THE BOOK IN FACT AND FICTION IN PRE-MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

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CONTENTS

Editor’s introduction: The Book in Fact and Fiction in Pre-Modern Arabic Literature……………………………………………… 1
Antonella Ghersetti

‘Foreign books’ in Arabic literature: discourses on books, knowledge and ethnicity in the writings of al-Jahiz……………….. 16
Peter Webb

The transmission of Ibn Saʿd’s biographical dictionary Kitāb al-Tabaqaṭ al-kabīr…………………………………………………… 56
Ahmad Nazir Atassi

Forbidden knowledge? Notes on the production, transmission, and reception of the major works of Ahmad al-Būnī………………… 81
Noah Gardiner

Il libro come maestro: sufismo e storia della lettura nel medioevo islamico…………………………………………………………… 144
Samuela Pagani

La prose amoureuse arabo-islamique médiévale, de l’isnād traditionnel aux sources livresques…………………………………… 186
Monica Balda-Tillier

Notes on a private library in fourth/tenth-century Baghdad……….. 215
Letizia Osti

‘Catching the eel’ – documentary evidence for concepts of the Arabic book in the Middle Period……………………………………… 224
Konrad Hirschler

Libri e artigiani del libro: le raccomandazioni dei giuristi musulmani……………………………………………………… 235
Giovanni Canova

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As Johannes Pedersen stated in his seminal work: ‘in scarcely any other culture did literary life play such a role as in Islam’. Speedy dissemination of books, their transmission, authentication, production, reproduction and exchange testify to an enormous activity in the Arab-Islamic world. The result of these intellectual undertakings was great indeed: many Arabic scholars of the pre-modern period are famous for their prodigious output, which biographical sources reckoned in terms of pages, physical volumes and titles. According to Ibn al-Nadim, the fourth/tenth century-scholar al-Marzubānī wrote over 38,000 pages! Books in both their concrete and intellectual sense were frequently a topic of discussion. Declarations of passionate love for books are quite common in Arabic literature, alongside literary representations of a passion for written materials – even verging on pathological attachment. The image of the personified book is also often found in the sources: it can be a trusted friend or might reveal itself as a generous teacher, always ready to inform and encourage conversation among people living in different times and places.

The study of the book as a material and intellectual item is multifaceted and covers all aspects related to book-production and their role in culture and society too. This encompasses delicate issues touching on problems of authorship; transmission of knowledge and knowledge control; the relationship between oral and written information, as well as freedom and books. Scholars have focused both on the material aspects of the book and on the great role it played as a cultural vehicle in the Arab-Muslim world. The material aspects of the Arabic book have been thoroughly investigated, mainly through a traditional bibliographic approach, whereas investigations into the book as an intellectual output have focused mainly on the relationship between written and oral. The classic work of Adolph Grohmann on *The Islamic Book* (Leipzig, 1929), and Johannes Pedersen’s *The Arabic Book* remain

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unequalled in many respects. Other works dedicated to more detailed aspects of the book as material entities have been produced later: notably, the works of Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition* (Leiden, 2001; plus *Supplement*, 2008) and *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden, 2009) and Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print. The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New York, 2001), among others, have greatly improved our understanding of the techniques of production of the Arabic book.²

If a systematic and exhaustive investigation into the production and circulation of the book has greatly progressed in recent years, a thorough analysis of the book as a communication means, and its role as a vehicle of dissemination of knowledge has been somehow under-researched. A statistical approach in the vein of the French *Annales* school, consisting in the study of the way books are produced and consumed, and the ideologies that can be traced throughout the process, has been seldom applied to the case of the Arabic book. A detailed statistical inquiry would be an enormous and time-consuming task, but this would be a promising line of research to shed new light on the spread and reception of books in the pre-modern period. Also still in its embryonic stages for the study of the Arabic book is the approach espoused by ‘the history of books’, a relatively new discipline at the intersection of diverse fields of research, including codicology, book production and circulation, history of reading and reception, textual criticism. This covers several areas, such as authorship, the transmission of knowledge, and the passage from oral to written culture, which is a point of tremendous significance for our purposes. History of books, in Darnton’s words, aims at understanding ‘how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behaviour of mankind during the last five hundred years’.³ Since it has been identified as a worthwhile field of research, the history of printed books in general has greatly progressed. An adaptation of its patterns and methodology to the history of the manuscript book is not only possible, but also desirable given that this equally affected—albeit in different proportions—the transmission of ideas and the thought and behaviour of those who came into contact with manuscripts. Much more remains to be done in this field, especially for the Arabic manuscript books.


In his introduction to *The Book in the Islamic World*, George Atyeh claimed that there was still ‘a great need to look into the role of the book in the development of the Islamic world and its culture’ and the history of the book ‘not only as an artefact, but also in terms of intellectual content and physical properties, needs to be seriously explored’. Although our knowledge of some aspects of the Arabic book has been greatly expanded since then, it is nonetheless worthwhile responding to Atyeh’s implicit invitation and stimulate further reflection on some of the less well-investigated questions. Thus, *The Book in Fact and Fiction in Pre-Modern Arabic Literature* was conceived with a precise task in mind: to examine representations and images of the Arabic book in pre-modern period, both as reflected in the literary sources, and in the documentary evidence. It was intended as an operating tool to achieve a tentative definition of the concept of ‘book’, as a material and intellectual output, and of its role in cultural growth, as perceived by Arab-Muslim intellectuals of the pre-modern (and pre-print) period. The choice to restrict the investigation to this time-span was dictated by the enormous gravity of the manuscript tradition in the Middle East. Indeed, this tradition survived long after the introduction of printing, and coexisted with it (which, incidentally, resulted in a very long transition period). The desire to avoid the path of technical innovation, which would have involved questioning the issue of the ‘electronic book’, has also informed this choice of approach.

The potential issues invited in the call for papers included concepts of forgery and plagiarism; the circulation of forbidden, or non-canonical, books; books and the ways knowledge and intellectual exchange were transmitted; books as a means of dialogue between different cultures; cases of bibliophilia or bibliomania; motives driving to love, hate, accumulate or destroy books; literary representations of libraries, both public and private; the projection of the self upon the book as an intellectual product expressing some inner feeling; the dissemination of books and the roles of professionals; recommendations on handling books and writing materials; and the representation of, and appreciation for, professions involved in book-production and distribution.

Some of these issues found the favour of the authors and have been thoroughly investigated in single contributions. In other cases, they have been touched upon in articles whose contents overlap or intertwine. Other points that were raised in the call for papers remain unaddressed,

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or have been addressed in a partial way, and call for further investigation. Indeed, I hope that they will be addressed in the future. In the process of assembling this volume, it soon became apparent that the two facets of the ‘book’, intended as a product of human intellectual and material activity, were more interrelated than expected. It was clear that an integrated approach, which combined the study of the material and intellectual sides of the Arabic book, could produce stimulating insights on the concept of book in addition to its impact on the development of intellectual life of the pre-modern Middle Eastern society. Some of the articles collected in this volume reflect the impossibility of sticking to a sharp separation between the two facets, and thus deal with the notion of ‘book’ as a global product involving physical and intellectual aspects in the same time.

A tentative synthesis of some points emerged in this volume of *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* could be useful to draw an outline of the preliminary results of this investigation. A substantial question was the relationship between freedom and books.\(^5\) This has always been a delicate point, as demonstrated by the systematic practice of controlling books in dictatorships. Arguably, the fear of the written word has run through the history of the humanity. The fear of printing (as opposed to handwriting) that pervaded Europe immediately after Gutenberg’s invention\(^6\) was a consequence of the uncontrolled and virtually infinite reproducibility of the texts in the printing age, which made knowledge more difficult to control, and undermined the authority of religious élites. Chirographic, Arabic-Muslim society was no exception, and its diffuse and long-lived wariness of the written word echoes, *mutatis mutandis*, this same sentiment.

A glaring example of this is represented by the case study of the debate on free and individual access to the texts aroused in the Sufi circles in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and finely illustrated in this volume by Samuela Pagani. This also can be taken as an indication of reading-practice(s), a point tightly bound to the previous one, which has been raised at various junctures throughout this volume. The matter is especially relevant in a manuscript culture, in which reading out aloud was a primary practice in education and the canonical way of teaching and learning (and, in some respects, it still is). The

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\(^5\) For illuminating reflections, see Luciano Canfora, *Libro e libertà* (Rome, 1994).

\(^6\) In this respect, the friar who stubbornly stood up against the use of printing in Venice of the sixteenth century, on the basis that this would distort sacred texts and corrupt knowledge by making it available to illiterate people, recalls the positions of many scholars of the pre-modern Middle East.
written word was intended to be read out, which explains why there was no need for punctuation marks to guide reading. Therefore, interpretation of the text made itself evident by virtue of pauses, segmentation, and the tone of the reader’s voice. The significance of reading in the presence of a master, especially in the case of secret and/or religious knowledge, points to the importance of masters who could control access to the text, testify to true reading and, in the end, guarantee the ‘correct’ access to knowledge. This stands in sharp contrast with reading intended as an individual and silent practice, and its significance as a way of creating new meanings through the process of interpretation, a point underlined by the reception theory that describes it as an active process.

The cautiousness in approaching written texts—typical in educational circles, and all the more so in esoteric circles—is a topic touched on, at different levels, in articles dealing with the transmission and reception of texts. This mirrors the ambivalent attitude of Muslim intellectuals towards books, an issue which frequently emerges in this volume: books can be good or bad; dangerous or helpful; they can be widely circulated; hidden and even destroyed; they can be accumulated or sold and dispersed; they can be cherished or hated, or even feared. This sometimes implies dissociation between the imaginary and the factual: books of magic, for instance, were generally considered dangerous, but this did not prevent people from reproducing them nor hinder their circulation, as shown in Noah Gardiner’s paper. This ambivalent attitude towards the object is no doubt grounded in wider opposition, more fiction than reality, between the two ways of transmission of knowledge: written and oral. The seminal works of Walter Ong and Jack Goody represent an essential point of departure for further inquiries. Nevertheless, they must be used with caution when applied to a ‘writerly culture’, a term befitting the ‘graphomaniac tendency’ that has characterised Arab-Islamic society in its long history.

The relationship between oral and written in Arabic sources has been carefully and widely investigated, and much more has been done in recent times. The antithesis of written and oral transmission is always present in the minds of Arab scholars and men of letters, and the issue of the reliability of written sources is a constant not only in the field of religious and legal studies, but also in more profane areas.

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The ambiguous relationships between these two alternative—and, in some measure, complementary—ways of transmitting knowledge has been addressed by almost all of the contributions, in tandem with the delicate balance between the need to depend on reliable and stable sources, and the wariness towards any forgery virtually implicit in any written source. In particular, the progressive reliance on written materials and the final acknowledgement of their status of trusted sources is thoroughly investigated in a case-study focusing on a specific literary genre, the ‘profane love treatises’, carefully explored in Monica Balda-Tillier’s article published herein.

This, and other contributions, also question, in different ways and in different respects, the concept of authorship and its various levels. The results are thought provoking and invite scholars to adopt cautious positions in accepting uncritically the attribution of some works in the huge corpus of the Arabic literature. The authority of many texts, whose reception and acceptance in the version(s) and form(s) are currently accepted, would probably not be so if submitted to thorough textual and philological scrutiny. This textual and authorial fluidity is also mirrored in the instability of the title, an issue that emerges patently in some papers: titles can change in the course of time; they can be transmitted orally; they can be attributed by the readers and not by the authors, and they can refer to works that consistently change their physiognomy as time goes by. Paradoxically, the fame of some personalities is tied to titles they never gave to their works, or to works they never conceived or published in the form(s) circulating later. As a matter of fact, it turned out that the concept of book as a well-defined textual unit, the final output of a single author to whom intellectual responsibility pertains, was probably much more fluid than that which we are accustomed to understand. While the existence of different levels of authorship relating to intervention and textual manipulation has long been acknowledged, the issue of a progressive construction of canonical texts has been much less investigated. The deep scrutiny of textual traditions carried out in a couple of contributions clearly demonstrates that, in some cases, by referring to ‘X book of X author’ we run the risk of making an inappropriate or ambivalent, if not false, statement. Through their case-studies, they convincingly show that two works circulating under the name of Ibn Saʿd, an historian of the formative period, and Ahmad al-Būnī, the Sufi/‘magician’ of the seventh/thirteenth century are not—in their current forms and with their current titles—the original output of their putative authors. The results of their research point to a collective and long process of construction of ‘canonical books’, widely controlled
by qualified readers (teachers, initiates, professionals) who participated in different ways in the partial or global dissemination of diverse formats and traditions of the original textual nucleus.

An interesting and ground-breaking question is the applicability of methodologies conceived for new disciplines to the specific field of Arabic studies. In the wider frame of the ‘history of books’ two points emerged as particularly promising: the ‘communication circuit’ as expounded by Robert Darnton, and the trend stressing the importance of paratexts in the perspective of a sociology of texts. The so-called communication circuit, conceived to investigate how printed books come into light and spread in society, is based on the holistic view of the book as a means of communication. It tries to assess how the book history ‘disparate segments can be brought together within a single conceptual scheme’ starting from the assumption that ‘books belong to circuits of communication that operate in consistent patterns’.8 The participants of the original pattern (author, publisher, printer, distributor, seller, reader) are obviously not all fitted to the study of manuscript culture. Nevertheless, this model can be readjusted to make it fit the reality of a manuscript culture. Indeed, Ahmad Nazir Atassi’s contribution here aims precisely at testing the validity of such a model for the Arabic manuscript.

The ‘participant-oriented’ pattern of Darnton, criticised by some for its unbalanced approach that neglects the book as a product, was reoriented later into a more ‘text oriented’ model. In this vein some scholars focussed their attention on the significance of paratexts, i.e. the liminal elements that determine and reveal how the text is perceived by its readers.9 Being located at the fringe, paratexts constitute a transitional zone where the interaction between the text and its public can take shape. This issue deserves careful investigation since it can offer promising insights for the study of the Arabic manuscript books. This could be made on condition that the typological range of the texts originally covered by the hypernym ‘paratext’ is varied and adapted to its different historical settings. For instance, the paratext can also be intended as the trace left by the ‘editors’/publishers of books (copyists), the ‘professional’ readers (scholars involved in the reception and dissemination of the texts contained in the books) and ‘simple readers’, such as those who used books for their private purposes adding notes and glosses, thus forming a ‘bridge’ between readers. Iḫāzās, reader’s

8 Darnton, ‘What is the History of Books?’, 75 and 81.
9 See, for example, the work of Gérard Genette, Seuils (Paris, 1987).
comments, corrections, and glosses can thus contribute to the reception and circulation of the books. The significance of paratexts is the issue addressed in Noah Gardiner’s article that thoroughly investigates them (especially titles and notes) in the view of determining the interaction between text, readers and the textual transmission of authoritative works. This constitutes a stimulating hint at the circulation of a specific text, but also at the intellectual representations involved in the dissemination and the reception of a certain kind of knowledge.

The interdependence between the cultural and social significance of the text on the one hand, and its material shape on the other is precisely what defines the book as a cultural object: no text can circulate in a ‘pure’ form, i.e. without any material support to make it readable. The particular significance of the materiality of books points to the need of a thorough and intense research on the several aspects of books production and the role that the diverse craftsmen played in it. Being placed at the intersection of intellectual work (collation, proofreading) and material activity (copying, binding), and often involving a close connection with sacred and canonical texts, the status and role of the professionals of the book market is crucial for a better understanding of the book as a communication tool. Many specialisms were involved in the book business: the calligrapher (ḥattāḥ), the cutter of paper (qāṭiʿ), the gilder (muḏahhib), and the bookbinder (muḡallid). Among them ‘the immense importance of the warrāq to the world of books’10 must be emphasised. The warrāq probably had the same role that the printer and the bookseller (and sometimes the publisher) have in Darnton’s ‘communication circuit’. To know more about the professionals involved in book production we can turn to the material evidence of the physical item itself. This is no doubt a precious and first-hand contribution in terms of techniques of production (treatment of the paper, techniques of copying and bookbinding), but leaves aside the evaluation of their daily activity, their role in society, and the status they had in the eyes of their contemporaries. For that we must turn to the witness of the sources that—directly or indirectly—tell of the participants’ relationship to the ‘communication circuit’. In this respect, the treatises that the jurists wrote to regulate in detail the life of the umma are valuable sources. When explicit interdictions come into play, we must infer that they are grounded in real practices that the jurists felt as reprehensible. This kind of literature thus represents first-hand evidence of the intellectuals’ attitude towards the book, both as a vehicle of transmission of

10 Pedersen, op. cit., 52.
knowledge and as a physical item. This topic has also been explored in this volume with a particular focus on the Mamlūk era. The greater attention that Mamlūk jurists dedicated to the book corresponds to the remarkable growth and particular vitality in the book market which characterised this period, something that, from different points of views, emerges from Balda-Tillier’s article dealing with the status of books as reliable sources or with the remarkable growth in the output of manuscripts.

The wealth of books in that period is reflected in many historical sources that describe remarkable libraries and book collections in laudatory terms. Throughout the history of the ‘graphomaniac’ Arab-Muslim culture, books were appreciated both as repositories of knowledge and as material objects, amassed for their aesthetic value and for their utility to scholars, giving birth to huge collections. Our knowledge of the Arab-Muslim libraries has been enriched by some seminal studies, such as Quatremère’s very early pioneering study;¹¹ later works by Pinto,¹² Eche,¹³ Touati¹⁴ et al., and most recently by Hirschler.¹⁵ All in all, there is still much to know about libraries, and in particular private libraries and collections. Their organisation; systems of cataloguing; the location of volumes on the shelves; the role and activity of librarians, copyists, bookbinders and others involved in the maintenance and running of the library, doubtless deserve deeper investigation. Literary and historical sources do not usually offer meaningful insights in the everyday activities of libraries. Rather, they tend towards cursory references to some prominent scholars’ collections or deal with libraries in connection with dramatic circumstances such as wars and riots that provoked their destruction.

The representation of libraries, both public and private, was among the points to be investigated. Two articles here elucidate these points. Through the lens of literary sources, the first outlines a picture of a scholar’s private library also known for his bibliophilia; while the latter delves into some problematic aspects of cataloguing on the evidence

¹¹ É. Quatremère, Mémoire sur le goût des livres chez les orientaux (Paris, 1838).
from first-hand sources. These studies also raise further questions, related to the exact interpretation of terms. To recall the title of an article by Franz Rosenthal, we can say that ‘of using many words to refer to books there is no end’. Clearly the term *kitāb* is not co-extensive with ‘book’ and remains somehow ambiguous, considering that in its primary meaning it referred to the result of the act of writing and could thus identify a letter, a charter, a note, or anything fixed by writing. Depending on the type of sources consulted concerning the discipline, the historical period and the cultural milieu, many other terms can be found to identify the item ‘book’. The result is that it is sometimes difficult to understand to which physical entity the terms exactly refer, and words like *daftar*, *muğallad*, *ґuz*, *muşaf* and so on, transmit different conceptual and physical entities.

Contemporary readers are seldom certain that the object they visualise corresponds to what the author had in mind and to what the pre-modern reader understood. Even if nowadays scholars can rely on valuable reference works, they could still feel a certain unease in interpreting the terms which should convey a precise mental image and thus depict a precise physical item. But even in the past conceptual ambiguities were difficult to avoid, for instance when the need of cataloguing prompted librarians to decide whether a certain physical item had to be ascribed to a conceptual category or another. Further contributions exploring the conceptual boundaries of the terms referring to the book in relation with well-defined historical periods, cultural milieux and disciplinary fields would no doubt be desirable.

The richness of the range of topics, periods and disciplines covered by the authors who generously participated in this enterprise, shedding light on the Arabic book in fact and fiction from diverse points of views, could only be partially represented by a quick and analytical glance at the individual contributions. The first article, by Peter Webb, focuses on the ideas of the famous polymath and bibliophile al-Ǧāḥiẓ, and explores his conception of book as a vehicle to transmit knowledge, in connection with the intellectual heritage foreign to the purely Arabic tradition. This encompasses some intertwined debates about the status of books as repositories of authoritative knowledge, the position of Arab/non-Arab in the light of the Šuʿībiyya movement, along with the position of the intellectual heritage of pre-Islamic ‘civilisations’. The evaluation of three key notions (book, knowledge, ethnicity) taken together sheds new light

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on aspects of al-Ǧāḥiz’s—sometimes ambivalent—praise of books and writing against the background of the growing integration of multiple cultural traditions into Muslim ‘civilisation’. The conclusions point to a re-evaluation of al-Ǧāḥiz’s great respect for books, which was, actually a respect for ‘Arabic’ books—and, perhaps, notably his own. The ‘ideal book’ extolled by this polymath turns out to be a sample of the typically Arabic eloquence and stylistic elegance (bayān). This definitely puts it out of reach of competition with the literary outputs of other cultural traditions, and permits to ascertain its superiority in the name of the superiority of the Arabic language.

The article by Ahmad Nazir Atassi explores, through a sample study, the validity and adaptability of the ‘communication circuit’ elaborated by Darnton to the pre-print tradition in an Arab-Islamic context. In particular, Atassi elaborates a methodological framework to study the mechanics of survival of medieval Islamic books, which involves adapting, reducing or replacing some segments of the circuit. A focal point in this is the assessment of the role played by books (as material objects) in their trajectory in private and public spaces. In this respect, the production/reproduction and circulation of a book in a specific social circuit can act as a clue to a better understanding of how and where knowledge was disseminated, or hint at the perceived value of ‘canonical’ books. The inquiry focuses on the history of the earliest extant biographical dictionaries, Ibn Saʿd’s (d. 230/845) Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr, which, in its current textual form, turns out to be a product of the seventh/thirteenth century. The analysis of the book’s transmitters and their historical contexts, based on asānīd, helps to trace the survival of this text’s multiple recensions and their geographical diffusion. The issues raised by this article are manifold: the tension between the single item and the canon; the relationship between the whole textual unit and its segmentation (and the unequal circulation of these), as well as the unstable concept of authorship, and multiplicity and ‘natural selection’ of different recensions.

The process of construction of ‘canonical’ text books, which highlights a type of ‘shared authorship’ of the participants (teachers, students, readers and so on) and the fluid nature of canonical texts are also issues touched in the following article by Noah Gardiner. This article focuses on the transmission of the works attributed to Aḥmad al-Būnī, and consists of an extensive survey of a huge manuscript corpus. The output of the survey is an overview of the major works of the medieval Būnian corpus, the assessment of their authenticity and, as a side product, the acquisition of new information on al-Būnī’s life.
Gardiner’s conclusions also point to a new assessment of the authorship and dating of the work to which al-Būnī owe his fame, Šams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā, which, in the form of it that we have, turns out to be a product of the early eleventh/seventeenth century. From a methodological viewpoint, the perusal of the texts coupled with an extremely accurate study of paratexts (transmission certificates and ownership notices) seems very promising for an appropriate re-evaluation of the texts and of their circulation. A delicate question raised by this detailed case study is the unreliability of some printed editions for the reconstruction of the intellectual heritage of Islam, in particular in the field of esoteric disciplines.

The path of having recourse to the perusal of esoteric texts as a clue to the image of the Arabic book is also shared by Samuela Pagani, who proposes a case study focused on the educational function of Šūfī books which took place at the end of the fourteenth century and beginning of the fifteenth. This alludes to a disputed question, the legitimacy of having recourse in the educational process to written textbooks as substitutes for masters, an issue that went well beyond the borders of esoteric circles, as attested by Ibn Ḥaldūn’s intervention on the topic. This heated debate is also taken as an indicator of the growing importance of private reading in intellectual life and educational processes, an issue that ultimately refers back to the unending tension between orality and writing. The subjects treated in this article (the relationship between free access to knowledge and its control, the tension between private reading and the tendency towards innovation) deserve even further investigation in other periods and disciplines, which would cast new light on the development of relationships between authority and knowledge in Islamic cultural history.

The attitude of intellectuals towards their sources is the topic of Monica Balda-Tillier’s contribution. It explores the tension between the use of written and oral sources and the shifting attitude towards acceptability as reliable authorities. Taking as a point of departure thirteen love treatises spanning from the fourth/tenth to the eleventh/seventeenth centuries, Balda-Tillier carries out an accurate survey of the techniques of quotations. The results demonstrate that the use of the traditional isnād, which boil down to a list of oral sources, tends to disappear to the advantage of citations of book-titles. At an individual level, to have recourse to written sources plausibly has to do with the assertion of a certain type of authorship, which consists of choosing and reshaping earlier materials. Put in its historical context, this shows a shifting attitude towards writing as a reliable way of
transmitting knowledge. It is not fortuitous that the turning point in this process proves to be a work of the Mamlūk period: the treatise of Muḫulṭāy (d. 762/1361), who lived in Cairo in a time when writing and written texts played a key role in education. The hypothesis put forward in this case study sketches out the interest of extending quantitative investigation to other ‘genres’ of Arabic literary output. This also seems a promising line of research to ascertain if there is a common turning point in the ‘never-ending affair’ of the tension between writing and orality in the intellectual history of the region.

The increasing confidence in books that seems to emerge in this period is parallel to the contemporary vitality of the book market, a side effect of the bookishness often attested in the sources for the Mamlūk period. But bibliophilia and the love of books seem to be a very typical feature of Arab-Muslim cultural history as a whole. References to cases of bibliophilia, reports of cases of exaggerate love for books, information about collections of books are scattered in the literary sources of all the periods. The paper by Letizia Osti investigates the image of a private library in the fourth/tenth century focusing on the quality and physical arrangement of books contained therein. The collection of Abū Bakr al-Ṣūfī, his love for books, and his reliance on writing as a source of knowledge (something which is severely censured in some biographical reports on him), are portrayed on the basis of the representations found in both contemporary and later sources. This presentation offers insights into the organisation of scholars’ private libraries, even more stimulating if we consider the renown of al-Ṣūfī as a passionate book-collector but also to his reputation as a scholar who was too dependent on written sources. Osti’s brief paper calls for further investigation on private libraries both as a contribution to a better knowledge of their contents and organisation, and their literary representations as symbols of intellectual and social phenomena: bibliophilia, the relationship between books and knowledge, the circulation of books in the scholars’ circles, the use of books as a status symbol and so on.

The study of libraries and books collections can also raise theoretical implications, like the definition of the concept of ‘book’, a challenging issue treated by Konrad Hirschler in his paper. The detailed investigation of a seventh/thirteenth-century library catalogue from Damascus shows that this concept in the Middle Period was far from being clear-cut, something that is also mirrored in the Formative Period. The perusal of the catalogue section dedicated to maḡāmiʿ (miscellaneous volumes) and to the arrangement of the single items shows that the person in charge of the cataloguing had recourse to two different definitions of ‘book’. The
first is based on its immaterial aspects and corresponds to a textual unit. The second responds more to its material shape. This ambivalence, while showing the intricacy of finding a unique clear-cut operating definition, also hints at the intertwined nature of both material and immaterial aspects of books. Hirschler’s contribution thus has a double interest: theoretical on the one side, and more practical on the other. It presents an unusual and rarely considered viewpoint on books: that of the ‘librarian’, who clearly had a different perspective from authors or readers, and whose role had probably to be based on perceived category distinctions. This also offers incisive views on the practical matter of arrangement that was faced in libraries, and on the role that professionals could have in handling and treating the books.

Related to the role of professionals of the book business is also the following essay by Giovanni Canova, who explores key aspects of the production and the handling of books through the eyes of the jurists and notably Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ, Tāǧ al-Dīn al-Subkī and Ibn Ġamā’a. The article consists of a critical selection and commentary of texts dating to the eighth/fourteenth century, a period in which jurists and ʿulamāʾ showed particular interest in the activities involved in book production. They explored all the aspects of the book-business, including practical instructions on how protect the volumes during consultation, how to put them in the stacks, and how to copy them, concerns which complement more general considerations on ‘professional ethics’. Nor did they neglect to regulate craftsmen’s everyday activities, giving detailed advice to the bookseller (kutubi or, more frequently, warraq), the copyist (nāsiḥ/nassāḥ), the bookbinder (muğallid), and the broker/bookseller (dallāl). The strong ethical slant of these treatises is particularly evident when the ʿulamāʾ urged the book artisans to act by following a strict Islamic moral code, on the ground of precepts such as the concept of miṭāl or ‘pattern of behavior’; adab ‘correct way to act,’ and niyya or ‘good purpose’. Their remarks no doubt constitute a significant—though indirect—contribution to our knowledge of the book market in the Mamlūk period. Along with documentary sources, such as waqf legal documents, they can help illuminate the role of ‘professionals’ involved in the processes of book production and circulation.

The multiple issues raised in this themed volume show the intricacies of the study of the pre-modern Arabic book in all its aspects, at a time when the traditional printed book meets new challenges, exactly like the manuscript books had to meet the challenges of printing – although admittedly in a less dramatic way. Indeed, the essays contained in this
(paradoxically) electronic volume are a witness to the great significance of the Arabic book in the intellectual history of the pre-modern period.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to those who responded to the call for papers and met the challenge of taking our knowledge of the Arabic book a step forward in a, hopefully, significant way. I also feel that I must express my gratitude to the editor of the Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Alex Metcalfe, who accepted the idea of dedicating a volume of the journal to this theme, patiently edited the texts and helped us all keep to the deadlines. Working with him and with the colleagues who contributed (and who, presumably, share my love of books) has been a very enriching and extremely instructive experience for which I owe them my warmest gratitude.
Al-Ǧāḥīz is one of the ʿAbbāsid era’s most celebrated bibliophiles, and his praise of books and championing of ‘writerly culture’ in 3rd/9th-century Iraq are well documented. However, he also expressed distinctly negative appraisals of books that have hitherto received much less scholarly attention. This paper will examine the curiously paradoxical views of al-Ǧāḥīz by considering his opinions on non-Arabic books in the context of scholarly debates in his contemporary Iraq. Al-Ǧāḥīz’s conception of such books intersected debates regarding (a) the suitability of books to transmit knowledge, (b) rivalries between Arabs and non-Arabs in early ʿAbbāsid Iraq, and (c) the merits of translating scholarly writings from pre-Islamic civilisations. Al-Ǧāḥīz’s opinions on these issues led him to develop a particular conception of the ‘perfect book’ whereby he could unreservedly praise his own writings and extol ʿAbbāsid literary culture, but at the same time subordinate foreign literary cultures to the non-literate pre-Islamic Arabians. Al-Ǧāḥīz’s theories reveal that 3rd/9th-century Iraq had not yet become entirely a ‘civilisation of the book’, and that conceptions of language, ethnicity and knowledge influenced the formation of Muslim bibliophilia.

In the wake of the Islamic conquests of the 1st/7th century which amalgamated the various pre-Islamic civilisations of the Near East and Mediterranean into one empire, and with the subsequent emergence of Arabic as the region’s new lingua franca of cultural production, scholars in early ʿAbbāsid Iraq (mid 2nd/8th to 3rd/9th centuries) experienced an environment responding to significant social and cultural change. From the later 2nd/8th century, the intellectual status quo was also confronted by technological developments which made the production of relatively inexpensive paper possible and facilitated a hitherto unprecedented opportunity for commercial book publication.¹ Scholars who formerly had relied largely on the aural acquisition of knowledge via lectures now could study from a growing library of books and disseminate their research and ideas to a wider reading public. The unique advantages of books to store and transmit knowledge were apparent to 3rd/9th-century

¹ See J. Bloom Paper before Print, discussed below, note 65.
intellectuals who praised writing specifically for this ability to communicate across time and space in ways that the oral/aural teacher/student relationship was physically unable to match.  

Akin to many such momentous epistemological and technological changes throughout history, the introduction of books and the integration of various ethnicities into the new social order of the 3rd/9th century were controversial and stimulated spirited debates which propelled Muslim civilisation along new trajectories. From the 4th/10th century, these eventually led to the bibliophilia and cultural unity for which medieval Muslim civilisation is famous. But in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries, scholars were in the midst of debate over whether a mute, inanimate book could sensibly replace a speaking, living lecturer as an authoritative source for knowledge, while the different ethnicities of the Muslim world vigorously jostled for status. These discourses collided with a third intellectual challenge when Arabic-speaking scholars began to translate and reflect on the books of Greco-Roman, Sāsānid Persian, Indian and other pre-Islamic cultures.

The ‘translation movement’, which began in the early 2nd/8th century (perhaps even before), made Arabic translations of pre-Islamic

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2 See, for example, the praise of ḥatt (writing) in both al-Ḡāḥīz’s R. al-Muʿallimīn (Rasāʾil, 3: 27), and Hayawān (1: 49–52).

3 Regarding the cultural bibliophilia, S. Toorawa identifies the late 4th/10th century as a time when ‘reliance on books would become pro forma’ (Ibn Abī Tāhir, 24). This was the period of Ibn al-Nadīm, whose lengthy Fihrist stands as a monument to the writerly culture of his generation. The cultural unity of the medieval Islamic world is well known, neatly encapsulated by a verse Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamaḏānī composed for his al-Maqāmāt al-ʿilmīyya (Maqāmāt, 203):

Alexandria is my home, Should I settle there;
But in Syria I spend the night, and in Iraq, my day.

4 Extant evidence for the controversies surrounding these debates can be adduced from bans on selling certain books in 279 and 284 reported in al-Ṭabarī (Ṭārīḵ, 10: 27, 54) (also discussed by S. Toorawa Ibn Abī Tāhir, 20); the heated debate over writing Islamic traditions (M. Cook ‘The Opponents’); and the discordant pro-Arab/anti-Arab Ṣuʿubiyya-style polemics so commonly encountered in 3rd/9th century adab texts, including those of al-Ḡāḥīz. L. Behzadi’s summary is apt: ‘ongoing discourses of [al-Ḡāḥīz’s] time must have been much more colourful than we usually assume’ (Sprache und Verstehen, 175).

5 Traditionally, the translation movement has been associated with al-Maʿmūn (r. 198/813–218/833), but more recently, scholars have identified the urge to absorb and translate foreign knowledge from an earlier date, during the caliphates of al-Mansūr (r. 136/754–158/775 and Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170/786–193/809), and perhaps the late Umayyad period (R. Rashed, ‘Greek into
scholarly texts widespread by the early 3rd/9th century.\textsuperscript{6} The translated texts differed starkly from the nascent Islamic sciences and Arabic philology, not only in terms of content, but also in form. Significantly, the translated texts were rooted in a manuscript tradition that contrasted with the Islamic and Arabic sciences where aurality was asserted as a key component of authority and authenticity. Furthermore, they were originally written in the distant past and in non-Arabic languages by peoples with neither geographical connection to Arabia, nor temporal proximity to Islamic history.

Muslim scholars in the late 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries thus simultaneously confronted issues of integrating diverse intellectual traditions of the Near East, theorising the acceptability of books as a means of transmitting knowledge, and accommodating multiple ethnicities into their social order. I suggest that these debates were interrelated and led 3rd/9th-century writers to adopt ambivalent positions which can be seen as steps on the way towards the more defined literate, bibliophilic and culturally inquisitive outlook of subsequent centuries. On the one hand, the budding bibliophilia of the 3rd/9th century would aid the favourable reception of both Arabic books and translated ‘pre-Islamic’ manuscripts, but the tensions inherent in the process of Arabicising a multi-ethnic society thrust non-Arabic writings into debates about how the polyglot heritage of the Muslim civilisation should be navigated. This paper will explore the way in which the Iraqi polymath, ʿAmr ibn Bahr al-Ǧāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) conceptualised ‘the book’ in the context of his views on non-Arabic peoples and the production of knowledge. Al-Ǧāḥiẓ may not be a squarely ‘typical’ scholar of his time, if such a notion should indeed exist,\textsuperscript{7} but his writings on these debates are extensive and demonstrate their interrelatedness.

\textsuperscript{6} ‘Foreign books’ commonly encountered in 3rd/9th century Arabic literature are Greek mathematical, scientific and philosophical writings, Sāsānīd Persian historical and legendary court literature and collected aphorisms of a devotional and philosophical nature from Sāsānīd Persia and India.

\textsuperscript{7} S. Toorawa criticises the trend in modern scholarship to identify al-Ǧāḥiẓ with the ethos of the 3rd/9th century (Ibn Abī Tāhir, 124–7), however, I believe it may be difficult to ascribe to anyone the attributes of a ‘standard’ citizen of
Al-Ḡāḥīz was a prolific writer⁸ and avid reader, identified in both medieval and modern writings as one of Islam’s most famous bibliophiles.⁹ Some later biographers even reported that books caused his death, crushing him around his ninety-fifth year under a collapsed bookcase!¹⁰ But in contrast to reports of his bibliophilia, al-Ḡāḥīz himself expressed ambivalent opinions on the utility of books. On the one hand, his well-known love of knowledge seems to have engendered his respect for books as vital carriers of knowledge and led him to adopt a markedly bibliocentric view of the world, whereby he appraised foreign peoples in correlation with their book production. This facet of al-Ḡāḥīz has been often cited in modern scholarship,¹¹ but little attention has been given to a paradoxically contrary trend in his writings where he expressed doubts about books as symbols of knowledge and societal achievement, and even disparaged books and ‘foreign book-producing’ peoples. Resolving the contradiction of al-Ḡāḥīz’s ambivalent

The Life and Works, 9. Neither al-Baghdādi’s nor Yāqūt’s biographies of al-Ḡāḥīz mention it, recording instead that al-Ḡāḥīz was in his ninety-sixth year around the time of his death and that his physical condition was extremely poor, suffering from semi-paralysis (fāliğ) and gout (niqris), and thus not likely in a fit state to browse bookshelves in his last days (al-Baghdādi, Tāriḥ, 12: 214, Yāqūt, Mu’jam, 4: 492, 496–8).

¹¹ See, particularly N. Anghelescu Langage et Culture and S. Günther ‘Praise to the Book!’.
bibliophilia must take into account the developing ‘writerly culture’ and conceptions of ‘foreign peoples’ in his contemporary Iraq. His writings highlight how the hallmarks of the medieval Islamic civilisation – bibliophilia, knowledge-seeking and a cosmopolitan outlook – were closely interrelated, though not definitively conceptualised, during the first ‘Abbāsid century.

Interpreting al-Ḡāḥiz on ethnicity: a scholarly advisory
Akin to other volatile substances, analysis of al-Ḡāḥiz must come with appropriate caveats. He has been described as sarcastic, witty, rambling, emotive, unsystematic and elusive, more lyrical than meticulous, neatly summarised by one modern scholar: ‘who is to say what [al-Ḡāḥiz’s] true intentions are – perhaps not even [al-Ḡāḥiz] himself’. Al-Ḡāḥiz makes strong arguments, though his opinions can appear to shift from one text to the next, leading readers to question whether he possessed strong opinions at all, or whether his ambivalence is a mixture of his own confusion and/or scholarly interest in debating multiple, and conflicting angles of an argument. As such, al-Ḡāḥiz’s work does not lend itself to macrosynthesis of anecdotes from his vast oeuvre. Rather, each quotation demands microanalysis to infer its meaning in the context of the text in which it is contained. Despite these difficulties, I concur with some modern opinions that al-Ḡāḥiz may be more systematic than traditional Western research has assumed. Nonetheless, the complications of al-Ḡāḥiz are manifold and evident in his discussions of books and ethnic groups which are the focus of this paper. As for peoples of the world, in some cases we find al-Ḡāḥiz praising the merits of a people, while in a different text he sharply lampoons them.

12 An appropriate term for the increasingly textual, book based approach to scholarly activity coined by S. Toorawa, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir (1) to describe the adab culture of the 3rd/9th and succeeding centuries.
14 An opinion expressed by J. Lassner, The Shaping, 121.
15 This approach to al-Ḡāḥiz was proposed by S.S. Agha (‘Language as a Component of Identity’, 72–3) and is mirrored in J. Montgomery’s three-fold strategy to extrapolating meaning from a given Ḡāḥizian text (‘Speech and Nature. Part 3’, 114–15).
16 J. Montgomery, borrowing from Isaiah Berlin, alludes to al-Ḡāḥiz’s ‘despotic [intellectual] system’ (‘Speech and Nature. Part 3’, 114), and Behzadi considers al-Ḡāḥiz a ‘systematic’ thinker (Sprache und Verstehen, 173).
17 For example, in al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn al-Ḡāḥiz denigrated the Zanj (a term particularly used to describe East Africans who arrived in al-Ḡāḥiz’s Iraq as...
agendas and patronly tastes may have coloured al-Ḡāḥiz’s analysis in particular epistles; and we ought to exercise further caution in interpreting his texts at face value, for, in addition to the sarcasm and tongue-in-cheek sometimes apparent in his style, al-Ḡāḥiz wrote in polemical genres which fostered exaggeration and embellishment at the expense of sober discourse.

It has been noted that al-Ḡāḥiz was singularly influenced by discourses emanating from the genre al-Maḥāsin wa-l-Masāwī (good versus bad traits) which used dialectic as a means of analysis whereby everything is imagined to be relative and all ideas could be called into question. Gériès has suggested how al-Ḡāḥiz used this methodology to good effect in his theological writings and it appears that al-Ḡāḥiz may have engaged in a similar logic regarding ethnicities. He is known to have written several contradictory pieces about peoples of the world: consider for instance a (now lost) work in praise of the South Arabian Qaṭṭān tribal group, and an antithetical text praising the specific merits of their rivals, the North Arabian Ḥadīn over Qaṭṭān. Al-Ḡāḥiz’s

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18 Noted by J. Lassner regarding Manāqib al-Turk (Virtues of the Turks) which al-Ḡāḥiz dedicated to the powerful Turkic wazīr al-Ṭāfī ibn Ḫaqqān (Rasā’il, 3: 163; J. Lassner, The Shaping, 119–120); and Pellat proposed that al-Ḡāḥiz’s al-Radd ala al-naṣārā (Rebuttal against Christians) was written for the Caliph al-Mutawakkil during a period of official anti-Christian sentiment (Le Milieu Basrien, 231).


20 Ibid.

21 In 3rd/9th-century Arabic writings, Qaṭṭān was identified as the legendary ancestor of all Southern Arabs (tribes who claimed a Yemeni origin). A rivalry between ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ Arabs fueled polemical treatises which tend towards a binary division of Arab tribes into these two groups. Qaṭṭān and Ḥadīn became virtual by-words for these two-halves of the Arab people.

22 Rasā’il, 1: 225. See also his Faḥr al-sūdān which defends the merits of al-Sūdān (lit. ‘the blacks’ from sub-Saharan Africa), but also contains a condescending approach and reserved praise: for example he concedes that African slaves in Iraq lack intelligence, but ascribes this to their status as slaves and their origin from a part of Africa where people are ‘devoid of beauty and sagacity (jamāl wa-ʿuqūl). Al-Ḡāḥiz ‘promises’ that in other parts of Africa, beautiful and more cultured peoples (jamāl wa-kamāl) could be found (Rasā’il,
ambivalence may thus represent his method for achieving a deeper understanding of his subject matter.

Notwithstanding the twists and turns of al-Ǧāḥiz’s views on ethnicity, Lassner made an important observation regarding al-Ǧāḥiz’s epistle Manāqib al-Turk (Virtues of the Turks). He ventured that a search for compatibility between the disparate elements of ʿAbbāsid society lay at the root of al-Ǧāḥiz’s writings on foreigners whereby al-Ǧāḥiz attempted to devise an integrating model in which non-Arabs, including al-Ǧāḥiz himself, could find a place in the social order. The desire to formulate an integrating model certainly accords well with the trend in ʿAbbāsid civilisation towards constructing a less divided social order. But the issue is more complex: as Pellat noted, al-Ǧāḥiz considered himself ‘very much a member of the Arab community’ and a ‘passionate defender of the Arab heritage’. Hence, al-Ǧāḥiz’s interest in merging various ethnicities into one social order, or perhaps a ‘cultural order’ unified by adab, conflicted with an Arabian particularism in his writings. As discussed above, issues of ethnicity, knowledge extracted from non-Arabic sources and the authoritativeness of books were being debated simultaneously in al-Ǧāḥiz’s Iraq and al-Ǧāḥiz’s conflicting leanings regarding different peoples of the world interact closely with his paradoxical opinion of books.

‘Foreigners’ and ‘foreign books’ in al-Ǧāḥiz’s writings
In the shadow of the burgeoning translation movement in 3rd/9th-century Iraq, the interplay of books and ethnicity in al-Ǧāḥiz’s thought coalesce in his writings about ‘foreigners’. His conceptions of ethnicity and the relationship between ‘peoples’ of the world (whom al-Ǧāḥiz generally labels umam) are complex and worthy of deeper study, but

1: 211–12).

24 Ch. Pellat, The Life and Works, 3; idem, ‘al-Djāḥiz’, 387.
25 Al-Ǧihāz generally designates umma as the largest distinct grouping of a people. The basis upon which Al-Ǧihāz conceived ummas to be distinct is not always apparent, but his hierarchy of terminology which identifies umma as the largest group can be found in Manāqib al-Turk (Rasā’il, 3: 213). See also his usage of umma to distinguish the Kurds, Berbers, Africans, etc (Bayān, 1: 137); or to connote the constituent ‘peoples’ of the world generally, Bayān, 3: 12.
26 Al-Ǧāḥiz’s opinions on ethnicity have been considered by modern scholars in varying degrees of detail. In addition to J. Lassner’s study of Manāqib al-Turk, Pellat considers some of al-Ǧāḥiz’s reactions to his multi-ethnic milieu (Le Milieu Baṣrien, 224–234) and ‘foreign literature’ in ‘Djāḥiz et
for our purposes, a brief outline of al-Ǧāḥiz’s conception of his community and the ‘outside world’ indicates how his worldview was in part formed through a ‘bibliocentric lens’.

Common to any analysis of identity and foreignness, al-Ǧāḥiz’s actual genealogy (which may have been black African (aswad) or at least not Arabian27) is less of a concern than the community to which he expressed his belonging and upon which he based his conception of the ‘outside world’. The answer to this is nuanced. Al-Ǧāḥiz was certainly a partisan of the Arabs and took up their defence against those whom he called šuʿābīs (his contemporaries who lauded the past glories of non-Arabian pre-Islamic peoples and argued for their superiority over the Arabs).28 But he usually refrained from identifying his own community as generically ‘Arab’. At times, al-Ǧāḥiz divides the ‘Arabs’ temporally and geographically into pre-Islamic (gāḥiliyyūn), Islamic (islāmiyyūn), desert-dwelling (badawīyyūn) and settled (ḥadāriyyūn).29 These distinctions separate al-Ǧāḥiz’s generation of urban Arabic speakers in both time and space from the ‘pure Arabians’ (al-aʿrāb al-ḫullas)30 who inhabited desert spaces in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times.31 Al-Ǧāḥiz usually identifies his contemporary community as ‘us’ (nahnu),32 ‘this nation’ (ḥadiḥi al-umma) or ‘our religious community’ (millatun).33 In debates with šuʿābīs, al-Ǧāḥiz does assume the position

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27 On his non-Arabian origins, see S. Daay (al-Fann wa-l-Maḏāhibuḫu, 154) and for mention of his ‘aswad’ roots see al-Bagdādi (Ṭārīḫ Baġdād, 12: 209), Yāqūt (Muʿgam, 4: 473). On the other hand, ‘A. Arḥīfa defends al-Ǧāḥiz’s Arabian origins (al-Kitāb, 29).

28 Bayān wa-l-tabyiḫn in particular refers to these partisans of pre-Islamic, non-Arabian peoples as al-šuʿābīyya (see 1: 383; 3: 5, 29, 31, 89).

29 Bayān, 1: 9.

30 Bayān, 3: 29.

31 See Bayān, 1: 384 where he uses the expression ‘arab al-gāḥiliyya wa ṣadr al-islām to describe the first Arabs, as historically distinct, though related to those whom he calls in the same passage ‘our community’ (ummatun).

32 E.g., Bayān, 3: 366, where he refers to the ‘Abbāsid caliphs as ‘our caliphs’ (ḫulafāʾunā).

33 Bayān, 1: 368.

34 Bayān, 1: 137. For the translation of milla, see Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān (11: 631) where it is defined as din wa-šaʿrāʿ (‘religion and religious law’) and al-Ḥalīl, ‘Ayn (8: 324) where it is related specifically to the communal religious
of ‘the Arab’, but his general reticence to label his community as simply ‘Arabs’ is evident and logical given the diverse ethnic backgrounds in 3rd/9th century Iraq. Thus, al-Ǧāḥīz’s umma could perhaps be considered Arabicised without being Arabian, maintaining a link to the ‘aʿrāb’ Arabians to the extent of its preservation of their ‘correct’ Arabic language. The maintenance of ‘proper Arabic’ emerges in al-Ǧāḥīz’s writing as the privilege of scholars, betraying an intellectual elitism, much remarked upon in modern literature. In brief, this restricted his community to the educated ‘reading public’ and he expressed little regard for the uneducated, and even less for the group he labelled aʿrīb: inarticulate Arabic speakers of vile origin. Al-Ǧāḥīz’s ‘us’ accordingly connotes a narrow band of literate, educated, Arabic speakers who inhabited the urban centres of the Muslim world and share ‘our religious community (milla), our religion (dīn), our language, our education/manners (adab), and our ethics (ahlāq)’. Ties of religion, language, education and ethics appear more determinative than strict genealogy.

In terms of the rest of humanity, al-Ǧāḥīz often presents a two-fold law of a group of people.

35 See, for example, his hypothetical dispute with the šuʿūbīs where he and the Arabs are addressed collectively with the second person plural pronoun, antum (Bayān, 3: 14).

36 By the term ‘Arabian’ I intend the Arabic-speaking peoples who inhabit the area now identified as the Arabian Peninsula. They are to be distinguished from Arabic speakers of the urban centres of the ‘Abbāsid period. The urban Arabic speakers were also aware of this difference, commonly (although not exclusively) applying the term ‘arāb to connote the desert-dwelling Arabs. To use al-Ǧāḥīz’s terminology, I mean by ‘Arabians’, al-Ǧāḥīz’s badwaiyyūn of the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. The ‘long-standing integration’ of non-Arabians like al-Ǧāḥīz into an Arabised identity is discussed in Ch. Pellat, Le Milieu Bassrien, which Pellat considers the cause for the non-Arabian al-Ǧāḥīz to side with Arabians in contemporary racial debates (53–5).

37 Bayān, 1: 145. The full text is translated below at note 147.

38 See, for example, J. Montgomery, ‘Speech and Nature. Part 3’, 112, 118–19.

39 Identified by Toorawa as ‘landlords, landowners, merchants, entrepreneurs, judges, jurists, physicians, poets, littératures, teachers and other scholars’ (Ibn Abī Ṭayfīr 1-2).

40 For example, his definition of ‘general populace’ (al-ʿawāmm) even explicitly excludes farmers, market sellers, tradesmen and the hishwa (‘lowlifes’), Bayān, 1: 137.

41 Bayān, 1: 146.

42 Bayān, 1: 137.
division of _ummas_. He explicitly identified only four ‘noteworthy’ (_maḏkūr_) peoples of the world: ‘Arabs’ (perhaps he means particularly Arabs from pre-Islamic up to Umayyad times), Persians, Indians and the Rūm. He cast the rest as _hamāg aw mā yuṣbih al-hamaq_ (‘disorganised rabble to varying degrees’). Al-Ǧāḥiz’s restricting of praise to these four peoples mirrors his approach to his own community and demonstrates a pivotal role of the ‘book’ in shaping his worldview. Al-Ǧāḥiz explains that his appraisal of world peoples was determined on an intellectual basis, declaring the above quartet as worthy of his esteem. He further specifies the Persians, Indians and Rūm as the only peoples whom he believed had developed advanced conceptions of rhetoric (balāgha), produced books and possessed commendable literary traditions.

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43 He notes that the Umayyads preserved the praiseworthy traditions and qualities of the pre-Islamic Arabs, whilst al-Ǧāḥiz remarks that these traditions suffered a decline during the ‘Abbāsid period. As such, the ‘Arabs’ are relatively historically remote in much of _al-Bayān wa-l-iḥyān_ and many of the more excellent aspects of their culture seem, in al-Ǧāḥiz’s view, to have passed (Bayān, 3: 366-367).

44 _Bayān_, 1: 137, see also _Bayān_, 1: 384, _Ḥayawān_, 1: 53. The term ‘Rūm’ generally designates contemporary Byzantines in Arabic texts, but can also refer to the Greco-Roman civilization. What we refer to today as the Ancient Greek civilization is usually identified as _al-Yūnān_. However, there is occasional overlap in Arabic writings of the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries where the relationship between Rūm and Yūnān were variously interpreted, sometimes al-Yūnān were deemed as descended from al-Rūm. Al-Masʿūdī helpfully summarises the various opinions and notes how the later al-Rūm lived in the same lands as al-Yūnān and adopted their language and ways (_madhhab_) (Murič 2: 664). Al-Ǧāḥiz cites al-Yūnān as a ‘disappeared peoples’ (_umma bāʿida_) (Bayān 1: 188), although in his epistle _al-Raddʿalā al-Naṣārā_, both al-Rūm and al-Yūnān are cited, indicating a perceived continuity between these two peoples in his worldview.

45 _Bayān_, 1: 137, _Hamaq_ derives from flies or gnats which cluster around sheep and donkeys (Ibn Manẓūr, _Lisān_, 2: 393). It is applied to people by analogy on account of the diminutive size of gnats and disorganisation of their flight (ibid, al-Zamaḥšarī, _Asās al-Balāgha_, 706). Rabble or riffraff could act as translations.

46 They are described as _al-umam allatī fiḥā l-aḥlāq wa-l-ādāb wa-l-ḥukm wa-l-ʿilm_ (Bayān, 1: 384).

47 _Bayān_, 1: 88.

48 _Bayān_, 3: 13, _Ḥayawān_, 1: 53.
As regards the outside world, therefore, al-Ǧāḥiẓ adopted a distinctly bibliocentric lens by which ‘foreign’ book producing peoples were accepted to join the ‘Arabs’ in the global hierarchy, while those whom al-Ǧāḥiẓ believed lacked literary traditions were excluded. Precisely why ‘the book’ could be utilised as an arbiter between madhkūr (worthwhile’) and hamaj (‘worthless’) peoples and the precise workings of this worldview in al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s writings, can be understood in the context of the conceptions of books and knowledge in al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s society.

The nexus of ‘book–knowledge–civilisation’ in Muslim thought
Al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s ‘intellectual elitist’ worldview indicates a profound respect for knowledge (ʿilm) and a conceptualisation of books (kutub) as representing physical embodiments of ʿilm. The three ‘foreign’ peoples, qua book producers, generated ʿilm and so earned the right to exist alongside the Arabs whose ʿilm al-Ǧāḥiẓ vigorously defended in his writings. This seems to harbinger a model of ‘universal bibliophilia’ encountered in later medieval Arabic writing where literary output and the worth of foreign peoples are unambiguously connected. This bibliophilia of the medieval period has led scholars to label the Muslim world a ‘civilisation of the book’ and the role of books in al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s worldview seems to be an early expression of this ‘global’ aspect of Muslim bibliophilia. In seeking the origins of the Muslim partiality to books, Western scholars have traditionally considered that the prototypical respect of kitāb and ʿilm emanate directly from the Qurʾān.

49 Al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s esteem for knowledge is famous (Ch. Pellat, Le Milieu Basrien, 68), and al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s dual conception of books–knowledge has been noted by ʿA. Arhila, al-Kitāb (see particularly 16, 66, 142) and N. Anghelescu, Langage et Culture, 59–59. Al-Ǧāḥiẓ wrote specifically on the topic of knowledge, composing texts entitled Faḍl al-ʿilm, Risālat al-muʿallimīn, al-ʿĀlim wa-l-gāhil and three separate texts about maʿrifā. Ch. Pellat, ‘Nouvel essai’, 130, 141, 147–8.

50 For an archetypal expression of this bibliocentrism, see Tabaqāt al-Umam of Sāʿīd ibn Ahmad al-Andalusī (d. 462/1070). See note [65] below.

51 G. N. Atiyeh, The Book in the Islamic World, xiv. J. Pedersen’s The Arabic Book is the classic exploration of the paradigmatic ‘bibliophilia’ in Islam. See also J. Bloom Paper Before Print (116–23) for a description of the outpouring of ‘book culture’ and S. Günther’s ‘Praise to the Book!’, 126 for the scholarly backing of this enterprise.

52 J. Pedersen opens his classic work with the phrase ‘The Arabic book owes its origin to Islam’ (The Arabic Book, 3) and identifies the Qurʾān as the first ‘proper’ Arab book (ibid., 12–16). As for ʿilm (knowledge), F. Rosenthal
of human existence: it makes myriad citation of kitāb and ‘ilm, it teaches that the kitāb will ‘release the people from darkness into light’ (Qurʾān 14:1), and it closely equates ‘ilm with the ideal human condition, describing Muslims as those who have or seek ‘ilm, in contrast to non-believers who act ‘without it’ (Qurʾān 31:20).\(^{53}\) However, the inference that the Qurʾān is the basis of later expressions of Muslim intellectualised bibliophelia risks anachronism.\(^{54}\)

While the Qurʾān, al-Ǧāḥiẓ and later Muslim writers all seem united in the same knowledge-seeking bibliophilic chorus, current scholarship is revealing that the acceptance of books as authoritative depositories of ‘ilm was a protracted process, the stages of which ought to be separated. First, in an insightful monograph, Madigan demonstrated that the Qurʾānic conception of the ‘enlightening kitāb’ was not a ‘book’ in the modern sense of a closed, definitive, authored text. Madigan argued that the Qurʾānic ‘kitāb’ is a symbol for God’s authoritative knowledge, representing the totality of His guidance to mankind. It thereby transcends terrestrial, time-bound texts.\(^{55}\) and, in fact, the Qurʾān states

\(^{53}\) In the same vein, the Qurʾān chastises those who ignore ‘ilm when it is taught/revealed to them (Qurʾān, 2: 145; 13: 37).

\(^{54}\) Promulgators of this conception, such as Rosenthal, do note the multi-faceted meaning of ‘ilm in Muslim thought. However, Rosenthal’s analysis implies the Qurʾān has retained a determinative role in shaping ‘ilm’s parameters (Qurʾān, 42–5, 48–90). This analysis primarily relies on texts from the later 3rd/9th century, leaving the first 250 years of Muslim intellectual history as a stasis in which the Quranic ideal seemingly was little changed.

\(^{55}\) For D. Madigan’s elucidation on the meaning of kitāb in the Qurʾān see The Qurʾān’s Self Image, 52–4; 70–2; 105; 145. According to Madigan, in the language of the Qurʾān, a printed copy of the text should not be referred to as kitāb, and for this reason, he proposes, the term muṣḥaf was adopted (ibid., 36–37). When the Qurʾān refers to written documents it eschews the verb kataba for physical writing (ibid., 108–9) and refers to physical ‘books’ with words like subḥf and qirṭās (ibid., 122–3).
that no human-authored book can approach the power of the Kitāb. While the Qurʾān does establish a discursive framework in which kitāb and ʿilm are connected in a tremendously positive manner and the possession of kitāb symbolises ‘correct guided’ life, it is unlikely that the earliest Muslim audiences associated this symbolic grandeur with terrestrial kutub (understood as human authored texts or anything ‘written’). The elevation of terrestrial kutub to the centrepiece of later Muslim bibliophilia is a separate phenomenon achieved via the gradual maturation of the writerly culture.

Towards a ‘writerly culture’: the concept of the ‘book’ in 3rd/9th-century Iraq Muslim ‘writerly culture’, which began to emerge about one hundred years after the Qurʾān’s revelation, would eventually champion the human-authored book and provide the necessary theoretical backdrop to use the book in appraising peoples of the world. But in al-Ǧāḥiz’s day, ‘writerly culture’ had not entirely matured and the status of books remained debated. Until the latter 2nd/8th century, scholars were primarily praised for their capacity to memorise. In contrast, book ‘publication’ was extremely limited and formal writing was restricted to

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56 See the Qurʾān 2: 79 for its extreme censure of the human act of claiming their writings to be like God’s kitāb.

57 A definition drawn from the earliest Arabic dictionary Kitāb al-ʿAyn, which identifies kitāb as the ‘verbal noun’ (maṣdar) of the verb kataba ‘to write’ (al-Ḫalīl, Kitāb al-ʿAyn, 5: 341).

58 Madigan notes that the impetus to ascribe terrestrial written texts with kitāb was aided by the written codification of the Qurʾān in a written muṣḥaf during the 1st/7th century which began to elevate respect for the written word (The Qurʾān’s Self Image, 23, 47–8).

59 Anecdotes recording the lampooning of traditionists in the 2nd century who relied on written notes and praising those who allegedly knew all their material from memory are frequently cited in debates about the authenticity of the ḥadīṯ, the permissibility of writing them and the development of a written hadīth tradition. Conversely, Schoeler stresses the important role of notebooks (hypomnemata) from early times (The Oral and the Written, 114–128). Irrespective of the private use of such notes, the public display of knowledge from memory was important, witnessed by the scale of anecdote in the Islamic tradition.

60 Both Nabia Abbot (Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri) and Fuat Sezgin (Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, 1) gathered evidence for scholarly writings in the latter first and second centuries of Islam. Subsequent research has cast doubt on these attempts to identify primordially early texts in the Islamic tradition (G. Schoeler, The Oral and the Written, 40).
bureaucratic matters and scholarly writing was limited to informal notebooks for personal use or shared between students. These writings, sometimes identified in the sources as *kutub*, should not be construed as ‘books’ in the sense of formally published closed-ended texts. Knowledge transmission was likely aided by written notes, and scholars did not only rely on their powers of memory. However, presumptions of 20th-century scholars in the tradition of Goldziher who sought to prove that the transmission of knowledge relied on writing have ignored the staunch opposition to writing as detailed by Cook and they lack evidence given the limited numbers of surviving papyri and other writing fragments from the period. The word of the scholar possessed greater value than his writings, and the authority of human written texts seems to have been somewhat mistrusted across the Islamic world, and particularly in al-Gāhīz’s hometown of al-ascusra. In this environment, the first translations of the ‘foreign’ texts from the Sāsānīd Persian, Greek, and Indian traditions would have circulated primarily in the palaces and administrative centres and not ventured far into the circles of the wider Muslim scholarly community. Overall, recourse to written notes was largely outside of public view, books lacked authority as standalone repositories of knowledge and consequently there was therefore almost no scope in the first two centuries of Islam to accept either the notebook *kutub* or translations of non-Arabic texts as epitomes of authoritative knowledge transmission.

As noted above, the introduction of paper and perhaps a greater familiarity with the textual traditions of pre-Islamic Near Eastern

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61 This theory was first proposed in the 19th century by Alois Sprenger and has been carefully developed in *The Oral and the Written* and *The Genesis of Literature* by Schoeler who identifies these writings as ‘notebooks’ / hypomnēma. For a summary of the difference between hypomnēma and syngrammā (the published book) see G. Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature*, 21.


63 Schoeler argues for a fairly wide use of the hypomnēma (The Oral and the Written, 40–41). Similarly Abbott (Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri) provides ample physical evidence for the writing heritage of the Umayyads, however neither gives an indication that books were upheld as praiseworthy repositories of *ʿilm* – this appears to have been the characteristic of the scholar, not his books.


66 Ibid., 27.
cultures via the growing translation movement nudged the writerly culture forwards in the latter 2nd/8th century. At this time Sībawayh (d. 180/796) ‘published’ *al-Kitāb*: one of the very first Arabic books definitively produced by its author and released to the public in written form. Following Sībawayh’s model, books began, slowly and rather faltering at first, to be ‘published’ to a growing reading public, and during the lifetime of al-Ǧāḥiẓ, the book was beginning to establish itself as a definitive repository of knowledge that could be read on its own. With the human-authored text finally familiar and widespread in society, Muslim writerly culture could begin to conceptualise the human-authored book as synonymous with ‘ilm and right-guided living in their vein of the Qur’ānic *kitāb*. As tangible objects, they became closely associated with their authors and as abstract symbols of knowledge,

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67 The role of translated materials is discussed by ʿA. Arḥila, *al-Kitāb* 66–7 and the effects of increased paper production by J. Bloom, *Paper Before Print*, 91, 110–13. Other factors cited for the growing importance of books include the rise of administrative writings (S. Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 1–2, 9), a gradual development from increasing reliance on the scholarly notebooks (G. Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature*), the role of the Muʿtazilite sect’s preference of reasoned thought over memorised facts (S. Günther, ‘Praise to the Book!’ 131) and a broadening of the literate public who sought books outside of a formally professional context (S. Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 1). It would seem logical that all of the above played a part.


69 Schoeler cites the written poetry anthology of al-Mufaddal al-Ḍabbī and Ibn Ishāq’s *al-Kitāb al-Kabīr* as examples (*The Oral and the Written*, 71). Abbott compiles a list of the surviving ‘books’ produced in the 3rd/9th century, indicating the growing frequency of formal publication (*A Ninth-Century Fragment*, 147–9).

70 Noted by S. Günther, ‘Praise to the Book!’ 139–140, who cites the earlier article of A. Ghersetti for evidence of the third-century opinion of the book as primary means of preserving knowledge (*L’utilità della scrittura e la lode del libro* [The Usefulness of Writing and Praise of the Book]).

71 Al-Ǧāḥiẓ explicitly makes this connection, to be considered below.

72 The close association of authors and their books begins to appear in the 3rd/9th century and is even more apparent the succeeding period. The early identification of books with their authors can be noted with Mālik ibn Ἄnas and al-Muwaṭṭā‘, al-Buḥārī and Muslim with their *ḥadīth* collections, and in the 4th/10th century we note Abū al-Faraq al-ʿĪsfahānī became popularly identified as *ṣāḥib al-ʿAgānī* indicating the association between author and his most famous work. In a similar vein, nations would similarly become identified by their
they became a readily deployable means to recognise cultured life. The possession of books therefore was directly linked to praiseworthy social status, opening the door for the application of a bibliophilic model to appraise other societies and past civilisations.

The writerly culture’s maturation in the 3rd/9th century accords well with al-Gāhīz’s bibliophilic worldview, and the contrast with the seemingly retrenched orality of the earlier period has understandably led modern researchers to identify the 3rd/9th century as literate, and writers such as al-Gāhīz and Ibn Qutayba as veritable champions of the writerly culture. The enthusiastic appraisal of this period’s literacy, however, ought to be tempered: writerly culture and the lofty status of kitāb were in a formative stage during al-Gāhīz’s lifetime. Authors still relied on aural sources, even into the 4th/10th century, and the degree of autodidactism (from books), anecdotally noted in the 3rd/9th century does not appear to have entirely superseded aural study. Genres such as qālat al-Rūm (‘the Rūm say’) or fi kutub al-Rūm (‘in the books of the Rūm’) are noted in texts of Ibn Qutayba (G. Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba*, 190). The notion of authors acquiring a proprietary right in their book is a vast and under-explored ramification of the development of the writerly culture, however, its origins in the 3rd/9th century along with the development of the critique of plagiarism are introduced in S. Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 26–9).

In the case of the Islamic sciences, see M. Cook (*The Opponents*, 476), and more generally, S. Günther ‘Praise to the Book!’ and A. Ghersetti ‘L’utilità della scrittura’.

See for example, S. Günther, who comments on the ‘vigorous stance’ of Ibn Qutayba and al-Gāhīz in promoting ‘reading, writing and books’ (‘Praise to the Book!’, 138); A. Arḥīla, who identifies al-Gāhīz as Islam’s most renowned ‘bookman’ (ashar man akhba al-kutub) (al-Kitāb, 15); N. Anghelcanu, who describes al-Gāhīz’s era as ‘temps d'ouverture intellectuelle’ where intellectuals paid the book great reverence (Langage et Culture, 56–8); and G. Schoeler, who argues for a much wider readership of al-Gāhīz compared to writers of previous generations (‘Writing for a Reading Public’, 59–60).

This is the topic of W. Werkmeister’s research *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb al-‘Iqd al-fārīd des andalusiers Ibn ‘Abdrabbih* (246/860–328/940): ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983), and similar conclusions regarding Kitāb al-‘Agānī and al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīḫ are noted in G. Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written*, 37–9.

The emergence of the autodidactic basis for self-study from books is noted by S. Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir*, 15–16). While this clearly formed the basis for much of the intellectual activity of the period, in the 3rd/9th century, Schoeler’s evidence suggests that the autodidactic process and wiḏāda (‘finding’ information in books) still lacked the authority of learning from formal lessons.
as philosophy and medicine may have been less fettered by oral legacies, but this should not distract us from conceiving the 3rd/9th century as one of transition. Published texts were certainly widespread, but the concept of the human-authored book as an authority for ʿilm was novel and remained an open question. This seems to have influenced al-Ǧāḥiz, and closer analysis of his contrary opinions on books and, consequently, foreigners reveals a more complex discourse.

Al-Ǧāḥiz: an ambivalent bibliophile
Al-Ǧāḥiz the ‘book-praiser’ is most evident in al-Ḥayawān and a shorter epistle on teachers (Risālat al-Muʿallimīn) where, in an elaborate analysis of the literate traditions of past civilisations, he marshals ‘the book’ in a markedly bibliocentric manner. Al-Ǧāḥiz as ‘book-censurer’, on the other hand, emerges in al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn and other texts where he expresses different intentions which impacted upon his esteem for the bibliophilic literate epistemology and the relative merits of book producing peoples.

Al-Ǧāḥiz: lover of books and knowledge
The bibliophilic tenor of al-Ḥayawān and Risālat al-Muʿallimīn is well known. al-Ǧāḥiz extolled human authored books for their utility, durability and dependability which make them an easy reference, a more efficient store of information than memory (seemingly a direct critique of the aural Islamic tradition), and the most robust method to preserve information against the ravages of time. In short, he writes:

Were it not for the book, the stories of the past would become corrupted and the sayings of those absent would be cut off. Your tongue [can only

or maǧālis (sessions) with other scholars (G. Schoeler, The Genesis of Literature, 115–17).

77 For the more ‘writerly’ context of the ‘foreign sciences’ see S. Toorawa, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, 9. He cites Rosenthal’s The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship which stresses that ‘all branches of literature relied for their preservation on written fixation’ which, dating from 1947 seems to overstate the rapidity of the writerly culture’s advance in the 3rd/9th century (S. Toorawa, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, 11).

78 In particular, S. Günther (‘Praise to the Book!’) and N. Anghelescu (Langage et Culture, 54–66) use excerpts from al-Ḥayawān to explore the bibliophilic leanings of al-Ǧāḥiz.

79 Hayawān, 1: 37. Al-Ǧāḥiz’s critique of this tradition is the subject of S. Günther’s ‘Praise to the Book!’, 131, 138.

inform] those present, while the pen [can inform] the absent – those who came before you and those who will come after. Thus, the benefit of the pen is greater, and the public administration (dawāwīn) in greater need of it.81

With his flamboyant description of the ‘book’ as ‘a vessel, full of knowledge, a container stuffed with cleverness, and a receptacle of mirth and sagacity’,82 al-Gāhīz portrays books as quintessential carriers of ‘ilm, akin to the Qurānic kitāb, and in reporting that the Qurān and other books of revelation are the best kutub,83 he implicitly groups all books, terrestrial and divine, in one conceptual category, the Qurān now being the ‘best book’, and not the ‘only book’.

Having established the intellectual value of books, al-Gāhīz describes their utility in developing a successful and right-guided society. He explains that ‘spending on books indicates a respect for ‘ilm, and a respect for ‘ilm indicates the nobility of the soul and its integrity from the intoxication of faults.’84 He explicitly lauds this ‘bookish’ ‘ilm, casting it in opposition to jahl (ignorance/passion), as the ‘pillar of the soul’, the ‘origin of all good things’,85 and the basis for social order:

God does not take ‘ilm from people. However, He takes away their scholars, and when there is no scholar left, the people choose ignorant rulers who govern without ‘ilm, and they go astray and misguide [their people].86


83 Hayawān, 1: 59.

84 Hayawān, 1: 41.

85 Such sentiments concerning ‘ilm are frequently cited in al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn and the Rasā’il of al-Gāhīz. See in particular Bayān, 1: 84–5, 1: 257 and 3: 12. The ‘pillar of the soul’/‘imād al-rūḥ quotation is from Bayān, 1: 77. For the praise of ‘ilm as the origin of all good things: wa-l-‘ilmū ˒ṣlu‘ūlu ḥayrin wa-bīhi yanfaṣi‘lu al-karamū mina l-lu‘mi wa-l-ḥalālu mina l-ḥarām (Rasā’il, 3: 35, Mu‘allimīn).

Taken together, al-Ḡāḥiz’s statements demonstrate that books transcend mere depositories of information: they are symbols for the pursuit of ‘ilm and prima facie evidence for the existence of culture and learning.

In al-Ḥayawān, al-Ḡāḥiz develops this bibliophilic reasoning into a world-historical vision whereby books become the *sine qua non* of humanity’s intellectual development across time and space, which is the basis of his ‘universal’ bibliocentric outlook noted above. To prove it, he explains that humans, as created by God, are unable to live self-sufficiently and are dependent on one another.\(^{87}\) From this principle, he argues that maintaining this necessary contact with neighbours is not always possible, hence the logical necessity of writing to communicate with those who are not immediately present.\(^{88}\) Al-Ḡāḥiz asserts that groups of people (*umam*) similarly rely on the passage of knowledge from past societies to advance their own learning and avoid mistakes of the past.\(^{89}\) Arguing that books are the only remaining tangible link with the past,\(^{90}\) al-Ḡāḥiz concludes that books vitally maintain the venture of knowledge on earth.\(^{91}\) The cycle is also continuous: writing is an ‘intellectual duty’ for the present in order to edify future generations and allow them to develop ‘ilm into new horizons.\(^{92}\)

The elevation of books into vessels of ‘ilm, and the portrayal of ‘ilm as the unifying force underwriting the sweep of human history from its origins and into the future neatly generates a global bibliocentric worldview whereby Muslim civilisation can locate itself as a participant in the historical endeavour of knowledge where each civilisation is a link in a chain soldered by books. Here al-Ḡāḥiz presents one of the earliest formulations in Muslim writing of an intellectualised and bibliophilic worldview at its humanistic apogee: inclusive and cosmopolitan.

\(^{87}\) *Hayawān*, 1: 34–5. The Qurʾān frequently considers mankind’s lack of self-sufficiency, although this is adduced as evidence of their inferiority to God (e.g. 92: 8, 96: 6–7). Al-Ḡāḥiz echoes this principle, but has shifted the emphasis to the need for humans to look for mutual help from each other.

\(^{88}\) Ibid.

\(^{89}\) *Hayawān*, 1: 53

\(^{90}\) Al-Ḡāḥiz makes this statement on account of books’ ability to survive whereas he believed architectural monuments and the other attempts of past civilisations to immortalise their accomplishments are more susceptible to the ravages of time than books. *Hayawān*, 1: 49–52.

\(^{91}\) *Hayawān*, 1: 59

\(^{92}\) *Hayawān*, 1: 60. See ‘A. Arḥīla (*al-Kitāb*, 35–39) for an alternative, though similar reading of al-Ḥayawān to that presented here.
Al-Ǧāḥīz: respect for foreign book-writers

His intellectualised worldview weaves together the contemporary status of books, opinions on the merits of past peoples and the contemporary translation project into a discourse asserting the primacy of books in knowledge acquisition which enables him to use ‘the book’ as a means to appraise other peoples, automatically elevating the status of book producers and validating his own 3rd/9th-century adab culture which, via the translation project, was benefitting from past literary heritages.93

Since many of the 3rd/9th-century intellectuals were not Arabian, it may seem unusual to refer to the intellectual heritage of Persians and Greeks as ‘foreign’, however, in light of al-Ǧāḥīz’s intellectualised conception of world history, issues of ethnicity, as noted above, were less concerned with ‘blood relation’, and more with intellectual achievement. As such, al-Ǧāḥīz’s discourse on ethnicities had a rearward looking aspect – the ‘Persians’ could be viewed as a past civilisation, and understood as contributors in the story of human knowledge production, assessable by the volume of their scholarly heritage. Societies that produced books earned a place for themselves in ‘history’, while those lacking literate traditions neither learned anything from those before them, nor could bequeath anything to posterity, and so had no place in al-Ǧāḥīz’s view of history.94 In *al-Hayawān*, al-Ǧāḥīz thus commends his book writing intellectual predecessors, expressing his gratitude that Indian astronomy was preserved in their ‘scripts’ (ḥuṭūṭ) 95 and professing a high opinion of Aristotle, Plato, Ptolemy and Democritus as pioneers of science and learning.96 In light of the close association of books with their authors in the emerging writerly culture, this intellectual, bibliocentric lens rendered foreign societies synonymous with their books. The wise Greek-thinkers and just Persian kings who emerge in Arabic adab as veritable stereotypes of Greeks and Persians

93 Al-Ǧāḥīz relied on these sources himself: Ch. Pellat (*The Life and Works*, 4–5) notes al-Ǧāḥīz’s exposure to Persian and Indian influence in al-ʿBaṣra (where al-Ǧāḥīz was born) and increasing access to Greek influence in Baghdād (where he lived a long segment of his adult life).

94 The role of the book in establishing the merits of past literate cultures has been similarly considered by N. Anghelescu, *Langage et Culture* 55–6, 59. She has, however, neglected to consider the negative opinions which al-Ǧāḥīz expressed about books, and to attempt a synthesis of these paradoxical strands in his thought. Such an exploration and a possible synthesis will be offered below.

95 *Hayawān*, 1: 36.

96 *Hayawān*, 1: 52.
appear to have stepped off the pages of the translated Greek and Persian books and into the imaginations of ʿAbbāsid writers. It is perhaps not coincidental therefore, that medieval Arabic literature generally gives more detailed accounts of the history of Greek books than it does the Greco-Roman political history. The ‘inclusive’ aspect of the writerly culture of al-Ǧāḥiz’s day has been identified as the beginning of an increasingly ‘secular’ (perhaps better labelled cosmopolitan) conception of knowledge in ʿAbbāsid circles as a widening audience consumed the knowledge of past peoples by reading their books. Based on the discourse in al-Hayawān, it seems straightforward to conclude that al-Ǧāḥiz squarely identified book production with worthy culture and that his bibliophilia transferred smoothly to xenophilia in the case of non-Arabic book-producing peoples. But this discourse on the centrality of books and praise for book producing people also displays a more pointed self-serving element underlying his seemingly effusive bibliophilic cosmopolitanism.

Given that the Muslim civilisation of al-Ǧāḥiz’s day had built its intellectual edifice upon the collective traditions of Arabians, Persians, Indians and the Rūm, it is entirely logical that al-Ǧāḥiz would commend these peoples on the basis of books. His discourse asserts that their books were ‘worth reading’ and so argues for the usefulness of their further translation and study in ʿAbbāsid Iraq. While the original authors were praised as a by-product of this argument, perhaps more importantly for al-Ǧāḥiz’s purposes, his equation of reading with the concept of social progression over time enabled him to theorise that his culture, which both consumed books of the past and wrote new books, stood at the pinnacle of human progression: the legitimate and worthy successor to

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97 While fourth-century Muslim world histories such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Masʿūdi or al-Maqdisī give fairly sketchy accounts of Roman Emperors and Greek kingdoms, their contemporary Ibn al-Nadīm narrates in fine detail the transmission of Greek texts from their ancient origins to their Arabic translations (e.g. for medical texts see Fihrist, 345–6). Further analysis of this discrepancy would be interesting to explore, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.
98 S. Toorawa, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, 129. Toorawa notes that the term ‘secular’ is of questionable application here, but intends by this the development of an adab culture in distinction to the scholarship specialised in the Islamic traditions.
99 Perhaps this accounts for al-Ǧāḥiz’s mention in his epistle on the ‘Virtues of the Blacks’ that the term for the written text of the Qurʾān, muṣḥaf, derives from ʿḤabāshi’ origins which thereby attempts to delineate some literate element in African culture, and thus a point of merit (Rasāʿīl, 1: 202, Faḥr al-sūdān).
its polyglot past. This has been identified as one of the centrepieces of al-
Ǧāḥīz’s thought and the theme of al-Ḥayawān.\textsuperscript{100} Al-Ǧāḥīz, in the guise
of a bibliophilic xenophile could thereby claim that the ʿAbbāsid
scholars, via their translation of Persian, Greek and Indian sources had
collated the \textit{entirety} of humanity’s knowledge and could legitimately
consider themselves the most erudite nation yet. His outward
cosmopolitan ‘humanism’\textsuperscript{101} may thus be more inward looking and self-

serving, linking with al-Ǧāḥīz’s discourses on ethnicity as an Arabian
partisan in al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn. Pellat observed this tendency and
related it to the character of \textit{adab} culture to ‘prendre de tout un peu’ and
to borrow from foreign cultures without accepting their superiority to
Arab culture.\textsuperscript{102} This is an accurate observation, but these leanings of al-
Ǧāḥīz are tied to a more multifaceted theory about books and knowledge
in general. The anti-book, xenophobic trend in his writing now calls for
examination.

\textit{Al-Ǧāḥīz the book cynic}

Al-Ǧāḥīz’s bibliophilic introduction to al-Ḥayawān was a polemical
treatise. He draws our attention to this, noting that he wrote it in self-
defence against those whom he described as unjust critics of his
writings.\textsuperscript{103} Furthermore, the influence of \textit{al-Maḥāsin wa-l-Masāwi} genre has been noted as operative in al-Ḥayawān more generally, which
cautions an uncritical acceptance of the content of \textit{al-Ḥayawān} at face
value.\textsuperscript{104} His extravagant description of books as ‘the most humble
teacher; the most capable companion; the least boring and least grating
friend…the most ready support’, and his florid analogy of the book as a
tree having the ‘longest lifespan and sweetest fruit which is most easily

\textsuperscript{100} Al-Ǧāḥīz is typically associated with this perceived cosmopolitan trend in
Muslim culture of the 3rd/9th century (Ch. Pellat, ‘al-Ǧāḥīz’, 387; N.
Anghelescu, \textit{Langage et culture}, 54–5). Enderwitz proposed, based on analysis
of \textit{al-Ḥayawān}, that \textit{adab} represents a fusion of the Arabian with the non-Arab
cultural heritage and that al-Ǧāḥīz considered \textit{adab} books as the highest forms
of historical human expression, behind only the Qurʾān (S. Enderwitz, ‘Culture
History and Religion’, 235–237).

\textsuperscript{101} A term applied to al-Ǧāḥīz in \textit{Al-Ǧāḥīz: a Muslim Humanist for our Time}
(‘Introduction’, v) and to al-Ǧāḥīz’s cultural milieu by N. Anghelescu, \textit{Langage et Culture}, 63, 66.

\textsuperscript{102} Ch. Pellat ‘Ǧāḥīz et la littérature comparée’, 95–6, 98.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ḥayawān}, 1: 7–14.

\textsuperscript{104} I. Gériès, ‘al-Maḥāsin wa-l-Masāwi’, 1224.
picked” are all specifically intended to rebut the critic of his books. In short, by promoting the virtues and social utility of books in general, al-Ǧāḥiz could defend his reputation as a writer and argue that his books ought to be read in the most positive possible light. Al-Ǧāḥiz certainly saw himself as a worthy participant in an intellectual heritage mediated by books, but he neither claims that all books are of equal merit nor that all writers are deserving of equal esteem.

Even in al-Hayawān, al-Ǧāḥiz notes that other forms of communication are potentially as useful as books (depending on the circumstance), and that the pen and tongue are balanced in virtue, making no explicit statement of the written word’s greater merit. He expressly states that his only intention in writing al-Hayawān’s introduction was to ‘expound the virtues of books’.

The fuller exploration of communication and knowledge hinted in al-Hayawān is taken up in al-Bayān wa-l-tabīyīn where his treatment of books is not quite so effusive.

Even before turning to his other writings, a reader of al-Hayawān can perceive various criticisms of books. Al-Ǧāḥiz censured the books of the zanādiqa (Zoroastrian Persians), lamenting their lack of ‘ilm, poor style and dismissing their stories of heroes, demons and wondrous adventure (à la ʿĀšbāvī) as ‘idle, inept legends’ lacking ‘useful’ knowledge, wisdom, witticism or anecdote. In his opinion, expenditure on these books is wasteful: they are idle, inept leg

\[105\] Hayawān, 1: 33–4.
\[106\] Hayawān, 1: 23: laʾalā raʾyaka inḍā ʿāšīka an yataḥawwala wa-qawluка yatabadda (that perhaps your opinion [after reading this book] will transform and your [previous critique] will change).
\[107\] Hayawān, 1: 31.
\[108\] Hayawān, 1: 38, 50–1.
\[109\] Innamā qaṣdānā bi-kalāminī ilā l-iḥbāriʾ an faḍīlati l-kitāb (Hayawān, 1: 38).
\[110\] Al-Ǧāḥiz describes the content of these books as ‘haḍr, wa-ʿiyy wa-ḥurāfa’, and the material they lack includes: maẓāl sāʾir, ḫabar ṣarīf, ᵃšʾat adab, hikma ḫarība, falsafa (Hayawān, 1: 42)
\[111\] Al-Ǧāḥiz (Hayawān, 1: 43) explains this though the rhetorical question: fa-ayyu kitābīn aḡḥalu wa-ayyu tadbīrin afsadū min kitābīn yūḡībuʿ alā l-nāsī l-iṭḥaʿa... wa-layṣa fīhi salāḥu maʾāšin wa-lā taṣḥīḥ din (What book is more ignorant, or what work is more corrupting than a book which demands obedience from its readers, but lacks any element of bettering their lives or edifying their religion!?).
Hayawān also invokes ḡahl to describe books written by Muslims which are censured as ‘trashy’ (kutub al-furrāḡ al-ḥula‘ā’) or as ‘diversions and banter’ (kutub al-malāḥī wa-l-fukāḥāt). Similarly, he relates criticism of books authored by those with bellicose agendas, shallow values or affected by the ‘rancour of the ḡāhiliyya’. Ḥayawān also invokes ḡahl to describe books written by Muslims which are censured as ‘trashy’ (kutub al-furrāḡ al-ḥula‘ā’) or as ‘diversions and banter’ (kutub al-malāḥī wa-l-fukāḥāt). Similarly, he relates criticism of books authored by those with bellicose agendas, shallow values or affected by the ‘rancour of the ḡāhiliyya’.112 Al-Ǧāḥiz narrates these opinions from the voice of a (hypothetical) critic, but it indicates what he conceived as the antithesis of his books. While we have seen that al-Ǧāḥiz equated some books with the Qur’ānic kitāb, i.e. as symbols of ʿilm, this was by no means a blanket endorsement for all books.

Outside of al-Hayawān, we find al-Ǧāḥiz denigrating the ‘writerly culture’, censuring those who read excessively and reproduce ‘book language’ as mere followers (tābi‘), especially criticising the kuttāb – the state secretaries whom modern scholars consider to be among the first movers towards the writerly culture at the end of the 2nd/8th century.114 These negative aspects of the writerly culture justify, for al-Ǧāḥiz, why God chose not to bestow skills in al-ḥaṭṭ (handwriting) on Muḥammad.115 And so al-Ǧāḥiz paradoxically undermines al-Hayawān’s framework for the transmission of knowledge across the sweep of human history by literate scholars.

Al-Ǧāḥiz hints at further suspicions regarding books in al-Hayawān in an insightful passage where he highlights the perilous journey of ‘book knowledge’ across time through the hands of copyists and translators. In particular, we read that the dual requirements for an ideal translator – (a) linguistically wholly proficient in the original and target language, and (b) intellectually on par with the authors whom he translates – can only exist in theory.116 Consequently, al-Ǧāḥiz notes that translations even in the ‘straightforward’ fields of geometry and philosophy (al-handasa wa-l-falsafa) can be found lacking, while errors are almost guaranteed in religious sciences, where precision and knowledge are paramount.117

In short, books emerge as twisted, corrupt and unreliable conveyors of knowledge.

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113 Rasā’il, 2: 192(Kuttāb).
115 Rasā’il, 2: 189–90 (Kuttāb).
117 Ibid.
past knowledge as they pass through the ‘criminal hands’ of copyists.\textsuperscript{118}

The above passage is enigmatic: it is not the direct speech of al-Ǧāḥiz, but again a ‘quotation’ from a hypothetical critic defending the Arabic oral poetic tradition. However, al-Ǧāḥiz does not refute any of these arguments and in fact adopts them himself elsewhere.\textsuperscript{119} Thus, with his signature ambivalence, al-Ǧāḥiz leaves to the reader the task of resolving the question of whether books can or cannot accurately transmit ‘ilm. Akin to the linguistic quandary that bedevils translation, al-Ǧāḥiz also cites the negative effect of writerly culture on language generally. He explains that book culture tends towards takalluf (unnatural mannerism)\textsuperscript{120} and readers who fashion their speech after books develop stiff and artificial language.\textsuperscript{121} Surprisingly for a bibliophile, al-Ǧāḥiz deems written language an inappropriate guide for good rhetoric!

Al-Ǧāḥiz’s well-reasoned bibliophilia and praise of books as symbolic embodiments of intellectual progress are therefore checked by his apparent belief that reading books neither guarantees accurate transmission of knowledge nor necessarily enables self-improvement, and that writerly culture can lack creativity and vitality. This sentiment closely mirrors a negative opinion of foreign civilisations and their books, which emerges from al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn and other Ġāḥizian epistles.

\textit{Al-Ǧāḥiz: censurer of book-writing foreigners}

Al-Ǧāḥiz’s denigration of the literate foreign cultures which he elsewhere extoled is less commented upon in modern scholarship.\textsuperscript{122} Regarding the Sasanian Persians, al-Ǧāḥiz criticised their books and intellectual

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\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Ḥayawān}, 1: 55: ǧāniya lā yazālu al-kitābu tatadāwaluhu l-aydī l-Ǧāniya (the book continues being passed down by ‘transgressing’ hands [of copyists]).

\textsuperscript{119} See his discussion of problems with translations from Persian and the Rūmī language and problems with Christian theology, discussed in the next section and note 150, below.

\textsuperscript{120} Bayān, 3: 29.

\textsuperscript{121} This even includes reading books authored by eloquent and/or wise writers (\textit{kutub al-bulaghā’...wa-dawāwīn al-hukamā’}): \textit{Rasā’il}, 3: 40–1 (\textit{Mu’āllimīn}).

\textsuperscript{122} The only article of which I am aware which specifically considers al-Ǧāḥiz’s negative opinions of Persian, Indian and Rūmī books is Ch. Pellat’s ‘Djāhiṣ et la littérature comparée’ where Pellat attributes these comments to al-Ǧāḥiz’s method of grappling with the adab culture’s integration of foreign ideas. This shall be further considered below.
heritage. He considered their books exhibit a laboured style, which he attributed to the Persian authors’ lack of natural brilliance and linguistic spontaneity, as, in his view, they copied from each other.\footnote{Bayān, 3: 28.} Further, he cast doubt on the authenticity of the translated Persian books circulating in the Abbāsid Iraq, insinuating that they may have been, in part, forged by translators in the early Abbāsid era.\footnote{Bayān, 3: 29.} In this argument, he adopts the reasoning of that hypothetical ‘book critic’ from al-Ḥayawān: mistrusting books capacity to faithfully convey ‘ilm across time, and denying the ‘Persian book’ as a basis for praising the past Persian heritage.

Having discredited Persian books, al-Ǧāḥiẓ censures his contemporaries who based their knowledge upon them in preference to the Qurʾān and hadīth.\footnote{Ibid., 2: 194–5.} Repeating his critique of the book as gaḥl, al-Ǧāḥiẓ laments that the knowledge gained from Persian books is in fact gaḥl\footnote{Ibid., 2: 192, 195. Also, al-Ǧāḥiẓ lists Ibn al-Muqaffā’’s Arabic language book al-Adab (which is commonly known today as al-Adab al-kabīr) among the Sasanian books of ‘substandard’ ‘ilm.} and sharply rebukes Ibn al-Muqaffā’, the epitome of the 2nd/8th-century Persian Abbāsid scholar/translator who championed Sasanian books and culture.\footnote{Rasāʾīl, 2: 195 (Kuttāb).} Evoking the Qurʾān (62:5), al-Ǧāḥiẓ relates an anecdote comparing Ibn al-Muqaffā’ to a donkey weighed down with books carrying much ‘ilm, but not benefiting in the least: ‘his knowledge made him weak, his reason baffled him, his wisdom blinded him and his insight confused him.’\footnote{Rasāʾīl, 2: 195 (Kuttāb).} Persian books in al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s estimation are thus a far cry from authoritative, enlightening sources and there is little praise of Persian culture here.

Al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s censure of the ancient Greeks again focuses on a criticism of their writing style. He claims that their knowledge of philosophy and logic did not translate into elegant expressions, and that despite their theoretical understanding of language, the Greeks (al-Yūnāniyyūn) did not produce well-formed speech in practice (pace Demosthenes et al, of whom al-Ǧāḥiẓ makes no mention).\footnote{Bayān, 3: 27–8. He specifically notes that Ṣāḥib al-mantiq (a sobriquet for Aristotle, see G. Lecomte, Ibn Qutayba, 191–2) was a poor speaker.} Similarly, al-Ǧāḥiẓ claimed that...
Ancient Greek society as a whole, notwithstanding the intelligence of their scholars, failed to make any practical application of their theoretical knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge has no civilisational benefit if unapplied, al-Ǧāḥiẓ argues, and accordingly, when comparing the Greeks to other peoples (ʿumam) such as the Chinese, Persians, Turks and Bedouin Arabs (ʾArāb), he concludes that the Greeks, for all their wisdom, do not deserve a higher status.

Contemporary Byzantine (Rūmī) civilisation fared worse. Since Ancient Greek (al-Yūnān) writers lived in the distant past, al-Ǧāḥiẓ rejects the possibility that their books and intellectual heritage could be claimed by contemporary generations of Byzantines. According to al-Ǧāḥiẓ, contemporary Rūmī literary production was negligible and their language was so different from Classical Greek that they could not possibly invoke its past glories for their benefit.

As for the Indians, al-Ǧāḥiẓ less frequently discusses them in his surviving writings, but his extant appraisal of their culture similarly contains unenthusiastic evaluation of their books, which he describes as lacking both rhetorical power and creative spirit. They ‘only contain ancient meanings, not attributable to one scholar…they are merely heritage since time immemorial, well known, well rehearsed’.

Towards a resolution

Al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s paradoxical style, the relative obscurity of his life and uncertain chronology of his writings complicate a reconciliation of his ‘book loving’ and ‘book hating’ tendencies. But patterns in his seemingly contradictory statements indicate a certain coherency within a complex web of issues. His opinions about books varied, but al-Ǧāḥiẓ was clearly preoccupied with books, indicating the maturation of the writerly culture in the 3rd/9th century. His analysis of foreign peoples also frequently cited books: whether al-Ǧāḥiẓ wished to praise or

131 Ibid., 216–18. In al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s opinion, here, these peoples excelled in a limited number of fields, but they failed to become all-round achievers.
133 He apparently wrote books in which he considered their religious beliefs and idolatry which he cites in Hayawān (1: 8–9). These are now lost and al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s conclusions are unknown.
135 Ch. Pellat, The Life and Works, 10–14.
denigrate groups, he marshalled ‘the book’, categorically denigrating those peoples whom he believed possessed no literary culture, and while privileging book producers, he cited shortcomings of their books as a means to criticise them. His critiques and praises of both books and foreign peoples also revolve around questions of language. Closer consideration of al-Ǧāḥīz’s conception of the praiseworthy book and the position of language in his worldview points towards a possible explanation of his paradoxical statements on literary culture.

The ideal book: ‘meaning and speech’

Al-Ǧāḥīz defined the ideal, unimpeachable book (muhkam, mutqan) as having ‘sound judgment, like the smooth face of bare rock, with precise and elegant meanings; and fine and eloquent wording’. The allusions to good ‘judgement’ and ‘meaning’ reflect al-Ǧāḥīz’s belief that books can be repositories of authoritative knowledge, as discussed earlier. His inclusion of ‘wording’ (lafẓ), however, introduces a second component: ‘expression’ (bayān) and indicates the centrality of language in the constitution of a worthy book. The twin roles of ʿilm/knowledge and bayān(expressive language as the basis of good communication are a major theme of al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn and are similarly, though more briefly described in his other major work, al-Ḥayawān. Al-Ǧāḥīz’s opinions of bayān have frequently been discussed in medieval and

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136 Even in Manāqib al-Turk, where he makes a fairly vigorous (and perhaps politically motivated, see above) defence of Turks, al-Ǧāḥīz does not promote them above book producers. Their skill in war and hardy attributes are praised, and while he equates their excellence in war with the Greek excellence in philosophy and the Sāsānid Persian achievements in statecraft, the Turks are not raised above these two (book writing) cultures (Rasāʾil, 3: 217–18). Outside of the Manāqib, the Turks are never listed among ‘noteworthy peoples’. The non-book producing pre-Islamic Arabians are a special case, considered below.

137 Rasāʾil, 1: 350 (al-ʿAdāwa wa-l-ḥasad).

138 Rasāʾil, 1: 351 (al-ʿAdāwa wa-l-ḥasad): al-kitābu... muḥṣafūn ka-annahu matnu ḥağarin amlasa bi-maʿānin latṭfatin muḥkama. This is, naturally(!), a description of one of his own books, though it conveys the ideal to which he strove in his own writing.

139 The similarity of al-Ǧāḥīz’s approach to bayān (Bayān, 1: 75–88 and passim and Ḥayawān, 1: 29–31) is important as it implies a (rare) continuity and stability in al-Ǧāḥīz’s thought. The books were written at different times — al-Bayān before 237/851 and al-Ḥayawān before 232/846 — (Ch. Pellat, ‘Nouvel essai’, 133, 139) and with different aims, but notwithstanding this, their treatment of bayān is very similar.
Taking Montgomery’s and Behzadi’s recent analysis of bayān together, it becomes clear that al-Ǧāḥiẓ afforded it importance not just as an ‘intellectual playground’, but as the cornerstone for all aspects of life including the means to understand God and both the nature and meaning of the Qurʾān in Mu‘tazilite theology.

Such a profound appreciation for good style and appropriate language consequently had important ramifications in many of al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s intellectual preoccupations, and his promotion of style and clarity of expression as a primary component of the ‘worthy book’ seems the product of his deep-rooted interest in bayān. Here the specific book-language nexus will be further explored to understand how al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s opinions took their particular shape and to demonstrate how his seeming ambivalence regarding the book and foreign peoples is in fact part of a more coherent discourse.

Al-Ǧāḥiẓ applied his belief in the supreme importance of communication directly to his intellectualised vision of world history. Whereas in al-Ḥayawān he emphasised the role of books in the historical venture of knowledge, it seems incorrect to assume that he considered books as the sole embodiment of this process. As noted above, even in al-Ḥayawān, he criticised the shortcomings of some books, and in al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, he more explicitly describes why. While books convey ‘knowledge’, al-Ǧāḥiẓ stresses that appropriate and clear expression (bayān) is necessary to faithfully transmit any learning. Badly or imprecisely written books distort the knowledge they contain and risk misunderstanding. Such books categorically fail to transmit knowledge, and hence al-Ǧāḥiẓ concluded that it is bayān, clear expression, that brings ʿilm to life. Al-Ǧāḥiẓ believed that all of the different forms of communication (which he enumerates as speaking, writing, computation, gesturing and metaphor) can convey ʿilm, and their relative suitability

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140 See L. Behzadi, ‘al-Ǧāḥiẓ and his Successors’ and Sprache und Verstehen. Also, the recent series of articles by Montgomery have carefully demonstrated the theological leanings of al-Ǧāḥiẓ’s ‘nature/speech’ dichotomy which figure prominently across his writings (‘Speech and Nature’).

141 L. Behzadi, Sprache und Verstehen, 173.

142 See, for example, Bayān, 1: 75: al-maʿānī l-qāʿimatu fī ṣudūrī l-nāsī l-mutasawwararatu fī aḍghānīhim... mastūratun ḥafīyyatun wa-baʿidatun wakhsīyyatun wa-mahgūbatun maknātun... wa-innamā yāhyī tilka l-maʿāniya ǧīkrūhum lahā wa-lḫbārūhumʾanḥā (‘the meanings in the souls of men and conceived in their minds...are hidden and obscured, remote and inaccessible, veiled and concealed…these meanings are only brought to life by [the scholars’] mentioning of them and informing of them’).
depends on the circumstances. Sometimes ḥatt, the written word, is ideal, but al-Ḡāḥīz maintains that clarity of expression trumps the medium: the correct conveyance of ‘ilm depends on the selection of the best method for the given circumstance. No single method suits all occasions: ‘the revelation of meaning occurs to the extent of semantic clarity, accuracy of expression, appropriate epitomisation [of meaning], and precision’. The transfer of knowledge, therefore, cannot logically be the exclusive preserve of literary culture.

For al-Ḡāḥīz, the perpetuation of intellectual culture via the communication of ‘ilm through clear bayān begins with the Qurʾān since its excellent bayān is the means by which God teaches His ‘ilm, and ideal bayān belongs to God. But al-Ḡāḥīz cites a definition of humans as the ‘living, clear speaking (mubīn)’ and so allows them to achieve degrees of eloquence too. Al-Ḡāḥīz thereby contrasts bayān with ‘iyy (inhibited speech) just as ‘ilm opposes ḡahl. As we have seen, he appraised books by their language and meaning together, and so it would appear, he appraised humans.

Crucially, al-Ḡāḥīz ventures that the concordance of sound meaning and correct expression in human communication approaches the Divine:

[i]The best speech is that which is brief and obviates the need for protracted expression and the meaning of which is apparent in its expression; Almighty God grants [such speech] some of His loftiness and bestows upon it the light of His wisdom, according to the good intentions and piety of the speaker.
Books and human activity thereby become both intellectually and linguistically construed. The Qurʾān represents the ideal concordance of meaning and language, but the model permits terrestrial communication to be appraised to the extent it approaches the Quranic standard.

Why al-Ǧāḥiz emphasised the centrality of bayān in the venture of knowledge and effectively promoted it above books may be explainable in part by the status of writerly culture in his day. As noted above, notwithstanding the growing importance of books in 3rd/9th-century intellectual circles, the ‘silent’ book had not replaced aural methods of knowledge transmission, and a respect for oral/aural skills and style would linger in Muslim culture for centuries. Why al-Ǧāḥiz emphasised the centrality of bayān in the venture of knowledge and effectively promote it above books may be explainable in part by the status of writerly culture in his day. As noted above, notwithstanding the growing importance of books in 3rd/9th-century intellectual circles, the ‘silent’ book had not replaced aural methods of knowledge transmission, and a respect for oral/aural skills and style would linger in Muslim culture for centuries. As such, emphasis on oral and other non-written forms of communication is natural, and an exclusive praise of books as stand-alone authorities of ʿilm would have seemed radical and perhaps nonsensical. Consequently, writing is a component of bayān, and indeed is privileged by the bibliophile al-Ǧāḥiz, but the written word is not paramount, as one may expect could be the case in a more thoroughly ‘literate’ intellectual milieu. The as-yet immature writerly culture and writerly styles of communication may thus have curbed al-Ǧāḥiz’s bibliophilia.

In addition to these factors, issues of ethnicity also appear which point to another intertwined agenda at work in his thoughts on bayān and, as a consequence, books in general. At the centre of this lies al-Ǧāḥiz’s acceptance of the Qurʾān’s stylistic pre-eminence, which is uncontroversial. However, he elevates this into an ethnic discourse whereby his conception of bayān shifts from pure stylistic analysis into a means to create a hierarchy of world languages. Inasmuch as Arabic is the language of the Qurʾān, al-Ǧāḥiz asserted that Arabic qua language, must possess the best potential for bayān. He explains:

There is no language on earth more enjoyable, elegant or sweet to hear, more intimately connected with clear rational thought or more expressive than that heard from the correct-speaking, sound-minded Arabians (ʿaʾrāb) and eloquent scholars.151

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150 For the persistence of the ‘oral’ aspect of learning into the late medieval period, notwithstanding the penetration of books in all fields of scholarly activity, see J. Pederson, The Arabic Book, 17, 31–6.

151 Bayān, 1: 145: innahu laysa fi l-arḍi kalāmin huwa amita’u wa-lā ānaqu wa-lā alaḏḏu fi l-asmāʾi wa-lā aṣaddu ittiṣālan bi-l-ʿuqūlī l-salīmati ... wa-lā aḡwadu taqwīman li-l-bayānī min ṭūli stimāʾi ḥadīṯi l-aʾrābī l-ʿuqalāʾi l-fuṣūḥāʾi wa-l-ʿulamāʾi l-bulaqāʾ.
Al-Ğāḥīz’s intellectual elitism is again at work here; his conception of bayān promotes the Arabians and his own ‘Arabised’ scholarly community above all others and disadvantages foreign cultures from the outset. Al-Ğāḥīz directed this thought to its logical conclusion: applying bayān to a global worldview, he conceded that all peoples can express themselves, even if only by ‘crude expression, poor meaning and ‘brutish language’, but in his opinion, only Arabic speakers are truly proficient in bayān, while a group of ‘foreigners’ (here he means the Persians) also had some, though lesser, expertise. The ‘four noteworthy peoples’ (madhkūrūn) of book producers, thus reduce to at most two (more likely one-and-a-half) when the secondary hurdle of bayān is erected before them.

The practical effects of this were far reaching. Speakers of imperfect languages, according to al-Ğāḥīz’s logic, necessarily possess imperfect knowledge: their expressions cannot accurately articulate what they intend to say. Hence al-Ğāḥīz attributed ‘errors’ of Christian theology (i.e. where Christian dogma differed from Islamic) to Rūmī linguistic deficiencies which prevented the accurate conveyance of the teachings of Jesus. In contrast, al-Ğāḥīz believed Arabic speaking theologians were better protected from theological error by the clarity of the Arabic language. The addition of the linguistic parameter in judging knowledge starkly handicaps non-Arabic speaking peoples and enables al-Ğāḥīz to acknowledge their literary heritage while maintaining that their books lack the fundamental linguistic component of the kitāb muḥkām mutqān, which he believed only Arabic could truly produce, and so justifying his negative opinions of non-Arabic books

152 Bayān, 3: 12–13: ḥattā inna l-Zanţa ma‘a l-qaṭṣarat... lt-tu‘līa l-ḥuṭab... wa-in kānat ma‘ānīhā aḡfā wa-aglaza wa-alṣāzūḥā ḥāfala wa-aḡhala.

153 Al-Ğāḥīz does not specify particular foreign groups in his, stating: ‘with [bayān] the Arabs are duly proud and with bayān some of the ‘Aṯām claim precedence’ (wa-bi-gālīka [al-bayān] taṣfaḥarat al-‘Arabu wa-taṣfaḍalāt aṣnāfū l-‘Aṯām, Bayān, 1: 75). Later on he specifies that the Persians are the other group who maintained an acceptable standard of bayān, although this is expressly inferior to the Arabic (Bayān, 3: 27–9).


155 Ibid., 337. Al-Ḡāḥīz did concede, alluding probably to the kalām debate in his own society, that not all Arab scholars understand the most complex points of theology because even the bayān of Arabic, as written by humans, can fall short of conveying such complex ‘ilm. This, however, was not, for al-Ḡāḥīz, a weakness of Arabic, but rather, a warning to scholars of the almost certain failure that will befall theological speculation in any other tongue.
Arabians and al-Ḡāḥīz’s emphasis on Bayān
While later medieval commentators attributed al-Ḡāḥīz’s partisanship of the Arabic language to his defence of the Qurʾān, and while very similar arguments for the primacy of Arabic among world languages would appear in the iʿgāz al-Qurʾān genre156, this is unlikely the only or indeed primary reason for al-Ḡāḥīz’s stance. Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn does not particularly defend the Qurʾān – perhaps he felt it could handle such matters itself157 – but instead, as noted by Pellat in ‘Djāḥīz et la littérature comparée’ and Behzadi in Sprache und Verstehen, it marshals arguments for a cultural defence of the Arabs. Indeed, as Behzadi argues, al-Ḡāḥīz utilised bayān for deeper purposes than merely asserting Arabian superiority, but he certainly found bayān a very useful tool in ūbū arguments, and, if we consider how his conceptions of bayān and the Arabians fit into the context of books, we can see how the pro-Arabian foundation of al-Ḡāḥīz’s bayān is in fact paramount. The Kitāb al-ʿašā (The Book of the Stick), the most expressly pro-Arabian tract in al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, ‘also contains some of al-Ḡāḥīz’s most detailed statements on both books and bayān. Indeed, the precise way in which his conception of bayān interacts with writerly culture and the cultural defence of the Arabians seems a good indication that these debates were intimately related. ʿAbbāsid scholars believed that the Arabians lacked a ‘book culture’ in pre-Islamic times,158 yet these ‘bookless’ Arabians

156 The study of the inimitability of the Qurʾān. See the defence of the Qurʾān by al-Baqqillānī (d. 403/1013) which utilises the same linguistic arguments as al-Ḡāḥīz and al-Baqqillānī similarly dismisses the merits of foreign languages and their books (Iʿgāz al-Qurʾān, 29–32). The opinion of al-Ḡurqānī regarding al-Ḡāḥīz and defence of the Qurʾān is discussed by L. Behzadi, ‘Al-Ḡāḥīz and his Successors’, 129–30.

157 He does expressly note the superiority of the Qurʾān’s language which constitutes evidence of its Divinity (Bayān, 1: 383), but a purposeful linguistic defence of the Qurʾān is not expressed as a primary concern of al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn as it would become in the later iʿgāz al-Qurʾān books of the 4th and 5th centuries.

158 Much has been made in Western scholarship of certain references to writing materials in pre-Islamic poetry and the odd treaty which the Islamic tradition informs us was ‘written’. These oft repeated references concerning literacy in pre-Islamic times have overshadowed the lack of any admission, rightly or wrongly, by ‘Abbāsid scholars of the existence of significant literacy in pre-Islamic Arabia. See, for example, Ibn Qutayba’s Kitāb Faḍl al-ʿArab wa-l-tanbih ʿala ʿulūmihā (Virtue of the Arabs and an Explication on their Sciences) where he lists the major fields of pre-Islamic ʿilm. Writing is absent, the closest is a description of ḥatt defined as divination via making lines in the
under the flag of Islam conquered ancient and learned civilisations. The incongruity of the ratio between Arabian military strength and their literacy would become problematic as the ‘book’ began to be culturally revered in the maturing writerly environment of the 3rd/9th century. When the parameters for esteem and power no longer rested on the force of arms alone, the descendants of the ‘literate’ Persians, Greeks and Indians could marshal the new ‘bookish’ benchmarks to claim their heritage was superior to the Arabians whose lack of an ancient literary tradition became an obvious source of embarrassment.

By stressing the dual intellectual and linguistic foundation of the ‘praiseworthy book’, and by focusing on the importance of bayān in underwriting ʿilm, al-Ǧāḥiẓ articulated a firm argument for a non-bookish conception of ʿilm. He pursued this reasoning and defined the ideal bayān as epitomised in spontaneous good speech (ḥadhīḥa, irtīqāl) — the attributes of skilled orators; while chiding the studied affectation (takalluf) of written language. He thus ventured that the best language actually has no need for books and so deftly parried any cultural disgrace attaching to the ‘bookless’ pre-Islamic Arabians: their lack of a literate tradition was transformed into a cultural strength. Al-Ǧāḥiẓ frequently cited the above conception of bayān to laud the Arabians and maintained that their eloquent speech was an inborn virtue, born from their desert environment, while he expressly denigrated the retrograde language of urban dwellers. In sum, the non-book-producing Arabians emerge at the summit of knowledgeable peoples for their lack of books was more than compensated by their excellent bayān. Al-Ǧāḥiẓ could cogently demonstrate that their ʿilm was an ʿilm of the most useful order, expressed, as it was, in what al-Ǧāḥiẓ deemed the most eloquent language. Simultaneously, the conquered non-Arabs and

sand (Faḍl, 143). Ḥaṭṭāt in pre-Islamic lore meant this sort of diviner, not the modern concept of a calligrapher (ibid.)!

Military power was, by the 3rd/9th century, considered the preserve of the Turks whom al-Ǧāḥiẓ noted for their martial abilities (cf. his Manāqib al-Turk), but this did not elevate them to the tier of ‘noteworthy peoples’.

Bayān, 3: 28.

Ibid.

al-Ǧāḥiẓ commonly alludes to the linguistic eloquence of the Bedouin over the city dweller (Bayān, 1: 13, 96–7), noting that ‘city eloquence’ is learned in any event and lacks the innate accuracy of the Bedouin (ibid., 145) and he specifically notes the corrupting influence of city language (ifsād), which he admits even affects his own language and the ʿAbbāsid scholarly community (ibid., 162–3).
their book culture were structurally subordinated. Interestingly, al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn is also silent on the translation project undertaken by the ʿAbbāsid caliphs, particularly al-Maʾmūn, a figure traditionally considered its prime architect. Al-Ǧāḥiz dedicated a book to al-Maʾmūn which was apparently well received, but al-Ǧāḥiz’s writings are devoid of praise for the caliph’s interest in foreign books, instead his praise for al-Maʾmūn, is on ‘Arabic’ grounds – concerning the caliph’s eloquence.

Al-Ǧāḥiz’s maintenance of this linguistic underpinning of ʿilm and support for the Arabians led him, somewhat unusually for an ʿAbbāsid writer, to express strong admiration for the Umayyads. When al-Ǧāḥiz enumerates Arab rulers who displayed proficiency in bayān, he emphasises the Umayyads (Muʿāwiya, Yazīd, al-Walīd and Sulaymān) as well their Arabian rival, Ibn Zubayr, whereas the ʿAbbāsid caliphs are expressly secondary. Furthermore, despite the ʿAbbāsid interest in book learning, al-Ǧāḥiz even commends the Umayyads for maintaining the linguistic and cultural traditions of the pre-Islamic Arabians and laments that the ʿAbbāsids eschewed what al-Ǧāḥiz considered the more virtuous Arabian orality as they turned instead towards the urban writerly culture. Can this be taken as an indirect slight on the ʿAbbāsids for too eagerly adopting the writerly culture and manners of the Persian state secretaries?

Conclusion
Al-Ǧāḥiz’s disparate opinions of books, ethnicities and learning merge under the umbrella of his theories about the human intellectual heritage. As a member of the burgeoning writerly culture of Iraq and reader of

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163 For example, Ibn al-Nadīm some 125 years after al-Ǧāḥiz’s death recounts the portentous dream of al-Maʾmūn in which the caliph had a vision of Aristotle who urged him to find Greek books for translation (Fihrist, 303–4).

164 Al-Maʾmūn’s praise for the quality of this book is reported by al-Ǧāḥiz (Bayān, 3: 374).

165 See Bayān, 1: 91, 115, 3: 374–8. Al-Maʾmūn’s opinions about good books, containing excellent meaning and language together is also cited by al-Ǧāḥiz, but this concerns his interest primarily in Arabic books. See Rasāʾil, 1: 351 (al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣarā).

166 Bayān, 1: 383. He expressly notes that the speech of Arab rulers other than the Umayyad era figures mentioned lacked what could be considered proper bayān, thereby placing the ʿAbbāsids in a secondary role. al-Maʾmūn is mentioned as an outstanding ʿAbbāsid, however no mention is made of his interest in translating foreign books.

167 Bayān, 3: 366.
translations from non-Arabic sources, he accepted books as valid transmitters of ‘ilm and theorised a structure of knowledge transmission via books in which the translation project and the foundations of ‘Abbāsid adab culture could be legitimised. So, in al-Ḥayawān in particular, al-Ǧāḥiz appears as the bibliophilic humanist and icon of the cosmopolitan book consuming medieval Muslim civilisation. But this bibliocentric worldview risked an implicit denigration of the bookless Arabians in the ethno-cultural debates of al-Ǧāḥiz’s intellectual milieu. To bolster the status of the Arabians in the story of human intellectual heritage, al-Ǧāḥiz played to their strengths, and found in his conception of bayān a cogent means to establish the parameters of ‘ilm around good language which he argued was the preserve of the Arabians.

In 3rd/9th-century Iraq, books by no means dominated the process of knowledge acquisition, and communication retained an oral/aural aspect. This background played into al-Ǧāḥiz’s hands, permitting him to refrain from unequivocally praising all written texts as authoritative sources of knowledge and to stress the importance of appropriately expressive language in the parameters of the ‘praiseworthy book’. While he accepted that some books could be veritable paragons of cultured thought, not all books are equal, and he wielded this re-conceptualised ‘ideal book’ against the very cultures that based their own superiority on ‘book culture’. Construing books in this fashion had another self-serving angle, as his theory implicitly assures that books written in Arabic (such as his own), must be the very best for all time.

Al-Ǧāḥiz’s dilemma of lauding book culture as legitimator of adab, and disparaging books to defend the Arabian heritage continued to confront later writers. In the mature writerly culture and on account of their own esteem of books, some would adopt an unambiguously bibliocentric lens to appraise the world, scorning not the non-believing kāfir but instead illiterates, and they even laud the polytheistic Babylonians and Pharaonic Egyptians as praiseworthy peoples on account of their perceived book production. But other later scholars would retreat into Arabian particularism, particularly in defence of the Qur’ān. Later cosmopolitan bibliophilia would thus continue to be cleft by issues of language and theology.

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168 See Enderwitz and Saliba for recent spirited arguments for a synthesising and cosmopolitan al-Ǧāḥiz. Ch. Pellat (The Life and Works, 12) gives more weight to al-Ǧāḥiz’s polemical and pro-Arab, pro-Islam stance, but also indicates that the cosmopolitan spirit of adab tempered this to some extent.

169 See Šā’id al-Andalusī’s Ṭabaqāt al-umam for a paradigmatic example of
Al-Ǧāḥīz was unequivocally a bibliophile, but in his particular Ǧāhiżian way. I suspect his bibliophilia was at its most efficive when he assessed his own books: while he respected non-Arabic books as sources of knowledge upon which he believed his 3rd/9th-century Muslim civilisation was founded, he probably loved his own writings best.170 Al-Ǧāḥīz’s theoretical framework enabled him to borrow from foreign ‘ilm without having to ‘pay’ for it by expressing respect for their cultures, since their languages were structurally subordinated. Al-Ǧāḥīz could thus comfortably extol the virtue of books and write books to his heart’s content, confident that he would never have to concede that Aristotle, Bozorgmehr or Ibn al-Muqaffa’ could possibly be his equals.

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170 Pellat considered that al-Ǧāḥīz dispensed with the format of Greek zoological works in al-Ḥayawān because he was ‘convinced that he [had] no need of recourse to Greek ideas, given that all that is found in the zoological works of the ‘philosophers’ [the Greco-Roman scholars] is known already to the Bedouins.’ (Ch. Pellat, ʿḤayawān’, 312).

Secondary Studies


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THE TRANSMISSION OF IBN SAʿD’S BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY *KITĀB AL-ṬABAQĀT AL-KABĪR*

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This article develops the concepts and tools for the systematic study of the mechanics of survival for medieval Islamic books. These concepts and tools are then applied to studying the history of the earliest extant biographical dictionary of the Islamic tradition: Ibn Saʿd’s *Ṭabaqāt*. First, the book’s transmitters and their historical contexts are investigated using a large number of transmission chains. Then, conclusions are extracted from this data concerning the book’s authorship, the survival process of its many versions, and the trajectories of its geographical diffusion at different phases of its long life.

*About the Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*

The Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr (literally, ‘The Great Book of Strata’, henceforth *KTK*) was compiled by the Baghdadi ḥadīṯ transmitter and historian Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845).

1 The book belongs to the Islamic genre of biographical dictionaries of ḥadīṯ transmitters (tarāǧīm). Within that tradition, it belongs to a specific sub-genre made up of lists of biographies of ḥadīṯ transmitters (muḥaddithīn) organized by generation. Such works are usually called ‘books of strata’ or *kutub al-ṭabaqāt*. Ibn Saʿd’s *KTK* stands out among its contemporaries in this genre, and even among historically minded compositions of the late second and early third Islamic centuries because the latter are basically lists of names, short lineages, dates of birth and/or death, whereas the *KTK* has full biographies organized according to a number of criteria.

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1 This article arises from research undertaken for my unpublished doctoral dissertation *A History of Ibn Saʿd’s Biographical Dictionary Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* (Santa Barbara: University of California at Santa Barbara, 2009). For the most up-to-date biography of Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd, see A.N. Atassi, *History*, 34–95.

2 Surviving examples of such compositions in the ṭabaqāt of muḥaddīṭīn genre are: Ḥalfīya b. Ḥāyyaṭ al-ʿUṣfūrī’s (d. 240/850) *Ṭabaqāt*, and Ibn Saʿd’s *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣāgīr* (still in manuscript).

3 For a good description of the *KTK* see J. W. Fück ‘Ibn Saʿd’. The first modern edition of the book was issued in eight volumes (plus a volume of indices) in Leiden by E. Sachau. The first two volumes constitute a biography of the
Being the earliest surviving biographical dictionary, and later a staple of the Sunnī tradition, it is surprising that Ibn Sa’d’s KTK has not received the attention it deserves, or at least as much attention as al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh, for example. 4 This paper will remedy some of this ‘injustice’ by tracing the history of survival and transmission of the KTK. 5 In the process, we will also explore what it means to study the history of a medieval Islamic book and how the notions of transmission and survival fit into that history.

Sources, data, and methodology

The aim here is to study the ‘survival dynamics’ of the KTK through an investigation of its communication circuit in each generation. The elements of the communication circuit (at least the ones that can be accessed from the available data) are the KTK author(s), its transmitters/teachers, its copyists/students, and its readers/users. Our first task then is to establish a pool of candidates for these roles, and assign one or more roles in the circuit to each person in that pool. For this we need to locate the KTK’s extant manuscripts and extract their different chains of transmission, and to locate the later compilations that contain Sa’dī reports and extract the transmission chains of such reports.

There is no single complete manuscript of the KTK, only fragments of it, with some overlaps. 6 Therefore, for these manuscripts, it is important to determine whether they represent a single recension of the work, a number of overlapping recensions, or widely different ones that cannot

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4 The existing literature about the KTK amounts to four works written during a period of about one hundred thirty years: O. Loth, Das Classebuch des Ibn Sa’d; E. Sachau’s introduction to the third volume of the Leiden edition of the KTK, vol. 3, part I, v–xlii; ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Umar Mūsā, Ibn Sa’d; and M. Cooperson, ‘Ibn Sa’d’. To these four works one must add ‘Alī Muḥammad ‘Umar’s insightful introduction to the Ḫāngī edition of the KTK. For a detailed description of these and other works, see A.N. Atassi, History, 18–29.

5 O. Loth’s short study briefly discussed different transmission routes of the KTK while studying the authenticity of the book’s different available manuscripts. In addition to reconstructing the outlines of Ibn Sa’d’s life, Loth discussed the accuracy of the book’s attribution to Ibn Sa’d, the issue of Ibn Ḥayyuwayh’s role in editing and popularizing it, and the issue of Ibn Fahm’s ‘mysterious’ version of the book.

6 For a list of these manuscripts, see A.N. Atassi, History, 211–24.
be, or should not be, reconciled. Fortunately, this work was done for us by the successive editors of the printed editions of the *KTK*. Next, several transmission trees of the *KTK*’s recensions represented by the extant manuscripts are drawn. Studying the transmission chains of Sa’dī reports within later compilations helps add more branches to these trees. Using biographical information of the persons involved in the aforementioned transmission trees (manuscripts and other recensions), we can study the temporal and geographical diffusion of the *KTK*.

Moreover, comparing these reports to corresponding ones in the printed edition of the *KTK* helps to establish the existence and character of other recensions, compared to the one available to us, and to give an approximate date to their disappearance from circulation; thus describing the process of crystallization of the book. Counting the frequency of Sa’dī reports in different compilations helps draw a picture of the *KTK*’s

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7 Several editions appeared in the Arab world that were based on the Leiden edition; namely the editions of Dār Bayrūt, 1957; Dār Šādir 1960; Dār Bayrūt li-l-Ṭībā’īh wa-l-Naṣr, 1978; Dār al-Tahrīr, 1968. In 1983, Ziyād M. Maṣṣūr published the part missing from the Medinan *tabaqūt*. In 1998, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, with M. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAtā as editor, published the more complete, but a worst, version of the *KTK*. In 1994, Muḥammad Ṣāmil al-Salāmī published the fifth stratum of the companions. The fourth stratum of companions appeared in 1995 in a volume edited by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sallūmī. Finally, in 2001 Maktabat al-Ḥānīfī in Cairo published the most complete version of the *KTK* edited by ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿUmar. For a detailed investigation of the overlapping of the extant manuscripts, see the introductions to the different volumes of the Leiden edition. In fact, we show here that the manuscripts and the Sa’dī reports in compilations written after the fifth/eleventh century come from the fusion of two recensions.

8 Due to space restrictions, these trees are not included in this paper, only a list of the major transmitters organized in generations is given. Readers interested in diagrams of these trees are referred to in Atassi, *History*, Appendices I and II.

9 How can we distinguish between a book-transmission chain and a report-transmission chain? I noticed that a good number of reports in later compilations share a portion of their transmission chains with those of the extant manuscripts; i.e. the portion covering the period from Ibn Sa’d’s time to the fifth/eleventh century. Therefore, when encountering a large number of such reports, I assumed that they were drawn from copies of the same recensions as those of the manuscripts. For example, we can confirm this assumption for Ibn Ḥaḍar al-ʿAsqalānī’s works because he tells us the sources of his copies of the *KTK* in his in *al-Muʿgam al-mufahras*, 1: 168–70.

10 Such analysis is detailed in Atassi, *History*, Ch. 4.
literary diffusion according to genre.\textsuperscript{11} This diffusion is an indication of how different generations perceived and classified the KTK. This classification, combined with the transmitters’ historical context, should orient later investigations concerning the reasons behind the KTK’s survival; and hence how and why its authority as a book of tradition was gradually established. Finally, comparing borrowings with extant manuscripts should give us an idea about the accuracy of book transmission within the medieval Islamic culture, which is, as we have mentioned, related to the rise of what we called the textbook.

The sample of compilations
Having combed a hundred or so medieval compilations looking for Sa‘dī material, I noticed the existence of two major time periods according to the number of compilations that contained Sa‘dī reports and the number of such reports within each compilation. Beyond the sixth/twelfth century, compilations containing Sa‘dī reports increased dramatically and so did the number of such reports in each compilation. Therefore, for this period I only included in my study the compilations that supplied the transmission chains of their Sa‘dī reports. I ignored the compilations that borrowed from Ibn Sa‘d’s works without specifying which one or how it was obtained. Before this date, I included all the compilations containing Sa‘dī material that I could find, except when several of them belonged to the same compiler and featured similar numbers of Sa‘dī reports. In the latter case, I selected a representative compilation of the compiler’s work which were then grouped into six genres: tarāġim (biographies) books\textsuperscript{12}, sīra and maḏāzī books\textsuperscript{13}, history (or historiography) books\textsuperscript{14}, ḥadīṯ

\textsuperscript{11} The counting was done electronically with the help of digitized versions of the books consulted and the help of al-Maktaba al-Šāmila; see Atassi, History, 208–11.

\textsuperscript{12} By tarāġim books I understand books that contain a succession of indivisible parts (targama, or biography) each containing information relating to one person. In this category I include books from the ṭabaqāt genre such as Ḥalfī’s. Ḥayyāt’s Tabaqāt, ansāb books such as Balāḏuri’s Ansāb al-asrāf, and biographical compilations such as al-Ḥaṭīb’s Tāriḥ Baġdādī.

\textsuperscript{13} By sīra and maḏāzī books I understand biographies of Muḥammad (sīra), monographs about his battles (maḏāzī), and books glorifying his personality traits and his acts (ṣamā’il and fadā’il books).

\textsuperscript{14} By history books I understand books of reports organized in any format other than the tāriḥ format. Such books include Ḥayyāt’s Tāriḥ, Ibn Ḥabīb’s al-Manammaq and his al-Muḥabbār, al-Wāqidi’s Futūḥ al-Šām, al-Ya’qūbī’s Tāriḥ and his Aḥbār al-zamān, Ṭabarī’s al-Tāriḥ al-kabīr, and al-Mas’ūdī’s Murūj al-ḡahab. Other books containing the word tāriḥ in their titles, such as al-Ḥaṭīb’s
books\textsuperscript{15}, fāhāris (maʿāqīm al-ṣuyūḥ or maṣyāḥāt) books\textsuperscript{16}, and books belonging to the Shīʿa tradition. Table 1 features a list of the compilations in my sample organized chronologically according to their compilers’ death dates.

According to Table 1 (below), tarāğīm books are disproportionately represented in my sample than any other genre, followed by ḥadīṣ compilations, and then historiographies. Books of the Shīʿa tradition, sīra and maṣyāḥāt lists are almost equally thinly represented in the sample. This imbalance may seem a great obstacle facing any serious conclusion as to the frequency of Saʿdī reports as a function of genre. However, the representation of different genres in my sample reflects their real representation in the entire Islamic tradition. Books of tarāğīm, ḥadīṣ and historiography are the most common. Sīra books are few and well known given the obvious limitation on their multiplication (i.e. the limited number of reports about Muḥammad’s life and person).

Table 1. Compilations containing Saʿdī reports, the number of these reports in each compilation, its genre, and its compiler; the compilers’ death dates, and main place of residence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Death (AH)</th>
<th>Reports</th>
<th>Compilation title</th>
<th>Compiler</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>262</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tārīḥ al-Madīna</td>
<td>Ibn Sabba</td>
<td>history</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>272</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sunan</td>
<td>Abū Dāwūd</td>
<td>ḥadīṣ</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>279</td>
<td>&gt;250</td>
<td>Ansāb al-ʾAṣrāf*</td>
<td>Al-Balāḏurī</td>
<td>tarāğīm</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>282</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>al-Musnad</td>
<td>Ibn Abī Usāma</td>
<td>ḥadīṣ</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>306</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Abhār al-Qudāʿ*</td>
<td>Wāki\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>tarāğīm</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>310</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>Tārīḥ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*</td>
<td>Al-Ṭabarī</td>
<td>history</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>317</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Muʿṣam al-ṣahāba*</td>
<td>al-Baḡwī</td>
<td>tarāğīm</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>al-Ǧarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl</td>
<td>Ibn Abī Hātim</td>
<td>tarāğīm</td>
<td>Rayy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4\textsuperscript{th} century</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kifāya al-ʿṭar*</td>
<td>Abū al-Qāsim al-Qumī</td>
<td>Shīʿa tradition</td>
<td>Rayy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tārīḥ Baḥdād and Ibn ʿAsākir’s Tārīḥ Dimāsq, do not fall in this category because the bulk of them are organized according to the tarāğīm format.

\textsuperscript{15} By ḥadīṣ books I understand compilations of prophetic sayings and deeds organized in any way: thematically like Bahṣāri’s Ṣaḥīḥ or the thematic monographs of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā; the ḥadīṣ transmitted by one ṭawwī like the masānīḏ; or any book listing ḥadīṣ without any other kind of reports. In this category I include ʿadīṣ criticism (ṣarḥ wa-taʿdīl) books such as Ibn Ḥanbal’s ‘Īlā, Ibn ʿAṣīr’s Tārīḥ Aṣmāʾ al-ṭiqāt, Ibn Mākūlah’s al-Ikmd, and Ibn Ḥibbān’s al-Ṭiqāt and his al-Ḍuʿaʿfāʾ, and al-Ḍabāb’s al-Mughfīl al-ṣuʿaʿfāʾ.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibn al-Nadīm’s Fīhrīṣṭ was very useful. However, the maṣyāḥa books, such as Fahrās ʿAlī Ḥayr al-Īṣbīlī and Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī’s al-Muʿṣam al-muḥāfras, produced the most spectaclar information.
Ahmad Nazir Atassi

61

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>&gt;20</th>
<th>al-Mu'gambar al-kabir*</th>
<th>Tabarani</th>
<th>tariqim</th>
<th>Isfahan</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Maqatil al-thalibiyin*</td>
<td>Abū al-Faraq al-Isfahāni</td>
<td>Shī‘a</td>
<td>Alepo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>374</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>al-Maḏżūn fl ‘ilm al-hadīth</td>
<td>Abū al-Fath al-Azdi</td>
<td>ḥadīth</td>
<td>Mosul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>385</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tārīḥ asmā‘ al-tiğār</td>
<td>Ibn Sāhin</td>
<td>tariqim</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>385</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sunan</td>
<td>al-Dāraquṭnī</td>
<td>ḥadīth</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>405</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>al-Mustadrak*</td>
<td>al-Ḥākim al-Nisābi</td>
<td>ḥadīth</td>
<td>Niṣābūr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>409</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kitāb al-mutawārin</td>
<td>Ḥ. Abd al-Ganī al-Azdi</td>
<td>history</td>
<td>Cairo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>430</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hilyat al-awliyā‘*</td>
<td>Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahāni</td>
<td>tariqim</td>
<td>Isfahan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>450</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Riḍāl al-Naḡāsī</td>
<td>al-Naḡāsī</td>
<td>Shī‘a</td>
<td>tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>458</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dalī‘il al-nubuweya*</td>
<td>al-Bayhaqī</td>
<td>sīra</td>
<td>Niṣābūr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>463</td>
<td>&gt;250</td>
<td>Tārīḥ Baḏdād</td>
<td>al-Ḥaḍīb al-Baghdādī</td>
<td>tariqim</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>&gt;250</td>
<td>al-Iṣṭī‘ab fi ma‘rifat al-ashāb</td>
<td>Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr</td>
<td>tariqim</td>
<td>Andalusia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>517</td>
<td>&gt;250</td>
<td>Tārīḥ Dimaṣq</td>
<td>Ibn ‘Asākir</td>
<td>tariqim</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>517</td>
<td>&gt;250</td>
<td>Fihrasat Ibn Ḥayr</td>
<td>Ibn al-Ḥayr al-Ṭabīḥī</td>
<td>ma‘ṣīḥ</td>
<td>Andalusia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&gt;250</td>
<td>‘Uyūn al-ṭar</td>
<td>Ibn Sayyid al-Nās</td>
<td>Sīra</td>
<td>Andalusia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>852</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī</td>
<td>ma‘ṣīḥ</td>
<td>Cairo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Compilations that use recensions different from those in the printed edition of the KTK.

Transmitters of the KTK

According to the chains of transmission of the KTK’s extant manuscripts, the material contained in these manuscripts is the fusion of two recensions, the first transmitted by Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥāirīt b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī Usāma al-Tamīmī (186/802–282/895), and the

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17 For details about the transmitters of the KTK inferred from Sa‘dī reports that were included in later compilations see A.N. Atassi, History, 211–250 and references therein; see also Appendix II for transmitters of the extant manuscripts only.

18 He resided in Baghdad and was probably a copyist and a tutor for hire. He has a musnad compilation (ḥadīths organized according to selected transmitters, usually the first after Muhammad) attributed to his name; but generally he was
second transmitted by Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān Ibn Fahm (211/826–289/901) who is the more problematic of the two. Both transmitters were second-tier muḥaddīṣ and possibly teachers by vocation. In the second generation, Abū al-Ḥasan Ahmad b. Maʿrūf al-Ḥaššāb (d. 321 or 322/933 or 934) transmitted on the authority of both Ibn Abī Usāma and Ibn Fahm. He was an obscure muḥaddīṣ from Baghdad. It is difficult to ascertain his profession from the designation al-Ḥaššāb (literally, ‘the carpenter’ or ‘wood handler/cutter’). However, it would not be far-fetched for the muḥaddīṣ of the pre-madrasa era to teach hadīṭ and related material as an avocation.20 Also in the second generation is Abū Ayyūb Iṣḥāq b. Sulaymān al-Ḡallāb (d. 334/945), another minor muḥaddīṣ from Baghdad, whose profession could have been a carrier given his designation al-Ḡallāb. He transmitted on the authority of Ibn Abī Usāma only.21 Al-Ḡallāb’s role as a transmitter of the KTK is inferred from transmission chains of Saʿdī reports in later compilations; especially Ibn ʿAsākir’s Tārīḥ madīnat Dimashq.

The third generation is even more problematic than the first two for it contains one person only; namely Abū ʿUmar Muḥammad b. Ḥaṣṣuwayh al-Ḥazzāz (295/907–382/992). Both manuscripts and Saʿdī reports give us this one transmitter. He lived in Baghdad and, according

not a major figure of the Baghdadi hadīṭ scene. It is noteworthy that the sīra part of the extant manuscripts is transmitted by Ibn Abī Usāma alone, the eldest of the two transmitters of the KTK. This lends credence to the claim that the sīra part of the Leiden edition of the KTK used to be circulated as a separate book.

19 An aḥbārī (transmitter of historical reports), a minor hadīṭ transmitter, and a learned person, Ibn Fahm was nineteen years of age when Ibn Saʿd died. This puts him at around age fifteen when he started studying under Ibn Saʿd, a typical age for third/ninth century youngsters to start their advanced studies. Does that make the fate of the KTK dependent on one teenager? Not necessarily, because many students of different ages may have attended the dictation of the book (or parts of it), but only two persons decided to teach it and Ibn Fahm is one of them.

20 We have a confirmation that Ibn Maʿrūf had taught Ibn Saʿd’s Sīra: the KTK’s transmission chain in Ibn Suyyid al-Nāṣ’s ‘Uṣūn al-aqār, 2: 440–1, states that Ibn Saʿd’s Sīra was ‘recited back to’ Ibn Maʿrūf in the month of ʿaḥān of the year 318/930.

21 In both al-Ḥaṣāb’s Tārīḥ Bağdād and Ibn ʿAsākir’s Tārīḥ Dimaṣq, al-Ḡallāb transmits Saʿdī reports exclusively from Ibn Abī Usāma. He also frequently transmits reports from Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarīb (d. 285/898), a famous compiler from Baghdad. Therefore, we can safely claim that al-Ḡallāb was a ‘teacher’ and not a compiler himself, which is something we will note about most transmitters of the KTK.
to his designation (ḥazzāz), he might have been a maker of silk yarn. We have no complete manuscript of the *KTK* with only Ibn Ābi Ḫusāma or Ibn Fahm in the chain of transmission. However, all available manuscripts include Ibn Ḥayyūwayḥ in their transmission-chains as the only transmitter at the third level after the author.\(^{22}\) It is possible that Ibn Maʿrūf had collected the entire *KTK* before Ibn Ḥayyūwayḥ; but it is the latter who seems to have propagated it. Al-Ṭāḥīb al-Bağdāḏī mentions that Ibn Ḥayyūwayḥ ‘heard plenty and wrote [i.e. copied] all his life and transmitted large compilations such as the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Saʿd, the *Maḡāzī* of al-Wāqīdī, the compilations of Abī Bakr b. al-Anbārī, the *Maḡāzī* of Saʿīd al-Umawī, the *History* of Ibn Ābi Ḫayṭāma, and many others’.\(^{23}\) One of the manuscripts’ transmission-chains states that Ibn Ḥayyūwayḥ copied the corresponding section of the *KTK* while the text was being recited back to Ibn Maʿrūf in the month of Šaʿbān of the year 318/930. This means that Ibn Ḥayyūwayḥ was then twenty years old and that Ibn Maʿrūf was at the end of his life. We notice here the same pattern we observed in the transmission of the *KTK* from Ibn Saʿd to Ibn Fahm; i.e. a young student tries to get the teacher’s book as early as possible in his career and as late as possible in the teacher’s life. This was a common practice among muḥaddīṣīs because it lowered the number of transmitters between the last in a chain and the Prophet.\(^{24}\) We must also remark that collecting and transmitting such large works possibly needed full time dedication. It is difficult however, given the dearth of information about these transmitters, to ascertain their professions, and whether or not they practiced teaching.

In the fourth generation we encounter three transmitters of the *KTK*, all of whom seem to have been teachers by vocation. The two transmitters supplied by the manuscripts are Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Ǧawharī (363/973–454/1062), and Abū Ḫishāb al-Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar al-Barmakī (361/971–445/1053). The one transmitter supplied by Saʿdī reports is Abū al-Qāsim ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ahmad al-Azharī.

\(^{22}\) If it were not for earlier books that mentioned Ibn Saʿd and his *KTK* with numerous borrowings that matched the *KTK* verbatim, I would have suggested considering Ibn Ḥayyūwayḥ as the ‘real’ compiler of the *KTK*. Nonetheless, it is possible that he had an impact on the *KTK* in terms of selection of recensions, organization of reports, and addition of some information. For a discussion of Ibn Ḥayyūwayḥ’s partition of the *KTK* in twenty four parts (*aḡzā‘*), as well as other known partitions, see A.N. Atassi, *History*, 239–41.


(355/965–435/1043). According to al-Ḥaṭīb’s Tārīḥ Baġdād, al-Ḡawharī resided in Darb al-Zaʿfarānī, where many muḥaddīṣ used to live. Al-Ḍahabī’s Siyār aʿlām al-nubalāʾ adds that ‘he was steeped in transmission, he transmitted abundantly, and held many dictation sessions’. 25 Al-Barmakī resided in Baghdad and was a Ḥanbalī muftī, with a teaching circle (ḥalqa) at the al-Manṣūr mosque. 26 Al-Ḥaṭīb also alludes to the fact that al-Azharī taught large compilations, such as the KTK, when he says: ‘we heard from him large compilations and long books’. 27

In the fifth generation, we know of five transmitters of the KTK; three of them through the manuscripts and two through Saʿdī reports. All of these transmitters were from Baghdad, and most of them seem to have been teachers. For example, Abū Bakr al-Qāḍī Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Bāqī (442/1050–535/1140) was a scholar and a teacher. 28 Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan (434/1042–510/1116) had two teaching circles in Baghdad, which he took over after his father, one of them being at the famous al-Manṣūr’s mosque. 29 To this generation belongs al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī (d. 463/1071), the compiler of the famous Tārīḥ Baġdād. 30 In the sixth generation, we know of five transmitters, all from Baghdad. The manuscripts give us only one, but the most renowned. He is Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. Duhbul b. Kāra (d. 599/1202). 31 To this generation belongs Ibn ʿAsākir (499/1105–571/1176), the compiler of the famous Tārīḥ madīnat Dimashq. 32 The sixth generation is practically the last of the known Baghdādī generations of KTK transmitters. 33

25 Al-Ḍahabī, Siyār aʿlām al-nubalāʾ, 18: 68.
26 Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī, Tārīḥ Baġdād, 6: 139, no. 3180. The mosque of al-Manṣūr, which should be located close to al-Manṣūr’s palace (Qaṣr al-Ḥulūd), was the main mosque on the western side (i.e. the old city) of the Tigris. Important teachers of all disciplines had teaching circles in that mosque.
27 Ibid, 10: 385, no. 5559.
28 Al-Ḍahabī, Siyār, 20: 23. He mentions in page 28 that Abū Bakr al-Qāḍī taught Ibn Saʿdī’s Ṭabaqāt; see also ibid., 19: 386, no. 228.
29 Ibn al-ʿImād, Saʿfarāt al-dahab, 4: 27.
30 See A.N. Atassi, History, 229, for a discussion of whether al-Ḥaṭīb taught the KTK or not, and his probable role in introducing it to Damascus.
31 For Ibn Kāra’s mention in the available manuscripts see ibid, 222, 244–245, 247. We also know from Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī’s transmission chain of the KTK that Ibn Kāra taught the book to a certain Ibn al-Ḥaḡgāḡ.
32 See ibid, 232–3 for a discussion of Ibn ʿAsākir’s popularization of the KTK in Syria.
33 In fact, Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī, in al-Muʿījam, 1: 168–70. supplies us with
Beyond the sixth/twelfth century the book was taught mostly in Syria and Egypt.

The seventh generation would see the book appearing in Egypt-Syria through three persons who acquired it in Baghdad and then later passed it on in their cities of residence. Abū l-Farağ al-Ḫarrānī (587/1191–672/1273) brought it to Cairo. Ibn ʿAbd al-Dāʾim (575/1179–668/1269) brought it to Damascus. But, most important among them is Abū l-Ḫaǧǧāǧ b. Ḥalîl (555/1160–648/1250), who brought it to Aleppo. Most transmitters in the eighth generation received the KTK in Aleppo from Abū l-Ḫaǧǧāǧ. The most notable teacher of the KTK in the eighth generation is Šaraf al-Dīn al-Dimyāṭī (613/1216–705/1305), who received it from Abū l-Ḫaǧǧāǧ. The transmitters of the eighth generation and beyond (up to the ninth/late sixteenth century) acquired the KTK and passed it on either in Aleppo, Damascus, or Cairo.

**Aspects of transmission**

Whether in Baghdad, Aleppo, Damascus, or Cairo, transmitters of the KTK who spent time actually teaching it were second-tier muḥaddīṭs and/or scholars. None of them had composed any compilation of their own. They were muḥaddīṭs who specialized in transmitting large works, such as al-Ḥaṣṣāb, Ibn Ḥayyūwayh, Abū Bakr al-Qāḍī, al-Ǧawharī, Ibn Kārī, Abū l-Ḫaǧǧāǧ, and al-Dimyāṭī. It is also noteworthy that many Baghdadi transmitters of the KTK, such as al-Barmāḵī, Abū Bakr al-Qāḍī, and Abū Naṣr, were Ḥanbalīs. Moreover, both al-Barmāḵī and Abū a name, Ibn al-Ḥayyīr (563/1167–648/1250), who could be viewed as a seventh generation of Baghdadi transmitters; for a biography see al-Ḏahābī, Siyar, 23: 235, no. 155.

This information is contained in the transmission chain supplied by Ibn Sayyid al-Nāṣ (d. 734/1333), who was a resident of Cairo, in his ʿUyūn al-ṭāṭar, 2: 440–1. It is possible that this al-Ḫarrānī was not a ‘true’ teacher of the KTK, for Ibn Sayyid al-Nāṣ mentions that the former supplied him with a part of the book through an igāza. For a biography of al-Ḫarrānī see Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Makki, Dhayl al-Ṭayyid, 2: 148, no. 1324.

For a biography see ibid., 1: 326, no. 649.

Al-Ḏahābī, Siyar, 23: 151, no. 104.

Al-Ḏahābī mentions that al-Dimyāṭī has related to him Ibn Saʿd’s Kitāb al-Ṭabaqaṭ al-Kubrā on the authority of Ibn Ḥalîl (Abū l-Ḫaǧǧāǧ); see al-Ḏahābī, Taḏkiraṭ al-huffāẓ, 2: 11, no. 431.

Our information about these later generations comes from two very detailed transmission chains, one is supplied by Ibn Sayyid al-Nāṣ, ʿUyūn al-ṭāṭar, 2: 440–1, and the other is supplied by Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), al-Muġam al-Mufahras, 1: 168–70.
Naṣr taught at al-Manṣūr’s mosque. Although al-Madrasa al-Nizāmiyya was built in 459/1066, none of the aforementioned teachers taught there because the vizier Nizām al-Mulk, the founder of the school, prohibited non-Šāfi’ites from teaching at al-Nizāmiyya.

In Syria and Egypt, we know that transmitters of the KTK were also full-time teachers, while famous compilers remained mostly users of the KTK. While many Baghdadi transmitters of Ibn Sa’d’s work taught in the neighborhood of al-Karḥ (south of Baghdad where the aforementioned Darb al-Za’farān was located) or in al-Manṣūr’s mosque in the walled city, their Syrian and Egyptian counterparts taught in institutions sponsored by the ruling elite, such as the network of madrasas patronized by the Mamlūk rulers and their amīrs. Moreover, while the Baghdadi transmitters were possibly religious scholars by avocation, their Syrian and Egyptian counterparts were professional scholars, judges, and members of the religious elite.

Islamic ‘tradition’ has a well-known fragmentary nature. The prevalent way of transmitting this tradition continued to be the individual report, which consisted of a transmission chain attached to the report’s text. Instead of continuous narratives, what emerged are compilations of reports which preserved the fragmentary nature of the original reports, and made possible their own re-fragmentation. Medieval Muslim compilers tended to fragment the works of their predecessors into individual reports (the same report could even be fragmented into many smaller ones to suit the needs of the user), and then include these fragments into their own works. Compiling and fragmenting knowledge were two distinct and opposing processes always active in the production and transmission of medieval Islamic knowledge. It is puzzling, but it seems that students of medieval knowledge had an aversion toward teaching books that they collected in their travels. Instead, they fragmented what they learned and wrote their own compilations which they later taught. In the current study, I suggest that people who chose to teach others’ compilations tended not to write any of their own.

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39 It is probable that this mosque and the neighboring district of Bāb Ḥarb, at whose cemetery some of these transmitters were buried, had strong ḥanbalī affiliations. It is possible that the ḥanbalites’ strong attachment to tradition may explain their interest in the KTK, given that it was one of the earliest works to deal with early Islamic history. This intellectual, and maybe social, aspect of the KTK’s history still needs further investigation.

40 Such information is included in the biographies of the different transmitters referenced in this paper when each of them is mentioned for the first time. See, for example, footnotes 40–4.
Attempting to explain this observation, I suggest that in medieval Muslim societies, intellectual prestige was built through the writing of compilations and legal texts, dictating them rather than teaching older compilations. Legal texts required competency, but compilations only required fragmenting older works and reassembling them. Seekers of intellectual capital (converted later into social and financial capitals) did just that. Otherwise, in the presence of Ibn Saʿd’s KTK, why would al-Baġawī (d. 317/929) produce his Muʿgam al-ṣaḥāba, or al-Ṭabarānī his al-Muʿgam al-kabīr, or Ibn Shāhīn’s Tārīḫ asmāʾ al-ṭiqāt, or Abū Nuʿaym’s Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba, or Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr’s al-Istīʿāb fi maʿrifat al-ṭiqāt? These authors could not possibly have known more about any of Muḥammad’s companions than did Ibn Saʿd.

In this atmosphere of enhancing one’s reputation as a scholar by absorbing and building upon the works of predecessors, the survival of older books becomes quite difficult: for that to happen, a group of dedicated transmitters, whose task is to popularize a selected group of works, has to exist. What would then make transmitting rather than compiling attractive to these teachers? This is a hard question to answer, but the transmission of entire books transformed these books into authoritative sources of tradition by virtue of a process of selection, at the heart of which were those dedicated teachers. In fact, such dedicated transmitters defined and preserved the ‘canonical’ books of tradition. This exact process transformed the KTK into an authoritative source of the Islamic tradition.

Methods of transmission of the KTK
It is noteworthy that by and from the ninth/late fourteenth century, the transmission of the KTK happened mostly by iǧāza. The clearest example is Ibn Ḥaḡar, who obtained five different permissions to use the KTK. It was also common for calculating parents to take their young boys (at age three or four) to hear a famous and old teacher for a while and then obtain a permission from this teacher for their son. This was the case, for example, of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (671/1272–763/1361) who, while a child, obtained a permission from Abū l-Faraḡ al-Ḥarrānī (587/1191–672/1273).41

The use of iǧāza in the transmission of the KTK was known since the third/tenth century, and, according to Ibn Ḥaḡar, even Ibn Ḥayyuwayḥ in the fourth/tenth century obtained parts of the KTK by an iǧāza from Ibn Maʿrūf al-Ḥaššāb. Tracking the use of iǧāza in the transmission-

41 Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Makkī, Ḏayl al-Taqyīd, 2: 148, no. 1324.
chains of Ibn Sayyid al-Nas and Ibn Ḥaǧar, we notice a steady increase in this usage as time progressed. By Ibn Ḥaǧar’s time (the ninth/fifteenth century), it was possible to obtain an ʿIraqa by mail and without even seeing the person granting it. This is an indication that the KTK had acquired such stability in its form that one could acquire a copy of it and then authenticate that copy through one or multiple ʿIraqas from different teachers. It was not required for the grantor of the ʿIraqa to have heard the entire book from a teacher either, only a status of scholarship and a reputation of trustworthiness sufficed for the chain of authentication to be valid and to carry the weight of saḥāba (hearing), the ultimate source of authenticity.

By the ninth century, the KTK had become fixed. No one could alter its content or form without attracting the attention of scholars and copyists both in Syria and in Egypt, who were capable of detecting such a change. The KTK had become a staple of the Islamic tradition, and possibly even textbook. Not many books attained a level at which survival was no longer an issue and did not depend on the efforts of a few dedicated transmitters. Beyond the seventh/fourteenth century, the survival of the KTK was assured by the increase in the number of students copying it, as well as by the multiplication of copies later authenticated by permissions from reputed scholars.

**Authorship of the KTK**

The bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995 or 388/998) in his Fihrist claims that Ibn Saʿd has only one book, which coincides with the sūra part of the printed edition of the KTK. However, Ibn al-Nadīm also added that Ibn Saʿd had ‘compiled his books’, thus insinuating that Ibn Saʿd might have had more than one book. Furthermore, Ibn al-Nadīm claims that Ibn Saʿd was ‘knowledgeable about the saḥāba and the

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42 Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī, al-Muʿjam al-mufahras, 1: 169, mentions that ʿAbū al-ʿAbbās … informed us in his letter from Damascus that Abū ʿAbd Allāh … informed us in his letter from Cairo…’

43 Lists of the different methods of acquiring the KTK by later generations of transmitters (beyond the ninth/fifteenth century) are given in A.N. Atassi, History, 137–8, 250.


45 Idem. Ibn al-Nadīm also claims that these alleged works were a mere reworking of al-Wāqidī’s compilations (Ibn Saʿd’s main teacher and source of reports).
Since the bulk of the KTK is composed of biographical information about the two classes of persons identified by Ibn al-Nadīm as Ibn Saʿd’s area of expertise, it is then possible that the latter wrote something about that topic in order to establish his authority. Ibn al-Nadīm also attributes a book of ṭabaqāt to Ibn Saʿd’s teacher and main source, al-Wāqīḍī (d. 207/823). Given that he is the only bibliographer who has ever made such a claim, and since he considered that Ibn Saʿd’s works were mere plagiarism of al-Wāqīḍī’s work, it is possible that he attributed the ṭabaqāt work (one of possible two) to the teacher rather than to the student. Finally, when listing the books of which he was aware and whose authors were not known to him, Ibn al-Nadīm names a certain Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt and attributes it to a certain Muḥammad b. Saʿd. It seems to me that Ibn al-Nadīm either did not double check his sources or intentionally downplayed Ibn Saʿd’s importance.

If Ibn al-Nadīm cannot always be trusted in ascribing books to their rightful authors, it is necessary to use other sources to confirm that our Ibn Saʿd had written a work of ṭabaqāt that can be confidently identified with the KTK. This was indeed possible since the third/ninth century genealogist al-Balādhūrī (d. 792) in his Ansāb al-Ashrāf mentions in passing that ‘Muḥammad b. Saʿd, the scribe of al-Wāqīḍī,’ has to his name a book of ṭabaqāt of muḥaddithīn and ḥulūmāh, from which he has extensively borrowed. The borrowed material exists in the KTK, which proves that the third/ninth century compiler Muḥammad b. Saʿd is indeed the author of the KTK. In fact, we have in our hand a recension of the KTK which is different from the recension used in al-Balādhūrī’s book.

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46 Idem.
47 Ibid., ‘Aḥbār al-Wāqīḍī.’
49 In comparing Ibn al-Nadīm’s biography of al-Wāqīḍī and the latter’s two biographies in the KTK, we are led to conclude that Ibn al-Nadīm’s biography of al-Wāqīḍī is a type of summary of the two biographies given in the KTK. Ibn al-Nadīm also mentions that his source was none other than Ibn Saʿd, al-Wāqīḍī’s scribe; see ibid., al-Fann al-awwal min al-maqāla al-tāliqa: Aḥbār al-Wāqīḍī.
51 In A.N. Atassi, History, 106–108 and 164–5, I suggest that Ibn Saʿd started writing the KTK sometime after 207/823, finished the bulk of it
The Egyptian author Ibn Ḥallikān (d. 681/1282), in his Wafayāt al-aʿyān, mentions that Ibn Saʿd’s Ṭabaqāt was a large (kabīr) book of fifteen volumes. Moreover, we learn there that there existed another work of ṭabaqāt that is a shorter (suʿra) version of the first. Here kabīr and suʿra are used simply as adjectives to describe the works and not as parts of the works’ titles. It is Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (d. 734/1333) in his Ḫūna al-qāṭar who first calls Ibn Saʿd’s book Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr. Al-Ḍahabī (d. 748/1348), in his Siyār al-ṭāʾīm al-nubalāʾ, gives us a summary of the different biographies previously written about Ibn Saʿd, interspersed with praise fit for the now famous author of Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr and [Kitāb] al-Ṭabaqāt al-sagīr. Ibn Saʿd’s works are no longer ‘large’ and ‘small’ but are named al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr and al-Ṭabaqāt al-sagīr. The earlier adjectives of these titleless works have become grandiose titles. Al-Ḍahabī, in his Taḥkīrat al-ḥuffāẓ, states that ‘Ibn Saʿd is the compiler of al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr and al-Saghīr and the compiler of al-Tārīḫ ... our teacher Šaraf al-Dīn al-Dimyāṭī has dictated to us his [Ibn Saʿd’s] al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā’. Is this a play on adjectives, or is al-kubrā really different from the KTK? We have previously concluded, when discussing Ibn al-Nadīm’s claims, that Ibn Saʿd’s Tārīḫ and Sīra (the first two volumes of the Leiden edition of the KTK) are most likely one and the same book. But it is curious that al-Ḍahabī mentions the Tārīḫ as if it were separate from the Ṭabaqāt. Cooperson thinks that the Sīra book ‘may have been intended to stand as a separate text’. We also know that the manuscripts upon which the

sometime around 213/828 (and started teaching it, which accounts of Ibn Abī Usāma’s recension); and kept editing and adding new material to it until 228/842, or until shortly before he died (I dated the writing of Ibn Fahm’s recension to around the interval 226/840–230/845).


55 al-Ḍahabī, Taḥkīrat al-ḥuffāẓ, 2: 431. Šaraf al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Muʾmin b. Ḥalaf al-Dimyāṭī is a famous Egyptian teacher who resided in Cairo.

56 M. Cooperson, ‘Ibn Saʿd,’ 201. This claim finds additional support in the fact that the manuscript of Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Sagīr (Süleymaniye Library, Özel 126) does not include the Sīra or any abridgement of it; which could mean that the original Ṭabaqāt project that materialized in the KTK did not include a Sīra part.
Leiden team depended for their edition were either transmitted or approved by al-Dimyāṭī,\(^\text{57}\) al-Dahabī’s teacher who taught him al-
Tabaqāt al-kubrā. It is then possible that when the Sīra was added to 
Kitāb al-tabaqāt al-kabīr, the two together became known as Kitāb al-
Tabaqāt al-kubrā. This lumping together of the Sīra and the Tabaqāt in 
one book may have been the work of al-Dimyāṭī. It is also possible that 
the two books, despite being separate entities, were transmitted together 
by the same teachers (al-Dimyāṭī, for example), and were thereafter 
treated as one book.

In al-Ḫāṭīb al-Bağdādī’s Tārīḫ Bağdād, we encounter a report that 
matches verbatim the biography of Ibn Sa’d that appears in the printed 
edition of the KTK at the end of the section dedicated to Baghdadi 
transmitters.\(^\text{58}\) However, the isnād says explicitly that Ibn Fahm, a major 
transmitter of the KTK manuscripts, was the writer of the biography. It 
seems that Ibn Fahm has added it after the death of his teacher. It seems 
normal that the student pays homage to his teacher by informing the 
reader about him. However, there is more. The best example of a 
biography that Ibn Sa’d could not have written is that of Ahmad b. 
Hanbal (d. 241/855).\(^\text{59}\) First of all, Ibn Hanbal died ten years after Ibn 
Sa’d’s death. Second, the biography mentions that ‘Ibn Ḥanbal was 
summoned to appear before al-Mutawakkil and was later offered money 
which he refused to take’.\(^\text{60}\) The ‘Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil took 
ofﬁce in 232/847, two years after Ibn Sa’d’s death. Therefore, Ibn Sa’d 
could not have known this information. Moreover, the biography 
contains a description of Ibn Ḥanbal’s funeral. There are also many 
biographical entries dedicated to persons who died after 230/845. Their 
author is possibly Ibn Fahm, but other transmitters of the book should 
not be dropped from consideration.\(^\text{61}\)

Now, we must deal with the question of who put together the 
recension represented in the KTK’s printed edition from different 
available recensions. Although all the transmission trees converge to a 
focal point at Ibn Ḥayyuwayh (295/907–382/992), I think that Ibn

\(^{57}\) See A.N. Atassi, History, 211–4 for an extensive discussion of the eighth 
generation of transmitters.

\(^{58}\) Al-Ḫāṭīb al-Bağdādī, Tārīḫ Bağdād, 5: 370, no. 876; Ibn Sa’d, KTK, 7: 258.

\(^{59}\) Ibn Sa’d, KTK, 7: 253.

\(^{60}\) Idem.

\(^{61}\) For an extensive discussion of biographies contained in the printed edition 
of the KTK, but that were possibly added after Ibn Sa’d’s death, see A.N. Atassi, 
History, 113–29.
Maʿrūf al-Ḥaṣṣāb started the process. All reports coming from Ibn Fahm were related by Ibn Maʿrūf only, without any exception. Moreover, we have not detected any Saʿdī report transmitted by Ibn Fahm with a chain different from that of the extant manuscripts. Therefore, it seems that Ibn Fahm bequeathed his recension of the KTK only to an otherwise ordinary student, namely Ibn Maʿrūf. Furthermore, Ibn Maʿrūf also transmitted reports from Ibn Abī Usāma, who also passed on a large number of Saʿdī reports, if not the entire KTK, to many students such as Wakīʿ and al-Ṭabarī. These reports came, as we will show in the next section, from Ibn Abī Usāma’s own recension of the KTK. Why then would Ibn Maʿrūf be the only person interested in collecting two different recensions and passing them on to future generations? If Ibn Maʿrūf was interested in teaching the KTK, why did he then bequeath his collection or recensions only to Ibn Ḥayyuywayh, who later took charge of its distribution on a large scale? Ibn Ḥayyuywayh also collected parts, or all, of Ibn Abī Usāma’s recension from al-Ǧallāb. What impact did Ibn Ḥayyuywayh, or for that matter Ibn Maʿrūf, have on the KTK, in addition to transmitting it?

The discovery of Ibn Haḡar’s detailed transmission chain of the KTK puts everything back into question. It shows that Ibn Maʿrūf transmitted the two recensions of the KTK (those of Ibn Fahm and Ibn Abī Usāma) with sizable lacunae, even at the biography level. It also shows that Ibn Ḥayyuywayh used most of Ibn Maʿrūf’s material except for certain sections that he obtained from al-Ǧallāb. In fact, we can say the same thing about Ibn Maʿrūf. That is, he had the complete recensions of Ibn Fahm and Ibn Abī Usāma but preferred to combine them, just as Ibn Ḥayyuywayh did. It seems that there is enough room for arguing that the KTK was actually put together by Ibn Maʿrūf and later improved upon by Ibn Ḥayyuywayh. This conclusion is confirmed by the analysis of individual Saʿdī reports in compilations written before the fifth/eleventh century, as the next section will show. Ibn Abī Usāma’s recension differs in many instances from the one available to us, because Ibn Fahm’s recension was the one relied upon in our version of the KTK and not that

62 In a report in al-Naḡāṣī’s Riḡāl we encounter the first mention of the chain Ibn Abī Usāma and from Ibn Fahm to Ibn Maʿrūf. This strengthens my claim that Ibn Maʿrūf was the first to harmonize the recensions of Ibn Abī Usāma and Ibn Fahm; a work that was completed by Ibn Ḥayyuywayh.

63 For a detailed analysis of Ibn Ḥaḡar’s transmission chain see A.N. Atassi, History, 238–50.
of Ibn Abī Usāma. Therefore, we can say that the work of Ibn Maʿrūf and Ibn Hayyuwayh was a process of selection and fusion of the two recensions of the KTK available to them. Finally, we have showed earlier that Ibn Fahn, and possibly Ibn Abī Usāma, had added to the KTK. It is possible then to say that all members of these three generations of transmitters had an impact on the form and content of the KTK.

Towards the definitive text of the KTK

Since our first encounter with Saʿdī reports, we notice that expecting a verbatim match between the reports found in a consulted compilation and the corresponding report in the printed KTK is unrealistic. The differences range from minor differences in word selection to major rewording of the report (while at the same time preserving certain core sentences). Other minor changes involve the order of a number of reports in a sequence, or changing the last transmitter (i.e. the source of the compiler). Major changes involve truncation of a long report, fragmentation of several reports and regrouping of selected fragments, grouping of several reports, and finally an extensive rewording of one or more reports. These changes can be consciously induced by the compilers or due to differences between the recensions used in the compilations consulted.

We can distinguish three phases in the history of the KTK’s recensions. The first phase stretches from the book’s compilation by Ibn Saʿd early in the third/ninth century until the writing of Tārīḥ Bağdādī by al-Ḥaḍīb al-Bağdādī in the first half of the fifth century. This is a period of relative obscurity and possible openness of the book. Any additions and/or modifications to the KTK must date to this phase. During this phase, we can talk about the possible existence of six recensions of the

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65 This agrees with Schoeler’s conclusion, The Oral and the Written, 45, that the sources of these compilations (for example of Malik’s Muwaṭṭā, of Ṭabarī’s Tārīḥ and Quranic commentary, and of Abū l-Faraḵ al-Isfahānī’s Kitāb al-ʾ Ağānī) are in most cases lessons given by the šayḥs on the basis of written notes (jottings), that they read or recited and which the pupils heard and wrote down (or took notes of). Most of them were not written works in book form, which authors definitively composed and published. Most of them were not purely oral transmission, meaning that the šayḥ and his audience did not keep the transmitted material exclusively in their memories.
66 A lengthy and detailed discussion of the different recensions of the KTK that may have been used by later compilers is given in A.N. Atassi, History, 146–93.
KTK that exhibit differences from the printed edition. The two most important recensions of which we have numerous quotes are those of al-Balādūrī and Ibn Abī Usāma as we have seen this recension was not fully incorporated in the available manuscripts. There are also two possible recensions of unknown provenance: one used by Abū l-Qāsīm al-Baḡawī, and the other used by al-Bayḥaqī (d. 458/1066). The remaining two possible recensions can be attributed to the Baghdadi transmitters (1) ʿUbayd b. Muḥammad al-Yazīdī (d. 284/815), used by al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/970); and (2) al-Ḥusayn b. al-Faṟāq (d. third/ninth century), used by al-Ḥākim al-Nīṣābūrī (d. 405/1014). This period was covered in the manuscripts by the following transmitters: Ibn Abī Usāma and Ibn Fahm; Ibn Maʿrūf and al-Ḡallāb; Ibn Hayyuyawah; and finally al-Ḡawharī. The book has crystallized during this period with only one recension surviving, i.e. the one compiled by Ibn Ḥayyuyawah based on Ibn Abī Usāma’s and Ibn Fahm’s recensions. This recension of the KTK was actually the only one to have survived. Although many persons acquired the KTK from Ibn Saʿd or from Ibn Abī Usāma, very few of them decided to teach it to future generations. Most Saʿdī reports encountered between the third/ninth and fifth/eleventh centuries were transmitted individually, not as part of a wholesale transmission of the KTK. It is remarkable and worthy of investigating that Ibn Maʿrūf al-Ḥaṣṣāb learned the KTK from Ibn Abī Usāma and Ibn Fahm then taught it to Ibn Ḥayyuyawah, who collected the material and divided it into systematic sections and then taught it to al-Ḡawharī, al-ʿAzhrāfī and few others. Beyond al-Ḡawharī’s generation, many persons will be involved in teaching the KTK. In summary, we can say that the KTK crystallized by the process of dying out of all other recensions and the fusion together of Ibn Abī Usāma’s and Ibn Fahm’s recensions in a book that found generations of dedicated teachers.

The second phase stretches from the fifth century to the seventh century, ending with al-Dimyāṭī. During this phase the definitive text of

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67 For a description of these differences see Atassi, History, 159–60, 165.
69 Ibid., 167, 171–2, 172–3, 179–81. The recension used by al-Baḡawī was also used by al-Ḡurğānī, Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Azdī, and Abū Nuʿaym al-Īṣḥāḥānī.
70 Ibid., 182–6.
71 Ibid., 169.
72 Ibid., 174–7.
the book spread outside Baghdad to Syria and Egypt, the two main centers of its later teaching. This phase saw an accurate and precise transmission of the KTK through the dictation-writing procedure. All our extant manuscripts go back to the end of this period. The third phase stretches from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries. During this phase the KTK continued being transmitted with the old dictation-writing procedure, but also saw the transformation of manuscripts into commodities bought, sold and inherited. This is how the extant manuscripts reached us.

Geographical diffusion of the KTK
We have seen that the KTK remained in Baghdad, and was kept alive by the efforts of generations of valiant transmitters until the end of the sixth or beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century. It then moved to Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo, the new centers of its diffusion. It was not the Mongol invasion that pushed the book west to Syria and Egypt, but it was certainly the reason that made Syria and Egypt the only centers of its diffusion. We have also seen that the appearance of the KTK in Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo was almost simultaneous: Abū l-Ḥaġḡāġ (555/1160–648/1250) in Aleppo; Ibn ʿAbd al-Dāʾīm (575/1179–668/1269) in Damascus; and Abū l-Faraḡ al-Ḥarrānī (587/1191–672/1283) in Cairo. Although all of these transmitters have passed the KTK to local and traveling students, Abū l-Ḥaġḡāġ is the most frequently mentioned for the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century. For example, all extant manuscripts were transmitted via Abū l-Ḥaģġāġ. Many Cairene and Damasc scholars came to Aleppo to learn the KTK under this teacher. Notable among them is al-Dimyāṯī, a resident of Cairo, who became the main source of authentication of the KTK in the seventh/thirteenth century.73

We have evidence (from Ibn Sayyid al-Nās and Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī) that both Ibn ʿAbd al-Dāʾīm and Abū l-Faraḡ al-Ḥarrānī taught the KTK during the seventh/thirteenth century in Damascus and Cairo, respectively. These two cities became centers for the diffusion of the KTK. However, the trend for the seventh/thirteenth, eighth/fourteenth, and ninth/fourteenth centuries is the increased influx of Syrian scholars into Cairo. For example, al-ʿUqaylī (632/1234–704/1304) acquired the KTK from Abū l-Ḥaġḡāġ and then moved to Cairo because of a judgeship appointment. Al-Daṣṭī (634/123–713/1313), also a student of Abū l-Ḥaġḡāģ, also ended up as a teacher in

73 Atassi, History, 236–8, 244–5, 247–8.
Cairo after a long stay in Damascus; al-Ḏahabī actually went to Cairo to learn the KTK under al-Dimyāṭī; Ibn Abī al-Maǧd (707/1307–800/1397), a famous preacher and teacher in Damascus, was invited to teach in Cairo by an official of the Mamlūk establishment, Ibn Ḥagar al-ʿAsqalānī, who acquired the KTK through multiple channels (mostly from Damascus), later settled and taught in Cairo. This is not a surprise since power shifted from Baghdad to Cairo during the reigns of the Ayyūbids (564/1168–659/1260) and the Bahrī Mamlūks (648/1250–784/1382).

Literary diffusion of Saʿdī reports
Although we differentiated between the KTK and individual Saʿdī reports, the diffusion of Saʿdī reports is an accurate measure of the diffusion of the KTK since most Saʿdī reports came from the KTK, and after the fifth/eleventh century most of them came from one recension of the KTK. The most fruitful in terms of producing Saʿdī reports are tarāǧim books. Sīra and mağāzī books and historiography books produced less Saʿdī reports than I originally expected. Ḥadīṯ compilations produced the least amount of information about the KTK or about Ibn Saʿd (books of ḥadīṯ criticism only produced short quotes and some clarifications). In fact, very few ḥadīṯs were transmitted on Ibn Saʿd’s authority. Most of them come from one source, i.e. one of Ibn Saʿd’s students, namely al-Ḥārīṯ b. Abī Usāma who was also a transmitter of the KTK. The majority of Saʿdī reports were biographical in nature. It came as a surprise to me that Saʿdī reports were less represented in historiography and ḥadīṯ books than in biographical dictionaries. It is a common practice in our field, when having general, collegial discussions of topics related to early Islamic periods, to talk in equal terms about historiographies and about biographical dictionaries; the latter usually being valuable sources of historical information. Moreover, given the lengthy biographies of the KTK, it is always considered a book of historiography. The previous results constitute a strong reminder that the two genres, namely historiography and biography, are not to be confused. They are actually very different in nature and often serve very distinct purposes. It seems that traditionalists...

74 Atassi, History, 236, 245–8.

75 Muʿgam al-ṣuyūḥ/mašāḥāt books only contain chains of transmission and not reports; therefore, this category will be dropped from the analysis of the KTK’s literary diffusion.
Ahmad Nazir Atassi

have always regarded the KTK as a source for biographical information that is best suited for writing other biographical dictionaries.

Even as a biographical dictionary, the KTK is different from the ones dedicated to ḥadīṯ transmitters such as Ḥalīfa’s Ṭabaqāt, Buḥārī’s al-Ṭārīḥ al-kabīr, or al-Ṭabarānī’s al-Muʿğam al-kabīr. The latter books are terse and usually focus on the trustworthiness of transmitters. Biographies written by Ibn Sa’d are longer, contain more biographical and historical information, and follow a general model. At least for the biographies of Muhammad’s companions and the Medinan ḥadīṯ transmitters, the model seems to be Ibn Sa’d’s biography of Muḥammad, since it is organized thematically rather than chronologically. These biographies are best described as hagiographies; the epic life-stories of the founders of the ḥadīṯ movement. After all, most of the book is dedicated to the companions and the Medinan transmitters; only two shorter sections are dedicated to Kufan and Basran transmitters; and even shorter sections relate to all other transmitters from the rest of the ‘Abbasid empire. It is no surprise then that most borrowings from the KTK come from the sections dedicated to Muḥammad’s companions.

Conclusions

For the KTK, the paper has showed Ibn Sa’d was indeed its original compiler, but it also showed that three successive generations of transmitters had contributed to, or modified, it. Many recensions of the book circulated until the fourth/tenth century when a well known Baghdādī teacher called Ibn Ḥayyuwayh produced an authoritative recension. Beyond the fifth/eleventh century, only this recension dominated the market until modern times. Studying the geographic and temporal diffusion of the KTK, it became clear that its real popularity was ushered in by al-Ḥaṭīb al-Bağdādī’s (fourth/tenth century) intensive borrowing from it in his Tārīḥ Bağdād. It was the Damascene scholar Ibn ʿAsākir (sixth/twelfth century) who brought the book from Baghdad to Damascus and extensively borrowed from it in his Tārīḥ Dimašq, thus popularizing it in the Muslim west. It is possible that he found in it a great help for his quest to implement the gihād agenda of Nūr al-Dīn Zanjī against the crusaders. The KTK was taught exclusively in Baghdad until the early seventh/thirteenth century when almost simultaneously it started being taught in Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo where it reached the zenith of its popularity. Studying the KTK’s transmission methods showed that, by the ninth/fifteenth century, it was mostly transmitted by iǧāza (authentication, permission to teach). Starting from the third/ninth century, this usage increased as time progressed. By the ninth/fifteenth
century, it was possible to obtain an ḏaṣlā by mail. This is an indication that the KTK had acquired a stable form and had possibly become a textbook. Finally, the paper observed that tarāqīm books (biographical dictionaries) showed the most frequency of occurrence of Saʿdī reports. Siṣra books and historiography books produced less Saʿdī reports. Ḥadīṯ compilations produced the least number of such reports. It seems that traditionalists have always regarded the KTK as a source for biographical information that is best suited for writing other biographical dictionaries.

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FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE? NOTES ON THE PRODUCTION, TRANSMISSION, AND RECEPTION OF THE MAJOR WORKS OF AḤMAD AL-BŪNĪ*

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This article is a preliminary presentation of findings from an extensive survey of the large manuscript corpus of works attributed to the 7th/13th-century Sufi and putative ‘magician’ Aḥmad al-Būnī. In addition to addressing the texts themselves, the survey has included attention to patterns over time in the reproduction of works, and to paratexts such as transmission certificates and ownership notices. Through detailed presentation of the latter, the article serves in a part as a methodological demonstration. It presents: 1) new information on al-Būnī’s life; 2) a brief overview of the major works of the medieval Būnian corpus, with a proposal that five of these works can be attributed most securely to al-Būnī; 3) a discussion of the spread of Būnian works between the 8th/14th and 10th/16th centuries; and 4) evidence that the work through which al-Būnī is best known, Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, is in significant ways a product of the early 11th/17th century, and that at least two lines of teachers claimed for al-Būnī in this work were plagiarized from the works of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī. It is argued that the tenor of al-Būnī’s teachings and the history of their reception have been broadly misunderstood due to reliance on printed editions and a modern scholarly disinclination to regard the occult sciences as a serious topic of inquiry. It ends with a call for more complete integration of manuscript studies into the broader field of Islamic historical studies.

Introduction
In both popular and scholarly imaginations there exists an image of the book of magic, the ‘grimoire,’ as a tome of dubious authorship filled with strange glyphs, secret alphabets, and unpronounceable names. It is often given as an artifact possessed of an aura of menace, something dangerous to have from a social, legal, or even soteriological standpoint. As the Europeanist medievalist Richard Kieckhefer puts it, ‘[a] book of magic is also a magical book,’ and thus a potential ‘source of spiritual and

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In some sense, then, the book of magic is a placeholder for everything that is most dangerous about books: their ability to convey knowledge and powers that, to the minds of many, would best be contained; their ability to deceive and lead astray. For such reasons books of magic are famously flammable as well, as countless literary and historical examples testify. In Acts, the magicians of Ephesus burned their scrolls on magic before the apostle Paul as a sign of repentance for their sorcery, and in medieval Florence, the archbishop Antoninus is said to have seized a book of incantations which, when burned, put forth a thick cloud of dark smoke as a result of the multitude of demons residing therein.

In the context of premodern Arabic–Islamic literature, the individual most often associated with books of magic is the seventh/thirteenth-century author ʿAlḥād al-Būnī, whose modern fame or infamy rests largely on printed editions of a work entitled Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā. Indeed, in his broadly framed survey, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*, the historian Owen Davies refers to al-Būnī as a ‘famed magician,’ and singles out Šams al-maʿārif as ‘the most influential magic book in Arabic popular culture’. Without a doubt both the modern printed editions of Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā and the premodern manuscripts of certain Būnian works would appear to fit the bill of ‘grimoires,’ replete as they are with complex talismans, secret alphabets, and so on. That al-Būnī’s ideas participate in the long Islamicate tradition of the occult science of letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*), a praxis with roots in early ‘extremist’ Shīʿite thought that posits the metaphysical entanglement of the letters of the alphabet and the created world, only adds to the

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1 Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 4.
2 Ibid., 6.
5 Or some variant thereof, particularly Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārf, although this should not be confused with the medieval work of that name, regarding which see the second section of this paper. In his recent entry on al-Būnī in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., Constant Hamès notes that there have been ‘scores’ of printed editions since around the turn of the twentieth century, mostly emanating from Cairo and Beirut.
6 Davies, *Grimoires*, 27.
7 For an excellent examination of the occult science of letters, see Denis Gril’s treatment of the subject in Ibn ʿArabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*: ‘The Science of Letters’. Equally important are the several essays on the subject by Pierre Lory, recently gathered in the volume *La Science des lettres en islam*. 
potential thaumaturgic charge of Būnian books-as-objects. It is therefore tempting to project onto al-Būnī’s works, in their premodern setting, the role of books of forbidden knowledge, imagining the codices and perhaps even their owners as ripe for autos-da-fé at the hands of zealous medieval Muslim jurists. Book-burnings were not unheard of in the premodern Islamicate world, and al-Būnī’s works seem a likely target for just that when reading the firebrand Ḥanbalī preacher and theologian Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 728/1328) accusation that al-Būnī and others of his ilk were star-worshippers in the thrall of devils,8 or the historian and judge Ibn Ḥaldūn’s (d. 808/1406) stern admonition that, despite its religious trappings, the occult science of letters was in reality a form of sorcery (siḥr) and thus a violation of God’s law.9 Such persecutorial imagining on the part of the modern reader are at least somewhat controverted, however, by the existence of hundreds of as-of-yet-unburned codices of Būnian works in libraries around the world, some of them as old as the seventh/thirteenth century. This remarkable phenomenon was the inspiration for the research the initial results of which are presented in this article – results that demonstrate the need to historicize both the image of ‘al-Būnī the magician’ and the notion of ‘books of magic’ in premodern Islamic society.

Despite the wealth of surviving manuscripts of different works attributed to al-Būnī, modern scholars have relied almost exclusively on printed editions of Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā in their discussions of his ideas. Although many have pointed out anachronisms in the text relative to the widely accepted death for al-Būnī of 622/1225—instances ranging from references to slightly later actors such as Ibn Sabīn (d. 669/1269–70) to a mention of Amrīka—they nonetheless have utilized it as their main source.10 Dissatisfied with such compromises, and inspired by recent suggestions that the ‘corpus Būnianum’ has a richly complex

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8 Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿ, 10: 251.
10 For one of the most recent discussions of anachronisms in Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, see Constant Hamès entry on al-Būnī in Encyclopaedia of Islam, 3rd ed. For the major statements on al-Būnī, see the works in the bibliography by Abel, Cordero, Dietrich, El-Gawhary, Fahd, Francis, Lory, Pielow, Ullmann, and Witkam. Many of these scholars have discussed the manuscript corpus briefly, but their investigations of it have been rather limited in scope. With the exception of Witkam, the bulk of their assessments have been drawn from Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā.
history. I resolved to eschew the printed editions of al-Būnī altogether in favor of an examination of the manuscript corpus. While originally I had hoped merely to gain access to texts authentic to al-Būnī, exposure to the finer points of manuscript studies made clear to me that, given a certain mass of data, more could be achieved, including a picture of the spread and development of the corpus in time and space, and some understanding of the actors who produced, transmitted, and read these hundreds of codices. With such goals in mind, I undertook an examination of the manuscript corpus in extenso; that is to say, of as many codices as possible of works attributed to al-Būnī, as well as those of some of his interpreters/commentators. At the time of this writing I have examined over 200 codices containing almost 300 works, paying attention not only to the texts contained in the main bodies of the

11 The University of Leiden manuscript studies scholar Jan Just Witkam has recently coined the term ‘corpus Būnianum’ to describe the chaotic wealth of Būnian material that survives in manuscripts, a reference to similar appellations for large bodies of occult writings considered to be of questionable/multiple authorship, e.g. the corpora Hermeticum and Gābirianum. He proposes that the Būnian corpus is ‘the product of the work of several generations of practicing magicians, who arranged al-Būnī’s work and thought… probably while mixing these with elements of their own works’ (Witkam, ‘Gazing at the Sun’, 183). The Mamlûkist Robert Irwin presents a ‘strong’ version of a multiple-authorship hypothesis in a recent review article, stating: ‘It seems likely that the ascription of writings to [al-Būnī] was intended to suggest the nature of their contents rather than indicate their actual authorship’; that ‘[a]l-Buni, like Jabir ibn Hayyan, was used as a label for an occult genre’; and that ‘the writings of both these semi-legendary figures were almost certainly produced by many anonymous authors’ (Irwin, ‘Review of Magic and Divination in Early Islam’, 107).

12 Research for this project has involved examination of the digital or microfilm surrogates of hundreds of Būnian manuscripts and those of related works, and when useful and possible the codices themselves have been physically inspected. In a minority of cases where direct examination of the surrogates or codices was not possible, information has been drawn from catalogs and articles describing members of the corpus. The bulk of this research was conducted in the summers of 2009 and 2011, entailing visits to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, the Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, the Schloß Friedenstein Library in Gotha, the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, the British Library in London, the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, the Suleymaniye Kütüphanesi in Istanbul, the Manisa Kütüphanesi, the Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, and the Dār al-Kutub (Egyptian National Library) in Cairo; digital resources have also been utilized.
Transmission paratexts—authorial and scribal colophons, ‘audition’ (ṣamāʿ) certificates, patronage statements, ownership notices, and so on—have provided an almost granular level of detail about certain points in the history of the corpus, and even some revelations about the life of al-Būnī himself. Readers unaccustomed to working with these paratexts may find the parts of this paper that deal with them to be something of a trip down the rabbit hole, but I have attempted to explain in detail my work with the most important of them in hopes that the value of paying close attention to such ‘marginal’ sources will become clear as the article proceeds. At the other end of the scale, the amassing of fairly mundane data such as titles, dates of copying, and the names of copyists and owners has allowed for certain kinds of wide-angle analysis of the corpus, including some measure of the popularity of different works based on the number of surviving copies, an overview of the corpus’ trajectory across time and space, and some rudimentary prosopographical analysis of the people involved with it. In this paper these are utilized for evaluating the relative importance of texts during a given century, dating the appearance of certain texts, and assessing some social features of the spread of the corpus. Certain weaknesses are inherent to these wide-angle methods insofar as the number and variety of surviving codices undoubtedly give an incomplete picture of the books that were in circulation and the actors involved, and the conclusions derived from them are liable to alternative interpretations, as well as to revision in the face of further data. I have found them good to think with nonetheless.13

As discussed briefly at the end of this paper, I am of the opinion that the abundance of Islamicate manuscripts in libraries around the world has far more to offer to scholarship than has typically been asked of it, and it is my hope that other researchers will find approaches similar to the ones employed here useful in their own projects.

The notes that constitute this article are in four somewhat discontinuous parts (followed by a brief conclusion), and are intended to introduce several findings that are, to the best of my knowledge, new to modern scholarship on al-Būnī. The first part concerns what can be known of al-Būnī’s life, including some details of his education and how he produced and transmitted his works. The second discusses the eight

13 Some of these methods were inspired by the literary historian Franco Moretti’s notion of ‘distant readings’; see his Atlas of the European Novel and Graphs, Maps, Trees.
major works of the medieval Būnian corpus; that is to say, those texts that appear numerous times in medieval codices or are otherwise of obvious importance, and which largely have been kept in the shadows by the scholarly focus on Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā. It argues that five of these works are most reliably attributable to al-Būnī himself, and discusses what may have been the important role of readers’ interests in shaping the corpus. The third concerns the spread and reception of the corpus in the eighth/fourteenth through tenth/sixteenth centuries, and includes discussions of means through which works were transmitted, a sketch of some of the elite social networks in which Būnian works flourished during this period (including the neo-Ḥwān al-ṣafāʾ), and the legality of codices bearing Būnian works. The fourth concerns Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, the work on which so much of al-Būnī’s modern reputation is based. It addresses the apparent emergence of this work in its best-known form in the eleventh/seventeenth century, and examines the origins of some of the chains of transmission (asānīḍ) that are alleged in the work to be al-Būnī’s.

Al-Būnī’s life and death

One of the enduring problems in the study of al-Būnī is a lack of reliable biographical information. He is absent from the medieval biographical dictionaries except for a largely unreliable tarqama in Taqī l-Dīn al-Maqrīzī’s (d. 845/1442) unfinished biographical work, al-Muqaffā al-kabīr.14 The entry for him in the Egyptian scholar ʿAbd al-Raʿūf al-Manawī’s (d. 1021/1613) turn-of-the-eleventh/seventeenth-century Sūfī tābaqāt work contains no biographical information.15 In the vast majority of medieval manuscripts his name is given as Abū l-ʿAbbās ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Qurašī l-Būnī, with his father’s name sometimes elaborated as al-ṣayḥ al-muqīrī Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī. Various honorifics often precede al-Būnī’s name in titlepages and opening formulae, such as al-ṣayḥ, al-imām, etc., and frequently also tāḡ al-dīn (crown of religion), ṣīḥāb al-dīn (brand of religion), muḥyī l-dīn (reviver

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14 This tarqama has only recently been brought to my attention, and, to the best of my knowledge, has not been adduced in previous Western scholarship on al-Būnī. Although I believe the biographical information it contains to be incorrect (starting with an erroneous rendering of al-Būnī’s name), it is of great interest nonetheless, and I plan to discuss it in detail in a separate article. For a printed edition see Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr, ed. Yaʿāwī, 1: 750–3.

15 Al-Manawī, al-Kawākib al-durriyya, 2: 38. For a discussion of entries on al-Būnī in the works of modern Maqrīzī biographies, see Francis, Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals, 97–9.
of religion), and q̄utb al-ʿārifīn (pole of the gnostics). He seems to have died in Cairo in the seventh/thirteenth century (his death date is discussed below), and the location of his gravesite is noted in Ibn al-Zayyāt’s early ninth/fifteenth-century visitation guide to the Qarāfā cemeteries.\(^\text{16}\) The lack of substantive information about al-Būnī’s life has invited projections of the image of ‘al-Būnī the magician,’ but some of the new information presented here provides a somewhat clearer picture.

Although the nīsba al-Būnī suggests that he was from the city of Būnā (Roman Hippo Regius, now ʿAnnāba) on the coast of present-day Algeria, some scholars have questioned the accuracy of this, and have taken to referring to al-Būnī as an Egyptian.\(^\text{17}\) However, an important new piece of information regarding al-Būnī’s life and training supports the notion that he was of Ifrīqiyyan origin. This is from the work ‘Ilm al-hudā wa-asrār al-ḥtīdā’ fi ʿarḍ ʿāsmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā—a major text of al-Būnī’s that has been all but entirely ignored by modern scholars—wherein al-Būnī identifies as his personal šayḥ (šayḫunā) Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Bakr al-Qurašī l-Mahdawī (d. 621/1224), the head of a center for Sufi instruction in Tunis. Al-Būnī recounts two incidents involving al-Mahdawī, the first of which includes a conversation that occurred ‘while I [al-Būnī] was sitting with him [al-Mahdawī]’ (wa-kuntu ḡālsan ʿindahu), confirming a face-to-face relationship between them.\(^\text{18}\) This is highly significant insofar as it is, to the best of my knowledge, the only place in a major work of the medieval corpus in which al-Būnī identifies one of his own šayḥs.

Beyond its value as a rare datum in al-Būnī’s biography, the fact that al-Mahdawī also exercised a great deal of influence over the development of the famous Andalusian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) is of great interest as well. Ibn ʿArabī resided at al-Mahdawī’s school (dār tadrīṣīhī) twice, once in 590/1194 for as much as six or seven months, and for a somewhat longer stay in 597–8/1201–2.\(^\text{19}\) Al-Būnī unfortunately provides no dates for his time in Tunis that might indicate if the two ever met. Al-Mahdawī is the šayḫ to whom Ibn ʿArabī dedicated his great work, al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya, and Gerald Elmore

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\(^\text{16}\) Ibn al-Zayyāt, Kawākh al-sayyārah, 268.

\(^\text{17}\) E.g. the full title of Witkam article, ‘Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī, and Carl Ernst, The Shambhala Guide to Sufism, 92.

\(^\text{18}\) Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, fol. 179b. For the second account involving al-Mahdawī, see fol. 238b.

notes that *al-šayh al-akbar* praised al-Mahdawī highly for ‘his magisterial discretion in translating the more indigestible esoteric knowledge of the Secrets of Unveiling into a pedagogical pabulum suitable to the capacities of the uninitiated’. That al-Būnī also took instruction from al-Mahdawī places him at least roughly within the same nexus of Western (i.e. Maghribī and Andalusī) Sufism from which Ibn ‘Arabī emerged, a milieu in which the science of letters (‘ilm al-ḥurūf) had played a prominent role since the time of Ibn Masarra al-Ǧabalī (d. 319/931). It also grants some credit to the Granadan litterateur Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥatīb and his friend Ibn Haldūn’s close linkings of al-Būnī and Ibn ‘Arabī as ‘extremist’ Sufis who were masters of the occult science of letters, a connection that some modern scholars have questioned or dismissed as polemical rhetoric.

Elements in al-Būnī’s writing that suggest a common source for some of his and Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical/cosmological speculations are briefly discussed in the second section of this paper, while the tendency of many later commentators (negative and positive) to closely associate the two men’s works is addressed in the third.

That al-Būnī would have traveled from Būna to Tunis for instruction, and that he would have continued on from there to Egypt, is not difficult to imagine. Indeed, he would seem to have been one of a number of Western Sufis who migrated eastwards in the seventh/thirteenth century, perhaps due in part to the controversial nature of their teachings, including Ibn ‘Arabī, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ḥarallī (d. 638/1240), Abū l-Ḥasan al-Šāḏilī (d. 656/1258), and Ibn Sabīn (d. 668/1269–71). It is noteworthy that the teachings of all these men were intertwined with, or at least somehow implicated in the science of letters and other occult praxeis. Throughout the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries the generally Mālikī-dominated Islamicate West was home to many controversial Sufis with esotericist tendencies who ran afool of the reigning political and religious authorities, such as Ibn Barraḡān and Ibn

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20 Ibid., 595.
al-ʿArīf, two prominent šayḥs who may have been assassinated by the Almoravids in 536/1141, perhaps due to their growing political influence; and Ibn Qasī, a Sufi šayḥ who took the extraordinary step of declaring himself ‘Imām’ and entering into open rebellion against the Almoravids in the Algarve, an adventure that ended with his assassination in 546/1151. The precise impact of the Almohad revolution on Western Sufism requires further study, but suffice it to say that a prudent esotericist Sufi might have thought it best to decamp eastward. Of course, Cairo’s appeal as a major economic and intellectual capital whose foreign military elites were generous with their patronage and protection of exotic Sufi masters may have been sufficient incentive in itself for migration.

Most other details of al-Būnī’s life remain obscure, and even the date of his death is open to question. For the latter, the date of 622/1225 is given at several places in Ḍūl-Qaʿda of 621, finishing it some weeks later on 27 Ḏū l-Ḥiḍāḥa in the same year, and that this occurred on the
outside of Cairo (bi-zāhir Miṣr), by which is probably meant the Qarāfa cemeteries, as is evident from other statements discussed below.

That authorial colophon is supported by a collection of paratexts in a two-part copy of the same work, Süleymaniye MSS Reşid efendi 590.1 and 590.2, copied in Cairo in 798/1396. In a multipart paratext on the final folio of the second part the copyist states that he collated his copy of Ḥml al-hudā against one copied in 738/1337 at the al-Muhassaniyya ḥāngāh in Alexandria, and that that copy had itself been collated against a copy bearing an ‘audition’ certificate (samāʾ) with the signature (ḥatt) of the musannif (author or copyist). As discussed below, this most likely indicates that al-Būnī himself presided over this session and signed the statement, although the original audition certificate is not reproduced in full. This audition process—a reference is made to mağālis, i.e. multiple sessions—is said to have ended on the twenty-third of Rabīʿ al-awwal, 622/1225, with the exemplar that bore the audition certificate having been completed in the Qarāfa al-Kabīra cemetery bi-zāhir Miṣr on the twenty-seventh of Dū l-Hiǧga, 621, having been begun in the first part of Dū l-Qaʿda of the same year; i.e. the same dates and place of composition as those in the authorial colophon reproduced in the three aforementioned manuscripts.

Finally, the occurrence of the audition sessions referred to in MS Reşid efendi 590.2 is supported by an audition certificate reproduced in full in BnF MS arabe 2658, a codex of the work Latāʾif al-išārāt fī l-ḥurūf al-ḥawīyāt copied in Cairo at al-Azhar Mosque in 809/1406. This reproduced certificate, which the copyist states was found at the back of the exemplar in a hand other than that of the copyist of the main text, states that the exemplar was auditioned in the Qarāfa al-Kabīra cemetery in the first part of Rabīʿ al-awwal, 622/1225. This is earlier in the same month that the prime exemplar referenced in MS Reşid efendi 590.2 was auditioned, which suggests that Ḥml al-hudā and Latāʾif al-išārāt were auditioned back-to-back during the course of these mağālis. What is more, a reference within the text of Latāʾif al-išārāt to events in Mecca in 621, combined with the above statement, provides us with termini post and ante quem for the composition of that work as well, i.e. sometime between 621 and Rabīʿ al-awwal of 622.

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28 Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, fol. 239b.
29 Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.2, fol. 130b. The date of copying for the set is in the colophon of 590.1, on fol. 64b.
30 Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.2, fol. 130b.
31 BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 90a.
This cluster of paratexts reveals at least two important points. The first is that al-Būnī was indeed alive and composing two of his major works in 621 and early 622. The second is that both of these works were auditioned in sessions at the Qarāfa cemetery on the outskirts of Cairo over the course of Rabī‘ al-awwal of 622. Book-audition (samā‘) sessions—which are not to be confused with the meditative scripture and/or poetry recitation practices of the same name also common among some Sufis—were gatherings at which a work was read aloud before the author, or someone in a line of transmission from the author, thereby inducting the auditors into the line of transmission for that work.\footnote{On the importance of audition practices in knowledge and book transmission, see Rosenthal, \textit{Technique and Approach}, 20–1; Makdisi, \textit{Rise of Colleges}, 140–146; Berkey, \textit{Transmission of Knowledge}, 21–35; Chamberlain, \textit{Knowledge and Social Practice}, 133–51. See also footnotes 33, 34, and 36 below.}

Neither of these references to audition sessions state explicitly that al-Būnī presided over them, but there are strong reasons to conclude that this was the case. The typical formula for an audition certificate is: \textit{sami‘a hāḍā l-kitāb ‘alā al-šayḫ fulānīn wa-fulānīn}, with the presiding šayḫ (the grammatical object of \textit{sami‘a alā}) ideally being the author of the work being ‘heard’ or someone in a direct line of transmission from the author, and the other named individuals (the grammatical subjects) being the auditors who are gaining admittance to the line of transmission of the work through the audition, and who are thereby granted the authority to teach and further transmit the work.\footnote{On audition certificates, see Gacek, \textit{Vademecum}, 52–3; Déroche, \textit{Islamic Codicology}, 332–4; and (for examples thereof) Vajda, \textit{Album de paléographie}, plt. 20 \textit{bis}.}

The statement copied in BnF MS arabe 2658, however, gives the names only of two of the auditors (\textit{al-qādī l-a‘dal al-ṣāliḥ al-zāhid qādī l- fuqārā} wa-\textit{‘umdat al-ṣulāḥā} ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm and his son Ibrāhīm) while omitting the name of the presiding šayḫ. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, the statement in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.2 states of the prime exemplar only that ‘\textit{alayh ẓamā‘} al-\textit{muṣannīf} wa-\textit{ḥattūhu}, i.e. that it bore an audition certificate (\textit{samā‘}) from the \textit{muṣannīf} (author or copyist) and his signature (\textit{ḥattūhu}). The omissions in these statements of the precise identity of the presiding šayḫ leave room for varying interpretations, but the most likely one, in my estimation, given the proximity of the dates and place of composition to those of the audition sessions, is that al-Būnī himself presided over these sessions.
The fact that some of al-Būnī’s works were being auditioned in Cairo at this time is valuable in assessing his standing among Egyptian Sufis, and the image of an audition session among a group of Sufis gathered in the Qarāfa cemetery is compelling. In his study of medieval tomb visitation practices, Christopher Taylor characterizes the Qarāfa, as ‘a place of ancient sanctity’ that ‘played an extraordinary role in the social and moral economy of medieval Cairene urban space,’ a liminal zone of social mixing and collective religious practice that was ‘enticingly beyond the reach of the ‘ulamā’.’34 If al-Būnī’s teachings were indeed ‘fringe’ according to many ‘ulamā’ of the time, then this choice of location may have been a reflection of that situation. Although the majority of the scholarship on book-audition practices has focused on their use in transmitting hadīṯ collections, book-audition was employed across a variety of scientific (‘ilm) traditions, religious and natural-philosophical. It functioned as a means not only of transmitting works accurately, but also of ritually passing on the authority to teach and utilize their contents. As pietistic events, book-audition sessions grew during the Ayyūbid period to have a great deal of appeal even among non-scholars,35 and Erik Ohlander recently has argued that they were also a key aspect of Abū Ḥafs ʿUmar al-Suhrawardi’s (d. 632/1234) strategies for legitimizing ṭarīqa Sufism in sixth/twelfth and early seventh/thirteenth-century Baghdad.36 While al-Būnī was certainly no Abū Ḥafs, the fact that he was able to command an audience for an audition of his freshly composed works strongly suggests that he was a respected Sufi šayḫ at the height of his powers in 622/1225. That he was even regarded as a ‘saint’ by some residents of the city, at least eventually, is shown by the mention of the location of his tomb in Ibn al-Zayyāt’s Kawākib al-sayyāra, which indicates that it was a site of veneration in the centuries after his death. Furthermore, as Hamès has recently noted, a note in Latin from 1872 on a flyleaf of BnF MS arabe 2647 (Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārif) suggests that al-Būnī’s tomb was still a ceremonial site in the latter half of the nineteenth

34 Taylor, In the Vicinity of the Righteous, 56–8.
35 On non-scholarly participation in audition sessions, see Dickinson, ‘Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrūzūri’ passim. On the closely related topic of ritual and even ‘magical’ uses of hadīṯ works, see Brown, The Canonization of al-Buḥari and Muslim, 335–48.
century. It states: ‘This man is said to be famous among Muslims not only for his teaching, but also for his piety, and his tomb is visited for the sake of religion. Commonly, they call him Sheikh Albouni’.37

In my estimation, the date of al-Būnī’s death must remain an open question for now. The paratextual statements adduced above demonstrate that he had a Cairene following in 622/1225, which would suggest that he was at something of an advanced age at that point. As discussed in the following section, there are elements within the medieval text of Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārif which raise the possibility that al-Būnī may have lived somewhat beyond 622/1225, although none is probative due to likely instances of interpolation in that work by later actors. Given that Ḥāǧǧī Ḥalīfa worked from many of the same manuscript collections now held in the libraries of the Republic of Turkey that were surveyed for this project, it is quite possible that he inferred the dates in Kašf al-ẓunūn through consulting some of the same manuscripts and paratexts as those adduced above, and that he arrived at the 622/1225 date due to a lack of later notations regarding al-Būnī. This is, of course, conjecture; it fails to explain the instance in which 630/1232–33 is given, and it must be considered that Ḥāǧǧī Ḥalīfa undoubtedly had access to codices and other sources that I have overlooked or that are now lost.38

Few other details of al-Būnī’s life are revealed in paratextual statements such as the ones above, although that his ambit extended at least to Alexandria is attested in another statement at the end of Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, a gloss that the copyist notes was found in the margin of the exemplar from which he worked (ḥāšiyya ʿalā ḥāniṣ al-asl al-maṣqūl minhu). The author of the original gloss, writing sometime between 622/1225 and 772/1370 (i.e. between the dates of the composition of ‘Ilm al-hudā and of the copying of MS Hamidiye 260.1), states that he obtained the book and read it under the supervision of his master, Abū l-Faḍl al-Gumārī,39 and that al-Gumārī had encountered al-Būnī (laqiya al-muʿallif) in Alexandria, where al-Būnī had ‘bestowed upon him the meanings of the path and the secrets of certainty’ (wa-


38 On the use of paratexts as sources by premodern bio/bibliographical writers, see Rosenthal, Technique and Approach, 20–1.

39 I assume this is a locative nisba. Yāqūt lists a handful of place names from which ‘al-Gumārī’ could be derived (Muʿgam al-buldūn, 211–13), although an argument could be made for ‘al-Gimārī’ as well.
afādahu fī maʿānī al-sulūk wa-l-āsrār al-yaqūnīyya), teachings which al-Gumārī had later passed on to his pupil, the glossator of the intermediary copy whose name is unfortunately lost. In reference to the quality of al-Būnī’s teachings, another gloss on the same folio of MS Hamidiye 260.1 records a statement attributed to one of al-Būnī’s students: ‘I swear by God that his utterances are like pearls or Egyptian gold. They are treasures the mystery of which is a blessed talisman for one who has deciphered [them] and who understands’ (li-baʾd talāmīḏihi: ʿuṣimu bi-l-lāh la-ʾal-fāżūhu ka-al-durar aw ka-al-ṭahab al-misrī, ṣa-hiyya kuṇūz sirrūḥa ṭilsam ṭūbā li-man ḫalla wa-man yadrī). Praise such as this, as well as the records of audition sessions and the anecdotes of al-Gumārī taking personal instruction from al-Būnī, suggest that during his lifetime the transmission of his teachings and the production of books therefrom were conducted well within the contours of traditional modes of Islamic instruction, which valorized ‘personalist’ modes of teaching and textual transmission. Thus, regardless of what some doubtless regarded as the heterodoxy of al-Būnī’s teachings, they seem to initially have been delivered and received through highly conventional means.

**Major works of the medieval Būnian corpus**

Any suggestion that al-Būnī may have been ‘just another’ Sufī šayḫ will strike as strange readers familiar with him only through Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, a veritable encyclopedia of the occult sciences that seems an entirely different animal from most late medieval Sufi texts. Indeed, such an impression would be misleading insofar as al-Būnī’s setting down in writing of techniques of the applied science of letters appears to have been groundbreaking; as Denis Gril notes: ‘Al-Buni was undoubtedly acting deliberately when he published what others either had kept under greater cover or had limited to oral transmission’. However, the impression given by Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā that al-Būnī’s writings were almost entirely concerned with practical implementations of the occult sciences is also misleading, as this overview of the major works of the medieval Būnian corpus endeavors to demonstrate.

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40 Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, op. cit.
41 Ibid.
42 As Makdisi observes: ‘The numerous certificates of audition written and signed by the authors of books, or by persons duly authorized in succession, attest to the perennial personalism of the Islamic system of education’ (Rise of Colleges, 145–6).
Carl Brockelmann listed almost forty works attributed to al-Būnī, while Jaime Cordero’s recent survey of Būnian works as they appear in various bibliographical works and the catalogs of major libraries found seventy titles. Both lists are of great value, although several items within each can be shown to be either single works under variant titles or works by other authors misattributed to al-Būnī. Nonetheless, a large array of distinct works remains to be accounted for, and there are well-founded questions surrounding how many and which of the numerous works attributed to al-Būnī were actually composed by him. What follows does not claim to resolve all of these issues, or even to address the majority of the titles in question. It is rather a brief overview of the eight major works of the medieval corpus, by which is meant those works that appear in pre-tenth/sixteenth century codices with sufficient consistency and frequency to be accounted as having been in regular circulation. Works of which only one or two copies survive, or the earliest surviving copies of which postdate the ninth/fifteenth century, are not included in this discussion, although two texts that appear only in the eight earliest surviving copies of which postdate the ninth/fifteenth century, are included because they are cited in a number of better-represented early works. The numerous works attributed to al-Būnī that seem to have survived only in one or two copies are certainly worthy of attention, although they fall outside the scope of this article. That such ‘minor’ works began to proliferate somewhat early in the career of the corpus is attested by a bibliographical paratext from a codex copied in

44 Brockelmann, GAL, 1: 497.
46 For example, Brockelmann lists al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya and also notes a Risāla fī l-ism al-ʿazm, a common alternate title for al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya. Cordero lists Tarīḥ al-daʿawāt fī taḥšīṣ al-awqāt and Kitāb manāfīʿ al-Qurʾān as separate works, when they in fact are alternate titles for the same work, and does the same with ʿIlm al-hudā, counting it again under one of its common alternate titles, Mūḍīḥ al-ṭariq wa-quṣṭās al-tahqīq.
47 Both Brockelmann and Cordero count al-Durr al-munazẓam fī l-sīr al-ʿazm as among works attributed to al-Būnī, when it is properly assigned to Ibn Ṭalḥa (regarding whom, see the discussion of Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārīf in this section). Cordero also attributes to al-Būnī a work called al-Durr al-faḥira, which was written by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥistāmī (regarding whom see the third section of this paper). None of these instances are particularly blameworthy, as the misattribution/miscataloging of occult works is quite common, in large part because so little scholarship has been done on them.
48 See footnote 11, above.
that names a number of works of which almost no trace has survived. ⁴⁹

Of the eight major medieval works, there are five that, in my estimation, can be most directly attributed to al-Būnī, and that can be considered to constitute the ‘core’ of the corpus as conceived by al-Būnī: Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif (not to be confused with Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, see below and section four of this paper); Hidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāṣifīn; Mawāqīf al-gāyāt fī asrār al-riyāḍāt, ‘Ilm al-hudā wa-asrār al-ḥiṭidāʾ fī šarḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā, and Ḭātāʾif al-iṣārāt fī l-hurūf al-ʿulwiyyāt. The three major medieval works that I consider to fall outside this ‘core’ category, al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya fī awrād al-rabbāniyya; Tartīb al-daʿawāt fī tahlīl al-tawqīf ‘alā ḥtilāf al-ṭrādāt, and Qabs al-iqtīdāʾ ilā waqf al-saʿāda wa-naqīm al-ḥiṭidāʾ, are hardly less important. They may well also have been composed by al-Būnī himself, or by his immediate students/amanuenses; alternatively, some may be forgeries that were convincing enough to have entered the ‘canon’ of Būnian works early on, such that they survive in numerous pre-tenth/sixteenth-century codices as well as in later ones. Whatever the facts of their authorship, they must be considered important in terms of the medieval reception of al-Būnī’s thought, even if there is a chance they may not be the direct products of his compositional efforts. Al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya, for example, is certainly one of the most important Būnian works due to its enduring popularity into the twelfth/eighteenth century, while two of the five ‘core’ works seem hardly to have made an impression.

The list of five works most directly attributable to al-Būnī is derived from references to other Būnian works made within the texts of ‘Ilm al-hudā and Ḭātāʾif al-iṣārāt, these being the two works which can be most firmly associated with al-Būnī due to the authorial colophon and auditional certificates discussed in the previous section. Within these two works, references are made, in many cases repeatedly, to the three others in the group: Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif; Hidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-

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⁴⁹ Süleymanıye MS Hamidiye 260, fol. 239b. The works in question are Kitāb Mawāqīf al-baṣāʾir wa-laṭāʾif al-sarāʾir; Kitāb Taṣīr al-ʿawārif fī tahlīṣ Šams al-maʿārif; Kitāb Asrār al-adwār wa-taškil al-amwār; Kitāb Yāʾ al-taṣrīf wa-hullat(?) al-taʾrif; Rīṣālat Yāʾ al-waw wa-qāf al-yāʾ wa-l-ayn wa-l-nūn, and Kitāb al-Latāʾif al-ʿarāra. The first, third, and last of these receive one-line mentions in Kašf al-zunūn, although to the best of my knowledge no manuscript copies of them have been located.
nihāyat al-wāsilīn, and Mawāqif al-ḡāyat fī ʿasrār al-riyāḍāt. What is more, these three works make repeated references to one another, as well as to ‘Ilm al-hudā and Laṭāʿif al-īsārat (the apparent paradox of the latter point is discussed immediately below). As shown in the chart at the end of this paper, the five works comprise a closed inter-referential circuit, i.e. they make references only to one another, and not to any of the other Būnian works. The majority of these references occur immediately after a somewhat gnomic statement on one esoteric topic or another, stating that the matter is explained in another of the five works. The whole effect can be taken as an example of the esotericist writing strategy—best known from the Ġābirian corpus—of tabdīʿ il-ʿilm, ‘the scattering of knowledge throughout the corpus with elaborate cross-references, to make access to the ‘art’ difficult for the unworthy.’

In several cases, pairs of works within the group contain references to one another, indicating the ongoing insertion of references into the works over time—unless one would embrace the unlikely possibility of all five having been written simultaneously. Such insertions are not necessarily indicative of interpolations by actors other than al-Būnī, as they are the sort of thing that the šayḥ might have added during an audition of a work, even years after it was originally composed. Indeed, they are typically phrased in the first person, e.g. wa-qad šaraḥnāhu fī kitābinā Šams al-маʿārif wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārif. Certain references seem more likely to have been added late in the process, such as the single reference to ‘Ilm al-hudā in Mawāqif al-ḡāyat, which occurs in the very last sentence of the work prior to the closing benedictions, and thus could easily have been inserted there at a later date. Others, such as the multiple ones throughout ‘Ilm al-hudā and Laṭāʿif al-īsārat, seem rather more integral to the texts in which they appear. Indeed, the wealth of references in these two works suggests that they were the last two to be composed, with Laṭāʿif al-īsārat most likely being the final addition to the group due to its multiple references to ‘Ilm al-hudā. Similarly, as Šams al-маʿārif wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārif is the only work cited in all four of the others, one could speculate that some version of Šams al-маʿārif wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārif preceded the other four works—although see below for arguments regarding the multiple difficulties involved in dating the medieval text of that work.

These five works are closely related as regards much of their content

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51 Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1, fol. 130b.
52 Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160.2, fol. 80a.
and technical vocabulary, although each has its particular foci. The science of letters permeates all of them to varying degrees, but instructions for making and using talismans are included in only two: Ṣams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʿif al-ʿawārif and Laṭāʿif al-īṣārat fi l-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyyāt, while the other three works deal to a greater extent with matters more traditionally found in Sufi literature and other pietistic genres. Hidāyat al-qāsidīn wa-nihāyat al-wāsitīn and Mawāqif al-ġāyāt fi āsrār al-riyāḍāt are both relatively short works (typically 30 to 40 folia depending on the number of lines per page) that primarily discuss topics immediately identifiable as Sufi theory and practice. Hidāyat al-qāsidīn establishes various stages of spiritual accomplishment, with a ranking of aspirants into three basic groups, sālikīn (seekers), murīdīn (adherents), and ʿārifīn (gnostics). Mawāqif al-ġāyāt fi āsrār al-riyāḍāt deals mainly with practices such as ritual seclusion (ḥalwa), but also touches upon matters taken up at length in the many of the other ‘core’ works, such as prophecy, metaphysics/cosmology, the invisible hierarchy of the saints, and the natures of such virtual actors as angels, devils, and gīnn. Many of these topics are discussed at greater length in ‘Ilm al-hudā wa-āsrār al-ḥtiyāt fi ṣarḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā, a large work (250 folia on average) structured as a discussion of the names of God, with each section devoted to a single divine name and each name marking a distinct station (maqāma) in a Sufi’s progress.

The statements and stories of a host of ‘sober’ Sufi and quasi-Sufi authorities posthumously well-regarded in al-Būnī’s lifetime are cited in these works, such as those of Ibrāhīm b. Aḍam (d. 161/777–78), Maʿrūf al-Karīḥī (d. 200/815–16), Biṣr al-Ḥāfi (d. 226/840 or 227/841–42), Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907), al-Ǧunayd al-Ǧaḍāḏī (d. 298/910), Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulaimī (d. 412/1021), Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq (d. 405/1015), and al-Daqqāq’s best-known student, Abū al-Kārim al-Ǧaṣāyīrī (d. 465/1072). A number of somewhat more risqué figures associated with speculative mysticism and/or ‘drunken’ Sufism are referenced frequently as well, including Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (261/874 or 264/877–8), Ḍū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861), and Abū Bakr al-Šībī (d. 334/945). Some statements and stretches of poetry attributed to the famously controversial al-Maṣfūr al-Ḥallaq (d. 309/922) are discussed near the end of Hidāyat al-qāsidīn, while al-Ḥallaq’s great interpreter and redactor Ibn Ḥaṭīf al-Ṣīrāzī (d. 371/982) and Ibn Ḥaṭīf’s disciple Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī53 (d. ca. 392/1001) are both

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Noah Gardiner

referred to al- Ḥarūfā. Ideas and statements attributed to Sahl al-
Tustarī (d. 283/896), the great Sufi theorist cited extensively—though
perhaps spuriously—in Ibn Masarra’s Kitāb Ḥawāṣṣ al- Ḥarūf,54 appear
regularly throughout the corpus. Thorough analyses of Hidāyat al-
qāsidīn, Mawūqif al-ḡāyāt, and ‘Ilm al- Ḥudā will be required to
determine the extent to which al-Būnī’s discussions of topics widely
discussed in Sufi literature were derivative or innovative in regard to
those of his predecessors.1 Ilm al- Ḥudā certainly participates in a lengthy
tradition of studies on the names of God, a field most famously
represented by Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ḡazālī’s (d. 505/1111) Al-
Maṣnad al-āsnāf šarḥ asmā’ Allāh al- Ḥusnā. Ḥāǧī Ḥalīfa, in his list of
numerous works from this genre, compares al-Būnī’s work to that of the
Magribī Sufi Ibn Barrağān.55 While this comparison seems based on the
considerable lengths of both works (wa-ḥuwa šarḥ kābir ka- ḥarīf Ibn
Barrağān),56 Elmore’s note that Ibn ‘Arabī studied at least one of Ibn
Barrağān’s works under al-Mahdawi suggests the possibility that al-Būnī
may have been similarly exposed to Ibn Barrağān’s writings.57

To the limited extent that the number of surviving copies is a reliable
guide, neither Hidāyat al-qāsidīn nor Mawūqif al-ḡāyāt seem to have
been widely copied; the survey for this project has found only three
copies of Hidāyat al-qāsidīn and nine of Mawūqif al-ḡāyāt, a few of the
latter being abridgements or fragments.58 ‘Ilm al- Ḥudā appears to have
been copied most widely in the eighth/nineteenth century and far less so
in ensuing centuries. Of the eleven colophonically dated copies surveyed
for this project (out of seventeen total), eight were produced between
739/1339 and 798/1396. Many of these early copies are high-quality
codices in elegant Syro-Egyptian hands, with the text fully vocalized.
The finest is Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 966, an oversized and

54 On the possibly spurious nature of Ibn Masarra’s citations of al-Tustarī,
see Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri’s recent article ‘The So-Called Risālat al-
ḥarūf’, 221–4 and passim.
55 See the bibliography for Purificación de la Torre’s edition of Ibn
Barrağān’s work.
56 Ḥāǧī Ḥalīfa, Kaṣf, 1033.
58 The copies of Hidāyat al-qāsidīn and Mawūqif al-ḡāyāt consulted for
constructing the chart of intertextual references above are bound together as the
first two works of the compilatory codex Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2160. All
the works in the codex are in a single hand, and a terminus ante quem for the
date of its production can be set at the year 914/1508–9 due to a dated
ownership notice on fol. 1a, but it is probably considerably older.
austerely beautiful codex with only fifteen lines of text per page. Probably of Egyptian origin, it is undated but almost certainly comes from the eighth/fourteenth century too. The high production values of many of these undoubtedly expensive codices of ʿIlm al-hudā bespeak a work that, at least in certain circles, was quite highly regarded, which makes its apparent decline in popularity all the more striking. For no other work in the corpus are there such disproportionate numbers of early copies over later ones. Indeed, as shown in the table at the end of this article, the surviving codices of other medieval Būnian works suggest that they were copied far more frequently in the ninth/fifteenth century than in the preceding ones. It is possible that this decline reflects shifting tastes among readers and producers of Būnian works, and I would suggest that it may have been due to the relative lack of practically oriented occult-scientific material in ʿIlm al-hudā, a factor that also may account for the relative paucity of copies of Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn and Mawāqif al-ḡāyāt. The works of the medieval corpus that remain to be discussed contain a good deal more material that can be characterized as occult-scientific with a practical bent, and also boast a greater numbers of surviving copies.

Of the five core works, the two with the greatest abundance of practical occult-scientific material are Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārif and Laṭāʿif al-išārāt fī l-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyyāt. As the table shows, the number of surviving copies suggests that they were more widely copied than the other three core works, and Šams al-maʿārif far more so than Laṭāʿif al-išārāt. It is a point of interest that the two were sometimes conflated. BnF MS arabe 6556, a copy of Laṭāʿif al-išārāt copied in 781/1380, has a titlepage (probably original to the codex) bearing the name Šams al-maʿārif al-suɡrā wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārif, while Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2799, a copy of Laṭāʿif al-išārāt copied in 861/1457, is simply titled Šams al-maʿārif. Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2802, an undated but most likely ninth/fifteenth-century copy of Laṭāʿif al-išārāt, is declared on its opening leaf to be ‘the book Šams al-maʿārif of which no [other] copy exists,’ with a further claim that ‘this copy is not the one found among the people, and in it are bonuses and additions to make it complete’ (Kitāb Šams al-maʿārif allati laysa li-nuṣḥatihā wuğūd wa-hāqīhi al-nuṣḥa laysa [sic!] hiyya al-nuṣḥa allatī mawgūda bayna al-nās wa-fihā fawāʾid wa-zawāʾid ‘alā al-tamām). One suspects this note was penned by a bookseller with enough experience in peddling Būnian

59 Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2802, fol. 1a.
works to recognize in the codex an opportunity to promote a ‘secret’ version of ʿSams al-maʿārif.

ʿSams al-maʿārif presents some of the greatest difficulties in the study of the Būnian corpus, and the notion that al-Būnī produced short, medium, and long redactions of it (al-ṣuğrā, al-wuṣṭā, and al-kubrā) is at the heart of much of the confusion and speculation surrounding this work. However, the surviving medieval corpus fails to bear out that there actually were different redactions circulating under those three names in that period, at least not in any consistent sense. This is to say that, among medieval codices, the title ʿSams al-maʿārif wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārif appears in almost every case without any extra size-appellation, and, aside from obvious instances of mis-titling, almost all of these codices contain a single fairly consistent and readily identifiable text. Such textual consistency is lacking entirely in the small handful of medieval codices entitled ʿSams al-maʿārif al-ṣuğrā, and I cannot confirm the existence of any medieval codices bearing the title ʿSams al-

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60 This notion appears to have originated fairly early in the career of the corpus, as evidenced by the title ʿSams al-maʿārif al-ṣuğrā wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārif having been assigned to BnF MS arabe 6556 in the eighth/fourteenth century. To the best of my knowledge, the first bibliographical notice mentioning three redactions of ʿSams al-maʿārif is al-Manāwī’s entry on al-Būnī in al-Kawākıb al-durrīyya fī tarafīm al-sūrat al-ṣūfīyya, a work completed in 1011/1602–3, although al-Manāwī mentions only that short, medium, and long versions exist, without giving incipits or other clues as to their contents (2: 38). Háǧī Ḥalīfa, writing a few decades after al-Manāwī, does not list three versions of ʿSams al-maʿārif in Kaṣf al-zunūn, although he does include a very brief entry for a work called Fusūl ʿSams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, which he says ‘is perhaps ʿSams al-maʿārif (la-allaha ʿSams al-maʿārif)’ (1270), and he makes a passing reference to ʿSams al-maʿārif al-kubrā in the entry for Ibn Ṭalḥa’s al-Durr al-munazzām fī sīr al-aʿẓam (734). The notion of three redactions has since been taken up by many modern scholars, beginning with a 1930 essay by Hans Winkler (see bibliography).

61 Such as Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2799, discussed in the previous paragraph.

62 This is the text that averages around 120 folia in length and begins with the incipit (following the basmala): al-ḥamd li-llāh allāfī ašīʿa ʿams al-maʿārif min ġayb al-ḡayb, or some close variation thereof.

63 Thus, BnF MS arabe 6556 is actually Laṭāʾif al-ḵārāt, while Harvard MS Arab 332 and Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥūrūf M 75 each appear to be entirely disparate works, neither of which has surfaced elsewhere. I have not seen Tunis MS 6711, and cannot comment on its date or contents.
Finally, in at least one case, a turn-of-the-sixteenth-century codex marked as al-kubrā contains the same text found in copies with no size-appellation, i.e. the usual medieval text. What is more, the al-kubrā designation appears to have been added to the titlepage at a later date. On the basis of all this, I would argue that:

1) there is only one widely copied, fairly consistent medieval text that can be called Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾifal-ʿawārif;  
2) the notion of three redactions of Šams al-maʿārif was a sort of a self-fulfilling rumor that gained momentum with time, such that the appellation al-ṣuqrā was applied to various shorter Būnian or pseudo-Būnian texts while others were subsequently labeled al-wustā and al-kubrā, and

3) this rumor was later exploited by the actor or actors who produced the eleventh/seventeenth-century work known as Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā.

Even if these hypotheses could be tested conclusively, however, it would not solve all the problems of Šams al-maʿārif, as even the fairly stable medieval text presents at least two serious conundrums with regard to dating. One is a mention of al-Durr al-munazzam fi l-sīr al-aʿẓam, a work by the Damascene scholar, ḥāṭib, occasional diplomat, and author of apocalyptic literature, Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ṭāmid Ibn Ṭalḥa (d. 652/1254). Mohammad Masad, who devotes a chapter to Ibn Ṭalḥa

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64 I know of three codices bearing the title Šams al-maʿārif al-wustā. Two of these are probably of eleventh/seventeenth century origin, and of these two one is a fragment and the other contains the same text found in the numerous medieval copies with no size-appellation. I have no basis upon which to comment on the third, Tunis MS 7401.

65 This is BnF MS arabe 2649 (copied in Cairo in 913/1508). That the al-kubrā may have been added to the titlepage at a later date (perhaps by a bookseller?) is indicated by the fact that it is written in smaller letters, tucked in above the leftmost end of the rest of the title.

66 The story begins with a holy man in Aleppo who has a vision of a mysterious tablet, and, in a subsequent vision, is instructed by ʿAlī b. Abī Ťalīb to have the tablet explained by Ibn Ṭalḥa; we are then informed that Ibn Ṭalḥa recorded his interpretation of the tablet in his work al-Durr al-munazzam fi l-sīr al-aʿẓam. This is a work of apocalyptic literature of which numerous copies survive, although some of these appear to have been wrongly attributed to al-Būnī (Cordero, El Kitāb Šams al-Maʿārif al-Kubrā, x). To further confuse matters, a version of al-Durr al-munazzam is entirely incorporated into Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, along with an additional frame story that implies al-Būnī’s personal involvement in these events. Given the importance of Ibn Ṭalḥa’s work in apocalyptic traditions of the late medieval and early modern periods,
in his dissertation on the medieval Islamic apocalyptic tradition, argues that *al-Durr al-munazzam* was probably completed in the first half of 644/1246,\(^7\) and the dating conundrum arises from the fact that *Šams al-maʿārif* is cited extensively in *ʿIlm al-hudā* and *Laṭāʿif al-išārāt*, both of which were auditioned in 622/1225. If Masad’s date is correct then this portion of the *Šams*, or at least this mention of the title of Ibn Ṭalḥa’s book, must be a post-622/1225 interpolation. This does not necessarily indicate an instance of pseudepigraphical interpolation however, insofar as, if the date for al-Būnī’s death given in *Kaṣf al-ẓunūn* can be set aside, it is conceivable that al-Būnī lived long enough to make this addition himself. The other, more glaring anachronism is the citation of a statement made in the year 670 (the date is given in the text) by *al-Ḫawārazmī*’s name is followed by a standard benediction for the dead, *qaddasa Allāh rūḥahu*, indicating that this section of the text postdates 670/1271–2. That this interpolation was made somewhat early in the life of the corpus is shown by the fact that the statement and date appear in the earliest copy of *Šams al-maʿārif* surveyed for this project, BnF MS arabe 2647. The codex lacks a dated colophon, but the Baron de Slane estimated that it is from the late seventh/thirteenth century,\(^9\) and it certainly is no more recent than the eighth/fourteenth century. All of the colophonically dated copies of *Šams al-maʿārif* were produced in the ninth/fifteenth century or later, and this stretch of text is a standard feature of those copies as well. Although it may be conceivable that al-Būnī could have lived to such an advanced age as to have made the interpolation himself, it is far more likely that it was done by someone other than al-Būnī, possibly one of his students.

The extant medieval text of *Šams al-maʿārif* is decidedly dedicated to occult–scientific matters, as made clear in a declaration in the introduction that it contains ‘secrets of the wielding of occult powers and the knowledge of hidden forces’ (*fī ẓimmihī min lātāʿif al-taṣrīf fī wa-ʾawārif al-taʿīrāt*), with the accompanying injunction: ‘Shame unto anyone who has this book of mine in hand and reveals it to a stranger, divulging it to one who is not worthy of it’ (*fa-ḥarām ʿalā man waqaʿa a-*)

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\(^{68}\) BnF MS arabe 2647, fol. 46a.

\(^{69}\) Slane, Catalogue des manuscrits arabe, entry no. 2647.
kitābī ḥāḏā bi-yadihi anna yubdīhi li-ḡayr ahlihi wa yubūḥu bi-hi li-ḡayr mustahiqqihi). Following the opening and introduction, the work commences with the presentation of a system associating the letters of the alphabet with various metaphysical/cosmological entities, e.g. the divine throne (ʿarṣ), the planetary spheres, and the four elements. Other chapters contain such things as discussions of the names of the ġinn imprisoned by the prophet Sulaymān; comments on the nature of angels, and instructions on the construction and use of certain awfāq (cryptograms), although all of this is leavened with elements of Sufi theory and devotional practices (ilhām, ḡirā, ḡalwa, etc.). Strikingly, one section is a discussion of alchemy in which Ḥābir b. Hayyān is cited, although the above-mentioned instances of interpolation might be grounds to question whether this was part of the original composition. If the ‘Abū l-Qāsim’ cited in this section is Abū l-Qāsim al-ʿIrāqī (fl. 660s/1260s) then this is all the more likely. There is still hope that an early seventh/thirteenth-century copy of Šams al-maʿārif might be located, but a thorough textual comparison of known medieval copies

70 A wafq (pl. awfāq), lit. ‘conjunction,’ is a written grid of letters and numbers used as a talisman. In some cases these are of the type known within mathematics as ‘magic squares,’ i.e. grids containing all the numbers from 1-n where the rows and columns all add to the same total. More often within the Būnian texts, however, these grids have no obvious mathematical properties, and the term ‘cryptogram’ is perhaps best suited to avoiding confusion on this point.

71 A number of modern scholars, beginning with Toufic Fahd (La Divination arabe, 230–231), have expressed the hope that Manisa MS 45 HK 1445 might be the earliest surviving copy of Šams al-maʿārif, due to a catalog entry that lists it as a copy of that work and notes that its colophon is dated AH 618. Unfortunately for those who had anticipated that it might be the magic bullet in resolving the issues discussed above, the codex in fact bears the title (in the copyist’s hand) Kitāb Šumūs li-l-ʿārif laṭāʾif al-išārāt and the text is that of Laṭāʾif al-išārāt rather than Šams al-maʿārif. Furthermore, while the colophon indeed does appear to say 618, the possibility of this being accurate is obviated by an anecdote from 621 mentioned in the text (on fols. 38a, in this particular codex). The date is written in Hindi–Arabic numerals rather than spelled out in full, as is more common in colophons. Unless this was a particularly clumsy attempt to backdate a codex, it must be assumed to be either a slip of the pen or a peculiar regional letterform for the initial number, which should perhaps be read as an eight or a nine instead of a six. A physical inspection of the codex yields no indication that it is especially old. The text is copied in an Eastern hand, i.e. one with Persianate tendencies, quite unlike the Syro-Egyptian hands that predominate among the great majority of early Būnian codices. The fact
of the work is needed in any eventuality – hopefully, not at the expense of continuing negligence of the rest of the Būnian corpus.

Laṭāʾif al-išārāt fī l-ḥurūf al-ʿulūwiyyāt deals with subject matter somewhat similar to that of Šams al-maʿārif, although the work is more methodically structured and contains no glaring anachronisms. It opens with a lengthy emanationist account of cosmogenesis/anthropogenesis in which the letters of the Arabic alphabet play a constitutive role in the structure of the worlds and of humans. This is followed by a series of shorter sections, each dedicated to a single letter of the alphabet, explicating their metaphysical and cosmological properties through inspired interpretations of the Qurʾān, various hadīt, and statements attributed to past Sufī masters. The majority of these latter sections are accompanied by one or more elaborate talismans which, we are told, if gazed upon in conjunction with various programs of supererogatory fasting and prayer, are capable of enabling the practitioner to witness certain mysteries and wonders of God’s creation. In addition to this visionary praxis, instructions are given whereby certain of the designs and/or various awfāq can be rendered as talismans, the wearing of which will afford the bearer more down-to-earth benefits, such as freedom from fear, provision of sustenance (rizq), etc. It is a possible point of interest that the exordium begins with what may be the earliest surviving written rendition of a hadīt in which Muḥammad berates the Companion Abū Ḍarr that ʾlām–ʾalif must be considered the twenty-ninth letter of the Arabic alphabet. This hadīt seems to have played a key role in Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī’s (d. 796/1394) ideas about language that helped drive the millenarian Ḥūrūfī sect of eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth-century Iran and Central Asia.

Laṭāʾif al-išārāt contains what may be the most highly developed forms of Būnian concepts and technical vocabulary that are shared across all five of the core works. One important example is a notion of the creation and the sustaining of the cosmos occurring in two overarching

that the support is an Oriental laid paper rather than a European one suggests that it quite possibly was produced prior to the end of the ninth/fifteenth century, although it is far from probative. Perhaps the most interesting item to note about Manisa MS 45 HK 1445 is that the full name given to al-Būnī on the titlepage is quite unique, granting him descent from al-Imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

72 BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 3a–b.

73 Regarding the role of this hadīt in Astarābādī’s thought see Bashir, Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis, 69 ff. To the best of my knowledge this likely connection to al-Būnī has not been noted by modern scholars of Ḥūrufism.
‘worlds’ or planes, ‘ālam al-iḥtirāʾ and ‘ālam al-ibdāʾ – terms Pierre Lory renders as ‘ideal creation’ and ‘the creation of forms’ in his remarkable article on al-Būnī’s thought as salvaged from printed editions of Ṣams al-maʿārif al-kubrā. While these two planes/phases are discussed to varying degrees in all five works, in Laṭāʾif al-išārāt they are further subdivided into first and second stages, and each of the resulting four stages is discussed through allusions to numerous discourses. Thus the first and highest stage of God’s creative action, ‘ālam al-iḥtirāʾ al-awwal, is identified with ‘the Cloud’, al-ʿamāʾ, wherein God formed the clay of Adam, arranging and implanting the letters of the alphabet into Adam in such a way that his intellect would aspire to communion with al-ḥādra al-ʿamāʾiyya (‘the nubilous presence’), the highest point of union with divinity that the human mind can attain. This phase is further associated with the letter alif, the divine Throne (al-ʿarṣ), and the First Intellect of a Neoplatonized Aristotelian metaphysics. The process of Creation proceeds through three more stages, each of which is associated with further letters of the alphabet, Adamic faculties, Qurʾānic mythologems, and Neoplatonic hypostases. Thus the second plane/presence, ‘ālam al-iḥtirāʾ al-thānī, is that of ‘the Dust’, al-habāʾ, and is associated with the letter bāʾ, the spirit (rūḥ), the heavenly Pen (qalam), and the Second Intellect. The third, ‘ālam al-ibdāʾ al-awwal, is the atomistic plane, ṭawr al-ḍarr, associated with the letter gīm, the soul (nafs), the Footstool (al-kursī), and the Universal Soul. The fourth, ‘ālam al-ibdāʾ al-thānī, is the plane of composition, ṭawr al-tarkīb, associated with the letter dāl, the heart (qalb), the heavenly Tablet (lawḥ), and the four elements. The whole is a remarkable exposition of a cosmos inextricable from the letters of the alphabet and the divine names. That the accompanying talismans are, in part, intended as aids in gaining supra-rational understandings of the reality of this cosmos gives the lie to any notion that al-Būnī’s works, even in their ‘practical’ aspects, were devoted solely to mundane ends.

The notion of ‘the Cloud’, al-ʿamāʾ, as the initial stage of creation and its use as a cosmological term of art are better known from Ibn ʿArabī’s later writings. The term and concept derive from a well-attested ḥadīth in which, when asked where God was prior to Creation, the Prophet responded: ‘He was in a cloud’ (kāna ḵīf ʿamāʾ). In both men’s writings the Cloud is conceived of as the very first place of manifestation, the

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74 Lory, ‘Science des lettres et magie’, 97.
75 BnF MS ar. 2658, fol. 5a–b and marginal addition.
76 For references in the ḥadīth literature, see Wensinck, Concordance, 4: 388.
juncture (barzaḥ) between the Creator and his creation from whence the worlds unfold. To the best of my knowledge, Ibn Ṭabarī put down in writing his cosmological conception of al-ʿamāʾ only in al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya and Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, neither of which are thought to have been disseminated widely until after Ibn Ṭabarī’s death in 638/1240. Thus, given the 622/1225 dating of the audition notice for Ḭanāfī if al-īšārāt cited above, this would not appear to be a case of al-Būnī borrowing from Ibn Ṭabarī, short of positing an undocumented living relationship between the two. Given that their systems are quite similar on certain points but hardly identical, it well could be an instance in which the influence of al-Mahdawī on both men can be detected.

As mentioned previously, the remaining three major medieval works are distinguished primarily by their omission from the inter-referential circuit that binds together the other five. While this in no way disqualifies them from having been authored by al-Būnī, it does deny them the link to al-Būnī that a reference in Ḭanāfī if al-īšārāt or ʿIlm al-hudā would provide. As measured by the number of surviving copies, al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya fi awrād al-rabbāniyya is by far the most important of these works, and one of the most important works of the corpus as a whole. The survey for this project found forty copies of the work, not all of them complete. One survives from the seventh/thirteenth century (Chester Beatty MS 3168.5), and the greatest number come from the ninth/fifteenth century. As with many of the other works, certain of these codices are professionally copied and fully vocalized, suggesting that the work was prized by some. It is in four parts:

1) a collection of invocatory prayers keyed to each hour of each day of the week, with brief commentaries on the operative functioning of the names of God that appear in each prayer;

2) a division of the names of God in ten groupings (anmāṭ) of names the actions of which in the world are closely related;

3) a further series of invocatory prayers for when various religious holidays, such as the Night of Destiny (laylat al-ḥadr), fall on a given day of the week, and

4) instructions for the composition of awfāq. The whole is conceived as a comment on the Greatest Name of God (al-ism al-ʿizzam) and is organized according to the proposition that the Greatest Name is situationally relative; that is to say, it could be any of the known divine names.

For references to the topic in Ibn Ṭabarī’s writings see Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge, 125–7; Hakīm, al-Muʿjam al-ṣūfī, 820–6; Ebstein and Sviri, ‘The So-Called Risālat al-ḥurūf’, 221–4.
names, varying according to the time and purpose for which it is invoked, the level of spiritual advancement of the practitioner, and so on. Due to this focus on the Greatest Name, the work sometimes appears under the title Šarḥ al-īsm al-aʿẓam.

Beyond the large number of surviving copies, the popularity of al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya is attested by the numerous references to it in mentions of al-Būnī by authors in the centuries following his death. It is almost certainly the work Ibn Taymiyya intended when he referred to al-Būnī as the author of al-Šuʿla al-nūrāniyya (an essentially synonymous title), and it is the only work mentioned by name in Ibn al-Zayyāt’s notice regarding al-Būnī’s tomb. In all likelihood it is also the work referred to by Ibn al-Ḫaṭīb as Kitāb al-anmāṭ, due to the section in which the divine names are divided into ten groups. In describing this work, Ibn al-Ḫaṭīb mentions the invocatory prayers arranged according the days of the week (al-daʿawāt allatī rattahabāʿ alā al-ayyām), expressing his concern that an ordinary Muslim might mistake the work for a simple book of prayers, not realizing the occult powers (al-taṣrīf) that could be brought into play if the prayers were performed. Ibn Ḥaldūn also mentions Kitāb al-anmāṭ, although he is most likely following Ibn al-Ḫaṭīb in this. As discussed in the following section of this paper, al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya was also the subject of a lengthy commentary by ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Biṣṭāmī (regarding whom, see the following section) in the early ninth/fifteenth century, which was no doubt a factor in its enduring popularity.

Tartīb al-daʿawāt fī taḥṣīṣ al-aqwāt al-ḥtalāf al-irādāt, which often appears under the title al-Ṭaʾlīqa fī manāfī al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīm, has been described (on the basis of Leiden MS oriental 1233) by Jan Just Witkam in his article on al-Būnī. Bristling with complex talismanic designs and ending with the key to an exotic-looking Alphabet of Nature (al-qalam al-taḥbīʿ), the work is perhaps the most ‘grimoire-ish’ of all the members of the medieval corpus. Indeed, one would think it to have been the work most likely to draw the ire of ‘conservative’ Muslim thinkers, insofar as it is almost exclusively dedicated to the construction and use of talismans toward concrete, worldly ends, including in some cases the slaying of one’s enemies. That in many cases these talismans are derived from the Qurʾān through the ‘deconstruction’ of the letters of a given āya into a complex design to be inscribed on parchment or a given type of metal would be unlikely to assuage suspicions that it is a book of sorcery.

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78 Ibn Taymiyya, Majmūʿ, 10: 251.
79 Ibn al-Ḫaṭīb, Rawdat al-taʿrif, 327.
Nonetheless, the earliest surviving copy found in the survey for this project was copied into the compilatory codex Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260 (copied in 772/1370) alongside ‘Ilm al-hudā, the most obviously pious-seeming of al-Būnī’s works, which suggests that at least some medieval actors perceived no irreconcilable contradiction between them. The text of this work seems particularly unstable across various copies, and that it was often designated as a ‘notebook’ (ta’līqa) might suggest that it was an unfinished work, or at least that it was regarded as such.

Finally, the short work Qabs al-iqtidāʾ ilā wafaq al-saʿāda wa-nağm al-ihtidāʾ is somewhat tame in comparison to Tarīb al-daʿawāt, although, as the title implies, it does contain instructions on the devising and use of awfāq. The fact that the earliest dated copies of this work are from the ninth/fifteenth century calls its authorship into question more so than the others. It cites the famed Maghribi šayḫ Abū Madyan (d. 594/1197), with whom al-Mahdawī was affiliated, as well as Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Qurašī (d. 599/1202), another disciple of Abū Madyan, and al-Qurašī’s own student Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 636/1238). If the work is authentic to al-Būnī then the mentions of these Western Sufis may hint at some further details of his life and training, although he claims no direct connection to them. As discussed in the fourth section of this paper, these šayḫs also appear in some of the asānīd alleged to be al-Būnī’s in Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, although it is far more likely that Qabs al-iqtidāʾ was the source of these names rather than that the two works can be taken as independently corroborating one another.

In closing this survey of the major works of the medieval corpus, it must be noted that the general observation made here that occult-scientific themes predominate over Sufistic ones in some works (and vice-versa in others) is in no way intended to suggest that clear divisions between these categories are instantiated in al-Būnī’s writings, or that there is any indication that some works of the medieval corpus were originally intended for ‘Sufis’ while others were intended for ‘occultists.’ To the contrary, the themes typically are integrated seamlessly in medieval Būnian writings, such that a division between them is a matter of second-order analysis rather than something native to the texts. That important interpreters of al-Būnī such as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bistāmī viewed the science of letters ‘as a rationally cultivable path to achieve the same knowledge of the divine and of the cosmos that was attainable

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80 Süleymaniye MS Laleli 1594.5, fol. 96a–97b.
by mystics through inspiration” \(^{81}\) should be seen as one possible response to the centuries of debates about whether the science of letters belonged to the ‘foreign’ or the religious sciences.\(^{82}\) For al-Būnī, that various forms of divine inspiration were the very essence of the science of letters, distinguishing it from many other sciences, is made clear near the end of *Laṭāʾif al-isārāt*:

O my brother, know that the secrets of the letters cannot be apprehended by means of analogical reasoning, such as some of the sciences can be, but are realizable only through the mystery of providence, whether through something of the mysteries of inspiration, something of the mysteries of prophetic revelation, something of the mysteries of unveiling, or some [other] type of [divine] communication. Whatever strays from these four categories is but self-deception, in which there is no benefit at all.\(^{83}\)

Indeed, it is made clear at many points in the medieval corpus that for al-Būnī the science of letters was the ‘science of the saints,’ and thus a secret teaching at the heart of Sufism rather than a separate or auxiliary body of knowledge.

That there was a process of selection on the part of readers of Būnian works in favor of material with a practical occult–scientific bent is suggested by the predominance of copies of *Šams al-maʿārif*, *al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya*, and (to a lesser extent) *Laṭāʾif al-isārāt* and *Tartīb al-daʾawāt* among surviving ninth/fifteenth-century codices, and by the lesser numbers of copies of *ʿIlm al-hudā*, *Hidāyat al-qāsidīn*, and *Mawāqif al-ğāyāt* in the same period – although it must be admitted that this could be due in whole or in part to accidents of survival and limitations in the data gathered for this project. As discussed in the following sections, certain trends in the reading of al-Būnī alongside other Sufi writers, especially Ibn ʿArabī, bolster the notion of a process of selection along these lines, as does the form taken by *Šams al-maʿārif*

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\(^{82}\) For an excellent overview of the contours of this debate, see the section ‘Lettrism in classifications of the sciences’ in Matthew Melvin-Koushki’s forthcoming essay, *Occult Philosophy and the Millenarian Quest*, (19–25 in the draft copy).

\(^{83}\) Iʿlam yā aḥḥī anna asrār al-ḥurāf lā tudraku bi-šayʾ min al-qiyyās kamā tudraku baʿd al-ʿulām wa-lā tudraku illā bi-sirr al-ʿināya annā bi-šayʾ min asrār al-ilqāʾ aw šayʾ min asrār al-wahy aw šayʾ min asrār al-kašīf aw nawʾ min anwāʾ al-muḥṭābāt wa-mā ʿadā hāḍihī al-aqṣām al-arbaʿa fā-hadīṯ nafs lā fāʾidata fīḥī. BnF MS arabe 2658, fol. 89b.
Noah Gardiner

al-kubrā when it appeared around the start of the eleventh/seventeenth century.

The transmission and reception of Būnian works from the eighth/fourteenth to the tenth/sixteenth centuries

An understanding of the social milieux in which the works of the Būnian corpus circulated, and of the ways in which they were taught and reproduced, is crucial to assessing the career of the corpus, as well as to examining the relationship(s) of al-Būnī’s teachings to ever-shifting notions of Islamic ‘orthodoxy.’ What follows addresses the geographical spread of the corpus, some prosopographical observations about actors involved with Būnian works, notes on some transmission practices that were used, and a brief assessment of what all this suggests about the role of Būnian works in certain social and intellectual trends of the eighth/fourteenth through tenth/sixteenth centuries. Finally, there is a brief discussion of the legal status of Būnian codices and the notion that risks may have accompanied the production and/or ownership of them.

Some general comments can be made about the geographical spread of the corpus in the centuries after al-Būnī’s death, although these are limited both by the rarity of locative notations in colophons and other paratexts, and by the fact that the data for this article does not include much detailed information on codices in Iranian, northwest African, and southern European libraries. The vast majority of the pre-ninth/fifteenth-century codices examined thus far appear to have originated in Egypt and Syria, judging by paratextual statements, the copyists’ hands, and certain physical characteristics such as the papers used and the few surviving original covers. A handful of these earliest codices are definitively located, e.g. Sūleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260, a collection of Būnian works copied in Damascus in 772/1370; Sūleymaniye MSS Reşid efendi 590.1 and 590.2, a two-part copy of ʿIlm al-hudā copied in Cairo which also notes that its exemplar was copied near Alexandria; and Sūleymaniye MS Reisulkuttab 1162.17, a copy of al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya copied in Damietta in 789/1387. The only definitively located outlier among these early codices is BnF MS arabe 2657, a copy of Latāʾif al-išārāt copied in Mecca in 788/1386; how long it remained there is unknown, but it had found its way to Aleppo by 949/1542, as evidenced by a duʿāʾ inscribed on its titlepage written to protect that city from al-ṭāʾūn, the Black Death.

Codices from the ninth/fifteenth century were produced as far north as Aleppo (the compilatory codex Sūleymaniye MS Laleli 1549, copied in 881/1476), and as far west as Tripoli (the compilatory codex Princeton
MS Garrett 1895Y, copied in 834/1430). On the basis of Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb’s knowledge of al-Būnī, however, it must be the case that Būnian works were circulating in the Maghrib and al-Andalus (at least in Granada) during the eighth/fourteenth century, and their continuing presence in the West is attested by Leo Africanus’ observation of Būnian works circulating in Fez around 905/1500.84 As for the northern and eastern stretches of the Muslim world, the first codices that can be tied definitively to Istanbul do not appear until the latter half of the tenth/sixteenth century, as does a single codex that appears to have been copied in Valjevo, Serbia in 963/1556, not long after Ottoman rule was established there (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS A.F. 162a). However, several earlier codices copied in distinctly Eastern hands strongly suggest that Būnian works were circulating well north and east of Syria by the end of the ninth/fifteenth century, as does evidence of their circulation in a certain transregional intellectual network discussed below.

Beyond the issue of geographical diffusion are questions of the social milieux in which Būnian works were transmitted and presumably put to use. In other words, what sorts of people were copying and/or purchasing these hundreds of manuscripts containing knowledge that is frequently assumed to have been quite heterodox in relation to dominant expressions of Islam? One method of approaching these questions undertaken for this project has been the compilation of a rudimentary prosopography of the human actors (auditors, copyists, owners, patrons, etc.) involved in the production and transmission of the corpus, the result being a list of just over a hundred individuals. There are serious limitations to this approach, insofar as many codices lack colophons, ownership statements, or other paratexts that would be of use in this regard, and because those actors who did leave traces in the corpus most often recorded only sparse information about themselves. Nonetheless, the compilation of what data exist allows for the deduction of some compelling observations, especially when viewed in relation to literary evidence and other sources.

Almost one-third of the actors involved with the corpus identified themselves as Sufis, most commonly through inclusion of the title al-faqīr or some variant thereof prior to their name, and their prevalence among the producers and owners of Būnian works supports the general notion that the spread of the corpus was abetted by the continuing growth in popularity of Sufi modes of piety. The earliest example comes from

the string of titles attached to ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm, one of the auditors of Ḭāfif al-iṣārāt in Cairo in 622/1225, which include al-qādī, ‘the judge,’ al-zāḥid, ‘the ascetic,’ and qādī al-fuqara‘, ‘judge of the Sufis (the poor ones).’ Another thirty-three actors, spread more or less evenly between the eighth/fourteenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries, each identified themselves as al-faqīr, and a number of instances in which the title al-šuyḥ was claimed are probably indicative of Sufis as well. In only a handful of statements did actors label themselves as adherents of a particular order. One finds, for example, ʿUṯmān b. Abī Bakr al-Qādirī al-Ḥanafī as the copyist of a large compilation of Būnian works produced in 893/1488 (Süleymaniye MS Carullah 2083), and al-faqīr Hasan b. Ahmad b. ʿAbī al-ʾAwlawī? al-Qādirī murīdan al-Ḥanafī maḏhaban as the copyist of a codex of Šams al-maʿārif produced in 903/1498 (Süleymaniye MS Nuruosmaniye 2835). Beyond these two Ḥanafīs, the Rifāʿī, Shāfiʿī and Mevlevī orders are also represented, each by a single actor. As is apparent from some of these examples, affiliation with a particular maḏhab was occasionally recorded as well; eight self-identified Shafīʿīs and five Ḥanafīs are represented in the data accumulated for this study.

As a number of recent studies have shown, in late medieval Egypt and Syria the spread and growing social influence of Sufism was facilitated to a significant degree by the championing and financial sponsorship of various individual Sufis and Sufi institutions by Turkish military elites (i.e. mamlūks), as well as by the participation of Arab civilian elites who filled bureaucratic, judicial, and teaching positions in the regimes of the former. This manifested in many cases in the construction of ḥānqāhs and tombs for Sufi saints by wealthy elites, and sometimes also in their defense of controversial Sufis and their followers from attempts by ‘conservative’ factions among the ʿulamāʾ to curb their perceived doctrinal and praxic excesses. Some of the best-documented cases of the latter stem from the numerous controversies throughout the Mamlūk period surrounding the poet cum saint Ibn al-Fāriḍ, as explored by Emil Homrin.85 In light of the prevalence of such Sufi–mamlūk relationships in the late medieval and early modern periods, it is of no small interest that another category of actors intertwined with the Būnian corpus is members of the ruling elite and their households. For example, al-mamlūk Hasan Qadam al-Ḥanafī maḏhaban was the owner of a copy of

85 Homrin, From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint, 55–77. For broader studies of the interactions of military elites and Arab scholars, Sufis, and bureaucrats, see the works by Chamberlain and Berkey listed in the bibliography.
ʿIlm al-hudā, Süleymaniyê MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 588 – the codex was copied in 792/1392, with Hasan Qadam acquiring it in 840/1436. BnF MS arabe 2649, a handsomely rendered copy of Şams al-maʿārif copied in Cairo in 913/1508, includes on its titlepage a patronage notice linking it to sayyid ʿAlī, al-dawādār of the household of al-amīr Ṭūḡān al-Nawrūzī.66 Similarly, the colophon of a copy of ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Bistāmi’s commentary on al-Lūm’a al-nūrāniyya (Süleymaniyê MS Carullah 1560, copied 952/1546) registers it as being from the library (ḫizāna) of the amīr Pîrî [Mehmed] Pasâ b. Ramaḍān (d. 974/1567), the head of a beylik centered in Adana, and notes that it was copied by his mamlûk Ibn ʿAbd Allâh.87

Many of the more lavishly produced copies of Būnian works were no doubt made for elite households. One that was certainly a patronage gift, although no recipient is named, is Süleymaniyê MS Nuruosmaniye 2822, a copy of Tartīb al-daʿawāt (but bearing the title Šarḥ asmāʾ Allâh al-ḥusnā). Copied in 814/1411 and penned in an elegant Syro-Egyptian hand, its most outstanding feature is that all of the many complex talismans are exquisitely rendered in gold ink (i.e. chrysographed), with section headings in blue ink – a combination of colors predominant in illuminated codices produced for Mamlûk courts. An interest in the occult sciences at many Muslim courts is well attested,88 and that this would have intersected with many late medieval and early modern rulers’ enthusiasm for Sufism is hardly surprising. Any science that promised the ability to predict future events was of great interest to those in power, and the defensive aspects of Būnian talismanic praxis were no doubt appealing to players in such dangerous arenas as Mamlûk and Ottoman politics. Cornell Fleischer has argued for the general importance of the occult sciences at Ottoman courts,89 and Hasan Karatas has recently discussed the role of defensive awfāq in early tenth/sixteenth-century court intrigue in Istanbul.90 The elaborately wafq-covered talisman shirts of Ottoman sultans of the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth

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66 BnF MS Arabe 2649, fol. 1a.
67 Süleymaniyê MS Carullah 1560, fol. 123b. Regarding Pîrî Mehmed Pasâ see Y. Kurt’s entry ‘Pîrî Mehmed Paşa, Ramazanoğlu’ in Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, and F. Babinger’s entry ‘Ramaḍān Oğulları’ in Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed.
89 Fleischer, ‘Shadow of Shadows’, and ‘Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences’.
century can be regarded as one outgrowth of the embrace of these occult technologies by preceding rulers.\footnote{For an excellent photographic catalog of these shirts held in the collection of the Topkapı Palace Museum, see Tezcan’s new edition of \textit{Tıslımlı Gömlekler}.}

In addition to \textit{mamlık}s, certain names in the prosopography are suggestive of individuals of Arab descent working as bureaucrats under military regimes, such as the copyist of Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260, ‘Alī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ‘Umar, kātib al-qawāsīn (secretary of the archers), or the qāḍī al-Šām ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, who owned what is probably a tenth/sixteenth-century copy of \textit{Šams al-maʿārif} (Süleymaniye MS Murad Buhari 236). That bureaucrats and others with close ties to military elites were sometimes among the readers of the corpus is also suggested by the mention of al-Būnī’s works in al-Qalqašandī’s (d. 821/1418) great secretarial manual, \textit{Šuhḥ al-aʿṣā fi ṣināʿat al-inšāʿ}, wherein he lists \textit{Laṭāʾif al-iṣārāt} and \textit{Šams al-maʿārif} as works in circulation among the learned of his day.\footnote{Al-Qalqašandī, \textit{Šuhḥ al-aʿṣā}, 1: 475.} In addition to sharing the interests of their rulers in the predictive and defensive aspects of Būnīan praxis, that the central role of complex talismans rendered it an inherently scribal praxis may have added to its appeal for ‘men of the pen.’

As for the means through which Būnīan teachings were transmitted in the centuries after al-Būnī’s death, there is evidence that knowledge of the texts at least sometimes was passed through recognized lines of teachers. This comes from the writings of the Antiochene scholar ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 858/1454), who helped facilitate the continuing popularity and spread of the Būnīan corpus with his commentary on \textit{al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya} (entitled \textit{Rašḥ adwāq al-ḥikma al-rabbāniyya fī ṣarḥ awfāq al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya}) and his other works that drew heavily on Būnīan writings. In \textit{Rašḥ adwāq al-ḥikma}, al-Biṣṭāmī notes that while in Cairo in 807/1404–5, he ‘read’ \textit{al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya} under the instruction of ʿayḥ Abū ʿAbd Allāh ʿIzz al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ǧāmāʿa al-Kīnānī (qaraʿtu kitāb al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya ʿalā al-ṣayḥ... Muḥammad ibn Ǧāmāʿa).\footnote{Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1543.1, fol. 5b.} The qaraʿa ʿalā construction used by al-Biṣṭāmī is indicative of a mode of face-to-face textual transmission closely related to audition (ṣamiʿa ʿalā). While ‘reading’ a text before a ʿayḥ seems generally to have been regarded as one step lower in the hierarchy of textual transmission practices than ‘hearing’ one, it was nonetheless regarded as a valid means of passing on the authority to
utilize and teach a text, and as far preferable to simply reading a book by oneself. The same grammatical construction was used by the glossator of the exemplar for Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 to describe his reading of ‘Ilm al-hudā under the tutelage of Abū l-Fadl al-Ǧumārī, indicating that this practice was already being employed at one step of remove from al-Būnī himself. Al-Bišṭāmī’s mention of having read the book under the supervision of ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad indicates that at least one of al-Būnī’s works was still being taught through a living line of authorities at the dawn of the ninth/fifteenth century. That al-Bišṭāmī felt that his having read al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya under ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad was something worth mentioning indicates that he regarded that act of transmission as licensing his own commentary on the work, and that his readers would have recognized this as well.

The identity of the šayḥ before whom al-Bišṭāmī read al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya is also noteworthy. ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ǧamāʿa (d. 819/1416–17) was a scion of the Ibn Ǧamāʿa scholarly ‘dynasty, ‘and his immediate forbears had served for three generations in some of the highest civilian offices of Mamlūk Cairo and Jerusalem, while also being known for their devotion to Sufism. ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad’s great grandfather, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 733/1333), served as the Ṣafīʾī grand qāḍī of Cairo and šayḥ al-šuyūḥ of the Sufi fraternities on and off between 690/1291 and 727/1327, and his grandfather, ‘Izz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 767/1366), and paternal uncle, Būrhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (d. 790/1388), had similarly illustrious careers. Although the family’s power in Cairo waned during ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad’s lifetime, the Syrian branch of the family maintained a high standing in Damascus and Jerusalem well into the Ottoman period under the nisba al-Nābulusī. ‘Abd al-Ǧānī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), one of the great interpreters of both Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fārid, was a distant relation of ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad. That ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad was regarded (at least by al-Bišṭāmī) as an authorized transmitter of al-Būnī’s teachings further bolsters the notion that al-Būnī’s works had something of a following among Arab scholarly elites with close ties to the ruling military

94 Regarding the difficult question of the distinction between the practices recorded as samīʿa ʿalā and qaraʿa ʿalā, see Makdisi, Rise of Colleges, 241–3.
95 Although the fact that Badr al-Dīn called for destruction of copies of some of Ibn ʿArabī’s works suggests he most likely would have disapproved of al-Būnī’s works. See Knysh, Ibn ʿArabī, 123–4.
97 Sirriyeh, ‘Whatever Happened to the Banu Jamaʾa?’, 55–64.
households. Indeed, al-Bistāmī’s exposure to, and continued interest in, al-Būnī’s works can be taken as further evidence of this, insofar as al-Bistāmī was a sort of professional court intellectual whose career bridged Mamlūk and early Ottoman ruling households in Cairo and Bursa.

Fleischer notes that, while in Cairo, al-Bistāmī ‘established contact with the ‘Rumi’ (Rumelian and Anatolian) scholarly circles that had for several decades journeyed to the Mamlūk capital for education and for the lively spiritual life the city offered.’⁹⁸ Eventually returning to reside at the Ottoman court in Bursa, al-Bistāmī came to be a leading participant in ‘an extraordinary network of religious scholars, mystics, and intellectuals’ connecting Mamlūk, Timurid, and Ottoman courts of the late eighth/nineteenth through ninth/fifteenth centuries, a network whose ideas were loosely unified by shared interest in the occult sciences (especially the science of letters), millenarian speculation, and—though al-Bistāmī and many others identified as Sunnīs—reverence for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṣāliḥ and many of his descendants as recipients of ancient wisdom that had passed down through the prophets since Adam.⁹⁹ Al-Bistāmī often referred to himself and others in this far-flung intellectual collective as the ‘Brethren of Purity and Friends of Fidelity’ (iḥwān al-ṣafā’ wa-ḥullān al-wafā’), an evocation of those proto-Ismā‘īlī provocateurs of fourth/tenth-century Iraq, whose Epistles (Rasā‘il iḥwān al-ṣafā’) constitute one of the great bodies of ‘golden age’ Islamic occult-scientific literature. A key early figure in this network seems to have been Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥusayn al-Aḥlāfī (d. 799/1397), a perhaps-Damascene physician, alchemist, and astrologer who served in the court of the Mamlūk sultan, al-Malik al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn Barqūq (d. 801/1399).¹⁰¹ Three of al-Aḥlāfī’s students also have been associated with modern scholars with the neo-Iḥwān al-ṣafā’: the Timurid thinker Sā‘īn al-Dīn Turka Ẓafāhānī (d. 835/1432), a theorist in the science of letters whose ‘stated goal was to create a universal science that would encompass history and the cosmos and unify all of human knowledge under its aegis,’ and who a number of times was forced to defend himself against charges of heresy;¹⁰² Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (d. 858/1454), the Timurid historian (and biographer of Timur himself) who was also known as an expert in the occult sciences and cryptographic poetry

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⁹⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰¹ Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, 139 ff.
¹⁰² Melvin-Koushki, Occult Philosophy and the Millenarian Quest, 2.
The strongest claims for the group’s coherence in arguing that the neo-ṣaḥāfa ‘movement’ (if indeed it ever achieved a level of coherence worthy of that label), and the precise contours of the political and/or religious convictions its members shared, are the topics of much current research, most of it focused on the ninth/fifteenth century. It is of no small interest then, that in the multipart paratext at the end of Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.2, the aforementioned copy of ʿIlm al-ḥudā completed in Cairo in 798/1396, the collator Ayyūb b. Quṭṭūl Beg al-Rūmī al-Ḥanafī notes the following about the exemplar from which he had worked: ‘The copy of the text against which this copy was collated has written at the end of it that it was collated, as well as possible, in the presence of the Brethren of Purity and Friends of Fidelity at the Muhāssaniyya ḥāngāh…’ (Wa-l-nuṣḥa allāti qūbilat ḥādīhi ʿalayhā makūb fī āḥirhā wa-qūbilat hasab al-imkān bi-ḥadrat ḣāwān al-ṣaḥāfa’ wa-ḥullān al-wafā’ bi-l-ḥāngāh al-muḫāssaniyya bi-ṭāgr al-Īskāndariyya...). It is noted in the colophon to the first part of this set (MS Reşid efendi 590.1) that this exemplar was produced in 738/1337. Thus, if this statement is a direct quote of what was found in the exemplar—which the phrasing certainly suggests—it would appear that the self-designation ḣāwān al-ṣaḥāfa’ wa-ḥullān al-wafā’ was in use among some of those involved with the Būnian corpus more than sixty years prior to al-Buṣṭāmi’s studying of al-Lum’a al-nūrāniyya in Cairo, a date that would push the origins of the movement at least to the time of al-Aḥlāfī’s youth. Alternatively, it could be supposed that Ayyūb b. Quṭṭūl Beg al-Rūmī, himself perhaps a

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103 Binbaş, Sharaf al-Din ‘Alı Yazdı, 100.
104 Ibid., 144–5.
105 See Fleischer, Ancient Wisdom; Binbaş, Sharaf al-Din ‘Alı Yazdı, 99–106; Melvin-Koushki, Occult Philosophy and the Millenarian Quest, 11–12 and 25; Fazioğlu, ‘İlk Dönem Osmanlı İlim’; Gril, Esoterisme. Binbaş has made the strongest claims for the group’s coherence in arguing that the neo-Ḥāwānīs were ‘a non-hierarchical intellectual collectivity’ (106).
Noah Gardiner

member of the Cairene Rūmī circles Fleischer describes, retrojected this appellation onto the earlier gathering.

Al-Būnī’s works were certainly in circulation among some ‘members’ of the neo-Itwān al-safā by the late eighth/fourteenth and early ninth/fifteenth centuries, and likely were an ingredient of al-Aḥlāfī’s teachings. Elements of Būnian praxis, typically in combination with interpretations of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, feature prominently in many of al-Bistāmī’s other works beyond his commentary on al-Lum’a al-nūrānīyya, especially in his Šams al-āšāq fi ‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-awfāq. Šā‘īn al-Dīn Turka acknowledged the efficacy and legitimacy of Būnian praxis, although he too drew heavily on Ibn ‘Arabī and positioned his own interest in the science of letters as serving philosophical rather than practical ends. Indeed, it seems as if a dynamic may have emerged in this period whereby the works of al-Būnī were understood to convey the practical application of the science of letters while those of Ibn ‘Arabī were credited with propounding its philosophical/theoretical dimensions. Certainly their works seem often to have been read together, as indicated by the numerous compilatory codices of the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/sixteenth centuries (and beyond) in which both men’s writings are bound, or in which Būnian works appear alongside those of Ibn ‘Arabī’s famous interpreters, such Šadr al-Dīn al-Quṇāwī (d. 673/1274). Such pairings are all the more striking in light of al-Būnī and Ibn ‘Arabī both having been students of al-Mahdawī, and the apparent popularity of Šahn al-hudā in the eighth/fourteenth century suggests that many readers would have been aware of this shared background. Of course, parallels between al-Būnī and Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas, such as the aforementioned notion of ‘the Cloud’ as the first stage of creation, were no doubt apparent to readers of the period as well, and the emphasis on the practical value of al-Būnī’s writings and the preference for Ibn ‘Arabī as a theorist may have been factors in readers’ selections of which Būnian works were worthy of reproduction.

The understanding of al-Būnī and Ibn ‘Arabī as two sides of the same coin is also seen in the writings of some of their critics. Both Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥajīb and Ibn Ḥalduhn closely associated al-Būnī with Ibn ‘Arabī, grouping them with other Sufis whose teachings they considered radical, such as Ibn Barrağān, Ibn Qasī, Ibn Sabīn, Ibn al-Fārīd, et al. Ibn al-Ḥajīb, in his Rawdat al-taʾrīf bi-l-hubb al-ṣarīf, referred to this grouping under the rather dubious heading of the ‘accomplished [mystics] who consider themselves to be perfect’ (min al-mutammimīn

106 Melvin-Koushki, Occult Philosophy and the Millenarian Quest, 17.
bi-zaʾmihim al-mukammalin),\(^{107}\) while the more critical Ibn Ḥaldūn referred to them as ‘extremist Sufis’ (al-ğulāt min al-mutaṣawwīfā).\(^{108}\) Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb’s explanation of the cosmological presuppositions of the science of letters allegedly shared by these Sufis is in fact closely adapted from the section of Laṭāʾif al-īšārāt wherein al-Būnī’s four-fold scheme of creation is initially presented, though Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb does not identify al-Būnī as his source.\(^ {109}\) Ibn Ḥaldūn’s presentation of the same topic in Šīfāʾ al-sāʾil li-taḥṣīl al-masāʾil in turn appears to be greatly indebted to Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb’s text.\(^ {110}\) Ibn Ḥaldūn’s critique of the ‘extremist’ Sufis was multi-faceted, and included charges that their obscure terminology and speculative theosophy distracted from the true duty of Muslims to obey God’s law, accusations that they were crypto-agents of millenarian Ismāʿīlī theories of the mahdi (with the Shiʿite mahdi replaced by the Sufi ‘pole [quṭb] of the age’), and of course his indictment of the science of letters as a form of sorcery in Sufi garb. Alexander Knysh has argued that Ibn Ḥaldūn’s misgivings were motivated by ‘sociopolitical rather than theological considerations,’ and that they ‘should be seen against the background of the turbulent Maghribi history that was punctuated by popular uprisings led by self-appointed mahdīs who supported their claims through magic, thaumaturgy, and occult prognostication’.\(^ {111}\) Taking a somewhat different tack, James Morris has recently argued that Ibn Ḥaldūn’s accusations were not theological or social critiques so much as strategic elements in a rhetorical offensive aimed at the elimination of ‘any suspicion of an intellectually and philosophically serious alternative to Ibn Ḥaldūn’s own understanding of the proper forms and interrelations of Islamic philosophy and religious belief’.\(^ {112}\) Without quite contradicting either of these analyses, I would put forward the proposition that, at least with respect to his attack in al-Muqaddima on al-Būnī and Ibn ʿArabī as promulgators of the science of letters, Ibn Ḥaldūn may have been responding to the more tangible and immediate threat of millenarian and occult-scientific ideas circulating at the Cairene court and in elite circles.

\(^{107}\) Knysh, Ibn ʿArabī, 179.


\(^{109}\) Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb, Rawdat al-taʿrīf, 324–6.


\(^{111}\) Ibid.

orbiting it. Gril observes that this section of al-Mugaddima does not appear in the version of the work that Ibn Ḥaldūn drafted while still in the Maghrib, which suggests that he added it sometime after his arrival in Cairo in 784/1382—the same year that al-Ǎḥlāṭī’s patron Barqūq first attained the sultanate. Given that al-Būnī and Ibn ʿArabī’s writings seem to have played a prominent role of in the thought of the neo-Iḥwān al-ṣafā’, the pro-ʿAlīd mythology and occult and millenarian preoccupations the group cultivated, and the fact that they seem to have been active in Egyptian elite circles as least as early as al-Ǎḥlāṭī’s tenure at Barqūq’s court, but possibly decades earlier, I think the possibility must be entertained that this section of al-Mugaddima was aimed at the intellectual foundations of the neo-Iḥwān al-ṣafā’, or some germinal form of the group.

That Ibn Ḥaldūn was not averse to attempts to enforce his views on these matters is clear from the fatwā he issued while in Egypt calling for the destruction by fire or water of books by Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Sabīn, Ibn Barraḡān, and their followers, on the grounds that they were ‘filled with pure unbelief and vile innovations, as well as corresponding interpretations of the outward forms [of scripture and practice] in the most bizarre, unfounded, and reprehensible ways’. Although al-Būnī’s works are not specified in the fatwā, that they would be included in this general category seems clear from Ibn Ḥaldūn’s earlier writings. Of course, that a fatwā was issued hardly guarantees that it was carried out, and I am aware of no evidence that action was taken on Ibn Ḥaldūn’s injunction. This raises the fascinating question of whether or not codices containing Būnīan works were ever the targets of organized destruction, or otherwise suffered the status of legally hazardous objects that books of magic have often borne in other cultural milieux.

The Damascene mudarris and ḥāṭīb Tāḡ al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) dictated in his Muʿīd al-niʿam that booksellers were forbidden from peddling works by heretics or astrologers. The subject is not touched upon in Ibn al-ㄢュwwa’s (d. 729/1329) acclaimed guide to supervision of the public markets, Maʿālim al-qurba fī ʿaḥkām al-ḥisba, and neither is anything else pertaining to the supervision of booksellers by city authorities, suggesting that enforcement of such dictates via the muhtasib

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114 Morris’ translation (An Arab Machiavelli?”, 249).
was uncommon in this period.\(^{116}\) To the best of my knowledge there is no record in the literary sources of organized destruction of Būnian works having occurred. What is more, the numerous surviving Būnian codices that are finely wrought objects with signed colophons, ownership notices, patronage statements, etc. hardly suggest works that were regularly subject to legal interdiction. As for how they were obtained, some were certainly copied by those who wanted to own them, but certain data suggest that copies of Būnian works also could be purchased in the same ways as those of other sorts of works. Süleymaniye MS Hafid efendi 198 is a copy of \(\text{Šams al-maʾārif wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārif}\) rendered in a highly readable Syro-Egyptian \(\text{nash}\) in 855/1451 by one Muḥammad b. Ḥaǧǧī al-Ḫayrī al-Šafī. As this name is rather distinctive, it is almost certain (and slightly ironic) that this is the same Muḥammad b. Ḥaǧǧī who in 870/1465 produced a copy of \(\text{Ǧalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī}’s\) commentary on al-Ṣubkī’s own \(\text{Ǧamīʿ al-ḡawāmiʿ fi ʿusūl al-fiqh}\) (Chester Beatty MS 3200). While it is possible that al-Ḥayrī copied both al-Būnī’s work and this volume on \(\text{fiqh}\) for his own use, it is at least as likely that he worked as a professional copyist, producing both codices under commission. Another example, albeit a very late one, is two complete copies (i.e. not the two halves of a set) of \(\text{Šams al-maʾārif al-kubrā}\) produced in Jerusalem, Süleymaniye MSS Hekimoğlu 534, copied in 1118/1707, and Hekimoğlu 537, copied in 1119/1708, both of which were copied by one Muḥammad Nūr Allāh al-ḥāfīz ʿl-kišām Allāh. This suggests that \(\text{Šams al-maʾārif al-kubrā}\) was part of Muḥammad Nūr Allāh’s standard repertoire, and, especially given the technical difficulties involved in the rendering of complex talismans, it is quite conceivable that some earlier copyists also may have ‘specialized’ in Būnian works to the extent of including them in their regular offerings. Of course, it is also quite possible that some scribes refused to do such work on religious grounds.

In summary, while it is possible that, as Yahya Michot proposes, Būnian works were popular among street-level astrologers and other ‘magical’ practitioners serving the general public,\(^{117}\) there is nothing to indicate that such people were especially responsible for the corpus’ spread. Neither is there any indication that codices of Būnian works were marked as particularly illicit objects. Indeed, the books seem frequently

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\(^{116}\) Ibn al-Uḥuwwa does deal with astrologers operating in the sūq, although his directives regarding them are fairly mild. See Michot and Savage-Smith, *Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology*, 280.

\(^{117}\) Ibid. 279–80.
to have moved among a rather elite readership, close to the centers of power, as well as through wider Sufi circles, and to have been transmitted and copied in essentially the same ways as works on other topics, including—at least until the turn of the ninth/fifteenth-century—transmission through ‘authorized’ lines of teachers. However, as discussed in the following section, it seems to be the case that whatever slight protection against undue alteration and/or forgery that such transmission practices may have provided largely had fallen by the wayside by the turn of the eleventh/seventeenth century.

**Al-Būnī in the eleventh/seventeenth century: Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā**

Al-Būnī’s modern reputation as a master of magic rests largely on the lengthy, talisman-laden miscellany on the occult sciences entitled Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā (sometimes called Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārif, or just Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārif, although it is drastically different from the medieval work by that name), a work that apparently was introduced to the Western scholarly community by Wilhelm Ahlwardt’s late nineteenth-century catalog entry detailing the contents of a codex held in Berlin, and which has appeared since around the same time in a number of commercial Middle Eastern printed editions.\(^{118}\) A scholarly consensus has emerged that large parts of the work probably are interpolations by authors other than al-Būnī.\(^ {119} \)

What follows supports this by verifying the late production dates of the numerous surviving manuscript copies of the work, as well as by identifying the origins of some of the asānīd near the end of the work

\(^ {118} \) Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss*, entry no. 4125.

\(^ {119} \) *Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā* is a lengthy and rather uneven work. It is divided into forty chapters (*fuṣūl*) which are largely self-contained texts on a variety of occult-scientific topics. Many scholars have noted multiple problems of coherence and consistency between the various chapters of the work, particularly in various schema of correspondences between the letters of the Arabic alphabet and sundry astrological forces, e.g. Francis, ‘Islamic Symbols’, 149-58. Pierre Lory offers the most generous and considered defense of *Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā* in asserting that, while it may not aspire to systematic philosophical coherence, it at least expresses a generally consistent view of a world determined by the metaphysical action of the divine names and hence manipulable thereby (*La science des lettres*, 96). Above and beyond the issue of internal coherence, a number of scholars, beginning in the 1960s with Mohamed el-Gawhary and Toufic Fahd, have noted serious difficulties in reconciling parts of the *Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā* with the widely accepted death date for al-Būnī of 622/1225.
that are claimed to be al-Būnī’s, and which many modern scholars have puzzled over.

The most basic observation regarding Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā to have emerged from the survey conducted for this project is that, of the twenty-six colophonically dated copies of the work (out of fifty-one total), the earliest, Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek MS 2755, is dated 1623 in a handlist of the collection. Of the fourteen undated copies that I have been able to view, none is possessed of any features that suggest an earlier date of production, but rather they are remarkably similar in their mise-en-page, hands, and other features to the dated copies. Given the plethora of dated copies of other Būnian works stretching back to the seventh/thirteenth century, there is no compelling reason that, if such a lengthy and important work were composed much earlier than the eleventh/seventeenth century, not even a single earlier dated copy would have survived. The fact that al-Manāwī mentions ṣuğrā, wuṣṭā, and kubrā versions of Šams al-maʿārif in al-Kawākib al-durriyya (completed in 1011/1602-3) could indicate a slightly earlier origin for the work, but, as argued above, the use of this designation could just as well have been the result of owners or booksellers with copies of the medieval Šams reacting to the presence of other texts marked as Šams al-maʿārif al-suğrā. Whatever its precise date of origin, the encyclopedic Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā is certainly a product of one or more early modern compilators, and not of al-Būnī or his amanuenses.

A section of Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā that has commanded a great deal of attention from modern scholars is a set of asānīd for al-Būnī near the end of the work, which claim to identify al-Būnī’s mentors in the science of letters and other areas of knowledge, as well as to identify the lines of teachers preceding al-Būnī’s masters through whom this knowledge was passed down. Indeed, some of the oft-noted issues of anachronism in Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā stem from these asānīd, insofar as they place people assumed to have been younger than al-Būnī several steps before him in the chain of transmission, such that, for example, he is said to have received the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī through five intermediaries, and those of al-Shāǧī’s pupil Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) through three intermediaries. Several modern researchers have commented on these issues, although Witkam has done the most thorough analyses of the asānīd based on the forms they take in printed

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120 Al-Manāwī, al-Kawākib al-durriyya, 2: 38.
121 Lory, La science des lettres, 92; Witkam, ‘Gazing at the Sun’, 194.
editions of the work, and I have drawn in part on Witkam’s work in what follows.122

It can now be shown that at least two of the asānīd were copied from the writings of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī, where they were originally presented as al-Biṣṭāmī’s own chains. The first instance is the chain that, in Ṣams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, claims to trace one of the lines through which al-Būnī’s knowledge of the science of letters was developed back to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; this is ‘Pedigree C’ in Witkam’s analysis.123 Table 1 below shows the asānīd as they appear in three sources: the left-hand column is from Süleymanie MS Bağdath Vehbi 930, a codex copied in 836/1433 of a work by al-Biṣṭāmī bearing the title al-‘Uğala fi ḥall al-anmāt al-mu’arrafa bi-ḡam’ Abī l-‘Abbās Aḥmad.

Table 1: First example of a plagiarized isnād

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS Bağdath Vehbi 930 fol. 627</th>
<th>MS Beşir Ağa 89 fol. 213</th>
<th>Witkam 2007 ‘Pedigree C’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī</td>
<td>Habīb al-ʿAḵāmī</td>
<td>Habīb al-ʿAḵāmī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habīb al-ʿAḵāmī</td>
<td>Dāwūd al-Tā’ī</td>
<td>Dāwūd al-Tā’ī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dāwūd al-Tā’ī</td>
<td>Maʿrūf al-Karḥī</td>
<td>Maʿrūf al-Karḥī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maʿrūf al-Karḥī</td>
<td>Sarī al-Suṭḥī</td>
<td>Sarī al-Dīn al-Suṭḥī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarī al-Suṭḥī</td>
<td>Günayd al-Bağdādī</td>
<td>Günayd al-Bağdādī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Günayd al-Bağdādī</td>
<td>Mīmṣād al-Dīnawarī</td>
<td>Mīmṣād al-Dīnawarī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mīmṣād al-Dīnawarī</td>
<td>Ahmad al-Aswad</td>
<td>Ahmad al-Aswad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad al-Aswad</td>
<td>Ahmad al-Qāzīlī</td>
<td>Muhammad al-Qāzīlī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad al-Qāzīlī</td>
<td>Abū l-Nāǧīb al-Suhrawardī</td>
<td>Abū l-Nāḡīb al-Suhrawardī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū l-Nāḡīb al-Suhrawardī</td>
<td>Qutt al-Dīn al-Abhārī</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qutt al-Dīn al-Abhārī</td>
<td>Rukn al-Dīn al-Saqsīsī(?)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rukn al-Dīn al-Saqsīsī(?)</td>
<td>Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Sīrāzī</td>
<td>Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Sīrāzī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Sīrāzī</td>
<td>‘Abd Allāh al-Baṭlānī</td>
<td>‘Abd Allāh al-Baṭlānī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Abd Allāh al-Baṭlānī</td>
<td>Qāsim al-Sīrāzī</td>
<td>Qāsim al-Sīrāzī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qāsim al-Sīrāzī</td>
<td>Qawwām al-Dīn Muhammad al-Biṣṭāmī</td>
<td>‘Abd Allāh al-Biṣṭāmī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qawwām al-Dīn Muhammad al-Biṣṭāmī</td>
<td>Alā’ al-Dīn al-Biṣṭāmī</td>
<td>Alā’ al-Dīn al-Biṣṭāmī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muhammad b. Ahmad b. al-ʿAṯrānī</td>
<td>‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī</td>
<td>Al-Būnī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī</td>
<td>Al-Būnī</td>
<td>Al-Būnī</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

122 Ibid., 190–7.
123 Ibid., 193.
Although the work is obviously related to al-Būnī, al-Bistāmī is clearly listing his own credentials in supplying this list. The middle column is from Süleymaniye MS Beşir Ağa 89, a copy of Śams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā produced in 1057/1647, one of the earlier dated copies of the work. When these two are compared side by side, it is quite clear that al-Bistāmī’s isnād has been arrogated to al-Būnī, with a few names having been omitted. Even some of the language al-Bistāmī uses to open the presentation of his isnād is reproduced in Śams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā, and the language used within the isnād regarding modes of transmission is also identical. Finally, the right-hand column is from Witkam’s article; it reflects the Murad printed edition of Śams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā. In addition to the swapping out of al-Bistāmī’s name for al-Būnī’s, one can see a cumulative loss of information from one chain to the next as names drop out or become garbled.

A similar process appears to have occurred with regard to al-Būnī’s alleged isnād for knowledge of kalimat al-shahāda, ‘Pedigree A’ in Witkam’s analysis. In the Table 2 (shown overleaf), the source for al-Bistāmī’s isnād is Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1543.1, an abridged copy of Rašh aqwāq al-hikma that probably was produced in the tenth/sixteenth century, in which the isnād is given as al-Bistāmī’s source for knowledge of ‘ilm al-hurūf wa-l-awfāq. In this case, where al-Bistāmī abbreviated the list by skipping the names of the ‘poles’ (aqtāb) between al-Šādīlī and the Prophet Muḥammad, those names have been supplied in Śams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā, albeit with al-Šādīlī’s name suppressed. A similar degeneration of information as that noted for the previous set of chains occurs here as well.

In Table 2, the proof of plagiarism lies in the names at the top of the list, particularly in that of Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Kūmī (al-Tūnīsī), a known figure whom Brockelmann identifies as having been writing in 810/1407, and whom al-Bistāmī claimed as a personal teacher. That al-Kūmī could have been four steps removed from al-Šādīlī and also have been al-Bistāmī’s teacher is perfectly conceivable. The same obviously cannot be said of him and al-Būnī.

124 This being the sentence that begins ‘ḫātimā fī ḍhr sanad šaykinā qaddasa lāh sirrham... ’
125 GAL, SII: 358.
Table 2: Second example of a plagiarized *isnād*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS Carullah 1543.1 fol. 5b–6a</th>
<th>MS Beşir Ağa 89 fol. 213a–b</th>
<th>Witkam 2007 ‘Pedigree A’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Bistāmī</td>
<td>Al-Būnī</td>
<td>Al-Būnī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Duḥhān(?)</td>
<td>Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Ḥāfī</td>
<td>Abū l-ʿAzāʾim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū l-ʿAzāʾim Māḍī b. Suḥlān</td>
<td>Abū l-ʿAzāʾim Māḍī</td>
<td>Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Abī al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ḥawārazm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pole after pole to... (<em>Wa-huwa aljāda ‘an qāb ba’dā qāb īla...</em>)</td>
<td>Abū Madīyan Suʿayb b. al-Ḥasan al-Andalusī al-Iṣbīlī</td>
<td>Abū Madīyan Suʿayb b. al-Ḥasan al-Andalusī al-Iṣbīlī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šuʿayb Ayyūb b. Saʿīd al-Ṣināḡī</td>
<td>Abū Yaʿzā al-Maʿarrī</td>
<td>Abū Yaʿzā al-Maʿarrī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibn Muḥammad Tubūr(?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ǧaflī b. Maqālān(?)</td>
<td>Abū Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir</td>
<td>Abū Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mūsā al-Kaẓīm</td>
<td>Mūsā al-Kaẓīm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū Gaʿfar al-Ṣādiq</td>
<td>Abū Gaʿfar al-Ṣādiq</td>
<td>Abū Gaʿfar al-Ṣādiq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaʿfar al-Ṣādiq</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad al-Bāqīr</td>
<td>Muḥammad al-Bāqīr</td>
<td>Muḥammad al-Bāqīr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zayn al-ʿAbīdīn</td>
<td>Zayn al-ʿAbīdīn</td>
<td>Zayn al-ʿAbīdīn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abī Tālib</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Ḥusayn b. Alī b. Abī Tālib</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although certain of al-Bûnî and al-Bîstâmî’s works perhaps could easily be mistaken as a work of the other (several modern catalogers have done so), I find it difficult to conceive of a scenario in which the arrogation of al-Bîstâmî’s asânîd to al-Bûnî could have occurred other than through a deliberate act of forgery, especially as al-Bîstâmî refers to himself in the third person in his versions of these chains. These are only two of eleven asânîd given for al-Bûnî in Šams al-ma’ârif al-kubrâ, and it is possible that some of the others may contain valid information, although these two instances of plagiarism are hardly positive indicators of that. As noted in the second section of this paper, Abû Madyân and two other šayhs mentioned in Qabs al-iqtidâ also appear in certain of these chains, although I am of the opinion that Qabs al-iqtidâ was probably the source upon which these chains were constructed. In short, I think it much more likely that the others chains in Šams al-ma’ârif al-kubrâ also are borrowed from other non-Bûnian sources, construed from other Bûnian or pseudo-Bûnian texts, or simply fabricated from whole cloth.

That al-Bîstâmî’s chains were assigned to al-Bûnî provides important clues as to the way Šams al-ma’ârif al-kubrâ as a whole was created. While certain parts of the work clearly were taken from earlier Bûnian works,126 I would propose that al-Bîstâmî’s writings were likely the source of other parts of the text beyond these two chains. Even at a glance, the talismans in Šams al-ma’ârif al-kubrâ (particularly the complex borders around many talismans in which the name Allâh is written repeatedly) are far more similar to the talismans in al-Bîstâmî’s Šams al-âfâq fi ’ilm al-ḥurûf wa-l-awfâq and other of his works than to any of those in the medieval Bûnian corpus. Of course, some parts of the Šams al-ma’ârif al-kubrâ may be entirely original to it, and a careful study of both men’s writings and similar works will be required to establish the provenance of the text’s many parts.

That the arrogation of al-Bîstâmî’s asânîd to al-Bûnî seems to have gone unnoticed and/or unchallenged suggests that living lines of authorized transmission of Bûnian works had died away in this period, and/or that asânîd generally had become primarily notional markers of a text’s age and good provenance rather than organizing principles for living communities of readers/practitioners. The success of Šams al-

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126 For example, large parts of the opening of the medieval Šams al-ma’ârif wa-latâ‘if al-awârîf are incorporated into that of Šams al-ma’ârif al-kubrâ, although the latter has a different incipit: Şahâda azal fa-min nûr hâqlihî şahâda...
Noah Gardiner

maʿārif al-kubrā suggests that it met some real demand in the marketplace for a work of this sort, and the text and its numerous codices are incredibly important sources for the study of the occult sciences in the eleventh/seventeenth-century and beyond. They are not, however, reliable sources for the study of al-Būnī’s thought as it was originally presented, or the medieval reception thereof. It is hoped that this distinction will take root as studies of al-Būnī and the Islamicate occult sciences move forward.

Conclusion
Al-Būnī and the full range of his works have been excluded too long from serious consideration in the historiography of Islamic thought and society, particularly with regard to what may have been his transformative role in Sufism. In modern times, al-Būnī often has been regarded as an archetypal ‘magician,’ a development that I think was largely the result of a centuries-long process of selection on the parts of readers and producers of his works in favor of practical occult–scientific aspects of his thought, the more pietistic and philosophical elements having been largely overshadowed by and integrated with the thought of Ibn ʿArabī by their shared interpreters – one important and late product of this process being Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā. However, the scholarly misapprehension of al-Būnī has also been the result of a major failure of textual scholarship conditioned by a modern academic predisposition to downplay the historical importance of the occult sciences. Many mid-twentieth-century scholars of Islamicate history participated in a tendency, well entrenched in the humanities and social sciences of their time, to regard ‘magic’ as an ancient but persistent detritus, an irrational and antisocial atavism thriving primarily among the poorly educated and flourishing in moments of cultural decline.127 That many of these scholars were content to draw on the easily available Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā as the main representative of al-Būnī’s thought is, in my estimation, symptomatic of their presumption of his fundamentally irrelevant and/or deleterious role in Islamic thought. Armand Abel, in his essay on the occult sciences as a sign of the ‘decadence’ of late-medieval thought and culture, derided the ‘confused doctrine’ and jumbled

contents of Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā. The historian of Islamic science Manfred Ullmann declared al-Būnī to have been a ‘credulous’ man and the work a collection of popular magical recipes with no roots in Arabic literary traditions. In the second edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam, Dietrich calls Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā al-Būnī’s ‘main work,’ and describes it as ‘a collection both muddled and dreary’ of popular magical materials. In short, it seems that for these scholars Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā was convenient evidence of what they assumed to be the intrinsic incoherence of magical thinking, and thus they saw no need to inquire further into the textual tradition. More puzzling is the reliance on Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā by scholars not at all hostile to al-Būnī or to magic and the occult sciences generally, though the modern fame of the work and ease of access undoubtedly have played important roles. I believe it to be imperative that, as research proceeds, more attention is paid to the full range of major medieval Būnian works. Of course a great deal of work also remains to be done on the numerous works attributed to al-Būnī which survive in only one or two copies.

Were al-Būnī’s works ‘books of magic?’ It is highly unlikely that anyone who owned and used them regarded them as books of ‘sorcery’ (sihr), insofar as sihr was primarily an accusatory designation for marking certain activities as intrinsically un-Islamic. A number of other terms the meanings and moral implications of which were more fluid are far more pertinent to the discussion of Būnian works, especially ‘ilm al-ḥurūf and ṣīmiyāʾ. To my mind the expressions of piety that run through out al-Būnī’s works absolutely cannot be dismissed as a mere veneer on ‘pre-Islamic’ beliefs and practices, especially given their rootedness in ‘ilm al-ḥurūf, a tradition that, however controversial, has a lengthy pedigree in Islamic thought and is thoroughly suffused with veneration for the Qur’ān. It is in fact hard to ascertain that al-Būnī’s works were popular among the unlettered masses so commonly associated with ‘magical’ practices in modern scholarship, while the evidence certainly indicates an audience among the elites. That Ibn Ḥaldūn and others tried to portray al-Būnī’s works as sorcerous is almost

131 For an excellent discussion of Qur’ānic notions of sihr and related terms, see Hamès – Hamès, ‘La notion de magie’, passim.
132 On the latter term, see MacDonald [Fahd], ‘Ṣīmiyāʾ’, Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed.; also Lory, ‘Kashīfī’s Aṣrār-i Qāsimī’, 531–5.
certainly evidence that the works were gaining an alarming (to the critics) degree of acceptance among ‘people who mattered,’ rather than of their having been primarily ‘popular’ practices widely looked down upon by the educated.

In keeping with Kieckhefer’s axiom noted at the outset of this article, it must also be asked if al-Būnī’s works were ‘magical books?’ Whether or not the books themselves were regarded as especially powerful artifacts is one of many questions that require further investigation. That some of them contained talismanic designs does not imply that these designs would have been regarded as ‘charged’ talismans, insofar as a variety of other practices (supererogatory fasting and prayer, construction at specific times, etc.) were required for them to be effective, and in many cases they were meant to be inscribed on specific metals or other media. On the other hand, it is very common to find numerous awfāq scrawled on the flyleaves of Būnian works, often accompanied by the texts of brief invocatory prayers, which suggests that their inscription in a Būnian work rather than in some other book was believed to enhance their efficacy.

I cannot help but add that, in the grand sense that Būnian works may have helped reshape the contours of Sufism and other arenas of Islamic thought, they were magical books indeed. Despite the attempts of many twentieth-century Sufi studies scholars to construct ‘Sufism proper’ as concerned exclusively with interior spiritual discovery and/or ascetic withdrawal, it has increasingly been recognized of late that Sufism, always polyphonic, was never entirely innocent of claims to occult power in the everyday world.133 Such claims do seem to have come to the fore in the late medieval period, and, without suggesting any simplistic causality, I would observe that it is likely no mere coincidence that this is roughly the same period in which certain Sufi leaders and groups began unmistakably to flex their sociopolitical muscles and to be incorporated into existing circles of power. Insofar as, at various times and places, al-Būnī’s works seem to have been some of the primary vehicles through which ‘occult’ aspects of Sufism were expressed in elite circles, they were no doubt dangerous and powerful books in the eyes of some.

Finally, as a methodological coda, I would note that al-Būnī’s general exclusion from Şūfi studies and other wings of Islamic social and intellectual history is to some degree due to a general negligence of

133 On this still-controversial topic, see Lory, ‘Sufism et sciences occultes’, passim; Morris, ‘Situating Islamic “Mysticism”’, passim.
important aspects of the manuscript inheritance among Islamicist premodernists. I originally came to engage with manuscript studies due to the absence of reliable scholarly editions of Būnian works, but soon came to realize that these codices offer far more than potential ‘corrected texts.’ Exposure to the field has made strikingly clear to me that manuscripts commonly are treated as if they were never more than text-containers, the ‘material support’ for written ideas rendered expendable once a scholarly edition has been produced, and readable like any other book. In reference to the tendency of many edition-makers and readers to ignore the wealth of paratexts and extratextual data found in premodern manuscripts, the Europeanist medievalist John Dagenais noted drily in 1994: ‘Medievalism, as it has been practiced over the past two centuries, is the only discipline I can think of that takes as its first move the suppression of its evidence’. I am of the opinion that this critique applies equally well to current Islamicist premodern studies, a field that, with certain important exceptions, seems to have remained largely innocent of the manuscript-centric methodologies of the ‘New Philology’ that swept through Europeanist medievalism in the past few decades, and of the discourses on the sociology and history of the book that have so influenced many other fields of sociopolitical and intellectual-historical inquiry. A small body of excellent scholarship exists on how books were produced and used in premodern Islamicate contexts, and on

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134 An absence now partially filled by Cordero’s production of an excellent scholarly edition of the first volume of Šams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā; see bibliography.

135 Dagenais, The Ethics of Reading, xviii. On some of the pitfalls of editing practices in relation to Islamic texts, see Witkam, ‘Establishing the Stemma’, passim.

136 For a number of examples of the fruits of this movement, see Speculum 65, no. 1 (1990), an issue dedicated to New Philology edited by Stephen Nichols. The issue opens with Nichols’ presentation of his since-influential notion of notion of the ‘manuscript matrix,’ wherein multiple contesting actors (authors, copyists, glossators, illuminators) contributed to the constitutions of a given codex. Dagenais’ critique of the New Philology in the preface to The Ethics of Reading is highly worthwhile as well.

137 Key works include McKenzie’s ‘The Sociology of a Text,’ Darnton's ‘What is the History of Books?,’ Chartier's The Order of Books, etc. Some important recent additions to this general area of inquiry are Fraser’s Book History through Postcolonial Eyes, and Barber’s The Anthropology of Texts. On the impact of some of these authors on the broader field of intellectual history, see Grafton, ‘The History of Ideas’, passim.
how the conditions of their production and use impacted the perceived epistemological value of their contents, but all too rarely has this scholarship been integrated with the broader study of premodern texts. I hope that this article can serve as a demonstration, however flawed, of some of what can be achieved through combining attention to transmission paratexts and other aspects of manuscript evidence with more conventional methods of intellectual and sociopolitical historiography. This may be especially relevant to the recovery of a figure such as al-Būnī, who has been obscured and misrepresented in the historical record for a variety of reasons both medieval and modern, but I strongly suspect that a return to the manuscripts of many better known authors – particularly those of the late medieval and early modern periods, from which so many codices survive – would yield a wealth of information about the lived worlds in which their works were read that has not yet been taken into account.

Chart: Inter-referentiality among the five ‘core’ works.
Numbers indicate the number of references each work makes to its partners, e.g. ʿIlm al-hudā makes seven references to Šams al-maʿārif.
N.B: the Šams al-maʿārif referred to here is the medieval Šams, not the Kubrā!

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138 E.g. Pedersen’s *The Arabic Book*; Rosenthal’s ‘Technique and Approach’; several sections of Makdisi’s *Rise of Colleges*, and, more recently, Gacek’s *Vademecum* and Déroche’s *Islamic Codicology*. There are obvious exceptions to the critique leveled here, including the works cited previously by Chamberlain, Berkey, Ohlander, and Dickinson, although these do not draw on specific codices so much as they present innovative general explorations of the use of books. Bauden’s series of *Magriziana* articles must be mentioned as making groundbreaking use of manuscript sources, and I am no doubt missing several other scholars whose names also should be included here.
Copies of major Bûnian works.
A number without parentheses indicts the number of colophonically dated copies. A number in parentheses indicates undated codices that can be assigned to a century with a reasonably high degree of confidence on the basis of certain physical characteristics (especially paper), mise-en-page, etc. In cases where the number in the total number of copies column does not add up to the columns preceding it, this is a result of some number of undated copies for which I have no basis to estimate a date. Some of the copies of works counted here are abridgements or fragments.

Table 3: Copies of major Bûnian works, by century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>7th/13th c.</th>
<th>8th/14th c.</th>
<th>9th/15th c.</th>
<th>10th/16th c.</th>
<th>11th/17th c. or later</th>
<th>Total copies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Šams al-maʿārif</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>12 (6)</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidāyat al-qāsidin</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawāṣṣ al-gāvāt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ʿIm al-hudā</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8 (1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laʃaʿif al-issārāt</td>
<td>1?</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-Lumʿa al-nūrānīyya</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>9 (6)</td>
<td>3 (5)</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tartīb al-daʿawāt</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qabs al-satīdā?</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥawaiṣ asmāʾ Allāh</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risāla fī ḥaddāʾ ʿil al-basmāla</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>3 (6)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Uṣūl wa-l-dawābiṣ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>5 (2)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>26 (15)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manuscripts cited
What follows lists only the codices directly cited within this article, and it reflects a little more than one-tenth of the manuscripts surveyed for this project. Because manuscripts have been referred to by their shelfmarks when discussed in the article, and because of the alternate titles by which many of the works/manuscripts are cataloged by the collections that hold them, this list is alphabetized by shelfmark rather than by title. In each case, if a title is given in the manuscript, then it is noted immediately after the author; a standardized title follows in brackets if it differs from the given title. In cases where no title is given in the manuscript, only the bracketed standardized title is given.

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Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies 12 (2012)

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Between the end of the 8th/14th century and the beginning of the 9th/15th, the literate elites in Yemen and al-Andalus publicly debated the legitimacy and the educational function of Sufi books. In Yemen, where Ibn ʿArabi’s ‘school’ thrived, some jurists urged the ban of his books, while ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ǧīlī and his associates extolled their educational virtue for Sufi novices. In al-Andalus, the debate focused on whether books could take the place of the master in Sufi education, an issue whose relevance was felt well beyond Sufi circles, prompting Ibn Ḥaldūn to join the discussion. These controversies, even though they were connected to specific local contexts, are significant in a general way because they offer evidence for the spread of private reading among Sufis in the later Middle Ages. To appreciate the historical importance of this, one should ask how far it is new and whether it is limited to Sufism. These two questions are addressed in the first two parts of this article. The first part outlines key changes relating to Sufi literary output in the 12th and 13th centuries. In particular, it examines the tension between orality and writing within Sufism, and the ways in which the written transmission of mystical knowledge was controlled or repressed. The second part draws attention to shared paradigms of both esoteric and exoteric knowledge as the connection between private reading and innovation, and the preservation of oral symbolism in written transmission. Finally, the third part re-examines the 14th and 15th-century debates from the angle of the history of reading in medieval Sufism. The arguments exchanged in these debates bear witnesses to changes in reading practice linked to the shifting relationships between authority and knowledge in Islamic cultural history.

Introduzione
Tra la fine del VIII/XIV secolo e l’inizio del IX/XV, le élites erudite dell’Andalusia e dello Yemen sono state coinvolte in due animati dibattiti pubblici intorno alla legittimità e alla funzione pedagogica dei libri nel sufismo. In Yemen, dove la scuola di Ibn ʿArabī ebbe in quest’epoca un momento di grande espansione, alcuni giuristi cercarono di far mettere al bando i libri di Ibn ʿArabī, mentre ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ǧīlī e altri sufi ne celebrarono il valore formativo e ne promossero la divulgazione. In Andalusia, si discusse se i libri potessero sostituire il maestro nell’educazione dei sufi. L’importanza della questione fu avvertita ben al di là dei circoli sufi, a tal punto da indurre Ibn Ḥaldūn a
Samuela Pagani

intervenire nel dibattito. Per quanto legate a specifici contesti locali, queste due controversie, sorte negli stessi anni ai due estremi del mondo arabo, sono il segno di una sempre maggiore diffusione della pratica della lettura privata in ambito sufi.

Per cogliere la portata storica di un tale fenomeno, occorre chiedersi in che misura esso costituisca una novità e sia limitato specificamente al sufismo. Le prime due parti di questo studio cercano di rispondere a queste due domande. La prima parte descrive alcune trasformazioni che si sono prodotte nel rapporto con il libro già nel sufismo dei due secoli precedenti ai dibattiti del VIII/XIV–IX/XV secolo, soffermandosi soprattutto sul problema della tensione fra oralità e scrittura all’interno del sufismo e sulle modalità di controllo o di repressione della divulgazione scritta della conoscenza mistica. La seconda parte mette in evidenza alcuni paradigmi comuni alle scienze religiose tradizionali e al sufismo, come il nesso fra lettura privata e innovazione, e la persistenza del simbolismo orale nella trasmissione scritta.

Dopo questo inquadramento generale, la terza parte riprende in esame le controversie del VIII/XIV–IX/XV secolo, cercando di metterne in evidenza l’interesse dal punto di vista della storia della lettura e del ruolo del libro nel sufismo del tardo medioevo. Questi dibattiti mostrano che la possibilità che la lettura privata di un libro sostituisca l’insegnamento orale non è soltanto una prassi più o meno tollerata, ma è un metodo che alcuni autori giustificano anche da un punto di vista teorico. Gli argomenti discussi consentono di vedere in un contesto preciso come il cambiamento nella pratica di lettura si colleghi ai mutevoli rapporti fra autorità e conoscenza nella storia culturale.

Esoterismo e divulgazione nel sufismo fra VI/XII e VIII/XIV secolo

Il sufismo è un caso particolarmente interessante dell’ambivalenza verso lo scritto nella civiltà arabo-islamica, dove la centralità religiosa del testo sacro e il culto del libro e dell’arte della scrittura coesistono con l’idea che l’insegnamento orale sia più autentico e autorevole dei testi scritti. In generale, il sufismo condivide con le altre scienze religiose musulmane l’idea che l’accesso al testo debba essere controllato da maestri autorizzati a trasmetterlo e a interpretarlo. Nel caso del sufismo, questo principio assume però un’importanza particolare, perché la conoscenza sufi è per definizione riservata a pochi. Pertanto, la possibilità e le condizioni della divulgazione in forma scritta di questa conoscenza hanno costituito un problema centrale sin dalle origini del sufismo. I dibattiti pubblici del VIII/XIV secolo intorno alla validità di una formazione mistica basata esclusivamente sui libri si inseriscono in
questa problematica generale, che ha assunto in quest’epoca una nuova urgenza in seguito alla fioritura di libri sugli aspetti teorici del sufismo nei due secoli precedenti. In questione non è dunque soltanto la pratica della lettura privata, ma la stessa legittimità della letteratura mistico-filosofica, contestata non solo dagli ‘ulamā’ ostili al sufismo, ma anche all’interno del sufismo.

Nella storia del sufismo, il principio dell’esoterismo, vale a dire l’obbligo di tenere il segreto fra chi è degno di riceverlo, distinto dal problema dell’‘indicibilità’ dell’esperienza mistica, ha un valore fondatore. L’opposizione alla divulgazione serve infatti sin dalle origini a contraddistinguere la corrente ‘sobia’ e ‘moderata’ del sufismo dalle sue manifestazioni eterodosse. Secondo la tradizione sufi, la ‘divulgazione del segreto’ (ifṣā’ al-sīr) è stata la causa della rottura di al-Ǧunayd (m. 298/910), l’autorità di riferimento della scuola di Baghdad, con al-Ḥallāq, già prima che questi fosse giustiziato nel 309/922.1 I copisti di Baghdad, dopo la condanna di al-Ḥallāq, dovettero giurare di non far circolare, né vendere, né comprare i suoi libri.2 D’altra parte, tutti gli scritti di Ǧunayd sono lettere inviate ad altri sufi, la cui diffusione doveva essere ristretta a un circolo di iniziati; nemmeno per lettera, tuttavia, Ǧunayd riteneva ammissibile uno stile troppo esplicito.3

Dato che il libro è un oggetto destinato a circolare, che ‘può cadere in mano a chiunque, chi ne è degno come chi non ne è degno’,4 la conservazione del segreto esige in linea di principio una comunicazione esclusivamente orale. Un discorso esoterico ma scritto è di per sé un paradosso, perché vi si uniscono la segretezza legata all’oralità e la pubblicità legata alla scrittura. Tutta la letteratura sufi si è misurata con questo paradosso, comune ad altre tradizioni mystiche e filosofiche e particolarmente importante nella filosofia arabo-islamica.5 D’altra parte, la registrazione scritta degli insegnamenti dei grandi maestri del passato nei manuali composti fra IV/X e V/XI secolo è indispensabile per affermare il sufismo come maghāb, cioè come una disciplina religiosa

1 A.T. Karamustafa, Sufism, 25.
4 Al-Ṣa’rānī, Durar al-ḡawwāṣ, 4 (wa-l-kitāb yaqa’u fī yad aḥlihi wa-ḡayr aḥlihi).
equiparabile alle discipline religiose tradizionali. Come le scuole di diritto, il sufismo costituisce una ‘comunità testuale’, identificata da un corpus di testi di base, attribuiti al fondatore eponimo o considerati come la registrazione scritta dei suoi detti, che costituiscono una letteratura specializzata la cui trasmissione e interpretazione deve essere controllata dai maestri.

I manuali sufi mantengono uno stretto legame con l’oralità sia per la forma che per la tecnica di scrittura. Per la forma perché, strutturati principalmente come raccolte di detti e aneddoti, adottano uno stile letterario che riproduce la parola detta, conformemente al modello della trasmissione del ḥadīth, ma anche della letteratura monastica tardantica. Per la tecnica di scrittura, perché il linguaggio dei manuali, caratterizzato dalla natura specializzata del lessico tecnico (iṣṭilāḥ) e dall’oscurità dell’allusione (išāra), presume la mediazione di un commento orale da parte di un maestro vivente capace di leggere fra le righe. Questo non ha impedito che i manuali servissero sin dal periodo classico come guida alla purificazione dell’anima inferiore in sostituzione di un maestro. L’uso dei manuali come guide alla fase preliminare del percorso spirituale, divenuto sempre più comune nei secoli successivi, non è però troppo problematico, perché la disciplina dell’ anima non è una dottrina segreta ma un insegnamento pratico che si ispira spesso direttamente ai modelli stabiliti nella sunna.

Anche al-Ḡazālī (m. 505/1111), come lui stesso racconta nella sua autobiografia, avrebbe avuto la sua prima iniziazione al sufismo per analogia con il modello stabilito dalla sunna. Ad esempio, nel caso di al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiḏī (m. tra il 295/905 e il 300/910 ca.) si veda B. Radtke e J. O’Kane, The Concept of Sainthood, 1–2, 17.
attraverso la lettura di tali libri. Il suo Ḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn, uno dei più grandi ‘best-seller’ del medioevo islamico, si differenzia dai manuali che lo hanno preceduto perché, destinato a un pubblico più ampio, ha avuto un ruolo fondamentale nel promuovere il sufismo come ‘letteratura’.

La novità di al-Ġazālī non sta nella presunta riconciliazione del sufismo con l’ortodossia, che risale a un periodo anteriore, ma nel progetto di presentare il sufismo come parte integrante della ‘cultura’ degli ‘ʿulamāʾ, promuovendo il sufismo più come ʿadab che come maḏḥab. L’Ḥyāʾ, proponendosi di introdurre gli ambienti scolastici alla pietà sufi, era espressamente rivolto a un pubblico di letterati non-iniziati, e destinato a circolare indipendentemente dall’insegnamento orale. Al termine dell’introduzione generale dell’opera, al-Ġazālī afferma di aver disposto la materia in modo simile ai trattati di diritto per invogliare alla lettura (muṭālaʿa) del libro i lettori privi di familiarità con i testi sufi, allo stesso modo in cui certi autori di trattati medici avevano scelto una veste grafica che imitava le tavole e i diagrammi dei testi astronomici. Non solo il termine muṭālaʿa rinvia specificamente alla lettura visiva e silenziosa, distinta dalla qirāʾa, che designa ugualmente la lettura ad alta voce, ma il paragone scelto da al-Ḡazālī evoca un manufatto librario destinato allo sguardo.

Nell’atto di pubblicare il libro, al-Ḡazālī si premura di chiarire preliminarmente che la sua trattazione è limitata all’unico aspetto della conoscenza sufi che può essere legittimamente comunicato, vale a dire la sua dimensione etica, o ‘scienza dell’azione’ (ʿilm al-ṣīḥa), contrapposta alla dimensione teorica, o ‘scienza dello svelamento’ (ʿilm al-mukāshafa). In linea con una convenzione sufi ben stabilita, al-Ḡazālī dichiara infatti che la seconda non può essere scritta nei libri, ma se ne può parlare solo a chi ne è degno (ahlūhu), attraverso l’insegnamento orale (muḏākara) o ‘al modo dei segreti’ (bi-ṭarīq al-asrār). Questa

11 Al-Ḡazālī, Munqid, 100–1.
13 Al-Ḡazālī, Ḥyāʾ, 1: 4–5.
‘comunicazione segreta’ va intesa probabilmente come una comunicazione scritta ma chiusa; al-Ġazālī infatti spiega altrove che i veri ‘ulumā’, come ‘eredi dei profeti’, devono imitare il riserbo di questi, che hanno trasmesso le conoscenze nascoste in una forma indiretta e allusiva, decifrabile solo dai pochi a cui l’accenno basta.\(^{15}\)

Malgrado queste dichiarazioni programmatiche, l’‘Iḥyāʾ’ è attraversato da continue allusioni alla ‘scienza dello svelamento’.\(^{16}\) ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (m. 525/1131), un autore che fu condannato a morte per eresia con il pretesto che aveva mescolato gli insegnamenti dei sufi con quelli dei filosofi, si considerava ‘discepolo dei libri di al-Ġazālī’. Nell’apologia che scrisse in carcere prima di essere giustiziato, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt rivendica che le affermazioni condannate nei suoi scritti si ritrovano alla lettera nelle opere del suo autorevole predecessore.\(^{17}\)

I libri di al-Ġazālī, malgrado o forse a causa del loro successo, non hanno sempre avuto vita facile. In al-Andalus, oltre ad essere condannati al rogo dai fuqahāʾ mālikī della prima metà del periodo almoravide\(^{18}\), sono stati criticati da Ibn Ṭūfayl e da Ibn Ruṣd per avere trasgredito l’esoterismo politico proprio dei fālāsīf. Ibn Ruṣd dichiara senz’altro che i libri di al-Ġazālī andrebbero proibiti agli incompetenti, perché, con la loro mescolanza dei livelli del discorso, sono colpevoli di una divulgazione dell’esegesi razionalista che li rende ben più dannosi dei libri dei filosofi.\(^{19}\) Fra VII/XIII e VIII/XIV secolo, del resto, le parti dei libri di al-Ġazālī consacrati allo ‘svelamento’ e al mondo invisibile suscitavano in Maghrib la diffidenza anche di alcuni sufi di tendenza tradizionalista (cfr. infra, par. 3).

Ciò nonostante, l’‘Iḥyāʾ’ resta essenzialmente, come nelle intenzioni del suo autore, un’enciclopedia della ‘scienza pratica’ del sufismo. Nell’ambito della ‘scienza teorica’, il suo corrispettivo sono le Futūḥāt makkīyya di Ibn ʿArabī (m. 638/1240), un autore che ha in comune con il suo predecessore l’ambizione di offrire una sintesi universale con il

\(^{15}\) Cfr. T.J. Gianotti, Al-Ġazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine, 50–1, 55–6.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., pp. 57–61.
\(^{17}\) F. Griffel, al-Ġazālī’s Philosophical Theology, 81–7; si veda anche O. Saﬁ, The Politics of Knowledge, 162, 172–5.
\(^{18}\) Si veda M. Fierro, ‘Opposition to Sufism in al-Andalus’, 186, 191–5; F. Griffel, Apostasie, 365, 378; Idem, al-Ġazālī’s Philosophical Theology, 80–1; M. Cook, Commanding Right, 455–6.
compito di infondere un nuovo spirito nella cultura religiosa del suo tempo.\(^\text{20}\)

Ibn \(^\text{ʿ}\)Arabī condivide con al-Ġazālī anche un’ambizione divulgatrice. Che le sue idee mistiche, attraverso un canale comunicativo come la poesia, potessero raggiungere anche i letterati contemporanei, colpendoli per motivi estetici oltre che spirituali, è attestato dalla più antica notizia biografica su di lui, conservata nella antologia poetica di Ibn al-Ṣa\(^\text{ʿ}\)ār al-Mawṣīlī (m. 654/1256). Al termine della biografia, prima delle poesie, si trova un elogio dello stile dell’autore, il cui ‘bel discorso sulla realtà essenziale’ (\(\text{kalām hasan fī l-ḥaqīqa}\)), prodotto di una diretta ispirazione, ‘confonde le menti quando viene ascoltato e trascina i cuori quando è recitato’.\(^\text{21}\) Il fatto che il testo sufi abbia valore in se stesso per il suo carattere poetico non è una novità, visto che nelle letterature islamiche il confine fra poesia profana e poesia mistica è incerto. Nel caso di Ibn \(^\text{ʿ}\)Arabī, tuttavia, l’autonomia poetica del testo si estende anche alla prosa teorica, che trasforma creativamente lo stile descrittivo e prescrittivo dei manuali tradizionali facendone sorgere significati inediti e paradossali.\(^\text{22}\)

La divulgazione, non necessariamente sinonimo di facilità, è in primo luogo legata a una rivendicazione di autorità. Nell’introduzione ai \(\text{Fūṣūṣ al-ḥikam}\), Ibn \(^\text{ʿ}\)Arabī racconta che questo libro gli è stato trasmesso dal Profeta in una visione con l’ordine di divulgarlo: il libro del santo può essere legittimamente ‘pubblicato’ perché si colloca nel quadro di una storia sacra, come un prolungamento del messaggio profetico di cui condivide non la dimensione normativa, ma il fatto di trasmettere una conoscenza utile alla salvezza. Sui \(\text{Fūṣūṣ al-ḥikam}\), più facilmente accessibili delle \(\text{Futūḥāt}\), si sono concentrate le accuse contro Ibn \(^\text{ʿ}\)Arabī nel ‘processo postumo’ che segna la storia religiosa dell’Islam pre-moderno a partire dal VIII/XIV secolo. Gli avversari hanno a più riprese raccomandato di distruggere i suoi libri, anche se tali drastiche misure sono state applicate solo occasionalmente e hanno avuto un successo limitato.\(^\text{23}\)


\(\text{21}\) G.T. Elmore, ‘New Evidence’, 60 e 69.

\(\text{22}\) Si veda Chodkiewicz, ‘Mi’rāj al-ḥalima’.

La cautela—o l’aperta ostilità—nei confronti dei libri di Ibn ʿArabī è dovuta anche al fatto che i commentatori di Ibn ʿArabī, a partire dalla seconda metà del VII/XIII secolo, hanno creato sulla base delle sue opere una scuola mistico-filosofica che è stata uno dei principali canali di riabilitazione della filosofia soprattutto di matrice avicenniana nel tardo medioevo. In questo ambito si è costituita una nuova biblioteca di ‘libri sulla ḥaqīqa’ che rappresentano un genere a sé stante nella letteratura sufī. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ḡīlī, uno dei più originali rappresentanti della scuola di Ibn ʿArabī, in un testo importante su cui ritornerei nel terzo paragrafo, definisce i ‘libri sulla ḥaqīqa’ come quelli che si occupano espressamente dell’‘essere’ (wuġūd), fondando una ‘gnosi salvifica’ (ʿirfān) che può essere coltivata attraverso lo studio individuale anche indipendentemente dal percorso di purificazione interiore. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāšānī (m. 730/1329), noto commentatore dei Fuṣūṣ, aveva scritto qualche decennio prima un dizionario dei termini tecnici del sufismo pensato per questo stesso tipo di lettori autodidatti, e più specificamente per intellettuali appartenenti alla tradizione filosofica avicenniana, non sufī anche se con inclinazioni per la mistica; che il dizionario di al-Qāšānī sia concepito come un ausilio alla lettura solitaria è indicato anche dalla disposizione dei lemmi in ordine alfabetico, un altro punto per il quale si discosta dai lessici contenuti nei manuali classici del sufismo.

L’importanza dell’opera di Ibn ʿArabī nella storia del sufismo è paragonabile a quella dello Zohar nella storia della mistica ebraica, a prescindere dalle affinità di contenuto e di stile, per il modo di trasmissione. La comparsa dello Zohar nella Spagna settentrionale della fine del VII/XIII secolo rappresenta infatti il punto di arrivo dello sviluppo di un corpus letterario svincolato dalla tradizione orale, che è stato considerato come il segno della transizione da una cultura orale a una cultura scritta. Anche se i cabalisti continuano ad aderire a un codice esoterico che impedisce la completa esposizione scritta di argomenti teorici o pratici particolarmente delicati, l’esistenza di un corpus letterario indipendente si presta allo studio individuale e apre la strada all’appropriazione della qabbalah da parte di filosofi non cabalisti, che la interpretano liberamente come una tradizione speculativa da

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24 Al-Ḡīlī, Marāṭīḥ, 7–12.
27 Vedi ibid., e M. Idel, Kabbalah, 20–2.
affiancare al sapere filosofico rigettato in linea di principio dalla mistica ebraica tradizionale. Questo fenomeno, che assume particolare rilevanza nell’ebraismo italiano, diventerà uno dei più importanti stimoli del pensiero rinascimentale.28

Un altro notevole parallelismo fra la mistica ebraica e il sufismo del VII/XIII secolo e oltre è il nesso fra rivelazione del segreto e messianismo, nel contesto di una concezione della storia vista come il dispiegarsi di una sempre maggiore chiarezza nella conoscenza delle realtà metafisiche e nella loro ‘pubblicazione’. Questa visione dinamica della storia implica che la disciplina del segreto ha un carattere solo provvisorio, diventando meno rigorosa man mano che ci si avvicina all’era messianica.29

Sia nell’ebraismo che nell’islam, questi sviluppi nelle forme comunicative e nelle idee a cui sono collegate hanno incontrato resistenze all’interno delle rispettive tradizioni mistiche. In entrambi i casi infatti la trasformazione della tradizione esoterica in ‘letteratura’ e la sua trascrizione in libri che possono finire in mano a chiunque mettono in pericolo la nozione stessa di ‘tradizione’, che è alla base tanto della qabbalah (che significa appunto ‘ricezione’ di qualcosa che è trasmesso oralmente), quanto del sufismo (che si ricollega al Profeta attraverso la ‘catena iniziatica’ [silsila], corrispettivo sufi dell’isnād).30

In ambito islamico, i sufi ‘moderati’, fra i due estremi dei fautori della distruzione dei libri di Ibn ʿArabī e della loro divulgazione, sostengono che questi libri non vanno messi nelle mani di chiunque e ne sconsigliano la lettura ai novizi. Per questo motivo, l’influenza di Ibn ʿArabī sulle confraternite, per quanto importante, è rimasta spesso implicita.31

L’esistenza di libri specializzati non pone di per sé in questione la necessità del maestro né nella tradizione sufi né nelle altre scienze religiose. Il sufismo, come è noto, insiste sin dal periodo classico sulla

28 Si veda B. Ogren, Renaissance and Rebirth, 27–30 e 37.
necessità del maestro: secondo un detto celebre attribuito a al-Bistāmī (m. 261/874 o 264/877), ‘Satana è l’imām di chi non ha maestro’. Ma la relazione maestro-discicolo si è evoluta nel tempo: la progressiva istituzionalizzazione del sufismo ha portato infatti a una formalizzazione di questa relazione, così come in genere della condotta dei discepoli e dei loro rapporti reciproci, fino alla fissazione di vere e proprie regole fra VI/XII e VII/XIII secolo. Nella codificazione del rapporto maestro-discicolo ha un posto di primo piano il dovere di ubbidienza assoluta, base del principio di autorità nelle confraternite (ṭuruq) che si costituiscono a partire dal VI/XII secolo.

Una delle più antiche regole sufi conservate prescrive di ‘legare il cuore al maestro’: il discepolo deve imprimere nel proprio cuore l’immagine del maestro, in modo che questo sia sempre presente davanti al suo occhio interiore. In questo forte legame personale, la parola del maestro ha una funzione essenziale, non tanto per l’insegnamento che trasmette, quanto per il suo potere di trasformare interiormente l’allievo. La parola del maestro si iscrive nel cuore dell’allievo come la parola rivelata nel cuore del Profeta. Al-Šāḏīlī, quando gli venne chiesto perché non avesse scritto libri, rispose: ‘I miei libri sono i miei allievi’ (kutūbī aṣḥābī).

Questa pedagogia spirituale, in cui tanta parte ha la presenza fisica del maestro, con la gestualità extra-verbale legata a questa presenza, caratterizza il ‘maestro educatore’ (šayḫ murabbī), cioè colui che ha il

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33 Su questo processo si veda F. Meier, ‘Khurāsān’; idem, ‘Qaṣṣāy’s Tarīkh’.
34 Ibid., 496.
37 Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, Lātā’if, 50.
compito di ‘allevare’ l’aspirante, piuttosto che di ‘istruirlo’ trasmettendogli un sapere. Come vedremo nel terzo paragrafo, i due modelli educativi della ‘pedagogia spirituale’ (tarbiya) e dell’‘insegnamento dottrinale’ (ta‘lim) possono entrare in conflitto, anche se idealmente sono complementari, come dovrebbero esserlo teoria e prassi, speculazione e rituale, haqiqa e tariqa.

La fioritura, nello stesso periodo della nascita delle confraternite, di ‘libri sulla haqiqa’ che pretendono di costituire un accesso privilegiato a una conoscenza salvifica descritta come l’essenza dell’eredità profetica, 38 è una sfida potenziale per gli šayḥ delle turaq, custodi di un’altra variante dell’eredità profetica, la facoltà di istituire sunan (le regole e i rituali della tariqa) e di essere quindi un modello per l’azione, oggetto di imitazione al pari del Profeta. 39

Oltre che i modelli educativi, il conflitto può riguardare anche i contenuti, come indica il fatto che ad alcuni grandi maestri di confraternite è attribuita la distruzione di testi mistici e filosofici. Nel caso di ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ǧīlānī (m. 561/1166), fondatore eponimo della Qādiriyya, la distruzione si inserisce in un racconto agiografico, ed è presentata come un miracolo:

Una volta, quand’ero giovane, mi presentai al cospetto dello šayḥ ʿAbd al-Qādir—che Dio sia soddisfatto di lui!—con una numerosa compagnia. Avevo con me un libro che trattava di filosofia e di scienze spirituali (ʿulūm al-rūḥāniyyāt). Appena fui entrato alla sua presenza, lo šayḥ mi parlò, rivolgendosi direttamente a me, non al resto del gruppo. Prima ancora di avere esaminato il libro, o di avermi interrogato sul suo contenuto, mi disse: ‘Quel tuo libro è un cattivo compagno. Faresti meglio a cancellarlo con l’acqua!’ Pensai allora di allontanarmi, chiudere il libro da qualche parte, e astenermi in seguito dal portarlo con me, per timore di offendere lo šayḥ. La mia anima inferiore non poteva accettare l’idea di cancellarlo con l’acqua, perché gli ero molto affezionato e alcune delle sue teorie e dei suoi principi avevano risvegliato la mia curiosità intellettuale. Mentre stavo per alzarmi ed andarmene, con l’intento di mettere in atto il mio proposito, lo šayḥ mi lanciò una tale occhiata, che fui incapace di alzarmi. Mi sentivo come paralizzato. Ma lui mi disse: ‘Dammi quel tuo libro!’ Allora lo apri, e—guarda un po’!—vedi che non conteneva altro che fogli bianchi, senza che vi fosse scritta una sola lettera. Quindi lo diedi allo šayḥ, che lo sfogliò e poi disse: ‘Questo è il libro delle eccelse virtù del Corano di Muḥammad Ibn al-Durays’ Quando me lo restituì, vidi che era proprio quel libro lì, scritto in una magnifica calligrafia. Quindi lo šayḥ mi disse: ‘Sei pronto a

38 Così in chiara sintesi al-Ǧīlānī nel prologo dei Marāṭīb, 7–12.
pentiriti per aver detto con la lingua qualcosa che non è nel tuo cuore? ‘Sì, maestro’, risposi. Infine mi ordinò di alzarmi. Ubbidii, ed ecco che avevo dimenticato tutto della filosofia e dei principi di spiritualità. Erano stati completamente cancellati dalla mia interiorità, come se non me ne fossi mai occupato.\footnote{al-Tāḍīfī, Necklaces, parte 8. Lo stesso testo è citato in A. Rippin, Muslims, 146.}

In questo racconto, dove l’ubbidienza dovuta allo šayḫ si contrappone all’infatuazione per la filosofia e le ‘scienze spirituali’, il libro proscritto resta anonimo. Più tardi, il grande sufi kuṭrāwī ‘Alā al-Dawla al-Simmānī (m. 736/1336), noto per le sue polemiche contro la scuola di Ibn ‘Arabī, racconta che il suo maestro Nūr al-Dīn al-Isfārāyīnī (m. 717/1317) ‘soleva proibire la lettura degli scritti di Ibn ‘Arabī, ed era così severo al riguardo che, avendo sentito che [...] due dei suoi allievi davano lezione sui Ḡūṣūṣ a certi studenti, si presentò laggiù quella stessa notte, strappò loro di mano il manoscritto, lo stracciò e ingiunse il divieto assoluto di leggerlo’.\footnote{H. Landolt, ‘Der Briefwechsel’, 75.}


Questi tre casi presentano una notevole differenza rispetto alle distruzioni di libri attribuite ad asceti più antichi, come Sufyān al-Ṭawrī (m. 161/778), Dāwūd al-Ṭāʾī (m. 165/781-2) e Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (m. 205/820 o 215/830), citati da al-Ṭawḥīḍī (m. 411/1023) come precedenti nell’epistola in cui giustifica la scelta di bruciare le sue stesse opere. Per questi personaggi infatti la distruzione dei libri coincide con
l’inizio della vita ascetica, ovvero con una rinuncia al mondo, le cui vanità includono un sapere inutile ai fini della salvezza.\textsuperscript{43} In questo caso, la distruzione dei libri è il segno di un atteggiamento anti-scolastico ben compendiato nel detto attribuito a al-Bistāmī in cui il mistico contrappone da parola viva della conoscenza spirituale alla lettera morta degli ‘ulamā’: ‘Avete preso la vostra scienza morto da morto, mentre noi abbiamo preso la nostra dal Vivo che non muore’.\textsuperscript{44} Al contrario, la distruzione di libri da parte di autorevoli maestri di ṭuruq è una deliberata opera di censura di tradizioni sapienziali e spirituali concorrenti all’interno di una cultura sufi che nel frattempo si è uniformata in buona parte alle modalità scolastiche della trasmissione del sapere. ‘Abd al-Qādī, nel suo ‘miracolo’, sostituisce un libro ‘utile’ a un libro ‘pericoloso’, ma non bandisce lo studio e la lettura in sé – anzi promuove lo studio di un classico delle scienze religiose tradizionali. ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī, da parte sua, contribuisce a cancellare una tradizione filosofica a cui sostituisce i suoi stessi libri, portatori di una gnosi intuitiva (‘irfān) contrapposta alla ragione dimostrativa (burhān).\textsuperscript{45} Inoltre, l’istituzionalizzazione del ‘maestro educatore’ (šayḥ al-tarbiya), alla quale al-Suhrawardī ha dato un contributo teorico decisivo, è perfettamente compatibile con lo studio. In effetti, l’educazione può anche farsi a distanza, attraverso il libro del maestro, e in questo caso l’iniziazione coincide con l’autorizzazione a trasmettere i suoi libri.\textsuperscript{46} Anche se i maestri possono esercitare la loro autorità come censori, le ṭuruq alimentano un’ampia produzione manualistica, agiografica e devozionale che contribuisce alla diffusione del libro e della lettura.


\textsuperscript{45} Si veda E. Ohlander, Sufism, 302.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 141.
Autodidattismo, tradizione e innovazione nelle scienze religiose tradizionali e nel sufismo

L'esigenza di controllare un sapere scritto in costante espansione è comune in questo periodo al sufismo e alle altre scienze religiose. In effetti, fra VII/XIII e VIII/XIV secolo, l'autodidattismo e la trasmissione testuale svincolata dalle forme tradizionali di verifica orale sembrano essersi intensificati anche nell'ambito della madrasa.

In Maghrib, nella seconda metà del VIII/XIV secolo, alcuni autori denunciano che fra gli studenti di Granada e di Fez si è diffusa la pratica di studiare individualmente i compendi di diritto, trascurando l'insegnamento orale dei maestri.47 Qualche decennio prima, nell'Egitto mameluco, il giudice Šāfiʿīta Ibn Ġamāʿa (m. 733/1333), nel suo libro sull'educazione nelle scienze religiose, mette in guardia dal prendersi come maestri coloro che hanno 'studiato i significati reconditi delle pagine (buṭūn al-awrāq) ma non hanno frequentato un maestro esperto' – un fenomeno che viene definito sprezzantemente taṣyīḥ al-saḥīfa, 'trasformare la pagina in maestro'.48 In effetti, secondo Ibn Ġamāʿa, 'la conoscenza non può essere tratta dai libri: questa è una delle più dannose cause di corruzione' (al-ʿilm la yuḥaqṣu min al-kutub fa-innahu min adarr al-mafāsid). Questo ovviamente non significa che uno studente non possa leggere da solo, ma che, per evitare errori, prima di memorizzare un testo, deve verificarne la correttezza con un maestro o con un ripetitore designato da questi.49 Inoltre, lo studente principiante deve affidarsi al maestro e non ai libri per l'interpretazione dei testi.50 In altri termini, la lettura solitaria dei principianti va regolata per garantire la corretta trasmissione e interpretazione dei testi, ma è ovviamente parte integrante dell'educazione. Ibn Ġamāʿa dedica infatti un intero capitolo alle 'regole da osservare con i libri che sono lo strumento del sapere', dove raccoglie varie raccomandazioni sul metodo da seguire nella lettura privata. La 'metodologia dello studio

48 Ibn Ġamāʿa, Taḏkira, p. 116. Su questa formula cfr. anche W.A. Graham, Beyond the Written Word, 104.
49 Ibn Ġamāʿa, Taḏkira, 131. Su questi passi e altri esempi in proposito: J. Berkey, Transmission, 26; D. Ayalon, Reading Palestine, 111–12; E. Moosa, Ghazālī, 97–8.
50 Ibn Ġamāʿa, Taḏkira, 131.
51 Ibid., 129–30.
52 Ibid., 143–51. Su questo capitolo dell'opera e la sua rielaborazione nel XVI sec., si veda F. Rosenthal, Technique, 7–18.
individuale’ (ādāb al-muṭāla’a) diventa oggetto di una trattazione specifica alla fine del XI/XVII secolo, da parte del famoso astronomo ottomano e sufi mawlawī Āḥmad Dede ibn Luṭfallāh Mūneḡǧim Başi (m. 1113/1702), ma in questo caso l’autore innova perché si propone deliberatamente di facilitare e incoraggiare l’apprendimento senza maestri. Nella sua opera infatti la muṭāla’a è descritta come un esercizio intellettuale che consiste nell’estrarre i significati delle espressioni linguistiche attraverso la lettura visiva e la riflessione’, e si oppone per definizione al taqlīd, la ricezione di una conoscenza in base al solo principio di autorità, senza conoscerne la prova.54

Per quanto riguarda la trasmissione materiale del libro, nel corso del medioevo il principio del controllo orale si mostra sempre più come una fiction, il cui mantenimento è determinato in primo luogo da ragioni ideologiche, come osserva G. Vajda a proposito di forme di ‘autorizzazione a trasmettere’ che non comportano il diretto ascolto dei testi, come l’iǧāza ‘generale’, o quella trasmessa per lettera, o quella accordata a bambini o a persone non ancora nate.55

In uno studio recente, Denis Gril ha mostrato che l’abitudine di collezionare e moltiplicare le iǧāzāt ha un corrispettivo ‘esoterico’ nella creazione, a partire dal periodo ayyubide, di repertori di catene iniziatiche diffusi in un ambiente di ‘ulamā’ sempre più aperto al sufismo. Le catene iniziatiche registrate in questi repertori, costruite sul modello dell’iṣnād nel ḥadīṯ, sono trasmesse spesso sulla base di altri testi, cioè in modo puramente libresco, sebbene questo non sia esplicitato. Non sono dunque la testimonianza del perpetuarsi della tradizione vivente di un insegnamento da maestro a discepolo, ma servono piuttosto a stabilire un legame simbolico con i grandi maestri del passato, e, attraverso di loro, con il Profeta. Come osserva Denis Gril nella conclusione del suo studio, ‘cette évolution se situe dans le cadre plus large d’une économie du savoir et du milieu qui le porte’.56

In effetti, un’evoluzione importante si è verificata nel VII/XIII secolo nelle scienze del ḥadīṯ, paradigma della centralità della trasmissione orale nel sapere religioso islamico. La trattatistica dell’epoca testimonia

56 D. Gril, ‘De la khirqa à la ṣaḥīqa’, 80.
la diminuita importanza dell’*isnād* come strumento di autenticazione delle tradizioni: una copia autenticata del testo è sufficiente garanzia di autenticità, e può essere copiata direttamente. In queste mutate condizioni, la trasmissione testuale è affiancata da forme ‘ritualizzate’ di trasmissione orale, mentre gli *isnād* si continuano a collezionare per interesse ‘spirituale’: particolarmente apprezzati da questo punto di vista sono quelli con il minor numero di garanti, perché accorciano la distanza fra il ricevente e il Profeta.\(^{57}\)

La pratica della lettura privata, scontata nelle ‘scienze straniere’ e nell’*adab*, dove non a caso il libro è lodato anche per il suo silenzio,\(^{58}\) è scoraggiata nelle scienze religiose perché mette in pericolo la continuità della tradizione. Avere una biblioteca permette di viaggiare nel tempo, ma questa libertà di movimento elimina la mediazione delle autorità che controllano l’interpretazione dei testi. I grandi ‘innovatori’ sono quelli che viaggiano a ritroso nel tempo. Lo mostra bene, nel campo del diritto di questo periodo, il caso di due personalità per tanti versi opposte, ma unite dalla rivendicazione dell’*iǧtiḥād*, come Ibn ʿArabī e Ibn Taymiyya (m. 728/1328).

Ibn ʿArabī scavalca l’autorità dei *fiqhā*ʾ mālikiti contemporanei rifacendosi direttamente a Ibn Ḥazm (m. 456/1064), esponente anticonformista del *madhab* zāhirita. Secondo Ibn Ḥaldūn, questa scuola giuridica minoritaria era sopravvissuta solo attraverso i libri, e Ibn Ḥazm, come altri seguaci della scuola, avrebbe avuto il torto di apprenderne i principi studiando i testi senza passare attraverso la mediazione dei maestri. L’indipendenza di giudizio e la mancanza di rispetto per le autorità legate a questo metodo di studio individualistico avrebbero fatto incorrere Ibn Ḥazm nella disapprovazione, a tal punto che i suoi stessi libri in certe occasioni furono vietati e distrutti.\(^{59}\) Comunque sia, la

\(^{57}\) E. Dickinson, ‘Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’.


tentazione di seguire questa scuola senza maestri viventi riemergeva regolarmente, e il caso di Ibn ʿArabī sembra confermarlo, dato che egli se ne ispira nella sua ermeneutica legale, anche se la sua effettiva adesione alla scuola è dibattuta.\(^{60}\)

Per quanto riguarda Ibn Taymiyya, la sua rottura del consensus è imputata dal suo avversario Taqī l-Dīn al-Subkī (m. 756/1355) al fatto che non avrebbe avuto un maestro: ‘Il diavolo era con lui perché il diavolo sta con chi è solo’.\(^{61}\) Ibn Taymiyya stesso aveva peraltro criticato l’ubbidienza incondizionata degli adepti nei riguardi dei maestri sufì, dedicando uno scritto indipendente alla critica del celebre adagio sufì secondo il quale ‘satana è il maestro di chi non ha maestro’.\(^{62}\)

La combinazione di lettura solitaria e rivendicazione dell’iqtihād è ugualmente presente nella carriera di un ʿālim-sufi come Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (m. 911/1505), forse l’autore più prolifico del periodo premoderno, che secondo uno dei suoi biografi era soprannominato ‘figlio dei libri’ (ibn al-kutub) perché era nato in una biblioteca. Al-Suyūṭī fu criticato molto violentemente da alcuni contemporanei perché aveva avuto scarsi rapporti diretti con i maestri e aveva ricevuto gran parte della sua istruzione solo attraverso i libri. A queste accuse si aggiungono quelle di plagio – come se l’accesso incontrollato ai testi predisponesse al furto e al saccheggio.\(^{63}\)

Al-Suyūṭī oltretutto pretendeva di ricevere direttamente dal Profeta informazioni sull’autenticità del ḥadīth. In una lettera, scrive di avere avuto fino a quel momento settantacinque incontri spirituali con il Profeta, e che tali incontri sono uno strumento indispensabile per la sua attività di tradizionista.\(^{64}\) Alla base di questa rivendicazione c’è con ogni probabilità la dottrina di Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, grande ammiratore di Ibn Taymiyya, sarebbe stata considerata dai detrattori il frutto di una immoderata lettura solitaria, non bilanciata dallo scambio orale con i detentori viventi della scienza: si veda M. Cook, ‘On the Origins’, 191.\(^{65}\)

\(^{60}\) Cfr. M. Chodkiewicz, Océan, 78; G.T. Elmore, Islamic Sainthood, 43.

\(^{61}\) C. Bori, Ibn Taymiyya, 166–8.


\(^{63}\) Si veda E.M. Sartain, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, 1: 24 e 74–5.

\(^{64}\) La lettera è citata in al-Ṣaʿrānī, al-Mīzān al-kubrā, 1: 35. Cfr. anche É. Geoffroy, Le soufisme, 100, n.70.

accennato, a quest’epoca si afferma la tendenza a collezionare hadīth con l’isnād più breve possibile, a cui si attribuiva un particolare valore ‘spirituale’ perché accorciava la distanza dal Profeta. Questo procedimento, come commenta E. Dickinson, ‘made time elastic and gave those unlucky enough to have been born late the opportunity to enjoy the spiritual superiority of earlier generations’;66 [...] “the general thrust was that one should avoid intermediaries. This argument was almost subversive, for the whole theoretical justification for hadīth transmission rested on the principle that one must accept information from trustworthy intermediaries’.67 Infatti, poiché il fine era quello di accorciare le distanze, si poteva arrivare a saltare del tutto gli intermediari, ricevendo il hadīth in sogno direttamente dal Profeta: un privilegio rivendicato da autorevoli tradizionisti e giuristi di questo periodo e anche di epoche precedenti.68

In un trattato in cui sostiene, basandosi principalmente su al-Suyūṭī, la validità dell’autorizzazione a trasmettere ricevuta in sogno, ʿAbd al-Ḡanī al-Nābulūsī (m. 1143/1731) afferma che questo tipo di autorizzazione equivale a un’autorizzazione generale (iǧāza ‘āmma): anche quest’ultima infatti è svincolata da una trasmissione orale, in quanto l’autorizzato non ha ascoltato il testo dalla viva voce del trasmettitore. Il sogno, dunque, è un sostituto fittizio della trasmissione orale, allo stesso titolo dell’iǧāza che non comporta un ascolto effettivo. Entrambe le modalità hanno soltanto una funzione di baraka, per cui la validità del testo ricevuto in sogno o per trasmissione indiretta dev’essere verificata controllandone la corrispondenza con il testo trasmesso secondo le regole.69

La ‘visione’ di un autore del passato non è necessariamente il segno di un’esperienza mistica, ma l’espressione simbolica della contemporaneità con l’autore che si verifica nel rapporto diretto e personale fra il lettore e il testo.70 L’aspirazione al ‘faccia a faccia’ con l’autore del passato, o con la fonte di autorità per eccellenza – il Profeta, o il Corano –, è in conflitto con il principio della mediazione attraverso una catena affidabile di trasmettori e di interpreti. La tensione fra

67 Ibid., 496.  
70 Si vedano a proposito del commento medievale le belle pagine di E. Coccia, La trasparenza delle immagini, 3–19.

\footnote{A. Schimmel, \textit{Die Träume des Kalifen}, 179.}
\footnote{P. Nwyia, \textit{Ibn ‘Abbād}, xlviii.}
\footnote{D. Gril, ‘De la \textit{khirqa} à la \textit{ṭarīqa}’, 74.}
\footnote{Al-Ǧazzāʾī, \textit{al-Wird al-unsī}, f. 184a.}}

Il maestro che istuisce a distanza di spazio o di tempo spesso è l’autore di un libro, o il libro stesso. Per esempio, il sufì persiano Kāzarunī (m. 426/1033), nel periodo in cui cercava invano un maestro, sogñò che qualcuno venne da lui con un cammello carico di libri e gli disse: ‘Questi sono i libri dello \textit{ṣayḥ} Ibn Ḥaftī (m. 371/982), che li ha mandati apposta per te con questo cammello’.\footnote{A. Schimmel, \textit{Die Träume des Kalifen}, 179.} Un sufì şāfiī magrebino della fine del VIII/XIV secolo affermava di essere allievo di Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (m. 709/1309), anche se questo era già morto da tempo, perché aveva letto le sue \textit{Ḥikam} e il commento che ne aveva fatto Ibn ʿAbbād di Ronda (m. 792/1390).\footnote{P. Nwyia, \textit{Ibn ‘Abbād}, xlviii.}

ʿArabī, all’inizio di un suo compendio delle dottrine di Ibn Ḥazm, racconta di avere scoperto la grandezza di questo autore attraverso una visione prima ancora di sapere chi fosse e di leggerne le opere. In altri termini, l’incontro con l’autore di un testo nel mondo immaginale ristabilisce fra lui e il suo lettore il rapporto personale proprio dell’oralità.

La tendenza a vedere il libro come una persona ha radici remote che risalgono alla teologia del logos. La riflessione sulla parola divina come mediatrice fra trascendenza e immanenza è comune alle tre religioni monoteiste, anche se il logos nell’islam e nel giudaismo ha finito col cristallizzarsi nella forma di un libro piuttosto che di una persona. Il libro ipostatizzato si presta però anche nell’islam e nel giudaismo a essere rappresentato in forma umana, un fenomeno che ha trovato sviluppi particolarmente notevoli nella mistica. Così, in un capitolo dello Zohar, la Tora è descritta come una fanciulla nascosta, che si ‘rivela faccia a faccia’ solo al suo vero amante, mentre il Corano si manifesta a Ibn ʿArabī in forma di fanciullo nella visione inaugurale delle Futūḥāt, ordinandogli di ‘sollevare i suoi veli e leggere ciò che racchiudono le sue iscrizioni’.

L’iniziazione personale attraverso un autore del passato può essere insomma considerata un riflesso dell’ipostatizzazione del libro rivelato, parola vivente la cui sacralità si riverbera anche sui libri che derivano da essa, come in linea di principio lo sono quelli scritti dagli ‘eredi del Profeta’.

79 Zohar, 125; cfr. anche E. Wolfson, ‘The Body in the Text’.
Le controversie in Yemen e in al-Andalus

A partire dal VII/XIII secolo, con l’espansione delle confraternite e la sempre maggiore penetrazione del sufismo a tutti i livelli della società, il pubblico dei lettori di testi sufi si allarga. I vari generi della letteratura sufi rispondono alle esigenze di diverse tipologie dei lettori – devozione, edificazione morale o ricerca intellettuale. La diffusione della letteratura sufi si accompagna a sua volta a un incremento della pratica della lettura privata. In ambito sufi, come segnala la tradizione biografica, i kutub al-muʿāmaalā possono sostituire al maestro già nel periodo classico, un fenomeno che diventa sempre più frequente nei secoli successivi.\(^82\) Nel tardo medioevo, questi testi, ormai parte delle biblioteche della madrasa, sono letture standard dei pīʿulamāʾ in fuṇzione di un perfezionamento morale che non comporta necessariamente un'affiliazione al sufismo.\(^83\)

Anche i kutub al-mukāšafa sono studiati al di fuori dell’ambito sufi. Come si è visto, il dizionario specializzato di al-Qānānī presuppone un pubblico di lettori-filosofi che continuano a coltivare nell’oriente islamico la tradizione avicenniana. D’altra parte, in Andalus, il libro sull’amore mistico del celebre storico e visir Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb (m. 776/1375), la Rawdat al-taʿrīf bi-l-ḥubb al-ṣarīf, è un esempio dell’integrazione della mistica speculativa e della falsafa nella letteratura profana da parte di un letterato che non è lui stesso un sufi.\(^84\)

Come testimoniano i dibattiti della fine del VIII/XIV secolo, questa evoluzione storica ha suscitato viventi reazioni fra i contemporanei. Le controversie non riguardano solo il valore educativo della lettura privata, ma la stessa legittimità dei ‘libri sullo svelamento’, o dei ‘libri sulla


haqīqa’. Per quest’ultimo aspetto, il dibattito intorno al libro si colloca nel contesto delle polemiche dottrinali intorno alla scuola di Ibn ʿArabī.

Questo è particolarmente evidente nelle controversie in Yemen. Qui, tra la fine del VIII/XIV secolo e l’inizio del IX/XV, i sultani della dinastia rasulide (1235–1454) avevano adottato una politica religiosa risolutamente favorevole al sufismo, facendo della loro capitale Zabīd un centro importante di attività sufi. 85 I sovrani privilegiarono i rappresentanti della scuola di Ibn ʿArabī, come lo šayḥ Ismāʿīl al-Ǧabartī (m. 806/1403), che fu il più prossimo amico e consigliere del sultano al-ʿĀṣraf Ismāʿīl (r. 1376–1400), e ʿAbbās Ibn Abī Bakr al-Raddād (m. 821/1417-1418), che divenne genero del sultano al-Nāṣir ʿAbbās (m. 827/1424) e fu da lui nominato qāḍī supremo dello Yemen rasulide.86

La protezione ufficiale della scuola di Ibn ʿArabī suscitò lo scontento di numerosi ʿulamāʾ, alimentando una serie di violente polemiche che si trascinarono per decenni e che costituiscono un capitolo importante della storia politico-religiosa dello Yemen medievale. In queste polemiche, il libro ha un ruolo fondamentale. Infatti, i libri di Ibn ʿArabī e dei suoi commentatori, base della dottrina dell’‘unità dell’essere’, erano diventati ‘una fonte di identità per la comunità sufi locale’.87 Per gli avversari, l’origine della corruzione morale e dottrinale della loro epoca va cercata innanzitutto nei libri di Ibn ʿArabī e della sua scuola,88 di cui raccomandano il divieto o la distruzione in vari avvisi legali.89 Al-Ǧabartī, da parte sua, impone ai suoi discepoli lo studio dei Fusūṣ al-ḥikam, esigendo che ne portino sempre una copia con sé,90 mentre Ibn al-Raddād, forte della sua autorità di giudice supremo, promuove una legittimazione ufficiale di Ibn ʿArabī, sanzionando la diffusione dei suoi libri nelle zone sotto la sua giurisdizione.91 La promozione di queste letture non solo fra i sufi più avanzati, ma fra i novizi e il lettore comune, scandalizza gli avversari come un atto di audacia senza precedenti.92

È in questo contesto che ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ǧīlī ha formulato una delle più articolate difese del valore formativo del libro nella mistica

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85 Sui rasulidi e i sufi e la polemica intorno a Ibn ʿArabī si veda ibid., 225–69; M. Chodkiewicz, ‘Le procès posthume’, 105–9.
87 Ibid., 250.
88 Ibid., 243, 258.
89 Ibid., 253, 261, 265.
90 Ibid., 242.
91 Ibid., 255.
92 Ibid., 269.
speculativa. Al-Ǧīlī, originario dell’India, trascorse gli ultimi decenni della sua vita in Yemen, dove si inserì nell’ambiente cosmopolita animato dal circolo di al-Ǧabarī e dove morì all’inizio del IX/XV secolo.\textsuperscript{93} Il prologo del Libro sui gradi dell’essere, dove al-Ǧīlī celebra la funzione dei ‘libri sulla ḥaqīqa’ nell’educazione dei sufi, illustra perfettamente il ruolo centrale del libro nella scuola di Ibn ʿArabī, oltre a offrire un’importante testimonianza storica sui metodi pedagogici praticati dai sufi ibnarabiani alla sua epoca.

Per al-Ǧīlī, i libri sulla ḥaqīqa sono il veicolo per eccellenza di un ‘ilm salvifico che coincide con la conoscenza dell’‘essere’ e della sua unità fondamentale. Questa conoscenza va perseguita piuttosto attraverso lo studio che attraverso l’attesa passiva dell’illuminazione:

Mi è stato raccontato che il mio maestro Ismā’īl al-Ǧabarī disse a un allievo, uno dei miei fratelli: ‘Studia i libri (ʿalayka bi-kutub) dello ʿayḥ Muhŷī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī!’ ‘Signore’, rispose l’allievo, ‘non è meglio che pazienti finché Dio stesso mi illumini attraverso la sua effusione?’ Il maestrò gli disse: ‘Quello che vuoi aspettare è proprio ciò di cui lo ʿayḥ parla per te in questi libri’.\textsuperscript{94}

La lettura è più produttiva della purificazione morale attraverso le pratiche devote, e può essere perseguita indipendentemente da esse. Infatti, lo studioso intelligente:

impara tutto dai libri e consegue attraverso di essi tutto ciò che si propone. Ho visto in questa nostra epoca un numeroso gruppo di gente di ogni razza—arabi, persiani, indiani, turchi, e altri ancora—raggiungere attraverso la lettura (muṭālaʿa) dei libri sulla ḥaqīqa il livello dei [grandi] uomini, e realizzare attraverso di essi l’oggetto delle loro speranze. Chi poi in seguito aggiunge alla scienza (ʿilm) e alla virtù la pratica e l’ascesi (sulūk wa-iṯtiḥād) diventa un perfetto, entro chi si ferma dopo avere conseguito la scienza diventa uno gnostico.\textsuperscript{95}

Al-Ǧīlī ammette che l’accesso a questi libri possa essere limitato per motivi di prudenza o di opportunità pedagogica:

La proibizione della lettura dei libri sulla ḥaqīqa espressa a volte dalla gente di Dio nei riguardi di alcuni allievi è dovuta al fatto che la persona di


\textsuperscript{94} Al-Ǧīlī, Marāṭīb, 9–10.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
scarsa comprensione può interpretare le parole degli autori in un senso diverso da quello che essi hanno inteso, per poi metterle in pratica e andare incontro alla perdizione; oppure egli rischia di perdere la vita compulsando i libri senza profitto. In tal caso è necessario che il maestro vieti la lettura affinché l’allievo si occupi di qualcos’altro che gli sia più utile.\footnote{Al-Ğîfî, \textit{Marâtîb}, 9.}

La lettura è però raccomandata anche ai principianti, che grazie ad essa superano i più anziani. I maestri infatti raccomandano agli allievi lo studio per far loro percorrere più rapidamente grandi distanze e per facilitare loro le difficoltà del cammino, perché un aspirante può ottenere, attraverso la comprensione\footnote{Ibid.} di una sola questione di questa nostra scienza, un risultato che non raggiungerebbe in cinquant’anni di ascesi (\textit{muğâhâda}).\footnote{Al-Ğîfî, \textit{Marâtîb}, 11.} […] ‘Ho visto io stesso dei fanciulli (\textit{sîbyân}), fra i miei fratelli nella Via, arrivare in pochi giorni, attraverso la sola lettura di questi libri, a un livello superiore a quello raggiunto dagli uomini adulti (\textit{riţâl}) in quaranta o cinquant’anni di ascesi; malgrado il fatto che erano stati questi adulti a iniziare alla Via quei fanciulli, infatti gli adulti si erano limitati alla pratica (\textit{sulûk}), mentre i fanciulli erano passati alla lettura e alla comprensione dei libri sulla \textit{ḥaqîqa}, così che i fanciulli sono diventati in senso proprio anziani, mentre i loro anziani maestri sono diventati fanciulli (\textit{sâra al-sîbyân \textit{suyûh fi l-\textit{ḥaqîqa wa-l-suyûh lahum sîbyân}}).’\footnote{Ibid., 8–9. Nel testo stampato manca la frase \textit{fa-inna al-\textit{āqid lahâ min al-ma\textit{‘}dan allaðî \textit{alqa\textit{f}a minhu musannîfuhu}, che si trova però nella citazione di questo passo in al-\textit{Nâbulusî}, \textit{Kitâb al-rusûf}, f. 192b.}

Il giovane lettore può superare il vecchio devoto perché attraverso la comprensione del testo diventa pari all’autore del passato:

Quando l’aspirante ricercatore comprende il senso della questione esposta in un libro e lo conosce, egli diviene l’eguale dell’autore nella conoscenza di quella questione (\textit{istawâ huwa \textit{wa-musannîfuhu fi ma’rîfat tilka al-mas’âla}), e consegue per mezzo di essa ciò che l’autore ha conseguito. Allora questa conoscenza gli appartiene (\textit{sârat lahu mulk}) come appartiene all’autore. E così ogni volta che qualcuno prende una questione dai libri, se la comprende in modo esatto, è come se la prendesse dalla stessa fonte (\textit{ma’dan}) da cui l’ha presa l’autore.\footnote{Ibid., 8–9. Nel testo stampato manca la frase \textit{fa-inna al-\textit{āqid lahâ min al-ma\textit{‘}dan allaðî \textit{alqa\textit{f}a minhu musannîfuhu}, che si trova però nella citazione di questo passo in al-\textit{Nâbulusî}, \textit{Kitâb al-rusûf}, f. 192b.}
sufi e rende difficile la ricerca dell’originalità di un autore: il sapere sufi appartiene a tutto un gruppo e non a delle persone-autori. In questa prospettiva, l’originalità non consiste in una innovazione individuale, ma nella capacità di accedere direttamente alla fonte divina della conoscenza: attraverso la comprensione del testo del santo, il lettore riattualizza l’ermeneutica spirituale della rivelazione che lo ha prodotto, emancipandosi dall’’imitazione’ passiva dei maestri.

La contrapposizione della ‘compreensione’ all’’imitazione’ corrisponde a una tensione fra una concezione aperta e una concezione chiusa del sapere che caratterizza in generale il conflitto fra discipline razionali e tradizionali. Ma il conflitto fra indipendenza intellettuale e fedeltà alla tradizione si ritrova anche all’interno delle tradizioni mistiche, nella tensione fra speculazione e trasmissione orale, ed è ugualmente presente nella dialettica fra autorità delle scuole e interpretazione personale nel diritto islamico. Il grado dell’aggio di non implica infatti necessariamente l’aggiunta di una nuova dottrina, ma può limitarsi alla ‘compreensione’ delle dottrine dei predecessori.

Una concezione del sapere come quella esposta da al-Ǧīlī, per il quale i giovani superano i vecchi e i moderni possono stare alla pari con gli antichi, spiega bene la resistenza degli ‘ulamā’ conservatori a questa scuola mistica, anche indipendentemente dall’’ortodossia’ dei suoi contenuti dottrinali. La scienza autorevole contenuta nei libri sulla ḥaqīqa minaccia anche l’autorità dei ‘vecchi’ sufi: la relativa svalutazione delle pratiche di mortificazione e purificazione nel testo di al-Ǧīlī è infatti l’espressione di una tensione fra conoscenza e azione, o ‘irfān e sulūk, all’interno del sufismo. La sostanza della contesa intorno al libro nel sufismo sembra risiedere proprio in questo contrasto. Con la sua ‘lode del libro’, al-Ǧīlī si propone di esaltare la conoscenza, ma non di sminuire il ruolo del maestro. Nella conclusione dice infatti:

Ti ho riferito tutte queste storie nell’introduzione di questo libro per farti comprendere il valore di questa scienza e l’elevatezza del suo rango, e ispirarti così il desiderio di conseguire questa nobile arte attraverso la lettura di questi libri, il loro studio, e la discussione su di essi con le persone che li conoscono, dovunque si trovino. Infatti, una di queste persone può insegnarti con una sola parola più di quanto possano insegnarti tutti i libri in

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102 Cfr. anche al-Ǧīlī, Marāṭib, 8, dove l’autore contesta certi sufi secondo i quali nelle epoche tarde l’ispirazione è quasi scomparsa, suggerendo che essa è semmai diventata invisibile, perché Dio non cessa mai di manifestarsi.
una vita intera [...]. La lettura dei libri sulla haqīqa, secondo coloro che comprendono la realtà delle cose, è superiore alle opere di devozione dei praticanti, ma la frequentazione (muqālasa) della gente di Dio e l’educazione (ta’addub) che si riceve da essa è superiore alla lettura di tutti i libri messi insieme.  

Lo stesso al-Ǧīlī ha celebrato altrove il proprio maestro, Ismāʿīl al-Ǧabarī, in termini iperbolici. In seguito a una visione ricevuta a Zabīd nel 796/1393, avrebbe infatti riconosciuto in lui la manifestazione del Profeta, ovvero dell’Uomo perfetto, che si rivela in un’unica persona in ogni generazione.  

Per questo motivo, al-Ǧīlī fu accusato dagli avversari, insieme ad altri seguaci di al-Ǧabarī, di ‘adorare’ il maestro. Adorazione’ del maestro ed esaltazione del libro non sono contraddittorie: al-Ǧīlī afferma infatti che l’Uomo perfetto, come espressione del logos divino, si identifica con il Corano.  

Alla fine del XI/XVII secolo, il testo di al-Ǧīlī sui libri è stato copiato quasi integralmente da ʿAbd al-Ǧānī al-Nābulusī in un opuscolo che difende il ruolo del libro nell’educazione sufi. Rifacendosi innanzitutto a al-Ǧazālī, anche al-Nābulusī mette al centro della sua argomentazione la superiorità della conoscenza sulla pratica, nel contesto di una polemica rivolta al tempo stesso contro i dottori essoterici e contro i maestri delle confraternite. Al-Nābulusī define altrove gli autori morti i cui libri leggeva durante la sua reclusione come ‘i viventi’, e i contemporanei viventi che aveva scelto di abbandonare come ‘i morti’.  

Negli stessi anni delle polemiche yemenite, un altro grande dibattito intorno alla lettura dei libri sufi si è svolto in Andalus e in Maghrib.
774/1372, il libro del visir Ibn al-Ḫaṭīb sull’amore mistico era stato bruciato pubblicamente nella piazza del mercato di Granada, alla presenza di eminenti ‘ulamā’. Nella stessa città, e nello stesso anno, la comunità sufi fu scossa da un’aspra controversia intorno alla questione se i libri possano sostituire il maestro. Secondo la tarda testimonianza del sufi šāḥīlītī Aḥmad Zarrūq (m. a Fez nell’899/1493), la disputa fu così violenta che i contendenti giunsero a prendersi a colpi di scarpa.

Il dibattito coinvolse anche i giuristi. Il grande teorico del diritto Abū Ḥāḳ al-Šaṭībī (m. 790/1388) scrisse una memoria della controversia, che inviò, insieme alla richiesta di un parere, al giurista mālikita Aḥmad al-Qabbāb (m. 1376) e al sufi šāḏilita Ibn ʿAbbād di Ronda. La memoria di al-Šaṭībī è conservata integralmente nello Ṣifāʾ al-sāʾil wa-tahdíb al-masāʾīl di Ibn Ḥaldūn (m. 780/1406), che, pur non essendo stato consultato direttamente, interviene con quest’opera in margine al dibattito. La trascrizione commentata della controversia è preceduta da una lunga introduzione in cui Ibn Ḥaldūn espone in una prospettiva critica la storia e le dottrine del sufismo.

Il dossier relativo a questa controversia è stato letto dalla maggior parte degli storici moderni nel quadro del conflitto fra giuristi e sufi, ovvero fra il sufismo dei dotti e il sufismo popolare. Questo punto di vista è giustificato dalla situazione del Maghrib nel periodo marinide (1258-1465), dove, nel contesto della rivalità fra ‘ulamā’ mālikiti e guide carismatiche delle confraternite, i giuristi si oppongono alla venerazione degli šayḥ. Questo schema interpretativo però impedisce di cogliere le complesse sfumature del dibattito, facendo sorgere notevoli contraddizioni.

113 Gli avversari del sufismo popolare andrebbero identificati secondo Mahdi con i sostenitori dell’indispensabilità del maestro (‘The Book and the Master’,...
Una diversa prospettiva è stata adottata da P. Nwyia in uno studio esemplare del 1961. Dopo avere accennato alla diffusione dell’apprendimento attraverso i libri tra gli studenti di diritto nel Maghrib della seconda metà del VIII/XIV secolo, Nwyia osserva: ‘ce qui signifie que d’une civilisation orale, on est en voie de passer à une civilisation du livre. Et si ce passage est loin encore d’être réalisé en ce qui concerne les sciences légales, il semble par contre que les soufis aient fait quelques pas dans cette voie’. Nella sua sintesi della controversia, Nwyia si sofferma quindi sulla questione essenziale di quali libri sufi fossero studiati e contestati nel Maghrib di questo periodo.


L’opposizione legale contro la diffusione dei ‘libri sullo svelamento’ è chiarita dagli interventi di Ahm al-Qabbāb e di Ibn Ḥaldūn. L’argomentazione comune a entrambi è che mentre nel perfezionamento morale si può fare a meno del maestro, affidandosi ai manuali sufi sulla scienza pratica (muʿāmalāt), il maestro è indispensabile nella ricerca dello ‘svelamento’ (mukāšafāt), perché questa via è piena di pericoli e i libri che ne parlano, lungi dall’essere utili, sono dannosi. Persino i libri di al-Gazālī, secondo al-Qabbāb, dovrebbero essere espurgati di tutti i passaggi in cui si parla delle realtà del mondo invisibile; un santo maghrebino del secolo precedente li aveva del resto condannati insieme a quelli di al-Qušayrī, dichiarando che avrebbe volentieri buttato a mare questi ultimi.

9), e secondo R. Pérez con i sostenitori della sua non indispensabilità (‘Introduction’, 31–2; 47–8 e 259 n. 29). M. Mahdi presuppone che i libri in questione siano ‘manuali popolari’, ma dalla controversia questo non appare chiaramente.

P. Nwyia, Ibn ‘Abbād, xlviii.

Ibid., xlviii–lx.

Ibn Ḥaldūn, da parte sua, concentra la sua polemica contro le deviazioni dottrinali dei libri sullo svelamento scritti dalle scuole ‘moderne’ della ‘teofania’ (tağallī) e dell’‘unicità’ (waḥda), illustrate rispettivamente da Ibn ‘Arabī e dall’altro mistico andaluso Ibn Sabīn (m. 668/1269 o 669/1271). Chi aspira a intraprendere il cammino dello svelamento, se non riesce a trovare un maestro, piuttosto che studiare questi libri, farebbe meglio a rinunciare del tutto all’impresa. L’argomentazione di Ibn Ḥaldūn si discosta dal discorso puramente legalista perché la sua critica al sufismo si basa anche sulla sua adesione alle scienze razionali, che gli fa riprendere le obiezioni epistemologiche contro la conoscenza mistica tipiche dei filosofi. Un punto di vista esclusivamente legalistico è adottato comunque da Ibn Ḥaldūn in una fatwā posteriore, risalente al suo periodo egiziano, in cui prescrive che i libri di Ibn ‘Arabī e di Ibn Sabīn siano dati alle fiamme o lavati con l’acqua. In ogni caso, sostenere la necessità del maestro nel cammino verso lo ‘svelamento’ equivale per Ibn Ḥaldūn a vietarne la trasmissione scritta.

Mentre le risposte di al-Qābbāb e di Ibn Ḥaldūn esprimono l’opposizione legale contro la mistica speculativa, l’intervento di Ibn ‘Abbād di Ronda illustra bene le tensioni interne al sufismo. Ibn ‘Abbād, che ha esercitato il suo insegnamento soprattutto per lettera – una modalità che Ibn Ḥaldūn rigetta espressamente – afferma all’inizio del testo di essersi formato sui libri. Ciò nonostante, Ibn ‘Abbād prende le distanze da entrambe le fazioni contendenti ed evita di pronunciarsi in termini categorici, perché ritiene che una tale questione non dovrebbe essere oggetto di una decisione legale. La sua risposta è così sfumata che è stata intesa diversamente dagli studiosi moderni: per esempio, secondo M. Mahdī, Ibn ‘Abbād si pronuncia ‘in pratica’ per l’indispensabilità del maestro, mentre F. Meier sottolinea che per Ibn

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117 Ibn Ḥaldūn, La voie et la loi, 180, 183.
118 Ibid., 245.
122 Ibn Ḥaldūn, La voie et la loi, 247.
Abbād il libro può ‘in pratica’ sostituire il maestro. Quest’ultimo punto di vista è confortato dalla sintesi di Ḥamad Zarrūq:

La risposta del mio signore Ibn Ṭabbād è che la cosa dipende dagli individui e dalle situazioni: il maestro insegnante (*sayḥ al-taʿlīm*) può essere sostituito dai libri per chi è dotato di intelligenza e ragione, mentre il maestro educatore (*sayḥ al-tarbiya*) è obbligatorio solo per lo stupido, anche se certamente consigliabile anche agli altri.

Il punto centrale dell’intervento di Ibn Ṭabbād è appunto la distinzione fra ‘maestro insegnante’ e ‘maestro educatore’. Si tratta di un punto di grande importanza nella storia del sufismo, dato che l’ascesa del ‘maestro educatore’ è una tappa decisiva nella formazione delle confraternite.

Ibn Ṭabbād descrive l’imposizione del ‘maestro educatore’ come un’innovazione ‘moderna’, cioè una deviazione dal sano sufismo delle origini, dovuta a un’abusiva enfasi sulla pratica piuttosto che sulla conoscenza.

Così, Ibn Ṭabbād critica l’aspetto istituzionale dell’evoluzione ‘moderna’ del sufismo, al contrario di Ibn Ḥaldūn, che ne critica l’aspetto dottrinale, ma include un ‘maestro educatore’ ‘moderno’ come ʿUmar al-Suhrawardi nella sua lista di letture consigliate.

Ciò che è decisivo, nella distinzione fra i due tipi di maestro, e dunque anche nella questione della loro necessità, è il contenuto dell’insegnamento: lo *sayḥ al-taʿlīm*, come dice il suo stesso nome, deve trasmettere una conoscenza, mentre l’educazione impartita dallo *sayḥ al-tarbiya* riguarda la sfera pratica. La questione di fondo è dunque in questo testo, come in quello contemporaneo di al-Ǧīlī, il primato della conoscenza o dell’azione. Per Ibn Ṭabbād, il nucleo autentico e originario del sufismo è la conoscenza, mentre la dimensione pratica e rituale istituzionalizzata dalle confraternite è uno sviluppo secondario, concomitante con l’attribuzione di un’indebita autorità al ‘maestro educatore’. Al contrario dell’educazione pratica, la conoscenza è essenziale e va raggiunta con ogni mezzo. Il mezzo privilegiato sarebbe il maestro, ma in sua assenza si può ricorrere anche al libro: anzi maestro e libro sono praticamente equiparati in quanto il libro, come fonte autorevole di conoscenza, è un autentico ‘sostituto’ del maestro.

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125 ‘Khurāsān’, 192.
126 Ḥamad Zarrūq, *Umdat al-murīd*, f. 48b.
127 Cfr. F. Meier, ‘Khurāsān’.
libro sia il maestro sono semplici ‘mezzi’, o ‘cause seconde’, di una illuminazione che dipende in realtà solo da Dio.\textsuperscript{131} Ma questo non significa che si debba stare fermi ad aspettare passivamente, rinunciando a mettersi in cammino in assenza di un maestro.\textsuperscript{132} Anche su questo punto, la posizione di Ibn ʿAbbād è contraria a quella di Ibn Ḥaldūn, che raccomanda di rinunciare a incamminarsi senza un maestro.

Mi pare che nelle sue linee essenziali il ragionamento di Ibn ʿAbbād sia identico a quello di al-Ǧīlī: il punto centrale è che il sufismo autentico è un ‘ilm salvifico accessibile anche solo attraverso i libri, aggirando al tempo stesso l’autorità dei maestri delle confraternite e la censura dei giuristi. La differenza fra i due autori sta essenzialmente nelle letture consigliate: mentre per al-Ǧīlī queste sono in generale i ‘libri sulla ḥaqīqa’ e in particolare Ibn ʿArabī, per Ibn ʿAbbād sono i classici della tradizione šāḏīlita e in particolare Ibn ʿĀṭāʾ Allāh.\textsuperscript{133} Il ‘ilm coltivato nella confraternita šāḏīlita si differenzia per molti aspetti, relativi allo stile espositivo forse ancor più che ai contenuti dottrinali, da quello dei sufî-philosofi.\textsuperscript{134} Ibn ʿAbbād in ogni caso, a differenza di altri sufi, oltre che di molti giuristi, non è un censore: lo dimostra il suo atteggiamento verso Ibn Sabīn, che si guarda bene dal condannare pur ritenendo personalmente che non valga tutto lo sforzo che la sua lettura richiede.\textsuperscript{135}

Sulla questione del libro e del maestro, Ibn ʿAbbād è il principale ispiratore, un secolo dopo, di Aḥmad Zarrūq, un altro maestro šāḏīlita che ha prestato particolare attenzione alla questione. Zarrūq, come Ibn ʿAbbād, tende a ridimensionare l’autorità carismatica del maestro sul discepolo e si considera un ‘maestro insegnante’ piuttosto che un ‘maestro educatore’. La sua scarsa stima per i maestri contemporanei gli fa peraltro ammettere che la guida dei libri possa dispensare da un maestro vivente.\textsuperscript{136} Zarrūq giunge a distinguere dieci tipologie di sufi in base ai loro libri di riferimento. Anche i libri di Ibn ʿArabī hanno il loro

\textsuperscript{131} Ibn ʿAbbād, \textit{Lettres}, 197–8. Un’idea frequente nella tradizione sufi, da accostare alla tesi del \textit{De magistro} di Agostino.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 133, 201.
\textsuperscript{134} É. Geoffroy, ‘Entre ésoterisme et exotérisme’.
posto in questa lista, dove servono a identificare la tipologia del ‘saggio’ (ḥakīm). Ma il sufi davvero perfetto è quello che fa riferimento ai libri della confraternita šāḏilīta.\(^\text{137}\) Poiché per Zarrūq il sufi perfetto è il giurista che fonda la propria condotta sui testi rivelati, la sua valorizzazione della lettura individuale si ricollega allo stesso tempo alla tradizione intellettuale del sufismo e alla tendenza al ritorno alle fonti di un muṯtahid riformista.

**Conclusioni**

La letteratura sufi, per la sua varietà e per la sua diffusione a vari livelli della società, potrebbe costituire un oggetto di studio privilegiato in una storia dell’islam premoderno. Ma il ruolo del libro sufi nella storia sociale e intellettuale dell’islam ha cominciato a essere esplorato in modo abbastanza sistematico solo per quanto riguarda il XIII/XIX secolo, il momento di passaggio dalla cultura manoscritta alla cultura della stampa nel mondo islamico.\(^\text{138}\)

Sulla base delle fonti prese in esame in questo articolo, sembra comunque possibile affermare che il sufismo abbia avuto un ruolo importante nella promozione della lettura privata nell’ambito delle scienze religiose. A partire dal VII/XIII secolo, la diffusione dell’opera di Ibn ʿArabi ha certamente incoraggiato la valorizzazione del libro e dello studio individuale. Anche nel caso dell’ebraismo, come si è visto, alcuni storici ritengono che la nascita di una letteratura mistica nel VII/XIII secolo abbia svolto un ruolo particolarmente importante nella transizione da una cultura orale a una cultura del libro.

La trasformazione delle pratiche di lettura e della forma del manoscritto prima dell’avvento della stampa è stata oggetto di un’attenzione particolare da parte degli storici dell’Europa medievale e della prima età moderna, in reazione alla tradizione storioografica che ha attribuito alla stampa la rivoluzione decisiva nelle pratiche di lettura.\(^\text{139}\)

Secondo P. Saenger, tali trasformazioni potrebbero essere state in parte il risultato dell’imitazione dei manoscritti arabi negli scriptoria spagnoli dove si tradussero testi filosofici e scientifici dall’arabo.\(^\text{140}\)

Comunque sia, è certo che il libro silenzioso è per eccellenza il libro tradotto. Proprio per questo, nella civiltà islamica classica, che è stata inaugurata da una straordinaria attività di traduzione, la trasmissione orale

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137 Cfr. A. Zarrūq, Qawāʿid, 51 (cap. 60).
139 S. Landi, ‘Stampa’, 52.
140 P. Saenger, Space Between Words, 124–5.
e la lettura privata hanno coesistito sin dall’inizio. Nel periodo classico però la ‘lode del libro’, cioè la valorizzazione del suo autonomo valore formativo, è legata soprattutto all’adab e alle ‘scienze straniere’, mentre le scienze religiose hanno insistito soprattutto sulla funzione pedagogica della trasmissione orale.

Nelle scienze religiose, la contrapposizione fra il libro e il maestro è in buona parte ideologica, perché la lettura privata è collegata a valori che minacciano la continuità della tradizione, come l’indipendenza intellettuale e il rovesciamento delle gerarchie tradizionali basate sull’anzianità o l’anticità. La dialettica fra fedeltà alla tradizione e confronto diretto con i testi è un dato strutturale in una cultura al tempo stesso orale e scritta. Il sufismo, parte integrante della cultura religiosa medievale, ha contribuito a rafforzare entrambi i poli di questa dialettica. Se il modello di educazione sufi è servito a confermare il principio dell’ubbidienza dovuta al maestro nella madrasa tardo-medievale, l’insistencia sul valore formativo del libro da parte di alcuni autori sufi si accompagna al recupero della cultura filosofica negli studi teologici e alla promozione di un’ermeneutica ‘rinnovata’ delle fonti del diritto. Contrariamente a quanto riteneva Louis Massignon, la scuola di Ibn ʿArabī non ha riservato ‘l’apanage de la mystique, science ésotérique qui ne doit pas être divulguée, à des cercles initiatiques fermés’. Le reazioni di Ibn Ḥaldūn e di altri autori dell’epoca mostrano infatti la rilevanza culturale e politica della diffusione dei ‘libri sullo svelamento’ prodotti da autori ‘moderni’ come Ibn ʿArabī e Ibn ʿAbīn. L’ulteriore espansione della letteratura prodotta dalle confraternite nel periodo ottomano meriterebbe di essere studiata nella prospettiva della storia sociale di una prima modernità islamica che, malgrado differenze di grande importanza, come la mancata adozione della stampa, presenta paralleli inesplorati con la storia europea.


142 L. Massignon, Essai, 80.

Fonti primarie


——, *Iḥyāʿ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Bālaq, 1289/1873).


——, *Marāṭīb al-wuqūd wa-ḥaqīqat kull mawgūd* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ǧandī, s.d.).


Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Beirut: Dār șādir, s.d.)


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——, *Laṭāʾif al-minan wa-l-akhqāq* (Cairo: ʿĀlam al-fikr, s.d.).

——, *Mīzān al-kubrā* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ʿĀmira, 1318 H.).


**Fonti secondarie**


——, ‘Rūḥāniyya,’ *El* viii, 593–4.


Vajda, G., ‘*Idjāţa*’, *EI* iii, 1020–2.


This article focuses on the method of transmission in *aḥbār* belonging to the Arabic literary genre of love prose. The survey of the system of quotations in thirteen love treatises written between the 4th/10th and the 11th/17th centuries indicates that the traditional *iṣnād*, in which the names of the transmitters are included, was progressively abandoned. Authors starting from Muḥulṭāy (d. 762/1361) chose instead to favour quotations of books by their titles, even though the preferred method of transmitting knowledge was still oral during the Mamluk period. Use of written ‘références’ not only indicates a formal change of conventional practice, but also implies the willingness of later authors to claim a kind of authorship in reshaping stories taken from old material.

L’histoire de la littérature arabo-islamique compte une quinzaine de traités d’amour conservés, dont la production s’est étendue sur huit siècles environ. Du point de vue chronologique, les premières monographies sur l’amour ‘ʿudrite, contenant une discussion théorique sur l’amour-passion (*ʿišq*)1 et pouvant être considérées comme de véritables traités d’amour, sont la *Risāla fi l-ʿišq wa-l-nisāʾ* et la *Risālat al-qiyān* d’al-Ǧāḥiṣ (m. 255/869). Le plus tardif des ouvrages de ce type publiés à ce jour est le *Kitāb ḥāwānī l-ašwāq fi maʿānī l-ʿuššāq* d’Ibn al-Bakkār al-Balḥī (m. 1040/1630). Tous les ouvrages qui traitent exclusivement de l’amour ‘courtois’ et qui furent écrits entre ces deux extrêmes, partagent, malgré leurs différences, un certain nombre de thèmes communs, comme l’essence de l’amour-passion (*māḥiyyat al-ʿišq*) et les états (*ahwāl*) des amants,2 ce qui permet d’évoquer un véritable ‘genre littéraire’. Dans tous ces traités d’amour, une discussion théorique sur l’attitude à adopter face à l’amour-passion est accompagnée et étayée par des notices relatant l’histoire d’amants éprouvés par le ‘ʿišq’, chaque auteur introduisant un nombre limité d’histoires originales.3 Cet

1 A. Cheikh-Moussa, ‘La négation d’érôs’, 73.
3 Stefan Leder observe, à propos de la transmission du ḥabar littéraire, que ‘authors of compilations are [...] not supposed to have produced the texts they present. In most of our sources we find quotations mostly without any indication
article analyse les déclarations des auteurs concernant les sources qu’ils utilisèrent, ainsi que les passages où ils exposent au lecteur la méthode adoptée dans la rédaction de leurs notices. Cette étude de cas se fonde sur un corpus limité aux traités d’amour, dont l’histoire peut être considérée comme représentative de tendances plus générales dans l’évolution de la littérature de langue arabe.

L’authentification du ḥabar par la mention de son origine fut très tôt introduite dans l’adab, bien que les auteurs fassent souvent une utilisation ‘allégée’ de cet instrument. L’isnād de l’adab n’a d’ailleurs pas la même fonction que dans le hadīth, car il ne sert pas véritablement à établir l’origine d’un texte. La méthode de l’isnād est traditionnellement liée à l’oralité. Il témoigne de la riwāya, ou transmission orale d’un texte écrit. Bien qu’elle fasse souvent référence à l’écrit, la riwāya est donc strictement liée au concept de tradition orale. Le prestige de cette forme de transmission du savoir, née entre la fin du IIe/VIIIe siècle et le début du IIIe/IXe siècle, lorsque les premières collections de hadīts (musannafs...
et musnads) furent couchées par écrit,8 s’est perpétuée dans la culture arabo-islamique jusqu’à une époque très tardive9. À partir de la deuxième moitié du IIe/VIIIe siècle, la transmission du ḥabar devint une discipline à part, bien qu’elle continuât à utiliser la méthode de l’isnād.10 Jonathan Berkey remarque que le prestige de cette méthode de transmission demeura intact pendant longtemps et que la valeur de la connaissance acquise par les livres continuâ à faire l’objet de doutes à l’époque mamelouke. Selon lui, la véritable connaissance venait, encore à cette époque, uniquement d’une personne instruite.11 Cet article propose d’analyser les passages qui font référence à la transmission des notices dans un corpus de treize traités d’amour, couvrant une période d’environ sept siècles. La première partie de ce travail relève et compare les données textuelles concernant la transmission des notices sur les amants dans les ouvrages qui précèdent chronologiquement al-Wādiḥ al-muhbīn fī ḍikr man ustushīda min al-muḥibbīn de Muğūltāy (m. 762/1361). La seconde partie est entièrement consacrée au Wādiḥ, qui représente un tournant dans l’histoire de la citation de références livresques explicites. Enfin, la troisième partie se penche sur l’évolution des méthodes de citation chez les auteurs postérieurs à Muğūltāy.

A. Les sources des notices sur les amants avant Muğūltāy (m. 762/1361)

Comme tout ouvrage d’adab, les traités d’amour mêlent poésie et prose, auxquelles s’ajoutent des citations du Coran et du ḥadīḥ. Chacune de ces composantes (à l’exception des citations coraniques) est traditionnellement précédée d’un isnād12 dans lequel figurent les noms

9 Gregor Schoeler remarque à ce propos : ‘The claim of ‘heard/audited transmission’ (al-riwāya al-masmū‘a) was in principle still in force even in the age of madrasa, irrespective of the fact that, in most cases, transmission took place on the basis of books. ‘Heard transmission’ continued to play a practical role and beginning from the fourth/tenth and the fifth/eleventh centuries, assumed new forms : a book heard from or read to an author was tagged with a written ‘endorsement’, the iğāzat al-samā‘. Arab scholars always regarded and still regard manuscripts with such a samā‘ ‘endorsement’ as superior to those without it.’ (G. Schoeler, The Oral and the Written, 44).
10 S. Leder, ‘The Literary Use of the Khabar’, 313.
des transmetteurs du matn (contenu). L’ensemble de l’isnād et du matn constitue le ḥabar ou ‘unité d’information’.\(^\text{13}\)

Dans les traités d’amour qui suivent, tous antérieurs au Wāḍih, la méthode suivie par chaque auteur pour renvoyer à ses sources a été relevée.\(^\text{14}\)

1) I’tīlāl al-qulūb fī aḥbār al-‘uṣṣāq wa-l-muḥābbīn d’al-Ḥarāʾītī (m. 327/938). L’I’tīlāl al-qulūb fī aḥbār al-‘uṣṣāq wa-l-muḥābbīn d’Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ǧaʿfar al-Sāmarrī al-Ḥarāʾītī, qui enseigna le ḥadīth à Damas\(^\text{15}\), est le premier d’une série d’ouvrages sur l’amour à caractère moralisant et d’inspiration religieuse. Par la suite, les ḥanbalites Ibn al-Ǧāwzī (m. 597/1200) et Ibn Qayyim al-Ǧawziyya (m. 751/1350) reprendront dans leurs traités plusieurs idées et exemples apparaissant dans l’I’tīlāl.\(^\text{16}\) Le livre est composé dans une perspective religieuse et éthique, son auteur essayant de combattre la tradition littéraire amoureuse profane sur la base du Coran, du ḥadīth et d’anecdotes pieuses.\(^\text{17}\) Beatrice Gruendler observe qu’il rapporte sans les commenter une grande variété d’opinions différentes à propos de l’amour.\(^\text{18}\)

Dans cet ouvrage, al-Ḥarāʾītī emploie une méthode de transmission traditionnelle, quel que soit le domaine auquel appartient l’information qu’il donne. Il mentionne un grand nombre de ḥadīths munis de chaînes de garants qui témoignent, du moins formellement, d’une transmission orale. Pas une seule source écrite n’est citée explicitement. Parmi les noms des transmetteurs qu’il mentionne dans ses isnāds, ceux de Wahb b. al-Munabbīh,\(^\text{19}\) d’al-Hayyām b. ʿAdī,\(^\text{20}\) d’al-Zubayr b. Bakkār\(^\text{21}\) et d’al-ʿAbbās b. Hišām al-Kalbī\(^\text{22}\) reviennent très souvent. Il s’agit de

\(^{13}\) ‘The basic meaning of khabar denotes ‘a piece of information’ as reflected also by the verbal use of this root. In a literary context, however, the notion applies to narration in a more general sense.’ (S. Leder, ‘The Literary Use of the Khabar’, 279).

\(^{14}\) Nous avons consacré plus ou moins de place à chaque auteur de traité d’amour en fonction de l’intérêt que sa méthode de citation des sources présente pour notre étude.

\(^{15}\) (Réd.), ‘al-Khārāʾītī’, Eḍ, iv, 1088b.

\(^{16}\) L.A. Giffen, Theory of Profane Love, 16.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.


\(^{19}\) Al-Ḥarāʾītī, I’tīlāl al-qulūb, 50, 57, 65, 129, 165.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 61, 95, 157, 211, 212, 231, 233, 234, 237, 259, 267.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 79, 80, 81, 86, 88, 97, 100, 101, 151, 167, 178, 182, 207, 208, 210, 214, 223, 253, 254, 255, 256, 270, 283, 286, 300, 320, 305, 322, 326, 346, 349 (2 fois).

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 114, 213, 242, 269, 272, 320.
personnalités célèbres, connues comme transmetteurs d’*āḥbār*. Ces auteurs seraient parmi les premiers à avoir couché par écrit des histoires d’amour de poètes bédouins, qui étaient auparavant connus pour leur valeur guerrière, et à les avoir ainsi transformés en héros de romans ‘courtois’. Même si al-Ḥarā’īṭī a utilisé leurs livres ou leurs cahiers de notes, il ne le mentionne pas clairement. Dans son ouvrage, le prestige de l’*ʿisnād* traditionnel, qui donne l’‘illusion’ d’une transmission orale, demeure intact.

2) Al-Maṣūn fi sīr al-hawā l-maknūn d’Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī al-Ṭayyār (m. 413/1022)
Le *Kitāb al-Maṣūn fi sīr al-hawā l-maknūn* d’al-Ḥuṣrī pose tout particulièrement la question de savoir quand l’on doit, ou quand l’on peut, garder ses sentiments secrets. L’œuvre constitue un lien essentiel dans la transmission de la matière littéraire sur l’amour entre les auteurs du IIIe et ceux du IVe siècle de l’hégire. Elle représente probablement l’anneau de conjonction entre l’histoire du ‘*ʿisq* profane et le soufisme. Pour la première fois, amour profane et amour divin sont mélangés.

Dans le *Maṣūn* les chaînes de transmission traditionnelles sont dans la plus part des cas omises. Al-Ḥuṣrī introduit ses *āḥbār* à la première personne, par un seul nom (qāla fulān), ou par une vague indication qui ne donne aucune information sur l’identité de celui qui parle. Dans deux cas seulement, les titres d’ouvrages écrits remplacent ces mentions. La référence aux sources reste donc imprécise chez al-Ḥuṣrī, qui ne fait pas usage de l’*ʿisnād* nominal traditionnel et n’applique guère non plus la méthode ‘moderne’ de citations ‘livresques’.

3) Tawq al-ḥāmāma fī l-ulfa wa-l-ullāf d’Ibn Ḥazm (m. 456/1064)
Le *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma* du célèbre juriste andalous Ibn Ḥazm constitue un cas particulier dans l’histoire du genre littéraire des traités d’amour. Bien qu’Ibn Ḥazm reste fidèle à la tradition orientale, les critiques ne manquent pas de souligner l’originalité de son ouvrage et le tour

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23 Voir à ce propos l’article de R. Blachère, ‘Problème de la transfiguration du poète tribal’.


28 Il s’agit du *Kitāb Faqīh al-luġa* et d’*al-Kitāb al-mubḥīh* d’al-Ṭaʾalībī (ibid., 166 et 331).

29 G. Martinez, ‘L’amour-trace !’, 1.
autobiographique, marqué par la sincérité, qu’il possède. Ibn Ḥazm a souvent été témoin des histoires qu’il raconte et il déclare ne pas s’intéresser aux récits des anciens Arabes (al-a’rāb al-muqaddamūn), comme d’autres l’ont fait, car les notices qui les concernent ont déjà été transmises par un grand nombre d’auteurs. Le traité d’Ibn Ḥazm se caractérise ainsi par un nombre très réduit d’isnāds ; en lieu et place, l’auteur déclare avoir été le témoin des événements ou avoir entendu personnellement raconter l’histoire, mais sans nommer ses sources, par souci de discrétion. La mention de sources écrites y est presque absente : il ne cite que quatre titres et ne nomme qu’un seul auteur. 4) Mašārī al-‘ussāq d’al-Sarrāḡ (m. 500/1106)
Célèbre traditionniste ḥanbalite de Bagdad, al-Sarrāḡ est également connu pour son œuvre poétique. Il se serait consacré en priorité à deux types de travaux littéraires : la versification de livres de fiqh ou à sujet religieux, et des ouvrages d’édification morale relevant de l’adab. Le Mašārī ressortit à cette seconde catégorie. Le titre du livre (Trépas des amants) donne le ton de l’ouvrage. Dans cette anthologie dont les notices évoquent toutes des amours tragiques, les histoires des amants ne sont apparemment pas classées selon un ordre précis, et les thèmes évoqués par les vers et les anecdotes sont conformes à ceux des autres traités d’amour.
À la différence de ses deux prédécesseurs, al-Ḥuṣṣī et Ibn Ḥazm, et selon ses propres déclarations, al-Sarrāḡ aurait recouru à la méthode traditionnelle de transmission du ḥabar, à laquelle il accorde une grande importance. Ses chaînes de transmission, très précises, comportent fréquemment la date et/ou le lieu où la transmission orale s’est produite. L’auteur cite souvent le nom du maître qui lui a transmis les

33 J.-C. Vadet, L’esprit courtois, 380–1.
34 Voici quelques exemples d’indications précises sur la transmission:
notices qu’il rapporte. À plusieurs reprises, l’auteur fait allusion à un texte écrit dont il aurait tiré certaines de ses notices, mais il n’en cite pas le titre. Seuls six titres d’ouvrages écrits sont cités explicitement.

5) Rawdat al-qulub wa-nuzhat al-muhbīb wa-l-mahbūb d’al-Šayzarī (XIe siècle)
L’auteur de la Rawda est peu connu. Tout au plus peut-on établir qu’il fut juge à Tabariyya. La date de sa mort est inconnue, mais son moment de gloire peut être situé dans le dernier quart du XIe siècle. Parmi les traités d’amour qui nous sont parvenus, le Wadīh est le premier, chronologiquement, à citer la Rawdat al-qulub. Les auteurs des traités


35 La mention bi-qirā’at ʿalayhi, parfois suivie de la date et/ou du lieu où la transmission est advenue, apparaît dans les passages suivants : 1 : 11, 12, 15, 21 (date), 21 (lieu), 26 (lieu), 31, 33, 36, 44, 49, 55, 67 (lieu), 85, 87, 91, 100, 102 (le lieu) ; 107, 113, 115, 120, 122, 124, 126, 127, 128, 131 (lieu), 138, 154 (date), 156 (date et le lieu), 161, 162 (lieu et date), 164, 167, 16 (lieu et date), 172, 174, 176, 181 (date), 184 (date et le lieu), 186 (date et le lieu), 187 (lieu), 193, 199 (date et le lieu), 207, 238, 245 (date et le lieu), 255, 267 (2 fois), 269 (date), 275, 292, 309, 312, 2 : 7, 18 (date), 20 (lieu), 25 (lieu), 41, 50, 56 (date), 86, 94, 98, 113, 192, 199, 253, 285, 287.


D. Semāh, ‘Rawdat al-qulūb’.
d’amour qui ont vécu après al-Šayzarī, que ce soit avant ou à la même
époque que Muğulāy (Šīhāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd et Ibn Qayyim al-
Gawziyya), ne semblent pas connaître ce traité.

La Rawda n’inclut pas de véritables isnāds. Les aḥbār sont souvent
introduits par des expressions vagues dont les plus fréquentes sont ḥakā
falān (Untel raconta), ḥukiya (on raconta) et qīla (on dit). Seuls
deux ouvrages écrits, dont al-Šayzarī affirme être l’auteur, y sont
mentionnés comme sources.

6) Ḍamm al-hawā d’Ibn al-Ḡawzī (m. 597/1200)
Ibn al-Ḡawzī est un des plus hauts représentants de l’école ḥanbalite et
exerçà une influence majeure sur le ḥanbalisme à l’époque ayyoubide. Son Ḍamm al-hawā eut une influence capitale, dans la forme comme
dans le fond, sur la Rawdat al-qlūb du ḥanbalite plus tardif Ibn Qayyim
al-Ḡawziyya (m. 751/1350). Le caractère moralisant de l’ouvrage, qui
transparaît déjà dans son titre, est confirmé par le contenu. Ibn al-Ḡawzī
defend un enseignement traditionnel relatif à l’amour, en réaction à
certaines pratiques soufies et aux théories d’Ibn Dāwūd et d’Ibn Ḥazm.
Le Ḍamm al-hawā diffère des autres ouvrages du genre par sa discussion
originale du désir et de la passion amoureuse. Les citations y ont une
portée didactique, religieuse, morale et philosophico-éthique. Se
présentant comme un médecin ou un éducateur, Ibn al-Ḡawzī propose de
guérir de la convoitise charnelle et de l’amour malheureux.

Les isnāds d’Ibn al-Ḡawzī ne laissent apparaître qu’une seule mention
explicite de livre comme source. Dans ses chaînes de transmission

39 Al-Šayzarī, Rawdat al-qlūb, 11, 38, 41, 44, 49, 57, 59, 62, 64, 70, 71, 80,
105, 107, 109, 119, 122 (2 fois), 124, 138, 167, 163, 169, 179, 203, 215, 219,
40 Ibid., 34, 69, 184, 189, 194, 200, 223, 251 (2 fois), 272, 276, 288, 289, 294.
41 Ibid., 60, 196, 197, 199 (2 fois), 200, 249, 250, 261, 277, 178, 280, 289,
290, 291 (2 fois), 296.
42 Wa-qad ḡakartu fī kitābī l-maʿrūf bi-l-Tuhfa wa-l-ṭurfa ; wa-fī kitābī l-maʿrūf
bi-l-Ḥadāʾ iq wa-l-ṭimār fī nāwādir al-qudāt wa-l-buḥalā : ibid., 234 et 297.
44 J. N. Bell, Love Theory, 9.
46 S. Leder, Ibn al-Ḡawzī, 70.
47 Wa-qad ḡakarta Abū Bakr b. Dāwūd fī Kitāb al-Zahra (Ibn al-Ḡawzī,
Ḏamm al-hawā, 319). Dans un autre passage, Ibn al-Ḡawzī mentionne le Kitāb
Gamil Buṭayna wa-ʿAfrā wa-ʿUrwa wa-ʿAṣayyir. Beaucoup de ces ‘ouvrages’
portant le mot kitāb suivi du nom de deux amants sont mentionnés dans le
Fihrist d’Ibn al-Nadīm (Fihrist, 478). Il ne s’agit probablement pas de véritables
‘traditionnelles’, les noms des mêmes ‘logographes’ et qussāṣ cités par son prédécesseur ḥanbalite al-Ḥarāʾīṭi sont particulièrement récurrents. ⁴⁸

7) Manāẓil al-ḥabbāb wa-manāẓih al-ḥabbāb de Šīḥāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd (m. 725/1325)


Comme dans le Maṣūn d’al-Ḥuṣrī et à différence du Maṣārīʿ al-ʿūṣāq d’Ibn al-Sarrāq et du Ẓamm al-ḥawā d’Ibn al-Ḡawzī, ses notices sont en général introduites soit par la mention d’un seul nom, ⁵⁰ soit par de vagues indications qui ne renseignent nullement ses lecteurs sur la source du ḥabar. ⁵¹

Le Manāẓil contient les titres de huit ouvrages écrits, pour un total de quatorze références explicites à des livres. ⁵² Dans cinq de ces citations apparaît la mention bi-ʾisnād ḡakaratuh. Ce renvoi du lecteur à un isnād apparaissant dans un autre ouvrage semble représenter la première déclaration explicite de l’utilisation d’un livre comme source.


⁵¹ Cf. par exemple, ‘ṣuʾīla baʾd al-ʾulamāʾ ‘an ahl al-ḥawā fa-qāla’ (ibid., 63).

⁵² Ḥakara Ibn al-Aʾrābī l-maʾrūf bi-l-Waṣṣāf fī kitābīhī bi-ʾisnād ḡakaratuh (ibid., 11); wa-min asmāʾihī wa-waṣaṣṭihi allātī ḡakarahdī al-Ḥuṣrī fī kitābīhī (ibid., 50); qad ḡakara al-Marzubānī fī Kitāb al-Riyyād (ibid., 67); ḡakara al-Ḥasan al-Qārī fī Kitāb Maṣārīʿ fī-ʾisnād ḡakarahdī (ibid., 223); wa-ḥakā Abū Bakr b. Dāwūd ṭan ṭalab bi-ʾisnād ḡakarahdī fī Kitāb al-Zahrā (ibid., 205); ḡakara Abū Bakr b. Dāwūd ṭāḥabarihi (ibid., 218); wa-ḥakā Abū Bakr al-Aḥbār al-ʾṯāʾīb bi-ʾisnād ḡakarahdī (ibid., 231); wa-ḥakara Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Gaʿfar al-Ḥarāʾīṭi fī Kitāb ṭalāl al-qulūb bi-ʾisnād ḡakarahdī (ibid., 247); wa-ḥakā al-Diyāʿ fī Kitāb ṭalāl al-qulūb (ibid., 249); ḡakara al-ṣayḥ Ḥanāl al-dīn Abū Faraq b. al-Ḡawzī fī kitāb lāhu yusammā l-Miftāḥ (ibid., 279).
B. Le cas d’al-Wādiḥ muḥbīn fi ḍikr man uṣṭushida min al-muḥbībīn de Muğulṭāy (m. 762/1361)

Dans les traités d’amour qui précèdent Muğulṭāy, deux techniques distinctes de renvoi aux sources sont adoptées. Al-Ḥarāʾiṭi, Ibn al-Sarrāḡ et Ibn al-Ḡawzī utilisent en priorité des chaînes de transmission comportant plusieurs noms, qui ressemblent, au moins formellement, aux ḫāṣīds employés pour la transmission du ḥadīṯ. Cela tient en partie au caractère moralisant de leurs ouvrages, qui les rapproche du ḥadīṯ et de la sunna. Dans al-Maṣṭūn, Ṭawq al-hamāma, Rawdat al-qlūb et Manāzīl al-ḥabūb, les références aux sources restent en revanche imprécises et peu documentées, peut-être à cause du caractère supposé plus ‘léger’ de ces ouvrages et, dans le cas du Ṭawq, de la Rawdat al-qlūb, du rôle de témoin direct des événements narrés que joue l’auteur. Tous les ouvrages mentionnés ont néanmoins en commun le nombre très réduit de sources écrites mentionnées et le fait que l’auteur ne précise jamais comment il s’est servi des ouvrages dont il mentionne les titres.

Le Wādiḥ al-muḥbīn fi ḍikr man uṣṭushida min al-muḥbībīn, ou Précis des martyrs de l’amour, fut écrit par Muğulṭāy, auteur d’origine turque qui vécut dans Le Caire des Mamelouks. Il mentionne quatre-vingt-deux ouvrages différents,53 dont plusieurs sont cités plusieurs fois, mais sans

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53 Muğulṭāy, al-Wādiḥ al-muḥbīn : Kitāb al-Kāmil, Kitāb al-Ḍaḥḥira et Taṣkīr al-hufṣa (19) ; Taʾrīḫ Nisābūr (19 et 42) ; Rustāq al-ittifāq fī maḥbūb ṣuʿ ārāʾ al-ḥaġāq (21 et 91) ; Kitāb al-Iʿtīlāl (23, 24, 61, 238 et 342) ; al-Taṣfīr (Kawāṣī) et al-Taṣfīr (Sufyān b. Saʿīd al-Ṭawrī, 2 fois) (23) ; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim et Masnad Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Sarrāḡ (24) ; al-Muḥtaḍāʾ et Taḥdīr al-āḏābām (29) ; Imitīzāḏ al-ruḥuʿ ou Imitīzāḏ al-nūfūs (30, 31, 43, 48, 62, 124, 137, 228, 229, 401 et 402) ; Rabiʿ al-abrār (33) ; Maydān al-ʿaṣīqīn fī ʿaḥwāl al-ʿaḏābām (34) ; Mīḥnāt al-ẓāṯīf (37, 93, 278, 286, 307, 326 et 403) ; Kitāb al-Ḥikma (41, 103) ; al-Awṣqāt et Kitāb al-Taḥaqāt (42) ; al-Naqāʿ id (44 et 125) ; al-Manṭūr wa-l-maẓār (44, 46, 61, 72 et 236) ; al-Laʿālī fi ʿaḥwāl al-ʿaṯāʾī (50) ; Qadḥ al-ʿaṯāʾī fī al-Kalām al-Laʿālī ; Kitāb al-Fāsil bayna al-ḥāḍīl ; Kitāb al-Kāmil et Kitāb al-Niṣwār (44) ; Kitāb al-Muttaqīyāmān (49) ; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (53., 61, 69, 72, 350) ; al-Muḥayyī (54) ; Bahgat al-muqāläss (62) ; Kitāb al-Azmāna (66) ; Kitāb al-Alfāzāt et Kitāb al-Talḥīs (70) ; Rawdat al-qlūb wa-nuḥāt al-maḥabbā wa-l-maḥbūb (71, 144, 186, 216, 260, 337 et 367) ; Nawāḏīr al-ʿuṣāl (88 et 236) ; al-Muṣṭahbah et Kitāb al-Rawḥāt (90) ; Taʾrīḫ Dimāṣq (91) ; al-Muṭaṣṣal li-l-Nāṣiʾ (106) ; Kitāb al-Ṭawq (116) ; Ḍamm al-hawā (116 et 395) ; Kitāb al-Zāhra, Kitāb al-ṣaḥāba ; Usd al-ḡāba et Kitāb al-Iḥāna (131) ; Anamlī (Ibn Durayd) (154) ; Anamlī (Muḥammad b. Qāsim al-Anbārī) (155) ; Fiqh al-ʿuṣāl (158) ; al-Taḥaqqāt (Ibn Qutayba) (163, 233 et 380) ; al-Muʿgam (al-Marzuqānī) (179 et 261) ; al-Mustanīr et Tark al-miḥrāb fī l-ziyāda al-Muʿgam al-ṣuʿ ārāʾ (179) ; Kitāb al-Anīs (181 et 264) ; Anamlī (Abū ʿAbd Allāḥ Muḥammad b.
qu’aucun ne se distingue véritablement des autres par le nombre de citations. Les livres mentionnés par Muğultây relèvent de genres variés. Ils vont du traité de grammaire et de langue à l’anthologie littéraire, en passant par les recueils de hadîth et les ouvrages historiques, sans oublier les autres traités d’amour. Muğultây privilégie clairement les citations ‘livresques’. Certains passages renvoyant à des sources écrites témoignent également de la méthode utilisée par Muğultây dans la rédaction de son ouvrage et de l’utilisation littéraire qu’il en fait.

1) Le choix de la ‘bonne’ version
À travers l’histoire de Bişr et Hind54 qu’il affirme avoir tirée du Musnad de Šaraf al-Dîn al-Miṣrî, Muğultây expose à ses lecteurs la méthode qu’il a adoptée dans le choix de la ‘bonne’ version de l’histoire. Le Wâdiḥ relate ainsi qu’une femme mariée, nommée Hind, tomba amoureuse de Bişr, un homme qui passait chaque jour devant chez elle lorsqu’il allait trouver le Prophète Muḥammad. Elle lui envoya des vers où elle lui exposait ses sentiments, mais Bişr lui conseilla de prier Dieu afin de ne pas tomber dans l’adultère. Malgré cet avertissement, Hind insista tant qu’il décida de changer de chemin. Elle en tomba malade de chagrin, puis réussit à convaincre son mari de s’installer sur la route que Bişr empruntait désormais. Le voir à nouveau la guérit de sa langueur. Un jour, elle s’ouvrît à une vieille femme qui lui promit que son amour serait satisfait. Elle attira Bişr chez Hind par la ruse et les enferma ensemble. Le mari de Hind rentra plus tôt que prévu et, trouvant sa femme avec un autre homme, la répudia, puis alla demander au Prophète justice contre Bişr. Ce dernier convoqua Hind et la vieille femme, qui avouèrent leur méfait. Bişr tomba amoureux de Hind et demanda sa main, mais Hind

54 Ibid., 125–31.
Informée de sa mort, Hind trépassa à son tour. À la fin du ḥabar, l’auteur du Wādīḥ écrit :


55 ʿAbū Mūsā al-Madhīnī dans Kitāb al-Ṣāḥība et Ibn al-ʿAṭīr dans Usd al-ḡāba ont mentionné des passages de cette histoire, mais ils en ont négligé d’autres qu’il était nécessaire de rapporter et que nous avons donc tirés du Kitāb al-Iḥāna’. (La citation de ce livre est trop vague pour pouvoir identifier ce dernier ouvrage.) Ibid., 131.


57 Voir à ce propos M. Balda-Tillier, Un traité d’amour tardif, 129–54.
plusieurs sources et remodelé le ḥabar à sa guise. Or, selon la méthode traditionnelle, les auteurs n’admettent aucune participation dans l’élaboration d’un récit, ce qui donne l’impression que son contenu n’a aucunement été touché par leur créativité.58


2) Les biographies
Dans un autre cas,60 Muġūṭṭāy apporte des précisions sur un personnage qu’il cite dans une de ses notices :


Ces références ‘bibliographiques’ précises semblent avoir pour fonction de permettre au lecteur de retrouver des informations sur le personnage cité.

3) De nouvelles histoires

Les sources que Muġūṭṭāy cite pour cette notice ne sont pas des traités d’amour64 et la notice ne se trouve, à notre connaissance, dans aucun des

59 Muġūṭṭāy, al-Wāḍīḥ al-mubīn, 226.
60 Ibid., 179.
61 ‘Ni al-Marzubānī dans son Muʿgam et dans son Kitāb al-Mustanīr, ni Abū l-Fārağ al-Umawī ne mentionnent ce ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAqlama, alors que je le mentionne dans mon livre Tark al-miḥā ṣā fi l-ziyāda ʿalā Muʿgam al-ṣuʾrārā’.
63 Ibid., 378.
64 La seule exception est représentée par Ibn al-Marzubānī, cité à la page 381, qui est bien l’auteur d’un traité d’amour. Malgré cela nous ne l’avons pas pris en compte, car Muġūṭṭāy ne rapporte pas sous l’autorité de ce transmetteur l’histoire dans sa totalité, mais uniquement le fait que la mutamanniya du
traités conservés antérieurs au Wādīḥ. Notre auteur déclare explicitement avoir comparé plusieurs versions écrites du ḥabar pour choisir celle qui convenait le mieux à son propos et l’avoir ensuite introduite dans la tradition amoureuse dont elle ne faisait pas encore partie.

4) Variations sur le thème de l’amour
La mention de sources ‘livresques’ en lieu d’ʿisnād offre à notre auteur la possibilité d’apporter des variations dans les histoires qu’il relate. Muğultây dit ainsi avoir tiré cette brève notice du Kitāb al-Zahra d’Ibn Dāwūd :

Dans la tradition amoureuse, cette histoire apparaît dans les ouvrages suivants : Kitāb al-Zahra d’Ibn Dāwūd (m. 294/909),66 Iʿtīlāl al-qulūb d’al-Ḥarāʾīṭī (m. 327/939),67 Damm al-hawā d’Ibn al-Ǧawzī (m. 597/1200),68 Manāżīl al-ḥabīb de Śihāb al-dīn Māhmūd (m. 725/1325),69 Tazīyān al-aswāq bi-tafsīl aśwāq al-ʿuṣṣāq de Dāwūd al-Anṭākī (m. 1008/1599).70 Dans le Kitāb al-Zahra, l’histoire est la même, mot pour mot, que dans le Wādīḥ ; comme dans l’ouvrage de Muğultây, elle ne comporte qu’un vers. Dans Iʿtīlāl al-qulūb, dans Damm al-hawā, l’auteur dit ainsi avoir tiré cette brève notice du Kitāb al-Zahra :

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65 ‘Ibn Dāwūd mentionna dans le Kitāb al-Zahra qu’un jeune homme appelé Imruʾ al-Qays tomba éperdument amoureux d’une jeune femme de son clan. Quand elle sut qu’il l’aimait, elle se détourna de lui. Il en perdit la raison et déperit, ce qui suscita la compassion des gens. Quand elle sut qu’il était au bord de la tombe, elle alla le trouver. Apparaissant dans le cadre de la porte, elle s’exclama : ‘Comment vas-tu, Imruʾ al-Qays ?’. Il répondit par ce vers :

Dāwūd al-Anṭākī, Tazīyān al-aswāq, 208.
dans Manāzīl al-aḥbāb et dans Tazyīn al-aswāq, l’histoire est beaucoup plus longue et mentionne trois vers au lieu d’un seul.

Bien que la partie en prose soit presque identique, une comparaison entre le vers du Kitāb al-Zahra et celui du Wādīh montre que, même si les deux versions sont semblables au point du vue du sens, elles présentent des variantes significatives. Dans Kitāb al-Zahra, nous trouvons en effet :

\[ \text{danat wa-zalāhu l-mawti baynī wa-baynahā} / \text{wa-‘adlat bi-wašlin ħīna lā yanfa’u l-wašlu} \]

Alors que le Wādīh mentionne :

\[ \text{danat wa-hiyādu l-mawti baynī wa-baynahā} / \text{wa-‘addat bi-wašlin ħīna lā yanfa’u l-wašlu} \]

Trois mots diffèrent dans la version du Wādīh par rapport à celle du Kitāb al-Zahra\(^1\) : atāt à la place de danat, ḥiyād à la place de zilāl et ġādat à la place adlat. Le verbe atāt a le sens de venir et danāl celui de se rapprocher. Zilāl est le pluriel de zill, ombre. Le terme peut avoir la connotation positive d’‘absence d’ardeur du soleil’ et indiquer le Paradis par opposition à la chaleur de l’Enfer, ou une connotation négative et signifier alors les ténèbres. Ḥiyād signifie en revanche, selon le Lisān al-‘arab, la fosse que l’on creuse pour y récolter de l’eau. Quant à adlat, il s’agit de la quatrième forme de dalāl et le verbe a le sens de ‘tendre, présenter quelque chose avec la main’ (un cadeau, par exemple). ġādat signifie ‘être généreux’.

La version du Kitāb al-Zahra est beaucoup moins récurrente et n’apparaît que dans trois ouvrages, qui font tous partie de la tradition amoureuse (‘tīlāl al-qulāb, Ḍamm al-hawā et Tazyīn al-aswāq). La version du Wādīh est en revanche présente dans un nombre relativement important d’ouvrages qui n’appartiennent pas au même genre littéraire, notamment : Muʿgam al-udābā’ d’Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (m. 626/1229),\(^2\) ‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fi ṯabaqāt al-‘aṭībā’ d’Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a (m. 668/1270).\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Nous sommes conscients que ces variantes pourraient être dues non pas à une intention explicite de l’auteur, mais à la fluidité textuelle qui accompagne la transmission des textes anciens. Dans le cas du Wādīh, la version du ḥabar donnée dans l’édition imprimée est néanmoins identique à celle d’un manuscrit copié du vivant de l’auteur. Ms Istanbul (Süleymaniye), Fātih, 4143, f. 48v l. 13–f. 49r l. 2.

\(^2\) Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, Muʿgam al-udābā’, 5 : 467.

\(^3\) Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a, ‘Uyūn al-anbā’, 660.
Al-Faḥrī fī l-ādāb al-sultāniyya d’Ibn al-Ṭiqtuqā (m. 709/1309) ;74 Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-‘Arab d’al-Nuwayrī (m. 733/1333) ;75 al-Wāfi bi-l-wāfiyāt d’al-Ṣafadī (m. 764/1363) ;76 al-Kaškūl d’al-‘Āmilī (m. 1030/1621).77

Dans un seul de ces ouvrages, al-Kaškūl d’al-‘Āmilī (qui est postérieur au traité de Muğulṭāy), le vers est mentionné dans le même contexte que dans le Wādīh et rattaché à la même histoire. Le Mu’qam al-udabā’, ‘Uyūn al-anbā’, Nihāyat al-arab et al-Wāfi bi-l-wāfiyāt racontent tous qu’Abū Ḥāfīl al-Kaḥhāl aurait offert à Šaraf al-Dīn Ibn ‘Unayn un agneau qu’il trouva trop maigre. Al-Kaḥhāl lui aurait alors envoyé un long poème qui se terminait par le vers cité dans le Wādīh. Le vers est utilisé, dans ce cas, afin de railler un cadeau ‘radīn’, ici un agneau trop maigre.

Dans une troisième anecdote, uniquement présente dans al-Faḥrī d’Ibn al-Ṭiqtuqā, l’auteur relate l’histoire d’un vizir du calife al-Muqtafī (r. 530/1136–554/1160) qui le servit pendant longtemps, puis fut déchu et mourut de privations. Juste avant sa mort, le vizir aurait récité le vers en question (i.e. la version du Wādīh) au calife qui était venu, enfin, lui rendre visite.

Un même vers, dont l’auteur n’est jamais mentionné, est donc utilisé dans trois contextes différents. Cependant, la version citée dans le Kitāb al-Zahra d’Ibn Dāwūd présente des variantes telles qu’on peut considérer qu’il s’agit d’un vers différent de celui présent dans le Wādīh. Bien que Muğulṭāy déclare au début de sa notice qu’il tire son ḥabar du Kitāb al-Zahra, il n’a en réalité pris de son illustre prédécesseur que la partie en prose de la notice, la citation poétique étant empruntée ailleurs. Le choix de l’auteur du Wādīh n’est pas anodin. En citant comme source de sa notice le Kitāb al-Zahra, Muğulṭāy renvoie son lecteur à ce livre. En introduisant une variante, cependant, l’auteur ‘signe’ sa propre version d’une histoire déjà connue. Cela lui permet également d’appliquer la technique du ḡidd et du hazl, qui consiste à intercaler parmi des alḥār ‘pédagogiques’ et sérieux des propos plus légers, dans le but d’enseigner en amusant et d’éviter l’ennui – procédé littéraire que Muğulṭāy affirme explicitement suivre dès son introduction.

74 Ibn al-Ṭiqtuqā, al-Faḥrī, 227–228.
75 Al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-arab, 10 : 77–8.
76 Al-Ṣafadī, al-Wāfi bi-l-wāfiyāt, 5 : 147.
77 Al-‘Āmilī, al-Kaškūl, 2 : 155.
C. Les traités d’amour postérieurs au Wādiḥ
En légitimant la citation de sources écrites, en commentant son utilisation et en montrant l’usage littéraire qu’il était possible d’en faire, Muqulṭāy ouvrit la voie à ses successeurs, qui tirèrent profit de son exemple et mentionnèrent de plus en plus de livres. Une fois la référence à des sources écrites devenue acceptable, de nouveaux procédés furent mis en œuvre. Les auteurs les plus innovateurs dans ce domaine sont l’auteur anonyme du Kitāb Asʿār al-aswāq fī ašʿār al-aswāq et Dāwūd al-Antākī, auteur du Tazīyīn al-aswāq fī aḥbār al-ʿuṣṣāq.

1) Rawdāt al-muḥībbīn wa-nuzhat al-muṣṭaʿqīn d’Ibn Qayyim al-Ḡawziyya (m. 751/1350)
Ibn Qayyim al-Gawziyya est le plus célèbre disciple d’Ibn Taymiyya (m. 728/1328).\(^{78}\) La Rawdā constitue la présentation la plus aboutie de la pensée hanbalite sur l’amour.\(^{79}\) L’auteur de la Rawdā mentionne parmi ses sources trente-cinq ouvrages écrites,\(^{80}\) ce qui représente moins de la moitié de ceux cités par le Wādiḥ pour un nombre équivalent de pages. Ses sources ne sont pas aussi variées que dans le Wādiḥ : bien qu’il cite quelques ouvrages historiques ou d’adab, la plupart des livres mentionnés dans la Rawdā sont des recueils de ḥadīth ou des ouvrages touchant aux sciences religieuses et à la morale islamique.

\(^{78}\) Pour une biographie détaillée de ce personnage, voir L. Holtzman, ‘Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah’, 202–23.\(^{79}\) J. N. Bell, Love Theory, 92.\(^{80}\) Ibn Qayyim al-Gawziyya, Rawdāt al-muḥībbīn : al-Șihāḥ (35, 46, 54 (2 fois) et 55) ; al-Muʾgam al-aswāṣ (al-Ṭabarānī) (86, 242, 244 (2 fois), 247 (2 fois) ; Taʾrīḥ Nisābūr (87) ; Şāhīḥ Muslim (99, 203, 242, 246, 247, 259–60 et 288) ; al-Şāhīḥayn (204, 242 et 288) ; Şāhīḥ Buhārī (243, 278 et 289) ; al-Şāhīḥ (2 fois) (289, 290, 311, 312, 342, 347, 363 (2 fois), 393, 394, 396, 397, 404, 405, 407 (2 fois), 408 et 422) ; Munṣad Muḥammad b. ʾĪsāq al-Sarrāq (99) ; Manāqib al-Ṣāfīʾī (116, 2 fois, 118 et 130) ; al-Ḳāmil (al-Mubarrad) et Kitāb rawḥu Mālik (117) ; Kitāb Rustaq al-ʾĪtīfāq (119) ; Şart al-Ḳāmil (121) ; Taʾrīḥ Bagdādī (122) ; Kitāb Imtīṣāq al-arwāḥ (145 et 367) ; Miḥna t al-zīrāf (147) ; Buhgāt al-maḡālīs (173) ; Kitāb al-Zahd (202) ; al-Munṣad (Ahmad b. Ḥanbal) (243 (2 fois), 291, 308, 313, 346, 387 et 410) ; Sunan Ibn Māḡah (245) ; Munṣad Abī Yaʿlā al-Mawṣīlī (246) ; Gāmiʿ al-Tirmīzī (247, 387 et 430) ; Aḥbār al-ʿuṣṣāq (263) ; al-Sunnah (Saʿīd b. Ṭāṣbīḥ) (292) ; Taṣfīr Ibn Abī Naqīf (353) ; Taṣfīr Abī Sāliḥ (354) ; Taṣfīr al-ʿAwāfī (355) ; Taṣfīr Ibn Abī Dāwūd (356) ; al-Munṣad (Abū Ḥusayn al-Layfī) (356) ; Tahrīm al-liwāʾ (359) ; Masāʿil Sāliḥ b. ʿAbd Allāh (362) ; Ṭabarī al-abrār (374) ; Sunan Abī Dāwūd (396 et 397) ; al-Şāhīḥ wa-l-Sunan wa-l-Masāʾilī (407) ; Munṣad al-Ḥārīqī b. ʿAbī Usāma (408) ; al-Munṣad (Yaʿqūb b. Suftūn) (412) ; al-Munṣad (al-Ṣāfīʾī) (414).

2) *Diwān al-ṣabāba* d’Ibn Abī Ḥaḍīla (m. 776/1375)

Le *Diwān al-ṣabāba* d’Ibn Abī Ḥaḍīla fut probablement rédigé peu de temps après le *Wādīḥ* et peut donc être considéré comme presque contemporain. Son auteur, après avoir étudié l’*adāb* à Damas, devint le directeur d’un couvent soufi. Il aurait pourtant été plus intéressé par la littérature que par la pratique du soufisme.82 Le *Diwān al-ṣabāba*, son livre le plus célèbre, contient un grand nombre de citations du Coran et du *ḥadīth*, mais compte aussi des anecdotes parfois audacieuses et une grande abondance de vers, ce qui en fait, selon la définition de Beatrice Gruendler, un ouvrage d’*adāb* pieux, semblable à l’*Iʿtīlāl al-qulūb*.83

Le *Diwān al-ṣabāba* compte très peu de chaînes de transmission traditionnelles, qu’Ibn Abī Ḥaḍīla n’utilise même pas pour citer le *ḥadīth*. Les titres d’ouvrages mentionnés sont en revanche relativement nombreux (30 pour 250 pages environ84 – une longueur qui correspond à un peu plus de la moitié du *Wādīḥ*). Les livres les plus cités sont des traités d’amour et des anthologies d’*adāb*. Quelques ouvrages de langue sont également mentionnés.

81 Cf. par exemple, ‘*fa-ammā l-maḥābbba fa-qīla*’ (33) ‘*wa-qīla*’ (36, 37 etc.), ‘*yuqāl*’ (39).


83 B. Gruendler, ‘ibn Abī Ḥaḍīla’, 121.

84 Ibn Abī Ḥaḍīla, *Diwān al-ṣabāba*: *Manāẓīl al-ahbāb* (5 et 223) ; *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt* (11) ; *Diwān al-ʿāsiqīn wa-l-ʿaṣīq* (20) ; *al-Ṣihāḥ* (20 et 22) ; *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (22 et 92) ; *al-Sahāl al-mawātī fi ṣadāʾ ilīn Ībn Mamātī* (30) ; *Tuhfat al-zirāf* (32) ; *Imītāz al-arwāḥ* (33 et 173) ; *Rawdat al-muḥibbin* (36, 89, 92 et 244) ; *Nāqī al-kīrām ti madh al-maqām* (53) ; *al-Wādīḥ al-mubīn* (64 et 147) ; *Fiqh al-luǧa* (65) ; *Ṭaʾrīḫ al-Islām* (74) ; *Durrat al-ḡawwās* (82 et 144) ; *al-Majāl al-sāʿīr* (90 et 94) ; *Mīrāṭ al-ʿuqūl* (98) ; *Ṭafsīr (al-Ṣayḥ Aṭīr al-Dīn Abū Ḥayyān)* (98) ; *al-Ḥamāsa* (108) ; *Ṣulūk al-sunan fi wasf al-sakān* (113 et 115) ; *Ṭaʾrīḫ (Ībn al-Sāʿādī)* (148) ; *al-Ṭārīʿi‘ alā l-sakrādān* (153) ; *Ṣaḥāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd* (153–154) ; *al-Ḥāfīz Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Buḥfārī* et *Ǧuniyyat al-labīb* ‘inda ǧaybat al-ṭabīb* (180) ; *Ṣaḥāb al-ʿAṣkīyā* (207) ; *al-Kāmil (al-Mubarrad)* (229) ; *Maṣārī* ‘al-ʿuṣṣāq* (257) ; *Ṭaʾrīḫ (Yāqūt)* (262) ; *Rawdat al-qulūb wa-nuzhat al-muḥibbin wa-l-maḥbūb* (266).
3) Kitāb Asʿār al-aswāq fī aṣʿār al-ašwāq (anonyme, IXe/XVe siècle)
Ce livre fut très probablement écrit à la même époque que le Taṣyīn par un auteur originaire du Maghreb. Selon L. A. Giffen, il s’inspire largement du Aswāq al-aswāq d’al-Biqā‘ī (m. 885/1480).Dans le premier tiers de l’ouvrage, 49 titres de livres sont mentionnés. L’ouvrage le plus cité est Aswāq al-aswāq (42 fois). Bien que l’insnād

86 Asʿār al-aswāq : Rawdat al-qulūb wa-muzhat al-muḥībb wā-l-mahbūb (f. 4v. l. 21–2, 38r l. 23 et 41r l. 4–5) ; Dīwān al-ṣabā‘a (f. 5v l. 6, 6r l. 4 et l. 11 (2 fois), 6v. l. 5, 7l. l. 5, 8v. l. 6 et l. 8–9 (2 fois) ; 9v. l. 13 et l. 19 (2 fois) ; 10v. l. 21–2, 13v. l. 22, 22v l. 9, 25r l. 21, 43v l. 11, 60v. l. 6–7, 62v. l. 23, 65r l. 13 et 76r l. 3 ; al-Qāmūs (7r l. 1 et l. 19 (2 fois), 8r l. 3), 8v. l. 6, l. 10 et l. 13 (3 fois), 9v. l. 13, l. 16–17 et l. 19, 10v. l. 21–2 et 55v l. 22) ; al-Gāmi‘ li-l-Farrā‘ (f. 7r l. 9) ; al-ṣiḥāḥ (f. 7r l. 9, 9v. l. 16–17) ; A’yānī fī ‘ilāj al-ḥubb ba’d tamakkunīhā an irdākāhu (f. 7v l. 21) ; Saltwat al-muṣṭāq (f. 7v l. 21–2) ; Fiqh al-lughā wa-l-luḥsūr al-ġariba (f. 12v. l. 13 et f. 15v. l. 9) ; Rawdat al-muḥībbīn (f. 14v. l. 13) ; Gūnyat al-labiḥa ‘inda ġaybat al-taḥīb (f. 15r l. 4–5) ; Rawdat al-azhār (f. 15v. l. 20–1, 19v l. 21, 59r l. 22–3) ; Šārḥ al-Maqāmāt (f. 19v l. 9, 30r l. 8, 59r l. 18, 68v. l. 15–16, 70r. l. 11–12 et 71r. l. 17) ; Šāhīb (Muslim) (f. 21r l. 21–2 et 23r l. 10–11) ; Šāhīb (al-Buhārī) (f. 21v l. 3 et 23r l. 10–11) ; al-Adāb al-mufrad (f. 21v l. 4) ; Kitāb al-Amṣāl (f. 21v l. 5 et l. 8 (2 fois) ; al-Masāṭ (al-Ṭabarānī) (f. 21v l. 11) ; Manāẓīl al-aḥbāb (f. 22r l. 4–5, 22v l. 4–5, 41v. l. 23, 42r l. 8, 69v l. 5, 72r l. 9–10) ; al-Maḥālīs (f. 22r l. 11) ; Musnad al-lī-Ṭarfawās (f. 22r l. 13–14) ; Musnad Aḥī Ya‘lā al-Mawṣūlī (f. 22r l. 13–14) ; Tatimmat qayy al-Amālī (23r l. 10–11) ; Kitāb al-Zaḥra (f. 24r l. 22–3, 25r l. 23 et 72v l. 6) ; al-Manṭūr wa-l-manzūm (f. 24v l. 17) ; al-Maṣān (f. 24v l. 21) ; Rawdat al-‘uṣṣāq (f. 25v l. 20 et 70r. l. 22–3) ; Taḥrīr al-taḥfīr (f. 27r l. 5) ; al-Rīsāla (f. 29v l. 19–20) ; Ḥara‘iq al-ḥaqiq ‘iq (f. 31r. l. 16) ; Muṣāriq anwār al-qulūb (f. 32 l. 19) ; al-Hamāsa (f. 39r l. 14) ; al-Waṣṣāḥ (f. 39v l. 14) ; Amāfī (al-Ṭāḥṣā) (f. 44v l. 16) ; al-ājnī (f. 47v l. 1) ; Kitāb al-Anṣāb li-l-Baladūrī (f. 49r l. 12–13) ; Kitāb Muqūltūy (f. 50r l. 15) ; Muḥājī ḥa Ḟāh (f. 52v l. 11) ; Kitāb Ṭabībāt al-muḥājī (f. 53r l. 20–1; 53v l. 1–2) ; Ḥadīṣat al-būdiya (f. 61r l. 21–2) ; Kitāb al-Kāmil (f. 62v l. 11–12) ; al-Dāhīra wa-Taṣkīra al-huṣayfāz (f. 62v. l. 12–13) ; Taḥrīr Nisābūr (f. 62v. l. 14) ; al-Bāḥāt al-kubrā (Ṭāq al-dīn al-Sukbī) (f. 64r l. 7–8) ; Kitāb Rustaq al-ṣīṣāfī fī miḥl ṣa‘ārā‘ al-ṣīṣāfī (f. 64v l. 4) ; al-Iṣāba (f. 68v l. 9–11) et Maṣārī al-‘uṣṣāq (l. 12) ; Taḥrīr al-Dahabī (f. 68v l. 13).
traditionnel n’y soit pas complètement abandonné, la ‘citation livresque’ est très présente dans le Kitāb Asʿār al-aswāq fī āʾār al-aswāq. L’auteur y cumule les références, notamment lorsqu’il s’agit d’apporter les définitions linguistiques et sémantiques des termes les plus communs du vocabulaire amoureux. Par exemple, dans un souci d’exhaustivité, l’auteur définit le mot ‘išq et ses dérivés, comme ‘āšiq, en citant quatre ouvrages88 qui traitent la question de points de vue différents : un traité d’amour, deux ouvrages de langue et un livre de ḥadīth. La mention de ḥadīts s’accompagne également souvent de références à des ouvrages écrits. C’est notamment le cas du célèbre ḥadīth : ‘Les esprits sont comme des soldats, Ceux qui se reconnaissent mutuellement s’allient et ceux qui s’ignorent s’opposent’,89 qui apparaît de manière récurrente dans les traités d’amour. L’auteur du Kitāb Asʿār al-aswāq affine tout d’abord l’avoir tiré du Aswāq al-aswāq, qui l’aurait lui-même mentionné sous l’autorité du Šahih de Muslim. Il mentionne ensuite qu’al-Buhārī commente ce dire prophétique dans son Šahih ; le ḥadīth fut par la suite transmis dans le Kitāb al-Adab al-mufrad, dans le Kitāb al-Amthāl d’Abū al-Fath ainsi que dans al-Awṣat d’al-Ṭabarānī, dans la biographie de Muḥammad b. Ṣafī.90 Cet exemple montre que l’auteur anonyme du Kitāb Asʿār al-aswāq a accompli une recherche poussée afin de retrouver les ouvrages dans lesquels ce ḥadīth était mentionné ou commenté. Le résultat de cette recherche apparaît dans un ‘isnād livresque’ qui remplace en quelque sorte la chaîne de transmetteurs nominale traditionnelle.

Le Kitāb Asʿār al-aswāq se distingue également par la précision de ses ‘références bibliographiques’. Dans nombre de cas, l’auteur ne donne pas seulement le titre de l’ouvrage dont est tirée sa citation, mais mentionne également le chapitre91 (ou la maqāma,92 ou encore la biographie93)
Dans lequel se trouve le passage en question. Tout se passe comme s’il invitait le lecteur à se reporter lui-même aux pages évoquées.

Notre anonyme offre également au lecteur des indications sur sa méthode de collecte des notices. Lorsqu’il raconte l’histoire d’une jeune femme prête à commettre l’illicite, mais qui, grâce à l’exemple de l’être aimé, devint dévote et conduisit une vie d’ascète jusqu’à en mourir, l’auteur déclare avoir réuni le récit de Muqulṭay et la version donnée par al-Sarrāq.

Il signale ensuite à partir de quel endroit de l’histoire il s’appuie sur la version de Muqulṭay.

L’auteur anonyme du Kitāb Asʾār al-aswāq rend ainsi explicite par ses déclarations le travail de ‘montage’ qu’il a accompli et revendique la ‘paternité’ du ḥabar tel qu’il le présente.

4) Tazyīn al-aswāq fī aḥbār al-ʿuṣṣāq de Dāwūd al-Anṭākī (m. 1008/1599)

Dāwūd al-Anṭākī enseigna la philosophie et la médecine en Égypte et écrivit un grand nombre de livres, pour la plupart des traités de médecine.

Le Tazyīn mentionne un grand nombre de sources écrites. L’on y compte 66 titres de livres sur un total de 550 pages (150 de plus que le Wādiḥ). La Nuzhat al-ʿuṣṣāq ou Nuzhat al-muṣṭaqf est citée 41 fois. Comme pour le Wādiḥ, les ouvrages mentionnés dans le Tazyīn appartiennent à des genres littéraires variés.

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Qādī l-ṣuddāt Šīhāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. Ḥaǧār [...] fī l-qism al-awwal min kitābī him al-lṣāba fī qasām asmāʾ al-ṣāhāba’, f. 68v, l. 9–11; ‘ḏukira fī Aswāq al-aṣwāq fī awwal al-bāb al-ṭāntī’, f. 70r l. 12–13, etc.

92 Cf. Asʾār al-aswāq: ‘qāla al-Ṣārīṣī fī l-Maqaṣima al-ḥāmisa wa-arbaʿīn’, f. 30r l. 8; ‘wa-qāla al-Ṣārīṣī fī l-Maqaṣima al-sābī′a wa-l-ʾisrīn’, f. 59r, l. 18; ‘qāla al-Ṣārīṣī fī l-Maqaṣima al-ṭāniya wa-l-arbaʿīn’, f. 68v l. 15–16, f. 70r l. 11–12, 71r l. 17, etc.

93 Cf. Asʾār al-aswāq, ‘fa-ravāḥu al-Ṭabarānī fī l-Awṣat fī tarafmat Muhammad b. al-Fāḍil’, f. 21v l. 11, etc.

94 Asʾār al-aswāq, f. 73v l. 15–16.

95 ‘Wa-fī mā ḥakāhu Muqulṭay…’, Asʾār al-aswāq, f. 74r l. 1.

L’attribution du Tazyīn à Dāwūd al-Anṭākī a été remise en cause par Julia Bray (‘Dāwūd ibn ‘Umar al-Anṭākī”, 53–4), qui affirme que les données textuelles en notre possession de permettent pas de se prononcer définitivement sur la question.

97 Dāwūd al-Anṭākī, Tazyīn al-aswāq fī aḥbār al-ʿuṣṣāq: Maṣārīj al-ʿuṣṣāq (9 et 56); Diwān al-ṣāhāba (10, 31, 356, 408, 418, 442); Rustaq al-ittifāq fī miḥ ṣuʿarāʾ al-ʾaṣfāq (15); Luzūm mā ʾa yatḥam (18); Manāẓīl al-ahbāb (19, 62, 78, 90, 93, 203, 208, 249, 417 et 527); Naqala Ibn Ḥallikān fī tarafmat al-ʾAllāf (24), Ḍayl al-Āmālī (25); Sirat al-Iskandar (29); Kitāb imtizāq al-nufus d’al-Tamīmī (29 et 372); al-Manẓur wa-l-manẓūm et al-ʾĀlī fī Šarḥ al-āmālī (30); al-
Dans l’introduction du Tazyīn al-aswāq fī āḥbār al-‘uṣṣāq, al-Anṭāḵī déclare que l’insnād traditionnel n’a pas sa place dans un ouvrage d’adab.98 Ses sources sont écrites : il déclare avoir tiré l’essentiel de ses notices du Mašārīʿ al-‘uṣṣāq99 et du livre (qu’il ne nomme pas100) d’al-Biqāʾī (m. 885/1480).101 Il ajoute qu’il a abrégé l’ouvrage d’al-Biqāʾī, omettant notamment les insnāds qu’il ne considère nécessaires que pour le hadīth prophétique et pour étayer des règles religieuses (tawfiq al-akhkām al-dīniyya).102 À la place de la chaîne de transmission traditionnelle,
Dāwūd al-Anṭākī recourt à la citation livresque. Même un poème peut se voir introduit par une référence à un ouvrage.\footnote{Cf. ibid., 15 où les vers sont précédés de cette mention ‘wa-fī Rustāq al-ittīfāq fī mīlḥ ūmarā’ l-āfāq li-Ibn Mubārak al-imām’. À la p. 18 l’on trouve : ‘wa-min Luzūm mā lā yalzam’, suivit des vers, etc.}

Souvent, l’auteur du Tazyg ne se contente pas de citer une seule source. Dans certains passages, il en indique deux ou plus pour une même information ou pour une même histoire, comme pour renseigner le lecteur sur les multiples endroits où il peut la trouver.\footnote{Cf. ibid., 134.} Il signale aussi la présence, chez d’autres auteurs, d’histoires semblables – bien que pas tout à fait identiques – à celle qu’il vient de raconter.\footnote{Ibid., 104.}

Le cumul de références peut également avoir pour fonction d’apporter le plus de précisions possible sur l’identité d’un personnage ou sur une histoire. Dāwūd al-Anṭākī mentionne qu’on amena un jeune homme émacié à Ibn ʿAbbās. Le jeune homme lui récita des vers où il évoquait la souffrance que lui causait sa passion amoureuse.\footnote{Cf. ibid., 157 où les vers sont précédés de cette mention ‘wa-fī Rustāq al-ittīfāq fī mīlḥ ūmarā’ l-āfāq li-Ibn Mubārak al-imām’. À la p. 18 l’on trouve : ‘wa-min Luzūm mā lā yalzam’, suivit des vers, etc.}

La notice n’est introduite par aucune référence bibliographique, mais après avoir raconté son histoire, al-Anṭākī précise que, selon les Amārī d’Ibn ʿAsīkir, le jeune homme était ʿuṣrīte. Il ajoute par la suite que, selon le Ṣarḥ al-Šawāhid d’al-Suyūtī, il s’appelait Urwa b. Qays. Concluant l’histoire de Urwa b. Ḥizām, l’auteur du Tazyg affirme que, selon le Taʿrīḥ d’al-Dahabī, Urwa mourut sous le califat de ʿUṯmān en l’an 30 de l’hégire, alors qu’un autre ouvrage anonyme indique qu’il mourut au mois de ṣawwāl de l’an 28.\footnote{Cf. ibid., 134.}

Un des ṣahīḥ qui composent l’histoire de Mağnūn,\footnote{Cf. ibid., 134.} tiré du Taṣrīḥ al-naẓīr (dont l’auteur n’est pas mentionné), relate qu’on emmena Mağnūn se promener dans des campements, où on lui montra des
femmes plus belles les unes que les autres, afin qu’il oublie Laylā. Mağnūn échappa à ses compagnons qui le retrouvèrent en larmes, une gazelle dans les bras, en train d’épousseter son pelage. Al-Anṭāḵī précise que tel est le récit du Ṭarsiḥ al-nāẓir, mais que la version de la Nuzhat al-muṣṭag ajoute qu’il aurait aussi récité un vers dans lequel il disait à la gazelle – qui ressemblait à Laylā – de ne rien craindre, car il était aujourd’hui son ami.109

Après avoir comparé différentes sources, al-Anṭāḵī indique parfois laquelle est, selon lui, la plus ‘juste’ (ṣahīḥ). Au sujet de l’amour d’al-Simma pour son amie d’enfance Rayyā, il dénonce une version erronée affirmant qu’al-Simma mourut parce qu’un devin lui prédit, lorsqu’il était en Iraq, que jamais il n’épouserait Rayyā. La ‘véritable’ histoire – affirme al-Anṭāḵī – est celle du Qūt al-qulūb, selon laquelle Rayyā fut fiancée à un autre homme de Muḥḥiẓ qui l’emmena avec lui dans son pays. Quand al-Simma fut informé de son départ, il en fut rempli de chagrin au point qu’il s’alit et mourut.110

Même pour les livres qui n’ont pas été écrits en arabe, Dāwūd al-Anṭāḵī n’accepte pas de références de ‘seconde’ main. Dans un passage du Ṭazīyīn, il mentionne avoir lu l’histoire d’Abrawī directement dans le Šahnāma, rédigé en persan, et l’avoir traduite.111

5) Kitāb Ġawānī l-ašwāq fī maʾānī l-ʾuṣṣāq d’Ibn al-Bakkāʾ al-Balḥī (m. 1040/1630)

L’auteur du Kitāb Ġawānī l-ašwāq est peu connu. Son traité d’amour se différencie des autres par une approche plus large du thème de l’amour. Il inclut en effet une partie sur l’amitié, ce qui n’est pas le cas pour les précédents ouvrages du même genre.112

L’isnād nominal traditionnel est omis. Les vers et les aḥbār sont souvent introduits par la mention d’un seul nom.113 On y compte également 26 ouvrages114 mentionnés explicitement sur un total de 150

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111 Ibid., 296.
113 Cf. par exemple ‘ḥaddaṭa Abū Faḍl al-Šaybānī’, 23.
114 Ibn al-Bakkāʾ al-Balḥī, Ġawānī l-ašwāq fī maʾānī l-ʾuṣṣāq : Bustān al-abrār wa-bahḥat al-ahyār (11 et 45) ; al-Muʿğām al-awṣat (al-Ṭabarānī) (12 et 48) ; Šarḥ Lāmiyyat al-ʾAḡām (13 et 22–23) ; al-ʾAḏānī (22) ; Wafayāt al-aʿyān (33 et 114) ; Bahḥat al-nufūs (36) ; Kaṣf al-asrār (37–38 et 82) ; Diwān al-ṣabāba (39, 66 et 96) ; Tafsīr (al-Baydāwī) (43) ; Mirāṭ al-zamān (47) ; al-Rayḥān wa-l-
pages environ (moins de la moitié du Wāḍih et du Tazyūn). L’auteur ne semble pas avoir privilégié une source en particulier aux dépens des autres. Il cite les traités d’amour de ses prédécesseurs et des anthologies littéraires.

Conclusion
Dans le genre littéraire des traités d’amour, deux tendances se profilent très tôt dans la manière de mentionner les sources. L’īṣnād traditionnel jouit de son prestige auprès des ḥanbalites al-Ḥarāʾitī, Ibn al-Sarrāği et Ibn al-Ǧawzī. Le Maṣāriʿ al-ʿuṣṣāq d’Ibn Sarrāği, en particulier, se distingue par de longs īṣnāds, qui portent souvent la date et le lieu de la transmission orale. Dans d’autres traités antérieurs au VIII°/XIV° siècle, comme le Tawq al-ḥamāma et la Rawdat al-qulūb, les notices sont généralement introduites par de vagues indications (un seul nom ou des verbes au passif: qīla, yuqāl et ḥukiya) qui ne fournissent aucun renseignement sur l’origine de la notice. La mention de sources livresques demeure rare.

À partir de Muġulṭāy cette tendance est inversée. Le Wāḍih privilégie en effet la référence à de titres des livres, ce qui ouvre à l’auteur des perspectives plus vastes. Il mentionne en effet une source écrite pour plus de la moitié de ses notices (95 sur un total de 164). Bien qu’il coexiste avec le système d’īṣnāds nominal, le livre devient avec Muġulṭāy non seulement une source avouée et avouable de transmission du savoir, mais acquiert également un prestige comparable à celui dont jouissait auparavant la chaîne de garants traditionnelle. Le contexte historique dans lequel il vécut, Le Caire de l’époque mamelouke, a probablement joué un rôle dans le choix de Muġulṭāy de privilégier les sources ‘livresques’, si, comme observe J. Berkey: ‘Written texts played an important role in education. Schools and mosques in Mamluk Cairo frequently housed large collections of books available for use’.115 Le sujet ‘léger’ de son ouvrage peut aussi avoir orienté son choix, l’auteur se sentant probablement moins lié par les obligations de ‘l’oralité’ que dans des ouvrages touchant aux disciplines religieuses. Sa démarche reste

néanmoins originale et audacieuse, car la connaissance acquise par les livres demeurait, encore à cette époque, ambivalente.\textsuperscript{116}

Bien que les auteurs précédant Muğulṭāy aient très probablement déjà travaillé à partir d’écrits, l’\textit{isnād} traditionnel ne constituant que formellement une référence à la transmission orale, c’est à partir du \textit{Wādiḥ} que la citation livresque commence à renvoyer le lecteur à la consultation d’un ouvrage antérieur, comme pour l’inviter à comparer les versions d’une même histoire. Cette méthode s’affine par la suite dans le \textit{Kitāb Asʿār al-aswāq}, où la citation de livres se fait de plus en plus détaillée. La partie (voire le chapitre où la \textit{maqāma}) du livre dont est tiré un passage y’est précisée. L’auteur anonyme de ce traité, tout en restant en partie attaché à la méthode de transmission ancienne, remplace parfois les noms des transmetteurs par des titres d’ouvrages, aboutissant à la formation d’\textit{‘isnāds} d’un nouveau genre, que nous pouvons définir comme des \textit{‘isnāds} livresques’. Enfin, chez Dāwūd al-Anṭākī, la méthode traditionnelle de l’\textit{‘isnād} est complètement abandonnée. Cet auteur omet systématiquement toute chaîne de transmission, qu’il remplace par des titres de livres. Dans son ouvrage, le prestige dont jouissait auparavant la chaîne de transmission nominale est définitivement transféré vers le livre.

Dans les ouvrages plus tardifs, qui privilégient les sources livresques, les procédés de comparaison et de choix des sources citées sont clairement exposés au lecteur. La citation livresque devient ainsi le moyen, pour un auteur, de revendiquer son individualité et l’originalité de son écriture.

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Al-\textsuperscript{r}Huṣrī, \textit{al-Maṣūn fī sīr al-hawā al-maknūn} (Le Caire : Matba\‘at al-amānā, s.d).


\textsuperscript{116} J. Berkey, \textit{The Transmission of Knowledge}, 26.


NOTES ON A PRIVATE LIBRARY IN FOURTH/TENTH-CENTURY BAGHDAD

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Studies on medieval Arabic bibliophilia have mainly focussed on public and semi-public institutions, for some of which we have detailed information. Less is known about private libraries and their physical arrangement. This paper looks at the library of Abū Bakr al-Ṣūfī (d. 335/947), which is described by the sources in unique terms, contextualising it with al-Ṣūfī’s own words on collecting and organizing books.

The importance of bibliophilia and its by-product—the library—for medieval Arabic culture is well documented in the sources and has been studied by scholars since the 1800s.¹ Information has come down to us not only on public and semi-public libraries such as al-Ma’mūn’s ḥizānat al-ḥikma and institutions connected to madrasas, but also on collections held by private individuals. However, while for the former we do have information on the physical spaces containing the books and on their arrangement, descriptions of early private libraries mainly restrict themselves to the amount of books they contained, their value, and the subjects they covered. The fourth/tenth-century bookseller and bibliophile Ibn al-Nadīm, for instance, mentions that the historian al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823) had left at his death six hundred cases full of books, each of which could only be carried by two men.² Accounts such as this are frequent, and modern scholars have been able to collect detailed information on the libraries of specific individuals who lived in late and post-ʿAbbāsid times.³ However, the library as a physical space, and the organization and arrangement of books within it are rarely mentioned.

Ibn al-Nadīm cites eleven individuals as book-collectors (ǧammāʾa li-l-kutub).⁴ He also mentions actual libraries (ḥizāna), two of which belonged to caliphs, saying of one private library, which he had

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¹ An early example is É. Quatremère, Mémoire. More recent studies are cited below.
² Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990), Fihrist, 1, part 2: 308.
⁴ Fihrist, indexes, 2, part 2: 932 and 933 respectively.
personally visited, that it was the largest he had ever seen. Its owner, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Baʿrah, kept antique and precious books in a case there, which he took out to show to Ibn al-Nadīm. The case (qimāṭr) weighed 300 ṭāl and contained writings on different materials, heavily annotated by successive owners. Unfortunately, after the owner’s death, Ibn al-Nadīm lost track of the case and its contents.

Ibn al-Nadīm does not give any physical detail for the other libraries he mentions in the Fihrist. However, he says that he had seen a notebook (daftar) coming from the library of another individual whom he identifies as a collector: the courtier, litterateur and chess-player Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947). This notebook is the proof that al-Ṣūlī was a plagiarist:

[…] A Biography and Selected Poetry of Sudayf [d. 147/764]. For the composition of this book he relied on the book of al-Maṭrādī [d. 286/899], Poetry and Poets, or rather he copied it word by word and plagiarized it. I have seen the notebook in the handwriting of the man himself; it came from the library of al-Ṣūlī, so it all became clear.

A more unusual description of the library of al-Ṣūlī is recorded by al-Ḫāṭīb al-Bağdādī:

[…] I saw that al-Ṣūlī had an enormous apartment full of books which were arranged into rows. Their bindings were of different colours, each row of books in a colour: one row was red, another green, another yellow, etc. […] al-Ṣūlī would say: ‘All these books are notes from lectures I have attended’.

Al-Ṣūlī’s claim in the last sentence deserves investigation. He says ‘ḥaḍiḥi l-kutub kulluhā samāʿī.’ Sellheim ties samāʿ to the establishment of madrasas in the late fifth/eleventh century. In that context, it indicates a written attestation that an individual has attended lectures on a certain book. That the term is used in reference to al-Ṣūlī may indicate that a similar procedure was in practice earlier than the period proposed by Sellheim; this is in fact what Toorawa’s translation of this passage

5 Al-Muʿtaḍid (Fihrist, 1, part 1: 177) and al- Maʿmūn (1, part 1: 13 and 15); see footnote 2 on p. 13 for this library and al-Maʿmūn’s bayt al-ḥikma).
6 Fihrist, 1, part 1: 106–8.
7 Fihrist, 1, part 1: 465. For a physical description of a daftar see J. M. Bloom, Paper before Print, 140–1.
9 R. Sellheim, ‘samāʿ.’
implies. However, al-Ṣūlī may intend with samā‘ī not a written document but simply the act of auditing the lectures and taking notes. Therefore, it is possible to interpret the statement as saying not that his books are his lectures, but that he has attended lectures on the contents of all of them. Many of al-Ṣūlī’s books would indeed have been dafātir, notebooks from lectures which he then might use to compose his own works. However, if Ibn al-Naḍīm’s testimony above is to be believed, not all of these were his own work.

Al-Ṣūlī’s claim is important because it introduces the next two accounts in his biography: when asked a scholarly question, we are told, al-Ṣūlī would not answer immediately from his memory, but would call a servant and have a book brought to him. ‘Al-Ṣūlī is indeed a scholar’, says a short satire, ‘but only to the extent that he can look things up in a book’. Once again, as in the Fihrist, the implications of being a book collector are not wholly positive.

Let us return to the material details: al-Ṣūlī’s books were not, or not all, stored in a qimār, a case made of woven reeds, but filled a large apartment (bayt), where they were arranged in rows (masfūfa), each of which had leather bindings (ǧūlūd) of a different colour. The first part of the statement appears to be illustrated precisely by a miniature on a Baghdadi manuscript copied in 634/1237: books would be stacked in little piles on shelves divided into sections. On the other hand, the

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10. S.M. Toorawa, Ibn Abī Ṭahir Ṭayfūr, 23: ‘all these books are my certificates of audition.’

11. See also the first two chapters of G. Schoeler, The Oral and the Written, 28–86; idem and S. M. Toorawa, The Genesis of Literature, 128. According to Schoeler’s definition, these would be hypomnema. More information and further bibliography on this topic can be found in Konrad Hirschler’s contribution to this volume.

12. Ibid. Later sources merge these three successive accounts. However, in al-Ḥaṭīb’s biography, which is the earliest, these are juxtaposed but distinct. The question is discussed in more detailed in my ‘Tailors of Stories’.

13. BnF Arabe 5847, 5v. The entire manuscript is available for download from the website of the Bibliothèque nationale de France http://gallica.bnf.fr/. The miniature is described by Pinto, ‘The Libraries of the Arabs’, 229. A black and white image of it was first published by E. Blochet, Les Enluminures des manuscrits orientaux, table X. Versions in colour can be found in J. Bloom, Paper before Print, 119; and in H. Touati, Armoire, fig. 23b. Although the miniature was painted much later than al-Ṣūlī’s lifetime, it seems to be the earliest extant representation of a library. See also Quatremère, Mémoire, especially 27–30, where the sale of a Fāṭimid library is described: in order to disguise the price of the books and being able to buy them for a very low price,
arrangement in different colours is, as far as I could ascertain, unique. While the description does not necessarily imply that the books were colour-coded, it does suggest that their arrangement followed a precise criterion. If the books were already bound when al-Ṣūlī acquired them, this criterion might have been exclusively aesthetic. If, however, he had them bound himself – and this must have been the case at least for his own notebooks – a different rationale may be considered. Another biographer, Yāqūt (d. 626/1229), comments on the arrangement of al-Ṣūlī’s books:

Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī had a library which he had devoted to the different books he had collected. He had arranged them in it in the best of orders. Yāqūt does not specify which order might be the best. It seems well-established that in public libraries books were placed on shelves in the same order in which they appeared in the catalogue, which in turn was arranged by subject. However, within this broad principle there is still much room for manoeuvre and for doubt. For instance: how to organise single books within the same subjects? Should lecture notes be separate from copied manuscripts? In the Fihrist Ibn al-Nadīm employs different criteria (alphabetical, chronological, etc.), not always explicitly, within each of the ten subjects in which he organises his catalogue. In his the courtiers in charge of the sale took them out of their cases and mixed up their arrangement by subject (this story is retold by Touati, Armoire, 294). A brief overview is also found in W. Heffening [J.D. Pearson], ‘Maktaba.’ All these studies deal mainly with public or semi-public libraries.

Ibn al-Nadīm lists the names of nine famous book binders (muğallid), the first of whom worked for al-Ma’mūn’s bayt al-ḥikma; he also briefly discusses the quality of leather used for bindings (Fihrist, 1, part 1: 24 and 48–9 respectively). Different binding techniques are illustrated by R. Selleim, ‘Kitāb.’ J. Bloom, Paper before Print, 111–13 provides a drawing detailing different part elements of the book. Pedersen, The Arabic Book, 101–12, devotes a chapter to bookbinding.

Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, Muʿğam al-ṣadīq, 2677 (biography no. 1134).

Y. Eche, Bibliothèques, 338. Eche does not mention differences in colour and indeed mentions bindings only tangentially. See also H. Touati, Armoire, 291-317 and note 13 above on the Fāṭimid library. These studies also discuss the subjects making up library collections.

The most thorough investigation of this topic, referring also to earlier studies, is S.M. Toorawa, ‘Proximity’. A late sample of the practical problems faced by a cataloguer is illustrated in Konrad Hirschler’s contribution to this volume.
Mu’jam al-udabā’, where al-Ṣūlī’s biography is found, Yāqūt arranges his entries in strict alphabetical order, one of the earliest compilers to do so consistently. Whether this is ‘the best of orders’ to which he refers, it is impossible to know.

In fact, this attention to the physical arrangement of books mirrors a skill displayed by al-Ṣūlī in his own writings: according to his student al-Marzubānī (d. 384/994), he had ‘ability in composing books and collocating their elements in the proper place’.

This is a skill al-Ṣūlī has in common with an earlier and more famous fellow-book collector, al-Ǧāhiz (d. 255/868–9); it is the skill of the author who writes for a readership.

Al-Ṣūlī’s love for books transpires in his own work, and especially in his chronicles of the caliphate, where he often gives information about himself, such as the Aḥbār al-Muqtadir and Aḥbār al-Rāḍī bi-llāh wa-l-Muttaqī li-llāh. For instance, he is proud to have transmitted his passion to younger generations. In 312/924–925 he relates that he was appointed tutor of the princes Abū l-ʿAbbās and Abū ʿAbd Allāh, sons of the caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295/908–320/932). Al-Ṣūlī taught them to use notebooks and had them learn traditions. The two boys were so enthusiastic that ‘the price of notebooks went as high as it had ever been in a long time,’ and ‘paper and book merchants [warrāqīn] became rich’.

I instilled in them the love of knowledge and bought them a good deal of books on jurisprudence, poetry, lexicography and chronicles. They competed, each putting together his own library.

What is interesting in this passage is that the boys take acquisitions in their own hands at such a young age. This can be compared with the education of their father, the caliph al-Muqtadir, for whom dafāṭīr and other educational tools were selected by his father al-Muʿtādīd (r. 279/892–289/902) with the help of Sinān b. Ṭābit (d. 331/943), the court

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20 Al-Ṣūlī, Mā lam yunṣar min awrāq al-Ṣūlī, 144.

21 Al-Ṣūlī, Aḥbār al-Rāḍī bi-llāh, 25.
physician. This material came from ‘the old caliphal repositories’ (al-
ḫazāʾ in al-qadīma li-l-sultān).  
Later, after Abū l-ʿAbbās has become the caliph al-Rāḍī, al-Ṣūlī discusses with his former pupil the contents of the library which he had ‘put together like the previous caliphs.’ Al-Ṣūlī is surprised that it should not contain the dīwān of a certain poet and advises the caliph as follows:

Begin by arranging the works of poetry (ʿamal al-ašʿār), starting with the Muḍar tribe, then Rabīʿa, then Yaman. What is not there, your servants will bring to you from their own stock. Whatever they only have as lecture notes (mā kāna samāʿ an li-ʿabīdika), and whatever they cannot replace, the copyists you appoint will copy it and the binders of the library will bind it.  

Al-Ṣūlī continues to say that, although his own library may be diminished by this, he cannot stand for the caliph to have something that is not perfect. After this discussion, al-Rāḍī decides to donate his library to his sons: day after day, he has books brought to him and proceeds, with the help of his courtiers, to divide them up between the two princes, keeping some for himself and leaving the least valuable to the courtiers, who sell them by weight.

This episode corroborates two hypotheses advanced above: first, al-Ṣūlī advises the caliph to arrange his books by subject, and within the subject he suggests a subordinate criterion – for classical poetry it is an arrangement by tribe, but one may imagine different rationales for other subjects. Second, the caliph will have his copyists reproduce those works which the courtiers only have as samāʿ, which here it seems uncontroversial to understand as lecture notes.

We hear again, tangentially, of al-Ṣūlī’s library in 329/941, when al-Ṣūlī’s home is ransacked. Amongst other precious objects, ‘they found a portion of my notebooks, which they pillaged’. He is now poor, he says, and survives on the revenue of a garden he owns and on his notebooks. While the expression ‘the price of my notebooks’ (aṭmān dafāʾitr) may imply an actual sale, it seems unlikely that he would sell the tools necessary for obtaining an income: the expression might also

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22 F. Rosenthal, Muslim Historiography, 48, quoting Ibn al-ʿAdim’s Buṭya; the Arabic text is on pages 541–2. See also A.S. Tritton, Materials, 168.
24 Ibid., 210.
25 Ibid., 211.
mean that al-Ṣūlī used these notebooks for teaching, or that he rented them out to other scholars.26

In fact, at this time al-Ṣūlī is in Baṣra, and one of his student is a young al-Tanūḥī (d. 384/994), who will go on to become a judge and adab author. In al-Farağ ba’da l-šidda al-Tanūkhī recalls that when he was a boy his father had been appointed testator for al-Ṣūlī, who had not named any heirs in his testament. However, when the scholar died in Baṣra in 335/947, three poor brothers went to al-Tanūḥī’s father, claiming that their mother had been related to al-Ṣūlī. At length, they produced the necessary testimony and were awarded a portion of the inheritance, which the judge had converted into money in the meantime. Unfortunately, al-Tanūḥī does not specify the amounts of money involved, nor does he say whether the possessions left by al-Ṣūlī included books.27 As mentioned above, at least one daftar survived into the late fourth/tenth century and was seen by Ibn al-Nadīm.

Information on al-Ṣūlī’s library is too scarce to allow a precise picture to emerge, and leaves us with more questions than answers, beginning with the obvious ones: which titles did it contain? Were these all lecture notes, as the scholar claimed? How many of these were personal, and how many had been acquired? How much did he spend to keep expanding the collection? How were the books organised exactly? Were they only for his personal use? Despite this uncertainty, what seems to be implicit in all the snippets of description found in the sources and discussed above is that al-Ṣūlī’s library was remarkable, and not only in the eyes of its owner, for its physical appearance as well as for its contents.

Reflecting on this material has also highlighted practical differences between a public library and a private one: for instance, al-Ṣūlī’s servants must have been conversant with the arrangement of the library if they were able to find a book when ordered to do so. However, it is not clear whether any of these servants were employed exclusively to look after them as librarian, cataloguer, copyist or binder. Moreover,

26 Pedersen, *Arabic Book*, 34, mentions cases where scholars borrowed books from senior colleagues for copying (quoting Yāqūt, *Mu’gam*, 2722), although it is not clear whether this implied a money transaction. I am grateful to Antonella Gheretti for this reference as well as for many helpful comments and suggestions on the first draft of this paper. I should also like to thank the anonymous reviewers.

maintaining a library was an investment: it could contribute to its owner’s income, help him get into the good graces of a patron, or be part of his inheritance. Finally, al-Ṣūlī’s ambiguous reputation as a scholar—knowledgeable, but only in writing; a good poetry editor, but a plagiarist—reflects a well-known conflictual relationship between the oral and the written in medieval Arabic culture.

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‘CATCHING THE EEL’ – DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE FOR CONCEPTS OF THE ARABIC BOOK IN THE MIDDLE PERIOD

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This article reflects on the concept of the ‘book’ in the Middle Period (fifth/eleventh to early tenth/sixteenth centuries). On the basis of a seventh/thirteenth-century library catalogue from Damascus it discusses how contemporaries faced the challenge of defining what a book actually was. Focusing on the catalogue’s section on composite manuscripts (mağāmi’) it suggests that this document’s writer employed two—ultimately irreconcilable—definitions of a book: the book as a discrete textual item (taking the title as the main criterion) and the book as defined by its physical shape. This writer’s cataloguing practices illustrate the fluid nature of the ‘book’ well beyond the Formative Period between the first/seventh and the fourth/tenth century.

At a time when the book as a physical object with a stable text is losing ground to digital files with more fluid textual formats, it seems pertinent to reflect on what a ‘book’ was understood to be in a pre-print, manuscript culture. For contemporaries in the Middle Period coming up with a single definition of the book was as elusive as any attempt to catch Luther’s proverbial eel. The present discussion takes a specific documentary example from the Middle Period in order to problematise the concept of the Arabic book. The choice of the Middle Period is informed by the chronological profile of modern scholarship on cultural history that has – as in so many other fields – put the two traditional foci of Middle Eastern historical studies on the main stage: the Formative Period of Islam until the fourth/tenth century and the Modern Period from the nineteenth century onwards. The Middle Period, however, has been neglected in most discussions of the Arabic book’s development between these ‘classical’ and ‘modern’ eras. Consequently, the most authoritative recent overview of the history of the book in the Muslim lands has little to say about the period between the fifth/eleventh and tenth/sixteenth centuries.

1 I thank Antonella Ghersetti for inviting me to contribute to this volume as well as the reviewers for their insightful comments.

2 Referring to Luther’s description of the elusive Erasmus as ‘the eel whom only Christ could catch’ and who could be all things to all men (Luther’s Works, vol. 54, 19; cf. N. Housley, Contesting the Crusades).
centuries.\textsuperscript{3} Discussions that have touched upon the Middle Period, such as Pedersen’s \textit{The Arabic Book} and Rosenthal’s ‘Of Making Books There Is No End’, are often grounded in the Formative Period and confidently apply a single concept of the book to a period stretching from the second/eighth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{4}

Studies such as those by Günther, Toorawa and Touati, to name but the most recent, have discussed in detail the gradual development of a ‘writerly culture’, to borrow Toorawa’s term, in the first Islamic centuries, especially its interplay with oral and aural practices.\textsuperscript{5} Schoeler’s work is particularly relevant for the present discussion as he has shown the inherent fluidity of textual formats during the Formative Period. Of particular importance is his differentiation between \textit{hypomnemata}, that is to say draft notes, notebooks and written records that were not independent manuscript-books and actual manuscript-books (\textit{syngramma}) that writers intended for wider circulation.\textsuperscript{6} This discussion of the fluid format of the written text during the early Islamic period finds its counterpart in scholarship on the gradual introduction of printing in the Arabic-speaking lands from the eighteenth century onwards. Here, the transformation of the book’s physical shape has again led to reflections on what a manuscript-book actually was.\textsuperscript{7}

At first glance the question of what contemporaries during the Middle Period understood to be a book might seem unproblematic as this period’s authors widely employed the term \textit{kitāb} whenever they referred to the written word. However, if we turn to the period’s narrative sources we see that a variety of concepts existed for textual units that do not sit easily with a commonsense understanding of a book. For instance, authors who referred to the number of books in collections could do so by employing either \textit{kitāb}, \textit{guz‘} or \textit{muğallas}. The latter two terms not only described a volume or quire belonging to a longer book, but could also refer to one separate (sometimes bound) quire or one of several unrelated quires that were bound together.\textsuperscript{8} This differentiation, especially in a culture with inherently fluid textual formats, raises a number of questions.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{3} G. Roper: ‘The History of the Book’.
\bibitem{5} S. Günther, ‘Praise to the Book!’; Sh. Toorawa, \textit{Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr}; H. Touati, \textit{L’Armoire à sagesse}.
\bibitem{6} G. Schoeler, The Genesis of Literature in Islam.
\bibitem{7} For instance B. Messick, \textit{The Calligraphic State} and M. Kunt ‘Reading Elite, Elite Reading’.
\bibitem{8} \textit{Guz‘/muğallas}: E. Kohlberg, \textit{A Medieval Muslim Scholar}, 79.
\end{thebibliography}
with regard to a manuscript’s status as book, quire or volume. What exactly was the borderline between a short kitāb and a ġuz? How did contemporaries deal with composite manuscripts that could contain anything from brief extracts to complete ‘books’? To what extent did contemporaries consider multi-volume works with one title to be a single book?

In order to take up these questions, the following discussion turns to documentary evidence of book collections as they offer unique insights into contemporary attitudes to, and understandings of, what a book was. The recently discovered catalogue of a local endowed library in Damascus, the oldest known complete catalogue for an Arabic library, is an appropriate point of entry. This catalogue documents the holdings of a minor library in the Ašrafiyya Mausoleum, which was situated close to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s resting-place in the city’s ‘Mausoleum Lane’, north of the Umayyad Mosque. A ruler, the Ayyubid al-Malik al-Ašraf (d. 635/1237), endowed this mausoleum-madrasa, but a member of the civilian elite endowed its library. The inventory of this library is not dated, but internal evidence, particularly the absence of later authors, indicates that it was produced shortly after the library was set up in the mid-seventh/thirteenth century. The document is fascinating precisely because it does not refer to one of the large-scale prestigious libraries set up by a member of the ruling elite. Rather, it gives an insight into a relatively small library in a somewhat modest institution, dozens of which existed in cities such as Damascus. As this was just an ordinary library, only one contemporary writer mentioned this library in a narrative source. In contrast to al-Ṣūlī’s library discussed in this volume by Letizia Osti, for which we have only narrative, but no documentary evidence, the source basis for this book collection is thus exactly inverted.

9 For the concept of the local endowed library, see my The Written Word, 124–63.
10 Fihrist kutub ḫizānat al-Ašrafiyya, Fatih 5433, Istanbul, Suleymaniye Library, fols. 246v–270r. The catalogue was briefly mentioned by Ş. al-Munāǧǧid, Qawā’id fahrasat al-maḥṭūṭ al-ʿarabiyya, 20/21 (also referred to in A. Gacek, ‘Some Remarks’, 173) and R. Şeşen, Salahaddin’den Baybars’a, 336. I am currently working on an edition of this document with translation and commentary.
12 Ibn Khallikān, Waḥayāt, I, 214.
The catalogue’s writer unequivocally set out the document’s function to list ‘books’ in its heading: ‘Catalogue of the Books of the Ašrafīyya Library’.

This document employs a very orderly method to organise the entries that run through its folios – or at least it appears to do so. The first level of this organisational method is the alphabetical order of the titles and lists all entries according to the letters of the alphabet starting with alif and finishing with yā’. Under each of the letters a second level of organisation subdivides all entries by size, either as a normal or small (ṣiğār) format. This differentiation was introduced because it presumably reflected the physical set-up of the shelving. Contemporary illustrations of libraries clearly show that shelves were organised according to the size of the manuscripts.

Each of the resulting fifty-six categories (twenty-eight letters each with two sections for size) is further subdivided by a third organisational level of subject-matter. For this third level the writer of the catalogue introduced fifteen thematic categories; for instance, category three is Islamic law, category five is history, and category ten is pharmacology and medicine. Thus each entry would potentially have a three-figure class mark in the form of letter/size/subject, such as A/s/3 for a book with a title starting with the letter alif, in small format, on Islamic law.

This organisation of the catalogue shows a rather uncomplicated understanding of what a book is: each title has an entry and although many of these titles surely consisted of several volumes this was not of concern for the classification of the library’s books. In the early parts of the catalogue we find a numerical system with numbers after many entries that referred to volumes, but this system is silently abandoned after the early folios. The implicit definition underlying this scheme was thus that a book was the entirety of a text belonging to one title, irrespective of whether it came in one or several volumes. Accordingly, the catalogue’s writer set out to give each title its own entry. For early entries he also listed each additional copy of the same title as a separate entry. For example, under the letter alif he enumerated: ‘al-ʿAdkiyā’ by Ibn al-Gawzī / second copy / al-Amṭāl wa-l-ḥikam by al-Māwardī / second copy / third copy’. After some folios he was to abandon this system because multiple copies, especially in the case of poetic works which could number well beyond fifteen, made his approach too

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13 Fihrist al-Ašrafīyya, fol. 246v: Fihrist kutub ḥizānat al-Ašrafīyya.
14 Cf. for instance al-Ḥarīrī, al-Maqāmāt, Paris, BnF, MS arabe 5847, fol. 5v.
15 Fihrist al-Ašrafīyya, fol. 247a.
cumbersome. Rather, he reverted to state briefly: ‘Poetry of Salāma b. Ǧandal, fifteen copies’.16

However, this one-text-one-title system of cataloguing posed more fundamental challenges than it seems to imply. There are two instances in this document where its orderly organisation almost falls apart entirely as the writer had to accommodate textual units that could not be fully integrated into this text-based definition of the book. The first instance is in the letter mīm when the writer came to composite volumes (mağāmi‘) and the second is in the catalogue’s final part where we find what the writer described as ‘defective manuscripts’ (maḥārīm). In both cases the function of these sections was more complicated than just drawing together manuscripts that were either composite or incomplete. We also find mağāmi‘ and maḥārīm-manuscripts in those parts of the catalogue that are structured by the three-tiered method. The writer placed, for example, a collection of sermons (ḫuṭab) under the letter ḥā‘ and a number of composite volumes of poetry (ṣī‘r) under the letter šīn – although in the latter case he grouped them at the very end of the letter’s section indicating again his uncertainty of where to list them.17

Furthermore some composite manuscripts are listed under the letter mīm, but outside the dedicated mağāmi‘-section. An anonymous ‘Collection of Legal Problems’, for instance, is appropriately placed under the letter’s normal-sized volumes, subject category 3 (Islamic Law).18 Another item containing, amongst others, writings by Galen on phlebotomy is placed under the letter’s normal-sized volumes, subject category 10 (pharmacology/medicine).19 The mağāmi‘ and maḥārīm-sections were thus not simply formal categories where any manuscript described as composite or defective was to be placed. Rather, they contained works that somehow eluded the three-figure classification of the catalogue. In quantitative terms these sections for composite volumes and defective manuscripts occupy a substantial part of the catalogue. The former runs to more than ten of the catalogue’s forty-eight pages and the latter takes up another six pages. In other words a third of the overall collection eluded the catalogue’s organisational approach and its implicit text-based definition of the book.20

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16 Fihrist al-Ašrafīyya, fol. 254r.
17 Ibid., fol. 251r: Ḥuṭab Maḡmū‘a; fol. 256r: several entries starting with Maḡmū‘ ṣī‘r.
18 Ibid., fol. 258r: Maḡmū‘ masā‘il fiqhīyya.
19 Ibid., fol. 259r.
My contention is that the writer’s initial certainty with regard to his project of producing a catalogue of this library’s ‘books’ faltered when he faced the collection. The sections for composite volumes and defective manuscripts were desperate attempts to tame the unwieldy material into an orderly list underpinned by a single definition of the book. In order to elaborate on this point I will focus on the section referring to composite volumes, which has a total of 172 entries with well over 500 titles. The first characteristic of this section is that it was not explicitly flagged as one – in contrast to all other sections of the catalogue. The writer had already started to include an increasing number of composite manuscripts on the preceding folios, but at one point, the point which I take to be the beginning of the section, he suddenly began to list composite manuscripts only, without explicitly marking this in any way. The end of this ‘section’ is only differentiated by the fact that a new letter starts, nūn, which follows the standard orderly method. Remarkably, the break with the catalogue’s system in this part is also reflected in the manuscript’s style and ductus: The earlier parts of the catalogue were written in an extremely neat and easily legible hand with clear headings for new categories and ample spaces separating the entries – the writer obviously took great care to represent this splendid collection in an appropriate textual form. Here, however, his script turned hasty, headings were virtually absent and the ample spacing disappeared in an increasingly dense organisation of the text with words running into each other. With the start of the letter nūn, however, the writing and the textual organisation resumed its former clarity, probably expressing the writer’s relief to have returned to safer shores.

That this composite section contained manuscripts which defied the catalogue’s logic of the book as a self-contained textual unit with a more or less stable title, is also evident from the breakdown of the thematic level of organisation. After the writer had, as usual, run through the fifteen categories of the normal-sized manuscripts of the letter mīm, he turned, as with all other letters, to the small-sized holdings of the library. However, under this letter the system of orderly sections gradually started to unravel as composite books increasingly dominated. In category three, generally preserved for Islamic Law, we now find titles pertaining to the field of poetry that have no relevance to this category such as Questions Asked to al-Mutanabbī Concerning his Poetry, selections from Ibn al-

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21 I take the mağāmī’-section to start on Fīhrist al-Āṣrafiyya, fol. 260v, l. 9: Mağmū‘ awwaluhu fiqh ‘alā mağhab Abī Ḥanīfa […] as it is from this point onwards that only mağāmī’-works are listed.
Muʿtazz’s *Generations of the Poets* and poetry from the early Islamic poet Ḍū l-Rumma. Category five, to cite a second example, normally contains works of history, but under this letter it starts to also include material such as an anonymous *Mağmūʿ of Poetry and Reports*. The writer attempted to secure at least some connection to the History category by including panegyrics on various Ayyubid rulers. After these attempts to keep his system up, he abandoned his efforts and on the following ten pages that make up the composite-volume section he introduced only three further category-headings (seven, eight and nine). This is in sharp contrast to the standard sections of the catalogue where a single page can easily contain up to twenty category-headings or more.

The writer was clearly uncertain of the best strategy to handle these composite manuscripts. He did not introduce a clear section outside his alphabetical organisation to ascribe a particular status to them, nor was he able to fit them convincingly into the existing cataloguing system. Rather, he opted to keep up his scheme, which at this point was no more than fictitious, thus circumventing the challenge posed by the heterogeneous items. The three category headings that he has in this section bear little relation to the actual content of the manuscripts listed under them. This is again in striking contrast to the rest of the catalogue where the link between subject-matter and category heading is generally reasonably close. Furthermore, in this section the writer abandoned his system of differentiating the manuscripts according to size – it is at least very unlikely that all of the items listed on these pages were indeed small-sized, as the catalogue implies.

The challenges posed by these items in comparison to the normal one-text-one-title books were indeed considerable. For instance, within category nine, where we would normally expect writings on astronomy/astrology and oneiromancy, one composite manuscript includes, amongst others, the following works: (1) Ibn Durayd’s (d. 321/933) poem on words ending in *alif* (2) a treatise on rhymes, arguably by Ibn Ṣinnā (d. 392/1002) (3) a *ḥadīth*-treatise by Ibn Ṣāḥib (d. 385/995) (4) a treatise on the prayers of supplication during Ramadan (5) a treatise on metrics (6) Ibn Fāris’s (d. 395/1004?) collection of juridical riddles based on a rare meaning of a word (7) a selection of passages from the same work (8) historical reports (9) al-Zaḡāḡ’s (d. 311/923) work of philology and lexicography detailing the Arabic terms for human

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23 Ibid., fol. 261r/v: *Mağmūʿ ašʿār wa-ʾaḥbāʾ muḡallad.*
anatomy (10) al-Rummānī’s (d. 384/994) treatise on the uniqueness and inimitability of the Qur’ān, and (11) five ḥadīṯ-dictations by Abū Ṭāhir al-Salafī (d. 576/1180).24 While the categories that the writer had drawn up covered the subject matter of the items within this entry, the composite item as a whole completely defied them.

The overall range of the material that the writer brought together in this section becomes more evident when we draw from a number of composite works: in addition to pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry as well as philological texts (both great favourites of the founder of the Ašrafiyya Library in all sections), we find for instance the testaments of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to his son al-Husayn and of the Sassanian ruler Ardašīr to his descendants/his son Sāpur; al-Ḥwārizmī’s fourth/tenth-century treatise on the classification of sciences; a treatise on geomancy; Greek medical treatises on the symptoms of imminent death; a collection on amulets and talismans; a treatise on the excellence of horses; selected items on jurisprudence, followed by a poem on the number of Quranic verses and sermons, poetry in Persian; fourth/tenth-century pharmacological treatises by al-Rāzī; the bacchanalian poetry of Abū Nuwās and Ibn al-Muqaffa’a’s mirror for princes.25

The cataloguer’s problem was that he had started out with the confident statement that this was the ‘Catalogue of the Books of the Ašrafiyya Library’. His organisation was based on the understanding that a book was simply a textual unit that could be catalogued under one specific title – and at first, this strategy had been entirely adequate. As seen, it was not a main concern for him whether this text was contained in a single volume or spread over several volumes. His abandonment of the numerical system for volumes after the initial folios was not a major change which undermined either the catalogue’s basic structure or the underlying definition of the book. The physical appearance of the


manuscripts was of concern only when it came to their size, the second level of the catalogue’s organisation. For the catalogue’s organisation though, as far as the present discussion is concerned, the size of the manuscripts was irrelevant.

Yet, the simple assumption of a text-based definition of the book hit the wall midway through the catalogue and proved impossible for around a third of the collection. The alphabetical organisation became useless at this point as it did not allow the catalogue’s users to identify specific texts, the thematic categories were impossible to impose on this material and even the normal/small-size differentiation fell by the wayside. The writer adopted for this material a new definition of ‘book’, which was based on its physical shape, in other words he devoted an entry to each collection of folios that was bound together, irrespective of title, theme or size. This shift to a physical definition is also evident in the writer’s exasperation when he repeatedly cut short the description of a volume’s content with a brief ‘and other [texts] than this’.\(^{26}\) Clearly, it was the physical shape of the book that had become his main concern in this section, and he could thus circumvent the daunting task of thematically classifying the content – an approach that would have been untenable in the catalogue’s other sections.

This shift in definition allowed the writer to keep up the appearance of a catalogue that progressed neatly entry by entry. Fundamentally, this combination of a text-based and a volume-based definition of the book was untenable – and arguably the changing styles of writing and presenting the material indicated that the writer himself felt uneasy with his solution. However, it was a useful solution to resolve this writer’s struggle to find order in a collection of ‘books’ that would not match one single definition. The writer was not able to ‘catch the eel’, but he was at least able to use the elusiveness of the definition to his own advantage as he preserved the illusion of a single scheme for the heterogeneous material that he found on the shelves. The main legacy of this seventh/thirteenth-century writer and his cataloguing practices for our purposes is to remind us that the term ‘book’ is far from a commonsense term, not only for the Formative Period, but also in subsequent centuries. Though the term kitāb could not mean all things to all men, it could at least mean quite different things to those dealing with the written word in this phase of Arabic manuscript culture.

\(^{26}\) For instance, *Fihrist al-ʿAṣrafiyya*, fol. 261v, l. 2, l. 14; 262r, l. 1, l. 3, l. 8/9, l. 16; fol. 262v, l. 14, l. 18/19; fol. 263r, l. 16; fol. 163v, l. 5.
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LIBRI E ARTIGIANI DEL LIBRO:
LE RACCOMANDAZIONI DEI GIURISTI MUSULMANI
(XIV SECOLO)*

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The paper deals with the comments 14th-century jurists, Ibn Ğamāʾa, Ibn al-Ḫājī and al-Subkī made about books and bookmaking, which highlight their ambivalent attitude towards the craftsmanship of those involved in the production of books. While extolling the merits of papermakers, scribes and bookbinders in connection with the production of religious books, the jurists urged these craftsmen to proceed in strict compliance with the Islamic code. Copying and binding certain kinds of books, such as folk romances, was severely censured or even prohibited. Some suggestions aiming at the prevention of fraud and illicit behaviour were also included in sections of legal treatises dealing with the crafts of book-production.

È ben noto il prestigio del libro nel mondo islamico: il ‘Libro’ per eccellenza è lo stesso Corano. In un importante saggio sulle biblioteche abbasidi, Olga Pinto scrive che ‘presso pochi popoli il culto del libro e della tradizione letteraria ed erudita ha avuto tanta importanza in tutta quanta la vita spirituale e culturale quanta ne ha avuta presso gli Arabi’. ¹ ¹
Tre erano state, secondo lo storico al-Ǧalqašandī (m. 821/1418) le principali biblioteche: quella abbaside a Baghdad, quella fatimide al Cairo e quella omayyade a Cordova. ² Particolarmente dense sono le pagine dedicate dallo storico Ibn Ėḥalūn (m. 808/1406) alla trasmissione del sapere tramite la scrittura e la produzione di libri, la cui perfezione o decadenza sono in stretta correlazione con l’analoga condizione della società urbana. ³ I testi ci lasciano intravedere un’intensa attività di

* Questo saggio riprende una serie di studi sulle professioni legate al libro arabo e intende presentare una riflessione sintetica sulla posizione dei giuristi in un periodo chiave per la produzione di libri: l’epoca mamelucca.

copisti, rilegatori, decoratori, mercanti di libri, bibliofili sia nell’Oriente che nell’Occidente islamico.\(^4\)

Nella Baghdad del X secolo, all’epoca di al-Ya‘qūbī, operavano più di cento librai e già esisteva quello che noi definiremmo il mercato antiquario.\(^5\) Il commercio librario si svolgeva in genere nelle parti più nobili del mercato, presso la principale moschea cattedrale delle grandi città.\(^6\) Nella pagina dedicata al sāq al-kutubiyyīn del Cairo, al-Maqrīzī (m. 845/1441) sottolinea come questo costituisse un luogo privilegiato di incontro tra i dotti, l’unico degno di essere frequentato assieme a quello del mercato delle armi. Assieme a kutūbī, ‘libraio’, si trova nei testi forse ancora più frequentemente il vocabolo warrāq, con il molteplice significato di fabbricante di carta in senso stretto, cartolaio, venditore di libri, ma anche rilegatore, copista o scriba.\(^7\) Analoghe considerazioni sono possibili per wirāqa, ‘l’industria del libro’. Famoso warrāq fu Ibn al-Naḍīm (m. 388/998), l’autore del Fihrist, il grande repertorio suddiviso per materia di tutti i libri in arabo noti al suo tempo.

L’VIII secolo dell’egira (XIV sec.) sembra essere il periodo in cui giuristi e ulema più hanno scritto e più si sono occupati delle attività concernenti la produzione di libri. Questo è probabilmente dovuto al fatto che l’epoca mamelucca aveva visto fiorire pratiche di lavoro, comportamenti, letterature, espressioni artistiche che mal si conciliavano con le accorate raccomandazioni degli uomini di religione, custodi della


stretta ortodossia. Queste pratiche si configuravano come innovazioni biasimevoli (bida’, sing. bid’a).

Le varie scuole giuridiche concordano su questo atteggiamento. Spiccano i nomi del malikita Muḥammad b. al-Hāġg al-Fāṣī al-ʿAbdarī (m. 737/1336) e degli shafiʿiti Tāḡ al-Dīn al-Subkī (m. 771/1370) e Ibn Ġamāʿa (m. 733/1333).

Essi fondano le loro argomentazioni sui concetti di mīṯāl ‘modelli di comportamento’, adab ‘corretto modo di agire’, niyya ‘buon proposito’.

In quanto segue presento le parti più significative dei tre trattati, precedute da alcune informazioni biografiche utili per inquadrare i loro autori. L’insieme delle ‘raccomandazioni’, spesso molto minuziose in relazione all’opera dello scriba, si può riassumere in due concetti fondamentali: 1) l’artigiano del libro deve comportarsi in tutte le sue azioni seguendo una stretta etica islamica; 2) deve operare possedendo la necessaria perizia tecnica e con un alto livello di professionalità.

1) Taqī al-Ǧīn e Tāḡ al-Dīn al-Subkī

Taqī l-Ǧīn al-Subkī (m. 756/1355), gran ṣāḥib di Damasco e predicatore nella moschea degli Omayyadi, si occupò di libri e di biblioteche, trasmettendoci il documento waqf della al-ʿAṣrāfiyya. Le informazioni riportate nella sua raccolta di fatwāh costituiscono un’importante attestazione per la conoscenza dell’organizzazione e del funzionamento della biblioteca:

Si versino mensilmente al bibliotecario 18 dirham. Egli avrà cura del restauro [delle legature] dei libri e ne renderà conto al soprintendente (nāẓir) o al suo sostituto, al fine di stanziare le somme necessarie dalle rendite della fondazione. Agirà nello stesso modo, qualora se ne presenti la necessità, per correggere il libro o collazionarlo... Interverrà per la fornitura di carta, degli strumenti di scrittura quali penne, calamai, supporti di libri (karārīs) etc., che metterà al servizio di coloro che operano nel grande ivān o nella sala di fronte, copiando [opere] di ḥadīṯ e di scienze ausiliarie, passi del Corano e commentari. Interverrà per le necessità di quelli che trascrivono nelle sedute di dettatura (imlāʾ) e di coloro che scrivono libri o raccolte di certificati (istiḥāza). Egli accorderà tuttavia il suo favore solo a quelli che copiano per i propri studi e non per ricavarne un guadagno e un profitto pecuniario. Il soprintendente può fare copiare o acquistare, per

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8 Sui kutub al-bida’ si veda in particolare Fierro, ‘The Treatises against Innovations’, e bibliografia citata.

9 Un paio di secoli dopo, ʿAbd al-Bāṣīṭ al-ʿAlmawī (m. 981/1573), šafiʿīta, riprende il testo di Ibn Ġamāʿa apportando integrazioni e chiarimenti. Un fondamentale studio su questo autore è stato pubblicato da F. Rosenthal, The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship, 7–18.


Tāḡ al-Dīn al-Subkī assume un atteggiamento censorio nei confronti degli artigiani del libro, dal copista fino al rilegatore e al decoratore. Nella sua requisitoria egli opera una netta distinzione tra gli scritti profani e le opere religiose: non solo condanna i libri ‘eretici’ o licenziosi, ma anche le popolari biografie leggendarie degli antichi eroi arabi, quali ʿAntara b. Šaddād, con la inquietante motivazione che ‘Dio non ne trae vantaggio’. Anche se è lecito chiedersi quale sia stata l’efficacia di simili anatemi, al-Subkī manifesta una preoccupazione condivisa tra gli ʿulamāʾ.\footnote{Forse al-Subkī riteneva che il pathos che caratterizza queste narrazioni riflettesse più lo spirito della Gāhiliyya che quello dell’Islam; o forse temeva la popolarità del cantastorie, che aveva presa sul pubblico più del predicatore (ricordiamo che egli stesso era stato ḥātib alla Moschea degli Omayyadi di Damasco). I riferimenti all’epica araba sono stati da me esaminati, assieme a quelli di altri autori, nel saggio ‘Critical Attitudes Toward Arabic Folk Epics’ (2005).} Il rapporto tra autore o committente e copista non sempre è privo di diffidenza e di contrasti, tanto da richiedere talora un responso giuridico. Anche i rilegatori dovrebbero limitare la propria opera a libri di carattere strettamente religioso; solo il Corano dovrebbe essere oggetto di doratura.
L'accorato appello di Tāğ al-Dīn al-Subkī sembra però aver avuto, fortunatamente, un’influenza limitata sull’evoluzione dell’arte del libro islamico.

Dal Kitāb Muʿīd al-niʿam wa-mubīd al-niqam:15

lxix. Lo scriba/copista (al-nāsiḥ)
È suo dovere non copiare nulla in fatto di libri fuorvianti, come quelli degli eretici e dei settari, e astenersi dal copiare libri di cui Dio non trae vantaggio, come la Sīra di ‘Antara e altre simili di fantasia, che costituiscono solo una perdita di tempo e dei quali la religione non ha alcun bisogno. Lo stesso vale per i libri dei libertini e per ciò che essi scrivono sulle modalità del coito, sulle qualità delle bevande inebrianti e su ogni altra cosa che istighi [a compiere] azioni proibite. Mettiamo in guardia i copisti da tutto ciò: la vita terrena li trae in errore. Spesso colui che commissiona di scrivere queste cose offre un compenso maggiore di quello che chiede i libri di scienza. È tuttavia opportuno che il copista ‘non svenda la sua religione per i beni del mondo’.
Ci sono copisti che non provano timor di Dio e scrivono affrettatamente, omettendo passi del libro per fretta di finirlo, malgrado il compenso sia stato pattuito per la copiatura integrale. Queste persone sono dei traditori nei confronti di Dio, dell’autore e di chi li ricompensa per il loro lavoro.
I giuristi hanno detto: se [al copista] viene commissionato di scrivere un testo e commette degli errori, o di scriverlo in arabo e invece lo fa in lingua diversa (ʿaḡamiyya), o il contrario, egli è responsabile della perdita della carta e non gli spetta alcun compenso. Al-Nawawī [m. 676/1277] diede il seguente responso—e quanto ha ricordato al-Gazzālī [m. 505/1111] nelle sue fatwā è molto simile—[a proposito di un copista] al quale viene commissionata la copiatura di un libro ed egli cambia la sequenza dei capitoli: se è possibile rimettere in ordine le varie parti del testo, ad esempio se il libro si compone di dieci capitoli e il copista ha scritto il primo [ponendolo] separato alla fine, ha diritto all’ammontare dell’importo pattuito; altrimenti non ha diritto a nulla. (…).

lxxx. Il fabbricante di carta (al-warrāq)
Si tratta di uno dei più eccellenti lavori, perché su di esso si basa la scrittura dei Corani, dei libri di scienza, dei documenti e dei contratti della gente. Che colui che svolge questa attività, per grazia di Dio, favorisca la ricerca della scienza e delle altre [discipline]; dia la preferenza a chi egli sa che acquista la carta per scrivere libri di scienza, ma si rifiuti di venderla a chi sa che scriverà ciò che non si conviene: scritti eretici ed eterodossi, testimonianze e atti giudiziari falsi e simili.

15 Ed. Cairo, Maktabat al-Ḥānḡī, 1996.
lxxxi. The bookbinder (al-
miğallid)\textsuperscript{16} È suo dovere comportarsi come il copista e il fabbricatore di carta.

lxxxii. Il decoratore-doratore (al-
muḏahhib)
È suo dovere dorare solamente copie del Corano. Sono note le divergenze tra i dotti sulla decorazione del Corano con oro. Al-Rāfiʿī e al-Nawawī sostengono che c’è differenza se esso appartenga a una donna, e in tal caso è ammessa, oppure a un uomo, e allora è vietata. Secondo noi è preferibile ammetterne la liceità senza restrizioni. Per quanto riguarda libri diversi dal Corano, i giuristi concordano nel non considerare lecita la decorazione con oro.

lvii. Il conservatore di libri (ḫāzin al-
kutub)
È suo dovere conservare i libri, riassestarli (tarmīmuḥā) quando sono scompaginati, rilegarli (ḥabkuhā) qualora se ne presenti la necessità. Egli deve essere accorto nel darli a coloro che non li rispettano, ma prodigo nei confronti di quelli che ne abbisognano; è inoltre opportuno che favorisca nel prestito i poveri, i quali hanno difficoltà nel procacciarsi libri, piuttosto che i ricchi. Frequentemente la persona che li ha dati in lascito (wāqif) pone la condizione che il libro sia consegnato solo dietro il versamento di una cauzione di valore corrispondente. Si tratta di una condizione giusta e da tenere in considerazione: il conservatore non deve concedere prestiti se non dietro cauzione. (…)

civ. I sensali/commissionari (al-
dallālūn)

2) Ibn Ġamāʿa

Damasco; successivamente fece ritorno in Egitto dove riprese la sua attività.\(^{17}\)

Tra le sue opere figurano un trattato sui diritti e doveri del sultano (\textit{Tahrîr al-ahkâm fī tadbîr ahl al-islâm}), vari libri sulle tradizioni del Profeta e altre opere minori.\(^{18}\) La \textit{Taǧkîrat al-sâmi\(\text{c}\) wa-l-mutakallim fī adab al-\(\text{i}^\text{ā}lîm wa-l-muta\(\text{a}^\text{llîm}\) ('Memoria per chi ascolta e chi parla in merito alle buone maniere del dotto e del discente') è un trattato sulla trasmissione del sapere religioso e sull’educazione nella \textit{madrasa}. L’autore insiste sul concetto di \textit{ādâb}, ‘corretto comportamento, buone maniere’,\(^{19}\) quella ‘bontà di comportamento (\textit{husn al-adab}) che con i suoi meriti è testimonianza di retta via e intelligenza’.\(^{20}\) L’opera è articolata in cinque ampie sezioni, i cui titoli ben evidenziano il contenuto: i. ‘Sul merito della scienza e dei dotti, del suo insegnamento e del suo apprendimento’; ii. ‘Sulle buone maniere del dotto verso se stesso e nel rispetto del suo studente e dello studio’; iii. ‘Sulle buone maniere del discente’; iv. ‘Sulle buone maniere con i libri’; v. ‘Sulle buone maniere di coloro che frequentano le scuole’.

Nella traduzione che segue, del iv capitolo,\(^{21}\) vengono ripresi i sottotitoli aggiunti per maggiore chiarezza dall’editore al-Nadwî.\(^{22}\)

Dalla \textit{Taǧkîrat al-sâmi\(\text{c}\)}. Libri e corretto comportamento:

Cap. iv: Sul corretto comportamento concernente i libri, che costituiscono lo strumento [per trasmettere] la scienza, e ciò che vi si riferisce in merito alla loro edizione, vocalizzazione, trasferimento, collocazione, e inoltre acquisto, prestito, copia etc. Il capitolo comprende dieci sezioni:

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\(^{20}\) \textit{Taǧkîrat al-sâmi\(\text{c}\)}, 13.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 151–72.

\(^{22}\) L’edizione è stata effettuata sulla base del codice migliore (Gotha, ms. ar. 162, del 682/1275), con l’aggiunta di copiose note; l’opera è stata riproposta dalla Dār al-Kutub al-\(\text{i}^\text{lmiyya di Beirut una prima volta in edizione anastatica (1974) e successivamente in una nuova veste tipografica (2005).}
Sezione i: [Sollecitudine degli studenti nel procurarsi i libri]
È opportuno che ‘colui che cerca la scienza’ (Ṭālib al-ʿilm, lo studente/lo studioso) sia sollecito nel procurarsi i libri di cui necessita, per quanto gli è possibile acquistandoli, altrimenti dietro compenso o in prestito, poiché costituiscono lo strumento per giungere alla scienza. Tuttavia averne in gran numero non significa necessariamente possederla né comprenderla, come ritengono molti che si atteggiano a esperti di giurisprudenza e ḥadīṯ. Sono giuste le parole di chi ha detto:

Se non tieni a mente [= non studi] con consapevolezza il tuo accumular libri non ti giova.

Se [lo studente / lo studioso] è in grado di acquistare i libri, non si impegni nella loro copiatura. Quest’ultima non è auspicabile per il tempo che richiede, a meno che egli non possa farlo, non essendo in grado di pagare il loro prezzo né il compenso per farseli copiare. Non si preoccupi eccessivamente di una bella scrittura, ma piuttosto della correttezza di quanto scrive. Non chieda in prestito un libro se ha la possibilità di acquistarlo o averlo dietro dietro compenso.

Sezione ii: [Presa in prestito dei libri in caso di necessità]
È auspicabile il prestito di libri a condizione che non subisca un danno chi li presta o chi li prende a prestito. Ad alcuni ripugna dare a prestito, ma il primo comportamento [cioè il prestare libri] è migliore, poiché in ciò vi è aiuto alla scienza e in sé è un’azione meritoria degna di ricompensa. (…) È opportuno che colui che chiede in prestito un libro ringrazi il prestatore e lo ricompensi con una buona azione. Non si prolunghi il possesso [del libro] senza necessità, anzi sia restituito quando è terminata [la lettura o copiatura]. Non si trattenga ulteriormente quando non ce n’è più bisogno o il suo proprietario lo richieda. Non è lecito introdurre correzioni senza permesso del proprietario.

Non si appongano note o scritte nello spazio vuoto delle pagine iniziali (fawāthīh) o finali (ḥawāṭīm), a meno che il proprietario del libro non sia d’accordo. Allo stesso modo deve comportarsi chi trascrive ḥadīṯ quando riporta la parte che ha udito o trascritto. Non ne faccia una brutta copia, non lo prestiti a terze persone né lo dia senza necessità anche se è lecito, e neppure lo copri senza permesso del proprietario.

Se il libro fa parte di una donazione pia (waqf), lasciato in uso a chi ne può trarre utilità, senza che ci siano particolari condizioni, non c’è nulla di male nel copiarlo, con la riserva che può introdurre eventuali correzioni solo chi ne ha la competenza; è in ogni caso bene che venga chiesto

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preventivamente il permesso al supervisore. Se, ottenuto questo permesso, lo copia, non scriva su di esso o su una pagina aggiunta o posta sopra lo scritto. Non ponga il calamaio sopra il libro, né faccia passare il calamo intriso di inchiostro sopra la pagina scritta [con il pericolo di macchiarla]. Un poeta ha detto:

O tu che prendi a prestito un libro da me
fammi contento [trattando bene il mio libro]
como vorresti esserlo tu [se fossi tu a prestarmelo].

Sezione iii [Come disporre i libri durante al consultazione]25
Quando si copia o si sta consultando un libro, questo non deve venire posto dispiegato sul pavimento, ma tra due libri o altri oggetti, o [preferibilmente] posato sul leggio (kursī al-kutub),26 al fine di non affrettare la rottura del filo di cucitura. Se si ripone il libro in una pila, ciò non deve avvenire sul supporto menzionato né su un palchetto di legno (taḥt ḫașab) o simili. La cosa migliore è mantenere il libro sollevato dal suolo, affinché non si bagni o assorbi umidità.

Se il libro viene posto su un supporto di legno o simili, è opportuno inserire sopra e sotto qualcosa che impedisca danni alla pelle della coperta; allo stesso modo, i libri devono venire protetti dal contatto con un muro o altro appoggio. Il retto comportamento (adab) nel riporre i libri tiene in considerazione le scienze (ʿulūm) [che vi sono trattate], la loro importanza, il loro autore, la loro eccellenza.

Il libro più ‘nobile’ deve venir collocato più in alto rispetto a tutti gli altri, tenendo in conto la suddivisione in classi (tadrīğ). Se c’è un Corano (muṣḥaf) deve stare sopra tutti; meglio se inserito in un contenitore con un appiglio da appendere a un chiodo o un picchetto su una parete pulita, in mezzo alla stanza dove ha luogo la riunione. Successivamente vengono, nell’ordine, i libri di tradizioni genuine del Profeta, come al-Ṣaḥīḥ di Muslim, quindi il commentario del Corano, il commentario del ḥadīṯ, i fondamenti della religione (uṣūl al-dīn) e della giurisprudenza (uṣūl al-fiqh), opere di grammatica e sintassi, infine le ‘poesie degli arabi’ (aḥār al-ʿarab) e i trattati di metrica (ʿarād). Se ci sono due libri dello stesso soggetto, viene posto in alto quello che contiene maggiormente parti del Corano o di ḥadīṯ; se in ciò non vi è differenza, è da tenere in considerazione l’importanza dell’autore e, in secondo luogo, la scrittura più antica o il maggior utilizzo da parte di dotti e persone pie, quindi il testo più corretto.

26 Il tradizionale leggio di legno a forma di X. Si veda Gacek, Arabic Manuscripts. A Vademecum, 295, fig. 215.
Il titolo del libro deve venire scritto sul bordo inferiore delle pagine.\textsuperscript{27} La scrittura con l’elenco dei capitoli (\textit{tarğama})\textsuperscript{28} sia riportata nel giusto senso all’interno della coperta, sul lato dove si trova la \textit{basmala}.\textsuperscript{29} L’utilità del titolo consiste nel permettere l’identificazione del libro e favorirne l’estrazione quando si trova collocato tra altre opere. Se il libro è posto a terra o su un supporto, la coperta dal lato della \textit{basmala} e l’inizio dell’opera deve stare verso l’alto. Non si ecceda nell’inserire la ribalta all’interno del corpo del libro [come segnalibro], per non accelerarne la rottura, né si mettano libri di grande formato sopra altri più piccoli, con il rischio di farli cadere.

Non si riduca il libro a contenitore di fascicoli sciolti (\textit{karārīs}),\textsuperscript{30} o altro, né sia usato per cuscino, ventaglio, peso, appoggio, sostegno, e neppure per uccidere cimici o altri insetti [!]; non [si traccino] segni sulle pagine, sarebbe cosa grave! I margini o gli angoli dei fogli non devono venire piegati. Se serve un segnalibro, si faccia di carta e non di legno o materiali rigidi. Bisogna fare attenzione a non lasciare sulle pagine segni di unghia.

Sezione iv: [Come acquistare libri] \textsuperscript{31} Quando si prende in prestito un libro o si restituisce, è opportuno esaminarli.\textsuperscript{32} Procedendo all’acquisto, si controlli con attenzione l’inizio, la fine, l’interno, l’ordine dei capitoli e dei fascicoli, si sfoglino le pagine, si valuti se c’è l’indicazione che il libro è stato oggetto di correzione. Se il tempo è limitato, prevalga il criterio della correttezza rispetto all’esame minuzioso; come disse al-Šāfi‘ī, Dio sia soddisfatto di lui: ‘Se vedo aggiunte e correzioni in un libro, sono sicuro della sua correttezza’. Un tale ha detto: ‘Il libro non riluce se non è annerito’, intendendo con ciò le correzioni (\textit{iṣlāḥ}) che vi sono state apportate.

\textsuperscript{27} Ciò è sul taglio di piede del libro.
\textsuperscript{29} In modo che, aprendo il libro, si trovi all’inizio.
\textsuperscript{30} Cfr. Gacek, \textit{Arabic Manuscripts}, 210–13 (Quires).
\textsuperscript{32} Al-ʿAlmawī aggiunge: ‘al fine di verificare che non siano state dimenticate al suo interno delle note utili o altro’ (al-Muʿīd \textit{fi adab al-mufid}, 254).
Sezione v: [Come copiare i libri]\footnote{33} Quando si copia da libri di scienze shari’iche, è necessario che lo scriba si trovi in stato di purità rituale, sia rivolto verso la qibla, puro di corpo e di abiti, e scriva con inchiostro puro.\footnote{34} Ogni scritto deve iniziare con la formula \textit{bismi l-lāhī l-rahmānī l-rahīm} (‘nel nome di Dio il Clemente il Misericordioso’). Se il libro inizia con una \textit{ḥuṭba} (‘prefazione’) che comprende l’espressione ‘Lode a Dio l’Altissimo e preghiera al Suo profeta’, si ponga appena dopo la basmala, a meno che già non si trovi in questa posizione.\footnote{35}

[Dopo la basmala e l’eventuale ḥuṭba] si copia il contenuto del libro. Alla conclusione di ciascuna parte (ḡaz‘), ad esempio dopo la prima o la seconda, si scriva ‘segue questo e quello’, qualora la scrittura sia ancora incompleta. Quando invece è terminato, si scriva \textit{tammā l--kitāb}… (‘è finito il libro… [segue il titolo]’). In ciò c’è molta utilità.

Ogni volta che si scrive il nome di Dio, si facciano seguire eulogie che lo glorificano, quali \textit{ta’ālā} (‘l’Altissimo’), \textit{subhānahu} (‘Dio sia esaltato’), \textit{taqaddasa} (‘sia santificato’) o simili. Quando si scrive il nome del Profeta, si aggiunga \textit{al-ṣalāt ‘alayhi wa-l-salām} (‘su di lui la preghiera e il saluto [di Dio]’), pronunciando al tempo stesso l’invocazione.

È consuetudine degli antichi e della generazione passata scrivere \textit{ṣallā l-lāhu ‘alayhi wa sallama} (‘Dio preghi su di lui [il Profeta] e gli dia il saluto/la salute [eterna]’), questo forse in accordo con il versetto del nobile Corano ‘Pregate anche voi su di lui e salutatelo di saluto di pace’.\footnote{36} Ci sono numerosi studi in proposito.

Anche se [la menzione del Profeta] ricorre ripetutamente, non si abbrevi la formula come fanno alcuni redattori disattenti, che scrivono \textit{ṣl‘}, oppure \textit{ṣlm} o \textit{ṣlm}. Tutto ciò non si addice al Profeta, Dio preghi su di lui e gli dia il saluto. Numerose tradizioni attestano che la scrittura deve essere completa, evitando le abbreviazioni.

Se ricorre la menzione di un compagno [del Profeta], in particolare i più importanti, si aggiunga \textit{radiya l-lāhu ‘anhu} (‘che Dio sia soddisfatto di lui’), ma non si scriva \textit{al-ṣalāt wa-l-salām} (‘la preghiera e il saluto’) per nessuno eccetto i profeti, e immediatamente dopo [il loro nome]. Ogni volta che ricorre la menzione di un pio antenato (salaf) ci si comporti allo stesso modo o si scriva \textit{rahimahu l-lāh} (‘che Dio lo abbia in misericordia’), in particolare per i celebri imam e per le guide spirituali dell’Islam.

\footnote{34} Cfr. Gacek, \textit{Arabic manuscripts}. 235–6 (Scribal etiquette).
\footnote{36} Cor. 33:56.
È opportuno evitare la scrittura minuta nella copiatura, poiché la calligrafia (ḫaṭṭ) è segno: la più chiara è la migliore. Un nostro antenato quando vide una calligrafia minuta disse: ‘Questa è la calligrafia di chi non è certo che Dio l’Altissimo gli darà una discendenza’. Un altro disse: ‘Scrivi ciò che ti è utile per quando ne hai bisogno, e non quello che non ti sarà di nessuna utilità’. Alludeva al tempo della vecchiaia e alla vista indebolita. Talvolta dei viaggiatori si propongono di ridurre con una scrittura minuta il disagio nel trasportare [manoscritti pesanti]; il proposito è lecito, tuttavia l’utilità in ultima analisi è passerella.

Usare inchiostro ḥibr è meglio che usare inchiostro midād, poiché assicura maggiore costanza nel tempo. Si ritiene che il calamo non debba essere troppo rigido, tanto da impedire la scioltezza del movimento, ma neppure troppo morbido per non logorarsi in fretta. Un tale ha detto: ‘Se vuoi migliorare la tua calligrafia lascia il pennino [cioè la punta del calamo] allungato, largo e con un taglio obliquo verso destra’. Il coltello per fare la punta al calamo e raschiare la carta deve essere molto affilato: non si usi se non a questo scopo. [La tavoletta] dove viene tagliata la punta al calamo deve essere molto solida. [Gli scribi] lodano in proposito la canna fārsī secca e l’ebano levigato.

Sezione vii: [Retto comportamento nella correzione del libro] Quando il libro è oggetto di revisione collazionandolo con l’originale corretto o [ricorrendo all’aiuto di] uno shaykh, è necessario introdurre la vocalizzazione e i punti diacritici, chiarendo i passi oscuri e verificando la correzione. Qualora sia necessario controllare ciò che si trova nel testo (matn) del libro nei confronti con ciò che è posto a margine, ed esplicitarlo, ci si scriva sopra un’annotazione. Lo stesso principio si estende alla nota a margine, con un’indicazione di preferenza; ad esempio se c’è nel testo il nome حَرِيْر si riportano a margine le [singole] lettere, cioè h, seguita da r, quindi da y e z; oppure [secondo una diversa lettura] con ḡ seguito da y.

39 Sul calamo e gli altri strumenti di scrittura si veda Gacek, Arabic Manuscripts, 40–2 (Calamus), 294–6 (Writing implements and accessories); A. Grohmann, Arabische Paläographie, 1: 117–27 (Die Schreibgeräte); J. Sadan, Nouveaux documents sur scribes et copistes, 62–4 sull’epistola di Ibn Qutayba, al-Haṭṭ wa-l-qalam.
È consuetudine indicare nella scrittura le lettere muʿǧama con i punti diacritici; per quelle muhmala (‘sprovviste’) c’è chi lascia come segno (‘alâma) la loro omissione, e chi pone dei simboli, dei punti rovesciati o simili, o una piccola mezzaluna e altre indicazioni.

Dopo aver revisionato un testo, è opportuno segnalare con una piccola ḥi luoghi che restano dubbi nel corso della consultazione e presentano possibilità [di interpretazione diverse], annotando sul testo o sulla copia: wa-huwa ḥaṭa’… (‘è un errore’, = errata) in caratteri piccoli e riportando a margine: sawābuḥu… (‘giusto è…’, = correggi),43 se si è ben certi di ciò.

[Interno caso di incertezza] si aggiunga una dabba (‘chiavistello’), che ha la forma della testa di una s, da scriversi sopra la parola ma non unita ad essa. Se in una successiva revisione risulta che la parola è esatta, si aggiunga alla s una h, che così diventa sāḥa (‘giusto’), altrimenti si scriva la parola corretta a margine così come detto in precedenza.44

Se ricorre una parola spuria nel manoscritto, qualora si tratti di una singola parola ci si scrive sopra lā (‘no’) o si espunge; se sono più parole, una riga o più righe, volendo si può scrivere sopra la prima: min (‘da [qui…]’) oppure lā (‘no’), e alla fine ilā (‘fino a…’). Questo significa ‘ometti da qui fino a lì’. Se è il caso, si espunga il tutto scrivendoci sopra con scrittura minuta, al fine di ottenere quanto ci si propone senza imbrattare la carta. Qualcuno pone al posto della scritta una fila di punti.

Se una parola viene ripetuta da parte dello scriba inavvertitamente, si espunga la seconda volta che ricorre, poiché la prima è giusta al suo posto. Questo purché essa non si trovi in fine al rigo: in tal caso è meglio cancellarla per un migliore inizio rigo, a meno che non sia annessa in uno stato costruito.

Sezione viii: [Come si pone un’aggiunta allo scritto] Se si vuole inserire (taḥrīq) qualcosa a margine, [processo] chiamato anche ‘aggiunta’ (laḥaqq), se ne contrassegni il luogo con una linea

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41 L’editore riporta nel testo harīz, ma è da intendersi, in base a quanto segue, la parola priva dei diacritici, senza i quali può essere interpretata sia come harīz (‘prezioso’) che come gāhrīr (‘briglia’): sarà il contesto a far scegliere quale delle due letture è più sensata. Nella tradizione araba, il copista scrivendo una parola di incerta lettura preferisce non porre i diacritici sulla singola lettera, ma ‘descriverla’, ad esempio ẓ muhmala (senza punti diacritici) o muʿǧama (con punti diacritici).

42 Gacek, Arabic Manuscripts, 144–5 (Letter-pointing); 286 (Unpointed letters).

43 Gacek, Arabic Manuscripts, 234–5 (Scribal errors).

44 Gacek, Arabic Manuscripts, 170–1 (Omissions and insertions); 283–5 (Transcription marks).

45 Il vocabolo ha significati diversi, talvolta contrastanti, tra i quali ‘edizione o redazione che comporta correzioni, selezione o riordinamento dei capitoli; omissione; estratto da un libro, citazione; inserimento’ e altri (Cfr. Gacek, The
leggere leggermente curva fino all’inserto, meglio se verso destra. Poi si scriva l’aggiunta a partire dall’estremità del segno salendo verso l’alto della pagina, senza scendere in basso per l’eventualità che sia necessaria un’altra aggiunta. L’orientamento delle lettere è con la testa verso la destra [del foglio],46 sia che l’aggiunta si trovi sul margine destro che sinistro dello scritto. È opportuno tener conto della lacuna e dello spazio necessario [per integrarla] prima di scrivere. Se sono due righe o più si faccia in modo che la scrittura seguia la fine della riga se l’aggiunta è sulla destra; l’inizio della riga [seguente] se è sulla sinistra. Non si continui a scrivere e tracciare righe a margine della pagina, ma si lasci uno spazio vuoto che renda possibile la cucitura. Inoltre si scriva alla fine dell’aggiunta ṣahha (‘è corretto’); alcuni riprendono anche la parola finale della frase [precedente], quale segno di continuità del discorso.

Sezione ix: [Annotazioni a margine]47
Non c’è impedimento nello scrivere glosse, notizie utili e avvertenze importanti ai margini di un libro di possesso. Non si annoti alla fine di quanto aggiunto ṣahha (‘è corretto’), lasciando distinta in questo modo la vera aggiunta al testo. Alcuni precisano nello spazio sovrastante ‘nota’ o ‘notizia utile’ (fāʾida), altri lo scrivono alla fine. Non si riportino se non informazioni importanti correlate al libro specifico, ad esempio un’avvertenza su questioni dubbie o su riserve, simboli o errori e simili.

Non si imbrattino le pagine aggiungendovi questioni o sezioni estranee, non si abbondi con le note tanto da nuocere [alla lettura] del libro o distrarre lo studente dagli argomenti trattati. Non si deve scrivere tra le righe; talvolta qualcuno lo fa tra righe distanziate con [inchiostro] rosso o altro colore, ma è meglio non farlo.

Sezione x: [Evidenziazione in rosso di capitoli e sezioni]48
Non c’è obiezione allo scrivere con inchiostro rosso i nomi di capitoli, rubriche e sezioni: ciò rende più evidente l’articolazione delle parti del discorso.49 Allo stesso modo, non c’è obiezione [nello scrivere in rosso] nomi, scuole, detti, metodi, generi, vocaboli, numeri o simili. Quando si opera così si esplicitino i relativi termini nell’introduzione del libro, al fine di farne capire il significato a chi si accinge [alla lettura]. Contrassegnano in rosso molti tradizionisti, giuristi, studiosi di diritto musulmano, volendo abbreviare. Se non si procede come menzionato in merito all’evidenziazione in rosso di capitoli, sezioni e rubriche, li si distingua con un tratto grosso del calamo e l’estensione della forma della lettera (maṣiq) lungo la riga, o

46 Procedendo la scrittura araba da destra a sinistra, si scrive dal basso in alto.
con simili procedimenti di scrittura, questo al fine di facilitare la suddivisione voluta.

È consigliabile separare due argomenti con un cerchio, una rubrica o un tratto di penna grosso, in modo che non ci sia continuità di scrittura [tra quanto precede e quanto segue], poiché la difficoltà di dedurne il contenuto comporta una perdita di tempo. Solo gli ignoranti non procedono in questo modo.

Sezione xi: [La cancellatura]

Cancellare (darb, tracciando una riga sopra la parola) è meglio che raschiare (ḥakk, in particolare nei libri di tradizioni del Profeta, poiché altrimenti ciò che era scritto non è più conoscibile o può essere solo oggetto di congettura, e inoltre perché una scrittura conservatasi a lungo ora va perduta. L’atto [di raschiare] è più grave: talvolta provoca la foratura della carta, un danno maggiore, e il suo indebolimento. Dal momento che rimuove punti diacritici e vocalizzazione, la cancellazione è maggiormente consigliabile.

Se il libro viene corretto [con l’aiuto di] uno ṣayḥ o tramite la collazione, si segni il luogo dove [la consultazione] o la collazione giungono nella revisione, o quant’altro risulti utile. Qualora questo avvenga in relazione all’audizione delle tradizioni del Profeta (samā’ al-ḥadīṯ), si contrassegni il passo cui si è giunti nel primo, secondo e successivi incontri, fino alla fine. Al-Ḥaṭīb [al-Baġdādī] disse che, se si deve emendare qualcosa, si faccia la correzione con una scheggia di tek o di altro legno duro, evitando di immergerlo (al-ṣarīḥ).

3) Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ

Nella sua biografia degli uomini illustri dell’VIII secolo dell’egira, Ibn Ḥaṭar al-ʿAskalānī (m. 852/1449) riporta una breve nota su Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ. Giurista di scuola malikita, egli si recò dal nativo Maghreb in
Egitto e da qui effettuò il pellegrinaggio alla Mecca. Si legò allo shaykh Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ğamra e ne raccolse l’insegnamento, distinguendosi per integrità e ascetismo. ‘Scrisse al-Madḫal—annota Ibn Ḥaǧār—un’opera che contiene molte osservazioni utili, nella quale mette in luce i vizi e le innovazioni nell’operato della gente che agisce con negligenza: la maggior parte di queste azioni è da condannare, ma alcune sono tollerabili’. Mori nel 737/1336.


76; al-Šaʿrānī, al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā, 1: 273.
35 Cfr. GAL 2: 95; S 2: 95: Mudḫal al-ṣarīf / Mudḫal al-ṣaʾlānī / Al-ṣaʾlānī al-niyyāt al-ʿamal... Mi sono servito della ristampa dell’edizione egiziana del 1929.
36 Ms., cfr. GAL 1: 482; S 1: 883.
incaricato di verificare pesi, misure, qualità e prezzi delle merci, e inoltre ‘ordinare il bene e vietare il male’. Nei manuali esaminati non ho trovato tuttavia cenno ai copisti, ai librai e ai rilegatori, verosimilmente perché il loro non è ritenuto un ‘mestiere’ assimilabile alle comuni attività di mercato, legato com’è a valori morali e religiosi, e il prodotto del loro lavoro è ben diverso da una comune merce.

L’ultima parte del trattato di Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ è riservata all’etica del lavoro. Tra le categorie di persone destinatarie dei suoi ammonimenti figurano chi produce e chi vende la carta, il copista, il legatore, il decoratore di libri.

Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ non manca di sottolineare il legame tra i mestieri di cartaiolo, copista e rilegatore con la religione. Il Corano—osserva l’autore—come pure gli altri libri religiosi sono scritti su carta, il che nobilita tale supporto e chi lo produce. Il copista ha un compito ancora più nobile, poiché con la sua opera diffonde la parola di Dio, associando scrittura, recitazione e riflessione. Nel copiare il Corano deve seguire la vulgata di ‘Uṭmān, anche in quei punti che suscitano perplessità per una grafia inconsueta. Della massima importanza è la scansione delle lettere, poiché ‘la calligrafia migliore è quella più leggibile’. Il copista non deve prestarsi a scrivere parole in lingua non araba, di cui non conosce il significato. L’artigiano che rilega i libri deve padroneggiare l’arte del mestiere, non sbagliando l’ordine dei fascicoli, non confondendo volumi

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61 Mi sembra significativo che il recente dettagliato studio di A. Ghabin citi a questo proposito solo Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ, non trovando negli altri trattati alcun riferimento alle arti del libro (Hisba, 147).


63 Evidentemente l’uso della pergamena era ormai molto limitato al tempo di Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ.
e rispettivi proprietari, onorando i tempi di consegna. Nella decorazione della coperta non è lecito usare oro o argento. È opportuno che il rilegatore rifiuti di operare su libri quali la Torah, il Vangelo, i Salmi, contenenti scritture celesti contraffatte. Da parte sua, il committente è tenuto ad accordarsi preventivamente con il rilegatore su materiali e costi.

Anche il nostro autore, come altri giuristi del tempo, non manca di condannare cartai, copisti e rilegatori che con la loro opera favorivano la diffusione delle ‘falsità’ (kiḏb) contenute nei popolari romanzi di cavalleria (siyar), oggetto di recitazione pubblica da parte dei cantastorie, come la storia di al-Batṭāl e quella di ʿAntara, che distoglievano i fedeli dai sermoni dei pii predicatori.64

Dal Kitāb al-Madhāl:65

1. Proposito del cartaio (warrāq)66

Sappi—che Dio ci assista—che questo [la carta] è uno dei mezzi più importanti per accostarci al Signore, qualora il proposito sia buono. Infatti il nobile Corano è scritto su carta, così il suo commentario (tafsīr), ‘l’abrogante e l’abrogato’ e le scienze correlate. Lo stesso vale per il ḥadīṯ del Profeta, il suo commento (ṣāḥīḥ) e ciò che contiene di massime, significati, utili insegnamenti, di numero incalcolabile; e ancora per i libri di giurisprudenza e delle diverse scienze shariʿi, per gli scritti sull’elemosina, sui contratti di vendita, di affitto, di procura, e molto altro di cui l’uomo necessita. Tutto questo riveste molta importanza per la religione (...).

A ciò si aggiunge il proposito della fede e della ricompensa [divina]; talvolta però si opera al contrario, ad esempio vendendo carta a chi si può presumere ne farà usi illeciti o sconvenienti. Non sono leciti [libri che descrivono] fatti iniqui e simili, e neppure menzogne come la storia (qiṣṣa) di al-Batṭāl o di ʿAntara; ma l’elenco sarebbe lungo. Quanto a quelli sconvenienti, sono le storie scherzose di cui la gente si diletta. Bisogna guardarsi da tutto ciò per non rientrare nelle parole dell’Altissimo: ‘O voi

64 Rimando in proposito al saggio ‘Critical Attitudes’.
65 Su cartai, copisti e rilegatori si vedano i rispettivi capitoli nel Manuel de codicologie arabe di Déroche; per la comprensione dei termini tecnici è stato molto utile il glossario di Gacek, The Arabic Manuscript Tradition e Supplement; sulla produzione di carta nel mondo islamico, si veda Bloom, Paper before Print.
66 Al-Madḥal, 4: 79–83. Dato lo scopo prevalentemente tecnico della traduzione, vengono omessi alcuni passi in cui l’autore si dilunga in considerazioni di ordine morale, biasimando venditori e artigiani poco coscienziosi e poco rispettosi della šarīʿa, in un ‘tempo caratterizzato da molte discordie e sedizioni’.
che credete! Perché dite ciò che non fate? È grandemente ripugnante presso Dio che voi diciate quello che non fate’ (Cor. 61:2–3). Questo perché se [il cartaio] vende carta a chi poi vi scriverà le cose menzionate, compie un’azione che non ha manifestato con le labbra né si è proposto con il cuore. Se il venditore afferma, come avviene nella maggior parte dei casi, di non conoscere la condizione del compratore, gli si può ribadire che è suo dovere condurre i musulmani sulla via della purezza e dell’integrità. È comunque raro di questi tempi non avere conoscenza dello stato degli acquirenti: nella maggior parte predomina l’ignoranza (...).

È opportuno che si guardi dalla truffa, tentando di vendere per quattro dirham una risma (dast) di carta che ne vale tre. Il prezzo della carta è diverso a seconda della qualità: può essere di bianchezza (bayād) e levigatezza (siqāl) superiore; può essere fabbricata in estate o, tendendo al bruno (samra) e mancando di levigatezza o bianchezza, essere prodotta in inverno. Se è così, [il cartaio] deve indicarlo con chiarezza per evitare l’inganno; qualora non lo facesse, rientra per la sua dissimulazione in quanto disse il Profeta: ‘Colui che ci imbroglia non è dei nostri’. La vendita all’acquirente non deve aver luogo priva di contrattazione (musāwama) o a premio fisso (murābahā). Se avviene per contrattazione, questo è il modo migliore e più sicuro; se invece è a premio fisso, deve essere soddisfatta la condizione menzionata a proposito del mercante di stoffe. Tutto ciò che è stato ricordato in merito al mancato esame da parte dell’acquirente, quando egli si reca al mercato o si ferma presso qualche venditore, vale per tutti gli operatori.

È opportuno fare attenzione, nell’acquistare carta, che non sia il momento in cui i lavoratori che la producono hanno scoperte le parti intime, poiché essi in genere si pongono ai lombi una stoffa succinta che si inzuppa di acqua lasciando le cosce scoperte. Se [l’acquirente] entra [nella cartiera] e si trova in questa situazione, compie un atto che invalida l’essenza stessa della sua niyya. [Il cartaio] deve aver cura nel non mescolare carta leggera a carta di buona qualità adatta alla copiatura, poiché questo è un imbroglio nei confronti del compratore, dal momento che la carta leggera non sopporta la raschiatura (kašāt) per il suo spessore ridotto. Se egli sa che l’acquirente è un copista, deve dargli ciò che gli conviene; se sa che è uno che scrive lettere e simili, è lecito vendergli carta leggera, ma solo dopo averlo informato in merito.

Non si faccia alcun uso di carta che presenta una scritta se non dopo averne conosciuto il contenuto: ci possono essere versetti coranici o ḥadīth del Profeta, o uno dei nomi dell’Altissimo, oppure il nome di un profeta o di un angelo. Tutto ciò è vietato per rispetto della legge, poiché alcuni potrebbero calpestare queste scritte, o compiere simili atti, il che sarebbe il peggiore degli abomini. Dio ce ne guardi! [Il cartaio] non deve permettere

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67 Cfr. Muslim, Ṣāḥīḥ, Īmān, 164 etc.
a nessuno degli operai comportarsi in modo disonorevole; se qualcuno agisce così, sia allontanato dal lavoro e un altro prenda il suo posto, purché rispetti le condizioni menzionate, compiendo la preghiera nei tempi stabiliti. (…)

II. Proposito del copista (nāṣihā)\(^68\)
Sappi che il copista merita maggiore compenso e remunerazione [celeste] del cartaio, poiché opera con grande devozione se copia di continuo il Libro di Dio, oppure il hadīṯ del Profeta, opere di giurisprudenza o di altre scienze shariʿitiche. Per quanto riguarda il Corano, il copista mette così assieme recitazione (tilāwa)—la pietà più autentica—e scrittura, specialmente se scrive con metodo e nel contempo riflette sui significati delle parole. Se scrive hadīṯ del Profeta è a lui vicino nella remunerazione; tra i meriti che ne derivano, viene ricordato che ‘gli angeli continuano a pregare per colui che scrive l’eulogia per il Profeta per tutto il tempo che essa perdura in quello scritto’. Il copista deve guardarsi dal copiare cose diverse dalle scienze shariʿitiche, poiché se faceesse ciò verrebbe meno il suo proposito, sul quale si era impegnato. (…)

[Il copista] deve inoltre guardarsi dal copiare quanto ricordato di opere menzognere, come la storia di al-Battāl e di ‘Antara e simili—questo è vietato, come pure storie scherzose—il che non è desiderabile. Egualmente non copi per l’iniquo o per chi propende per l’ingiustizia o consegue guadagni sospetti, per non ricadere nelle parole dell’Altissimo: ‘O voi che credete! Perché dite ciò che non fate...?’ (Cor. 61:2–3).

Il copista è tenuto a ben distinguere le lettere nel suo scritto, senza introdurre legamenti [inconsueti] nella sua calligrafia, tanto che questa possa essere compresa solo da chi ne ha profonda conoscenza: le lettere devono essere chiare ed essere distinte. Non deve inoltre omettere nessun punto [diacritico] nelle lettere che ne necessitano, poiché بب è diversa da ثث e لل, e la loro diversità risulta solo grazie a questi punti; lo stesso per جﺝ حﺡ خﺥ etc. Riponga ogni cura in ciò, poiché così facendo ne trae utilità gran numero di musulmani. Al contrario agiscono ai giorni nostri molti compilatori di documenti, dal momento che inseriscono abbreviazioni che solo loro sono in grado di comprendere; qualcuno addirittura non sa leggere quanto scritto da altri scrivani, poiché ciascuno ha i propri metodi ed è difficile che un altro capisca. Tutto ciò è contrario alla Sunna. Si racconta che il Profeta disse a Muʿāwiya: ‘Metti [cotone] nel calamaio, taglia obliquamente la punta del calamo. [Quando scrivi la basmala], traccia diritta la بﺏ, separa [i dentini] della سﺱ, non accecare [l’occhio della مﻡ], scrivi bene الله، estendi الرحمان, da’ bella forma a الرحيم. Poni il calamo dietro l’orecchio, ti farà ricordare chi detta’.\(^69\) Nell’eventualità che lo scrivano muoia, o sia difficilissimo rintracciarlo, vanno persi i diritti dei musulmani e i loro

\(^{68}\) Al-Madḥal, 4: 83–7.

contratti di matrimonio scritti nella forma menzionata, dal momento che nessun altro è più in grado di leggere quei documenti.

[Il copista] non deve scrivere con un inchiostro (ḥibr) che corrode la carta: in ciò vi è perdita di beni e di scienza, in modo particolare se si tratta della copia di un libro perduto o prezioso; lo stesso se si usa inchiostro che si cancella rapidamente dal foglio. Quanto allo scrivere con un inchiostro (midāḏ)\(^{70}\) che annerisce la carta tanto che le lettere rimangono confuse—fenomeno ben comune—deve senza alcun dubbio venire vietato, a meno che lo scriva non verghi una lettera [copiandola] da un documento a un altro e simili operazioni; purché non vi si trattino sentenze giuridiche, com’è il caso del libro del Qāḍī ['Iyāḍ], dovendo allora sottostare alle condizioni menzionate a proposito di fiqh, procure e simili. Si dice che ‘la calligrafia migliore è quella più leggibile’. Conviene che lo scriba, quando si accinge alla sua opera, abbia compiuto le abluzioni rituali, almeno all’inizio della seduta. Se però sta copiando il Libro di Dio, le abluzioni sono necessarie ogni qualvolta sopravvenga uno stato di impurità (ḥadaṯ).

Che [il copista] si astenga dal tirare per le lunghe il lavoro, ma rispetti la parola data, poiché questo rientra in una genuina pratica devota. Non la macchi con il venir meno a quanto stabilito, dicendo ‘domani o dopodomani’, senza poi eseguire il lavoro. Si guardi dal perdere la fiducia [dei suoi committenti]. Non deve inoltre agire come alcuni fanno, cioè assumere da varie persone l’incarico di copiare e poi farlo solo per questo e per quello, senza che [gli altri] ne siano a conoscenza. Ciò incrina la loro fiducia, poiché [tale atteggiamento è indice di] altezzosità e cupidigia combinate assieme.

È doveroso che lo scriba non svolga la sua opera nella moschea, anche se vi si trova per atto di culto: ciò potrebbe, per una causa o un’altra, contaminarla. Se sente l’appello alla preghiera, egli deve lasciare il lavoro che sta effettuando, porgere attenzione alle parole del muʾadḏin e prepararsi per non mancare alla salāt con gli altri fedeli nel tempo stabilito. O Dio, che l’adḏān non avvenga mentre lo scriba è [concentrato] nello scrivere sul foglio, [teme] di alterare il suo tratto se si interrompe e così indugia fino al completamento dello scritto... Lo stesso se sta tracciando righe sulla carta e non vuole sollevare la mano prima di averle finite. Ciò non è tuttavia da biasimarsi, poiché rientra nella buona pratica di lavoro ed è di esortazione ai suoi fratelli musulmani. Ma Dio ne sa di più.

Lo scriba non deve tener conto di quanto alcuni gli dicono ai giorni nostri, e cioè di scrivere una copia completa del Corano (ḥaima)\(^{71}\) basandosi su una scrittura che deriva dal mushaf su cui concorda la ʿUmma, in base a quanto essa ha ricevuto per mano di ʿUṯmān b. ʿAffān\(^{72}\) – Dio lo

\(^{70}\) Si veda nota 38.


\(^{72}\) Le principali peculiarità ortografiche del cosiddetto Corano di ʿUṯmān sono analizzate da Bergsträsser e Pretzl in *GdQ* 3: 26–53.
abbia in misericordia. Disse Mālik che il Corano è scritto nel Libro Primo [l’archetipo celeste]. Nulla è lecito diverso da questo, né l’inclinare verso la pretesa di chi se ne discosta, sostenendo che tanto il volgo non conosce lo scritto (marṣūm) coranico, facendo errare la gente nella recitazione. (…) Quelli del volgo che non conoscono la scrittura coranica non devono leggere se non dopo il suo apprendimento, altrimenti introdurranno errori nel testo condiviso dalla Umma. (…) 

Lo scriba deve guardarsi dallo scrivere la ḥatma nella lingua degli ʿAğam,73 poiché Dio l’Altissimo ha fatto scendere il Corano in ‘lingua araba chiara’74 e non nella loro lingua. Mālik—che Dio lo abbia in misericordia—biasimava la scrittura del Corano in parti disgiunte, osservando che Dio ha detto ‘a noi sta raccoglierlo’;75 ma alcuni, nonostante ciò, lo suddividono. Se egli detestava la suddivisione in aẓzā’, figuriamoci come avrebbe giudicato chi altera la lingua araba chiara! Questo purtroppo avviene nel nostro tempo, tanto che alcuni adattano la lettura/recitazione del Corano alla ʿaḡamiyya e così scrivono il testo. Si giunge a mettere assieme in un unico scritto parti in arabo e parti in ʿaḡamī, scrivendo due-tre versetti in arabo per poi riportarli in ʿaḡamī. Tutto ciò contrasta con quanto condiviso unanimemente dalla prima generazione musulmana, dai pii antenati e dagli ulema, Dio li abbia in misericordia.

III. Proposito dell’artigiano che rilega Corani e altri libri76
Sappi che questo è uno dei più importanti lavori per la religione perché permette di proteggere i Corani, i libri di ḥadīṯ e di scienze shariʿitiche. È necessario in tutto ciò il proposito precedentemente menzionato in relazione al copista, poiché [l’opera del rilegatore] è di ausilio alla salvaguardia del frutto della sua fatica, oltre alla bellezza che dà al libro stesso e la dignità che gli conferisce. Quando l’artigiano esce di casa, assume quanto gli compete dei propositi del dotto e dell’istrutto, quindi esprime l’intenzione di aiutare i suoi fratelli musulmani con il suo mestiere, dedicandosi alla cura dei loro Corani e dei loro libri; infine manifesta la niyya della fede e della ricompensa [celeste]. Se qualcuno dice che a questo – o altri artigiani – non si addice la niyya del dotto poiché quest’ultimo si reca alla moschea ad apprendere e insegnare in ottemperanza al proprio proposito, mentre per lui non può essere così poiché è immerso nella propria attività, la risposta è che non esiste differenza tra il dotto e l’artigiano, dal momento che sia lui che tutti coloro che svolgono simili lavori devono conoscere quattro ‘scienze’: 1. l’arte del mestiere (ʿilm al-ṣināʿa’); 2. il lessico tecnico ad esso riferito; 3. la coscienza di se stessi, che

73 bi-lisān al-ʾaḡam, ‘nella lingua dei Persiani’. Lascio tuttavia il termine in trascrizione, poiché verosimilmente l’A. intende qualsiasi lingua non araba.
74 Cfr. Cor. 16:103 ‘Ma la lingua di quello cui pensano è barbara (ʿaḡamī) , mentre questo è arabo chiaro’; 26:165.
75 Cor. 75:17.
76 Al-Madḥjal, 4: 87–92
ognuno dovrebbe avere, per ciò che concerne le azioni di culto, i doveri etc.;
4. la prudenza necessaria da parte di colui che riceve un incarico nei confronti
del committente. (...)

È auspicabile che, quando [l’artigiano] si reca alla sua bottega, si
comporti in conformità con la Sunna, come già ricordato in merito
all’entrare e uscire da casa: faccia precedere la destra alla sinistra
pronunciando la tasmiya\footnote{La formula \textit{bism\textsuperscript{m} lāhī}.} e quanto riferito dalla tradizione. Effettui due
\textit{rak`a}, poiché la preghiera è un legame tra l’uomo e il Signore, quindi si
metta all’opera. Se nella bottega non c’è un luogo adatto alla preghiera, la
sostituisca con la menzione di Dio. (...) Si astenga dagli imbrogli che lo
adombrano nel suo mestiere, poiché, come ha detto il Profeta, ‘la fede è
verso Dio, il Profeta, il Suo Libro, gli imām dei musulmani e la loro comunità’.
}

[Il committente] si guardi dal comportamento di alcuni: deve consegnare il
libro al rilegatore a condizioni chiare e non generiche. Così evita che [il
rilegatore] faccia tutt’uno di pelle, fogli di sguardie (biṭāna), seta e suo
compenso. [Sono da tenere in considerazione tre possibilità:] 1. [Il
committente] fornisca da parte sua al rilegatore pelle, sguardie e seta e gli
chieda di lavorare con questo materiale; 2. [oppure] il rilegatore indichi con
precisione tutto ciò che occorre e il suo costo; 3. [il committente] lo incarichi
di acquistare i materiali necessari, se già non li possiede, quindi si stabilisca il
compenso per il lavoro. Questi tre punti sono di facile applicazione ed evitano
noie. (...) Il proprietario del libro si sentirà responsabile del valore di pelle,
sguardie e seta [fornite] e del giusto compenso al rilegatore; quest’ultimo si
sentirà responsabile di ciò che riceve dal proprietario. C’è da stupirsi come
alcuni rilegatori ricevano [ordini di] lavoro su libri di scienza e si comportino
in modo non lecito.

[Il rilegatore] deve fare bene attenzione alla carta che usa per le
sguardie. Prevalle presso alcuni artigiani del nostro tempo l’uso di carta
senza curarsi di cosa vi sia [scritto]: ciò non è lecito. Vi può figurare il
nobile Corano o un \textit{ḥadīṯ} del Profeta o nomi di angeli o di profeti – su di
loro il saluto. Se è così non è lecito impiegare questa carta né abusarne per
il rispetto che merita e il suo valore. Se invece vi sono nomi di ulema e di
più antenati—Dio sia soddisfatto di loro—or passi di scienze shari`i
tiche, l’uso è sconsigliabile, anche se non si giunge al grado di divieto come nel
caso sopra menzionato. Colui che cerca la scienza a maggior ragione si
astenga dal compiere azioni riprovevoli. Se l’artigiano sa o pensa di fare
qualsiasi che rientra in tutto ciò, non lo faccia! Lavori solo dopo che gli è
stata chiarita la relativa prescrizione e ne abbia preso atto.

Non c’è inconveniente nel ricoprire internamente la pelle [della coperta]
con carte contenenti cifre; non è biasimevole, ma il rilegatore deve essere
prudente e accertarsi che non facciano parte di un quaderno (\textit{daftar}) perduto
da qualcuno, di cui abbisogna per non subire perdite di denaro. Se agisce in questo modo, l’artigiano contribuisce a salvaguardare i beni della gente. Deve inoltre fare attenzione al numero dei fascicoli del libro e dei suoi fogli, senza anticiparne o posticiparne la giusta posizione. Ciò rientra tra le raccomandazioni che mirano a tenere lontano l’imbroglio. L’artigiano ha bisogno di conoscere i richiami [a fondo pagina, ḳ̣īṭhārāǧ] per unire coerentemente il testo con ciò che segue [nel foglio successivo], oppure deve essere reso partecipe [dallo scriba o dal proprietario del libro] nel conoscere [il giusto ordine dei fogli]. Oltre a tutto ciò, deve essere prudente nell’affidare il lavoro ad altri artigiani o garzoni incompetenti, affinché non si confonda libro e suo proprietario, cosa che spesso si verifica nel nostro tempo. [Il rilegatore] pena nel suo lavoro, ma talvolta con la fatica consegue guadagni illeciti se pretende dal proprietario [del libro più del dovuto]. Se questo avviene, l’artigiano deve restituire [il malfato], anche se in più momenti, per rimettersi sulla buona strada, tenendo per sé solo il compenso inizialmente [pattuito] (...).

L’artigiano non deve rilegare nessun libro appartenente a gente che professa religioni false, poiché così facendo favorisce la loro miscredenza: chi aiuta qualcuno in un’azione ne condivide [la responsabilità]. Un secondo aspetto simile o a questo vicino, è che queste persone sono gratificate nella loro religione, poiché se vedono un musulmano che le aiuta si convincono di essere nel giusto. Qualora [il rilegatore] sappia che il libro datogli è tra quelli rivelati — come la Torah, il Vangelo, i Salmi — deve tenere conto della prescrizione che vieta [la sua opera]; questo perché è certo che essi [ebrei e cristiani] vi hanno apportato cambiamenti e contraffazioni. Non conoscendone i luoghi [dove ciò è avvenuto], meglio tralasciare tutti questi libri. Se gli viene data un’opera scritta in siriaco o in ebraico, e simili, non rileghi nulla di tutto ciò! Mālik—Dio ne abbia misericordia—disse a proposito delle formule magiche (ruqā’) in lingua non araba: ‘Come fai a sapere [cosa significano]? Forse è miscredenza’. Bisogna stare attentì ad evitare tutto ciò che di simile viene escogitato nel cuore dell’uomo.

È opportuno che colui che cerca la scienza o altri che ricorrono all’opera del rilegatore si cautelino nei confronti degli artigiani che agiscono in questo modo e se ne astengano dopo averli istruiti sul retto comportamento: forse si pentiranno o si rasseranno. Questo se era impossibile [al committente] affidare il lavoro a chi ne ha i requisiti, come menzionato a proposito della disapprovazione dell’azione riprovevole. (...) Cosa pensare dell’artigiano che rilega [libri agli iniqui] e attraverso la sua opera permette loro di conservare ciò che è proibito dalla nobile legge?

Che [il rilegatore] non decori una coperta servendosi di un calamaio che contiene oro o argento, poiché non è lecito usarli, come pure non è lecito servirsi di queste sostanze nel processo di rilegatura. Inoltre non deve rilegare per gli iniqui. Ciò per due motivi: 1. chi aiuta qualcuno diventa corresponsabile, come abbiamo ricordato; 2. la maggior parte della loro
ricchezza è illecita, e va a finire che l’artigiano si sforza nel suo lavoro per ricavarne un guadagno lecito ma invece lo consegue illecitamente. Si guardi da tutto ciò! Prevale tuttavia il fatto, tra artigiani e non, che guadagno lecito e illecito siano considerati equivalenti e non ci si fermi davanti a nulla. Questo a causa di una falsa ignoranza di ciò che è stato ordinato all’uomo e predisposto per lui di bontà d’animo nel conseguire profitti aspirando a migliorare la propria vita terrena. Apparteniamo a Dio e a Lui faremo ritorno... L’artigiano [rilegatore] rifletta, non rimandi il lavoro all’in predisposto per lui di bontà d’animo nel conseguire profitti aspirando a
di ciò che è stato ordinato all'uomo e
di scienze shari’ite che rilega lo ordinano e vietano il contrario.

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