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-kuḥrā, 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 soterial 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

* Research for this article was made possible by generous funding from a number of entities within the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, including the Medieval and Early Modern Studies Program, the Rackham Graduate School, and the Department of Near Eastern Studies. Special thanks are due to my adviser Alexander Knysh for his patient support of my strange interests, and to many others.
psychological contagion’.\(^2\) 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,\(^3\) 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.\(^4\)

In the context of premodern Arabic–Islamic literature, the individual most often associated with books of magic is the seventh/thirteenth-century author Aḥmad al-Būnī, whose modern fame or infamy rests largely on printed editions of a work entitled Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā.\(^5\) 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’.\(^6\) 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’ Shiʿite thought that posits the metaphysical entanglement of the letters of the alphabet and the created world,\(^7\) only adds to the

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\(^{1}\) Kieckhefer, Forbidden Rites, 4.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{3}\) Acts 19:19.
\(^{4}\) Kieckhefer, Forbidden Rites, 6–7.
\(^{5}\) Or some variant thereof, particularly Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʿīf al-ʿawārīf, 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 imaginings 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.
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 Mamlūkist 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-Būnī, 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 Süleymaniye 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.
manuscripts, but also to the transmission paratexts that populate many of them, and details of the codices’ physical construction.

Transmission paratexts—authorial and scribal colophons, ‘audition’ (samā‘) 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.
Symbolic 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-ṣaḥāʾ), 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 (asānīd) 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 ṭargama in Taqī l-Dīn al-Maqrīzī’s (d. 845/1442) unfinished biographical work, al-Muqaffā al-kabīr. The entry for him in the Egyptian scholar ʿAbd al-Raʿūf al-Manāwī’s (d. 1021/1613) turn-of-the-eleventh/seventeenth-century Sūfī ṭabaqāt work contains no biographical information. 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-muqrī 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 tāg al-dīn (crown of religion), siḥāb al-dīn (brand of religion), muḥīyī l-dīn (reviver

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14. This ṭargama 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. Yaʿībāwī, 1: 750–3.

of religion), and *qubl al-ʿārifin* (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.\(^{16}\) 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 *nisba* al-Būnī suggests that he was from the city of Būna (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.\(^ {17}\) However, an important new piece of information regarding al-Būnī’s life and training supports the notion that he was of Ifrīqiyan origin. This is from the work ‘*Ilμ al-hudā wa-asrār al-ḥtādā* ʿfī ʿsār ṣadamente Allāh ʿl-ḥṣnā—*a* major text of al-Būnī’s that has been all but entirely ignored by modern scholars—wherein al-Būnī identifies as his personal ʿsayḥ (*ṣayḥunā*) Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Bakr al-Quraṣī 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-kunṭu ḡālīṣan ʿindahu*), confirming a face-to-face relationship between them.\(^ {18}\) 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 ʿsayḥs.

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 tadrīsiḥi*) twice, once in 590/1194 for as much as six or seven months, and for a somewhat longer stay in 597–8/1201–2.\(^ {19}\) Al-Būnī unfortunately provides no dates for his time in Tunis that might indicate if the two ever met. Al-Mahdawī is the ʿsayḥ to whom Ibn ʿArabī dedicated his great work, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, and Gerald Elmore

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

notes that al-šayḫ 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’.20 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 ʿArabī emerged, a milieu in which the science of letters (ʿilm al-hurūf) had played a prominent role since the time of Ibn Masarra al-Ǧabalī (d. 319/931).21 It also grants some credit to the Granadan litterateur Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb and his friend Ibn Haldūn’s close linkings of al-Būnī and Ibn ʿArabī 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.22 Elements in al-Būnī’s writing that suggest a common source for some of his and Ibn ʿArabī’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 ʿArabī, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ḥarallī (d. 638/1240), Abū l-Ḥasan al-Šāḏilī (d. 656/1258), and Ibn Sabīn (d. 668–9/1269–71). 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.23 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 afoot of the reigning political and religious authorities, such as Ibn Barraḡān and Ibn

20 Ibid., 595.
al-ʿArif, two prominent ʿsayḥs who may have been assassinated by the Almoravids in 536/1141, perhaps due to their growing political influence; and Ibn Qasī, a Sufi ʿsayḥ who took the extraordinary step of declaring himself ʿImām 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 Ḥāǧǧī Ḥalīfa’s Kaṣf al-ʿẓunūn, although 630/1232–33 is given in one entry. No earlier source corroborating either date has yet been discovered. Modern scholarship has generally accepted the earlier date, although many scholars have expressed serious reservations on account of dates and people mentioned in certain Būnian texts which would suggest a later date (discussed below). However, on the basis of some of the transmission paratexts surveyed for this article it now at least can be established that al-Būnī ‘flourished’ in Cairo in 622/1225 as a revered Sufi ʿsayḥ.

The primary cluster of evidence to this effect is a series of paratexts not previously adduced in scholarship on al-Būnī. The first of these is an authorial colophon for the work ʿIlm al-hudā reproduced identically in three eighth/fourteenth-century codices: Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 (copied in Damascus in 772/1370), Beyazid MS 1377 (copied in 773/1371), and Süleymaniye MS Kılıç Ali Paşa 588 (copied in 792/1390). In this authorial colophon al-Būnī states that he began ʿIlm al-hudā in the first part of Dū l-Qaʿda of 621, finishing it some weeks later on 27 Dū l-Ḥiǧǧa in the same year, and that this occurred on the 24 For a review of scholarship on these events, see Addas, Andalusī Mysticism, 919–29.
26 On Cairene foreign military elites’ enthusiasm for exotic Sufis, see Knysch, Ibn ʿArabī, 49–58. For a discussion of Western Sufis who took refuge in Damascus, see Pouzet, Maqrébins à Damas, passim.
27 For the 622 date, see, for example, the entry on Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārīf, 062; see 161 for the 630 date.
outsskirts 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 ʿIlm 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-ʾišārāt fī l-hurūf al-ʾulwiyyāt 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 ʿIlm al-hudā and Latāʾif al-ʾišārāt were auditioned back-to-back during the course of these mağālis. What is more, a reference within the text of Latāʾif al-ʾišārāt 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.

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 Qarāfā cemetery on the outskirts of Cairo over the course of Rabīʿ al-awwal of 622. Book-audition (sāmāʿ) 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. Neither of these references to audition sessions states 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: sāmiʿa ḥāḏā l-kitāb ʿalā al-šayḥ fulānˁ fulānˁ wa-fulānˁ, with the presiding šayḥ (the grammatical object of sāmiʿa ʿalā) 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. The statement copied in BnF MS arabe 2658, however, gives the names only of two of the auditors (al-qāḍī l-aʿdal al-ṣāliḥ al-zāhid qādī l-fuqarāʾ wa-ʿumdat al-ṣulahāʾ ʿUmar b. Ibrāhīm and his son Ibrāhīm) while omitting the name of the presiding šayḥ. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, the statement in Süleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.2 states of the prime exemplar only that ʿalayhī samāʿ al-muṣannif wa-ḥattuhu, i.e. that it bore an audition certificate (samāʿ) from the muṣannif (author or copyist) and his signature (ḥattuhu). The omissions in these statements of the precise identity of the presiding šayḥ 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.

32 On the importance of audition practices in knowledge and book transmission, see Rosenthal, Technique and Approach, 20–1; Makdisi, Rise of Colleges, 140–146; Berkey, Transmission of Knowledge, 21–35; Chamberlain, Knowledge and Social Practice, 133–51. See also footnotes 33, 34, and 36 below.

33 On audition certificates, see Gacek, Vademecum, 52–3; Déroche, Islamic Codicology, 332–4; and (for examples thereof) Vajda, Album de paléographie, plt. 20 bis.
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 Qarāfā cemetery is compelling. In his study of medieval tomb visitation practices, Christopher Taylor characterizes the Qarāfā, 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 hadīth 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 tarīqa 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-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif) suggests that al-Būnī’s tomb was still a ceremonial site in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

34 Taylor, In the Vicinity of the Righteous, 56–8.
35 On non-scholarly participation in audition sessions, see Dickinson, ‘Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrázūrī’ passim. On the closely related topic of ritual and even ‘magical’ uses of hadīth works, see Brown, The Canonization of al-Buhārī 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-laṣṭif 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 Hāǧī 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 Hāǧī 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 ‘alā hāmis al-asl al-maṣqlūl 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-Ǧumārī,39 and that al-Ǧumārī 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-

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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-Ǧumārī’ could be derived (Muʿgam al-buldān, 211–13), although an argument could be made for ‘al-Ǧimārī’ as well.
afādahu fī maʿānī al-sulūk wa-l-asrār al-yaqīniyya), 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-baʿd talāmiḍīhi: uqsimu bi-l-lāh la-alfūzuhu ka-al-durar aw ka-al-ḏahab al-miṣrī, fa-hiyya kunūz sirruhā ūlāsīmū ṭubā li-man ḥalla 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’ Sufi šayḫ will strike as strange readers familiar with him only through Ṣams 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 Ṣams 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 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

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44 Brockelmann, GAL, 1: 497.
46 For example, Brockelmann lists al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya and also notes a Risāla fī l-ism al-aʿẓam, a common alternate title for al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya. Cordero lists Tariḥ al-daʿwaʾ fī taḥṣīṣ al-awqāt and Kitāb manāfiʿ al-Qurʾān as separate works, when they in fact are alternate titles for the same work, and does the same with ʿīm al-hudū, counting it again under one of its common alternate titles, Mūḍih al-ṭariq wa-qusuṣās al-tahqiq.
47 Both Brockelmann and Cordero count al-Durr al-munazzam fī l-sīr al-aʿẓam 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-latattif al-ʿawārīf in this section). Cordero also attributes to al-Būnī a work called al-Durr al-ṣafira, which was written by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (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.
772/1370 that names a number of works of which almost no trace has survived. 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: ʿĪlm al-asrār wa-l-taṣrīf (not to be confused with ʿĪlm al-maʿārif al-kubrā, see below and section four of this paper); ʿHidāyat al-qāṣīdīn wa-liḥyāt al-wāṣilīn; Maqāṣif al-gāyīt fī aṣrār al-rīyāḍāt, ‘Īlm al-hudā wa-asrār al-ḥiṭidāt; fī ṣārḥ asmāʿ Allāh al-ḥusnā, and ʿĪlam al-īsārāt fī l-hurūf al-ʿulāwiyāt. The three major medieval works that I consider to fall outside this ‘core’ category, al-Lumʿa al-nūrānīyya fī awrād al-rabbānīyya; Tartīb al-daʿawāt fī taḥṣīs al-awqāt ‘alā ḥīlāf al-īrādāt, and ʿQabs al-iqrāḍīyya ilā waṣq al-saʿāda wa-nağm 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-nūrānīyya, 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 ‘Īlm al-hudā and ʿĪlam al-īsārāt, these being the two works which can be most firmly associated with al-Būnī due to the authorial colophon and audition certificates discussed in the previous section. Within these two works, references are made, in many cases repeatedly, to the three others in the group: ʿĪlam al-maʿārif wa-l-taṣrīf; ʿHidāyat al-qāṣīdīn wa-

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49 Süleymanîye MS Hamidiye 260, fol. 239b. The works in question are Kitāb Mawāqūt al-baṣāʾir wa-l-taṣrīf; Kitāb Taṣwīf al-ʿawārīf fī taḥṣīs ʿĪlam al-maʿārif; Kitāb Aṣrār al-adwar wa-taṣkīl al-āmvār; Kitāb Yāʿ al-taṣrīf wa-hullat(?) al-taṣrīf; Risālat Yāʾ al-ʿawāf wa-qāf al-yaʿ wa-l-ʿayn wa-l-nān, and Kitāb al-ʿLasāʾir ilā al-ʿasara. 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-wāṣilīn, and Mawāqif al-ğāyāt fī asrār al-riyādāt. What is more, these three works make repeated references to one another, as well as to ‘Ilm al-hudā and Laṭāʾif al-ışārāt (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 ṭabd al-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 šayḫ 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-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif 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-ğāyāt, 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 Laṭāʾif al-ışārāt, 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 Laṭāʾif al-ışārāt most likely being the final addition to the group due to its multiple references to ‘Ilm al-hudā. Similarly, as Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif is the only work cited in all four of the others, one could speculate that some version of Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif 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

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-ʿawāriḍ and Laṭāʿif al-išārāt fī l-ḥurūf al-ulwiyyāṭ, 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-nihayat al-wāṣīlīn and Mawāqif al-ġayāt fī 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, sālikān (seekers), murīdān (adherents), and ʿārifīn (gnostics). Mawāqif al-ġayāt fī 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 ġinn. Many of those topics are discussed at greater length in ‘Ilm al-hudā wa-āsrār al-iḥtiṭāʿa fī al-ṣarḥ ṣamāʿ Allāh al-hūsnā, 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 (maqāmah) 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. Aḍām (d. 161/777–78), Maʿrūf al-Karḥī (d. 200/815–16), Bīṣr al-Ḥāḍ (d. 226/840 or 227/841–42), Abū l-Ḩusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907), al-Ǧunayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910), Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq (d. 405/1015), and al-Daqqāq’s best-known student, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qūṣāyry (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-Ḥun al-Misrī (d. 246/861), and Abū Bakr al-Ṣībīl (d. 334/945). Some statements and stretches of poetry attributed to the famously controversial al-Manṣūr al-Ḥallāg (d. 309/922) are discussed near the end of Hidāyat al-qāsidīn, while al-Ḥallāg’s great interpreter and redactor Ibn Ḥaḍīf al-Ṣirāzī (d. 371/982) and Ibn Ḥaḍīf’s disciple Abū ʿAbd al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī53 (d. ca. 392/1001) are both

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referred to in ‘Ilm al-hudā. 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-ḥurūf,⁵⁴ appear regularly throughout the corpus. Thorough analyses of Ḥidāyat al-qāṣidīn, Mawāqif al-ḡayāt, and ‘Ilm al-hudā 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. ‘Ilm al-hudā 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-Maqṣad al-asnad fī šarḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-husnā. Ḥāfīz Ḥālifa, in his list of numerous works from this genre, compares al-Būnī’s work to that of the Magribī Sufi Ibn Barraḡān.⁵⁵ While this comparison seems based on the considerable lengths of both works (wa-huwa šarḥ kabīr ka-šarḥ Ibn Barraḡān).⁵⁶ Elmore’s note that Ibn ʿArabī studied at least one of Ibn Barraḡān’s works under al-Mahdawi suggests the possibility that al-Būnī may have been similarly exposed to Ibn Barraḡān’s writings.⁵⁷

To the limited extent that the number of surviving copies is a reliable guide, neither Ḥidāyat al-qāṣidīn nor Mawāqif al-ḡayāt seem to have been widely copied; the survey for this project has found only three copies of Ḥidāyat al-qāṣidīn and nine of Mawāqif al-ḡayāt, a few of the latter being abridgements or fragments.⁵⁸ ‘Ilm al-hudā appears to have been copied most widely in the eighth/fourteenth 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 Sūleymaniye 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-ḥurūf’, 221–4 and passim.
⁵⁵ See the bibliography for Purificación de la Torre’s edition of Ibn Barraḡān’s work.
⁵⁶ Ḥāfīz Ḥālifa, Kasīf, 1033.
⁵⁷ Elmore, ʿṢayḥ Abd al-Azīz al-Mahdawi’, 611.
⁵⁸ The copies of Ḥidāyat al-qāṣidīn and Mawāqif al-ḡayāt consulted for constructing the chart of intertextual references above are bound together as the first two works of the compilatory codex Sūleymaniye 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 ‘Ilm 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 ‘Ilm al-hudā, a factor that also may account for the relative paucity of copies of Hidāyat al-qāsidīn and Mawāqif al-gāyāt. 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-latāʾif al-ʿawārif and Laṭāʾif al-ʾisārāt 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 Laṭāʾif al-ʾisārāt. It is a point of interest that the two were sometimes conflated. BnF MS arabe 6556, a copy of Laṭāʾif al-ʾisārāt copied in 781/1380, has a titlepage (probably original to the codex) bearing the name Šams al-maʿārif al-suğrā wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārif, while Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2799, a copy of Laṭāʾif al-ʾisārāt copied in 861/1457, is simply titled Šams al-maʿārif. Süleymaniye MS Ayasofya 2802, an undated but most likely ninth/fifteenth-century copy of Laṭāʾif al-ʾisārāt, 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 allatī laysa li-nuṣṣatihā wuqūd wa-hāqīhi al-nuṣa laysa [sic!] hiyya al-nuṣa allatī mawgūda bayna al-nās wa-fihā fawāʾid wa-zawāʾid ʿalā al-tamām).59 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 Šams al-maʿārif.

Šams 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-wustā, and al-kubrā) is at the heart of much of the confusion and speculation surrounding this work.60 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 Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʿif al-ʿawārif appears in almost every case without any extra size-appellation, and, aside from obvious instances of mis-titling,61 almost all of these codices contain a single fairly consistent and readily identifiable text.62 Such textual consistency is lacking entirely in the small handful of medieval codices entitled Šams al-maʿārif al-ṣuğrā,63 and I cannot confirm the existence of any medieval codices bearing the title Šams al-

60 This notion appears to have originated fairly early in the career of the corpus, as evidenced by the title Šams 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 Šams al-maʿārif is al-Manāwī’s entry on al-Būnī in al-Kawākib al-durriyya fi tarāǧim al-sārat 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). Hāǧī Ḥalīfā, writing a few decades after al-Manāwī, does not list three versions of Šams al-maʿārif in Kašf al-zunūn, although he does include a very brief entry for a work called Fusīl Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā, which he says ‘is perhaps Šams al-maʿārif (la’ allaha Šams al-maʿārif)’ (1270), and he makes a passing reference to Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā in the entry for Ibn Ṭalḥa’s al-Durr al-munazzam fi sīr al-aʿzam (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 allāfi aṭlāʿa Šams al-maʿārif min gāyb al-gāyb, or some close variation thereof.

63 Thus, BnF MS arabe 6556 is actually Laṭāʿif al-išārāt, while Harvard MS Arab 332 and Dūr al-Kutub MS Hurūf 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-laṭṭāʿifal-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-ṣagrā was applied to various shorter Būnian or pseudo-Būnian texts while others were subsequently labeled al-wusṭā 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-sirr al-aʿzam, a work by the Damascene scholar, ḥāṭib, occasional diplomat, and author of apocalyptic literature, Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAbīmad 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-wusṭā. 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 Ḥāṭib b. Ṭalib 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-sirr al-aʿzam. 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, and the dating conundrum arises from the fact that *Şams al-maʿārif* is cited extensively in *‘Ilm al-hudā* and *Laṭāʾif al-išārāt*, both of which were auditioned in 622/1225. If Masad’s date is correct then this portion of the *Şams*, or at least this mention of the title of Ibn Ṭaḥa’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 *Kašf 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*. 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 *Şams 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, and it certainly is no more recent than the eighth/fourteenth century. All of the colophonically dated copies of *Şams 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 *Şams 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 ḍīmnihī min laṭāʾif al-taṣrīfāt wa-ʾawārīf al-taʾīrāt*), 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 ’alā man waqaʾa*

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68 BnF MS arabe 2647, fol. 46a.
69 Slane, Catalogue des manuscrits arabe, entry no. 2647.
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 (‘arš), 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, dikr, ḫalwa, etc.). Strikingly, one section is a discussion of alchemy in which Ǧābir b. Ḥān 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 laṭāʿif al-ʾisābrero and the text is that of Laṭāʿif al-ʾisābrero 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 fol. 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.

Ṣamṣ al-ḥarīf 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 Sufi 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 lām–alif 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.

Ṣamṣ al-ḥarīf 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

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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, ‘ʿālam al-iḥtirāʾ’ and ‘ālam al-ibdāʿ – 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 Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā. While these two planes/phases are discussed to varying degrees in all five works, in Ḭajīf al-iṣārāt 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, ‘ʿālam 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-ḥadra 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.75 The process of Creation proceeds through three more stages, each of which is associated with further letters of the alphabet, Adamic faculties, Qur’ānic mythologems, and Neoplatonic hypostases. Thus the second plane/presence, ‘ʿālam 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-ibdāʿ al-awwal, is the atomistic plane, ṭawr al-ḏār, associated with the letter ǧīm, the soul (nafs), the Footstool (al-kursī), and the Universal Soul. The fourth, ‘ālam al-ibdāʿ 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 ḥadīṯ in which, when asked where God was prior to Creation, the Prophet responded: ‘He was in a cloud’ (kāna fī ʿamāʾ).76 In both men’s writings the Cloud is conceived of as the very first place of manifestation, the

74 Lory, ‘Science des lettres et magie’, 97.
75 BnF MS ar. 2658, fol. 5a–b and marginal addition.
76 For references in the ḥadīṯ literature, see Wensinck, Concordance, 4: 388.
juncture (barzaḥ) between the Creator and his creation from whence the worlds unfold.\(^{77}\) To the best of my knowledge, Ibn "Arabī put down in writing his cosmological conception of al-ʿamāʾ only in al-Futūḥat al-Makkiyya and Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, neither of which are thought to have been disseminated widely until after Ibn "Arabī’s death in 638/1240. Thus, given the 622/1225 dating of the audition notice for Latāʾif al-ʿiṣārāt cited above, this would not appear to be a case of al-Būnī borrowing from Ibn "Arabī, 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 Latāʾif al-ʿiṣārāt or ʿIlm al-hudā would provide. As measured by the number of surviving copies, al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya fī 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-qadr), 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-ʿazīzam) 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

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\(^{77}\) For references to the topic in Ibn "Arabī’s writings see Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge, 125–7; Hakīm, al-Muʿgambar al-ṣūfi, 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 *Šarh al-ism al-a‘zam*.

Beyond the large number of surviving copies, the popularity of *al-Lum‘a 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-Šu‘la al-nūrāniyya* (an essentially synonymous title),\(^78\) 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-Haṭīb as *Kitāb al-anmāt*, due to the section in which the divine names are divided into ten groups. In describing this work, Ibn al-Haṭīb mentions the invocatory prayers arranged according the days of the week (*al-da‘awāt allatī rattabahā ‘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.\(^79\) Ibn Ḥaldūn also mentions *Kitāb al-anmāt*, although he is most likely following Ibn al-Haṭīb in this. As discussed in the following section of this paper, *al-Lum‘a al-nūrāniyya* was also the subject of a lengthy commentary by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān 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-da‘awāt fi ṭahṣīṣ al-arqāt ‘alā ḫīlāf al-irādāt*, which often appears under the title *al-Ta‘līqa fi manāfī ‘al-Qur‘ān al-‘aẓīm*, 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-tabī‘i*), 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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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 wafq al-saʿāda wa-naqīm al-iḥtidāʾ is somewhat tame in comparison to Tarīḥ 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 Maghribī šayḥ Abū Madyan (d. 594/1197), with whom al-Mahdawī was affiliated, as well as Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Quraštī (d. 599/1202), another disciple of Abū Madyan, and al-Quraštī’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 šayḥs 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

80 Süleymaniye MS Laleli 1594.5, fol. 96a–97b.
by mystics through inspiration” 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. 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 \textit{Laṭāʾif al-išārāt}:

\begin{quote}
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.
\end{quote}

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) \textit{Laṭāʾif al-išārāt} and \textit{Tartīb al-daʿawāt} among surviving ninth/fifteenth-century codices, and by the lesser numbers of copies of ‘\textit{Ilm al-hudā}, Hidāyat al-qāṣidūn, and Mawāqif al-ḡāyāt 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 Ṭarabī, bolster the notion of a process of selection along these lines, as does the form taken by Šams al-maʿārif

\footnote{Fleischer, Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences, 234. Cf. Gril, Ésotérisme contre hérésie, 186.}

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

\footnote{Iʿlam yā aḥī 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-kašf aw nawʾ min anwāʾ al-muḥṭabāt wa-mā ʿadā hāḏīhi al-aqṣām al-arbaʿa fa-ḥadīṯ nafs lā fāʿidata fīhi. 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. Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260, a collection of Būnian works copied in Damascus in 772/1370; Süleymaniye MSS Reşid efendi 590.1 and 590.2, a two-part copy of ‘Ilm al-hudā copied in Cairo which also notes that its exemplar was copied near Alexandria; and Süleymaniye MS Reisulkuttab 1162.17, a copy of al-Lum’a 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 Laṭāʾif al-īsārāt 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 du’ā‘ inscribed on its titlepage written to protect that city from al-ṭā‘ūn, the Black Death.

Codices from the ninth/fifteenth century were produced as far north as Aleppo (the compilatory codex Süleymaniye 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-Ḥāṭīb’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. 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

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the string of titles attached to ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm, one of the auditors of \textit{Lātā’if al-išārāt} in Cairo in 622/1225, which include \textit{al-qādī}, ‘the judge,’ \textit{al-zāhīd}, ‘the ascetic,’ and \textit{qādī al-fuqārā‘}, ‘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 \textit{al-faqīr}, and a number of instances in which the title \textit{al-shāyḫ} 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, ‘Uṭmān b. Abī Bakt \textit{al-Qādirī} \textit{al-Ḥanafī} as the copyist of a large compilation of Būnian works produced in 893/1488 (Süleymaniye MS Carullah 2083), and \textit{al-faqīr} Hasan b. Ahmad b. ‘Alī al-‘Awlawī[?] \textit{al-Qādirī} \textit{murīdān al-Ḥanafī mağhabān} as the copyist of a codex of \textit{Ṣams al-ma‘ārif} produced in 903/1498 (Süleymaniye MS Nuruosmaniye 2835). Beyond these two Qādirīs, the Rifā‘ī, Shāḏīlī and Mevlevī orders are also represented, each by a single actor. As is apparent from some of these examples, affiliation with a particular \textit{maḏhab} was occasionally recorded as well; eight self-identified Shafī‘īs 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. \textit{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 ḥāngāḥs 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 ‘ulamā‘ 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 \textit{cum} saint Ibn al-Fārīḍ, as explored by Emil Homerin.\footnote{Homerin, \textit{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.} In light of the prevalence of such Sufi–\textit{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, \textit{al-mamlūk} Hasan Qadam \textit{al-Ḥanafī mağhabān} was the owner of a copy of
ʿIlm al-hudā, Süleymaniye 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 Šams al-maʿārif copied in Cairo in 913/1508, includes on its titlepage a patronage notice linking it to sayyīd ʿAlī, al-dawādār of the household of al-amīr Ṭūğān al-Nawrūzī. Similarly, the colophon of a copy of ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Biṣṭāmī’s commentary on al-Lum’a al-nūrāniyya (Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1560, copied 952/1546) registers it as being from the library (ḫizāna) of the amīr Pīrī Mehmed Pāšā b. Ramaḍān (d. 974/1567), the head of a beylik centered in Adana, and notes that it was copied by his mamālīk Ibn ʿAbd Allāh.

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 Süleymaniye MS Nuruosmaniye 2822, a copy of Tartīb al-ṣaʿawāt (but bearing the title Šarḥ asmāʾ Allāh 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 Mamlūk courts. An interest in the occult sciences at many Muslim courts is well attested, 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 Mamlūk and Ottoman politics. Cornell Fleischer has argued for the general importance of the occult sciences at Ottoman courts, and Hasan Karatas has recently discussed the role of defensive awfāq in early tenth/sixteenth-century court intrigue in Istanbul. The elaborately wafq-covered talisman shirts of Ottoman sultans of the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth

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86. BnF MS Arabe 2649, fol. 1a.
87. Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1560, fol. 123b. Regarding Pīrī Mehmed Pāšā see Y. Kurt’s entry ‘Pīrī Mehməd Paşə, Ramazanoğlu’ in Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, and F. Babinger’s entry ‘Ramaḍān Oğulları’ in Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed.
The Topkapı palace is now renowned as a valid means of passing on the authority to
hierarchy of textual transmission practices than that of the Topkapı palace. Nonetheless, the palace of the Topkapı

In addition to mamlūks, 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, ʿAfl b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar, kāṭib al-qawāṣīn (secretary of the archers), or the qāḍī al-Šām ʿAbd al-Rahmān, who owned what is probably a tenth/sixteenth-century copy of 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-Qalqāšandi’s (d. 821/1418) great secretarial manual, Šubḥ al-aʿsā fi šināʿat al-inšāʿ, wherein he lists Latāʿif al-išārāt and Šams al-maʿārif as works in circulation among the learned of his day. 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-Rahmān al-Bīstānī (d. 858/1454), who helped facilitate the continuing popularity and spread of the Būnīan corpus with his commentary on al-Lumʿa al-nūrānīyya (entitled Rashḥ ḏāwīq al-ḥikma al-rabbānīyya fi šarḥ awfīq al-Lumʿa al-nūrānīyya) and his other works that drew heavily on Būnīan writings. In Rashḥ ḏāwīq al-ḥikma, al-Bīstānī notes that while in Cairo in 807/1404–5, he ‘read’ al-Lumʿa al-nūrānīyya under the instruction of šayḥ Abū ʿAbd Allāh ʿIzz al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḍāmī b. al-Kinānī (qaraʿtu kitāb al-Lumʿa al-nūrānīyya ‘alā al-šayḥ... Muḥammad ibn Ḍāmī”), 93 The qaraʿa ‘alā construction used by al-Bīstānī is indicative of a mode of face-to-face textual transmission closely related to audition (samīʿa ‘alā). While ‘reading’ a text before a šayḥ 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

91 For an excellent photographic catalog of these shirts held in the collection of the Topkapı Palace Museum, see Tezcan’s new edition of Tıslımlı Gömlekler.
92 Al-Qalqāšandi, Šubḥ al-aʿsā, 1: 475.
93 Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1543.1, fol. 5b.
utilize and teach a text, and as far preferable to simply reading a book by oneself.\textsuperscript{94} The same grammatical construction was used by the glossator of the exemplar for Süleymaniye MS Hamidiye 260.1 to describe his reading of ‘Ibn 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-Ǧūnī himself. Al-Biṣṭāmī’s mention of having read the book under the supervision of ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad indicates that at least one of al-Ǧūnī’s works was still being taught through a living line of authorities at the dawn of the ninth/fifteenth century. That al-Biṣṭāmī felt that his having read al-‘Um‘a 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-Biṣṭāmī read al-‘Um‘a al-nūrāniyya is also noteworthy. ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ǧamā‘a (d. 819/1416–17) was a scion of the Ibn Ǧamā‘a 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 Šafī‘ī grand qādi of Cairo and šayḥ al-šuyūh of the Sufi fraternities on and off between 690/1291 and 727/1327,\textsuperscript{95} and his grandfather, ‘Izz al-Dīn ǦAbd al-‘Azīz (d. 767/1366), and paternal uncle, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (d. 790/1388), had similarly illustrious careers.\textsuperscript{96} 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 ǦArabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ, was a distant relation of ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad.\textsuperscript{97} That ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad was regarded (at least by al-Biṣṭāmī) as an authorized transmitter of al-Ǧūnī’s teachings further bolsters the notion that al-Ǧūnī’s works had something of a following among Arab scholarly elites with close ties to the ruling military

\textsuperscript{94} Regarding the difficult question of the distinction between the practices recorded as samī‘a ʿalā and qara‘a ʿalā, see Makdisi, Rise of Colleges, 241–3.
\textsuperscript{95} Although the fact that Badr al-Dīn called for destruction of copies of some of Ibn ǦArabī’s works suggests he most likely would have disapproved of al-Ǧūnī’s works. See Knysh, Ibn ǦArabī, 123–4.
\textsuperscript{96} Salibi, ‘The Banu Jama‘a’, 97–103.
\textsuperscript{97} Sirriyeh, ‘Whatever Happened to the Banu Jama‘a?’, 55–64.
households. Indeed, al-Bīšāmī’s exposure to, and continued interest in, al-Būnī’s works can be taken as further evidence of this, insofar as al-Bīšāmī 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-Bīšāmī ‘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.’ Eventually returning to reside at the Ottoman court in Bursa, al-Bīšāmī 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/fourteenth 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-Bīšāmī and many others identified as Sunnīs — reverence for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and many of his descendants as recipients of ancient wisdom that had passed down through the prophets since Adam. Al-Bīšāmī often referred to himself and others in this far-flung intellectual collective as the ‘Brethren of Purity and Friends of Fidelity’ (iḥwān al-ṣaḥā’ī wa-ḥullān al-wafā’), an evocation of those proto-Ismāʿīlī provocateurs of fourth/tenth-century Iraq, whose Epistles (Rasāʾil iḥwān al-ṣaḥā’) 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. ʿAbd 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). Three of al-Aḥlāfī’s students also have been associated with modern scholars with the neo-iḥwān al-ṣaḥā’: the Timurid thinker Sāʾīn al-Dīn Turka Ḯsahānī (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; Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī 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

99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.; cf. Gril, Ésotérisme contre hérésie, 186.
101 Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī, 139 ff.
102 Melvin-Koushki, Occult Philosophy and the Millenarian Quest, 2.
(muʿammā); Molla Fenārī, (d. 834/1431), the first šayḫ al-islām under the Ottomans;103 and Šayḫ Badr al-Dīn al-Simāwī (d. ca. 821/1418), an erstwhile student of Mubārakšāh al-Maʿtūqī (d. 815/1413) who became a ‘millenarian activist’ under al-Ḥālāṭī’s influence, went on to become well known as a judge and as a commentator on Ibn ʿArabi’s works, and ended his life as a leader of an ultimately unsuccessful rebellion fuelled by millenarian expectations that ‘shook the Ottoman State’ in 819/1416.104

The origins, extent, and duration of this neo-ʿIḥwān al-ṣafā’ ‘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.105 It is of no small interest then, that in the multipart paratext at the end of Sūleymaniye MS Reşid efendi 590.2, the aforementioned copy of ʿIlm al-hudā completed in Cairo in 798/1396, the collator Ayyūb b. Quṭlū 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 Muḥassaniyya ḥāngāh…’ (Wa-l-nuṣḥa al-latī qūbilat hāḍīhi ʿalayhā maktūb fī ʿāhirhā wa-qūbilat hasab al-imkān bi-haḍrat ʿIḥwān al-ṣafā’ wa-ḥullān al-waṣfā’ bi-l-ḥāngāh al-muḥassaniyya bi-taġr 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 ʿIḥwān al-ṣafā’ ‘wa-ḥullān al-waṣfā’ was in use among some of those involved with the Būnian corpus more than sixty years prior to al-Ǧistāmī’s studying of al-Lumʿa al-nūrāniyya in Cairo, a date that would push the origins of the movement at least to the time of al-Ḥālāṭī’s youth. Alternatively, it could be supposed that Ayyūb b. Quṭlū Beg al-Rūmī, himself perhaps a

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103 Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī, 100.
104 Ibid., 144–5.
105 See Fleischer, Ancient Wisdom; Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī, 99–106; Melvin-Koukis, Occult Philosophy and the Millenarian Quest, 11–12 and 25; Fazioğlu, ʿIlk Dönem Osmanlı İlim”; Gril, Ésotérisme. Binbaş has made the strongest claims for the group’s coherence in arguing that the neo-ʿIḥwānīs were ‘a non-hierarchical intellectual collectivity’ (106).
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-Iḥwān 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 ʿArabī’s thought, feature prominently in many of al-Bistāmī’s other works beyond his commentary on al-Lum‘a al-nūrāniyya, especially in his Šams al-āfāq fī ʿilm 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 ʿArabī and positioned his own interest in the science of letters as serving philosophical rather than practical ends.106 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 ʿArabī 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 Būnīan works appear alongside those of Ibn ʿArabī’s famous interpreters, such Šadr al-Dīn al-Qunāwī (d. 673/1274). Such pairings are all the more striking in light of al-Būnī and Ibn ʿArabī both having been students of al-Mahdawī, and the apparent popularity of ʿilm 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 ʿArabī’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 ʿArabī 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 ʿArabī as two sides of the same coin is also seen in the writings of some of their critics. Both Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb and Ibn Ḥaldūn closely associated al-Būnī with Ibn ʿArabī, grouping them with other Sufis whose teachings they considered radical, such as Ibn Barrağān, Ibn Qasī, Ibn Sabīn, Ibn al-Fārid, et al. Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb, in his Rawdat al-taʿrif bi-l-hubb al-šarīf, referred to this grouping under the rather dubious heading of the ‘accomplished [mystics] who consider themselves to be perfect’ (min al-mutamīmīn

106 Melvin-Koushki, Occult Philosophy and the Millenarian Quest, 17.
bi-za’mihim al-mukammalin), while the more critical Ibn Ḥaldūn referred to them as ‘extremist Sufis’ (al-ġulāt min al-mutaṣawwifa). 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-iṣārāt wherein al-Būnī’s four-fold scheme of creation is initially presented, though Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb does not identify al-Būnī as his source. Ibn Ḥaldūn’s presentation of the same topic in Šīfāʾ al-sā’il li-tahḍīb al-masā’il in turn appears to be greatly indebted to Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb’s text.

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 mahdī (with the Shīʿite mahdī 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’. 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’. Without quite contradicting either of these analyses, I would put forward the proposition that, at least with respect to his attack in al-Mugaddima 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.
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,\(^{113}\) which suggests that he added it sometime after his arrival in Cairo in 784/1382 – the same year that al-ʿĀlīḍī’s patron Barqūq first attained the sultanate. Given that al-Būnī and Ibn ʿArabī’s writings seem to have played a prominent role 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-ʿĀlīḍī’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’.\(^{114}\) 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 *ḥāṭib* 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.\(^{115}\) The subject is not touched upon in Ibn al-ʿUḫuwwa’s (d. 729/1329) acclaimed guide to supervision of the public markets, *Maʿālim al-qurba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba*, and neither is anything else pertaining to the supervision of booksellers by city authorities, suggesting that enforcement of such dictates via the *muḥtasib*


\(^{114}\) Morris’ translation (An Arab Machiavelli?’, 249).

\(^{115}\) Shatzmiller, ‘Tidjāra’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.
was uncommon in this period.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Šams al-ma'ārif wa-latā'if al-‘awārif} rendered in a highly readable Syro-Egyptian \textit{nāsh} in 855/1451 by one Muḥammad b. Ḥaǧǧī al-Ḵāyīrī al-Šafīʿī. As this name is rather distinctive, it is almost certain (and slightly ironic) that this is the same Muḥammad b. Ḥaǧǧī who in 870/1465–66 produced a copy of Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Mahallî’s commentary on al-Subktî’s own \textit{Ḡam‘ al-ḡawāmi‘ fi ṭūsūl al-fiqh} (Chester Beatty MS 3200). While it is possible that al-Ḥayrī copied both al-Būnî’s work and this volume on fiqh for his own use, it is at least as likely that he worked as a professional copyist, producing both codices under commission. Another example, albeit a very late one, is two complete copies (i.e. not the two halves of a set) of \textit{Šams al-ma'ārif 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-ḥāfiz il-kalām Allāh. This suggests that \textit{Šams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā} was part of Muḥammad Nūr Allāh’s standard repertoire, and, especially given the technical difficulties involved in the rendering of complex talismans, 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,\textsuperscript{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

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{116} Ibn al-Uḫuwwa does deal with astrologers operating in the \textit{sīq}, although his directives regarding them are fairly mild. See Michot and Savage-Smith, \textit{Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology}, 280.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid. 279–80.
\end{footnotesize}
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, wusṭā, 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-Shāṭili’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

\[\text{120} \] Al-Manāwī, al-Kawākib al-durriyya, 2: 38.

\[\text{121} \] 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.\textsuperscript{122}

It can now be shown that at least two of the \textit{asānīd} were copied from the writings of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bīṣṭāmī, where they were originally presented as al-Bīṣṭāmī’s own chains. The first instance is the chain that, in \textit{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.\textsuperscript{123} Table 1 below shows the \textit{asānīd} as they appear in three sources: the left-hand column is from Süleymaniye MS Bağdath Vehbi 930, a codex copied in 836/1433 of a work by al-Bīṣṭāmī bearing the title al-ʿUğāla fī ḥall al-amnāt al-muʿarrafa bi-ğam’ Abī l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad.

Table 1: First example of a plagiarized \textit{isnād}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
MS Bağdath Vehbi 930 & MS Beşir Ağa 89 & Witkam 2007\textsuperscript{1}  \\
fol. 6\textsuperscript{a}–7\textsuperscript{b} & fol. 213\textsuperscript{b} & ‘Pedigree C’ \\
\hline
‘Ali b. Abī Tālib & Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī & Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī \textsuperscript{122} \\
Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī & Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī & Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī \textsuperscript{122} \\
Habīb al-ʿAğāmī & Habīb al-ʿAğāmī & Habīb al-ʿAğāmī \\
Dāwūd al-Ṭāʾī & Dāwūd al-Ṭāʾī & Dāwūd al-Ǧabali \\
Maʿrūf al-Karḥī & Maʿrūf al-Karḥī & Maʿrūf al-Karḥī \\
Ṣarī al-Saqaṭī & Sarī al-Saqaṭī & Sarī al-Dīn al-Saqaṭī \\
Ǧunayd al-Ǧagdādī & Ǧunayd al-Ǧagdādī & Ǧunayd al-Ǧagdādī \\
Mīmāẓ al-Dīnawārī & Mīmāẓ al-Dīnawārī & Hammād al-Dīnawārī \\
Aḥmad al-Aswād & – & Aḥmad al-Aswād \\
Aḥḥār Ḍaʿār al-Zinjānī & – & – \\
Aḥmad al-Ǧazālī & Aḥmad al-Ǧazālī & Muḥammad al-Ǧazālī \\
Aḥḥār Ḍaʿār al-Zinjānī & – & – \\
Abū Ḥaṣan al-Saḥwārī & Abū Ḥaṣan al-Saḥwārī & Abū Ḥaṣan al-Saḥwārī \\
Qūṭ al-Dīn al-Abbārī & Muḥammad al-Saḥwārī & – \\
Rūk n al-Dīn al-Ǧaṣṣīṣī & – & – \\
Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Ṣirāẓī & Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Ṣirāẓī & Aṣīl al-Dīn al-Ṣirāẓī \\
Aḥḥār Ḍaʿār al-Zinjānī & – & – \\
Qawwāl al-Dīn & Qawwāl al-Dīn & Qawwāl al-Dīn \\
Muḥammad al-Bīṣṭāmī & Muḥammad al-Bīṣṭāmī & Muḥammad al-Bīṣṭāmī \\
Aḥḥār Ḍaʿār al-Zinjānī & – & – \\
Sūḫawām al-Dīn & Sūḫawām al-Dīn & Sūḫawām al-Dīn \\
Muḥammad al-Bīṣṭāmī & Muḥammad al-Bīṣṭāmī & Muḥammad al-Bīṣṭāmī \\
Aḥḥār Ḍaʿār al-Zinjānī & – & – \\
Aḥḥār Ḍaʿār al-Zinjānī & – & – \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{First example of a plagiarized \textit{isnād}}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 190–7.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 193.
Although the work is obviously related to al-Būnī, al-Biṣṭāmī is clearly listing his own credentials in supplying this list. The middle column is from Süleymaniye MS Beşir Ağa 89, a copy of Šams al-maʿārif 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-Biṣṭāmī’s isnād has been arrogated to al-Būnī, with a few names having been omitted. Even some of the language al-Biṣṭāmī uses to open the presentation of his isnād is reproduced in Šams al-maʿārif 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 Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā. In addition to the swapping out of al-Biṣṭāmī’s name for al-Būnī’s, one can see a cumulative loss of information from one chain to the next as names drop out or become garbled.

A similar process appears to have occurred with regard to al-Būnī’s alleged isnād for knowledge of kalimat al-šahāda, ‘Pedigree A’ in Witkam’s analysis. In the Table 2 (shown overleaf), the source for al-Biṣṭāmī’s isnād is Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1543.1, an abridged copy of Rašḥ aḏvāq al-hikma that probably was produced in the tenth/sixteenth century, in which the isnād is given as al-Biṣṭāmī’s source for knowledge of ‘ilm al-hurūf wa-l-awfāq. In this case, where al-Biṣṭāmī abbreviated the list by skipping the names of the ‘poles’ (aqtāb) between al-Šādīlī and the Prophet Muḥammad, those names have been supplied in Šams al-maʿārif 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-Tūnisī), a known figure whom Brockelmann identifies as having been writing in 810/1407, and whom al-Biṣṭāmī claimed as a personal teacher. That al-Kūmī could have been four steps removed from al-Šādīlī and also have been al-Biṣṭāmī’s teacher is perfectly conceivable. The same obviously cannot be said of him and al-Būnī.

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124 This being the sentence that begins ‘ḥātima fi ḍihr sanad šaykinā qaddasa llāh sirrāhu…’

125 GAL, SII: 358.
Table 2: Second example of a plagiarized īsnād

<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-Duhhān(?)</td>
<td>Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Ḥāfī</td>
<td>Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Gāfī(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū l-ʿAzāʾim Mādī b. Sultān</td>
<td>Abū l-ʿAzāʾim Mādī</td>
<td>Mādī l-ʿAzāʾim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pole after pole to… (Wa-huwa al-aḥādaʿ ‘an qaṭb baʿda qaṭb ilā …)</td>
<td>Abū Muḥammad Śāliḥ b. Baydāʾ(?) b. ?? al-Dukkānī al-Mālikī</td>
<td>Abū Muḥammad Śāliḥ b. Aqūbūn al-Qākifī al-Mālikī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Abū Yiʿzā al-Haṣkūrī(?)</td>
<td>Abū Suʿayb Ayyūb b. Šaʿīd al-Ṣinḥāgī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Šuʿayb Ayyūb b. Šaʿīd al-Ṣinḥāgī</td>
<td>Abū Yaʿzā al-Maʿarrī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Mūṣā al-Kaẓīm</td>
<td>Mūṣā al-Kaẓīm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Abū ʿAlī ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīb, who took from his grandfather…</td>
<td>Abū ʿAlī ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīb</td>
<td>Al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
<td>Muḥammad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although certain of al-Būnī and al-Bīṣṭāmī’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-Bīṣṭāmī’s asānīd to al-Būnī could have occurred other than through a deliberate act of forgery, especially as al-Bīṣṭāmī refers to himself in the third person in his versions of these chains. These are only two of eleven asānīd given for al-Būnī in Šams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā, 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, Abū Madyan and two other šayḥs mentioned in Qabs al-iqtidāʾ also appear in certain of these chains, although I am of the opinion that Qabs al-iqtidāʾ 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’ārif al-kubrā also are borrowed from other non-Būnian sources, construed from other Būnian or pseudo-Būnian texts, or simply fabricated from whole cloth.

That al-Bīṣṭāmī’s chains were assigned to al-Būnī provides important clues as to the way Šams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā as a whole was created. While certain parts of the work clearly were taken from earlier Būnian works,126 I would propose that al-Bīṣṭāmī’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’ārif al-kubrā (particularly the complex borders around many talismans in which the name Allāh is written repeatedly) are far more similar to the talismans in al-Bīṣṭāmī’s Šams al-āfāq fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-t-awfāq and other of his works than to any of those in the medieval Būnian corpus. Of course, some parts of the Šams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā may be entirely original to it, and a careful study of both men’s writings and similar works will be required to establish the provenance of the text’s many parts.

That the arrogation of al-Bīṣṭāmī’s asānīd to al-Būnī seems to have gone unnoticed and/or unchallenged suggests that living lines of authorized transmission of Būnian works had died away in this period, and/or that asānīd 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-

126 For example, large parts of the opening of the medieval Šams al-ma’ārif wa-latāʾif al-ʿawārif are incorporated into that of Šams al-ma’ārif al-kubrā, although the latter has a different incipit: Sahāda azal fa-min nūr ḥāḏīhi sahāda...
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

¹²⁷ For some excellent accounts of the history of ‘magic’ as an analytical category in the modern social sciences and humanities, see Styers, Making Magic, and Hanegraaff, ‘The Emergence of the Academic Science of Magic’. Specifically in regard to the Islamicate occult sciences, see Francis, ‘Magic and Divination’, and Lemay, ‘L’Islam historique et les sciences occultes’. 
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 ‘īlm al-ḥurūf and sīmiyā’. 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 ‘īlm al-ḥurūf, a tradition that, however controversial, has a lengthy pedigree in Islamic thought and is thoroughly suffused with veneration for the Qurʾān. 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 Qurʾānic notions of sihr and related terms, see Hamès – Hamès, ‘La notion de magie’, passim.
132 On the latter term, see MacDonald [Fahd], ‘Sīmiyā’, Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed.; also Lory, ‘Kashiṭ’s Asrār-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. 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 Śūfī studies and other wings of Islamic social and intellectual history is to some degree due to a general negligence of

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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!

\[\text{138 E.g. Pedersen’s } \text{The Arabic Book}; \text{ Rosenthal’s } \text{‘Technique and Approach’}; \text{ several sections of Makdisi’s } \text{Rise of Colleges}, \text{ and, more recently, Gacek’s } \text{Vademecum} \text{ and Déroche’s } \text{Islamic Codicology. There are obvious exceptions to the critique leveled here, including the works cited previously by Chamberlain, Berkey, Ohlander, and Dickinson, although these do not draw on specific codices so much as they present innovative general explorations of the use of books. Bauden’s series of } \text{Magriziana} \text{ articles must be mentioned as making groundbreaking use of manuscript sources, and I am no doubt missing several other scholars whose names also should be included here.} \]
Copies of major Būnian works.
A number without parentheses indicates 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 Būnian 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-ma'ārif</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>Mawāqif al-gāvāt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṭlm 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>Laṭāʾif al-isārāt</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-nūrāniyya</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-ḍaʿawāt</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-ītādāʾ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥawaṣṣ asmāʾ Allāh</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risiṣlah fī juldāʾ il al-basmala</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>
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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.

BnF MS arabe 2647, Ahmad al-Būnī, Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʾīf al-ʿawārif, undated (late 13th or 14th century), 148 folia.

BnF MS arabe 2649, Ahmad al-Būnī, Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā wa-latāʾīf al-ʿawārif [Šams al-maʿārif wa-latāʾīf al-ʿawārif], dated 913/1508, 110 folia.


BnF MS arabe 6556, Ahmad al-Būnī, Šams al-maʿārif al-ṣuğrā wa-latāʾīf al-ʿawārif [Laṭāʾīf al-išārāt fī l-ḥurūf al-ʿulwiyyāt], dated 781/1380, 58 folia.


Chester Beatty MS 3200, al-Maḥallī’s commentary on al-Subkī’s Ġamʿ al-ḡawāmiʿ, dated 870/1465–66.

Dār al-Kutub MS Ḥurūf M 75, Aḥmad al-Būnī, Šams al-maʿārif al-ṣuğrā [unknown], undated.


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