Stars and Saints

The Esotericist Astrology of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī

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Though little explored in modern scholarship, the North African *cum* Egyptian Sufi Aḥmad al-Būnī's *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-ʿuluwīyāt* (*The Subtleties of the Allusions regarding the Superior Letters*), completed in Cairo in 622/1225, is a key text for investigating an occultist tendency in late medieval Sufism that helped seed a renaissance of the occult sciences in early modern Islamic culture.[1] The work contains al-Būnī's most explicit discussion of the "science

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1. *Laṭāʾif al-ishārātfī al-ḥurūf al-ʿuluwīyāt* survives in at least twenty-two manuscript copies. All citations of the text in this article refer to the present author's readings of Bibliothèque nationale de France MS arabe 2658, with certain readings checked against Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS oriental Folio 80. BnF 2658 was copied in 809/1406. It contains elements suggesting it was copied from an autograph, and an audition certificate (*samāʿ*) copied from the exemplar that records al-Būnī having presided over a reading of the work in 622/1225—a traditional guarantor of textual accuracy. Berlin or. Fol. 80, copied in 669/1270, appears to be the oldest surviving copy, but is in a difficult hand and lacks transmission certificates. Dietrich notes the existence of a Cairene lithograph of the work dated 1307 AH, though the present author has not seen it; *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "al- Būnī, Abu 'l- ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Ḳurashī al-Ṣūfī Muḥyī 'l-Dīn." More recently, Jean-Charles Coulon includes a transcription of the work in his dissertation, "La magie islamique et le 'corpus bunianum' au Moyen Âge" (Ph.D. diss., Paris IV - Sorbonne, 2013), III/64–180. For further discussions of the MSS, including a full transcription of the aforementioned audition certificate, see Noah Gardiner, "Esotericist reading communities and the early circulation of the Sufi occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī's works," *Arabica* (forthcoming in 2017); cf. idem, "Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production,

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of letters and names" (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmāʾ*)—or "lettrism," as scholars recently have come to call it. Similar in ways to Jewish Kabbalah, lettrism was a cosmologically-oriented discourse on the powers of the Arabic alphabet and the names of God that, in certain iterations, was linked to occult practices such as divination and the making of talismans. Some writers on lettrism, such as al-Būnī's famous Andalusian contemporary Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), confined their written discussions to theological and philosophical aspects of the science, eschewing revelations of its occult-practical side as prone to dangerous misunderstandings.[2] Al-Būnī's *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, on the other hand, includes no small amount of practical instruction in such matters, including much that could be described as "astrological magic," which is to say the use of talismans and prayers to harness the forces emanating from the planets and stars that were thought by many to shape life on earth in manifold ways. Indeed, some of its contents bear similarities to those of an earlier Arabic work of that nature, the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (*Goal of the Wise*) of Maslamah b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), known in its influential Latin and Spanish translations as *Picatrix*.[3] Unlike that work, however, al-Būnī's text is pervaded by expressions of distinctly Sufi piety, as is the rest of al-Būnī's *oeuvre*, most of which does not address explicitly occult-scientific matters.[4]

Because Islam and the occult sciences are sometimes perceived as fundamentally incompatible, modern scholarship has largely dismissed al-Būnī as a

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Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Aḥmad Al-Būnī," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012): 89–92.

2. For Ibn al-ʿArabī's statement against writing about occult lettrist practices see his *Kitāb al-Mīm wa-al-wāw wa-al-nūn*; the edition and French translation of Charles-Andre Gilis is problematic but relatively available, *Le Livre du mim, du waw, et du nun* (Beirut: Editions Albouraq, 2002), 56–59. For a brief discussion of that text in relation to al-Būnī's willingness to write about such topics see the present author's forthcoming article mentioned in the previous note.

3. On the attribution of *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* to Maslamah al-Qurṭubī, rather than to the fourth/tenth-century mathematician Maslamah b. Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī, to whom it was long attributed, see Maribel Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus: Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), Author of the *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm* and the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*)," *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996): 87–112; Godefroid de Callataÿ, "Philosophy and Bāṭinism in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra's *Risālat al-ʿitibār* and the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 41 (2014): 261–312. On the translation of the *Ghāyah* as *Picatrix*, see David Pingree, "Between the *Ghāya* and *Picatrix* I: The Spanish Version," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (January 1, 1981): 27–56; idem, *Picatrix, the Latin version of the Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (London: Warburg Institute, 1986). On its impact on Renaissance European thought, see Liana Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), passim.

4. On al-Būnī's bibliography see note 14 infra.

mere magician in Sufi garb, someone who superficially "Islamized" popular occult practices to make them more culturally palatable.[5] While the present author has neither the inclination nor qualifications to offer an opinion on the strictly theological question of whether al-Būnī's teachings are compatible with Islam, in what follows it is argued that al-Būnī's engagement with astrology in *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* represents something altogether more complex—and more interesting from an intellectual-historical perspective—than popular occultism in pious drag. It is demonstrated that important elements of al-Būnī's teachings in *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, particularly his unusual doctrine of forty-eight letters, amounts to an esotericist unveiling of the hidden realities underlying "profane" astrology, one that identifies the world-shaping efflux of forces from the celestial spheres with the continuous flow of the letters of God's creative speech. He furthermore implies a central role for Sufi adepts (*muḥaqqiqūn*) and saints (*awliyāʾ*) in mediating these astral-lettristic radiations, adding a uniquely occult-scientific twist to views deeply embedded in Sufi tradition—and premodern Muslim culture generally—of the saints as key executors of God's word and will on earth. In the conclusion, al-Būnī's approach to astrology is discussed as part of a transconfessional wave of esotericism in the late medieval Mediterranean, one that heralded shifting ideas about the order of nature and the relationship between divine and human agency.

AḤMAD Al-BŪNĪ

We have only a few glimpses of the life of Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Būnī. The name al-Būnī suggests that he was from the Ifrīqiyan[6] port-city of Būnah (formerly Hippo Regius, the bishopric of Augustine, now the Algerian city of Annaba), in a period when Ifrīqiyah was closely linked to Andalusia through sea-routes and the rule of the Almohad Caliphate. His father is said to have been a Qurʾān-reciter,[7] and al-Būnī was likely educated in the religious sciences from an early age. At some point al-Būnī became a

5. For example Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 390–91; A. Dietrich, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "al-Būnī, Abu l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Ḳurashī al-Ṣūfī Muḥyī l-Dīn."

6. In medieval Arabic geographical terms, Ifrīqiya was more or less coterminous with the Roman province of Africa Proconsularis, which is to say the coastal region of North Africa roughly between modern northwest Libya and northeast Algeria.

7. In a number of medieval manuscript copies of al-Būnī's works his father's name is given as Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī the Qurʾān reciter (*al-muqriʾ*); see, for example, al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS arabe 2649, fol. 2a.

disciple of an important Sufi *shaykh* in the city of Tunis, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Mahdawī (d. 621/1224)[8]; this is mentioned in al-Būnī's major work on the names of God, *ʿAlam al-hudā wa-asrār al-ihtidāʾ fī sharḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā* (*The Banner of Right Guidance and the Mysteries of the Proper Way in Elucidating the Beautiful Names of God*).[9] This datum is especially noteworthy insofar as al-Mahdawī also instructed the aforementioned Andalusian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, another of the most important Sufi writers on lettrism and indeed one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Islam. There is no definitive indication that Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Būnī met or were familiar with each other's teachings,[10] and it is unclear if al-Mahdawī was the main source of al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī's lettrism, as few details of al-Mahdawī's teachings survive. There is significant conceptual and terminological crossover between his two students' discussions of the topic, such that Ibn al-ʿArabī's plentiful writings can sometimes be used to shed light on al-Būnī's more gnomic statements, though there are also considerable differences.[11]

At some point after his time in Tunis, al-Būnī migrated eastward to Egypt, also visiting Mecca at least once, in 621/1224.[12] Various pieces of manuscript evidence place him back in Cairo in late 621/1224 and 622/1225, completing and promulgating both *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* and the aforementioned *ʿAlam al-hudā* to a select audience of disciples gathered in the Qarāfah cemetery—

8. On al-Mahdawī see Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn Ibn Qunfudh, *Uns al-faqīr wa-ʿizz al-ḥaqīr*, ed. Abū Sahl Najāḥ ʿAwaḍ Siyām and ʿAlī Jumʿah (Cairo: Dar al-Muqattam, 2002), 142–44; Gerald Elmore, "Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Mahdawī. Ibn al-ʿArabī's mentor," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 4 (2001): 593–613; Pablo Beneito and Stephen Hirtenstein, "The prayer of blessing (upon the Light of Muhammad) by ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Mahdawī," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 34 (2003): 1–57; Noah Gardiner, *Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE*, s.v. "ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Mahdawī."

9. In my 2012 article "Forbidden Knowledge?," I followed Brockelmann and others in referring to this work as *ʿIlm al-hudā* rather than *ʿAlam*, a reading I now believe to be incorrect. I first saw the title rendered as *ʿAlam* in John Martin, "Theurgy in the Medieval Islamic World: Conceptions of Cosmology in Al-Būnī's Doctrine of the Divine Names" (MA thesis, The American University in Cairo, 2011). It was only after this that I noticed the title is indeed vocalized that way in some of the oldest Bunian manuscripts, and thus was convinced of the correctness of that reading.

10. On al-Mahdawī and Ibn al-ʿArabī see Elmore, "Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Mahdawī"; Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The life of Ibn ʿArabī*, tr. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), passim.

11. For brief discussions of some of the terminological crossover between al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī, and of ways that later Muslim thinkers assessed the relationship between the two, see Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?," 105–7, 119–21.

12. Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, fol. 54b.

Cairo's great "city of the dead" that was a center of tomb-visitation practices linked to the cult of saints.[13] Al-Būnī also authored some number of other works during his life, though his bibliography presents several challenges thanks to the large and complex corpus of manuscripts of texts attributed to him.[14] The promulgation of *ʿAlam al-hudā* and *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* may have been among al-Būnī's final acts, as the famed Ottoman bibliographer Ḥājjī Khalīfah notes in his magisterial *Kashf al-ẓunūn* (*The Removal of Doubts*) that al-Būnī died in 622/1225, although at one place he instead gives the date 630/1232–3.[15] Neither date is confirmed or contradicted by reliable outside sources.[16] Al-Būnī is reported to have been buried in the Qarāfah cemetery, and there is evidence that, at least through the twelfth/eighteenth century, his tomb was a popular site for visitation by those seeking his saintly *barakah*, i.e. his special spiritual power to intercede in worldly matters.[17] His works on

13. Christopher Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 56–58; Tetsuya Ohtoshi, "Cairene Cemeteries as Public Loci in Mamluk Egypt," *Mamluk Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (2006), passim.

14. Scores of works attributed to al-Būnī are extant in hundreds of manuscripts, and questions of which works are authentic to him are complex due to pseudepigraphy and other issues. The topic has been investigated seriously only in my own scholarship and that of Jean-Charles Coulon, and while we have reached similar conclusions on many points, there is still a great deal of work to be done on the matter. See Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?," 94–111; idem, "Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture: Aḥmad Al-Būnī and His Readers through the Mamlūk Period" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2014), 19–40. Coulon, "La magie islamique," I/447ff.

15. Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn,* 2 vols., ed. Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn Yāltaqāyā and Rifʿat Bīlga (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1941–3). For the 622/1225 date see, for example, the entry on *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* at II/col. 1551. For the 630/1232–3 date see the entry for *ʿAlam al-hudā* at II/col. 1161. The latter entry, incidentally, in fact describes al-Būnī's *al-Lumʿah al-nūrānīyah*, whereas *ʿAlam al-hudā* is described under the title *Sharḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā* at II/col. 1033.

16. The great Mamlūk-era historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1142) includes a wholly unreliable biography of al-Būnī in his unfinished biographical dictionary *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr.* In it he gives al-Būnī's death date as 602/1201, though this is demonstrably incorrect on the basis of manuscript evidence. Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr,* ed. Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2006), 464. Note that al-Yaʿlāwī attempts to amend the date to 622 to bring it into line with Ḥājjī Khalīfah's date, but al-Maqrīzī clearly intended the 602 date, as he estimates al-Būnī to have been born around 520, and states that he was around eighty when he died.

17. For a medieval report of al-Būnī's gravesite in the Qarafah see Shams al-Dīn

lettrism and related topics greatly influenced occultist thinkers of succeeding centuries, ensuring the survival and wide dissemination of his texts, along with various pseudepigraphic works in his name. This enduring influence was despite the efforts of some prominent theologians, such as Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), to brand him posthumously as a sorcerer and heretic.[18]

Modern scholarship mostly has relegated al-Būnī to the ill-defined sphere of "popular religion,"[19] thereby denying his importance to Islamic intellectual history. This was due in part to scholarly reliance on a pseudo-Bunian work called *Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā*—a large occult-scientific miscellany of early modern vintage that combines al-Būnī's writings with those of other authors, which commonly has been found in print editions since the early twentieth century.[20] Close study of surviving manuscripts from the medieval period, however, reveals al-Būnī's readership in Egypt and environs to have been comprised largely of learned elites.[21] As the present author argues elsewhere, the earliest manuscript evidence, considered alongside certain statements in al-Būnī's texts, suggests that he intended his works only for Sufi adepts who could properly comprehend and teach their contents, and that for a century or so after his death his texts indeed circulated primarily among small reading communities of esotericist Sufis who guarded their contents against exposure to those outside their circles.[22] Over time, however, and contrary to al-Būnī's explicit esotericism, his works (along with a number of pseudepigraphic works in his name) eventually came to circulate more widely, reaching even

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Muḥammad b. al-Zayyāt, *Kitāb Kawākib al-sayyārah fī tartīb al-ziyārah* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Azharīyah li-al-Turāth, 2005), 268. Regarding the veneration of his tomb into the eighteenth century, see the present author's note about the inscription in Latin at the front of BnF arabe 2647, Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?," 92–93.

18. Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmuʿ fatāwā shaykh al-Islam Aḥmad b. Taymīyah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim, 37 vols. (n.l.: Maṭbaʿah al-Mukhtar al-Islāmī, 1979), X/251. Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1958), III/171–82.

19. See for example Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*, 390–91; Dietrich, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* s.v. "al-Būnī, Abu 'l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Ḳurashī al-Ṣūfī Muḥyī 'l-Dīn"; Armand Abel, "La place des sciences occultes dans la décadence," in *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l'histoire de l'islam* (Paris: Editions Besson, 1957), 291–318.

20. On the dating of this work to the early modern period, see Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?," 123–29.

21. Ibid., 111–23.

22. See Gardiner, "Esotericist reading communities and the early circulation of the Sufi occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī's works," *Arabica* (forthcoming in 2017).

into the households of Mamlūk and Ottoman rulers and the soldiers and bureaucrats who served them, and probably reaching the peak of their popularity in Ottoman milieux of the eleventh/seventeenth century. He remains (in)famous in much of the Muslim world today, as a sorcerer or saint according to various perspectives.

ESOTERICISM, COSMOLOGY, AND LETTRISM

Al-Būnī's thought is marked by a deep commitment to "esotericism," by which is meant an epistemic, exegetical, and rhetorical style cultivated among groups that regarded scripture and, to varying extents, nature as possessed of both apparent and hidden layers of meaning, and that were elitist and exclusivist, taking practical steps to limit the circulation of their teachings to group members and protect them from exposure to the "vulgar" masses.[23] This use of the term "esotericism" is consonant with that of many religious studies scholars, though less so with the usage of scholars working within the paradigm of "Western esoteric studies," for whom it tends be a blanket term for engagement with the occult sciences, Christian Kabbalah, some forms of Neoplatonism, etc.[24] Esotericist attitudes and practices are well known from

23. Esotericism in much the sense used here is regularly mentioned in studies of Shi'ism and Sufism, though focused discussions of it are somewhat rare. Maribel Fierro's concept of "bāṭinism," which also has been taken up by Godefroid de Callataÿ, is essentially coterminous with the "esotericism" as outlined above, though the present author prefers the latter term for its transconfessional applicability; Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus"; de Callataÿ, "Philosophy and Bāṭinism in Al-Andalus." Some other important contributions are Mohammad Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Etan Kohlberg, "Taqiyya in Shiʿi Theology and Religion," in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, ed. Hans Kippenberg and Guy Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 345–380; Maria Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight: The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shiʿite Islam," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (2006): 324–55; Annemarie Schimmel, "Secrecy in Sufism," in *Secrecy in Religions*, ed. Kees Bolle (Leiden: Brill, 1987): 81–102; Carl Ernst, "Esoteric and Mystic Aspects of Religious Knowledge in Sufism," *Journal of Religious Studies* 12 (1984): 93–100; James Morris, "Ibn ʿArabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority," *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990): 37–64. Michael Ebstein, "Secrecy in Ismaʿili Tradition and in the Mystical Thought of Ibn al-ʿArabi," *Journal Asiatique* 298 (2010): 303–43; idem, "Absent yet at All Times Present: Further Thoughts on Secrecy in the Shiʿi Tradition and in Sunni Mysticism," *Al-Qantara* 34 (2014): 387–413.

24. Regarding definitions of esotericism within the field of Western esoteric studies see, for example, Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 3–47; idem, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), s.v. "Esotericism"; Arthur

certain Shiʿi, Sufi, and philosophical collectives in medieval Islamic culture, and quite similar dynamics were at work in other confessional communities of the period, such as among Jewish Kabbalists.[25] "Occultism" and "occult sciences," as used here, refer to theories and practices of discerning and harnessing the hidden—i.e. "occult"—properties of various phenomena (stars and planets, gems, herbs, magnets, the letters of the alphabet, etc.). Occultism thus should not be taken as synonymous with esotericism, although, as both traffic in the hidden, the two cannot always be cleanly distinguished. Esotericism was integral to some occult-scientific discourses, for example the Jabirian alchemical corpus that probably was produced by Shiʿi collectives of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries,[26] key teachings of which are intentionally "dispersed" across multiple works so as to make them inaccessible to all but the most committed readers.[27] Esotericism was far less integral, however, to astrology, which had numerous practical applications ranging from divination to medicine and agriculture, and was widely and openly engaged

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Versluis, "What Is Esoteric? Methods in the Study of Western Esotericism," *Esoterica* 4 (2002): 1–15. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism, ed. Antoine Faivre et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), s.v. "Esotericism"; idem, "Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism Between Counterculture and New Complexity," *Aries* 1 (2001): 5–37; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005), 1–11. For an interesting and timely discussion of the relationship between Western esoteric studies and non-Western cultures, see Egil Asprem, "Beyond the West: Towards a New Comparativism in the Study of Esotericism," *Correspondences* 2 (2014), 3–33.

25. Some important contributions on esotericism and Kabbalah include Moshe Idel, "Transmission in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, ed. Yaakov Elman and I. Gershoni (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 138–65; Elliot Wolfson, "Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism," in the same volume, 166–224; Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, trans. Jackie Feldman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), passim.

26. This is according to the widely accepted hypothesis of Paul Kraus, though this notion of relatively late, multiple authorship has been challenged by Nomanul Haq. See Paul Kraus, *Contributions à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam: Volume I, Le corpus d'écrits jābiriens* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1943), xvii–lxv; Nomanul Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things: The Alchemist Jabir Ibn Hayyan and His Kitab Al-Ahjar* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 8–29.

27. This is the technique known as "dispersion of knowledge" (*tabdīd al-ʿilm)*. On its use in the Jabirian corpus see Kraus, *Contributions*, xxvii–xxxiii; Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things*, 6–7, 14.

in at various levels of society in the medieval Islamic world despite the disapprobation of many Muslim jurists and the marked skepticism of some other thinkers.[28] Indeed, it is the ubiquity and relative transparency of astrology that makes al-Būnī's attempt to unveil its true nature so striking.

Al-Būnī's esotericism is on clear display in the introduction to *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, where he adduces a series of reports about the Prophet Muḥammad (i.e. *ḥadīth*s) and various other seminal figures in Islamic history. These include Adam, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), ʿAlī's martyred son al-Ḥusayn (d. 61/680), and the "Companions of the Prophet" Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32/652–3) and Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/686–8), the latter of whom was the nominal progenitor of the ʿAbbāsid dynasty[29]—arranged so as to suggest the existence of a secret tradition of lettrist teachings at the very heart of Islam. Al-Būnī here implies that this tradition had been hidden from the majority of Muslims for their own good, the powers it could unleash being too awesome for the minds of ordinary men.

As Denis Gril, Pierre Lory, Michael Ebstein, and others have discussed, the strain of cosmologically oriented lettrism that finds expression in the works of Sufis such as al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī had significant roots in the thought of early Shiʿi "exaggerators" (*ghulāt*) and Ismaʿili thinkers, the latter of whom greatly Neoplatonized the discourse.[30] The idiosyncratic fourth/tenth-century Cordovan thinker Ibn Masarrah al-Jabalī (d. 319/931) and his

28. For a range of information on astrology in the premodern Muslim world, see George Saliba, "The Role of the Astrologer in Medieval Islamic Society," in *Bulletin d'études orientales* 44 (1992): 45–67 (though Saliba's arguments regarding a premodern distinction between astronomy and astrology should, in this author's opinion, be taken with a large grain of salt); Bernd Radtke, "The Attitude of Islamic Theology and Philosophy to Astrology," *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies* 8 (2004): 1–11; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Astrology, Lettrism, Geomancy: The Occult-Scientific Methods of Post-Mongol Islamicate Imperialism," *The Medieval History Journal* 19, no. 1 (2016): 142–50.

29. "Companion of the Prophet" (*ṣāhib al-nabī*) is a technical term in Islamic historiography, meaning someone who knew the Prophet Muḥammad personally and was among the earliest converts to Islam. Statements attributed to the Companions are generally regarded as especially trustworthy and meaningful.

30. On the history of lettrism prior to al-Būnī see Denis Gril, "The Science of Letters," in *The Meccan Revelations*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2004), 103–219; Pierre Lory's various essays on the topic collected in the volume *La science des lettres en islam* (Paris: Editions Dervy, 2004); Michael Ebstein, "The Word of God and the Divine Will: Ismāʿīlī Traces in Andalusī Mysticism," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012): 247–302; idem, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-*

followers helped translate lettrism to an esotericist Sunni-Sufi frame of reference. The circulation in the Islamic West of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*), an encyclopedic set of philosophical treatises produced by a quasi-Ismaʿili esotericist collective in tenth-century Iraq undoubtedly played a role in this process as well. Over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the strain of lettrism that developed among western Sufis would come to emphasize the role of the names of God—and the letters of which they are composed—in the creation and ongoing sustenance of the cosmos, and to position lettrism as a secret "science of the saints" (*ʿilm al-awliyāʾ*) through which God's elite servants divined and helped guide the order of the world.[31]

Connections between esotericist scriptural hermeneutics and cosmological speculation run deep in Islamic thought, as reflected in the Orientalist and philosopher Henry Corbin's compelling axiom that an esotericist approach to scripture necessarily "presupposes the superimposition of worlds and interworlds, as the correlative basis for a plurality of meanings in the same text."[32] Lettrism might be said to carry that logic to its utmost conclusion, its central conceit being that the cosmos, with its many visible and invisible parts, and the Qurʾān, with all its apparent and hidden meanings, are coextensive manifestations of God's creative speech. This led lettrist thinkers to assert that plumbing the depths of the Qurʾān could facilitate the acquisition of extraordinary knowledge and power over the created world. It also led to the startling supposition that the letters of the Arabic alphabet which constitute the Qurʾān are also the very *prima materia* of the creation, the "primordial building-blocks" of the manifest world.[33]

Al-Būnī was a full-throated participant in this discourse, such that much of *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* is dedicated to the framing of a quasi-Neoplatonic,[34] emanationist cosmology in which the letters of the Arabic alphabet and the divine

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Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ismāʿīlī Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 2014); and the first volume of Coulon's "La magie islamique."

31. Ibn al-ʿArabī attributes the term to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. c. 318/936); *Le Livre du mim, du waw, et du nun*, 40. Al-Būnī expresses a similar sentiment in declaring that full knowledge of the letters is available only to "God's pure elect" (*khawāṣṣ aṣfiyāʾ Allāh*); *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt,* fol. 4b.

32. Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 54.

33. "Primordial building blocks" is from Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat Al-Ḥurūf (Epistle on Letters*) Ascribed to Sahl Al-Tustarī and Letter Mysticism in Al-Andalus," *Journal Asiatique* 299 (2011): 231.

34. By "quasi-Neoplatonic" is meant that there are no indications that al-Būnī

names play central roles. Adam, the primordial man and first prophet, also plays a leading part as the microcosm of the creation, an element of al-Būnī's thought that, as we will see, is of particular importance with regard to his understanding of sainthood and the workings of astrological causation.

For al-Būnī, the first emanation from the godhead is a single letter *alif* (the first letter of the Arabic alphabet) in which all the other letters of the alphabet, and indeed all of creation, exists *in potentia*. It is the equivalent to the Intellect of Neoplatonic philosophy, and on the microcosmic scale it is Adam's intellect (ʿ*aql*), into which the letters are "sown" (*gharasa*), as they will be into each subsequent stage of Adam's being. Al-Būnī refers to this plane as the "first world of invention" (ʿ*ālam al-ikhtirāʿ al-awwal*), and he further identifies it with the divine Throne (ʿ*arsh*) and other symbols drawn from Muslim scriptures,[35] and with the outermost celestial sphere (*Primum Mobile*). Next is the "second world of invention" (ʿ*ālam al-ikhtirāʿ al-thānī*), which is linked to Adam's immortal spirit (*rūḥ*), the divine Pen (*qalam*) mentioned in the Qurʾān,[36] the spirit of holiness (*rūḥ al-qudus*),[37] and the rays of metaphysical light that are understood to be the "pre-existent" essences of the saints and prophets.[38] The third emanation is the "first world of origination" (ʿ*ālam al-ibdāʿ al-awwal*), which is linked to the divine Footstool (*kursī*) of the Qurʾān.[39] It is equivalent to the World Soul of Neoplatonism and is mirrored by Adam's soul or psyche (*nafs*). A mesocosmic or intermediary realm of images that lend form to material things potentiated by the divine word, it is a plane in which the letters of the alphabet exist as angelic forces working continually to constitute the manifest world, which makes up in the fourth and final plane. The fourth plane is the "second world of origination" (ʿ*ālam al-ibdāʿ al-thānī*), which corresponds to the heart (*qalb*) and bodily nature (*fiṭrah*) of

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was reading Plotinus, Porphyry, et al., or indeed that he considered himself a "philosopher" in any strict sense. Rather it seems that he was developing a tradition of thought in which Neoplatonism had long since been naturalized.

35. On the divine Throne, see Q 17:44, 40:15, 43:82, 81:20; also Cl. Huart and J. Sadan, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* s.v. "Kursī."

36. On the divine Pen see Q 68:1; also İrvin Schick, "Text," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal Elias (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 327ff.

37. Q 2:87, 2:253, 5:110, 16:102.

38. On notions of prophets and others as pre-existent lights, see Uri Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 62–119.

39. On the divine Footstool see Q 2:256, 38:33; also Cl. Huart and J. Sadan, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* s.v. "Kursī."

Adam, and to the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) mentioned in the Qurʾān, in which all that has been and will be is written.[40] It comprises the spheres of the seven planets and four elements, the movements of which generate the cycles of coming-to-be and passing-away that are constitutive of the manifest world.

The notion that the movements of the heavenly spheres are the engine of earthly events is familiar from Hellenistic cosmology, and had been well known in Islamic thought at least since the writings of the Baghdadi astrologer Abū Maʿshar al-Balkhī (Albumasar, d. 272/886),[41] though it was never universally accepted by Muslim thinkers.[42] What was novel in the current of cosmological thought from which al-Būnī's ideas stem was the fusing of that notion to a Neoplatonic, emanative cosmology, such that the spheres of the planets and elements were themselves emanations from the World Soul, increasing in density as they descended the ladder of being until their forces culminated in the concretely material sublunary realm. This fusion of cosmological concepts was already found in the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* some three centuries prior to al-Būnī. It allowed the Brethren to mount a defense of astrology *vis-a-vis* Islamic teachings, by portraying the influences of the heavens as the means through which God's "command" (*amr*) or "word"

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40. Q 85:22; also C.E. Bosworth and A.J. Wensinck, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "Lawḥ."

41. See Charles Burnett's discussion of Abū Maʿshar's refutation of skeptics of astrology in his *Kitāb al-mudhkal ilā ʿilm aḥkam al-nujūm* (*The Book of the Introduction to the Science of Astrology*); "The Certitude of Astrology: The Scientific Methodology of al-Qabīṣī and abū Maʿshar," *Early Science and Medicine* 7, no. 3 (2002): 205ff. Cf. Peter Adamson, "Abū Maʿšar, Al-Kindī and the Philosophical Defense of Astrology," *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 69, no. 2 (2002): 245–70.

42. Josef van Ess notes that ideas of astrological causation were present among pre-Islamic Arabs, and astrology certainly had prominent proponents in the first few centuries of Islamic thought, among the most notable of which were Abu Yaʿqūb al-Kindī (died mid-third/ninth century) and the aforementioned Abū Maʿshar al-Balkhī. Nonetheless, opposition to astrology was found among several prominent intellectuals as well, particularly from among the rationalist theologians known as the Muʿtazilites, e.g. Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 227/842) and Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt (d. 300/913); see Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam, Section One, The Near and Middle East*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), I/31; Radtke, "The Attitude of Islamic Theology and Philosophy to Astrology," 6, footnote 40; Adamson, "Abū Maʿšar, Al-Kindī and the Philosophical Defense of Astrology," 262. Certain prophetic ḥadīths seem to represent views against astrological belief and practice, e.g. Sunan Abī Dawūd nos. 3905 and 3906 (*Kitāb al-Kihānah wa-al-taṭayyar/Bāb fī al-nujūm*, nos. 2 and 3).

(*kalimah*) was—through the whole series of emanative planes and historical cycles—translated into manifest events.[43] As we will see, al-Būnī more fully fleshes out the notion that God's speech is manifested via astrological forces, particularly in his unusual doctrine of the forty-eight letters. In doing so he builds on the notion of Adam as microcosm to grant Sufi adepts and saints an important place in that process.

AL-BŪNĪ'S ESOTERICIST ASTROLOGY

It is stated at several points in the Qurʾān that, in creating the things of the cosmos, God says "Be!" and "it is" (*kun fa-yakūn*).[44] Creation, in short, is a divine speech-act—a relatively straightforward theological principle upon which the elaborate cosmologies of al-Būnī and other lettrists are founded. For al-Būnī, the letters of God's speech pervade the cosmos, being integral to its various planes just as they are to the intellect, spirit, soul, and body of Adam and his progeny. One of the numerous striking diagrams that populate *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* is a cosmograph of a type familiar from works of Ptolemaic astronomy from around the medieval Mediterranean: a series of concentric rings representing the firmament and the spheres of the planets with the earth at the center (see Figure). In al-Būnī's figure there are thirteen rings—the outermost one for the divine Throne that is the Intellect and the sphere of the *Primum Mobile,* the next for the divine Footstool that is the World Soul and the firmament of fixed stars, the following seven for the spheres (*aflāk*) of the classical planets (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon), and the final four for the elements of the sublunary realm (fire, air, water, earth).[45] Each of these spheres is associated with two letters of the alphabet, accounting for twenty-six of the twenty-eight Arabic letters; the other two letters are associated with the Pen and Tablet, the former being the "second world of origination" and the spirit of holiness that moves throughout the cosmos, and the latter, as the "second world of origination," comprising all the planetary and elementary rings. At the center of the figure is written "the world as disposed by the letters" (*ʿālam al-taṣrīf bi-al-ḥurūf*), which is to say the manifest world that is shaped by the letters radiating from the celestial spheres.[46]

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43. For a concise and accessible discussion of the cosmology and astrology of the *Epistles*, see Godefroid de Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safaʾ: A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 17–58.

44. Q 2:116–18, 3:46–48, 3:58–60, 6:72–74, 16:39–41, 19:34–36, 36:81–83, 40:67–69.

45. Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, fol. 13b.

46. Ibn al-ʿArabī's view of the relationship between the celestial spheres and the letters is similar. As Gril summarizes it: "Far from being original or simple entities . . .

"[As for] the letters," al-Būnī tell us, "God brought the world into existence by means of them, making them to be the signs of signs [*aʿlām al-aʿlām*] and the secrets of the judgements [*asrār al-aḥkām*]." The description of the letters as *aʿlām al-aʿlām* is polysemic; an *ʿalam* can be a star or asterism as well as a sign or letter, such that the phrase can be the "sign of a sign," "the sign of a star," "the star of a letter," etc. The term "judgements" (*aḥkām*) is immediately evocative of astrological divination, the art of astrology traditionally being known in Arabic as *ʿilm aḥkām al-nujūm*, the science of the judgements of the stars. Al-Būnī posits far greater powers for the letters than simple prediction, however: "Through them God's greatest name is made known, and through them is made known the speech of the people of paradise in the next world, and by means of them the speech of God the Highest is heard through the unveiling in the presence of the highest spirit of holiness."[47] This refers to the process by which holy books and other wisdom are revealed to prophets by the angel Gabriel (Jibrīl), indicating that the letters are at the heart of prophecy itself, and thus at the heart of Islam.[48] The adepts versed in these secrets take care to protect them, al-Būnī assures us, "lest those who have gone astray [*ahl al-ḍalālāt*] happen upon them, and by means of them expose that which God keeps sacred."[49]

THE FORTY-EIGHT LETTERS

Having asserted the powers of the letters in shaping the world, al-Būnī's exposition takes an unforeseen turn when he clarifies that the letters of which he speaks are forty-eight in number—rather than twenty-eight, as one would

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[the] letters themselves are produced by the rotation and interaction of a specific number of celestial spheres (*aflāk*) among all the spheres that move concentrically within the total, ultimate sphere (*al-falak al-aqṣā*). Along with bringing the letters into existence, the rotation of the spheres combines physical qualities (heat, cold, dryness, and humidity) together in pairs. The letters are thus located on the edge of the physical world (*ṭabīʿah*), since these qualities or Original Elements (*al-ʿanāṣir al-uwal*) give birth to the physical elements (fire, air, water, and earth) when they combine. . . . The science of letters can thus not be looked at independently of the science of the heavenly bodies or of the cosmic cycles"; Gril, "The Science of Letters," 108.

47. Al-Būnī, *Latāʾif al-ishārāt*, fol. 17b; cf. Berlin or. Fol. 80, fol. 15a. *Wa-bi-hā yaẓhar sirr ism Allāh al-aʿẓam wa-bi-hā yaẓhar nuṭq ahl al-jannah fī al-dār al-ukhrawīyah wa-bi-hā yusmaʿ kalām Allāh taʿāllā ʿalā al-kashf fī ḥaḍrat al-qudus al-aʿlā.*

48. On Gabriel/Jibrīl being the *rūḥ al-qudus* mentioned in Q 2:87, 2:253, 5:110, and 16:102, see D.B. Macdonald, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* s.v. "Malāʾika."

49. Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, fol. 17b.

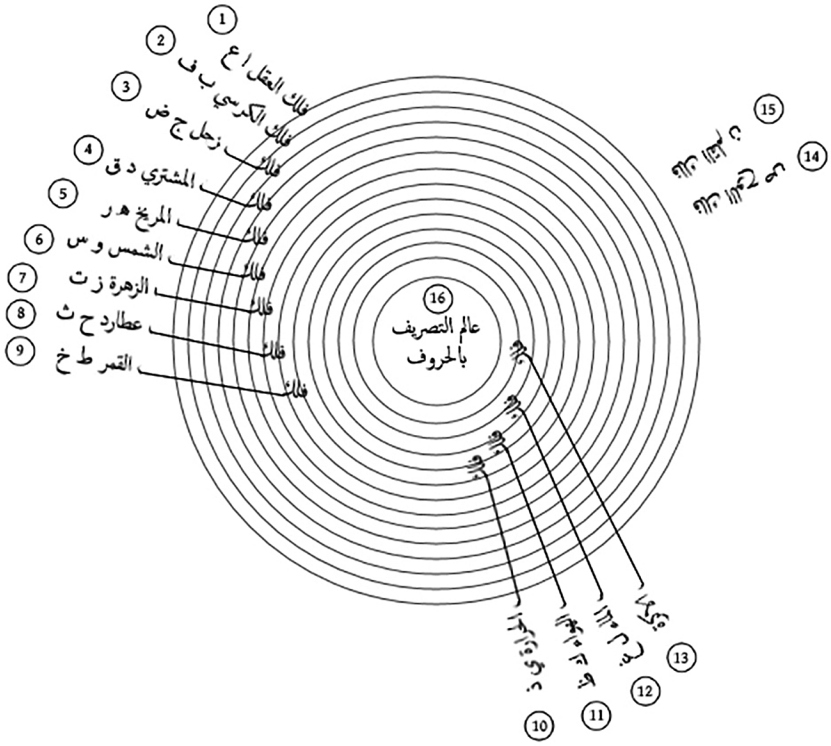

Image 1. An approximate rendering of the cosmograph from BnF arabe 2658, fol. 13b.

Legend:

1. The sphere of the intellect (*al-ʿaql*), which is linked to the letters *alif* and *ʿayn*. This corresponds to the First World of Invention (*ʿālam al-ikhtirāʿ al-awwal*) and the divine Throne (*al-ʿarsh*).
2. The sphere of the divine Footstool (al-kursī), which is linked to the letters *bāʾ* and *fāʾ*. This corresponds to the First World of Origination (*ʿālam al-ibdāʿ al-awwal*).
3. The sphere of Saturn, which is linked to the letters *jīm* and *ḍād*.
4. The sphere of Jupiter, which is linked to the letters *dāl* and *qāf*.
5. The sphere of Mars, which is linked to the letters *hāʾ* and *rāʾ*.
6. The sphere of the Sun, which is linked to the letters *wāw* and *sīn*.
7. The sphere of Venus, which is linked to the letters *zāʾ* and *tāʾ*.
8. The sphere of Mercury, which is linked to the letters *ḥāʾ* and *thāʾ*.
9. The sphere of the Moon, which is linked to the letters *ṭāʾ* and *khāʾ*.
10. The sphere of Fire, which is linked to the letters *yāʾ* and *dhāl*.
11. The sphere of Air, which is linked to the letters *kāf* and *ẓāʾ*.
12. The sphere of Water, which is linked to the letters *lām* and *ghayn*.
13. The sphere of Earth, which is linked to the letters *mīm* and *shīn*.
14. The sphere of the Preserved Tablet, which is linked to the letter *ṣād*. This corresponds to the Second World of Origination (*ʿālam al-ibdāʿ al-thānī*), which encompasses nos. 3–13 and 16.
15. The sphere of the divine Pen, which is linked to the letter *nūn*. This corresponds to the Second World of Invention (*ʿālam al-ikhtirāʿ al-thānī*), which would seem to interpenetrate nos. 2–13 and 16.
16. "The world as disposed by the letters" (*ʿālam al-taṣrīf bi-al-ḥurūf*), i.e. the manifest world.

expect based on the Arabic alphabet. These comprise seven "luciform" (*nūrānīyah*) letters, twelve "spiritual" (*rūḥānīyah*) letters, and twenty-nine "corporeal" (*jusmānīyah*) letters. The numbers seven and twelve, being the numbers of planets and zodiacal signs (or astrological houses) respectively, hint that references to astrology will be forthcoming, and al-Būnī does not disappoint. Indeed, it is in al-Būnī's description of the forty-eight letters that we see the extent to which he seeks to reorient his readers to an esotericist understanding of astrology, revealing the apparent powers of the planets as the continuous action of God's names on the earth, linking the zodiac to the differential capacity of humans to receive God's word—and thereby implying an important role for Sufi saints and adepts in the process of astrological causation—and reimagining the sublunary world, which is to say manifest reality, as a fabric of letters in a constant flux driven by the movements of the celestial spheres. None of this is to say that al-Būnī denounces or abandons astrology's "outer" forms. Rather, particularly with regard to the material world, he engages to a considerable degree with conventional astrology.

The seven luciform letters, al-Būnī tells us, are not letters in the usual sense, but rather that name is a figure of speech (*majāz*) concealing a secret for the initiated (*li-sirr al-tablīgh*). He is indeed less than straightforward about the true nature of these so-called letters, resorting to actual code in describing them.

> They [the luciform letters] are different lights not with regard to their essences, but rather with regard to one who perceives them. They are referred to as the two, the one, the thirty, the sixty, the eighty, the one, and the four hundred; these [numbers] are a link [*nisbah*] to the luciform letters. Were it not for these luciform letters, God (Most High) would not be known, and the created beings would not be disposed upon the planes of unity.[50]

The most obvious solution to the numerical code is through *abjad*, the Arabic system of assigning numerical values to the letter. Applying the *abjad* values used in the Islamic West (a preference al-Būnī makes clear elsewhere in the text),[51] the numbers yield the phrase *bi-al-ṣifāt*, "by means of the attributes";

50. Ibid., fol. 18a. *Wa hiya anwār mukhtalifāt lā min ḥaythu dhawātihā bal min ḥaythu man yudrikhā wa hiya al-muʿabbar ʿanhā al-ithnayn wa-al-wāḥid wa-al-thulāthīn wa-al-sittīn wa-al-thamānīn wa-al-waḥid wa-al-arbaʿ miʾah fa-hiya nisbat al-ḥurūf al-nūrānīyah wa-lawlā hādhihi al-ḥurūf al-nūrānīyah mā ʿurifa Allāh taʿāllā wa-lā taṣarrafat al-akwān fī aṭwār al-tawḥīd.*

51. Much like the Hebrew alphabet, the letters of the Arabic alphabet have numerical values traditionally associated with them, sometimes referred to as their *abjad* numerals. There are two commonly used sets of values, the eastern (*mashriqī*)

2 = *bāʾ*, 1 = *alif*, 30 = *lām*, 60 = *ṣād*, 80 = *fāʾ*, 1 = *alif*, 400 = *tāʾ*. This must be taken as referring to the "beautiful names of God" (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) found in the Qurʾān, notionally ninety-nine in number, an important subset of which are referred to by theologians as God's "attributes" (*ṣifāt*). The identification of the luciform letters with the attributes also fits well with al-Būnī's assertion that the luciform letters differ from the point of view of the receiver, but not in their essence—just as God is one in His essence but known to humans through a multitude of names.

The attributes, which are names describing divine powers or properties such as "the Knowing" (*al-ʿalīm*), "the Hearing" (*al-samīʿ*), etc., were a frequent point of controversy in Muslim theology in relation to debates about the absolute unity of God, anthropomorphism, and other issues.[52] For many Sufi thinkers, the attributes (and the divine names generally) were considered vital links between divine and human realities, channels through which the divine could manifest in the world, and through which adepts could attain higher realities. Seven attributes in particular—"the Living" (*al-ḥayy*), "the Speaking" (*al-mutakallim*), "the Knowing" (*al-ʿalīm*), "the Hearing" (*al-samīʿ*), "the Seeing" (*al-baṣīr*), "the Willing" (*al-murīd*), and "the Powerful" (*al-qadīr*)—were regarded by many theologians and Sufis as the principal divine names from which all the others derive,[53] and it is quite possible that al-Būnī has these seven in mind with regard the seven luciform letters. Al-Būnī deals extensively with the divine names in his aforementioned work *ʿAlam al-hudā,* paying particular attention to spiritual exercises through which the Sufi practitioner can identify with the names and draw on their power (*takhalluq*).[54] As al-Būnī's discussion of the "spiritual" and "corporeal" letters proceeds, it becomes clear that he identifies the power attributed to the planets in conventional astrology with that of the divine names. This seems to be not a simple, one-to-one correspondence between the planets and names, but

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and western (*maghribī*), in which the values of four of the letters (*sīn, shīn, ṣād, ḍād*) vary. Al-Būnī clearly employed the western values, as for example in *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, fol. 14a-b.

52. For an overview of these debates see Claude Gilliot, *Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE*, s.v. "Attributes of God"; Samer Akkach, *Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE*, s.v. "Beautiful Names of God."

53. Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 81.

54. Regarding *takhalluq* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, which is close to al-Būnī's on this matter, see Elmore, "Shaykh ʿAbd Al-ʿAzīz Al-Mahdawī," 609; William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 21–22.

rather a situation in which all the luciform letters act on the planets; as he puts it, "[t]he occult force (*ruḥānīyah*) of every heavenly sphere (*falak*) is determined by the lights of every one of the luciform letters."[55]

The twelve "spiritual letters" also are not letters in a conventional sense. Rather, al-Būnī reveals, they represent the human faculties—which is to say the various modules of human consciousness through which divine and earthly realities are perceived and processed. These are twelve in number according to al-Būnī's scheme: the faculty of hearing (*quwwat al-samʿ*), the faculty of vision (*quwwat al-baṣar*), the faculty of smell (*quwwat al-shamm*), the faculty of taste (*quwwat al-dhawq*), the faculty of touch (*quwwat al-lams*), the cogitative faculty (*al-quwwah al-mufakkirah*), the imaginative faculty (*al-quwwah al-khayālīyah*), the formal faculty (*al-quwwah al-muṣawwirah*), the administrative faculty (*al-quwwah al-mudabbirah*), the integrative faculty (*al-quwwah al-mushakkilah*), the preserving faculty (*al-quwwah al-ḥāfiẓah*), and the dispositive faculty (*al-quwwah al-muṣarrifah*).[56] The implication is that the twelve spiritual letters/faculties fulfill the function of the zodiac in the sense of receiving the "planetary" forces of the divine names and, as we will see, mediating their effects upon the manifest world. As with the luciform letters and the planets, he offers no one-to-one correspondence between the faculties and signs; however, the linking of the spiritual letters to the zodiac is confirmed by his explicit comparison of the movement of the planets through the zodiacal signs to the shifting influences of the luciform letters on the faculties: "[A]s the celestial spheres, in their track through the zodiacal signs, are measured according to degree and minute and so on, so the effect manifests sequentially. . . . Likewise these twelve spiritual-lettristic faculties take from the lights of the luciform letters, stage after stage, in accordance with the mystery of a gradated sequence."[57]

Al-Būnī goes into no further detail about the faculties, except to note that they are not evenly developed among humans, being perfected in some and lacking in others. That, however, is a key point, as a central tenet of Sufism is that humans are differentially disposed to receiving divine blessing and

55. Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, fol 18b. *Fa-qāmat ruḥānīyat kull falak bi-anwār kull ḥarf min al-ḥurūf al-nūrānīyah*.

56. Ibid., fol. 18a.

57. Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, fol. 18b. *Wa-lammā kānat al-aflāk al-ʿulwīyah tandarij fī al-sayr fī abrāj ʿalā daraj wa-daqāʾiq wa-ghayr dhālika la-yaẓhar al-taʾthīr ʿalā al-tartīb . . . Ka-dhālika kānat hādhihi al-quwwā al-ḥarfīyah al-ruḥānīyah al-ithnā ʿashar tastamid min anwār al-ḥurūf al-nūrānīyah ṭawrᵃⁿ ṭawrᵃⁿ ʿalā sirr al-tartīb al-darajī.*

communication, in accordance with their degree of spiritual perfection. The increasing and refining of the capacity for receiving God's light through suppression of the personal ego and appetites is the *raison d'être* of the spiritual exercises that are central to Sufi practice (*riyāḍāt*). A saint is someone extraordinarily advanced in this regard, such that God acts through him or her seamlessly, and who is thus a locus of spiritual power (*barakah*). In forging this link between astrology and Sufi notions of the individual capacity for receiving the divine, al-Būnī might be seen as building on the importance of the individual human actor in horary astrology, each nativity being essentially unique.

As for the twenty-nine corporeal letters, al-Būnī explains that they are the twenty-eight letters of the regular Arabic alphabet plus the ligature *lām-alif*—the latter is counted by some, including al-Būnī, as a letter in its own right, though it plays no obvious role in the elemental division of the letters he outlines. In a scheme reminiscent of Jabirian alchemical theory, al-Būnī divides the main twenty-eight letters into four groups corresponding to the elemental qualities: heat, moisture, dryness, and cold, such that there are seven "degrees" for each quality marked by individual letters.[58] All created things are composed of these corporeal, elemental letters, which are the building blocks of manifest reality. He emphasizes, however, that the powers of the seven luciform letters do not act directly on the corporeal letters, but rather only through the mediation of the twelve spiritual letters that are the human faculties—much as the powers of the planets are mediated by the signs and houses in conventional astrology. As al-Būnī puts it: "As the seven [heavenly] spheres are the stations of the superior forces and the people of the inferior world [i.e. the earth] are guided by them, so [the spiritual letters] take from the seven luciform letters, every human cosmos in accordance with his worthiness to witness the lights of those letters."[59] As for the corporeal letters, they are "like the earth in relation to the spiritual letters" (*ka-al-arḍ li-al-ḥurūf al-rūḥānīyah*), in that "all of their forces, meaning those of the spiritual letters, convene in the earth of the corporeal letters in order to manifest

58. For similar assignments of the letters to the elemental qualities in the Jabirian art of the "Balance of the Letters" (*mīzān al-ḥurūf*) see Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things*, 81–108.

59. Al-Būnī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, fol. 18b. *Wa-lamma kānat al-aflāk al-sabʿah hiya marākiz al-ʿulwīyāt wa-bihā 'htadā ahl al-sufltīyāt kānat hiya [al-ḥurūf al-rūḥānīyah] mustamaddatᵃⁿ min hādhihi al-ḥurūf al-nūrānīyah al-sabʿah kull ʿālam [insānī] bi-mā yalīq bihi min shuhūd anwār tilka al-ḥurūf.* That *kull ʿālam* should here be understood as *kull ʿālam insānī*, i.e. "every human microcosm," is clear from the use of the term shortly prior, at the bottom of fol. 18a, as well as at several points earlier in the text.

the superior influences [i.e. those from the luciform letters] in the earthly sphere."[60]

Thus al-Būnī seems to suggest not only that the powers attributed to the planets are really those of the divine names, but also that humans are an indispensable element in the reception of the influence of the divine names into the material world. The latter point is a significant departure from conventional models of astrological causation, in which celestial rays have no need of human mediators. It is quite in keeping, however, with the central cosmological importance al-Būnī assigns to Adam and the "human cosmos" (*al-ʿālam al-insānī*), whereby, as he discusses in *ʿAlam al-hudā*, humans are the only created beings capable of fully bridging the highest and lowest planes of existence.[61] And it is in further keeping with a Sufi ethos in which reigned the notion that the very existence of the world was sustained by a concealed hierarchy or college (*dīwān*) of living Sufi saints with miraculous powers. As for the impact a saint might have on the "corporeal letters" of the materiality of his or her surroundings, one is reminded of Ibn al-ʿArabī's discussion of how, as Michel Chodkiewicz summarizes it, "the passage of a saint or his posthumous sojourn in a place establishes in it a field of beneficent power"[62]—a notion central to the cult of saints and the practice of visiting saints' tombs.

The idea of the invisible hierarchy of the saints has been an element of Sufism since at least the ninth century, but it seems to have gained wider currency by the onset of the late medieval period, particularly in the Islamic West. It would continue to do so across the Muslim world well into the early modern period, particularly as theory met social practice in the rise of the corporate Sufi brotherhoods. Among Ibn al-ʿArabī's most influential contributions to Sufi thought is his visionary hagiology in which he details the various ranks of the saints, their spiritual and earthly functions, and related topics.[63] In *Laṭāʾif al-isharāt*, al-Būnī is not centrally concerned with the hierarchy of the saints, though a version of the various ranks of saints does appear

60. Ibid. *Jamīʿ amdādihā aʿnī al-ḥurūf al-rūḥānīyah tajtamiʿ fī arḍ al-ḥurūf al-jusmānīyah li-ẓuhūr al-āthār al-ʿulwīyah fī al-ukr al-turābīyah.*

61. Al-Būnī, *ʿAlam al-hudā*, Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, fol. 88a.

62. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 8.

63. On Sufi sainthood in the medieval Islamic West generally see Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998). On Ibn al-ʿArabī's hagiology and something of its impact on other Sufis see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints,* 89–102; and Richard McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafāʾ Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn ʿArabī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004). For Ibn al-ʿArabī's most exten-

in one of the diagrams in the work (a cosmograph associated with the letter *alif*).[64] The work can nonetheless be seen as contributing to the hagiological speculation of the period, insofar as al-Būnī's human-mediated model of astrological causation implies that the saints, with their superior capacity for receiving the divine signal, would transmit the forces of the luciform letters/divine names most purely and efficiently. As we will see, the talismanic practices outlined in the text, discussed briefly below, further bear out this model, as al-Būnī emphasizes the importance of the spiritual accomplishment of the operator in the efficacy of such tools.

ASTROLOGY AND LETTRISM IN PRACTICE

However radical al-Būnī's re-envisioning of the forces at work in astrology, he does not eschew the importance of traditional astrological actors such as the planets and zodiacal signs. Notably, he particularly embraces them in connection with issues and practices set squarely in the manifest world. Such is the case in his discussion of practices for healing the human body, where he links the zodiacal signs to the parts of the body—a move he justifies by explaining that the sun is linked to the human soul (*al-shams hiya nisbat al-nafs*),[65] such that the solar zodiac has dominion over the body. Aries (*al-ḥamal*) has dominion over the hair of the head, Taurus (*al-thawr*) over the forehead, Gemini (*al-jawzāʾ*) over the eyes, and so on down to Pisces' (*al-ḥūt*) dominion over the legs and feet. Each sign of the zodiac, he explains, is linked to an element (fire, air, water, earth) that is a combination of two elemental qualities. Thus all seven of the "corporeal" letters assigned to each of those qualities also correspond to the zodiacal sign they constitute, with the result that fourteen letters are attached to each sign. These letters are the keys to healing the body through "spiritual medicine" (*ṭibb rūḥānī*). Armed with knowledge

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sive discussion of the saintly hierarchy see chapter 73 of his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*. For a comparison of Muslim and Jewish concepts of a world-sustaining hierarchy of saints, see Paul Fenton, "The Hierarchy of Saints in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 10 (1991): 12–34.

64. The leaf with this diagram is missing from BnF 2658, but it appears on fol. 29b of Berlin MS or. Fol. 80. The diagram contains two columns. The one on the right shows the ranks of the celestial cosmos, i.e. those of the spheres, while that on the left shows the ranks of the *ʿālam al-dīn*, the "world of religion" through which the adepts ascend to reunion with the godhead. The titles of various ranks of saints are clustered along the left-hand column, e.g. "the poles" (*al-aqṭāb*), "the substitutes" (*al-abdāl*), "the nobles" (*al-nujabāʾ*), "the leaders" (*al-nuqabāʾ*), etc. The present author will discuss this and other of al- Būnī's diagrams in a forthcoming paper.

65. Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt,* fol. 28b.

of the proper correspondences, the initiate can seek out verses of the Qurʾān that include all the letters appropriate to a given sign/part of the body and utilize them for healing, whether by praying with them, writing them on paper and then immersing it in water to be given to the sick person to drink, etc.[66] Al-Būnī's utilization of the zodiacal signs in his *ṭibb rūḥānī* can be seen as a qualified acknowledgement of the validity and efficacy of the pre-Islamic astrological-medical thought to which it obviously hearkens back (*melothesia, iatromathematica*, etc.), though the Qurʾān is given pride of place as the therapeutic instrument *par excellence*. Thus he grants conventional astrology a substantial degree of legitimacy in the "outer" world of everyday life and afflicted human bodies, while still proclaiming the text of the Qurʾān to be the most effective tool for intervening on that reality, and thus supporting the superiority of Islamic revelation.

Another area where al-Būnī explicitly engages with conventional astrology is with regard to the making of talismans, though it is also here that the theory of the forty-eight letters can be seen in practical application. This is a process that, as one might expect from earlier works on astral magic such as *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm/Picatrix*, often entails the crafting of talismans under certain astral conditions, which is to say while certain planets are in conjunction in a certain sign, etc. However, al-Būnī's theory and practice of talismans is additionally intertwined with his teachings on the names of God, and he pays significant attention to the purification of the mind and body of the practitioner as the channel through which a talisman is charged with the forces that render it efficacious.[67]

At various places in *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* al-Būnī addresses a cluster of topics that includes the letter *dāl*, its numerical value of four, and names of God that include *dāl* such as the attributes "the Permanent" (*al-dāʾim*) and "the Loving" (*al-wadūd*). Al-Būnī also assigns the letter *dāl* to the sphere of Jupiter, and, although he does not make the point explicitly, his discussion of the Permanent and the Loving emphasizes their denotation of God's beneficent,

66. Ibid., fol. 29b.

67. Many of al-Būnī's works other than *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* are centrally concerned with embodied "spiritual practices" (*riyāḍāt*) familiar from the classical Sufi tradition, e.g. *khalwah* (ritual seclusion), supererogatory fasting, and *dhikr* and other forms of supererogatory prayer. As mentioned above, a focus of *ʿAlam al-hudā* is *takhalluq* through spiritual exercises centered on God's attributes, and another of al-Būnī's works, *Mawāqif al-ghāyāt fī asrār al-riyāḍāt*, is entirely dedicated to traditional Sufi practices, albeit with subtle lettrist inflections. In *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, however, we see such spiritual exercises being directed especially at a higher capacity for disposing astral-lettristic forces in the material world, particularly through the use of talismans.

nurturing, and administrative qualities—virtues commonly associated with Jupiter in Hellenistic astrology.

Al-Būnī discusses a number of talismans associated with this cluster of *dāl*-elements. One relatively simple set of instructions is as follows:

> He who writes the shape of [the letter] *dāl* on a piece of white silk thirty-five times while the Moon is in Cancer and aligned favorably with Jupiter, and places it in his signet-ring during that time and wears it while in a state of ritual purity, fasting, and continuous internal quietude (*ṣafāʾ al-bāṭin*), God will make lasting for him the state of grace he is in, and support him in every external undertaking. And God will extend His sustenance generously to one who multiplies [i.e. performs *dhikr* of] His name the Permanent if he has that [talisman] with him. We have explained it [God's generosity] extensively regarding His name the Permanent and the *dāl* in *al-ḥamd* [i.e. in the common phrase of blessing *al-ḥamd li-llāh*] in our book *ʿAlam al-hudā* . . . and its inner (*bāṭin*) meaning in [the chapter] on His name the Merciful (*al-raḥmān*).[68]

The thirty-five times reflects the *abjad* value of *dāl* when spelled out: *dāl* = 4, *alif* = 1, *lām* = 30. The prescribed astrological conditions for the making of the talisman harness the energies of both Jupiter and Cancer, the sign in which Jupiter is exalted. Note, however, that the operator must himself be in a state of fasting, ritual purity, and internal quietude in order to effectively channel these forces. It is also best if the talisman is employed in combination with *dhikr* of the appropriate divine name—*dhikr* being a form of prayer special to Sufism, which involves the repetitive chanting of one or more divine names, often in tandem with various breathing practices and rhythmic movements. The reader is also referred to *ʿAlam al-hudā* for al-Būnī's more detailed discourse on the forces of mercy and beneficence linked to the letter *dāl*. In sum, the material talisman would seem to be harnessing forces emanating from the powers of the divine names that are linked through the letter *dāl* to the sphere of Jupiter, channeling them through the purified soul and body of the adept into the talisman. The effects of the talisman are fittingly concordant with the Jovian divine qualities al-Būnī associates with the *dāl*-names.

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68. Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, fol. 76a. *Man kataba shakl al-dāl fī ḥarīrat bayḍāʾ khamsah wa-thulāthīn marrat*^{an} *wa-al-qamr fī al-saraṭān makhẓūẓ min al-mushtarī wa-jaʿalahu fī khātimihi fī mithla dhālika al-waqt wa-labasahu ʿalā ṭahāra wa-ṣawm wa-ṣafāʾ bāṭin dāʾim adāma Allāh taʿālā ʿalayhi al-niʿmah allāti huwa fī-hā wa-aqāmahu ilā kull ḥaraka ẓāhira wa-wasaʿa Allāh ʿalayhi rizqahu wa-man akthara min ismihi al-dāʾim kāna la-hu dhālika wa-qad sharaḥnāhu jumlat*^{an} *fī ismihi al-dāʾim wa-al-dāl min al-ḥamd fī kitābnā ʿAlam al-hudā . . . wa-bāṭinahu fī ismihi al-raḥmān taʿālā.*

Another, more complex operation evoking the divine names and related forces associated with *dāl* is the manufacturing of a talisman featuring a four-by-four mathematical "magic square," which is to say a four-by-four grid of numbers—or their equivalents in letters—in which all the rows and columns tally to the same sum. For this procedure the adept must fast for two weeks, eating nothing but bread, maintaining a state of ritual purity throughout, and regularly invoking God's name while meditating on a sheet of silver. On a Thursday (traditionally the day of Jupiter), in the hour of Jupiter, on a day when the moon is favorably aligned with Jupiter and the sun, and when the ascending lunar node is in Gemini (in which the ascending node is exalted), he is to inscribe the square on the sheet of silver while facing the *qiblah* and burning mastic and white oud. He is then to wear the talisman on Thursdays, and God will make easy for him his religious obligations, provide him with all his necessities, and grant him *barakah* "in all that his hand attempts" (*fī kull mā tuḥāwiluhu yadihi*).[69]

The operation would be entirely at home in *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* or a similar work, except that the astrological image that such a work would call for on the talisman has been replaced with the grid of numbers and letters. The character of the operation is further transformed by al-Būnī's commentary on the names and forces associated with *dāl,* and his extensive framing of the "worlds and interworlds" that underlie manifest reality, in which the letters and numbers exist as angelic entities in their own right. In addition, his focus on the asceticism and ritual purity of the practitioner emphasizes the notion of the Sufi adept as the ideal conduit through which such forces can be channeled. Much as with his "spiritual medicine," however, al-Būnī nevertheless acknowledges a significant degree of technical legitimacy to conventional astrology, particularly with regard to the timing of operations. This again suggests that he credits the pre-Islamic science as valid knowledge with regard to the "outer" world and the observable aspects of the celestial spheres, while yet privileging the power of God's saints and the lettrist understanding of Islamic revelation as the true keys to understanding and manipulating the hidden secrets of the creation.

CONCLUSION

Al-Būnī's approach to astrology is esotericist in that, like the Qurʾān, the "profane" astrology of the Hellenistic *cum* Maʿsharī tradition is implied to have hidden depths of meaning. What non-initiates assume to be the effects of the stars is understood by the lettrist adept as aspects of the manifold power

69. Ibid., fol. 21b.

of God's speech. Thus the Sufi saints and adepts' relationship to the letters that convey both the Qurʾān and the forces emanating from the heavens transcends the merely discursive knowledge traded in by ordinary Muslim exegetes and jurists on the one hand, and vulgar astrologers on the other. Rather than merely reading the Qurʾānic and celestial "texts," the Sufis' souls and bodies are the channels through which God's world-making speech is most purely manifested and disposed. It is an extraordinary set of claims on al-Būnī's part, one that reconfigures the relationship between divine and human agency by granting a quasi-naturalistic basis to the miraculous powers attributed to the Sufi saints, while yet affirming their transcendent spiritual authority as the selfless vehicles of God's word.

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, al-Būnī intended his written teachings only for a select audience of Sufi initiates, and communities of learned Sufis in Egypt and environs indeed seem to have kept his writings largely to themselves for a century or so after his death. This air of secrecy is but one indication that al-Būnī and his early readers were aware that his teachings might attract severe criticism from religious authorities. Thus, if *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* can be taken as an attempt to reconcile astrology and Islam, then this reconciliation was not one that al-Būnī intended to be carried out publicly, but only among the networks of peers and followers that he and other members of his western Sufi cohort were building as they traveled east around the turn of the thirteenth century.

The historian of Jewish thought Moshe Halbertal has described the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE as "the age of esotericism and its disclosure,"[70] a period in which secrecy and elitism were important features of Jewish discourses ranging from Kabbalah, to the occultism-infused exegetical efforts of Abraham b. Ezra (d. between 1164 and 1167 CE), to the distinctly non-occultist philosophy of Maimonides (d. 1204 CE). This trend emerged largely in the Muslim-ruled western Mediterranean, and its florescence in the same period and region as produced such Muslim esotericists *extraordinaire* as al-Būnī and Ibn al-ʿArabī is one hint that the trend was transconfessional. Various scholars have noted that the *air de famille* which pertains between Kabbalah and western-Sufi lettrism—with their shared fascinations with sacred alphabets, divine names, the primordial Adam, emanationist cosmology, and theurgy—suggests significant cross-fertilization between the discourses.[71]

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70. Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and its Philosophical Implications*, trans. Jackie Feldman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 5.

71. The comparative study of these discourses is mostly in its infancy. For a sam-

An important function of Jewish esotericism was that, in claiming access to initiated understandings of holy texts, esotericists of the period forged novel connections between scripture and various philosophical and occult-scientific discourses—all while claiming to reveal the primordial essence of Jewish scripture. As Halbertal puts it, "[t]he esoteric idea provides a new and powerful tool to exegesis as a means of receiving ideas and transforming them into an integral part of the tradition."[72] Ibn Ezra, for example, reads Torah against the grain of the mainstream exegetical tradition to "reveal" layers of cosmological and astrological meaning that he claims as the inner meaning of scripture known only to the elite few, even going so far as to interpret ancient Jewish ritual practices as a means of drawing down power from the heavens *à la* an astral talisman from *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*.[73]Al-Būnī similarly locates the metaphysical underpinnings of an astrologically-charged cosmos in the hidden meanings of the Qurʾān, legitimating thereby the utilization of various elements of astrology while still vouchsafing the superiority of Islamic revelation.

Halbertal also offers the view that the innovative exegetical efforts of Jewish esotericists were symptomatic of a crisis of dissatisfaction with traditional religious thought, and of a shift toward causal explanations of reality that utilized "nature as the central explanatory category." This was particularly apparent, he argues, in a changing conception of prayer in which what long had been viewed as humanity's means of appeasing a personal God came to be articulated as methods by which humans could activate essentially impersonal forces in order to remake the world.[74] Al-Būnī's lettrist-talismanic practices seem largely to fit this pattern, particularly insofar as he "astrologizes"

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pling see Vahid Brown, "Andalusī Mysticism: A Recontextualization," in *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2 (2006): 69–101; Michael Ebstein and Tzahi Weiss, "A Drama in Heaven: 'Emanation on the Left' in Kabbalah and a Parallel Cosmogonic Myth in Ismāʿīlī Literature," *History of Religions* 55 (2015): 148–71; Ronald Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites: A Re-Orientation," in *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam: Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions*, ed. Michael M. Laskier and Yaacov Lev (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 147–67; Ehud Krinis, "Cyclical Time in the Ismāʿīlī Circle of Ikhwān Al-Ṣafāʾ (Tenth Century) and in Early Jewish Kabbalists Circles (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries)," *Studia Islamica* 111 (2016): 20–108; Michael McGaha, "The Sefer Ha-Bahir and Andalusian Sufism," *Medieval Encounters* 3 (1997): 20–57; Steven Wasserstrom, "Sefer Yeṣira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993): 1–30.

72. Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation,* 40.

73. Ibid., 34–48; For a detailed discussion of Ibn Ezra's teachings on this matter, see Dov Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 9–26.

74. Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation,* 139.

the forces of the divine names.[75] But does Halbertal succumb to too Yatesian a narrative of the occult-fueled discovery of nature at the end of the medieval period? It is perhaps better that al-Būnī's ideas be considered one of the streams contributing to the formation of "the Sufi-philosophical (or philosophical-Sufi) amalgam" that Shahab Ahmed recently described as having emerged in the Muslim world during the transition from the late medieval to early modern periods, and that predominated in much of Muslim culture for centuries.[76] Best of all, we might recognize that the daring esotericism of al-Būnī and his fellow lettrists causes their ideas to cut across the borders modern scholarship has sought to erect between the histories of theology, mysticism, philosophy, and science, and that to study their place in intellectual history requires a willingness to follow their lines of flight across such traditional disciplinary categories.

75. A move that can be seen as part of what Matthew Melvin-Koushki refers to as the rising Neopythagoreanism and mathematicalization of late medieval/early modern occultism; Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 5, no. 1 (2017).

76. Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 31 and passim.