in Islam that would

indicate the successful differentiation of diverse societal systems in premodern Islam; for instance, he enumerates *fiqh*, sufism, theology and hadith. In his argumentation, Bauer then opposes the views of several prestigious scholars in Islamic studies that allegedly have been engaged in this process of the 'Islamization of Islam', Gustav von Grunebaum, Martin Plessner, and Ignaz Goldziher. He finally points to the pervasive interpretation scheme in modern media that reduces all phenomena in the Middle East to its 'Islamic dimension'.

Bauer dedicates the seventh chapter (224-267) to the role of ambiguity in rhetoric and poetry. One of the most brilliant chapters of the book, it reminds one that these are Bauer's chief areas of expertise. He reconstructs the emergence of Classical Arabic as a key cultural element in the first centuries of Islam, a process which gave way to sophisticated theories in grammar, lexicography, linguistic theories, rhetoric and philology. According to Bauer, this centrality of language fostered the fascination for polysemy and opened the way to the playful sides of ambiguity. He then comments on such frequent Arabic literary tropes and genres as *iqtibās*, *muʿāraḍa*, *naqāʾid, thawriya* and *badīʿiyya*, all of which evidence this broad attitude, and whose use also served as training in 'ambiguity tolerance' ("Ambiguitätstraining," 253-267). Bauer contrasts these currents of thought with the bias against rhetoric in modern Western scholarship (as exemplified, for example, by the Orientalist H.L. Fleischer), rooted as it was in Romantic ideas of veracity and a resistance to ornate style and semantic ambiguity.

The eighth chapter (268-312) addresses the radical changes that, according to Bauer, the Islamic understanding of sexuality has undergone since the nineteenth century (in particular as regards male homosexuality). Until then, sexuality was seen as something natural and enjoyable, as long as it took place within Islamic legality (i.e., matrimony), since Islam does not hold to the idea of original sin. Furthermore, pre-modern Near Eastern societies did not feel the need to differentiate between (male) love and friendship. In contrast, present Islamic attitudes towards sexuality are clearly prudish, misogynist and homophobic. As in the previous chapters, Bauer attributes these transformations to the impact of Western ideas: the 'ambiguity-intolerant' sexuality discourse of the West that emerged in the nineteenth century (rooted in pre-modern Christian hostility to the body) introduced an essentialized 'hetero-homo-binarity.' Homosexuality became an unnatural deviation and perversion. In addition, the Western 'obsession with truth' (*Wahrheitsobsession*) would have forced individuals to 'confess' (*bekennen*) their sexual orientation and to live 'truly' according to it. His argumentation is widely based on the theories formulated by Foucault and Muchembled about the European history of sexuality. Finally, this peculiar 'western' understanding of sexuality was fatally combined with the need to universalize European concepts and to colonize, so that the peculiar discourse of sexuality was imposed on the allegedly 'decadent' and 'degenerated' Islam.

The ninth chapter (312-375) elaborates on the idea that the West has sought to universalize its peculiar worldview. It seeks to monopolize dominating discourses,

an attitude that stands in contrast to the open attitude of the pre-modern Islamic Orient, a period that was characterized by an awareness that there were multiple perspectives on reality and a general acceptance of plurality. According to Bauer, post-formative Islam would feature a 'relaxed view on the world' (*gelassener Blick auf die Welt*). Bauer then discusses several political discourses in Islam and argues in favor of a greater consideration of textual genres, such as panegyric poetry, mirror of princes and *fiqh* literature, that all convey a secular view on politics. In a second part (343-375), he analyses the term Arabic *gharīb* ('foreigner, stranger') and argues that its meaning does not denote any xenophobic dimension. The West, in contrast, understands the semantic equivalents of *gharīb* in an objectivizing, discriminating way, denoting a characteristic 'ambiguity anxiety', and so feels a need to convert and assimilate the 'foreigner' in order to disambiguate his ambiguous status.

The tenth chapter (376-405) functions in part as a conclusion. In it Bauer develops his thesis of an 'ambiguity-tolerant' and multi-perspective pre-modern Islam that only changed after the confrontation with the 'ambiguity-intolerant' West. Bauer deals with abstract philosophical ideas and concepts that, according to his far-reaching argumentation, are radically different in the West and pre-modern Islam. Islam pursued a skeptical world-view that accepted the human limits of cognition, as seen in the work of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (543-606/1149-1209), and even developed, in the ideas of Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (422-466/1031-1074), a theory of non-understanding. The West, for its part, adhered, after Descartes, to an anti-humanist, logistic philosophy that ultimately aims to eradicate any ambivalence and ambiguity. Modern fundamentalist and liberal Islam have both incorporated this originally Western perception of reality that only allows for one unique truth. It is a paradox that the post-modernist West, in the meanwhile, has abandoned these attitudes for an open, humanistic and tolerant philosophy, whereas Islam is still 'stuck' in monochrome modernity.

As illustrated above, Bauer pursues three main goals: the introduction of a new analytic tool to explain cultural changes ('cultural ambiguity'); second, its application to Islamic history and culture, and third, to propose thereby a new overriding narrative of Islamic history. What are the main constituents of this new term as proposed by Bauer?

In its original context, the term *ambiguity* is used in the field of semantics and linguistics to denominate the inherent capacity of utterances, words and other symbols to carry multiple meanings, i.e., semantic polyvalence. If semantic ambiguity goes too far and produces misunderstandings, it loses efficacy. But ambiguity is also a necessary quality of language, since it provides the appropriate flexibility for its social use. Ambiguity can also be a quality of social acts, insofar as they might be socially interpreted (i.e., 'read') and valued in multiple and conflicting ways. In this case, ambiguity tends to be a problem and becomes a source of anxiety: the ability of an individual to cope with this ambiguity, and manage it in a positive way, is commonly seen as part of his personal capacity of solving conflicts. Psychology, since the 1950's, has investigated the degree of

'ambiguity tolerance' as a personality trait; this was related to the study of the so-called 'authoritarian personality' and its hypothetical connection to fascism and racism.

Bauer proposes now to broaden the term's application, by defining 'ambiguity tolerance' as a basic trait of whole cultures and societies. Such a qualitative leap from individual psychology to collective psychology, and then to cultural studies is risky, but can also be very inspiring and might open the path to new perspectives. A telling example is the remarkable career of the term 'identity', which in its origin was only used in psychology and philosophy, but has come to be used in the last decades mainly in the sense of collective identity or identities (understood variously as cultural, religious or ethnic). A similar case is that of 'memory' (as in 'collective' or 'cultural memory'). From this perspective, the introduction of the term 'cultural ambiguity' in Cultural Studies promises to open a fruitful new field of research.

An essential weakness of this kind of ambitious, broad, and comparative approach, however, is that it relies on generalizations, simplifications and a selective evidence base that can be challenged from many perspectives. Bauer posits a dichotomy between an 'ambiguity-tolerant' pre-modern Islam and an 'ambiguity-intolerant' West. Unfortunately, aside from being an undue simplification on both sides, based on a debatable selection of sources, he fails to adequately explain why and how this basic difference emerged, creating in the process a radical contrast between two neighboring and entangled cultures, both equally offshoots of Late Antiquity (and ultimately of Aristotelian epistemology). It also remains unclear why it was so easy for the West to impose its unitary world-view and eradicate successfully pre-modern, 'ambiguity-tolerant' Islam.

A further point is that Bauer's portrayal of pre-modern Islam occasionally suggests that this period was almost post-modern, which is, of course, a *contradictio in adjecto* (e.g., 113 "Konzeption [...] ist unverkennbar *postmodern*"), since post-modernity presupposes modernity by its very essence. Furthermore, Bauer has to rely on previous generalizing, selective and often outdated studies that provide a unidimensional view on many phenomena. This applies, in particular, to his portrayal of Western sexuality and his understanding of homosexuality (based on Foucault and Muchembled), as well as that of modern European philosophy (here Bauer relies mostly on the antilogicist and postmodernist Stephen Toulmin and his polemics against analytical philosophy, which would explain the almost complete omission of German idealism in Bauer's book). It is also curious that Bauer, in his enthusiasm for the blessings of ambiguity, refers to the argumentation of the sociologist D.N. Levine[4], who actually condemned ambiguity as an essential trait of sharply stratified societies in which elites used secrecy to maintain their privileged status.

In contrast to Edward Said, whose expertise was in English and French literature – Said's ignorance of the academic field of Oriental Studies has always been a crucial argument against his theories - Bauer is an established scholar in the field. A widely-acknowledged expert

4. *The flight from Ambiguity.Essays in Social and Cultural Theory*. Chicago 1985.

in Classical Arabic poetry, Arabic Rhetoric and Mamluk literature, he is a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies (University of Münster). Thus, Bauer's scholarly knowledge of Islamic culture is beyond doubt (particularly in the field of Arabic literature). His selection of sources is at times puzzling; he omits the thinker and fundamentalist *ante litteram,* Ibn Ṭaymiyya (661-728/1263-1328), and focuses almost exclusively on the Mamluk and Ayyūbid periods. (For other questionable omissions, see the review by Irene Schneider).[5]

Another point concerns his understanding of sex, gender and sexuality in pre-modern Islam, which is debatable;[6] and Bauer's almost complete neglect of female sexuality and gender in a chapter addressing sexuality in Islam is also hardly comprehensible. Bauer might be said to share a certain lack of balance with Edward Said, though in his case regarding "the West," about which his sweeping comments are occasionally superficial and selective. His expertise in Arabic and Islamic studies, however, is on display throughout. Bauer's treatment of Arabic literature, for example, offers inspired insights into its playful aesthetics, and his introduction to important Muslim thinkers from the rather unknown post-formative period are very meritorious, readable and highly interesting.

Bauer's book is overall a commendable work. It suggests the possibility of writing an alternative history of Islam that would focus on the post-formative or Middle period and its many original if far less known thinkers. One hopes that the book will also remind European scholars that the modern roots of Islamic fundamentalism are by no means 'medieval'. It is also remarkable that an Arabist has written a book of such wide cultural scope. Even if some of Bauer's assumptions and conclusions might be debatable, it is very exciting to think about scholars in 'European' and 'Western' studies henceforth discussing questions of Islamic law, hadith, Qurʾān and Arabic literature as topics that might be relevant to them and to cultural studies in general.

5. See note 3 above.

6. See in particular Sara Omar's study "From Semantics to Normative Law: Perceptions of *Liwāṭ* (Sodomy) and *Siḥāq* (Tribadism) in Islamic Jurisprudence (8th to 15th century C.E.)," *Islamic Law and Society* 19 (2012), 222-256..

Book Review

Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Qur'ānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), viii+244 pages. ISBN: 9780199947997, Price: $78.00.

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Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) has been the subject of much recent scholarship that has affirmed his importance as an innovative thinker, who had a hand in advancing the many disciplines in which he wrote. Tariq Jaffer's new book stands on the shoulders of long-standing work by the likes of Ignaz Goldziher and Josef van Ess, as well as scholars who have recently written on al-Rāzī including Ayman Shihadeh and Michel Lagarde. Jaffer adds valuable insights to the available work on this towering figure in Islamic intellectual history. This book is not meant to be a comprehensive account of al-Rāzī's thought but rather a focused examination of his methodology, particularly in his famous commentary on the Qurʾān, the *Mafātīh al-ghayb*. Jaffer shows how *tafsīr*, in al-Rāzī's hands, becomes more complex and comprehensive than simply an exegesis in the narrow sense; it provides, rather, "a context in which philosophical questions can be examined," by using critical reasoning to arrive at truth (173-4).

Jaffer explores several related dimensions of al-Rāzī's thought in the service of demonstrating the scholar's innovative adaptation of disparate methodologies to the genre of *tafsīr*. In his opening chapter, he briefly takes account of the history of doubt in Islamic thought as a method of arriving at personal understanding, highlighting al-Rāzī's effort to escape from *taqlīd*, the uncritical acceptance of authority, in both his philosophy and exegesis. In order to eschew *taqlīd*, al-Rāzī implemented a dialectical method, raising questions and formulating arguments so to achieve a critical investigation of the philosophical and theological issues that the text raises in the reader's mind. Al-Rāzī was not the only thinker to apply this type of method in his writings around this time in history, Jaffer writes, but he was unique in pioneering its use in *tafsīr*.

The individual effort to arrive at understanding rather than blindly accepting authorities' conclusions goes hand in hand with privileging the intellect, *ʿaql*, as a tool for approaching Islamic thought. The championing of *ʿaql,* over and above the authority of transmitted sources (*manqūlāt*), is conventionally seen as central to Muʿtazilite thought. Jaffer, in his second chapter, demonstrates al-Rāzī's elevating of the status of *ʿaql* in *tafsīr*, thus challenging his identity as a wholehearted Ashʿarite and positioning him instead as having a "strongly Muʿtazilite" methodology (55). In so doing, Jaffer demonstrates the way in which al-Rāzī assigns the intellect priority over revelation, placing limits on the authority of the Qurʾān and *hadīth*.

Jaffer draws connections between this hierarchy and particular facets of al-Rāzī's commentary. Applying *ʿaql* to Qurʾānic exegesis, for al-Rāzī, meant, most prominently, using reason to determine when non-literal interpretation of a verse is in order. The reader's *ʿaql* determines when the plain meaning of a verse is in conflict with rational evidence, providing the cue to read the verse figuratively. *ʿAql* also plays a central role in establishing the credibility of the Qurʾān. It is logically impossible, in al-Rāzī's thought, for scripture to confirm itself: it requires a witness. Thus, the credibility of Muḥammad himself, and not simply the attestation of miracles, must be subject to rational confirmation (Chapter Three). Ultimately, it is reason that tells us God would not send a false prophet. These fascinating explorations of the results of al-Rāzī's privileging of *ʿaql* are a strength of Jaffer's book.

The final two chapters of the book consist of case studies of al-Rāzī's *tafsīr,* carefully chosen to highlight al-Rāzī's adaptation of non-traditional sources and methods in his commentary. Jaffer, in Chapter Four, provides a detailed analysis of al-Rāzī's interpretation of the Light Verse (Q 24:35) as a means of showing that al-Rāzī employed Avicennian thought as well as the paradoxical logic of al-Ghazali's interpretation in his commentary on the particular *āya*, ultimately staging a developed theory of knowledge through this exegesis. The methods of Avicenna's allegorical *falsafa* and al-Ghazali's Sufi principles were adopted into Sunni *tafsīr* in this way.

Jaffer turns, in Chapter Five, to al-Rāzī's doctrine of the soul in *Mafātīh al-ghayb.* His comments showcase the adoption of Muʿtazilite thought on the soul as well as al-Rāzī's mediation between *falāsifa* and theologians' disagreements on the topic of the soul. These later chapters of Jaffer's book are very detailed and replete with lengthy quotations. A thorough reading will nonetheless reward the reader who is interested in the fine points of al-Rāzī's exegesis and its relationship to other thinkers' explanations of the Light Verse and the soul.

Though Jaffer's book is a focused study of al-Rāzī's methodology, particularly in his *tafsīr*, the book does strive to place al-Rāzī into the context of his position in the history of Islamic thought. Al-Rāzī was not the first thinker to make many of the important intellectual moves that Jaffer examines, and the book provides some background on earlier thinkers such as al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), accounting for the ways in which al-Rāzī responded to and incorporated his predecessors' insights into his thought. Jaffer considers

the influence that al-Rāzī's methodology had on later Islamic thought, referencing research that has shown its adoption among Sunni scholars, such as al-Ījī (d. c. 756/1355), al-Taftazānī (d. 793/1390), and al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), who drew on al-Rāzī's tåwīl methodology (117). He also looks closely at the Traditionalist rejection of the *ʿaqlī* method, as represented by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328).

Jaffer's book is a solid contribution to scholarship on al-Rāzī as well as the broader development of Islamic disciplines in the "postclassical" period. Over and above academic work on individual fields of thought such as exegesis, philosophy, and theology, Jaffer offers a perspective into the cross-pollination of thought across disciplines. By showing the ways in which al-Rāzī applies a method used in one discipline to his writing in another, Jaffer describes and analyzes those methods that were characteristic of al-Rāzī as a thinker, as opposed more narrowly as an exegete or theologian. The book provides an account, illustrated through adeptly translated excerpts of al-Rāzī's writings, of al-Rāzī's commitment to integrating *ʿaql* into *tafsīr*. In fact, as Jaffer shows, al-Rāzī saw the Qurʾān itself as being organized according to rational logic and containing answers to the questions it poses, with "the solutions to difficulties... already worked out by divine reasoning and... embedded in Qurʾānic verses for human reasoning to discover" (170).

Jaffer depicts al-Rāzī as a scholar who applied a consistent logic across his oeuvre, one who was concerned with importing the methods of philosophy and theology into *tafsīr* and applying them critically. The result, Jaffer shows, is an eclectic compound method of reading the Qurʾān in which elements of disparate origins coexist and together produce insightful interpretation. In light of this methodological exploration, it is especially intriguing to read that al-Rāzī in fact developed divergent interpretations of the Light Verse in different books that he authored. This section raises some thought-provoking questions about the coherence of al-Rāzī's oeuvre.

Jaffer attributes these differences, especially between the *Mafātīh al-ghayb* and the more Sufi-like *Asrār al-tanzīl*, to generic conventions (166) and the "unprecedented" flexibility of his methodology (168) rather than concluding that there are inconsistencies in al-Rāzī's work. Considering Jaffer's thesis that al-Rāzī freely adopted a variety of schools' ways of thinking in his *tafsīr* and yet still differed in his explanations of key *āyāt* across his commentaries, such divergences seems worthy of further exploration. One wonders what the significance of generic boundaries was for a scholar like al-Rāzī who, as Jaffer so aptly demonstrates, worked to apply the methods of many schools of thought to *tafsīr*.

Jaffer's writing is admirably clear. He carefully leads his readers through each chapter with explicit explanation of what each section seeks to demonstrate and the way each topic fits into Jaffer's larger project. This book will be useful for students and specialists in Islamic Studies, especially those interested in understanding the so-called postclassical developments in Islamic thought across disciplines. Jaffer adds his voice to those of scholars who have helped advance understanding of one of the most influential figures in Islamic intellectual history.

Book Review

Amina Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans: Urban Protest in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria* (Cairo/New York: The American University of Cairo Press, 2015), 276 pages. ISBN: 9789774167171, Price: $49.95 (Cloth).

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Amina Elbendary's book is an attempt to reconsider the social implications of the economic crises and political transformations of the fifteenth century while taking into account the point of view of common people, especially the urban non-elite. This "non-elite" is defined as craftsmen, artisans, and tradesmen, as well as minor clerks and employees of the ruling and educational institutions of Egyptian and Syrian cities. All these members of society were traditionally marginalized in contemporary sources, but their increasing presence in the narratives of the late Mamluk period is interpreted by Elbendary as the result of social transformations. Popular protests thus offer a unique window to observe non-elite participation in politics.

The period considered is a long fifteenth century, presented in Chapter 1 (pp.1-18). This century begins with the reign of Sultan Barqūq (r. 1382-1399) and includes the start of the Ottoman domination over the Arab provinces, which undermines the generally accepted periodization, and erases the rupture between Mamluks and Ottomans. The author chooses to avoid the "decline and fall paradigm" and instead reinstates the Mamluk regime in line with the work of Imad Abu Ghazi. She considers that the actions taken by the Mamluk regime to address declining revenues (such as the payment of bribes and the venality of offices) formed part of a policy of financial compensation, which allowed the state to function in a more decentralized manner. Challenging the supremacy of the sultan paved the way for the participation of other groups – amirs as well as people from the middle class – in political life. Despite the undeniably autocratic nature of the regime, certain policies could be adjusted or modified in response to public dissatisfaction. The different political and economic crises that dotted this century can thus be considered as opportunities for some groups to gain more access to power and renegotiate their positions.

Chapter 2 ("The Mamluk State transformed," pp. 19-43) is devoted to the transformations of the State and the reactions prompted by these changes. By deductive reasoning, the author endeavors to determine the root causes behind these transformations and the sequence of events: state response, popular reaction, and the turn to negotiated settlements. "The policies that the Mamluk rulers followed were not only a reaction to these changes, but also factors that shaped them, and they resulted in many people's suffering and/or social displacement. This in turn prompted more acts of protest" (p. 20). The first challenge was the black plague, for which the author gives an estimate of the human and economic cost based on the studies of M. Dols, J. Abu Lughod, and A. Raymond (between one-third and two-fifths of the population of Cairo wiped out, and two-fifths of Syria). A decline in resources fueled elite competition, while a shortage of gold and subsequent currency devaluation led to popular protests. A revolt against Qāyt Bāy in 1481 related by Ibn Iyās, which was sparked by the issuance of new copper coins, reveals the existence of negotiation procedures: the authorities accepted a monetary adjustment in order to regulate the conflict. Yet the reader would have liked a more detailed presentation of the monetary reforms, since they were the cause of numerous popular revolts in both Cairo and Damascus and gave rise to numerous historiographical commentaries from al-Maqrīzī to Ibn Ṭawq (see notably the studies of W. Schultz[1]). The author briefly reviews the revolts brought on by currency devaluation in chapter 5 (pp. 136-9), but without further consideration of the objectives pursued by the authorities, notably in relation to the urban popular classes directly targeted by these reforms.

Other measures, interpreted as signs of decline and corruption by contemporaries, aimed at solving the economic crisis: taxation, or alternative measures such as bribery, *ḥimāya,* forced sales (*ṭarḥ*), sales of offices, extortion, confiscation, and land sales. According to the author, who cites J. Meloy, bribery and extortion were "a routine feature that allowed the state to function" (p. 33). The *iqṭāʿ* system collapsed because of the conversion of land into private property, while the Mamluk amirs were given administrative and judiciary functions, reinforcing the militarization of society. Thus, the entire Mamluk system was transformed. In this respect, the author concludes of decentralization and the diffusion of power among numerous actors.

Chapter 3, "A society in flux" (pp. 45-69), discusses both upward and downward social mobility. Some groups rose to the fore, taking advantage of the diffusion of power and decentralization of government. Once again, the greater visibility of a group in historiography is interpreted as an indication of its

1. Warren C. Schultz, "Mahmûd ibn ʿAlî and the 'New Fulûs': Late Fourteenth Century Mamluk Egyptian Copper Coinage Reconsidered," *American Journal of Numismatics*, 2nd series, 10 (1998): 127-48; Warren C. Schultz, "'It Has No Root among Any Community that Believes in Revealed Religion, Nor Legal Foundation for Its Implementation': Placing al-Maqrīzī's Comments on Money in a Wider Context," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7, no. 2 (2003): 169-81. On al-Maqrīzī, see Adel Allouche, *Mamluk Economics: A Study and Translation of al-Maqrīzī's Ighāthah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994).

increasing political prominence. A case in point were the Bedouins. They took hold of a large share of the *iqṭāʿ* (46 percent in the province of Sharqiya). Their shaykhs thus became official authorities in the countryside and levied taxes. This situation inevitably caused tensions with the Mamluk authorities, leading to plundering, especially during the pilgrimage and harvest seasons (with the transfer of grain to the capital), an indication of the extent to which the central authorities controlled the countryside.

Coptic conversion to Islam also accelerated during this period. The pressure put on the Copts is seen as the result of the Mamluk rulers bolstering Islam, as they themselves were born non-Muslims (pp. 56-8). The author interprets the numerous acts of violence against non-Muslims as a consequence of the evolving social position of the Coptic community and the will to restore an imagined traditional social order. This explanation is extremely interesting and opens up avenues for future research, but is insufficiently analyzed in the book: the link between conversion and violence against Christians deserves further exploration.[2] Other unexpected personalities moved from the periphery of society to the core at this time as well. The author examines at length one case of the ascension of a commoner, that of Abū al-Khayr al-Naḥḥās (d. 1459), who has already been studied by R. Mortel.

All of these transformations created a sense of anxiety and social malaise, which is reflected in Mamluk sources in terms of nostalgia for the previous social order. In the streets, the social malaise led to an increased rate of violence and urban protest. Indeed, references to incidents of protest appear to be more frequent than those reported for other historical periods. Elbandary relies on a study on suicide and voluntary death by B. Martel-Thoumian, which allow us to gauge the pressure placed on people by the authorities[3].

Chapter 4 is entitled "Popularization of culture and the bourgeois trend" (pp. 71-120). The patterns of social mobility analyzed in the previous chapter are presented here as the cause of changes to cultural production (literature, historiography, and religious texts) in the late Mamluk period. This reflects a "bourgeois trend" that allowed people from the "middle class" (in a socio-economic sense) to make their voices heard by engaging in cultural production. One of the principal manifestations of this "bourgeois trend" was the popularization and vernacularizing of cultural forms. Sufism, for example, became the expression of the "merging of classical and vernacular culture and the mainstreaming of popular culture during the late Mamluk period" (p. 78).

The popularization of culture also manifested itself in written texts through the use of colloquial Arabic as well as non-canonical forms of Arabic and colloquial poetry (see, for example, Ibn Sūdūn's (d. 1464) *Nuzhat al-nufūs*

2. Denis Gril, "Une émeute anti-chrétienne à Qūṣ au début du VIII^e^-XIV^e^ siècle," *Annales islamologiques/Ḥawlīyāt Islāmīyah* 16 (1980): 241-74, contends that the uprising against the Copts was provoked by their boast of having high-ranking support.

3. B. Martel-Thoumian, "La mort volontaire : le traitement du suicide et du suicidé dans les chroniques mameloukes tardives", *Annales islamologiques* 38 (2004): 405-435.

wa muḍḥik al-ʿabūs or the diffusion of *rubāʿiya*, *kān wa-kān*, *qūmā*, *muwashḥah, mawāliya and zajal*). The author interprets this as a means to reach a new audience (pp. 106-9). Mamluk sources "include echoes of the vernacular, reflect an increasing interest in the mundane, and reveal a different sense of self and identity of the authors – many of whom came from popular backgrounds – who include themselves in the narrative" (p. 82). Elbendary devotes specific comments to the inclusion of women in biographical dictionaries (cf. *Kitāb al-nisāʾ* of al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497) at the end of his *Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, pp. 84-7).

Thus, everyday life became a topic of interest in both literature and history. Yet some discrepancies exist between the historiography of Cairo, more focused on the politics of the sultanate, and that of Syria, where authors like Ibn Ṭawq (d. 1509, a notary at the Damascus court) and Ibn Ṭulūn (d. 1546) were more interested in events from a local perspective. However, in Egypt, changes to historical works only emerged during the period of Ottoman domination. The works of such authors as Ibn Abī al-Surūr al-Bakrī (d. ca. 1619), al-Damurdāshī (d. 1775), and al-Jabartī (d. 1825), suggest a strong connection between the Egyptian historians of the late Mamluk period and the regime, which supports T. Khalidi's thesis about "*siyāsa*-oriented historiography." [4] This does not mean that Egyptian historians were disconnected from the life of the community: they recorded the annual level of the Nile, changing prices, food shortages, crimes, rumors, disputes, and so forth, which reveal a "civic interest" (pp. 98-103). Despite their differences, both Damascene and Cairene historians seem to have used history as a way to protest against the dominant political order, as shown by their critical attitude toward contemporary rulers (pp. 112-9).

These three chapters set the stage for the remainder of the book, which treats the main subject: popular protest. This section offers more of a synthesis of recent studies on the economic and social situation of Egypt and Syria in the fifteenth century than new research. Some of this material is drawn exclusively in fact from the secondary literature, sometimes quite briefly and without contributing any supplementary conclusions. The subchapter entitled "Emerging landowning class" (pp. 55-6) does not draw from any primary sources and cites only one author (Imad Abu Ghazi) without giving a precise reference. Furthermore, numerous repetitions give an impression of déjà vu, and should have been spotted by the editor (sometimes, the same sentence is repeated on the same page, see p. 22).

In chapter 5, "Between riots and negotiations: Popular politics and protest" (pp. 121-55), the author relies on detailed narratives of popular protests, which show that the urban populace, far from being a submissive mass, was part of the transformations taking place in Mamluk society. These events can be understood as a sign of a "new civic awareness and vitality" (p. 122). "Artisans and ulama, traders and amirs, formed temporary alliances for a variety of reasons in order to confront particular situations" (p. 125). The *ulama*—be they high-ranking or more modest—played a key role in protests.

4. See T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 182-231.

They did so as agents of protest, as in the revolt in Damascus against the high sugar price fixed by the *ustādār* Ibn Shād Bek (p. 127), and as mediators between the state and the masses, as in Jumādā I 907/ November 1501, when the governor of Damascus sent a delegation including four *qadi*s to negotiate with rebel leaders (pp. 127-8).

In Damascus, the protests often included the chanting of *takbīr* and a march to/ from the Umayyad mosque (detailed further in chapter 6, pp. 191-3). At times, women were also involved (pp. 134-6). Demonstrations took place to protest against currency devaluation, extra levies and taxes, food shortages, or whatever was perceived by the rioters as an injustice or an indication of official corruption. The notion of a "moral economy," conceptualized by E. P. Thomson for early modern Europe, is mentioned once (p. 129), but one would have expected the author to define the concept more precisely during the argumentation itself.[5]

Elbendary also considers Mamluk protests (pp. 149-53). These protests were not only against economic burdens and injustices: they also attempted to maintain a certain social order as shown in chapter 6, "Protest and the medieval social imagination" (pp. 157-201). For example, in the name of *ḥisba* as the responsibility of every Muslim, moral issues (the consumption of alcohol and hashish, especially when they involved members of the military elite) were the cause of popular revolt. Some of these campaigns to redress injustice thus could have occurred with the official endorsement of the authorities, which would have allowed them to boost their popularity. But crowds sometimes managed to take the law into their own hands in carrying out justice.

Similarly, sectarian violence manifested as an appeal to revive the restrictions on *dhimmīs*. As for the administration, it was a way to prove its credentials and bolster its legitimacy. Protests were often directed against middle-class officials. *Muḥtasib*s could thus be the targets of stoning, because of the transformation of their function from regulating public morality to more administrative and financial duties. Riots against governors often took place in provincial cities, far from the control of the central government. They could become violent and even lead to murder, as occurred in Damietta in 1417 (pp. 181-2). "This suggests that it was the crowd rather than the ulama, that had the upper hand and were deciding what would happen" (p. 182).

Generally, the head of state—the sultan—remained untouched. A brief analysis of the theoretical literature (from al-Mawardī to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah) on the legitimacy of rebelling against the ruler shows that the "attitudes and positions in the literature vis-à-vis the imams were transferred to Mamluk sultans, making real, meaningful protest against them very limited. Instead, the sultan was often presented as the judge of last resort and above blame" (p. 188). But this did not prevent the ruling factions from using popular crowds in their struggles for power. Satire and parody could also be used against rulers (pp. 193-7).

This book has the merit of revealing the complexity of urban societies in the

5. For a transposition of the concept in the Mamluk context, see Amalia Levanoni, "The al-Nashw Episode: A Case Study of 'Moral Economy'," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 1 (2005): 207-20.

pre-modern Middle East and drawing attention to a topic that has been poorly researched until now. Without calling into question the conclusions of the author, this subject would have benefited from being situated in a better defined conceptual framework.

First of all, this concerns the periodization. From the start of the book, the author claims to query the periodization by broadening the fifteenth century to include the Ottoman period, so to speak. The fifteenth century was a time of intense transformations, whose mechanisms are described here with clarity. Nevertheless, the starting point of this specific periodization is not justified. Some elements analyzed in this work appear well before the fifteenth century and characterize the Middle Islamic period spanning from the eleventh to sixteenth centuries. For example, the "popularization" and the changes made to the writing of history pre-existed the fifteenth century. On these issues, Elbendary might have drawn on the work of C. Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013). This would have provided a more satisfactory definition of the concept of popularization (i.e., the spread of the written word to non-elite groups) in order to avoid the pitfall of the dichotomy of popular/elite culture.

Further, a conceptual refocusing of revolts and their representation in the sources (notably through the study of vocabulary) would have been expected. A definition of the "urban protests" announced in the title of the book should be given in the introduction,[6] and the study of Bedouin revolts, addressed in the work, but outside the framework of the urban protests, should be justified.[7]

Finally, the kind of negotiation procedures that put an end to the revolts, and which are discussed here as characteristic of the fifteenth century, have been treated extensively in scholarship on medieval Western Europe since the research of Claude Gauvard[8]. Taking this into account could give rise, *mutatis mutandis*, to quite interesting comparisons with the Islamic Middle East. These remarks notwithstanding, Elbendary's study of popular protest in the late Mamluk period is a welcome addition to the field.

6. The chapter of Jean-Claude Garcin, "La révolte donnée à voir chez les populations civiles de l'état militaire mamluk (XIII^{e}-XV^{e} s.)," in Éric Chaumont (ed.), *Autour du regard : Mélanges Gimaret* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 261-78, would have been very useful in this respect.

7. On the mecanism of this revolt, see Sarah Büssow-Schmitz, "Rules of Communication and Politics between Bedouin and Mamluk Elites in Egypt: The Case of the al-Aḥdab Revolt, c. 1353," *Nomads in the Political Field. Eurasian Studies* (2010): 67-104.

8. See for instance, the studies collected by C. Gauvard, *Violence et ordre public au Moyen Âge*, "Les Médiévistes fançais" 5 (Paris, Picard: 2005).

Book Review

Petrus Martyr Anglerius, *Legatio Babylonica. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar von Hans Heinrich Todt*, Corpus Islamo-Christianum 8 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2015), x, 450 pages. ISBN 9783447103473, Price: € 122.00.

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Scholars of Mamluk history are indebted to the late Ulrich Haarmann (1942-1999) for underscoring the value of travelogues by European pilgrims and diplomats as primary sources. In his pioneering article, "The Mamluk System of Rule in the Eyes of Western Travelers," published posthumously in 2001 in the *Mamlūk Studies Review* (pp. 1-24), Haarmann showed that the works of Europeans who visited Egypt and Syria during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries included valuable information on the social, natural, cultural and political history of the later Mamluk period. Their writings constitute an important corpus that can help modern-day historians to supplement and scrutinize the contents of works in Near Eastern languages. This is especially the case since European authors sometimes provide information on aspects of everyday life that, while of great interest to modern-day readers, were taken for granted and therefore left uncommented by local historiographers.

While Haarmann referred to a large number of relevant sources in his article, he never intended it as an exhaustive review of the extant premodern European literature on the Mamluk Sultanate. It is thus not surprising that subsequent scholarship has pointed to other texts in European languages that are of considerable value for the study of late Mamluk history. One of these texts, the *Legatio Babylonica* by the Spanish envoy Petrus Martyr Anglerius (1457-1526), has long been available only in the Latin original and a very dated Spanish translation. It is now accessible to the broader scholarly public by means of Hans Heinrich Todt's recent re-edition and German translation. This new publication is of outstanding quality and deserves the full attention of all scholars interested in the history of the late Mamluk period, especially since the *Legatio Babylonica* includes ample and valuable information on a period for which the corpus of Arabic sources is very limited, namely,

from the death of the Mamluk Sultan Qāyitbāy (r. 872-901/1468-1496) to the early reign of Sultan Qanṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906-922/1501-1516).

The book under review, based on the author's PhD dissertation, consists of a comprehensive Introduction (pp. 1-160), the Latin edition with parallel German translation and notes (pp. 161-365), three appendices (pp. 366-426), a bibliography (pp. 427-443), a list of figures (pp. 444-6) and an index of proper names (pp. 447-450).

The Introduction is divided into eleven subsections. In the first subsection (pp. 1-3), Todt explains why the *Legatio Babylonica* deserves a new edition, pointing *inter alia* to the value of the text as a work of Latin literature and as a unique source on the history of the Near East at the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, neither a text-critical edition of the text nor an up-to-date annotated translation had been available up to now. Todt addresses these desiderata with his publication.

Todt offers a brief albeit adequate overview of the state of research on the *Legatio Babylonica* (pp. 3-8). He then turns in the third section of the Introduction to the historical context of the text (pp. 9-24). Here, the editor provides detailed information on the conquest of the last primarily Muslim-inhabited areas of the Iberian Peninsula at the hands of the Catholic kings Isabella I and Ferdinand II and the religious policy of these Christian rulers in the years 1481-1502. These developments resulted in the forced mass conversion, expulsion, enslavement or killing of most of the remaining Muslim and Jewish population of the Iberian Peninsula.

The fourth section is dedicated to a study of the biography of the Petrus Martyr Anglerius (pp. 25-48). Born in the Italian town of Arona on the shores of the Lago Maggiore in 1457, Petrus Martyr held numerous diplomatic, educational and administrative posts at various localities in northern and central Italy, thereby using to full advantage his thorough education in the antique Latin cultural heritage which he had received in Milan and Rome. In 1487, he moved to Spain, where he joined the court society of Isabella I. Having participated in military activities against the Muslims of Granada, he became a priest in 1492 and thereafter served as a tutor to young noblemen and as the queen's personal confessor. After his return from his diplomatic embassy to Egypt, Petrus Martyr received several promotions, including that to the post of Prior of Granada in 1503. After Isabella's death in 1504, Petrus Martyr continued his service to the crown in various religious, literary, diplomatic and administrative capacities, reaching the pinnacle of his career in 1524 with his promotion to Bishop of Jamaica. Suffering from weak health, however, the newly appointed Bishop was unable to travel to his oversea diocese and died in 1526, most likely in Granada. Among his literary works, Petrus Martyr's multivolume history of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, *De Orbe Novo Decades*, has received by far the most attention, although the author is also known for his collection of letters as well as a number of other works, including the *Legatio Babylonica*.

The short fifth section (pp. 49-51) deals with the background of Petrus Martyr's mission to Egypt and the content of the account of his trip, the *Legatio Babylonica*.

In reaction to the measures taken by Isabella and Ferdinand against the Muslim inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula, the Mamluk Sultan al-Ghawrī had threatened to force European merchants to convert to Islam, to banish them from their territory or to kill them outright. Moreover, he announced his intention to destroy Christian pilgrimage sites within his realm. Isabella and Ferdinand responded by sending an envoy to Egypt to dissuade the Mamluk ruler from these plans, ensure favorable conditions for Christian pilgrims, and point out the economic and military advantages that friendly relations between Spain and the Mamluk Sultanate would have for the Muslim side. They appointed Petrus Martyr for this mission.

The *Legatio Babylonica* contains the detailed account of his undertaking. It consists of three letters. The first of these letters deals with the envoy's trip from Granada to Venice and his sojourn in this city. The second letter describes the crossing of the Mediterranean and Petrus Martyr's arrival in Alexandria. Petrus Martyr's trip to Cairo, his diplomatic activities in this city, and his return to Europe form the contents of the third and by far longest part of the work. Here, the author provides not only a detailed report of his negotiations with the Mamluk Sultan al-Ghawrī, but also informs his readers about the history and the political system of the Mamluk Sultanate as well as the natural history of Egypt and its famous sights such as the Pyramids of Giza.

The sixth section of the Introduction (pp. 52-75) includes a thorough historical reconstruction of Petrus Martyr's mission to Egypt, which lasted from August 1501 (departure from Granada) to September 1502 (return to Toledo) and included a sojourn in Egypt of about three months between late December 1501 and late March 1502. Among other things, Todt elucidates in painstaking detail the route that the Spanish envoy took to and from Egypt.

The seventh section (pp. 76-98) is dedicated to a study of the biographies of Petrus Martyr's two most important interlocutors in Mamluk Egypt, the dragoman and low-ranking *amīr* Taghrī Birdī and Sultan al-Ghawrī. Whereas Todt's short overview of the career of the Mamluk Sultan provides hardly any new information on this well-known political figure, his discussion of Taghrī Birdī's life and background constitutes in itself a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the social history of the late Mamluk period. Among other things, Todt shows that Taghrī Birdī was most likely born in Catalonia into a Jewish family before coming to Egypt in the wake of a shipwreck. This information on Taghrī Birdī's background is of considerable importance, given that in numerous instances Petrus Martyr highlights the Mamluk dragoman's connection to the Iberian Peninsula as an important basis for their good collaboration in Egypt.

The eighth section (pp. 99-103) provides an in-depth analysis of Petrus Martyr's account of his negotiations with al-Ghawrī, paying special attention to the argumentative, rhetoric and narrative strategies featuring in this portion of the Latin text.

Continuing the focus of the preceding section, the ninth part of the Introduction (pp. 104-21) studies the literary character of the *Legatio Babylonica*. It contextualizes the text within the genre of diplomatic reports and deals with its narrative

strategies in engaging with the foreign as well as with its language and style.

The tenth section (pp. 122-157) provides detailed bibliographical information and comments on the preceding editions and translations of *Legatio Babylonica*, beginning with the Latin *editio princeps* of 1511 and ending with the Latin edition *cum* Spanish translation of 1947. Reproductions of the cover pages of all editions and translations dealt with allow the reader direct insights into the history of the text and its publications.

Introductory remarks on the translation and edition proper makes up the eleventh and final section (pp. 158-160) of the Introduction. Todt explains that text-critical annotations can be kept to a minimum, given that early prints of the work offer a generally very reliable text with few variants. The author has slightly adjusted the Latin text, however, using a more common orthography, additional punctuation marks, and chapter and paragraph breaks to make it more readable. His endnotes provide helpful information on linguistic peculiarities, uncommon names, and technical terms.

The edition and translation of the text make up the bulk of the volume. The Latin text and the corresponding German translation are presented on opposite pages, with paragraph and sentence numbers allowing for easy navigation and comparison. Petrus Martyr's eloquent Latin is, as the editor himself notes, of high linguistic quality and a considerable degree of complexity. Readers who are not thoroughly familiar with the Latin literature of the early sixteenth century will therefore often rely on Todt's translation. They can do so without the slightest reservations, given that the translation, as an in-depth comparison of several sample passages showed, is a very precise and linguistically absolutely appropriate rendering of the Latin original. Todt deserves ample praise for this masterpiece of philological precision and stylistic beauty.

In terms of content, the sections of the text (pp. 258-271) that deal with the reign of Sultan Qāytbāy, the chaotic period following his death and Sultan al-Ghawrī's ascension to the throne deserve special attention, given that they include numerous pieces of information not included in our Arabic standard source for this period, Muḥammad Ibn Iyās' (d. after 928/1522) *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*. Any future study of this still little understood period will have to take Petrus Martyr's statements into account, especially since the European envoy received his information from people directly involved in the events.

The first of the three appendices (pp. 366-413) deals with the Latin inscriptions Petrus Martyr mentions in his text, which are of limited interest to the non-specialist. The second appendix (pp. 413-416) discusses the historical background of the fact that Petrus Martyr refers to parts of Cairo as "Babylon," while the third one (pp. 416-425) contains editions of letters and other documents related to the envoy's mission.

Todt's thorough introduction to the text provides the reader with all information necessary. The edition itself and his translation are of very high scholarly quality, leaving little room for improvement. It should be noted, however, that Todt's book is the work of a Latinist who writes primarily with a Latinist readership in mind. Hence, the

Introduction includes several lengthy untranslated Latin quotations that not every reader will find easily accessible. Moreover, Todt's transliteration of Arabic and Turkish words and names is at times idiosyncratic (e.g., "Bajazet II." [pp. 89, 95] instead of "Bāyezīd II.") and sometimes does not comply with the rules of the German Oriental Society that the author seeks to apply (cf. p. 159).

Readers should, moreover, keep two additional points in mind which, however, cannot be fairly blamed on the editor. First, Todt did his best in his notes to compare Petrus Martyr's account of the history of the late Mamluk Sultanate to that of Ibn Iyās (which is widely available in French, German and English translations). But he was obviously unable to incorporate relevant material from other, thus far untranslated works of the Arabic historiographical tradition, such as the chronicles of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 953/1546), Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (d. 934/1527) or Ibn Sibāṭ (d. in or after 926/1520). For historians of the Near East of the late middle period, even Todt's thorough annotations are no substitute for a detailed knowledge of the primary Arabic sources.

Second, Todt was unable to take into account another recent re-edition of Petrus Martyr's text published together with a (valuable) Spanish and a (highly anachronistic and problematic) Arabic translation in Madrid in 2013.[1] Although Todt's Introduction and notes are generally more detailed and comprehensive than those included in the recent Spanish edition, readers who want to make sure that they are fully familiar with the latest scholarship on Petrus Martyr and the *Legatio Babylonica* will wish to consult both recent publications.

These minor points notwithstanding, Todt's re-edition and translation of the text with the accompanying comprehensive Introduction is a philological achievement of exemplary character. Scholars interested in using Petrus Martyr's text as a source for their study of the history of the late Mamluk period could not have hoped for a better basis for their work. It is hoped that Todt's work will incite new interest in this era in general and the chaotic five-year period between Sultan Qāytbāy's death and Sultan al-Ghawrī's ascension in particular – a fascinating period that still awaits a detailed historical analysis.

1. Pedro Mártir de Anglería: *Una embajada española al Egipto de principios del siglo XVI: la Legatio Babilonica de Pedro Mártir de Anglería: estudio y edición trilingüe anotada en latín, español y árabe. Estudio, edición latina, notas y traducción al español de Raúl Álvarez-Moreno. Traducción al árabe de Ebtisam Shaban Mursi. Revisión de la traducción al árabe de El Sayed Ibrahm Soheim*, Madrid 2013.

In Memoriam

Shahab Ahmed
(1966-2015)

When I arrived at Harvard as a doctoral student in Islamic studies in 2005, the then-chair of my department, in an attempt to orient me, mentioned a certain Shahab Ahmed. He had been offered a faculty position, but was spending the year at Princeton completing a post-doctoral fellowship. I asked: "What does he specialize in?" He replied: "Everything." When I met Shahab the following fall at a department cocktail party, he approached me and said, "I read your file. I should be your supervisor." I asked: "What do you specialize in?" "Everything," he replied.

Shahab became my co-advisor, along with Leila Ahmed, whom he always respected and admired. The greatest period of my intellectual growth began.

Over time I would come to realize that Shahab's statement that he specialized in "everything" was not *braggadocio*. Less a comment of what he had achieved, it was an indication of his impeccable standards and sense of what was possible for a scholar to attain. It will perhaps not surprise the reader to learn that his graduate students could find this attitude challenging. It simply was not acceptable to Shahab not to know something, though

(Photo courtesy of Nora Lessersohn, Harvard University.)

it would also excite him when he did not. He would be sure to look into whatever lapse in knowledge had emerged, and he would bring it up the next time you saw him. His obsessiveness, a stunning intellectual strength, was difficult on him as a person.

Shahab once asked me to articulate exactly why I was pursuing a Ph.D. in Islamic studies. After giving it some thought, I replied, "If it is not to make positive change, I don't see the point." He seemed satisfied with this answer and a touch surprised. He told me that, for his part, it was Fazlur Rahman's work that inspired him to become a scholar of Islamic Studies. "Most doctoral students start out as reformers," he once reflected, an insight I have never forgotten for its simple truth. How different a place so many of us land after years of rigorous study. He went on to become, in my view, one of the best Islamicists in the world. He perhaps felt that the journey had required him to abandon the goal of reform, though I personally do not think he ever completely did.

I was in awe of Shahab for many years. I had never met anyone so intellectually dedicated, exacting, exciting, relentless, unsatisfied with cutting the slightest corner, at once ruthlessly self-critical and self-aggrandizing, deeply kind and, at times, cruel. His eyes were always lively and curious, even when he was depressed or in physical pain, which he often was. I also never worked harder for anyone in my life than I did for Shahab. Nearly every interaction expanded me as a scholar. He profoundly changed my world-view.

Shahab and I had much in common. We both came from Muslim backgrounds, but were both intellectually and sociologically westernized. He, having had a more dizzyingly cosmopolitan childhood, struggled with his rootlessness and pan-culturalism more than I did. We shared a sense of wanting to redeem the past and change the future of the Islamic world. We had hundreds of conversations about how and why to do this. In one

"Most doctoral students start out as reformers..."

particularly memorable exchange, we discussed the possibility of simply erasing all of Islamic history and starting, as he put it, at "year zero." This nuclear option seemed appealing on days when there was another terrorist bombing in Pakistan, his ancestral homeland (along with India), whereupon his father, who lived in Malaysia, would suggest that he delay his next visit. Or on days when one would hear of a retrograde *fatwa*. Or on days of Islamophobic violence in the West.

There were moments in which I would be frustrated with what I saw as the intransigence of the arcane Islamic legal treatises that I was reading for my dissertation. Shahab was not particularly tolerant of such feelings, once snapping, "You need to be a better structural engineer." What did that mean? "You can't dismantle the one pillar that survived colonialism." Rather taken aback at the accusation, I assured Shahab that I was not trying to destroy post-colonial Muslim hope, but that I found many of the texts hopelessly patriarchal and to engage them in arcane detail was to fight an eternally losing battle. Shahab replied: "God is male. Get used to it."

The comment typified Shahab in several respects. Those who have read his peerless, indeed landmark book, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton University Press, 2015) understand that underlying his discerning arguments is a critique of our contemporary tendency to overemphasize the Islamic legal tradition. What did it mean that, in what he coined the "Bengal to Balkans complex" – the regions outside what is typically regarded as the Arab "orthodox" geographical center of Islam – Sufi poetry was written in praise of wine? Or that Islamic legal thinking influenced and was influenced by speculative theology, which often reasoned itself away from literalist strict constructionist legal orthodoxies? Shahab argues that we must expand our idea of Islam to admit the contradictions embedded in its texts and practices. The book, a nimble scholarly offering, surely will engage generations of Islamicists. Shahab would not let me, a graduate student, get away with a critique of Islamic legal fetishism without first mastering it. For this, I thank him.

"God is male." The Islamic tradition is in part a historicized, secular one with particular foundational features. One of those, for Shahab, was patriarchy. Having engaged Shahab on a range of topics, I can report that, as a person, Shahab saw the problems with patriarchy, and agreed with me that it was as bad for men as it was for women. But, as an intellectual matter, the evidence was clear to him that the Islamic tradition was patriarchal, and to deny this was for him intellectual dishonesty. I understood this and fundamentally agreed. But there was more. Feminist scholarship set Shahab on edge, and he loathed nothing more than to be anxious and uncertain about any scholarly question. This strain of scholarship threatened him, and, being who he was, he knew that he would eventually have to engage with – indeed, master – an approach with which he was uncomfortable. This unsettled him, but I know he took it to heart. This intellectual integrity was a main reason I respected Shahab.

By the time I learned Shahab was gravely ill, we had not been in close contact for a few years. I was devastated to receive the news. I immediately wrote Shahab a letter, which I hope he received. I continue to find his death unfathomable, and mourn it as a personal loss and a loss to modern scholarship. I am grateful that we have not only *What is Islam?,* but that we will soon have *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Harvard University Press, 2017), his magnum opus on the implications for the development of Islamic orthodoxy of the infamous Satanic Versus incident in early Islam. It is tragic that Shahab will not be here to engage with other scholars on these important works. At the same time, there is a small part of me that is grateful – for his sake – that he will not have to engage with the inevitable critique. It was not his strong suit, and I believe that part of the reason that his work was delayed for publication was that he was acutely aware of what potential critiques could be, and he worked tirelessly to preempt them.

Shahab was, at once, obsessive, difficult, unquestionably brilliant, charming, meticulous, and in possession of a wickedly dry sense of humor. He was an absolute original. I miss him, and owe any of my own high scholarly standards very much to him. As I wrote in my letter, I pledge to do what I can to honor his legacy by sharing

and engaging his work with students. I have no doubt that scholars of Islam around the world will do the same, which I believe is what Shahab wanted more than anything. I pray that my tough teacher, and this great soul, will rest in peace.

— Sarah Eltantawi
Evergreen State College
(eltantas@evergreen.edu)

Announcements

Join MEM or renew your MEMbership:
An invitation from Middle East Medievalists

Dear Colleagues,

We are very pleased to announce the launch of the new website of Middle East Medievalists (MEM). Please visit the site at the following address:

http://islamichistorycommons.org/mem/

It is now time to either renew your MEMbership or join MEM if you are not a member. The new website features a new database that will dramatically improve MEM's ability to communicate with MEMbers, manage MEMberships, and carry out other key functions. Just click the membership menu on our website and choose the "individual" or "institutional" option.

Please note that MEM's annual dues have risen (after no increase for years). Individual dues are now $40.00 per year. This is a flat rate (domestic and international). Institutional dues are $250.00 a year.

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You will then be directed to PayPal. There you can either pay with a PayPal account or with a credit/debit card. Once you are done, you will be redirected to our website. You should receive via email 1) a payment confirmation from PayPal and 2) a confirmation from our own website reflecting the changes to your membership. If you run into any problems at all, please be sure to contact us directly.

We have transformed *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* (*UW*) into an open access, peer-reviewed, and online journal. This decision followed much discussion, online and during our annual business meetings. Our aim, quite simply, is to transform *UW* into the journal of choice of Middle East Medievalists, the largest scholarly association in the field in North America. We might add that, the changes notwithstanding, *UW* will continue to provide a sense of community and common purpose for all of us in the discipline.

The new dues also reflect MEM's renewed commitment to the field. We are planning to reintroduce our graduate student paper prize and to introduce a MEM book prize as well, on top of our

(Continued on next page)

Announcements

Join MEM or renew your MEMbership:
An invitation from Middle East Medievalists (Cont.)

existing Lifetime Achievement Award and Honorary Membership. Other new ideas are of course welcome!

As announced at last MESA, MEM has also noticeably increased its presence on social media. Make sure to follow us on Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/MideastMedievalists) and on Twitter (@MideastMedieval)!

Our new website will include, in due course, further new resources dedicated to teaching and digital humanities in particular, and will benefit from the many resources (such as working papers) that the Islamic History Commons have to offer.

We would also remind you that our list (H-MEM) provides opportunity to engage colleagues worldwide with the topics and questions that concern us all.

Please join now. MEM is embracing change and needs you to continue to provide outstanding service to the field.

— The MEM Board of Directors

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