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**FROM ASTRAL INSTRUMENT TO HUMAN TALISMAN:  
A PHILOSOPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION  
OF SUFI TALISMANRY**

NUO ASTRALINIO INSTRUMENTO IKI ŽMOGAUS-TALISMANO:  
FILOSOFINĖ SUFIJŲ TALISMANIJOS REKONSTRUKCIJA

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## INTRODUCTION

### Significance of the Research

The significance of this research lies in its intervention in historiography and intellectual history: it identifies an under-theorised problem, namely the conceptual status of talismanry (*'ilm al-ṭilasmāt*) within medieval Islamic thought (10th–13th centuries), and formulates clear objectives to address it by reconstructing talismanry as a philosophically coherent theory of symbolic mediation within Islamicate metaphysics, thereby refining the historiography of key philosophical–mystical trajectories in Islamicate intellectual history. Rather than treating talismans simply as ritual or material objects, the study reconstructs talismanry as a philosophically articulated theory of symbolic mediation; a way of theorising how intelligible causes, sensible forms, and human agency are related within a graded cosmos. The dissertation traces a determinate conceptual arc from the talisman as an externally constructed astral instrument aligned with natural–celestial correspondences to its progressive interiorisation in Sufi–Illuminationist metaphysics, where the human being may be construed as a living talisman, that is, a privileged mediating form whose efficacy and intelligibility are conditioned by symbolic interpretation and ethical formation. This historiographical and philosophical intervention is part of a wider paradigmatic shift in the humanities, where previously under-theorised fields, particularly Islamic esotericism, are increasingly recognised as legitimate subjects of rigorous academic inquiry. Classical Islamology, as shaped by scholars such as Louis Massignon, Gustave von Grünebaum, Franz Rosenthal, Montgomery Watt, Reynold A. Nicholson, and Dominique Sourdel, primarily focused on the formation of Islamic civilisation, legal-theological institutions, and major intellectual currents, thereby giving comparatively less systematic attention to the philosophical status of the esoteric and occult sciences within Islamic thought. Within this historiographical framework, talismanic practices were often approached through theological, juridical, or sociological lenses, and in some contexts were discussed in relation to accusations of *shirk*, understood as the inadmissible association of other powers with God, in violation of the principle of *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God). While such approaches were methodologically appropriate to their disciplinary aims, they did not typically pursue a sustained philosophical reconstruction of talismanry as a metaphysical theory of mediation. By contrast, this dissertation argues that the

talisman should be defined at the outset not merely as an external “magical charm” but as a metaphysical mediator, that is, a symbolic and operative principle that can take on a material form (an inscribed object, diagram, or constructed figure) or become internalised in the human being, who, in certain Sufi and Illuminationist contexts, is himself understood as a human or living talisman<sup>1</sup>, aligning microcosm and macrocosm and rendering intelligible correspondences within a theologically ordered cosmos.

The study seeks to remedy the scholarly lacuna that has emerged within classical Islamology by reinterpreting talismanry as a phenomenon of metaphysical and philosophical significance, and a distinctive domain of knowledge with its own conceptual categories and problems, embedded in the broader architecture of the Islamic intellectual tradition. In so doing, it contributes to an emergent scholarly discourse, shaped above all by Charles Burnett, Liana Saif, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, and Noah Gardiner, alongside Jean-Charles Coulon and others, which situates the Islamic occult sciences, particularly *‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt*, within coherent cosmological and epistemological frameworks. Building on this foundation, this dissertation reconstructs *‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt* as a philosophically articulated theory of symbolic mediation which integrates ontology (graded participation), epistemology (non-discursive or participatory knowing through signs), and ethics (formation of intention and purity). The study argues that, in key Sufi–Illuminationist trajectories (10th–13th centuries), talismanic logic is progressively interiorised, culminating in the figure of the human talisman. As Ch. Burnett observes in describing the culmination of this tradition of knowledge and practice: “The most sublime art is all about putting knowledge into practice. It is the culmination of an ascent in learning and asceticism which leads through all the theoretical sciences and allows one to become the *ṣāni* ‘ or *ṣāhib al-ṭilasmāt wa-l-nīranjāt* (‘the practitioner or lord of the talismans or the *nīranjāt*’).”<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary multidimensional and comparative scholarship increasingly treats talismanic discourse as a symbolic-ontological technology: a mode of theorising

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, the expressions “human talisman” and “living talisman” are used interchangeably to designate the interiorised form of talismanic mediation. “Human talisman” emphasises anthropological structure, whereas “living talisman” underscores dynamic interiorisation; no strict terminological distinction is intended.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Burnett, “Arabic Practical Magic: The Role of the *nīranjāt* and *rūḥāniyyāt*,” in *Science and Craft: The Relations between the Theoretical and Practical Sides of the Occult and Esoteric Sciences in the Islamic World*, ed. by Godefroid De Callatay and Liana Saif (forthcoming).

mediation, correspondence, and causality across the sensible and intelligible domains, particularly within Sufi and Illuminationist metaphysics. Rather than positioning itself against earlier narratives, the present study participates in this broader reorientation of the field by offering a systematic philosophical reconstruction. It examines how talismanic efficacy was conceptualized as compatible with divine unity within specific intellectual traditions, and how debates over *shirk* functioned as philosophical boundary-markers in discussions of mediation and causal participation. In these contexts, talismanic practices are conceptualized as operating within a theologically coherent framework where the cosmos is understood as a living and symbolically ordered totality. The talisman thus emerges not merely as a ritual object but as both a conceptual and operative apparatus of metaphysical engagement, functioning as a threshold into wider constellations of mystical philosophy, astral science, and sacred cosmology. Beyond its esoteric valences, talismanry is approached as an epistemic domain internal to Islamic philosophical discourse. The analysis clarifies its intersections with *falsafa* (philosophy) and symbolic reasoning within medieval Islamicate metaphysics.

In line with Marshall Hodgson's concept of the "Islamicate"<sup>3</sup> and cognisant of George Makdisi's work on the institutional structures of knowledge transmission,<sup>4</sup> this dissertation refrains from teleological periodisations such as the "Golden Age" or "Islamic Renaissance." It focuses instead on the historically specific intellectual milieu of medieval Islam (10th–13th centuries), in which philosophical, mystical, juridical, and cosmological discourses intersected. G. Makdisi's analysis of the *madrasa* (college of law) and *waqf* (charitable trust) highlights the institutional frameworks that sustained diverse forms of inquiry in medieval Islamic intellectual life, while M. Hodgson's notion of the Islamicate underscores the broader cultural matrix that established the foundations for the development of philosophical and esoteric sciences as integral components of that intellectual environment. The present study does not pursue a macro-civilisational synthesis; rather, it reconstructs the conceptual environments in which talismanic theories were articulated, debated, and transformed. The emphasis thus falls not on period labels, but on the philosophical structures of mediation, causality, and symbolic participation that emerged in these dynamic medieval intellectual contexts.

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<sup>3</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. I–III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

## Justification of the Research Problem

Recognising that Islamic esotericism reflects a complex synthesis of Neoplatonic, Hermetic, Zoroastrian, and Qur'ānic cosmologies, this study is justified by the need to move beyond genealogical accounts towards a systematic philosophical analysis of the conditions that make talismanry intelligible, legitimate, and operative within Islamicate intellectual discourse. Despite being rooted in this complex synthesis, talismanic practices have often been characterised in both internal polemics and classical Islamological scholarship as marginal or heterodox. By re-situating talismanry as a philosophically structured mode of mediation, rather than as a residual or anomalous practice, this dissertation addresses a critical gap in the historiography of Islamic thought.

As L. Saif has argued in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, the Islamic occult sciences emerged from the conviction that celestial configurations directly influenced terrestrial realities. Astrology, numerology, and cosmology functioned not as marginal pseudo-sciences but as integral epistemic frameworks for decoding divine will and structuring metaphysical knowledge.<sup>5</sup> In delineating the ontological foundations of Islamic esotericism in his *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasised the “theomorphic nature of humanity”, whereby the human being mirrors divine attributes and serves as a nexus between macrocosmic and microcosmic planes.<sup>6</sup> This articulation provided the conditions under which the Hermetic axiom “as above, so below” could regain ontological resonance, particularly within Sufi metaphysics.

S. H. Nasr further develops this perspective in his exposition of divine transcendence and immanence: “The Ultimate Reality which is both Supra-Being and Being is at once transcendent and immanent. It is beyond everything and at the very heart and centre of man’s soul.”<sup>7</sup> This coheres with William Chittick’s claim in *The Recovery of Human Nature* that both philosophy and Sufism aim at *ma‘rifah* (gnosis), with transmitted knowledge serving merely as a “finger pointing at the moon.”<sup>8</sup> In esoteric Islamic cosmology, as developed by classical Islamic thinkers

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<sup>5</sup> Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, Liana Saif, and Farouk Yahya, eds., *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>8</sup> William Chittick, “The Recovery of Human Nature,” *Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion* 4 (2008), 283.

such as Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī, natural causality is subordinated to divine ontology, the causal order itself being grounded in the emanative activity of the First Principle. On this basis, metaphysical speculation is reconciled with Islamic monotheism without reducing philosophy to dogmatics: understood in this way, talismanry remains compatible with *tawhīd* because causality is symbolic and participatory rather than autonomous, and signs mediate divine action without competing with the First Principle.

Within Sufi philosophy, talismanic practices gave concrete form to the integration of symbolic language, divine correspondence, and cryptographic rigour. Here encryption served not merely to shield knowledge from the uninitiated but to preserve its sanctity and to catalyse interpretative transformation in those properly prepared. Building on long-standing cryptographic practices known across Asia and Africa, certain Islamic esoteric thinkers refined these strategies in talismanic texts, transforming concealment into a hermeneutic and initiatory principle. This was particularly prominent among Sufīs, Shi‘ites, and Ismailis, who encoded divine wisdom through *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* (science of letters) and symbolic structures.

Across these traditions, talismanic science developed as part of broader esoteric systems that integrated symbolic practice with cosmological and metaphysical reflection. Sufi traditions in North Africa and Persia, in particular, incorporated pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian, and Neoplatonic cosmologies into complex esoteric configurations. Henry Corbin highlights Iranian Islam as a fertile ground for such synthesis, where philosophical, mystical, and theurgical traditions converged.<sup>9</sup> Such a comparative perspective is essential for this study, which demonstrates how talismanic knowledge functioned as a node of intellectual transfer across civilisations, moving from late antique Hermeticism and Neoplatonism to Islamic esotericism. Moreover, it suggests comparative implications that are confined to elucidating the internal formation of Islamicate talismanic discourse, where intellectual transfer is framed in terms of plural routes, selective uptake, and patterned rearticulation.

In certain medieval Sufi and philosophical contexts, practices such as alchemy, astrology, *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, and related disciplines functioned as interpretative tools for understanding cosmic processes and the multiple dimensions of human existence. They operated as disciplined symbolic technologies oriented towards inner purification and ontological ascent. In line with the perspectives of S. H. Nasr and

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971–1972).

Titus Burckhardt, such disciplines were conceived as licit “spiritual operations” grounded in sacred cosmology and ethical discipline, distinguished from illicit practices by intention, purification, and doctrinal framing.<sup>10</sup> Through these sciences, mystics sought to decode the cosmos, align with celestial harmonies, and engage in spiritually transformative action.

Talismanic knowledge was transmitted within tightly regulated *silsila* (initiation chains), which required not only technical competence but also ethical maturity and metaphysical readiness. Esoteric knowledge was intended solely for initiates rather than for public dissemination. It was guarded as *sirr*, a secrecy understood simultaneously as concealment and sacred power. Within such a system, the talisman was not regarded as a mere charm but as a mirror: a coded reflection of the cosmos and the self, an instrument of *fanā*’ (annihilation in divine unity), and a symbolic portal towards transcendence.

In this context, talismans signify not magical manipulation but metaphysical participation in cosmic dynamics and the processes of human existence. Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* (oneness of being) positions talismanic symbolism within a vision of ontological unity. Al-Būnī’s *Shams al-ma‘ārif* (*The Sun of Knowledge*) exemplifies the meticulous use of letter mysticism to access and channel divine force. These systems were structured as symbolic extensions of divine wisdom and functioned within a theologically grounded cosmology.

To avoid the category mistakes that have long marginalised the topic, this dissertation adopts an explicitly philosophical register. The talisman is treated, first, as a mediating form (*ṣūra / ṭilasm*) that instantiates higher causes in matter; second, as an epistemic operator (divine names, letters, numbers as “seals”) that discloses intelligibles through symbolic labour; and third, as an ethical technology whose licit efficacy presupposes purification (*tahāra*), right intention (*niyya*), and disciplined practice (*‘amal*). Under this rubric, the talisman functions as a structured interface: it joins ontological grades of being without confusion; it grants epistemic access by participatory intellection (*methexis*) rather than mere representation; and it binds efficacy to ethical formation as a condition for such participation. This triadic framework, comprising ontology, epistemology, and ethics, provides the dissertation’s conceptual centre of gravity, against which historical variations in form and function

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<sup>10</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for Its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978); Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967).

are assessed. Here the expressions “symbolic causality” and “talismanic mediation” designate analytically distinct aspects of a single conceptual structure: the operation of symbolic forms as mediators between intelligible causes, sensible substrates, and the conditions under which such relations become operative, whether cosmological, ontological, or humanly enacted. Thus, the talisman is reconstructed as a rigorously theorised mode of mediation in which symbolic form, cosmological causality, and spiritual anthropology converge.

In this light, this dissertation argues that talismanic science functioned as a mediating practice within medieval Islamic metaphysics and Sufi thought. It demonstrates that talismanic science is not a marginal curiosity but a conceptually rigorous interface through which ontology, epistemology, and spiritual practice are coordinated.<sup>11</sup> This interdisciplinary and comparative study further situates talismany as a mode of symbolic mediation within the intellectual traditions of medieval Islam, arguing for its significance as an epistemic and ontological framework for specific metaphysical and mystical discourses.

It is important to clarify that this dissertation does not attempt to encompass the full breadth of the diverse talismanic and esoteric traditions of the medieval Islamic world. Instead, it focuses on four thinkers: al-Qurṭubī (c. 906–964), Suhrawardī (1154–1191), al-Būnī (d. c. 1225 or 1233), and Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240), whose works represent the most conceptually decisive moments in the intellectual rethinking of talismany. These authors are selected not only for their historical influence but also for the philosophical depth and systematic rigour with which they integrate talismanic logic into cosmology, metaphysics, and Sufi anthropology. Limiting the corpus in this way ensures depth of conceptual analysis and textual precision, while acknowledging that the broader talismanic tradition is far more extensive.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This analytical focus on talismany as philosophically articulated does not imply that talismanic objects were exclusive to learned or elite milieux. Talismanic practices also circulated in wider devotional and popular contexts. However, the present study is specifically concerned with the conceptual and metaphysical frameworks through which talismany was theorised within learned intellectual traditions.

<sup>12</sup> The broader Islamic literature on talismans includes salient primary *loci* and analyses, such as those of al-Kindī (c. 801–873), who grounds talismanic efficacy in a general theory of natural causation by rays (*De radiis stellarum*)—a theoretical foundation for later astral–talismanic constructions, see: Marie-Thérèse d’Alverny and Françoise Hudry, “Al-Kindī. *De radiis*,” in *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 41 (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1974), 139–260; Peter Adamson and Peter E. Pormann, “On Rays,” in *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 217–234. Thābit ibn Qurra (c. 830–901) is credited with treatises on *ṭilasmāt* that systematise operations on materials and images within

mathematical–astral frameworks, see Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. VII (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 151–152. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (c. 10th c.) devotes an epistle to magic and talismans, explicitly linking cosmology, mathematics, and image-making, see: Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (British Library, Or. 8254, Arabic ms., copied 1247 CE); Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: On Magic I. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 52a*, ed. by Godefroid de Callataÿ and Bruno Halflants (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Ibn Sīnā (c. 980–1037) treats *khawāṣṣ* and “occult” effects as natural properties whose causes may be hidden yet non-illicit, and distinguishes them from forbidden *sihr*. For his account of such non-discursive causal modalities in nature, see: Ibn Sīnā, *Shifā’, al-Ṭabī’iyyāt: Al-Kawn wa-l-fasād (The Healing, Physics: Generation and Corruption)*, ed. by Maḥmūd Qāsim (Cairo: The General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1969); Ibn Sīnā, “Kitāb al-Nafs,” in *Avicenna’s De Anima (Arabic Text): Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifa*, ed. by Fazlur Rahman (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); also cf. Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 178–208. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149–1210) deepens and problematises this Avicennan model by integrating talismanic operations into a philosophically articulated account of nature, in which celestial causation, the internal senses, especially the estimative faculty (*wahm*), and the soul’s capacity to effect change in the sublunary world are treated as continuous with, rather than external to natural philosophy. In this context, occult practices are neither simply dismissed nor uncritically affirmed, but reinterpreted as operating through complex, partially hidden causal chains that link cosmology, psychology, and ritual action. For further analysis and a comprehensive bibliography, see Michael-Sebastian Noble, *Philosophising the Occult: Avicennan Psychology and “The Hidden Secret” of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021). Al-Bīrūnī (973–1048) offers a mathematician’s eyewitness to operative image-making: within his pedagogy of astronomical / astrological method, in the *Kitāb al-taḥfīm li-awā’il ṣinā’at al-tanjīm (Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology)* he records the practitioners’ procedures for fabricating images (*tamāthīl / ṣuwar*) timed to planetary configurations and using appropriate materials, while pointedly distinguishing demonstrative astronomy from such ‘*amalī*’ (operative) techniques and urging methodological caution, see: Al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-taḥfīm li-awā’il ṣinā’at al-tanjīm* (British Library, Or. 8349, Arabic ms., written in Ghazna 1029 CE); Al-Bīrūnī, *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*, transl. by Robert Ramsay Wright (London: Luzac & Co., 1934).

These figures exemplify only a subset of the technical and descriptive tradition that informed later talismanry; alongside them stands a robust polemical literature that problematised and delimited such practices. Al-Ghazālī (c. 1058–1111) oscillates between severe cautions against *sihr* and a carefully delimited acceptance of licit invocations, names, and Qur’ānic amulets, see: Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, 5 vols., ed. by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Sayyrawān (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.); cf. Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 147–213. Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) offers the classic juristic critique of *ṭilasmāt* and name-magic in his *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā (Compilation of Fatwas)*, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, compiled by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim al-‘Āṣimī and Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Qāsim, 37 vols. (al-Madīna al-Munawwara: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur’ān, Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Da’wah and Guidance, 2004). Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), in the *Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (esp. ch. 6), provides the most influential medieval taxonomy of *sihr*, *ṭilasmāt*, and the science of letters, distinguishing natural, psychic, and talismanic modes, see Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to*

## Research Problem

The central research problem may be stated philosophically: how and why the talisman, initially conceived in terms of astral–natural causality, comes to function in the classical Islamic tradition as a mode of philosophical mediation integrating an ontology of graded being, an epistemology of participatory intellection, and an ethics of purification and intention, and how, in certain Sufi metaphysical contexts, this reconfiguration culminates in the articulation of the human being as the *locus* of talismanic mediation. This problem involves not merely a historical transformation but a deeper reconfiguration of causality, knowledge, and human agency in the philosophical–mystical traditions of medieval Islam.

In its earlier philosophical formulations, particularly in the works of al-Kindī and, more indirectly, al-Fārābī, the talisman was defined within an Aristotelian cosmology as a material configuration whose efficacy depended on the precise alignment between celestial influences and sublunary matter. This model situated talismanry within the domain of *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *falsafa*, grounding it in a theory of causal correspondence and rational design. Yet this same framework also provoked juridical and theological critique. Thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Khaldūn, and, at times, al-Ghazālī,<sup>13</sup> treated certain talismanic practices as bordering on *shirk*, that is, the attribution of efficacious agency to created intermediaries, inasmuch as such practices appeared to compromise divine unity. These critiques do not simply reject talismanry; rather, they bring into focus a fundamental tension

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*History*, transl. and intro. by Franz Rosenthal, abridg. and ed. by D. J. Dawood, intro. by Bruce B. Lawrence (Princeton: Bollingen / Princeton, 2005), esp. 572–599. For modern syntheses that frame these materials conceptually, see works by J.-C. Coulon, L. Saif, N. Gardiner, Ch. Burnett, M. Melvin-Koushki, E. Savage-Smith, as well as other studies cited throughout this dissertation. Against this extensive backdrop, the present study narrows to al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī precisely because each of them marks a conceptual threshold in the transition from astral-natural instrument (*tilasm* as engineered image) to philosophical mediator (symbolic form as ontological / epistemic / ethical interface), which constitutes the central problematics of the dissertation.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Ghazālī’s position on magic and talismanry is complex. While in the *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (*Revival of the Religious Sciences*) he distinguishes between licit and illicit forms of the occult sciences, he remains cautious regarding practices that attribute causal efficacy to material forms rather than to divine will. In *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa* (*The Intentions of the Philosophers*) and, more critically, in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), his rejection of intrinsic causality indirectly challenges the metaphysical assumptions underlying talismanic operations, insofar as they appear to compromise *tawhīd*. Thus, though not uniformly condemnatory, al-Ghazālī’s treatment of talismans aligns with broader theological anxieties surrounding *sihr* and *shirk*.

concerning the legitimacy of mediated causality within an Islamic framework.

This tension may be clarified through the relationship between *ilm* (knowledge), *sihr* (magic), and *falsafa* (philosophy). These categories function as historically variable epistemic registers rather than fixed, mutually exclusive domains. Talismanry thus operated at the fluid boundary where symbolic reasoning, empirical observation, and metaphysical intuition intersected. As such, the talisman was a multifunctional phenomenon: simultaneously a scientific device, a theurgical object, and a spiritual symbol.

In delineating these tensions (especially in Part II), the present study does not posit a single, monolithic Islamic orthodoxy against which talismanry is to be measured. Rather, it attends to specific discursive positions articulated by identifiable actors within distinct intellectual traditions. Terms such as “orthodoxy,” “heterodoxy,” or “illicit” are employed heuristically to describe historically situated arguments, not to adjudicate doctrinal legitimacy. Nor does the analysis claim that talismanry occupied an institutional “centre” of Islamic intellectual life. Instead, its centrality is understood conceptually: within particular philosophical–mystical traditions, talismanic mediation functioned as a structurally significant mode of metaphysical reasoning, even if it did not define juridical or theological normativity across all Islamic milieux.<sup>14</sup>

Against this methodological backdrop, this research situates the transformation of talismanic science within the broader intellectual and transcultural configurations of medieval Islamic thought, a context in which Greek Neoplatonism, Hermetic cosmology, Zoroastrian cosmological motifs, and Qur’ānic metaphysics were actively interpreted, integrated, and rearticulated. It traces, across several registers, how key Islamic thinkers reinterpreted talismans as microcosmic condensations of divine order, functioning both as cosmological instruments and as spiritual symbols. Each of the four thinkers examined in this thesis represents a distinct configuration within this philosophical rearticulation.

**Al-Qurṭubī**, in his *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (*The Goal of the Sage*), defines the talisman through the lens of astral ritual and philosophical causality, emphasising its precision and symbolic structure.

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<sup>14</sup> Islamic intellectual life in the classical period was polycentric rather than institutionally unified, comprising multiple juridical, theological, philosophical, and mystical discursive formations. The present study follows approaches that caution against reducing Islamic normativity to a single juridical or theological core while analysing discursive formations within specific philosophical and mystical traditions.

**Suhrawardī**, in his Illuminationist metaphysics, refigures talismanic mediation as a function of the soul’s luminosity and receptivity and develops what may be reconstructed (conceptually rather than lexically) as a doctrine of the “human talisman” (*al-ṭilasm al-basharī*), articulated through his own mediational vocabulary (e.g., *haykal*, *ṣīṣiyya*, and *barzakh*-like structures of mediation), rather than presupposing uniform talisman terminology.

**Al-Būnī**, in the *Shams al-ma‘ārif* (*The Sun of Knowledge*) and *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt* (*The Subtleties of the Allusions Regarding the Superior Letters*), reorients talismanic mediation towards *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, establishing a theurgical system of divine names, letters, and numerical matrices (*awfāq* (letter-number grids) and related operators) through which efficacy is framed as name-based and symbolically constrained, rather than as a simple extension of astral instrumentality.

**Ibn ‘Arabī**, within the framework of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (oneness of being), internalises talismanic logic as a metaphysical reflection of divine names, where the cosmos itself becomes a grand talisman, and the perfected human becomes a mirror of divine correspondence.

Each of the four case studies is read through a consistent analytic triad: ontology (what a talisman is within a hierarchy of being), epistemology (how a talisman discloses / “knows”), and ethics (the conditions under which it may licitly operate), allowing the study to trace a determinate arc leading from al-Qurṭubī’s astral-causal construction, through Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist reframing and al-Būnī’s letter-based theurgy, to Ibn ‘Arabī’s interiorisation of talismanic logic.

This philosophical reconfiguration from an externally constructed instrument of celestial influence to an internalised mediator of participatory ontology does not negate *tawḥīd*, but can be understood as a deepening of its metaphysical articulation. The talisman, like *al-insān al-kāmil* (*The Perfect Human*), becomes a symbolic interface between the visible and invisible, the material and the spiritual, the contingent and the eternal. In Sufi metaphysics, symbolic instruments such as talismans are not autonomous sources of power, but means of divine disclosure, a symbolic indication of transcendent truth. Their function is not to manipulate, but to align; not to dominate, but to reflect divine intentionality.

This dissertation examines how talismanic mediation was articulated within specific philosophical–mystical traditions of medieval Islam, where cryptographic and symbolic strategies shaped distinct epistemological frameworks. In this respect, the vision articulated by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (Brethren of Purity) serves as an

important precedent: they described talismanry as a mode of harmonising soul and cosmos, framing it as a symbolic articulation of inner transformation that anticipates later Sufi elaborations. For them—and, in a distinct but related register, for Ibn ‘Arabī—the concept of *al-insān al-kāmil* can be read as a paradigmatic instance of talismanic logic, insofar as the perfected human functions as a mediating form through which cosmological order and metaphysical reflection are brought into structured correspondence.

Thus, this thesis reconstructs talismanic science as a philosophically articulated mode of mediation within medieval Islamic mystical thought. Taken together, this demonstration enriches the present discussion by articulating how talismans functioned as structured interfaces between cosmology, ritual practice, and conceptions of divine proximity within specific intellectual milieux of the 10th–13th centuries. A thorough comparative textual analysis and philosophical reconstruction situates the *ṭilasm* within a tradition that theorises natural causality, divine agency, and symbolic form as interrelated dimensions of metaphysical participation.

## Research Object

This study examines the conceptual evolution of the talisman (*ṭilasm*) and the science of talismans (*‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt*) within Islamic intellectual history, with particular focus on talismanic transformation from an astral–natural instrument of causality into a philosophical and symbolic concept in medieval Islamic metaphysics (10th–13th centuries). Rather than treating the talisman as a static artefact, this study reconceptualizes it as a dynamic epistemic and ontological medium; namely, as a mode of philosophical talismanic mediation through which relations between cosmology, knowledge, and human transformation are articulated. This perspective situates talismanry at the intersection of natural philosophy, esoteric science, and Sufi metaphysics, while also grounding it in a structured account of mediation that integrates ontology, epistemology, and ethical practice. The analysis traces how this reconfiguration unfolds across the distinct yet interrelated philosophical systems of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī. Thereby, it positions talismanry within a broader intellectual field defined by cryptographic symbolism, Islamic cosmology, and philosophical accounts of the human as a site of mediation.

## Aim and Objectives

**Aim:** To undertake a philosophical reconstruction and critical analysis of the historical development, conceptual specificity, and internal transformation of Islamic talismanry (*‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt*), approaching the talisman not merely as a ritual object but as a structured system of metaphysical, cosmological, and symbolic mediation. By situating talismanic practice within the intersecting frameworks of *taṣawwuf*, philosophical theurgy, and esoteric epistemology, the study seeks to demonstrate how Islamic talismans were rearticulated from instruments of astral causality into refined expressions of ontological unity and divine correspondence. It further aims to examine how these transformations contributed to broader developments in medieval Islamic intellectual culture, and to show how talismanic mediation becomes a philosophically articulated model of ontology, epistemology, and ethical formation in Sufi metaphysics.

### **Objectives:**

- To investigate the historical and philosophical foundations of Islamic talismanry by tracing its emergence from Hermetic, Neoplatonic, and Zoroastrian cosmologies, and by assessing how these pre-Islamic traditions informed early Islamic esoteric thought.
- To elucidate the conceptual transformation of the talisman from its grounding in natural and astral causality as articulated by al-Kindī and al-Fārābī, to its reconfiguration as a symbolic and theurgical mediator within the cosmological architectures of Sufi metaphysics.
- To analyse the conceptual structure and semantic field of talismanic terminology, with particular attention to foundational categories such as *ṭilasm*, *ṣanam*, *sīmīyā*, *khawāṣṣ*, *nīranjāt*, and related constructs, by examining their philosophical, cosmological, linguistic, and ritual functions within Islamic esotericism, and by demonstrating their role in articulating the material-spiritual correspondence that underpins talismanic efficacy.
- To conduct a comparative analysis of talismanic discourse in the works of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī, highlighting the epistemological, symbolic, and metaphysical reconfigurations introduced by each thinker.
- To examine the evolution of *‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt* as an internal conceptual transformation from operative astral technique to a philosophically articulated symbolic system, and to analyse how this transformation grounds a metaphysical

anthropology in which the human being functions as a privileged mediating form within medieval Islamic intellectual culture.

- To articulate the philosophical stakes of talismanic mediation by specifying what is most essential in the talismanic problem-field (symbolic causality, participatory intellection, and ethical constraint), and by demonstrating how these are reconfigured across the four case studies.

## Methodological Principles of the Research

This dissertation positions itself at the intersection of the history of philosophical ideas, Islamic intellectual history, transcultural comparative philosophy, esotericism, and metaphysics. Its central problematic field is approached through a comparative and interdisciplinary strategy that proceeds systematically from broader questions to more specific analyses. In doing so, the study combines both established and innovative methodological approaches, drawing on auxiliary methods where appropriate to address particular research needs. The guiding aim is to reconstruct the conceptual development of talismanry as a specific field of Islamic knowledge, treating it as an integral philosophical and spiritual discursive system. Throughout, an explicit triadic lens is maintained: ontological analysis tracks how symbolic forms instantiate higher causes in matter (e.g., *ṭilasm*, *ṣūra*, *awfāq*); epistemological analysis follows non-discursive cognition via divine names / letters / numbers (e.g., *asmā' Allāh*, *'ilm al-ḥurūf*, proportional / numerical harmonics) as participatory media of intellection; ethical analysis specifies the normative constraints, such as purity, intention, and licit aims, by which efficacy is delimited. This lens governs both close readings of primary texts and cross- and intra-traditional *comparanda* alike.

The study adopts a source-centred, interdisciplinary methodological framework grounded in philosophical, historical, hermeneutical, and philological analysis. Rather than relying on abstract methodological templates, this research proceeds through direct engagement with a wide spectrum of primary sources in their original languages (Arabic, Greek, and Latin), interpreted within their intellectual and esoteric contexts. In addition to the dissertation's philosophical trajectory, the author's philological competence enables the analysis to move beyond surface translation, allowing for a precise reconstruction of the semantic fields, symbolic vocabularies, and conceptual transformations that shaped talismanic discourse. The methodology has developed organically from the research process itself, beginning with a conceptual inquiry into *'ālam al-mithāl* (the realm of similitudes, or the imaginal

realm), which in turn opened onto an exploration of the *ṭilasm* as a philosophical and symbolic structure across Islamic metaphysical systems.

At the foundation stands comparative methodology. In its traditional modality, comparative philosophy juxtaposed distinct traditions by identifying structural homologies and symbolic isomorphisms across civilisations. While such approaches opened valuable horizons, they also risked methodological reductionism by abstracting Islam into Western categories or aligning incommensurable systems as if they were structurally identical. This dissertation acknowledges the heuristic value of earlier comparativism but proceeds instead from a modern transcultural comparative paradigm. Here, comparison is historicised, reflexive, and mediational: the objects of analysis are treated in their own conceptual integrity, similarities are approached as heuristic prompts rather than equivalences, and differences are preserved as philosophically significant data. In this sense, the research situates talismanry in an interactive comparative field in which the author actively formulates the strategy of juxtaposition and the scope of comparativist problems. This permits a methodologically consistent treatment of talismanic discourse as a philosophical practice in its own right, while simultaneously opening it to dialogue with parallel currents in Neoplatonism and Hermeticism as late antique problem-fields that inform Islamicate metaphysical vocabularies of mediation.

In this comparative frame, the dissertation proceeds along three axes. Diachronically, it analyses conceptual transformations in talismanic thought in transcivilisational and transcultural contexts. Synchronically, it compares the approaches of key thinkers within the Islamicate intellectual tradition: al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ʿArabī, each of whom articulated distinctive talismanic paradigms within their respective metaphysical systems. Contextually and transculturally, it situates talismanry in the broader dynamics of Islamic philosophy and Sufi-inspired esotericism, while treating late antique and early Islamicate patterns of transmission (translation, adaptation, rearticulation) as a conceptual background only insofar as they clarify the internal formation of Islamicate talismanic discourse in the 10th–13th centuries. These methodological orientations reflect the ontological, linguistic, and symbolic character of the source-material and have been further refined through sustained engagement with critical scholarship, digital archives, and scholarly exchanges with specialists in the field, including Charles Burnett, Liana Saif, and Antonio de Diego González.

To this end, the dissertation employs a set of auxiliary instruments. Contextualisation interprets each system within its intellectual and cultural milieu,

including Andalusian synthesis, Persianate Illuminationism, mathematico-lettrist theurgy, and Akbarian metaphysics, clarifying how talismanic discourse was shaped by distinct cosmological, theological, and esoteric environments. Hermeneutics provides close readings that disclose the layered *ẓāhir* (outer / exoteric) and *bāṭin* (inner / esoteric) structures of talismanic texts and diagrams, uncovering their ontological and symbolic dimensions. Philology secures precision in tracing the evolution of key lexemes, including *ṭilasm* (talisman), *nīranjāt* (ritual / incantational magical operation), *khawāṣṣ* (occult or hidden properties), among others, across Arabic, Greek, and Latin traditions, elucidating the semantic refinements through which talismanry developed into a systematic symbolic vocabulary. Finally, critical discourse analysis engages with earlier and contemporary academic interpretations of talismanry and, in dialogue with recent scholarship (Ch. Burnett, L. Saif, N. Gardiner, M. Melvin-Koushki, J.-C. Coulon), examines how talismanic discourse has been variously framed within the historiography of Islamic intellectual history, while reassessing it as a philosophically articulated discourse of symbolic causality. Each methodological principle employed in this research is directly aligned with the object and aim of the study: to interpret the talisman as a philosophically articulated construct of symbolic mediation within Islamic cosmology.

Given the polyglossia of sources, the dissertation stabilises a minimal cross-traditional lexicon in service of the philosophical triad: Neoplatonic *symbolon*, *synthēma*, and *stoicheiōma* → Islamicate *ṭilasm*, *ism*, and *ḥarf* (ontology of mediation); *methexis* → participatory intellection through *asmāʾ Allāh*, *ḥurūf*, *aʿdād* (epistemology); oracular and Iamblichean purification together with *ochēma-discipline*<sup>15</sup> → Islamic *ṭahāra*, *adab*, and *niyya* (ethics). In the Latin tradition, terms such as *imagines*, *figurae caelestes*, and *prestigium* likewise designate talismanic or image-based operations.<sup>16</sup> This schematic mapping is heuristic rather than one-to-one

<sup>15</sup> By “*ochēma-discipline*” is meant the purification and regulation of the soul’s *ochēma pneuma* (its subtle pneumatic vehicle), understood in late antique theurgy as the intermediary substrate through which divine signs (*symbolon*, *synthēma*), that is, ritually operative tokens that mediate higher powers, are received and actualised, thereby grounding both participatory intellection and ritual efficacy.

<sup>16</sup> The Greek terms *symbolon* and *synthēma* denote ritual or material signs that mediate higher powers in late antique theurgy; *stoicheiōma* (“elemental sign” or “configured element”) appears in the Greek fragment of Thābit ibn Qurra’s treatise on talismans as a designation for talismanic configurations. In the Islamicate context, *ṭilasm* refers to a talisman or operative image designed to channel celestial or spiritual influences; *ism* denotes a divine name (especially within the framework of *asmāʾ Allāh*, the names of God); and *ḥarf* refers to a letter, particularly within the

and will be historically and philosophically elaborated in Parts I–III. In conclusion, the methodological architecture of this dissertation is comparative at its core, modern in its reflexivity, and interdisciplinary in its instruments. Traditional comparativism remains a heuristic horizon, but the decisive orientation is contemporary comparative philosophy, here applied in dialogue with hermeneutics, philology, contextualisation, and discourse analysis in order to reconstruct talismanry as a rigorous mode of symbolic and theurgical reasoning within Islamic esotericism.

It is essential to clarify that although this dissertation consistently employs the terms “talisman” and “talismanry” as conceptual anchors, these designations do not always correspond to the explicit vocabulary of the historical authors and traditions under examination. They function here as comparative-philosophical instruments that enable the identification of a coherent complex of metaphysical assumptions, symbolic structures, and ritual operations grounded in ontological participation. As noted above, in Neoplatonic and theurgical sources, analogous practices are described through terms such as *symbola*, *semēia*, *theourgiai*, or *erga theia* in the Greek, and *imagines*, *figurae caelestes*, or *res caelestes / virtus astrorum* in the Latin. Within Islamic intellectual discourse, related configurations appear under diverse idioms. While al-Qurṭubī employs the vocabulary of *ṭilasm* and *ṣanam* (statue, image), other Arabic terms such as *ṣūra* (form / image), *timthāl* (figural statue or material image), and *tamthīl* (the act or mode of representation or figuration) likewise designate imaginal or figural configurations through which celestial or spiritual correspondences may be given material form. Other thinkers articulate comparable mediational structures through concepts such as the microcosm, *al-insān al-tāmm / al-kāmil*, and the *barzakh*; in Suhrawardī’s case, this includes the gradational notions of *ṣiṣiyya* (fortress / body) and *haykal* (temple / body). These terms are not lexically equivalent to *ṭilasm*, nor are they presented as such; rather, they participate in analogous problems of mediation between ontological levels.

Accordingly, the uniform use of “talisman” in this study does not presuppose terminological uniformity in the sources and does not impose an anachronistic

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lettrist science (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*), where letters are treated as cosmological and symbolic operators. The terms *asmā’ Allāh* (divine names), *ḥurūf* (letters), and *a’dād* (numbers) designate the principal symbolic media through which participatory intellection is enacted in Islamic lettrist traditions. In the ethical register, *ṭahāra* denotes ritual and spiritual purification, *adab* cultivated discipline or proper comportment, and *niyya* intentional orientation of the will. In the Latin tradition of astral images and talismans, terms such as *imagines* (images or astral figures), *figurae caelestes* (celestial figures), and *prestigium* (magical or illusion-producing operation) likewise refer to image-based or talismanic procedures within cosmological frameworks of mediation.

lexical label. It designates a comparative-philosophical problem-field: mediation between intelligible causes and sensible substrates, whether materially instantiated or symbolically structured, and articulated through distinct emic vocabularies by each author. The analysis therefore proceeds conceptually rather than lexically; it does not assume that the same word is operative across traditions, but traces a shared philosophical problem of mediation expressed through historically specific semantic and symbolic configurations.

Two additional methodological clarifications are required regarding the treatment of sources. Throughout this dissertation, the most authoritative and respected translations in Arabic, Greek, Latin, German, and French have been employed. Where necessary, they have been supplemented with the author's own translations, additions, or explanatory notes, particularly in cases where terminological nuance or conceptual precision required closer philological control. This applies not only to individual terms and their semantic fields, but, in some instances, also to the rendering of entire passages. Such interventions have been carried out with methodological consistency, aiming to preserve both the integrity of the original sources and the conceptual precision required for philosophical analysis.

The system of transliteration adopted is also not fully uniform. When citing existing translations or secondary scholarship that employs a particular system of transliteration, concepts and names are retained as presented by the respective translator or scholar. Elsewhere, the most widely used academic system for Arabic transliteration, that of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES), has been applied, given its balance of scholarly precision and accessibility. Although IJMES guidelines recommend omitting diacritics in personal names, place names, and titles of works, this dissertation retains full diacritical markings in such cases, given its philological orientation and its sustained engagement with Arabic philosophical and esoteric terminology, where precision and proximity to the original linguistic form are methodologically essential. The resulting variation means that certain terms, titles, or names may appear in slightly different forms (e.g., *Shams* vs. *Šams* in L. Saif's analysis of the *Shams al-ma'ārif*; *Ibn 'Arabī* vs. *Ibn al-'Arabī* in W. Chittick). These discrepancies are deliberate, reflecting a commitment to scholarly accuracy and fidelity to cited authorities rather than imposing artificial uniformity. References and notes throughout the dissertation follow the Chicago style of citation.

## Structure of the Thesis

The dissertation consists of an introduction, four main parts, a conclusion, a list of references and a summary in Lithuanian. Its structure is organised conceptually and thematically to address the problems posed at the outset and to achieve the stated objectives.

The introduction establishes the significance of the research within current debates on Islamic esotericism; formulates the research problem and its justification; defines the research object (the conceptual evolution of the *ṭīlasm* / *‘ilm al-ṭīlasmāt*), aim and objectives; and outlines the methodological principles, which combine multilayered diachronic, synchronic, and contextual-transcultural comparison with hermeneutic, philological, historical-comparative, and critical discourse analysis. It also sets out the dissertation’s scholarly contribution and novelty: the first systematic philosophical reconstruction of *‘ilm al-ṭīlasmāt* as an internally coherent theory of symbolic mediation, integrating graded ontology, participatory epistemology, and ethical formation, and tracing its conceptual transformation from astral instrumentality to the interiorised figure of the human being as a living talisman in medieval Islamicate thought. In addition, the introduction provides an overview of sources and interpretative literature: on the one hand, the foundational works of modern scholarship; on the other, the primary texts of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī. Taken together, these bodies of material establish the conceptual and historical setting in which Islamic talismanry is reconstructed as an integral philosophical and spiritual discourse.

Part One, titled *The Intellectual Genealogy of Islamic Talismanry*, reconstructs the metaphysical and cosmological foundations of talismanic thought by examining key pre-Islamic traditions that shaped Islamic esotericism. It focuses on Hermeticism, Neopythagoreanism, Neoplatonism, and Zoroastrian cosmology, tracing how these systems, particularly the doctrines of emanation, cosmic sympathy, and symbolic correspondence, were transmitted into the Islamic intellectual tradition and laid the groundwork for talismanic science.

Part Two, titled *Conceptualising Islamic Talismanry*, reconstructs the conditions of intelligibility under which talismanic mediation could be articulated within a theologically ordered cosmos (9th–13th centuries). It maps the conceptual field in which talismanry becomes thinkable as “symbolic causality”: the Qur’ānic ontology of signs (*āyāt*) and divine speech; the philosophical grammar of hierarchical / secondary causation developed in *falsafa*; and the boundary-

setting role of *kalām* and legal discourse in regulating mediation under *tawḥīd*. It then develops the dissertation's analytic triad (ontology–epistemology–ethics) by showing how efficacy is constrained: ontologically (graded being and derivative causation), epistemologically (letters / names / numbers as operators of participatory intellection), and ethically (*niyya*, *ṭahāra*, and disciplined agency). Sections 2.3–2.4 formalise this shift through *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* and theurgical practice, framing talismanry as a rule-governed model of mediation.

Part Three, titled *Characteristics and Transformations of Philosophical Islamic Talismanry in the 10th–13th Centuries*, presents case studies of al-Qurtubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī. Each chapter shows how these thinkers conceptualise the talisman within distinct metaphysical, cosmological, and philosophical systems, marking a transition from astral causality to symbolic participation in divine reality and culminating in the articulation of the human being as a living talisman.

Part Four, titled *Philosophical Talismanry in Medieval Islamic Thought: A Comparative Perspective*, offers a systematic synthesis of the four thinkers as they appear in the medieval Islamicate context, consolidating the dissertation's findings and specifying convergences and divergences in the ontological, epistemological, and ethical grammars of talismanic mediation.

Conclusion succinctly synthesises the findings: it reaffirms the central claim that talismanry is reconfigured from an instrument of astral causality within natural philosophy to a symbolic and theurgical mediator in Sufi metaphysics, understood as a philosophically articulated mode of mediation. The chapter further clarifies the status of talismanry as a conceptually central epistemic and ontological paradigm within specific philosophical–mystical constellations (particularly Illuminationist, lettrist-theurgical, and Akbarian traditions), without implying institutional centrality in juridical–theological normativity across the Islamicate world, and it situates late antique antecedents as conceptual background for Islamicate rearticulation. Ultimately, talismanry is framed as a systematic configuration of symbolic causality, mediation, and spiritual anthropology that must be recognised as integral to the intellectual history of these specific metaphysical traditions within medieval Islamicate thought.

## Scholarly Contribution and Novelty

This dissertation intervenes in a critical lacuna in Islamic intellectual historiography: the absence of a systematic philosophical reconstruction of talismanic sciences, particularly in the context of Sufi philosophy. Over the past two decades, foundational

scholarship by Ch. Burnett, L. Saif, N. Gardiner, and M. Melvin-Koushki has demonstrated that talismanic sciences formed a coherent and intellectually sophisticated domain in medieval Islamic thought. Their studies, complemented by the work of Emilie Savage-Smith, J.-C. Coulon, and Francesca Leoni, have clarified the cosmological, textual, and ritual dimensions of talismanic practices, situating them in broader currents of Islamic intellectual history. Methodological and historiographical perspectives offered by Simon Sorgerfrei and Mark Sedgwick have further contributed to the conceptual clarification of Islamic esotericism, providing a critical basis for understanding talismanic discourse.

Relying on these conceptual, theoretical, and previously outlined methodological premises, the present study advances a distinctively philosophical intervention. Its specific philosophical contribution is to show that *'ilm al-ṭilasmāt* can be reconstructed as a rule-governed theory of symbolic mediation in which ontological participation, participatory intellection, and ethical discipline function as constraints on efficacy and intelligibility, and whose internal transformation culminates (in certain Sufi metaphysical anthropologies) in the human being as a privileged mediating form. The study approaches talismanry not merely as a ritual or cosmological practice but as a philosophically integrated system of mediation linking ontology, participatory epistemology, and ethical self-transformation within specific philosophical–mystical discursive constellations. Through close textual analysis of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn 'Arabī, it reconstructs talismanic theory as a coherent account of symbolic causality: one in which form mediates between intelligible and sensible domains, knowledge proceeds through participatory intellection, and efficacy is conditioned by moral and spiritual discipline. Its principal novelty is therefore systematic rather than descriptive: it demonstrates that talismanry functions as an internal philosophy of mediation in identifiable metaphysical trajectories of medieval Islamicate thought, and that this logic culminates in the concept of the human being as a living talisman, the privileged mediating form in Sufi metaphysical anthropology.

The study's originality lies in its flexible, interdisciplinary comparative methodology, which combines civilisational, hermeneutic, philological, historical-comparative, and critical discourse analysis with direct engagement with primary sources in Arabic, Greek, and Latin. Drawing on conceptual repertoires such as *'ilm al-ḥurūf, ṭilasmāt, nīranjāt, sīmiyā'*, and others, the dissertation reconstructs the talisman as a dynamic symbolic technology operating across shifting Islamic ontologies.

A distinctive contribution of this research is its focus on the cryptographic architecture of Sufi metaphysics, an underexplored dimension that highlights the hermeneutic and symbolic sophistication of Islamic esotericism. In the thought systems of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī, the talisman emerges as a philosophically charged sign, an instrument through which metaphysical realities are encoded, concealed, and revealed. The study demonstrates that the transformation of talismanry from operative astral technique to philosophically articulated mediation represents a significant internal reconfiguration within medieval Islamic intellectual history, one that makes clear how symbolic form, participatory knowing, and ethical discipline cohere as a philosophy of mediation. The contribution is thus not only historical but systematic: it recovers talismanry as an internal philosophy of mediation, an account of how form acts in matter, how intellection proceeds by symbols, and why moral purification conditions efficacy.

## Overview of Sources and Interpretative Literature

This dissertation engages both traditionalist and critical approaches to reconstruct the conceptual evolution of talismanic science as an integrated philosophical and spiritual discourse. Although talismanic sciences have been examined from cosmological, philological, and historical perspectives, the talisman has not yet received sustained treatment as a systematic philosophical category within Islamic metaphysical discourse. Studies on Islamic arts, *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, Islamic astrology, and Sufi metaphysics often touch on talismanic themes without fully reconstructing their conceptual architecture. This dissertation therefore addresses a significant lacuna by offering a systematic philosophical analysis of talismanry as a category internal to Islamic metaphysics. In doing so, it moves beyond descriptive accounts of talismanic practice towards a reconstruction of the conceptual structures that render such practices philosophically intelligible across specific Islamicate intellectual traditions.

The primary body of sources analysed in this dissertation consists of six classical works that articulate talismanic philosophy across distinct metaphysical and cosmological systems: al-Qurṭubī’s *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (interpreted through the studies of Ch. Burnett, L. Saif, David Pingree, and Dan Attrell / David Porreca); Suhrawardī’s *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (with interpretative guidance from John Walbridge, Hossein Ziai, Mehdi Aminrazavi, and H. Corbin); al-Būnī’s *Shams al-ma‘ārif* and *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt* (examined in particular by N. Gardiner,

L. Saif, and J.-C. Coulon); and the corpus of Ibn ‘Arabī, with emphasis on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and the *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (contextualised by W. Chittick, Michel Chodkiewicz, and H. Corbin).<sup>17</sup>

These texts were selected because they represent the most systematic and conceptually developed articulations of talismanry in the Islamic intellectual tradition, each embodying a distinctive paradigm of thought. Al-Qurṭubī’s *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (*The Goal of the Sage*) offers a philosophical synthesis of Hermetic science, astrology, and Islamic metaphysics. Suhrawardī’s *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (*The Philosophy of Illumination*) positions the talisman as a metaphor for illumination and ontological ascent. Al-Būnī’s *Shams al-ma‘ārif* (*The Sun of Knowledge*) and *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt* (*The Subtleties of the Allusions Regarding the Superior Letters*) present a rigorous esoteric system grounded in letter mysticism, numerical symbolism, and theurgical activation. Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*) and *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) integrate talismanic logic into a metaphysics of divine names, imaginal symbolism, and spiritual transformation. Collectively, these works constitute the conceptual backbone of the present study.

The study of these works is complicated by the diversity of manuscript traditions, the uneven state of textual transmission, and the complex history of translations and editions. For al-Qurṭubī, I have relied primarily on Hellmut Ritter’s critical Arabic edition of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, a foundational reference in the field, supplemented by H. Ritter’s and Martin Plessner’s German translation, D. Pingree’s Latin edition, and the more recent English translation by D. Attrell and D. Porreca.<sup>18</sup> This combination reflects both philological rigour and the text’s wide reception across scholarly traditions. English citations are taken from the bilingual edition where appropriate. Suhrawardī’s *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* was studied through the edition and bilingual text of

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<sup>17</sup> The full bibliography of interpretative works by Ch. Burnett, L. Saif, D. Pingree, D. Attrell & D. Porreca, J. Walbridge, H. Ziai, M. Aminrazavi, H. Corbin, N. Gardiner, J.-C. Coulon, W. C. Chittick, and M. Chodkiewicz is presented and discussed in detail later in this section on Sources and Interpretative Literature.

<sup>18</sup> Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, ed. by Hellmut Ritter (Glückstadt and Hamburg: Maṭba‘at Augustin, 1927); Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix: Das Ziel des Weisen von Pseudo-Majrīṭī*, ed. by Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner (London: Warburg Institute, 1962); Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*, ed. by David Pingree (London: Warburg Institute, 1986); Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix: A Medieval Treatise on Astral Magic*, English transl. and intro. by Dan Attrell and David Porreca (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

J. Walbridge and H. Ziai, which enables simultaneous engagement with the original terminology and a robust interpretative apparatus.<sup>19</sup>

For al-Būnī, whose *Shams al-ma'ārif* survives in multiple and often contested versions, the principal source used in this study is the Paris manuscript (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 2647)<sup>20</sup>, treated here as a representative witness of the broader *Shams al-ma'ārif* manuscript tradition and supplemented by secondary scholarship to account for textual instability. In this dissertation, the term *Shams al-ma'ārif* refers not to a single stable authorial work but to the wider Būnian corpus associated with al-Būnī and his later tradition, whose textual history is complex and frequently pseudepigraphic. Recent scholarship has shown that works circulating under titles such as *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif* (*The Sun of Knowledge and the Secrets of Gnosis*) form part of this evolving manuscript tradition and served as the basis for later compilations, including the well-known *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* (*The Great Sun of Knowledge*). In addition, al-Būnī's *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* is treated as a key witness for his views on talismans and *awfāq*. Citations are based primarily on BnF MS Arabe 2658, with selective reliance on L. Saif's and N. Gardiner's published quotations and translations from the Paris manuscript.<sup>21</sup>

For Ibn 'Arabī this study draws on the authoritative modern Yemeni edition of the *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* and on M. Chodkiewicz's curated English translations of selected passages,<sup>22</sup> alongside the widely used edition of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* prepared by Abū al-'Alā' 'Affī (Abul Ela Affī),<sup>23</sup> supplemented where appropriate by Ralph Austin's English translation.<sup>24</sup>

Methodologically, the study engages the Arabic originals whenever possible but cites from bilingual translations in English where these have become authoritative

<sup>19</sup> Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination (Ḥikmat al-ishrāq)*, ed. and transl. by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Pseudo-al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Arabe 2647).

<sup>21</sup> Al-Būnī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-'ulwiyyāt* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Arabe 2658).

<sup>22</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations: Selected Texts of al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. by Michel Chodkiewicz, vol. I in collaboration with William C. Chittick and James W. Morris; vol. II in collaboration with Cyrille Chodkiewicz and Denis Gril (New York: Pir Press, 2002–2004); Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, ed. by 'Abd al-'Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb, 12 vols. (Ṣan'ā': Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. by Abū al-'Alā' 'Affī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1946).

<sup>24</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, transl. and intro. by Ralph W. J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

reference points in contemporary scholarship. This approach ensures accuracy while situating the analysis within the shared interpretative frameworks of the field. In this way, the primary sources are treated not only as historical texts but also as nodes in an ongoing history of transmission and reception, central to the conceptual reconstruction of Islamic talismanry.

Concerning Islamicate sources beyond the four primary authors, this study notes the well-known complexities of Arabic–Persian manuscript transmission: multiple recensions, variant lemmata and rubrics, uneven copy quality, and unstable paratexts.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of scholarly prudence, and rather than exhaustive stemmatic reconstruction, critical editions are preferred where available; otherwise, widely used scholarly prints are cited and, when feasible, checked against accessible manuscript witnesses. Published translations are consulted heuristically, but interpretation remains anchored in the Arabic texts. Accordingly, any minor discrepancies are bibliographic in nature (folio / page numeration, section headings) rather than interpretative.

Alongside these primary sources, the dissertation engages extensively with interpretative literature spanning both traditionalist readings and historicist, philological, and intellectual-historical scholarship. From the traditionalist side, S. H. Nasr,<sup>26</sup> W. Chittick,<sup>27</sup> H. Corbin,<sup>28</sup> and Algis Uždavinys<sup>29</sup> provide

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<sup>25</sup> For scale, consider Ibn Taymiyya's *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, which exists in at least eight competing multi-volume recensions with differing pagination and internal divisions (see the consolidated listing in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. by Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), bibliographical appendix). Even so, it is not among the most complex cases in the Arabic–Persian manuscript sphere, where greater variance in textual strata and paratexts is common.

<sup>26</sup> Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Henry Corbin, *L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Paris: Flammarion, 1958); Corbin, *En Islam iranien*; Henry Corbin, *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste: De l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shī'ite* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1979).

<sup>29</sup> Algis Uždavinys, *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Platonic and Pythagorean Philosophy*

the metaphysical-hermeneutic framework, essential for interpreting talismans as ontological symbols and instruments of divine participation. Their work on symbolic cosmology, the imaginal realm (*'ālam al-mithāl*), and the theomorphic anthropology of Sufism has decisively shaped the conceptual orientation of this dissertation. At the same time, these interpretations tend to approach talismanic symbolism primarily through the lens of perennial metaphysical structures rather than through detailed historical analysis of particular textual traditions. The present study therefore adopts a complementary perspective: while drawing on their insights into symbolic cosmology, it examines how talismanic reasoning functions within specific philosophical and textual contexts in medieval Islamic thought.

In this context, A. Uždavyns holds particular importance: internationally recognised for his studies on Pythagoreanism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and, to some extent, Sufism, he remains the only Lithuanian scholar to have addressed themes directly pertinent to the present inquiry. Through his analyses of theurgy, symbolic imagination, and the transcendent dimensions of religious traditions, his oeuvre indirectly engages the philosophical problematic of talismanry, thereby situating Lithuanian scholarship within broader international debates on esotericism. It is also worth noting Linas Kondratas, whose few but incisive studies of Islamic esotericism exhibit notable methodological rigour and conceptual clarity.

At the same time, research on Islam and esotericism in Lithuania remains very limited. Egdūnas Račius has introduced aspects of Islam to Lithuanian audiences, though primarily through sociological and contemporary perspectives, while Antanas Andrijauskas and Dalia Marija Stančienė have occasionally addressed Islamic philosophy within broader treatments of aesthetics and medieval scholasticism. In the field of Greek thought, Naglis Kardelis, Tatjana Aleknienė, and Rasius Makselis have engaged with Platonic and late antique traditions, including studies that intersect with esoteric themes. While academic work on esotericism more generally is slowly expanding, the specific study of Islamic intellectual and esoteric traditions

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(Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004); Algis Uždavyns, *Simbolių ir atvaizdų interpretacijos problema senovės civilizacijose* [*The Problem of the Interpretation of Symbols and Images in Ancient Civilisations*] (Vilnius: Sophia, 2006); Algis Uždavyns, *Philosophy as a Rite of Re-birth: From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism* (Dilton Marsh: The Prometheus Trust, 2008); Algis Uždavyns, *Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2010); Algis Uždavyns, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism* (Dilton Marsh: The Prometheus Trust, 2011); Algis Uždavyns, *Sufism and Ancient Wisdom* (London: Archetype / The Matheson Trust, 2020); Algis Uždavyns, *Hermes Trismegistus: The Way of Wisdom* (London: The Matheson Trust, 2025).

in Lithuania is still in its infancy. The lack of sustained research underscores both the challenges and the opportunities for further development in the field.

Against this backdrop of limited local engagement, the dissertation situates itself within and draws primarily upon the broader corpus of recent international scholarship, where historicist, philological, and intellectual-historical studies have been particularly decisive. At the forefront stand Ch. Burnett, L. Saif, N. Gardiner, and M. Melvin-Koushki, whose works constitute the essential scholarly foundation of this dissertation. Ch. Burnett's studies of Hermetic transmission, especially his analyses of the Arabic and Latin Hermetica and his philological elucidation of occult vocabularies, provide indispensable tools for understanding both the wider cultural reception of talismanic science and the semantic precision of its technical terminology.<sup>30</sup> L. Saif's analyses of Islamic occult sciences and her reconstruction of the transregional transfer of Hermetic, Hellenistic, and Persian sciences into Islamic thought have redefined the field on a conceptual level.<sup>31</sup> N. Gardiner's material-semiotic approach has clarified how talismans functioned simultaneously as textual, cosmological, and ritual mediators.<sup>32</sup> M. Melvin-Koushki, for his part, has demonstrated how talismans operate as "cosmopolitical technologies" within

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<sup>30</sup> Burnett, "Arabic Practical Magic"; Charles Burnett, "The Three Divisions of Arabic Magic," in Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, Liana Saif, and Farouk Yahya, eds., *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 43–56; Charles Burnett, "The Pseudo-Aristotelian and Pseudo-Apollonian Hermetica in Arabic and Latin," handout, 27 March 2024.

<sup>31</sup> Liana Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* (Basingstoke / New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Venetia Porter, Liana Saif, and Emilie Savage-Smith, "Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans, and Magic," in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. by Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 521–557; Liana Saif, "From *Ġāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma'ārif*: Ways of Knowing and Paths of Power in Medieval Islam," *Arabica* 64 (3–4) (2017), 297–345; Leoni, Melvin-Koushki, Saif, and Yahya, *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*.

<sup>32</sup> Noah Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production, Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Aḥmad al-Būnī," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012), 81–143; Noah Gardiner, *Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture: Aḥmad al-Būnī and His Readers Through the Mamlūk Period*, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2014; Noah Gardiner, "Stars and Saints: The Esotericist Astrology of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 12 (1) (2017), 39–65; Noah Gardiner, "The Occultist Encyclopedism of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 20 (2017), 3–38; Noah Gardiner, "Diagrams and Visionary Experience in al-Būnī's (d. 622 / 1225) *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt fī al-hurūf al-'ulwiyyāt*," in *Visualizing Sufism: Studies on Graphic Representations in Sufi Literature (13th to 16th Century)*, ed. by Giovanni Maria Martini (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 16–50.

Neoplatonic-Islamic paradigms, embedding them within intellectual and political histories alike.<sup>33</sup>

Collectively, these scholars have demonstrated the intellectual coherence and conceptual sophistication of talismanic sciences in medieval Islamic thought. However, their studies primarily address the historical transmission, textual traditions, and cultural functions of these sciences, rather than reconstruct talismanry as a systematic philosophical category in Islamicate metaphysics. The present dissertation builds on their philological and historical foundations while pursuing a different objective: the conceptual reconstruction of talismanry as a form of metaphysical reasoning within specific philosophical traditions.

M. Sedgwick's<sup>34</sup> and S. Sorgenfrei's<sup>35</sup> broader studies on the conceptualisation of Islamic esotericism have further contributed to situating talismanic science in a wider historiographical and theoretical landscape, clarifying its place in the genealogy of esoteric traditions. M. Sedgwick's work, in particular, has emphasised the methodological necessity of distinguishing historical analysis from normative or traditionalist interpretations of esotericism; this approach informs the critical orientation of the present study. Further contributions by F. Leoni,<sup>36</sup> E. Savage-

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Introduction: De-orienting the Study of Islamicate Occultism," *Arabica* 64 (3–4), ed. by Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Noah Gardiner, 287–295; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 5 (1) (2017), 127–199; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Imperial Talismanic Love: Ibn Turka's *Debate of Feast and Fight* (1426) as Philosophical Romance and Lettrist Mirror for Timurid Princes," *Der Islam* 96 (1) (2019), 42–86; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "World as (Arabic) Text: Mīr Dāmād and the Neopythagoreanization of Philosophy in Safavid Iran," *Studia Islamica* 114 (3) (2019), 378–431; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Toward a Neopythagorean Historiography: Kemālpaṣāzāde's (d. 1534) Lettrist Call for the Conquest of Cairo and the Development of Ottoman Occult-Scientific Imperialism," in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, Liana Saif, and Farouk Yahya (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 380–419.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Mark Sedgwick, "Islamic and Western Esotericism," *Correspondences* 7 (1) (2019), 277–299.

<sup>35</sup> Simon Sorgenfrei, "Hidden or Forbidden, Elected or Rejected: Sufism as 'Islamic Esotericism'?" *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 29 (2) (2018), 145–165.

<sup>36</sup> Francesca Leoni, *Power and Protection: Islamic Art and the Supernatural* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum / Yale University Press, 2016); Francesca Leoni, "Seeing the Unseen: The Role of the Visual in Islamic Talismanic Practice," *Journal of Material Culture* 20 (2) (2015), 189–209.

Smith,<sup>37</sup> and J.-C. Coulon<sup>38</sup> refine the picture by demonstrating the textual, ritual, and symbolic sophistication of talismanic practices across different regions and schools of thought. These studies have helped to frame this dissertation's methodological orientation, positioning talismanry at the intersection of cosmology, semiotics, and esoteric epistemology.

The cryptographic and ritual functions of talismans are examined through the works of Pierre Lory<sup>39</sup> and Constant Hamès,<sup>40</sup> who conceptualise the *ṭilasm* as a theurgical and semiotic device. P. Lory provides fundamental insights into the symbolic and operative dimensions of alchemical and letter-based practices, while C. Hamès explores the Qur'ānic and ritual embedding of talismanic practices in Muslim societies. Their perspectives on divine causality, linguistic symbolism, and operative intentionality are essential to this study's interpretation of Islamic *'ilm al-ḥurūf* and symbolic causation. At the same time, their analyses focus primarily on ritual practice and symbolic language, whereas the present dissertation seeks to clarify the philosophical structures that make such practices conceptually coherent in Islamicate metaphysical thought.

While A. Schimmel, W. Chittick, and M. Aminrazavi do not focus directly on talismanry, their works are indispensable for situating talismanic practice in the broader metaphysical systems of Sufism. A. Schimmel's studies of Islamic mysticism illuminate the symbolic imagination, numerological structures, and semiotic hermeneutics of Sufi thought,<sup>41</sup> while W. Chittick's detailed readings of Ibn

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<sup>37</sup> Emilie Savage-Smith, ed., *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Emilie Savage-Smith, "Science, Magic and the Occult in the Western Islamic World," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 634–654.

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Charles Coulon, *La magie islamique et le corpus bunianum au Moyen Âge*, PhD dissertation, Université de Paris IV Sorbonne, 2013; Jean-Charles Coulon, "Les sciences occultes dans l'Islam médiéval: entre savoirs légitimes et savoirs réprouvés," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 133 (2013), 75–95; Jean-Charles Coulon, *La magie en terre d'Islam au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2018); Jean-Charles Coulon, "Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Bunianum," in *Amulets and Talismans of the Middle East and North Africa in Context: Transmission, Efficacy and Collections* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> Pierre Lory, *Alchimie et mystique en terre d'Islam* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1989); Pierre Lory, *La science des lettres en Islam* (Paris: Dervy, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Constant Hamès, ed., *Coran et talismans: Textes et pratiques magiques en milieu musulman* (Paris: Karthala, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach*

‘Arabī clarify how the imaginal realm functions as the operative medium between divine realities and human intentionality.<sup>42</sup> M. Aminrazavi’s analysis of Suhrawardī highlights how Illuminationist metaphysics intertwines anthropology and cosmology in ways that conceptually anticipate the interiorisation of talismanic mediation.<sup>43</sup> Taken together, these contributions frame talismanry not as an isolated practice but as part of an integrated symbolic and cosmological system within Islamic esotericism. Building on these insights, the present study examines how such symbolic and metaphysical structures are articulated in specific talismanic discourses rather than treating them solely as general features of Sufi cosmology.

Finally, my own participation in international scholarly networks has helped refine the scope and positioning of this research. Through discussions with scholars such as Ch. Burnett, M. Sedgwick, L. Saif, and A. de Diego González at conferences of ENSIE (The European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism) and ESSWE (The European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism), as well as through ongoing scholarly exchange, it became increasingly apparent that the philosophical concept of the talisman has not yet received sustained systematic treatment. These exchanges have contributed to sharpening the research problem and clarifying the critical orientation of this dissertation. I am sincerely grateful to all the colleagues whose thought-provoking discussions, guidance, and critique have helped this dissertation reach its fruition. I also thank Ingrida Tatolytė for her meticulous copy-editing of the manuscript; any remaining errors are my own.

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*to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*; Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*.

<sup>43</sup> Mehdi Aminrazavi, *Suhrawardī and the School of Illumination* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997).

# 1. THE INTELLECTUAL GENEALOGY OF ISLAMIC TALISMANRY

## 1.1. Hermetic, Neopythagorean, and Neoplatonic Foundations: Cosmology and Correspondence in Early Magical Thought

### 1.1.1. The Idrisian Legacy: Hermetic Thought as the Foundation of Islamic Esotericism

The assimilation of Hermetic doctrines into Islamic philosophical and esoteric discourses reflects a significant phase in the intellectual cross-pollination between late antique metaphysics and Islamic cosmology. While the Hermetic corpus, particularly the *Corpus Hermeticum*, has been widely recognised for its influence on Renaissance esotericism and Christian Kabbalah,<sup>44</sup> contemporary scholarship also emphasizes its importance for specific Islamicate intellectual milieux and genres. Through doctrines of divine emanation, ontological unity, and the correspondence between celestial and terrestrial orders, Hermetic cosmology provided a conceptual substratum for Islamic metaphysical systems.<sup>45</sup> This study aligns with that interpretative trajectory by situating talismanic thought within a lineage that integrates Hermetic symbolic epistemology with Sufi metaphysical realism.

The epistemological convergence between Hermetic cosmology and Islamic esotericism is exemplified in the Islamic reception of Hermes as a prophetic figure identified with the Qur'ānic Idrīs. This identification functioned, in some contexts, as a legitimating frame for the integration of Hermetic wisdom into esoteric disciplines such as talismanry and astral science. Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, and other esotericists drew upon Hermetic principles to formulate a vision of the cosmos as a symbolic and participatory reality, wherein divine wisdom permeates all levels of existence. This ontological vision provided one metaphysical framing for talismanic practices, which aimed to channel cosmic intelligences into material configurations through symbolic operations.

However, as Ch. Burnett has shown, the transmission of Hermetic knowledge into the Islamic world did not rely solely on the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a set of Greek

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<sup>44</sup> John Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (Detroit: Gale Research, 2001), 721–722.

<sup>45</sup> See Lory, *Alchimie et mystique en terre d'Islam*; Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*; Uždavinys, *Hermes Trismegistus*.

philosophical dialogues traditionally attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, but involved a broader and more differentiated Hermetic literature. Ch. Burnett distinguishes between the *Corpus Hermeticum* and what he terms “spiritual Hermeticism” in Arabic culture: “Distinct tradition in Arabic thought, which passes into Latin and Hebrew (and thence the vernacular languages) which one might call ‘spiritual Hermeticism.’ It is called Hermetic because it purports to transmit the wisdom of Hermes (not Hermes Trismegistus or the Egyptian Hermes, but only ‘Hermes’), and one may add the adjective ‘spiritual’ because, at the heart of this knowledge is the spirit (*rūḥ* in Arabic, *spiritus* in Latin), and spiritual forces (*rūḥāniyyāt* or *spiritualia*). The writings that convey this knowledge are a corpus of texts called the Pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica.”<sup>46</sup> These Arabic Hermetica were not simply translations of Greek originals but underwent substantial transformation within the intellectual climate of the Abbasid court. The reimagining of Hermes as Idrīs positioned him as a bearer of primordial wisdom, aligning Hermetic teachings with Islamic metaphysical doctrines. This adaptation enabled Hermetic cosmology to function not as a simple importation, but as a reconfigured framework within which Islamic esotericism could develop.<sup>47</sup>

In this context, Hermetic cosmology did not serve as a foreign overlay but was restructured within Islamic metaphysical and symbolic taxonomies, informing both philosophical conceptions of divine causality and the operative frameworks of Islamic talismanry. The transmutation of Hermetic correspondences into talismanic modalities illustrates the integration of pre-Islamic metaphysics into Islamic models of the cosmos as a hierarchically ordered and symbolically saturated system; an integration that would later culminate in the elaboration of *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, astral theurgy, and Sufi ontological symbolism. The Hermetic tradition, through its Arabic adaptations, provided important epistemological resources for Islamic occult sciences by linking philosophy, cosmology, and operative magic within a coherent metaphysical framework. This synthesis made possible forms of talismanic reasoning that were simultaneously scientific, philosophical, and symbolic.

The transmission of Hermetic doctrines into the Islamicate philosophical corpus occurred through several channels and genres, facilitated by the Abbasid

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<sup>46</sup> Burnett, “Arabic Practical Magic.”

<sup>47</sup> Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kevin van Bladel, “Hermes and Hermetica,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, ed. by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Devin J. Stewart (Leiden: Brill), 182–186.

translation movement and intensified through sustained engagement with Hellenistic philosophical currents.

A significant conduit for the transmission of Hermetic, Neoplatonic, and Chaldean doctrines into early Islamic cosmological and philosophical frameworks was the Harranian Sabians, a religious and philosophical community situated in northern Mesopotamia. Often self-identifying as heirs of the Chaldean and Hermetic sciences, they functioned as intermediaries between late antique cosmological thought and the emerging Arabic philosophical synthesis under the Abbasids. Drawing on the Hermetic image of Hermes Trismegistus, identified in Islamic tradition with the prophet Idrīs, Harranian authors and practitioners contributed a conceptual and ritual substrate that informed later Islamic theories of talismanry and astral metaphysics.

Although the notion of a “Neoplatonic Academy of Harran,” famously defended by Michel Tardieu and Ilsetraut Hadot,<sup>48</sup> has been widely challenged, particularly by Kevin van Bladel, their work nonetheless illustrates how the Harranians were perceived in later historiography: as intellectual custodians who preserved and transmitted ancient wisdom, especially in astrology, mathematics, and theurgy. D. Pingree<sup>49</sup> further elucidates this transmission, highlighting how the Harranian Sabians used Neoplatonic concepts to justify their practices of astral magic and maintained Greek astronomical and astrological studies during periods of decline in Byzantine intellectual life.

It is also often argued that the Sabians contributed significantly to the translation and conceptual adaptation of Hellenistic metaphysics,<sup>50</sup> particularly via figures such as Tābit ibn Qurra (*Abū al-Ḥasan Tābit ibn Qurra ibn Zahrūn al-Ḥarrānī al-Ṣābi*’, c. 830–901), who is generally thought to have translated the *Nawāmīs Hirmis wa-s-suwar wa-ṣ-ṣalawāt allatī yuṣallī bihā ṣ-Ṣābi ’ūn* (*The Laws of Hermes and the Verses and Prayers that the Sabians Use in Prayer*), attributed to Hermes.<sup>51</sup> This portrayal aligns with their strategic self-identification as *Ṣābi ’ūn* (a Qur’ānic category),

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<sup>48</sup> Ilsetraut Hadot, “The Life and Work of Simplicius in Greek and Arabic Sources,” in *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, ed. by Richard Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1990), 275–304; Michel Tardieu, *Les paysages reliques: Routes et haltes syriennes d’Isidore à Simplicius* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990).

<sup>49</sup> David Pingree, “The Ṣābiyans of Ḥarrān and the Classical Tradition,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9 (1) (2002), 8–35.

<sup>50</sup> van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*; Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society* (London: Routledge, 1998); Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. V (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

<sup>51</sup> van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 92–94.

thereby securing legal and cultural legitimacy within the Islamic framework while continuing to practice a form of Hermetic-naturalist religiosity centred on celestial intelligences and ritual cosmology.

Rather than merely translating Greek texts, the Harranian Sabians reframed Hermetic and Neoplatonic teachings through their religious lens, embedding these doctrines within an astral metaphysics that deeply resonated with emerging Islamic esoteric cosmologies. As A. Uždavinys emphasises, their legacy may be seen as a form of Hermeticism within the Islamic milieu, informed by Neopythagorean number symbolism, Hermetic ritual, and astrological practices.<sup>52</sup> Their contribution, therefore, was not only philological but conceptual: they helped infuse late antique symbolic and causal worldviews into the emerging Islamic intellectual tradition, creating fertile ground for the later elaboration of talismanic sciences, astral theurgy, and ultimately *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*.

In parallel to these Sabian contributions, a broader wave of Hermetic incorporation was catalysed during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH (8th–9th centuries CE), when Greek and Syriac texts attributed to Hermes Trismegistus were rendered into Arabic and absorbed into the emerging frameworks of Islamic metaphysics and occult sciences. As Abul Ela Affifi explains, Hermetic doctrines were introduced to the *Moslem* world during the second and third centuries of the Hijra (8th and 9th centuries AD) primarily through translations of Greek and Syriac works into Arabic. These works, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, emphasised themes of divine emanation, the unity of existence, and the correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Such themes resonated deeply with early Islamic philosophers, particularly those engaged in the study of metaphysics and the occult sciences.<sup>53</sup>

Ch. Burnett further points out that the incorporation of Hermetic texts into Arabic culture occurred primarily through Syriac intermediaries and in the translation milieu of 9<sup>th</sup>-century Baghdad. Thus, the translation activity involved Syriac-speaking Christians who had already absorbed the Hermetic material and passed it into Arabic via philosophical and medical contexts. This process was crucial for embedding Hermetic cosmology within emerging Islamic occult sciences.

The thematic convergence between Hermeticism and Islamic cosmology was not merely doctrinal but operative, particularly within the talismanic and theurgical dimensions of esoteric practice. The Hermetic texts, especially the Emerald Tablet

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<sup>52</sup> Uždavinys, *Hermes Trismegistus*.

<sup>53</sup> Abul Ela Affifi, “The Influence of Hermetic Literature on Moslem Thought,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 13 (4) (1951), 840–855.

(*al-Lawḥ al-Zumurrudī*), had a profound impact on the Islamic sciences of alchemy and astrology. These sciences were more than practical disciplines; they were deeply rooted in the philosophical notion of a universal harmony that could be accessed and directed through theurgy and talismanry. The creation of talismans was thus conceived as an act of bridging the celestial and terrestrial realms, reflecting a hierarchy of being that could be articulated in broadly emanationist terms.

Beyond its role in natural philosophy, Hermetic paradigms were appropriated into Islamic metaphysical discourse at its highest conceptual levels. Emanationist and monistic themes within Hermetic cosmology found resonance in the elaboration of Islamic philosophical theology (*kalām falsafī*) and mystical cosmology. Ibn Sīnā's conception of the Necessary Existence (*wājib al-wujūd*) and his articulation of the divine attributes, as discussed by Olga Lizzini,<sup>54</sup> reflect structural affinities with Hermetic-Neoplatonic metaphysical structures. This is particularly evident in the use of hierarchical ontologies and the role of the intellect as a mediating ontological principle.

Similarly, Sufi metaphysics, particularly in its epistemological emphasis on experiential gnosis (*ma'rifa*), internal illumination, and the ascent of the soul, sometimes mobilises Hermetic tropes. The esoteric path as a gradual return to the divine source, marked by visionary knowledge and symbolic ascent, parallels the Hermetic schema of cosmological reintegration. As W. Chittick suggests in comparative terms, the Hermetic emphasis on inner illumination and spiritual ascent is homologous with the Sufi paradigm of divine knowledge and the soul's journey towards unification with the Absolute.<sup>55</sup>

### 1.1.2. Neopythagoreanism and the Concept of the Philosopher-Magus in Islamic Mysticism

The reception of Neopythagorean metaphysics within Islamic intellectual history reflects not a passive inheritance but a strategic reconfiguration of mathematical cosmology and symbolic ontology for esoteric purposes. Central to Neopythagorean doctrine is the metaphysical equivalence between number and being; an equivalence that proved foundational for Islamic talismanic and theurgical sciences, where numerical structures were conceived as symbolic condensations of cosmic reality.

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<sup>54</sup> Olga Lizzini, "Wuḡūd-Mawḡūd / Existence–Existent in Avicenna. A Key Ontological Notion of Arabic Philosophy," *Quaestio* 3 (2003), 111–138.

<sup>55</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*.

This philosophical current was instrumental in articulating an Islamic metaphysics in which the structure of reality could be read, interpreted, and influenced through symbolic manipulation, thus laying the groundwork for the epistemic and operative legitimacy of talismanic mediation.

The deliberate Neopythagoreanisation of Islamic occult philosophy reached an advanced articulation in Safavid Iran, where the synthesis of numerical, philosophical, and ritual knowledge redefined the ontological role of the philosopher within esoteric epistemology the Neopythagoreanisation of philosophy in Safavid Iran involved a conscious integration of mathematical and occult sciences, “mathematisation of the cosmos,” positioning the philosopher as a magus who employs talismanic knowledge to manipulate the material and spiritual worlds.<sup>56</sup> In the most comprehensive and methodologically relevant recent scholarship, the topic has been most extensively and insightfully examined by M. Melvin-Koushki, whose work constitutes the deepest exploration of the Neoplatonic and Pythagorean substratum within Islamic esotericism to date. The following passages therefore engage closely with his arguments concerning the Neopythagorean foundations of Islamic occult philosophy and their enduring influence on talismanic and cosmological thought.<sup>57</sup>

Beyond its Safavid elaboration, this paradigm of the philosopher as magus permeated broader currents in the Islamicate world, where the image of the *ḥakīm* as philosopher, theurgist, and occultist was deeply intertwined with Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean metaphysics: “For the tenor of Safavid philosophy is strongly *Neoplatonic* in most respects, as is widely recognized; less recognized is the fact that, in practical and indeed political terms, this often entailed an embrace of the Neoplatonic notion of sage (*ḥakīm*) as *occultist architect of the world*, theurgic invoker of the celestial and the divine through practices expressly magical in order to understand—and shape—reality. That is to say, an investment in the occult sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-gharība*) was not only considered unproblematic by the majority of Safavid scholarly elites, but in fact indispensable to the practice of Neoplatonic philosophy.”<sup>58</sup> This ontological elevation of the philosopher as a magus who mediates between realms directly correlates with talismanic practices that operationalise

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<sup>56</sup> Although this Safavid crystallisation lies outside the dissertation’s 10th–13th-century focus, it is cited here as a later comparative horizon that more explicitly articulates patterns that can also be observed in earlier Islamicate materials.

<sup>57</sup> Melvin-Koushki, “World as (Arabic) Text”; Melvin-Koushki, “Imperial Talismanic Love”; Melvin-Koushki “Powers of One.”

<sup>58</sup> Melvin-Koushki, “World as (Arabic) Text,” 381.

the symbolic correspondences between cosmological strata. M. Melvin-Koushki continues with the further impact: “The thoroughly Neoplatonic (*aflāṭūnī*) character of Safavid-era philosophy is widely acknowledged; less acknowledged is its equally strong Neopythagorean (*fīthāghūrī*) tenor. And almost universally ignored is the fact that this Neoplatonic-Neopythagorean outlook typically entailed an investment in various mathematicalized occult sciences, especially lettrism (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*), geomancy (*‘ilm al-raml*), astrology (*‘ilm al-nujūm*) and alchemy (*‘ilm al-kīmiyā*). Yet Safavid philosophical anthologies routinely included occultist texts alongside the classics of Neopythagoreanizing Neoplatonism, and the founding members of the so-called School of Isfahan, including Mīr Dāmād (d. 1630), Shaykh Bahā’ī (d. 1621) and Mīr Findiriskī (d. 1640), are represented in some sources as powerful practicing occultists in service to the Shi’izing Safavid state.”<sup>59</sup>

A growing body of contemporary scholarship, including the works of L. Saif, Ch. Burnett, E. Savage-Smith, and others, has emphasised the foundational role of mathematical mysticism and number symbolism in the development of Islamic talismanic theory. Rooted in Neopythagorean and Hermetic traditions, this intellectual framework construed numbers not merely as quantitative tools, but as qualitative carriers of metaphysical significance. The symbolic correspondences between numbers, letters, celestial bodies, and spiritual entities formed an intricate semiotic system that structured talismanic efficacy. This is particularly evident in Arabic treatises on *wafq* (magic squares), *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, and planetary configurations, where talismanic design emerges as a product of numerically encoded cosmological harmonies. These systems were conceptually central to the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of particular Islamicate esoteric discourses, shaping a vision of reality in which numerical-symbolic structures mediated divine influence.

This configuration was consolidated in foundational Islamic esoteric traditions. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ emphasised the symbolic-mathematical structure of the cosmos, embedding Neopythagorean harmonics into their cosmological and ethical treatises. Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist metaphysics developed this into a luminous ontology of graded reality, wherein numerical and luminous structures can function within a theurgic register. Likewise, later Safavid thinkers continued this tradition, aligning cosmological numerology with the construction of talismans as metaphysical instruments. These traditions did not merely reflect Neopythagorean influence, but

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Mīr Dāmād and the Neopythagoreanisation of Philosophy in Safavid Iran,” paper presented at the First Annual Shi’ah Institute Symposium, Warburg Institute, London, 2–4 September 2015, <https://www.academia.edu/13915213/>.

rather operationalised it, using its symbolic logic to articulate a theurgy rooted in divine names, astral hierarchies, and metaphysical causality.

In this context, the figure of the philosopher-magus emerges not as a syncretic anachronism but as a historically situated category in certain Islamic esoteric discourses, where knowledge (*ilm*) and power (*qudra*) converge in the talismanic manipulation of divine signs. Through Neopythagorean structures, Islamic thinkers articulated a model of epistemological agency that wedded speculative philosophy to symbolic action, redefining talismanry as an extension of metaphysical cognition.

### 1.1.3. Neoplatonic Cosmology and the Role of Symbols

The Neoplatonic cosmological system, particularly as articulated by Plotinus, Proclus, and Iamblichus, establishes a metaphysical framework in which the cosmos is understood as a hierarchically ordered series of emanations descending from the ineffable One. At the apex of this ontological chain stands the One (or the Good), followed by the Nous (Intellect), then the World Soul, and finally the material cosmos. Each successive hypostasis represents a decrease in ontological proximity to the divine source. This model of graded reality, where each level reflects its antecedent in a symbolic and participatory mode, provides an important late-antique background for subsequent theurgical accounts of symbolic efficacy, including those rearticulated in Islamicate talismanic discourses. That this cosmological schema forms the foundation of later esoteric metaphysics, including Islamic theories of causality, is a well-established theme in the scholarship (e.g., Arthur Hilary Armstrong, Pierre Hadot, John Dillon, Gregory Shaw, among many others),<sup>60</sup> though its modalities and degrees of uptake vary by context and genre.

Proclus, following his “ingenious predecessor” Iamblichus, extends this hierarchical model into a rigorous metaphysical architecture: “Again and again in the *Elements* Proclus justifies his multiplication of entities, like Iamblichus in the same circumstances, by reference to the ‘law of mean terms,’ viz. that two doubly disjunct terms AB and not-A not-B cannot be continuous, but must be linked by an

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<sup>60</sup> See Plotinus, *Enneads*, transl. by Arthur Hilary Armstrong, 7 vols. (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966–1988); Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, 6 vols., ed. by Henri Dominique Saffrey and Leendert Gerrit Westerink (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968–1997); Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), Collection “Folio Essais,” no. 302; John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

intermediate term, either A not-B or B not-A, which forms a ‘triad’ with them. Not less frequently does he save the unity of his system or reconcile conflicting traditions with the help of the principle—perhaps Neopythagorean, but first systematically applied, so far as we know, by Iamblichus—that ‘all things are in all things, but in each according to its proper nature.’”<sup>61</sup> This principle affirms the presence of higher realities within the lower, grounding the Neoplatonic doctrine of universal sympathy and facilitating the symbolic operation of talismans as conduits for divine presence. Symbols, in this framework, are not linguistic signs but ontological vehicles that mediate real causal links between levels of being. As Sara Rappe strongly claims in her chapter “History of an Enigma: Mathematical Symbolism in the Neoplatonic Tradition”: “The language of Neoplatonism is the language of symbols.”<sup>62</sup> For Neoplatonists, symbols are embedded within a metaphysical reality that they do not simply refer to but participate in. S. Rappe underscores that for thinkers like Plotinus and Proclus, symbolic discourse is non-discursive in nature: it engages modes of understanding and transformation that transcend propositional reasoning, enabling the soul’s reversion to higher ontological levels. In her analysis of conjuration and the *telestic* (statue-animation) rites in the *Chaldean Oracles*, a *locus classicus* for late-antique theurgy, Ruth Majercik emphasises that this participatory logic is ritualised through *sympatheia*: “The operative principle behind all these procedures is that of *sympatheia*, a notion which assumes a direct correspondence between a given deity and his or her symbolic representative in the animal, mineral, and vegetable worlds. Thus, by properly fashioning and consecrating the god’s ‘material image’ (and then placing it in the god’s statue), he or she could be persuaded to appear (generally in the form of light) and answer the questions put to him by the theurgist. The ‘illumination’ from the deity also aided the purification of the soul and its ‘vehicle.’”<sup>63</sup> This oracular rationale for material images, including light-epiphany, symbolic correspondence across natural kingdoms, and the purification of the soul’s *ochēma*, articulates precisely the metaphysical basis of talismanic efficacy that Islamic and later esoteric traditions develop. Marsilio Ficino subsequently articulates this metaphysical semiotics in the *De vita libri tres* (particularly in the second part

<sup>61</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, transl. by Eric Robertson Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), Introduction, xxii.

<sup>62</sup> Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117.

<sup>63</sup> Ruth Dorothy Majercik, ed. and transl., *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Dilton Marsh: The Prometheus Trust, 2013), Introduction, 27.

of Book III), where he argues that images, names, and numbers derive their efficacy from their alignment with celestial archetypes.<sup>64</sup>

In Neoplatonism, the symbol is not a convention but a theophanic structure: a visible sign that participates in and reveals the invisible. As a late-antique practical articulation of this non-discursive, participatory symbolics, the *Chaldean Oracles* (composed in the late second century CE and authoritative in Neoplatonic curricula from the third to the sixth centuries) formulate a precise technical lexicon: *symbolon*, *synthēma*, *methexis*, together with the soul's *ochēma pneuma*, by which consecrated materials are coordinated with immaterial tokens (e.g., *voces mysticae*, “seals”) to effect graded ascent and purification.<sup>65</sup> Iamblichus systematically argues in the *De Mysteriis* (especially in books I, VI and VII) that the soul cannot re-establish contact with the intelligible realm through intellectual effort alone but must be aided by symbols and theurgical rites that correspond to transcendent archetypes.<sup>66</sup> He writes: “The theurgist, through the power of arcane symbols, commands cosmic entities no longer as a human being or employing a human soul but, existing above them in the order of the gods, uses threats greater than are consistent with his own proper essence—not, however, with the implication that he would perform that which he asserts, but using such words to instruct them how much, how great and what sort of power he holds through his unification with the gods, which he gains through knowledge of the ineffable symbols.”<sup>67</sup> Talismans, as material embodiments of these symbolic correspondences, thus serve not merely ritual but metaphysical ends: to realign the soul and cosmos through mimesis of divine intelligibles.

Within the same oracular dossier, the dynamics of ascent are rendered in the imagery of light: “tokens” and “symbols” possess both material and immaterial manifestations. Materially, they are the stones, herbs, scents, etc., handled by the theurgist in preparatory rites; immaterially, they are *voces mysticae* “embedded in the soul,” which both “prod the soul upward” and ward off demonic attack. Thus fortified, the soul “hastens toward the streams of light,” “mingles” with the solar

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<sup>64</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *De vita libri tres; Apologia; Quod necessaria sit ad vitam securitas. Con aggiunte di Amerigo Corsinus* (Florence: Antonio Miscomini, 1489). Manuscript held at Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, shelfmark Pal. 25.2.4.21 (I); Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life (De vita libri tres)*, transl. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989), Book III.

<sup>65</sup> Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 41–46.

<sup>66</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis (On the Mysteries)*, transl. and intro. by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

<sup>67</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, VI.6, 287.

“channels / rays,” and is “established in the sun,” the “seven-rayed god” (fr. 66, 111, 115, 194), whose rays effect the final purification that consummates the anagoge.<sup>68</sup>

This ontology of the symbol grounds Neoplatonic talismanry in a metaphysical realism in which the material mirrors the spiritual and functions as its vessel. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, when transmitting Neoplatonic mysticism into Renaissance esotericism, echoes this in *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres* (II.29), referring to instruments of planetary operation (“when thou art working anything which belongs to any planet”) that function analogously to talismans, acting as condensations of higher forces when constructed in accordance with celestial harmony.<sup>69</sup> The talisman thus becomes a philosophical object: an encoded expression of cosmological laws and a practical mechanism for their invocation.

This symbolic cosmology became central to the Islamic understanding of images. In Arabic Hermetic literature, images were not seen as inert representations but as ontologically active forms, vehicles for celestial forces whose efficacy depended on precise astronomical timing and symbolic correspondences. As shown above, this configuration is classically formulated in the *Chaldean Oracles* as a twofold operation of the above discussed *symbola / synthemata*: material consecrations paired with immaterial “seals” or *voces mysticae* impressed upon the soul’s vehicle. This structural parallel can be described functionally, and it is in this functional sense that Arabic Hermetic and Neoplatonic materials may be brought into relation with it. Thus, when this understanding is integrated into Islamic cosmological thinking, image, number, and word do not function as arbitrary signs but as operations within a metaphysically ordered universe. On this basis, al-Qurtubī’s *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and, later, al-Būnī’s *Shams al-ma’ārif* systematically conjoin carefully timed material configurations (planetary images, selected substances, and magic squares) with immaterial “seals” articulated as divine names and letter-formulae, thereby rearticulating the late-antique pairing of material consecration and immaterial token in an Islamicate key. The talismanic image thus becomes a mode of participation in cosmic harmony, designed to reflect and channel higher realities into the material plane.

The theoretical foundations of this symbolic paradigm are firmly rooted in earlier Platonic cosmology. In the *Timaeus*, Plato describes the universe as a rational,

<sup>68</sup> Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 39.

<sup>69</sup> Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres* (Cologne: Johann Soter); Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, transl. by James Freake, ed. and annot. by Donald Tyson (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1993), 357.

ensouled organism governed by divine intellect and proportion (30b–37e).<sup>70</sup> The cosmos is a living *logos*, and the physical world—though imperfect—is a structured echo of the eternal Forms. This metaphysical continuity enabled later Neoplatonists to articulate a full-fledged theory of symbolic correspondences among celestial, intellectual, and material realms. Franz Cumont’s *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans* offers a foundational analysis of how Platonic and Neoplatonic cosmology provided the intellectual scaffolding for ancient astrology as a symbolic system; one in which the stars and planets functioned not merely as physical entities, but as sacred signs mediating divine will through mathematically ordered ritual, thus anticipating later Islamic metaphysical uses of celestial symbolism and talismanry.<sup>71</sup>

In the Islamic context, this symbolic cosmology found fertile ground. H. Corbin argues that Neoplatonic imaginal metaphysics profoundly shaped Islamic philosophical and mystical thought, particularly through *‘ālam al-mithāl*, where symbols acquire ontological density.<sup>72</sup> A. Uždavinys elaborates even further by explaining that theurgical symbolism in Neoplatonism and its Islamic counterparts is not merely expressive but participatory and metaphysically operative. Symbolic acts in this context are efficacious because they reflect and actualise the metaphysical realities they signify: they are not decorative or allegorical, but ontologically real gestures aligned with divine order.<sup>73</sup> Through this lens, Islamic talismanry emerges as a discursive configuration in which symbolic forms are integrated into a metaphysics of divine unity, structured by cosmological hierarchies and activated through metaphysical intention.

The role of symbols in Neoplatonic cosmology is foundational to the development of Islamic talismanic theory and practice. It is precisely through this symbolic ontology that talismans transcend their materiality to function as operative nodes in a participatory cosmos, mediating between divine archetypes and human ritual engagement. Against this background, a brief terminological mapping clarifies the passage of key concepts from Neoplatonism into Islamicate talismanic discourse. In late antique usage, *sýmbolon* and *synthēma* name the divinely

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<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, transl. by Robert Gregg Bury, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press / London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1929), 55–77.

<sup>71</sup> Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912).

<sup>72</sup> Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, esp. vol. II: *Sohrawardī et les Platoniciens de Perse*; Corbin, *L’Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d’Ibn ‘Arabī*; Corbin, *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste*.

<sup>73</sup> Uždavinys, *Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity*; Uždavinys, *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth*.

authored “tokens” or “signatures” that mediate and effect *methexis* (participatory presence) across ontological tiers; *ochēma pneuma* designates the soul’s “vehicle” that receives and bears these tokens; *télēsma* and *telestikē* denote the consecrated object and its animation-*techne*; while the Greek term *stoicheiōma*, used in Greek talismanic contexts and attested in the Greek fragment of Thābit ibn Qurra’s treatise on talismans, likewise denotes a talismanic configuration or operative elemental sign. Latin *imago / figurae caelestes* specify the cosmologically patterned image. In the Arabic–Islamicate reception, these map not one-to-one but functionally onto *ṭilasm / ṭilasmāt* (from *télēsma / telemata*, the talisman as ritually completed *locus* of influx), *ṣūra* (form or image), and *timthāl* (figural statue or material image) as carriers of celestial order, as well as related representational terms such as *tamthīl* (the act or mode of representation or figuration) through which celestial influences are embodied; *‘ulūm al-ḥurūf wa-l-a‘dād* (letter- and number-sciences that encode intelligible forms); *awfāq* (magic squares); and, crucially, the immaterial register of the *asmā’ Allāh* (divine names) as “seals” that effect presence without coercion. Ontologically, the *sýmbolon / synthēma* → *ṭilasm / ism / ḥarf* pathway preserves the Neoplatonic premise that form-descents are real modes of causality: the talisman is a node of participation where higher formal causes are instantiated in matter. Epistemologically, cognition proceeds by *methexis* rather than mere representation: number (*‘adad*), letter (*ḥarf*), image (*ṣūra*), and Name (*ism*) are operative media of knowing; they disclose the higher by ritually aligning the lower (as exemplified in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and *Shams al-ma‘ārif* pairing of temporally configured material forms with immaterial seals). Ethically, efficacy is inseparable from purification: the Neoplatonic theurgic paradigm of light-ascent and *ochēma*-purification reappears as Islamic requirements of *ṭahāra / adab / niyya*; talismanry is licit only as anagogic discipline, not domination. In sum, the Neoplatonic *sýmbolon / synthēma* becomes, in Islamicate talismanry, a philosophical mediator, variously material (engraved *ṭilasm*, planetary *ṣūra*, *awfāq*) and immaterial (Names / letters), through which ontology (graded being), epistemology (participatory intellection), and ethics (purification and right intention) are jointly enacted. The analytic equivalences proposed here are schematic and will be substantiated, case by case, in the following parts on Islamic cosmology, talismanic praxis, and the sciences of letters and numbers.

#### 1.1.4. The Hermetic Influence on Neoplatonic Talismanry

The convergence of Hermetic and Neoplatonic cosmologies played a major role in shaping the metaphysical and operative logic of late antique talismanry. The Hermetic tradition, particularly as formulated in the *Asclepius* and *Corpus Hermeticum*, reinforced the Neoplatonic conception of the cosmos as an ensouled and hierarchically structured totality governed by metaphysical sympathy. As Garth Fowden has shown in his *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, the Hermetic worldview introduced a performative-symbolic dimension to cosmological practice, wherein theurgy and material ritual were inseparable from metaphysical ascent.<sup>74</sup>

Hermeticism and Neoplatonism shared a common ontological grammar: both posited the cosmos as a living organism animated by the divine mind and structured through intelligible archetypes. This resonance is affirmed by Brian Copenhaver, who foregrounds Hermeticism's emphasis on the divine *nous* as the governing principle of the cosmic order, an emphasis clearly articulated in the *Corpus Hermeticum*: "Nous, the father of all, who is life and light, gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child."<sup>75</sup> Within this cosmology, symbols and images are not representational but participatory; they channel and embody divine intelligibles within the material world.

The *Asclepius* is paradigmatic in this regard. Hermes Trismegistus speaks of images and statues endowed with divine efficacy, crafted according to principles of cosmic sympathy and precise correspondences. These "ensouled" ritual forms serve as *loci* of theophanic manifestation, functioning simultaneously as material vessels and metaphysical mediators.<sup>76</sup> The ritual technology described there anticipates the theoretical principles of Neoplatonic talismanry. As Hans Dieter Betz observes, this ritual practice, reflected also in the Greek Magical Papyri, operates through a sacred economy of divine signatures, encoded in symbolic materials selected for their cosmological affinities.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>75</sup> Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), I.12, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986).

Eric Robertson Dodds, in his translation and introduction to *The Elements of Theology* by Proclus, outlines the Neoplatonic conception of symbolic causality as foundational to its metaphysical system. While E. R. Dodds does not directly associate this with Hermetic correspondential logic, the structure he elucidates allows for a reading in which talismans and theurgical objects function not as inert magical implements but as symbolic condensations of divine order, mediating between intelligible and sensible realities.<sup>78</sup> Within this framework, the talisman emerges as an ontologically charged symbol, operative in a graded cosmos governed by metaphysical sympathy.

This convergence culminates in Renaissance Neoplatonism, where M. Ficino extends the Hermetic-Neoplatonic synthesis into a philosophy of astral and spiritual medicine. In the *De vita libri tres*, chapter 12 of Book III, titled *Res naturales atque etiam artificiosae habent virtutes a stellis occultas, per quas spiritum nostrum stellis eisdem exponunt* (*Natural and Even Artificial Things Have Occult Powers from the Stars, Through Which They Expose Our Spirit to the Same Stars*), he writes of “artificial things” that, when correctly fashioned, enable the soul’s ascent by harmonising with celestial archetypes.<sup>79</sup> Here again, the talisman is not superstition but a metaphysical technology embedded in a rigorous symbolic cosmology.

An interesting mythological parallel to this symbolic-operational worldview appears in an Arabic narrative cited by Ch. Burnett. In this Hermeticised cosmogony, an Islamicate reworking of the primordial creation myth, a demiurgic figure, Hādūs, transmits the occult sciences to Admānūs, the mythic first man. This narrative reflects a distinctly Hermetic logic, in which creation is structured through the coordinated interaction of spiritual forces (*rūḥāniyyāt*) and operative acts (*a‘māl*), guided by precise correspondences and esoteric procedures. Hādūs, formed from the coalescence of planetary spiritual forces, creates Admānūs through focused intention and the deliberate combination and direction of these forces, a process that mirrors later descriptions of operative techniques such as *nīranjāt* (incantational magic). He then transmits to him the sciences of *nīranjāt*, *kalām* (theology), and *‘ulūm al-khafiyya* (hidden sciences), preparing him to master nature and the cosmos through knowledge of correspondences and occult sympathies. As Ch. Burnett notes, this Hermetic myth situates such operative and esoteric knowledge within a primordial, cosmological framework, preceding and legitimising its later

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<sup>78</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*.

<sup>79</sup> Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, III.12.

transmission through figures such as Hermes and the philosophical tradition.<sup>80</sup> The talismanic and operative sciences are thus not presented as later accretions but as constitutive elements of an original body of knowledge imparted at the very inception of humanity, grounding their authority in a mythic pre-history of revelation and technique.

This mythic framework mirrors the symbolic structure and metaphysical causality found in both late antique Neoplatonism and Hermeticism. By grounding talismanic practice in a sacred cosmogony, it provided one possible legitimating strategy within the Islamic worldview. The symbolic structure and cosmological theurgy inherited from these traditions furnished Islamic thinkers with a metaphysical grammar through which talismans could be constructed as ontological instruments, that is, material forms fashioned to embody intelligible realities and participate in the divine order. This continuity laid the intellectual foundation for later Islamic elaborations, particularly in *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, Sufi letter mysticism, and the philosophical theurgy of figures such as al-Būnī, where talismans were envisioned as operative signs within a rigorously symbolic semiotics.

#### 1.1.5. Plotinus and the Metaphysical Preconditions of Symbolic Efficacy

Plotinus (c. 204/5–270 CE), often interpreted as an abstract metaphysician concerned primarily with the contemplative ascent of the soul, nevertheless offers a corpus that reveals an implicit metaphysical infrastructure later authors could mobilise in accounts of symbolic and theurgical operations. In the *Enneads* (e.g., IV.4.40), he addresses the principle of sympathetic connection: the metaphysical premise that objects or actions, when properly aligned, can exert influence across ontological distances through hidden correspondences.<sup>81</sup> While E. R. Dodds does not directly ascribe to Plotinus a theory of talismanic or magical causality, he situates Neoplatonism within the broader Platonic tradition in which *magia naturalis*, a form of spiritual influence grounded in the interrelatedness of all things, is philosophically coherent. As E. R. Dodds observes, the notion that the world is pervaded by “powers” and “signatures” capable of being activated through ritual or symbolic acts stems from a worldview in which rationality coexists with mysticism, and philosophical contemplation does not exclude the efficacy of rites. This context helps illuminate how Plotinian cosmology, though not overtly magical,

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<sup>80</sup> Burnett, “Arabic Practical Magic”.

<sup>81</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.4.40, 261–265.

provides conceptual grounds later expanded by theurgists such as Iamblichus and Islamic esoteric thinkers.<sup>82</sup>

For Plotinus, the universe, though ontologically stratified, is a continuous emanation of the One. Its multiplicity is underwritten by a hidden unity, enabling the possibility of influence across ontological levels in a participatory cosmos. While Plotinus himself does not advocate theurgical or talismanic manipulation of the material world, his cosmology implicitly allows for such possibilities. As G. Shaw notes in his study of later Neoplatonism, the metaphysical intimacy of all levels of being in this emanative structure renders the cosmos an ontologically dynamic system, one in which symbolic correspondences can facilitate interaction between the sensible and the intelligible. Though G. Shaw's analysis centres on Iamblichus, his insights shed light on how Plotinian metaphysics could be interpreted as providing conceptual space for magical or talismanic phenomena, even if Plotinus maintains a philosophical reservation regarding the overt manipulation of the material realm for instrumental aims.<sup>83</sup> In the *Enneads* I.2.3, he emphasises the soul's ascent to the One through intellectual purification and contemplative detachment, not through ritual interventions aimed at pragmatic outcomes.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, this ascetic caution does not negate the operative potential of his metaphysics; rather, it situates theurgy and talismanic practice within a higher ethical and spiritual teleology.

Crucially, Plotinus explains the mechanism by which purely intellectual activity becomes available to consciousness and memory: the intellect's content is "unfolded" as *logos* into the image-making power (*phantastikon*), which then reflects it "as in a mirror," allowing apprehension and retention. As he writes: "The intellectual act is without parts and has not, so to speak, come out into the open, but remains unobserved within; but the verbal expression [*logos*] unfolds its content and brings it out of the intellectual act into the image-making power, and so shows the intellectual act as if in a mirror, and this is how there is apprehension and persistence and memory of it. [...] The intellectual act is one thing and the apprehension of it another; and we are always intellectually active but do not always apprehend our activity" (Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.3.30; cf. IV.4.2). This yields a precise psychology for inward reception: when the senses are quiet (as in sleep), the *phantastikon* is less encumbered by sense-

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<sup>82</sup> Eric Robertson Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

<sup>83</sup> Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*.

<sup>84</sup> Plotinus, *Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus and the Order of his Books. Enneads I, 1–9*, transl. by Arthur Hilary Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

data and can more readily “mirror” intelligible activity—hence Plotinus’s repeated remarks on the higher soul’s activity during sleep (e.g., *Enn.* IV.3.30; IV.8.1).<sup>85</sup>

A succinct oracular formulation, preserved by Synesius (Synesius of Cyrene, c. 373–414), captures the same two modalities that Plotinus’s framework allows (didactic cultivation and inward activation): “To some, (God) has granted (the ability) to apprehend the symbol of light through instruction. Others, however, he has fructified with their own strength while they are sleeping” (*Chaldean Oracles*, fr. 118).<sup>86</sup> Read in a Plotinian key, the first clause parallels the disciplined ascent of the intellect, while the second accords with Plotinus’s view that the higher part of the soul can receive intelligible impressions when the senses are quiet in sleep, thereby legitimating non-discursive reception alongside pedagogical instruction.

Over a millennium later, M. Ficino recognised this latent theurgical structure when he situated talismanic (“artificial things / objects”) operations within a Plotinian metaphysical cosmology in the *De vita libri tres* (III.18), aligning the efficacy of images and rites with celestial harmonies and the soul’s alignment with divine order.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, Iamblichus would later radicalise this metaphysical framework in the *De Mysteriis* II.11, asserting that symbols are not merely representational signs but material vessels of divine presence, capable of effecting theurgic union independent of human thought. In doing so, he draws out and transforms the latent ontological implications of Plotinus’s emanative system into a fully operative theurgical paradigm.<sup>88</sup>

Plotinus, therefore, while personally distancing himself from practical theurgy, nonetheless establishes conceptual preconditions that later Neoplatonists, and, by extension, some Islamicate philosophers and esotericists, could develop into talismans as symbolic expressions of cosmological unity, divine order, and metaphysical causality.

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<sup>85</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.3.30, 128–131; IV.8.1, 396–401.

<sup>86</sup> Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 95. Cf. Synesius, *De insomniis*: “To some he gave by teaching a token to grasp the light, / others he impregnated with his strength even as they slept” (135 a-b) in *On Prophecy, Dreams and Human Imagination: Synesius, De insomniis*, ed. by Donald A. Russell and Heinz-Günther Nesselrath; text, transl. and essays by Donald A. Russell et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014, SAPERE 24), 18–21.

<sup>87</sup> Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, III.18, 333–343.

<sup>88</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, II.11, 113–117.

### 1.1.6. Iamblichus and the Theurgy of Talismans

The thought of Iamblichus (c. 245–325 CE) marks a transformative moment in Neoplatonic metaphysics, whereby symbolic philosophy is transfigured into a fully ritualised theurgy. While Plotinus privileged contemplative ascent through intellectual purification, Iamblichus reoriented Neoplatonism towards a participatory metaphysics, arguing in the *De Mysteriis* I.3 that the divine is accessed not merely through *noēsis* (intellectual apprehension), but through an innate, pre-conceptual union, later made operative through theurgy: ritual praxis charged with symbolic and divine presence.<sup>89</sup> This reorientation laid the metaphysical foundation for talismanry (*symbola, theourgiai, sēmeia, erga theia*) as a legitimate and even necessary modality of divine engagement. Defending the theurgical use of symbols, Iamblichus invokes the ancient Egyptians as exemplars of sacred science: “The Egyptians, imitating the nature of the universe and the demiurgic power of the gods, display certain signs of mystical, arcane and invisible intellections by means of symbols just as nature copies the unseen principles in visible forms through some mode of symbolism, and the creative activity of the gods indicates the truth of the forms in visible signs. Perceiving therefore that all superior beings rejoice in the efforts of their inferiors to imitate them, and therefore wish to fill them with good things, insofar as it is possible through imitation, it is reasonable that they should proffer a mode of concealment that is appropriate to the mystical doctrine of concealment in symbols.”<sup>90</sup> In this view, symbolic forms are not arbitrary or representational, but participate ontologically in the divine. As R. Majercik emphasises, this Iamblichean recasting of theurgy is expressly non-coercive: the rites work “from the gods’ side,” so to speak, as a willing bestowal of divine power, and their efficacy is intrinsic to the *synthemata* themselves (*ex opere operato*), which Iamblichus contrasts with *goēteia* (coercive, manipulative rites); in this way he becomes the privileged late-antique theorist of the symbol’s self-acting, anagogic power.<sup>91</sup>

In contrast to the more dualistic tendencies within earlier Platonism, Iamblichus affirms the ontological dignity of the material world, viewing it as a necessary manifestation and reflection of the divine order. As G. Shaw explains, for Iamblichus theurgy was “a work of the gods” (*theion ergon*), not merely a symbolic re-enactment of cosmic order but a means by which “divine principles were embodied and enacted, not merely contemplated,” enabling the soul to “participate both as

<sup>89</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, I.3, 11–15.

<sup>90</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, VII.1, 291.

<sup>91</sup> Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 23.

recipient and beneficiary” in the divine. This understanding marked a profound transformation in Neoplatonic metaphysics, grounding ritual practice in genuine ontological participation rather than philosophical abstraction.<sup>92</sup> Theurgy transforms the soul’s *prohairesis* (its intentional disposition) by conforming it to the divine actions embodied in theurgic symbols: the sacred stones, plants, animals, prayers, and names that “preserve the will of the gods.”<sup>93</sup> Within this theurgical framework, talismans function not as devices of superstition but as metaphysical instruments, bridges between the material and spiritual planes, attuned to the divine order. G. Shaw further clarifies: “Such objects served as receptacles of the gods because they preserved an intimate relation with them and bore their ‘signatures’ (*sunthēmata*) in the manifest world. As such they were pure specimens of divine presence in matter, and for souls suffering a specific imbalance within the administration of a divine being, the objects that bore its symbol / *sunthēma* became homeopathic antidotes if handled in a ritually appropriate manner. Iamblichus explains: ‘Therefore, whether (it is) certain animals or plants or any of the other things on earth governed by Superior Beings, they simultaneously share in their inspective care and procure for us an indivisible communion with the Gods’ (DM 235, 5–9). Through the appropriate use of the gods’ *sunthēmata* in nature the soul could awaken in itself the power of their corresponding symbols (DM 136, 6–10). This realigned the soul with the manifesting energies of a deity and freed it from servitude to the daimons who watched over its physical expression (DM 174, 9–10).”<sup>94</sup> R. Majercik’s analysis of *telestikē*, noting Iamblichus’s preference for the rubric of the *theourgikē technē*, specifies the material procedure with precision: the insertion of *synthēmata* (stones, plants, aromatic substances, or animals) into the cavity of the statue to establish a sympathetic relation with the deity.<sup>95</sup> Correspondingly, Iamblichus states that the theurgic art employs “sacred, perfect, godlike” objects (*hiera, telea, theoeidē*) so as to make a “complete and pure receptacle” (*docheion apoteles kai katharon*) for the deity, in accordance with the properties proper to each god (DM V.23).<sup>96</sup>

Iamblichus’s *De Mysteriis* offers a precise metaphysical account of how divine power operates through symbols. What later Latin sources will call *imagines, figurae caelestes, res caelestes / virtus astrorum* are, in his system, not inert matter

<sup>92</sup> Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, V.23, 265–271; VII.4, 297.

<sup>94</sup> Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 48.

<sup>95</sup> Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 26.

<sup>96</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, V.23, 268–269.

but symbolic forms that participate in the divine intelligibles. Their efficacy does not depend on human intellect or intention but arises from the inherent power of the “unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods” (DM II.11).<sup>97</sup> Through theurgical ritual, the soul does not merely contemplate but is joined to the divine by means of acts “beyond all conception,” in which the gods recognise their own images—not via discursive thought but through ontological affinity. In this way, talismanic praxis emerges as a rigorously articulated metaphysical mode of divine mediation and invocation, rather than a tool of magical manipulation. Read alongside the *Chaldean Oracles* as presented by R. Majercik, Iamblichus’s distinct contribution is to systematise the Oracular double register, material consecrations and immaterial “seals” / *voces mysticae*, into a theology of symbols as god-given signatures that dignify matter as a vessel of presence and operate anagogically by affinity rather than by human compulsion.

This symbolic logic was further systematised in Renaissance Neoplatonism, where M. Ficino, in his *De vita libri tres* (III.14), reinforces the idea that talismans align the human microcosm with celestial archetypes, allowing for spiritual ascent and protection when composed with philosophical precision.<sup>98</sup> M. Ficino’s reception of Iamblichean theurgy reflects the continuity and transmission of this ritual-symbolic metaphysics into later esoteric frameworks, including Islamic thought.

Importantly, Iamblichus’s theological position on matter and ritual marks a significant development within the Platonic tradition. As underscored by Richard T. Wallis, Iamblichus rejects the notion of materiality as a *locus* of corruption, proposing instead that it is through the sanctified engagement with material symbols that divine harmony is restored.<sup>99</sup> Thus, he underwrites talismanry as theurgic: symbols are efficacious as divine signatures (*theia sēmeia*), not as products of human will; and talismanic media, material and vocal, are calibrated vehicles of ascent rather than instruments of domination. For Iamblichus, the talisman is not a device of magical manipulation but a structured vessel of theurgy, an ontologically potent symbol that realigns human existence with divine causality. As Georg Luck explains, the ultimate goal of theurgy is not instrumental power but participation in the divine order and the soul’s anagogic return to its source.<sup>100</sup> Theurgy, including

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<sup>97</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, II.11, 113–117.

<sup>98</sup> Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, III.14, 309–313.

<sup>99</sup> Richard T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972).

<sup>100</sup> Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Collection of Ancient Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

talismanic operations, thus becomes a metaphysical mode of restoring alignment within a hierarchically ordered cosmos. This late-antique articulation offers a conceptual parallel to later Islamicate efforts to theorize symbolic media within a monotheistic causal framework, where efficacy is framed as participatory and ethically conditioned rather than coercive.

#### 1.1.7. Proclus and the Symbolism of the Cosmos

In the philosophical system of Proclus (412–485 CE), talismanry is ontologically justified as a precise mode of symbolic participation within a hierarchically structured and intelligibly ordered cosmos. Building upon the metaphysical architecture of Plotinus and the theurgical praxis of Iamblichus, Proclus articulates a vision of the universe as a dynamic interplay of divine intelligibles expressed through the symbolic fabric of the sensible world. While Proclus, like other Neoplatonists, does not explicitly focus on talismans as such, his metaphysical system offers a robust ontological foundation for symbolic and ritual acts, such as those found in talismanic practices, that aim to mediate divine causality through the material world. As he explains across several propositions in *The Elements of Theology* (e.g., 29, 113, 132), divine procession occurs through likeness and intermediate terms, ensuring that the divine hierarchy remains unified. The gods, whose essence is more unified than beings, are connected through intermediary classes that preserve ontological continuity and enable symbolic correspondence.<sup>101</sup> As Eleni Pachoumi shows in her critical edition and translation of *On the Hieratic Art According to the Greeks*, Proclus frames theurgic efficacy as four operational moments: a preparatory “warming” grounded in sympathy; an “approach and good positioning” through right materials and timing; a “transmission of fire” in the presence of divine light; and a culminating “kindling / illumination” effecting deification and the radiance of enmattered things: a law-governed sequence that unfolds within Proclus’ triadic metaphysics of remaining, procession, and return.<sup>102</sup>

Within the Proclean transmission of the *Chaldean Oracles*, ascent is described as effected “by making the soul bright with fire” (fr. 122), that is, saturating the soul with pure fire so that it contacts the divine light rather than collapsing into material disorder; relatedly, the Oracles speak of “approaching the fire” (fr. 121) as

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<sup>101</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*.

<sup>102</sup> Eleni Pachoumi, *Proclus’ On the Hieratic Art according to the Greeks: Critical Edition with Translation and Commentary* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2024), 65–66.

the condition for receiving light from God, and of a graded participation through *symbola / synthemata* “at whatever level,” from corporally immanent tokens to higher noetic indices—precisely the tiered *methexis* presupposed by Proclus’ triadic architecture.<sup>103</sup> This oracular logic underwrites the philosophical legitimacy of talismanic media: their efficacy is construed not as manipulation but as ontological participation in divinely “sown” (fr. 108) signatures (both material and immaterial) that mediate procession and reversion across the celestial–sublunary interface. Proclus then corroborates this participatory physics by appeal to natural “proofs,” such as heliotropic and selenotropic sympathies, plants and stones dependent on solar and lunar powers that display celestial causality pervading sublunar media.<sup>104</sup>

In the introduction to the English translation of Proclus’s *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, Dirk Baltzly and Harold Tarrant explain: “For the Neoplatonists of the Athenian school, the theurgical virtues were the highest level of intellectual and moral perfection. The accomplished theurgist understands enough about the way in which various gods are manifested and symbolized through different physical substances in order to open himself to the ubiquitous presence of the divine in all things. It is a form of ritual magic in which the aim is to become united with the gods.”<sup>105</sup> In this context, symbols in Proclus’s philosophy are not merely representational signs but ontological participants in the realities they signify. They serve as mediating structures between the divine intelligible order and its expression in the sensible world. This conception is elaborated throughout the *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, where Proclus argues that the material cosmos is imbued with divine signatures—symbolic configurations that disclose higher realities and can be engaged through ritual and contemplative correspondence.<sup>106</sup> In Proclus’s account, the *telestic* (initiatory) art fashions statues “suitable for the reception of divine illuminations” through symbols and secret *synthēmata*; talismanic images operate on the same assimilative principle, resemblance (*homoiotēs*) rather than coercion.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, talismans are not arbitrary constructs but metaphysically grounded instruments of participation, designed to align the human soul with the divine order they reflect.

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<sup>103</sup> Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 45.

<sup>104</sup> Pachoumi, *Proclus’ On the Hieratic Art according to the Greeks*, 31; 54–55.

<sup>105</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, vol. I, Book I: *Proclus on the Socratic State and Atlantis*, transl. by Harold Tarrant, intro. and notes by Harold Tarrant; gen. intro. by Dirk Baltzly and Harold Tarrant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>106</sup> Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, vol. I, Book I.

<sup>107</sup> Pachoumi, *Proclus’ On the Hieratic Art according to the Greeks*, 64; 114.

Like Iamblichus, Proclus views theurgic operations, including talismanic creation, not as manipulative techniques but as sacred actions embedded within the divine order. G. Shaw explains that for Proclus, symbols are not human inventions but cosmic truths, revealed through the divine noetic order and inscribed into reality itself.<sup>108</sup> In his chapter “Noetic *sunthēmata*—The Theurgy of Numbers,” R. Shaw emphasises that for Neoplatonists, especially Proclus, symbolic forms such as numbers, images, and names function as vehicles of divine manifestation, not as abstract representations. These forms are “not chosen arbitrarily” but “discovered in the nature of things,” and their power derives from their ontological participation in divine patterns.<sup>109</sup> Talismans become *loci* of cosmic convergence, designed to align the microcosmic soul with macrocosmic intelligibles through ritualised symbolic participation.

R. T. Wallis shows that for Neoplatonists like Proclus, the universe itself is a hieroglyph: a network of symbolic relations where each ontological stratum reflects and refracts the one above it.<sup>110</sup> Talismans therefore function by mimetically participating in the divine archetypes they correspond to. Their construction must adhere to precise cosmological principles, astrological, numerical, and theurgical, in order to capture and conduct the divine energies they are intended to channel.

Proclus’s theory of talismany is thus inseparable from his broader ontological commitments. The cosmos is a living, rational organism animated by the divine intellect; to act symbolically within it is to act within the order of *Nous* itself. As Proclus states in his much-discussed *locus classicus* in the first part of the *Platonic Theology*: “Theurgy is power higher than all human wisdom, embracing the blessings of divination, the purifying powers of initiation, and in a word all the operations of divine possession.”<sup>111</sup> Against this backdrop, G. Luck points out that theurgical symbols, such as herbs, stones, seals, or engraved gems, functioned not as tools of vulgar magic but as instruments of divine mediation grounded in Neoplatonic cosmology. In response to E. R. Dodds’s view that theurgy was essentially “magic applied to a religious purpose,”<sup>112</sup> G. Luck notes that such rites sometimes required

<sup>108</sup> Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 162–169.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 199–215.

<sup>110</sup> Wallis, *Neoplatonism*.

<sup>111</sup> Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, livre I, ch. 25 (κε´), ed. and transl. by Henri Dominique Saffrey and Leendert Gerrit Westerink (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968), 113:6–10; as cited in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Introduction; xxii, citing as “*Th. Pl. I.* (xxvi.) 63.” (Note: some printings number this as I.26 because the passage straddles the I.25 / 26 break.)

<sup>112</sup> Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 291.

no intermediary beyond these sacred symbols and formulas, since they were believed to operate through natural correspondences and divine signatures.<sup>113</sup> Rather than disrupting the natural order, talismans exemplify its hidden intelligibility, serving, in effect, as bridges between the material and spiritual realms by enabling symbolic participation in higher realities.

Read through this Proclean lens, talismanry appears as a disciplined semiotics of participation: a lawful symbolic causality grounded in sympathy and assimilation, a metaphysical grammar that later Islamicate thinkers could appropriate and reconfigure to render operations both philosophically intelligible and legally sortable within a *tawhīdic* cosmos. In this way, the Proclean paradigm provided Islamic philosophers and esotericists with a conceptual foundation for construing talismans not as mechanical instruments of magical causality but as symbolic devices harmonised with divine ontology. Across Islamic esotericism, from the cosmological numerologies of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' to the operative semiotics of al-Būnī, talismanic forms appear as ritually and cosmologically structured reflections of *tawhīd*, the divine unity expressed in multiplicity.

## 1.2. Zoroastrian Dualism and Symbolic Cosmology in the Development of Esoteric Islam

### 1.2.1. Zoroastrian Cosmology and the Transmission of Symbolic Correspondence

The continuity between Zoroastrian dualism and Islamicate esoteric cosmology may be understood as more than residual inheritance; it constitutes an important comparative layer in the development of certain Islamicate talismanic doctrines. Within the Islamicate intellectual milieu, pre-Islamic metaphysical schemata, especially those rooted in Zoroastrian cosmology and ritual practice, were absorbed and re-articulated. Among these traditions was the use of ritual objects imbued with divine power, conceived as mediators between the celestial and material realms. This logic of mediation profoundly shaped Islamic talismanry, whose very architecture, with its emphasis on celestial–terrestrial correspondences, symbolic dualism, and cosmic alignment, reveals structural affinities with Zoroastrian metaphysical patterns.

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<sup>113</sup> Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 51.

Early Arabic talismanic and astrological texts frequently emphasise the opposition of light and darkness, good and evil, with planetary powers categorised as beneficent (*sa'īd*) or maleficent (*naḥs*). Such dualities reflect older Iranian cosmological frameworks. Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī's *Kitāb al-madkhal al-kabīr ilā 'ilm aḥkām al-nujūm* (*The Great Introduction to the Science of the Judgements of the Stars*) explicitly delineates the benefic and malefic natures of the planets, while the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* integrates such oppositions into talismanic practice, in this way mapping them onto ritual operations intended to align human will with the cosmic order.

Mary Boyce emphasises the foundational presence of cosmological symbolism in Zoroastrian ritual thought, describing how Zoroastrian magi preserved an extensive epistemology of the cosmos: “the concern of the magi as a body was with study and worship, with ethics, divination and prophecy, and with learning holy utterances and observing the rules of purity.”<sup>114</sup> Antonio Panaino similarly stresses the educational and initiatory character of the Zoroastrian priestly class, whose rigorous training and discipline preserved: “a mass of initiatory knowledge, considered indispensable for contributing to the maintenance of the Cosmic Order (*aša*), and the defense of the orderly cycle of life against the disruptive actions of Anra Mainiiu (Pahl. *Ahremen*) and the demons.”<sup>115</sup> Comparable emphases on Zoroastrian cosmological expertise and its transmission can also be found in the work of scholars such as Robert Charles Zaehner, Jean Kellens, Marijan Molé, and others,<sup>116</sup> who highlight the continuity of ritual purity, astral correspondences, and magico-religious knowledge across the Iranian and late antique worlds. Taken together, this body of research makes clear that the Zoroastrian magi functioned not only as priests but also as custodians of extensive cosmological knowledge, including doctrines of celestial–terrestrial correspondence. Through Persian intermediaries, elements of this epistemic framework entered the Islamic intellectual sphere,<sup>117</sup> and contributed conceptual

<sup>114</sup> Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2001), 98.

<sup>115</sup> Antonio Panaino, “The Mazdean Esoteric Dimension between Ritual and Theology,” *Religiographies* 3 (1) (2024), 7–26.

<sup>116</sup> Robert Charles Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi: A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956); Jean Kellens, *Essays on Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism*, transl. by Prods Oktor Skjærvø (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2000); Marijan Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien: Le problème zoroastrien et la tradition mazdéenne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).

<sup>117</sup> Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 98–99.

resources later mobilised in talismanic practice, where the crafting of talismans became an act of aligning human will with the divine cosmic order.

In this model, talismanry can be interpreted not merely as a ritual operation but as a symbolic articulation of cosmological order. Here dualism is not simply theological but cosmo-technical: it serves as a structural principle for constructing symbolic technologies (i.e., talismans) that mediate ontological tensions between light and darkness, order and chaos.

S. H. Nasr situates this question within the larger debate about continuity and rupture between Mazdean<sup>118</sup> and Islamic worldviews. While he recognises “profound morphological resemblances”<sup>119</sup> between the two cosmologies, he insists that their metaphysical foundations are distinct: “Of course the metaphysical background into which the cosmological sciences are integrated is not the same, the view of Islam being the emphasis upon the Divine Unity which absorbs all contingencies, from the particle of dust to the highest archangel, and the view of Zoroastrianism the cosmic duality of good and evil or light and darkness.”<sup>120</sup> For S. H. Nasr, Islamic cosmology inherited and rearticulated Iranian symbolic structures, but always under the unifying principle of *tawḥīd*. This perspective highlights both the persistence of Zoroastrian dualistic archetypes and the way they were transformed in the Islamicate esoteric sciences into a cosmology of unity-in-opposition, where light and darkness, order and chaos were subsumed into a theocentric framework.

The comparative evidence thus points to a profound process of intellectual transmutation rather than simple borrowing. The Zoroastrian cosmological heritage, with its ritual technologies and symbolic structures, provided Islam with categories that were reshaped under the unifying principle of *tawḥīd*. As S. H. Nasr observes, continuity here does not imply identity: Iranian archetypes were not erased but integrated into a new metaphysical horizon. In this way, talismanry came to embody the re-inscription of inherited cosmologies into the fabric of Islamic esoteric thought. This reconfiguration of Iranian legacies set the stage for the Illuminationist project of Suhrawardī, in which ancient Persian symbols of light and order found renewed philosophical articulation.

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<sup>118</sup> Throughout this study I use “Zoroastrian” to designate the religious and cosmological system rooted in the teachings of Zarathustra. The term “Mazdean” (from Mazdaism, i.e., the worship of Ahura Mazda) is occasionally retained in citations from Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Henry Corbin, who employ it to emphasise the cosmological dualism of light and darkness characteristic of late antique Iranian thought. For clarity, “Zoroastrian” and “Mazdean” may be read here as equivalent.

<sup>119</sup> Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, 3.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

### 1.2.2. Illuminationist Metaphysics and the Zoroastrian Legacy in Suhrawardī

Zoroastrian symbolic cosmology finds a particularly systematic philosophical rearticulation in the Illuminationist metaphysics of Suhrawardī, known as *Shaykh al-Ishrāq* (Master of Illumination). His project of reviving the *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (The Philosophy of Illumination) deliberately re-engages with ancient Iranian metaphysical currents, embedding Zoroastrian cosmological dualism within an elaborate hierarchical structure of ontological light. Rather than simply adopting Zoroastrian motifs, Suhrawardī recasts them into a rigorous metaphysical lexicon.

The *Nūr al-Anwār* (Light of Lights) at the apex of Suhrawardī's ontology has often been read in comparison with the Zoroastrian conception of Ahura Mazda as supreme luminosity. The metaphysical polarity between the Light of Lights and the darkness that marks the lower ontological orders invites comparison with the cosmic opposition of Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu. As H. Corbin has shown, Suhrawardī did not merely borrow such dualisms but reactivated archetypes of Iranian gnosis through a philosophical transposition. In his *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, H. Corbin notes that Suhrawardī revives the ancient Persian angelology of Light and reworks the Mazdean dualism of Light and Darkness into a metaphysics of hierarchical illumination.<sup>121</sup> Within this structure, every ontological level corresponds to degrees of luminous intensity, with the darker realms signifying greater distance from the divine source. This is not simply a Neoplatonic schema, but one re-reflecting by the Zoroastrian principle of cosmic struggle. Suhrawardī's cosmos thus emerges as a graded hierarchy of lights and degrees of luminosity, ordered by proximity to the Light of Lights, within which talismanic action may be interpreted as participating in a broader symbolic effort to restore alignment with celestial order.

Building on this interpretation, S. H. Nasr highlights how Suhrawardī systematises this cosmology into a precise hierarchy: "From the Light of lights there issues a vertical or longitudinal hierarchy of lights that comprises the levels of universal existence and a horizontal or latitudinal order that contains the archetypes (sg. *rabb al-naw'*) or Platonic ideas of all that appears here below as objects and things. These lights are none other than what in the language of religion are called 'angels.' Suhrawardī gives names of Mazdaean angels as well as Islamic ones to these lights and brings out the central role of the angels in cosmology as well as in epistemology and soteriology."<sup>122</sup> By situating Mazdaean angelic figures within an

<sup>121</sup> Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. II, 54.

<sup>122</sup> Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present*, 160–161.

Islamic metaphysics of light, Suhrawardī established a symbolic architecture within which talismanic practice could be philosophically articulated: talismans, aligned with these angelic archetypes, were construed as instruments not of superstition but of cosmological resonance, intended to heal the rupture between the terrestrial and the celestial.

Furthermore, Suhrawardī's rehabilitation of Iranian wisdom traditions contributes to the legitimation of ancient Persian cosmology within an Islamicate philosophical paradigm. His synthesis thus represents not an anachronistic revival, but a methodologically coherent re-inscription of Zoroastrian dualism into the heart of Islamic esoteric thought. This hermeneutic operation renders his cosmology a philosophical vessel through which talismany could be both theorised and practised.

In sum, the Zoroastrian legacy within Islamic esotericism is neither incidental background nor ornamental motif. Through Suhrawardī's Illuminationist metaphysics, the dualistic cosmology of ancient Iran is transformed into a symbolic science of light; a framework in which talismans serve as microcosmic analogues of cosmic struggle and spiritual ascent. The synthesis of astral symbolism, ritual efficacy, and metaphysical dualism affirms the Zoroastrian substratum as a significant comparative layer in the architecture of certain Islamicate talismanic epistemologies.

### **1.3. Hellenistic Philosophy and the Principle of Emanation: Pre-Islamic Foundations of the Talismanic Worldview**

The integration of Hellenistic philosophy into Islamic cosmology marks one of the most influential developments in the intellectual genealogy of talismanic science in the Islamicate world. Central to this transmission is the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation (*apórrhoia* or *aporrhoē*), reinterpreted by Islamic thinkers into a metaphysical architecture that enabled the theorisation and legitimation of talismany. Talismans, in this schema, are conceived as symbolic instantiations of metaphysical order, that is, manifestations of divine overflow structured along cosmological hierarchies. As such, the principle of emanation inherited from Neoplatonism provides a metaphysical framework within which symbolic efficacy can be coherently theorised, thereby giving talismans ontological intelligibility within a participatory cosmos.

The lexical lineage of the term “talisman” reveals deep Hellenistic roots. The Greek word *telesma* (τέλεσμα), meaning “consecration,” “completion,” or

“religious rite,” derives from the verb *telein* (τελεῖν), “to consecrate” or “to fulfil a ritual.” Closely related is *sínthēma* (σύνθημα), meaning “token,” “symbol,” or “password,” a term associated with secret knowledge or initiatic transmission. The Greek Magical Papyri preserve detailed instructions for ritual objects—sometimes phylacteries inscribed on papyrus, sometimes implements made of stone, metal, or plant materials—designed to harness celestial or daemonic powers through invocation, material composition, and astrological timing. Parallel to these textual prescriptions, archaeological evidence attests to amulets: portable objects, often carved gems or inscribed tablets, worn for protection against curses, the evil eye, or malign forces.<sup>123</sup> Although later usage often distinguished between talismans and amulets, the boundary between the two is porous. As V. Porter, L. Saif and E. Savage-Smith observe: “The term ‘amulet’ is interchangeable with the term ‘talisman,’ [...] An amulet can be defined as an object generally worn for protection and most often made from a durable material such as a metal or a hardstone. Amulet can also be applied to paper examples, although ‘talisman’ is often used to describe these less robust and usually individualized forms.”<sup>124</sup> G. Luck extends this by adducing archaeological and textual examples, noting that: “Amulets were worn as protection against curses, the evil eye, and evil powers in general [...] The word amulet is probably derived from *āmōlītum* (averted)<sup>125</sup>, whereas talisman could be an Arabic transformation of Greek *telesma* ‘initiation.’ Any devotee of magic, whether Gentile, Jew, or Christian, could wear amulets, with their mixture of Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and cabalistic elements, regardless of his faith or affiliation. The amulets carry the same formulas as the papyri, though these inscriptions were probably copied from the papyri in a more abbreviated and concentrated form. Again, it seems that the papyri were the working texts of the professional sorcerer and could be put to various uses.”<sup>126</sup> Fritz Graf further stresses the polyvalence of such objects observing that a single amulet might be expected to confer beauty, sexual attractiveness, victory, commercial success, and protection simultaneously. In the *Papyrus Mimaut of the Louvre*, for instance, a prayer to Helios petitions the god for “sustenance, health, safety, wealth, the blessing of children, knowledge, a good name, goodwill [on the part of other men], sound judgment, honor, memory,

<sup>123</sup> Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*.

<sup>124</sup> Porter, Saif, and Savage-Smith, “Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans, and Magic,” 542.

<sup>125</sup> Lat. *āmōlior*—“to remove from, move or carry away”; (figuratively) “to avert, prevent; repel, refute.” In Pliny the Elder (see *Natural History*), the term designates an object that protects a person from trouble.

<sup>126</sup> Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 49.

grace, shapeliness, [and] beauty in the eyes of all men who see me [...].”<sup>127</sup> Taken together, the philological, textual, and archaeological evidence indicates not a rigid taxonomy but overlapping ritual technologies: amulets as polyvalent and protective tokens, phylacteries as textualised charms, and talismans as consecrated constructs consciously aligned with cosmological principles.

In late antiquity, the notion of *telesma* acquired a specifically theurgical meaning, referring to consecrated statues designed to channel cosmic powers. This practice, often associated with figures like Apollonius of Tyana, relied on embedding substances such as stones or herbs within statues to attract protective or healing forces.<sup>128</sup> Benjamin Anderson notes that these operations were viewed not as arbitrary acts of magic but as applications of a systematic talismanic science or art (*telestikē epistēmē* or *technē*), whose fragments survive in Greek sources and later flourished in Arabic treatises on *‘ilm al-tilsamāt*.<sup>129</sup> In the Arabic intellectual tradition, Apollonius was re-envisioned as Balinas, and the Greek *telesma* was rendered as *tilsam* (pl. *tilsamāt*), underscoring the continuity of these practices across linguistic and cultural frontiers.<sup>130</sup> This transmission illustrates how late antique symbolic practices were received into the Islamicate intellectual sphere as components of a cosmologically structured science.

Building on this heritage, the Arabic tradition came to ascribe to Balīnās a body of Hermetic writings that anchored his authority in talismanic knowledge. Central to this image was the Pseudo-Apollonian *Kitāb Sirr al-khalīqa wa-ṣan‘at al-ṭabī‘a*,<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, transl. by Franklin Philip (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 158.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Manuel Álvarez Martí-Aguilar, “Talismans Against Tsunamis: Apollonius of Tyana and the *stelai* of the Herakleion in Gades (VA 5.5),” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57 (4) (2017), 968–993; Walter L. Dulière, “Protection permanente contre les animaux nuisibles assurée par Apollonius de Tyane dans Byzance et Antioche: Evolution de son mythe,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 64 (1970), 247–277.

<sup>129</sup> Benjamin Anderson, “The Science of Talismans Today,” *History Compass* 21 (3–4) (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12761>.

<sup>130</sup> Theo Loinaz, “Balīnās Almutalsim Arrūmī: La tradició talismànica d’Apolloni de Tiana en la literatura geogràfica araboislàmica,” in Roser Puig Aguilar and Ingrid Bejarano Escamilla, eds., *Homenatge a Francesc Castelló* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2012), 171–233; Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. III (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 354.

<sup>131</sup> The full Arabic title of the treatise attributed to Balīnās is *Kitāb Sirr al-khalīqa wa-ṣan‘at al-ṭabī‘a* (*The Book of the Secret of Creation and the Art of Nature*). In scholarly usage, however, the work is frequently cited by the abbreviated form *Sirr al-khalīqa*. This shorter title appears in manuscript catalogues (e.g., Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. III, 354) and is

which, according to the legend, he discovered in a cavern beneath a statue of Hermes, alongside the Emerald Tablet. As Ch. Burnett summarises, the work “points out the underlying unity in all nature, and the bonds connecting all things,” describing how the elements are paired as male and female and how their union generates the cosmos.<sup>132</sup> This doctrine of cosmic bonds provided a natural-philosophical rationale for talismanry, in which images and substances could be consecrated to capture celestial influences. In her study of the *Kitāb al-ṭalāsīm al-akbar* (*Great Book of Talismans*), Lucia Raggetti traces how the Arabic tradition recontextualises the work within the cultural milieu of its reception, integrating it into technical literature and texts on the natural sciences, and transmitting detailed procedures involving materials, inscriptions, and ritual operations for the construction of talismans. Within this reception history, Balīnās was reframed not only as a wonder-worker but also as the authoritative transmitter of a body of specialised knowledge associated with talismans.<sup>133</sup>

The philosophical assimilation of these legacies into Islamicate thought was mediated above all by Neoplatonic cosmology. Alongside the Hermetica attributed to Balīnās, other strands of late antique science such as Pseudo-Aristotelian cosmological texts, astrological doctrines and Neoplatonic metaphysics were incorporated into the conceptual framework of *‘ilm al-ṭīlasmāt*. In particular, the doctrine of emanation, central to Neoplatonism, was adopted by Islamic thinkers who saw it as compatible with Qur’ānic cosmology. This doctrine furnished the metaphysical foundation for talismanic practice: talismans were conceived not as arbitrary magical devices but as instruments harnessing the energies of the celestial spheres, with the deeper aim of aligning the human soul with the divine order.

The Arabic term *ḥayḍ* in Islamic philosophy refers to the emanation of created things from God. This term itself does not appear in the Qur’ān, where the creation process is described with the terms *khalq* (creation) and *ibdā’* (invention).<sup>134</sup> Early

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also adopted by Charles Burnett, who follows the conventional shorthand when discussing the Pseudo-Apollonian Hermetica.

<sup>132</sup> Burnett, “The Pseudo-Aristotelian and Pseudo-Apollonian Hermetica in Arabic and Latin.”

<sup>133</sup> Lucia Raggetti, “Apollonius of Tyana’s *Great Book of Talismans*,” *Nuncius* 34 (2019), 155–182.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibdā’* signifies absolute creation, a primordial novelty. This term is not Qur’ānic, but in the Qur’ān God is referred to as *Badī’*, The Absolute Creator, The Inventor of Novelties. God is “the Originator (*Badī’*) of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees a matter, He simply tells it, ‘Be!’ and it is!” (sūrat *al-Baqara*: 117); “He is the Originator (*badī’*) of the heavens and the earth. [...] He created (*wakhālaqa*) everything and has knowledge of everything” (sūrat *al-An‘ām*: 101). Some commentators emphasise that God is called *Badī’* because He created the

Muslim theologians addressed this issue by adhering to the literal meanings of Qur'ānic terms, meaning that God commanded the world to be, and it was. Later Muslim philosophers, such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, influenced by Neoplatonism, interpreted creation as a gradual process. They generally argued that the world resulted from God's overflow. In this view, the creation process occurs gradually, starting from the most perfect level and descending to the least perfect—the material world. The degree of perfection is measured by the distance from the First Emanation, which all created things desire. For instance, the soul is imprisoned in the body and continually longs to free itself from the bodily confinement so as to join the world of spirits, which is closer to the First Cause and therefore more perfect.

While Islamic cosmology remains grounded in the monotheistic doctrine of *tawhīd*, it incorporates emanationist models to express the gradational structure of being. This theological flexibility allowed for the articulation of a cosmology that could simultaneously affirm divine transcendence and accommodate a symbolic metaphysics in which talismans became legitimate instruments of spiritual and cosmic mediation. The Arabic *al-Uthūlūjīyā*<sup>135</sup> (*The Theology of Aristotle*), a paraphrase of Plotinus' *Enneads*, was central in transmitting emanationist metaphysics into Islamicate philosophy.

This emanative worldview, while formally divergent from Islamic creation theology (*ex nihilo*), was conceptually integrated into Islamic metaphysics by figures such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Suhrawardī. According to Parviz Morewedge, “The monistic vision of the entire universe descending from a single principle, and a potentiality of a mystical ascent—a return to the origin,” is a recurring theme in Islamic mysticism, reflecting a clear Neoplatonic influence.<sup>136</sup> The process of spiritual substances manifesting in the material world is a key aspect of Neoplatonic thought that was integrated into Islamic philosophy, providing a framework for understanding the efficacy of talismans.

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heavens and the earth absolutely, while *Khāliq* is used because He created (*khālaqa*) man from dry (clay) (sūrat *al-Mu'minūn*: 12).

<sup>135</sup> The *Uthūlūjīyā* (from Greek “Theologia”) is the title given in Arabic to a paraphrase of parts of Plotinus' *Enneads* (IV–VI), translated and adapted in 9th-century Baghdad and attributed in the Arabic tradition to Aristotle. Although misattributed, this “Theology of Aristotle” became a major conduit for Neoplatonic metaphysics in Islamic philosophy, see Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 145; Janne Mattila, *The Eudaimonist Ethics of al-Fārābī and Avicenna* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2022), 12.

<sup>136</sup> Parviz Morewedge, ed., *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

The metaphysical utility of talismans stems from their resonance with the cosmological hierarchy. Within this emanative framework, talismans were conceived as points of contact with celestial intelligences, *loci* where material forms could resonate with metaphysical currents. *Fayḍ* became widely employed by Islamic philosophers to denote this metaphysical principle. The idea that spiritual reality “flows” from the divine through intelligible intermediaries into the physical realm allowed for a conceptualisation of talismans as points of ritual insertion into this cosmic current. In Arabic texts on astrology and talismans, the emanationist model is presupposed as the very basis of celestial influence. Talismans operate within this structure as focal points for astral energy.

Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā systematised a model of ten intellects emanating from the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*), culminating in the Active Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘āl*), which acts as the intermediary between the divine and the sublunary world. As such, talismans were seen not as superstitious objects, but as tools harmonised with the same cosmological logic governing prophetic inspiration and rational illumination. This placed talismanic action within a chain of intelligible causality, where matter, if properly prepared and symbolically encoded, could reflect and attract metaphysical influx.

The correspondence between Neoplatonic metaphysics and Islamic cosmology is particularly visible in Ibn Sīnā’s tripartite division of reality into intellect, soul, and celestial spheres: a structural analogue to Plotinus’s triad of the One, Nous, and Soul. By reworking this schema into his own metaphysical system, Ibn Sīnā provided a philosophical framework in which cosmic hierarchies could be mapped with precision. Within such a structure, the legitimacy of talismanic operations followed not from superstition but from their alignment with intelligible principles embedded in the order of emanation.

Suhrawardī radicalised the emanationist model by recasting it in terms of light. His Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) cosmology, drawing simultaneously on Neoplatonism and Zoroastrian angelology, depicts the universe as a hierarchy of luminosities descending from the *Nūr al-Anwār*. Every being is defined by its degree of radiance and its proximity to this supreme source. Within this luminous ontology, talismans are no longer conceived merely as astral constructs aligned with planetary configurations, but as codified mediations of light itself, crafted to resonate with articulated symbolic and ontological correspondences. In Suhrawardī’s system, talismanry thus becomes a philosophical practice of illumination, embedding ritual action within a metaphysics of radiance.

In this Neoplatonic-Islamic synthesis, the pre-Islamic Greek concept of *telesma* survives not only linguistically but ontologically, as a term for a crafted, consecrated object charged with celestial and spiritual power. The talisman becomes an expression of *logos* materialized: a symbolic instrument harmonizing the visible and invisible domains.

Although the theory of emanation faced substantial theological resistance, particularly from theologians al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymīyah, its metaphysical framework endured within Islamic esotericism, especially among Sufis, Illuminationists, and Shi‘i philosophers. The persistence of emanationist metaphysics and symbolic cosmology across centuries of Islamic thought reveals the lasting impact of Hellenistic philosophy on the development of a talismanic worldview in Islam.

Therefore, the principle of emanation, transmitted from Hellenistic metaphysics through Islamic Neoplatonism, provided a cosmological ordering that could be operationalised within talismanic theory, enabling theorisation of talismanry as a structured symbolic discipline grounded in a hierarchical conception of reality.

## 2. CONCEPTUALISING ISLAMIC TALISMANRY

### 2.1. The Philosophical and Theological Foundations of Islamic Esoteric Practice

The emergence of talismanic discourse in Islamic intellectual history must be analysed in relation to the metaphysical, cosmological, and hermeneutical frameworks developed between the 9th and 13th centuries. This chapter reconstructs how philosophical and Sufi authors articulated symbolic mediation using Qur'ānic, Neoplatonic, and Aristotelian vocabularies, thereby establishing the conceptual conditions under which talismanic reasoning became intelligible in a theologically ordered cosmos. The philosophical stake is to show how “symbolic efficacy” could be theorised without assigning independent causal status to symbols: mediation is reconstructed as a mode of derivative causation operating through ontological hierarchy, linguistic form, and ethically qualified agency. In these contexts, talismanic theory appears as a determinate configuration of a broader ontology of signs (*āyāt*), where creation is understood as graded, relational, and symbolically articulated.

For the purposes of Part II, talismanic discourse refers not primarily to ritual practice but to a set of theoretical claims about mediation: that causality unfolds through graded ontological levels; that language, especially letters, names, and numbers, functions as a structurally significant operator within that hierarchy; and that efficacy is conditioned by ethical and spiritual discipline as a criterion of agency. The aim of this chapter is to reconstruct the conditions of intelligibility under which *‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt* could be articulated as a coherent mode of symbolic causality within identifiable learned intellectual constellations.

At the foundation of this development lies the Qur'ān's discourse on divine speech and cosmological symbolism. The *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa'āt*—the disjointed letters prefacing twenty-nine surahs—functioned in later exegetical and mystical traditions as hermeneutic triggers. Their resistance to grammatical parsing invited symbolic interpretation. For theologians such as al-Bāqillānī, they exemplified the Qur'ān's *i'jāz* (inimitability); for Ibn 'Arabī and later Sufi metaphysicians, they were interpreted as pre-cosmic archetypes or ontological principles. On this basis, letters came to signify a layered cosmos in which meaning unfolds across levels of being, providing one of the earliest hermeneutical resources for later letrist and talismanic theories.

Furthermore, the most beautiful names of God (*asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*), traditionally enumerated as ninety-nine, offer a lexicon of power and presence. Within Sufi metaphysical interpretations, each Name, when invoked ritually or inscribed talismanically, was understood to mediate divine presence within created reality. M. Chodkiewicz states that the Name is never a mere designation in Islamic metaphysics; it is theophanic.<sup>137</sup> In this configuration, invocation and inscription are construed as formal modes of participation in an already operative divine order. The conceptual possibility of talismanic mediation thus presupposes a cosmology in which names correspond to structured levels of reality.

The Abbasid-era translation movement introduced Arabic thinkers to the full panoply of Hellenistic philosophical traditions. However, as Dimitri Gutas and others have argued, these texts were not assimilated passively but Islamised actively.<sup>138</sup> Neoplatonic emanation was reinterpreted as cosmological gradation under divine sovereignty; Aristotelian causality was tempered by *kalām* occasionalism. Within this rearticulated cosmology, hierarchical mediation became philosophically intelligible as a theory of secondary causation under divine unity, thereby providing a conceptual grammar later mobilised in discussions of talismanic causality. Al-Kindī's metaphysical writings, especially *Kitāb fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* (*On First Philosophy*), establish a framework in which the cosmos is bound together through the emanative activity of the One. The First Truth (*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*) is described as the cause of all being and unity.<sup>139</sup> From this principle unfolds a cosmos ordered through causal dependence, in which celestial realities transmit their effects to the sublunar world. In the *Risāla fī al-fā'il al-ḥaqq al-awwal al-tāmm wa-l-fā'il al-nāqiṣ alladhī huwa bi-l-majāz* (*Epistle on the True, Primary and Perfect Agent, and the Deficient Agent that is Metaphorically [an Agent]*), al-Kindī distinguishes between the perfect, primary cause and derivative, deficient agents, emphasising that all secondary causation depends upon the First Cause. Knowledge, in this context, is not confined to isolated causal sequences but is grounded in recognising the hierarchical structure of causation that links all levels of reality.<sup>140</sup> His cosmology thus suggests

<sup>137</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*, transl. by Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 167; 181, n. 77.

<sup>138</sup> Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 187–188.

<sup>139</sup> See Roshdi Rashed and Jean Jolivet, eds., *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'Al-Kindī, vol. II: Métaphysique et cosmologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), Arabic and French text, *Kitāb al-Kindī ilā al-Mu'taṣim bi-llāh fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, ch. 4, 93–95.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 168–172.

an epistemology grounded in recognising hierarchical correspondences, where phenomena are understood through symbolic affinities and their participation in the order established by the First Cause. Within such a framework, talismanic operations could be understood not as imposing will upon the world but as acting within pre-established harmonies. On this account, talismanic form can be read as a material index of pre-given correspondences, whose efficacy, if any, is derivative and subordinated to *tawhīd*.

Al-Fārābī introduces an ethical dimension into this ontological vision. In the *Mabādi' Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* (*Principles of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City*), he teaches that the philosopher's perfection lies not only in intellectual apprehension but in the right ordering of the soul, by which the human faculties become attuned to the divine order of emanation. When the two parts of the rational faculty, the theoretical (*al-naẓariyya*) and the practical (*al-'amaliyya*), are rightly ordered together with the imaginative / representative faculty (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*), the human being receives Divine Revelation (*yūḥā ilayhi*) through the mediation of the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*). The emanation then proceeds to the passive intellect (*al-'aql al-munfa'il*) by way of the acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafād*), and into the faculty of representation, so that he becomes a wise man and philosopher on the intellectual side and a visionary prophet on the imaginative side. Al-Fārābī concludes that such a person “holds the most perfect rank of humanity ... [and] his soul is, as it were, united with the Active Intellect” (*takūnu nafsuḥu kal-muttaḥidah bi-l-'aql al-fa'āl*).<sup>141</sup> In this view efficacy, whether intellectual, prophetic, or symbolic, depends upon ethical and spiritual alignment: only a perfected soul can act in accord with divine causation. Centuries later, al-Būnī would echo the same principle, making spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) the *sine qua non* of successful talismanic operation. This furnishes a durable constraint on mediation: agency is indexed to moral formation, not merely to formal procedure.

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' systematise the occult within their encyclopaedia as part of the philosophical sciences. In the preface to the magic epistle they state that: “the knowledge of the actions of the stars and their influences upon what is below the Moon [...] is part of spiritual philosophy (*al-falsafa al-rūḥāniyya*),” and they even class it among “the ultimate sciences of philosophy” (*juz' min ākhir 'ulūm al-falsafa*) that presuppose the preceding disciplines.<sup>142</sup> Under this curricular

<sup>141</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, ch. 15, 10–11, ed. and transl. by Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 44–245.

<sup>142</sup> Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, 90–92.

logic, their broader taxonomy explicitly includes *sihr* and *ṭilasmāt*, linking them to angelology and astral causation, and articulating an ascending pedagogy of inner power and transformation, famously: “by the science of magic and talismans subjects are joined to [the rank of] kings and kings to that of angels.”<sup>143</sup> Within this classificatory structure talismanic knowledge appears integrated into a broader Pythagorean-inflected science of number, harmony, and celestial correspondence. As Ian Richard Netton explains in his discussion of the Pythagorean legacy, *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* treats numbers and letters as symbolic principles underpinning the structure of creation: every cosmic order depends on number, proportion, and name: “Numbers constituted the first of these principles, and many resemblances were detected between numbers and material and spiritual phenomena; the whole universe was modelled on numbers. These Pythagorean sentiments are evident in the *Rasā’il* in the stress laid by the Ikhwān on the importance of number. Again and again the Ikhwān urge their fellows to acquire a good knowledge of the science of mathematics before proceeding to a study of the three higher sciences of logic, physics and divinity.”<sup>144</sup> According to S. H. Nasr, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ understood numbers not as abstractions but as qualitative principles that integrate beings into unity. In this view, cosmological sciences, including talismanry, constitute a sacred science of nature, in which mathematical harmony mirrors the coherence of creation.<sup>145</sup> The argument advanced here is that such mathematical and linguistic disciplines are not merely adjunct to talismanry; they are its epistemic foundation, validating it within the classificatory logic of Islamic knowledge (*‘ilm*).

It is against this classificatory and mathematical horizon that the science of letters (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*) emerges as a decisive development. If number articulated the proportional structure of the cosmos, letters were increasingly understood as its semantic and ontological articulation. No longer confined to phonetic or exegetical function, the *ḥurūf* came to be treated as structural principles through which divine command, cosmological differentiation, and epistemic access were mediated. The elaboration of *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* thus represents a linguistically focused theory of mediation, a systematic attempt to theorise how symbolic form participates in ontological hierarchy. In this sense, lettrism provided a conceptual grammar for talismanic reasoning, grounding symbolic operations in a disciplined account of

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>144</sup> Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 10.

<sup>145</sup> Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*.

language, number, and correspondence. Its fuller doctrinal and ritual elaboration will be examined in Section 2.3.

Yet the systematisation of symbolic mediation also required conceptual calibration. If number and letter could be theorised as ontological principles embedded within a stratified cosmos, their integration into philosophical discourse raised the question of how mediated efficacy was to be articulated without compromising divine sovereignty. The issue was not the simple affirmation or denial of talismanic practice, but the articulation of the theological and metaphysical parameters in which mediated efficacy could be intelligibly framed. A particularly influential formulation of these parameters appears in the work of al-Ghazālī.

In this regard, al-Ghazālī offers one of the most influential Sunni articulations of the distinction between illicit magic and licit devotional practice. He condemns the “science of sorcery and talismans” (*‘ilm al-siḥr wa-l-ṭilasmāt*) not because knowledge is blameworthy *per se*, but because, as practiced, it “joins to it utterances of unbelief and obscene words contrary to the Law, and by means of them one seeks the aid of demons,” from which “strange effects” follow “by God’s customary decree” (*ijrā’ al-‘ādah*).<sup>146</sup> This yields his ethical maxim: “the means to evil is itself evil” (*al-wasīlah ilā al-sharr sharr*), which frames magic as a prohibited *wasīlah* through an ethics of means and ends.<sup>147</sup> Yet al-Ghazālī simultaneously legitimates theurgic remembrance: the “effective and truly beneficial [remembrance] is the constant dhikr with the heart present” (*al-mu’aththir al-nāfi ‘ huwa al-dhikr ‘alā al-dawām ma ‘a ḥuḍūr al-qalb*), whereas “dhikr on the tongue while the heart is heedless yields little” (*fa-ammā al-dhikr bi-l-lisān wa-l-qalb lāhin fa-huwa qalīl al-jadwā*).<sup>148</sup> Read together, these statements specify the ethical and theological conditions under which symbolic practice participates in divine causality. Al-Ghazālī’s framework thereby operates as boundary-setting: it differentiates forms of symbolic action by intention, lawful means, and interior presence, and it limits causal language that would reify intermediaries.

Recent scholarship has increasingly illuminated the intricate theological and philosophical dimensions of Islamic talismanic practices. M. Melvin-Koushki, for instance, underscores that the occult sciences in the Islamic world were often integrated into intellectual and spiritual life, deeply embedded in the cosmological and metaphysical frameworks of the time. He articulates that these sciences were

<sup>146</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1, “Kitāb al-‘Ilm,” 33.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1, “Kitāb al-Adhkār wa-l-Da‘awāt,” 268.

considered rigorous disciplines, intertwining Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean principles with Islamic theological concepts, thereby forming a sophisticated system of knowledge and practice.<sup>149</sup> L. Saif and N. Gardiner also highlight that *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* operates within a symbolic epistemology, where the manipulation of letters and numbers is not arbitrary but follows a structured, analogical reasoning that reflects the divine order. This practice is underpinned by a moral and ethical orientation, ensuring that the engagement with such sciences aligns with spiritual and theological principles.<sup>150</sup> These perspectives contribute to a reassessment of Islamic talismanry as a philosophically configured field of symbolic reasoning embedded in broader metaphysical and ethical discourses.

Thus, within the traditions examined here, talismanic practice appears as a structured attempt to articulate symbolic mediation within a theologically ordered cosmos. It is a discipline that bridges ontology and ritual, cosmology and devotion, philosophy and ethics. It is predicated on a view of reality as symbolic and participatory, where the divine discloses itself through names, numbers, letters, and stars—not arbitrarily, but in accordance with intelligible and theologically grounded principles. In these contexts, the talisman functions as a materialised symbol situated within a participatory metaphysics. It embodies the Islamic vision of a cosmos suffused with meaning, governed by divine unity, and accessible through disciplined spiritual knowledge.

Yet this symbolic cosmology also brings to the fore adjacent and contested categories of knowledge, which both illuminate and complicate the understanding of talismanry. Among these, the concept of *sīmīyā*’ occupies a distinct, though often ambiguous, position within the Islamic classification of occult sciences. Etymologically, *sīmīyā*’ is commonly understood to derive from the Greek word σημεῖον (*sēmeion*), meaning “sign” or “symbol,” through a likely intermediary in Syriac or Persian transmission. It thus signifies a “science of signs,” distinct from *ṭilasmāt*, whose etymology is rooted in the Greek *telesma*, meaning “completion” or “ritual operation.” While both sciences involve symbolic correspondence and ritual efficacy, *ṭilasmāt* generally refers to material operations aimed at influencing

<sup>149</sup> Melvin-Koushki, “Introduction: De-orienting the Study of Islamicate Occultism”; Melvin-Koushki, “Toward a Neopythagorean Historiography.”

<sup>150</sup> Leoni, Melvin-Koushki, Saif, and Yahya, *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*; Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*; Noah Gardiner, “Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī’s Works,” *Arabica* 64 (2017), 405–441.

physical or metaphysical realities through celestial alignments, whereas *sīmiyā*’, as Toufic Fahd and Duncan Black Macdonald note, was most often described as working on the level of perception and imagination, producing appearances with no external reality.<sup>151</sup> It is also worth mentioning, as L. Saif observes, that in later sources *sīmiyā*’ was defined in terms of illusion and sleight of hand, as the production of fleeting forms in the air perceptible only to the imagination. She notes: “Within the context of revelatory *bāṭinism*, then, *sīmiyā*’ acquired negative connotations—namely, it was associated with illusionism and mundane magical practices such as talismans. In their studies of the science of letters generally and al-Būnī specifically, a number of scholars have inaccurately used *sīmiyā*’ interchangeably with ‘*ilm al-ḥurūf*.’”<sup>152</sup> In a similar way, medieval authors frequently grouped *sīmiyā*’ with deceptive forms of *siḥr*, even while esoteric writers, particularly those in the Sufi and letter-mystical traditions, continued to engage with it, revealing how classificatory boundaries were drawn, contested, and redrawn.<sup>153</sup>

However, this ambiguity becomes more complex and more productive in later medieval Sufi metaphysics. Particularly in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī, the faculty of imagination (*khayāl*) is revalorised as the very ground of ontological mediation, embodied in the concept of the *‘ālam al-mithāl*. In this construal perception and reality are no longer neatly opposed; *sīmiyā*’, traditionally viewed as an illusionist operation, can be reinterpreted as a form of spiritual unveiling, an imaginal disclosure rather than mere perceptual trickery. This metaphysical rehabilitation of imagination blurs the boundary between false semblance and divine sign, allowing *sīmiyā*’ to be reconsidered as a liminal zone in which symbolic vision, spiritual transformation, and esoteric knowledge intersect.

Seen in this light, the practices of talismanry and the discourses surrounding *sīmiyā*’ converge: both presuppose a cosmos in which signs, names, and symbols participate in the structure of reality. Accordingly, within the traditions examined here, talismanic discourse can be understood as a structured modality of symbolic mediation articulated in a theologically ordered cosmology. In these contexts, the talisman is presented not as an instrument of arbitrary manipulation but as a materialised symbol situated within a participatory cosmology.

<sup>151</sup> Toufic Fahd [revising Duncan Black Macdonald], “*Sīmiyā*’,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 612–613.

<sup>152</sup> Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma‘ārif*,” 336–337.

<sup>153</sup> Fahd [rev. Macdonald], “*Sīmiyā*’.”

## 2.2. Symbolic Causality Between Magic (*sihr*), Knowledge (*‘ilm*), and Philosophy (*falsafa*): Conceptual Constraints of Talismanic Mediation

Building on the ontology of signs and hierarchies outlined in 2.1, talismanic discourse unfolds in a field of epistemic tension structured by three interrelated intellectual vectors: *sihr*,<sup>154</sup> *‘ilm*,<sup>155</sup> and *falsafa*.<sup>156</sup> These were not merely classificatory labels but competing registers through which models of causality, mediation, and knowledge were evaluated. This chapter examines how these categories functioned as conceptual constraints delimiting the conditions under which symbolic mediation could be articulated within an Islamicate metaphysical horizon.

The Qur’ānic treatment of *sihr*, which unequivocally condemns certain forms of magic (Q. 2:102; 113:4), has often been interpreted as a wholesale rejection of all

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<sup>154</sup> In this study, *sihr* is treated as a historically graded and contested category whose status is determined by authority, intention, and cosmology rather than by sheer (in)efficacy. Classical materials register both condemnation and constrained accommodation, distinguishing between illicit manipulation that presumes independent causal power and regulated symbolic practices subordinated to divine *irāda* and legal–ethical norms. The term also functions polemically to mark rival expertise. Here *sihr* denotes a spectrum ranging from prohibited operations severed from divine authorisation to regulated symbolic procedures, reclassified as lawful when disciplined by *niyya* and conformity to *‘āda / sunan ilāhiyya*. See Toufic Fahd, “Sihr,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Coulon, *La magie en terre d’Islam au Moyen Âge*.

<sup>155</sup> By *‘ilm* is meant its classical, capacious sense of disciplined and transmissible cognition encompassing revealed and rational sciences, including operative craft (*ṣinā‘a*). Medieval classifications situate *‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt* within the mathematical / astral sciences (*‘ulūm ta’līmīyya*) and operative disciplines (*‘ulūm ‘amalīyya*), where rule-governed procedure, authorisation (*isnād*), and ethical formation secure legitimacy. In this study, talismany is treated as a regulated *‘ilm ṣinā‘a*: a rule-bound craft-science whose validity depends on methodological discipline and conformity to the divinely instituted order. See Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*; Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. by ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Wāfi, 4 vols. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Bayān al-‘Arabī, 1957–1962); Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, intro. by Dimitri Gutas (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>156</sup> *Falsafa* provides the metaphysical and natural-philosophical framework within which talismanic mediation is rendered causally intelligible without compromising divine agency. In the Greco-Arabic tradition, symbolic operations are theorised through lawful causal media–celestial influence, cosmic sympathy, and the powers of the soul, so that talismany appears as participation in a hierarchically ordered cosmos rather than as disruption of it. In this study, *falsafa* denotes the articulation of ontological hierarchy, demonstrative reasoning, and ethical discipline that allows symbolic operations to be conceptualised as natural-philosophical rather than polemically as *sihr*. See Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā’ al-‘Ulūm*, ed. by ‘Uthmān Amīn (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1949); Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*.

forms of occult practices. For the present argument, the decisive point is how these passages constrain causal attribution: the textual emphasis falls less on the denial of efficacy than on the safeguarding of divine sovereignty. The central problem is mediation under *tawḥīd*; namely, how symbolic forms can operate without implying autonomous causal power. While Patricia Crone does not address *siḥr* specifically in *God's Rule: Government and Islam*, her wider analysis of religious authority underscores that prohibitions in Islam were aimed at safeguarding divine prerogatives rather than denying the possibility of efficacy.<sup>157</sup> The textual framing of *siḥr* therefore centres on the safeguarding of God's exclusive *irāda* (divine will) rather than on a denial of efficacy as such. Accordingly, the epistemological problem of talismanry is not irrationality but mediation: how can symbolic forms operate without implying autonomous causal power? It is this very ambiguity that allows for the emergence of a sophisticated discourse on symbolic action in Islamic thought.

Within the theological schools, this ambiguity was the object of intense scrutiny. The Ash'arites, committed to occasionalism (*al-āda*), maintained that God is the sole cause of all effects, thereby denying intrinsic causality to material entities. As Frank Griffel explains, al-Bāqillānī insisted that when fire burns cotton: "All we can know without doubt is that these two things usually follow each other in our observation or our sense perception (*mushāhada*). Such perceptions, however, are unable to inform us about a causal connection between these two events."<sup>158</sup> This position establishes an ontological constraint: mediation cannot entail independent causal agency. What appears as natural causality is in fact God's free act, enacted according to His established habit (*āda*): "God follows a habit (*ajrā al-āda*) in the temporal order in which He brings these events about, and doing it the other way would be a violation of His habit."<sup>159</sup> Within such a cosmology, talismanic efficacy could only be theorised as participation in divine habit (*āda*) as a constrained description of regularity, not as manipulation of causal forces. Yet al-Ghazālī nuances this occasionalist paradigm by situating all operative power within the continuity of divine *āda* rather than outside it.<sup>160</sup> In the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, he explains that the extraordinary effects attributed to *siḥr* arise only "by God's customary decree" (*bi-ḥukmi ijrā' Allāh al-ādah*), and thus possess no independent causality. But within the same theological horizon, he affirms that true efficacy belongs to acts of remembrance animated by

<sup>157</sup> Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>158</sup> Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 152.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>160</sup> See ibid., 150–160.

spiritual presence: it is the heart's orientation toward God (*tawajjuh al-qalb*) and its continuous awareness / presence (*ḥuḍūr al-qalb*), not the verbal formula itself, that renders *dhikr* effective.<sup>161</sup> Here the *locus* of efficacy shifts from material form to interior disposition. This move is philosophically decisive: it reframes action as ethically qualified participation in a divine order. The talisman, when employed with correct *niyya* and spiritual discipline, becomes not a tool of domination, but a form of supplication and divine remembrance—*dhikr*. Thus, within *kalām*, the tension between *siḥr* and *‘ilm* is recast as a problem of causation and intention rather than of mere practice.

The Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya, perhaps the most influential voice against talismanic practices, consistently rejected the use of amulets or talismans inscribed with obscure symbols or non-Qur’ānic texts. He regarded such objects as potentially involving *shirk* or even sorcery, and therefore strictly prohibited them. For Ibn Taymiyya, attributing efficacy to anything other than God, even implicitly, constituted a deviation that undermined divine sovereignty.<sup>162</sup> His critique therefore functions not merely as juridical prohibition but as an epistemological boundary-marker: it rejects symbolic configurations in which causal language risks reifying intermediaries. This is analytically useful precisely as boundary-setting, rather than as an arbiter of legitimacy.

If *kalām* imposed ontological limits upon mediation, *falsafa* articulated the cosmological structures in which symbolic causality could be rendered intelligible. Islamic philosophers, particularly those influenced by the Neoplatonic corpus, articulated a model of talismanic efficacy distinct from but complementary to theological frameworks. In *De radiis stellarum*, al-Kindī posits that celestial bodies continuously emit rays that structure terrestrial reality through subtle, immaterial influences. When harnessed through talismanic devices, constructed in accordance with celestial configurations and encoded with letters, numbers, and divine names, these influences could be directed and intensified. Al-Kindī’s theory embodies a metaphysics of cosmic sympathy, in which knowledge itself is conceived as the art of resonance: to know is to perceive and participate in the hidden bonds linking celestial and terrestrial orders. Talismanic form thus functions as a structured interface between intelligible causes and sensible substrates; a model of mediation that will later intersect with lettrist semiotics (2.3) and theurgical formalization (2.4).

<sup>161</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1, “Kitāb al-‘Ilm,” 33; “Kitāb al-Adhkār wa-l-Da‘awāt,” 298.

<sup>162</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vols. 11 and 19.

Operating within the same philosophical horizon, al-Fārābī adds an essential ethical and epistemological component. In the *Al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, he argues that only the morally perfected philosopher is capable of understanding and participating in the Active Intellect (*‘aql al-fa‘āl*). The practitioner must be intellectually attuned and ethically purified, for only such a soul can enact talismanic operations that align with the divine order. His broader philosophical system affirms that any engagement with the metaphysical structure of reality requires not only knowledge but moral readiness. This emphasis on moral and intellectual discipline anchors talismanry firmly within the Islamic philosophical project as a legitimate form of sacred science (*‘ilm muqaddas*), conditioned by ethical criteria.

Although al-Fārābī represents a later stage in the philosophical articulation of talismanry, the intellectual prestige of the discipline had already been firmly established in the ninth century. Harranian Thābit ibn Qurra, writing in Baghdad, described *‘ilm al-tilsamāt* as “the noblest part of astronomy,” thereby embedding it within the rational study of celestial influence.<sup>163</sup> A century later, Ibn Sīnā deepened this conception by explaining that the purpose of talismanic science was to unite the powers of the heavens with carefully chosen earthly substances so as to produce extraordinary effects in the sublunary realm.<sup>164</sup> This understanding of talismanic science in the ambit of astronomy traces back to Aristotelian cosmology, which distinguishes two distinct realms on either side of the lunar sphere. The region beneath the moon encompasses the earthly domain, characterised by constant flux, generation, and decay, where physical processes govern the interplay of change. As Ptolemy explains, the study of the heavens belongs primarily to mathematics, since celestial motions are regular and unchanging, whereas the mutable world below the lunar sphere is the domain of physics.<sup>165</sup> Within this cosmological structure, the science of talismans sought to draw upon the predictable courses of the stars to effect transformations in the sublunary world through the use of visual and symbolic forms.<sup>166</sup>

Ibn Sīnā later sharpens this articulation by making talismanic efficacy intelligible within his psychology of the soul. In the *al-Shifā’*: *Kitāb al-Nafs* (*The Healing: Book*

<sup>163</sup> Charles Burnett, “Tābit ibn Qurra the Harrānian on talismans,” *La Corónica* 36 (1) (2007), 17; Francis J. Carmody, ed. and transl., *The Astronomical Works of Thabit b. Qurra* (University of California Press, 1960).

<sup>164</sup> Burnett, “The Three Divisions of Arabic Magic,” 43–44.

<sup>165</sup> Gerald Johnston Toomer, ed. and transl., *Ptolemy’s “Almagest”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 35–37.

<sup>166</sup> Anderson, “The Science of Talismans Today.”

of the Soul) he argues that, when the soul's preparedness (*isti'dād*) is perfected, the form in the soul functions as the principle (*mabda'*) of effects in the sublunary element; operative agency proceeds by emanation from *al-'aql al-fa'āl* to the imaginative / representative faculty (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*), which mediates those forms towards matter. Extraordinary outcomes are therefore participatory, not mechanical: symbolic operations work when the rightly disciplined soul aligns with celestial intelligences and transmits form to receptive terrestrial substrates.<sup>167</sup> This anticipates what later Sufi traditions articulate as *himma*: a concentrated spiritual will that acts not by force but through ontological alignment. The decisive shift lies in interiorisation: mediation is relocated to the prepared soul. Symbolic efficacy becomes a function of participatory alignment between intellect, imagination, and matter. The talisman, in this view, becomes a mediator of metaphysical order, not a manipulator of material causality.

Sufi metaphysics elaborates this participatory logic into a theurgical horizon. For Ibn 'Arabī, the cosmos is a weave of divine names and attributes disclosed through letters and forms. Here mediation is radicalised: all efficacy belongs to the divine command (*amr*), while the human becomes a *locus* of manifestation rather than an independent operator. Accordingly, the gnostic (*al-'ārif*) does not act independently but serves as a *locus* in which that command is manifested: true knowledge consists in witnessing God as the sole effective agent in all states.<sup>168</sup> On this basis, talismanic practice can be construed not as private power but as a signature of resonance with the divine address, provided it remains a symbolic alignment rather than a claim to intrinsic efficacy. This ontological modesty transforms talismanic logic into a metaphysics of disclosure: symbolic forms do not compete with divine causality but reveal its patterned descent into material articulation.

This metaphysics of manifestation is inseparable from the broader Islamic doctrine of the divine names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), which long precedes Ibn 'Arabī but receives systematic ontological elaboration in his thought. In the *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Ibn 'Arabī states that the Most Beautiful Names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), which exceed the enumerated Names in number yet are lower in felicity—that is, in ontological rank insofar as they are operative in this world (*al-mu'aththira fī hādihā al-'ālam*)—constitute the primary keys (*al-mafātiḥ al-ūwal*) known only to Him. He adds that every reality has a name from among the Names pertaining specifically to

<sup>167</sup> Ibn Sīnā, "Kitāb al-Nafs," 199.

<sup>168</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vols. 5 and 10.

it (*li-kulli ḥaqīqatin ismun mā yakhuṣṣuhā min al-asmā*'), defining "reality" here as a reality that gathers together a genus of realities (*ḥaqīqatan tajma 'u jinsan min al-ḥaqā'iq*). The lord of that reality is that Name (*rabbu tilka al-ḥaqīqa dhālika al-ism*), and that reality is worshipping ('*ābida*) and subject to its obligation (*taḥta taklīfihi*).<sup>169</sup> On this basis, talismanic efficacy does not stem from the material substrate but from aligning an invoked or inscribed Name (*ism*) with the corresponding *ḥaqīqa*; a symbolic consonance that, when joined to proper timing (*waqt*) and intention (*niyya*), becomes a *locus* of blessing (*baraka*).

It is precisely this doctrine of ontological correspondence between Name and reality that receives technical systematisation in al-Būnī's *Shams al-ma'ārif*, where talismanic science is constructed upon the permutations of the divine names, the principles of '*ilm al-ḥurūf*, and the astronomical cycles governing the heavens. Al-Būnī does not conceal the potency of these configurations, but he rigorously conditions their use upon spiritual purity and correct intention. Al-Būnī warns that inscribing the divine names without purity (*tahāra*), awe (*hayba*), and reverence (*ta'zīm*) rebounds upon the practitioner as a harmful consequence (*wabāl*) and an inner burning (*harīq*): its fire (*nār*) turns against him rather than working for him.<sup>170</sup> The analytic point is structural: talismanic efficacy is delimited by ethical purification and ritual discipline. The practitioner appears as a technician of symbolic correspondences whose authority is inseparable from spiritual formation.

Taken together, these theological and philosophical articulations reveal that talismany occupies a liminal but structured space between *sihr*, '*ilm*, and *falsafa*. Talismany here emerges as a disciplined science of mediation governed by ontological hierarchy, participatory epistemology, and ethical constraint. In this sense, talismanic mediation can be understood as a disciplined practice of presence (*ḥuḍūr*), in which symbolic form renders intelligible the graded descent of causality without implying autonomous agency.

Beyond cosmological and psychological accounts of mediation, Ismaili thought articulated a hierarchically structured hermeneutics in which the *bāṭin* is regarded as ontologically prior to, and determinative of, the *ẓāhir*. Within this framework, the talisman assumes a metaphysical function as a sign whose validity depends upon its correspondence to an inward, intelligible reality. According to Nāṣir Khusraw (d. after 1070), outward forms have no standing apart from their inward meanings: it

<sup>169</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 2, ch. 4, 319.

<sup>170</sup> Pseudo-al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif*.

is through *‘aql* (intellect / reason), *ma‘rifā* (gnosis), and *tā‘a* (obedience / devotional submission) that a sign becomes true, and only then may its written or fashioned form count as an index of reality rather than a rival to it.<sup>171</sup> Thus, within Ismaili gnosis, the talisman is neither autonomous object nor operative image, but a structured expression of the soul’s alignment with divine intelligibility. In this configuration, mediation is subordinated to hermeneutics rather than to cosmology or celestial causality: symbolic form derives legitimacy from prior ontological correspondence between intellect and revelation. The Ismaili model therefore offers a distinct resolution of the *sihr–‘ilm–falsafa* tension: symbolic efficacy is neither materially instrumentalised nor cosmologically engineered, but interiorised within a hierarchised structure of meaning.

At the level of scholarly classification and legal evaluation, Ibn Khaldūn offers yet another regulatory perspective. In the *Muqaddimah*, he sets out clear definitions. Sorcery, he argues, operates without external aid, whereas talismanry depends upon celestial configurations and numerical properties. He traces both to earlier civilisations, yet ultimately rules them unlawful in religious law for misdirecting devotion and causing harm, while distinguishing saintly wonders as occurring through divine support.<sup>172</sup> What Ibn Khaldūn condemns is not the conceptual intelligibility of talismanic science *per se*, but its law-contravening and harmful applications. His distinction indicates that the controversy turned less on metaphysical possibility than on juridical regulation and ethical framing.

Across these distinct yet intersecting discursive formations, the triad of *sihr*, *‘ilm*, and *falsafa* functions not as a set of competing labels but as a conceptual matrix regulating the intelligibility of symbolic causality. Theological doctrines of divine sovereignty circumscribed the language of causation; philosophical cosmology supplied models of hierarchical mediation; Sufi metaphysics interiorised symbolic efficacy within disciplined consciousness; juridical and classificatory discourses regulated its legal and epistemic status. This yields the governing question for the next chapter: how linguistic form becomes a privileged medium for theorising mediation.

<sup>171</sup> Nāṣir Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, ed. by Ghulām-Riḍā A‘vānī (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977).

<sup>172</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, ed. by ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Wāfī, 4 vols. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Bayān al-‘Arabī, 1957–1962).

### 2.3. The Development of *‘Ilm al-Ḥurūf* and Lettrist Techniques

Situated within the conceptual matrix of *sihr*, *‘ilm*, and *falsafa* delineated above, the emergence and systematisation of *‘ilm al-hurūf* may be understood as a historically specific attempt to articulate a theory of symbolic mediation in which linguistic forms function as ontological operators bridging intelligible and sensible orders under constraints of divine unity and qualified agency. Crystallising within early Sufi milieux while drawing upon philosophical and hermeneutical currents, the science of letters developed as a systematic reflection on the ontological status of language within an Islamicate cosmology. It represents an internally elaborated mode of theorising how Qur’ānic language participates in metaphysical structure. Here, Arabic letters are not treated merely as phonetic units but as structurally significant elements within a tiered ontological schema. Within such a linguistic-cosmological configuration, the talisman can be conceptualised not as an assertion of autonomous control, but as a formalised act of alignment within a pre-structured symbolic order.

The Qur’ānic phenomenon of *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta‘āt* demands serious philosophical engagement: “Alif Lām Mīm. This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of God” (*Alif Lām Mīm. Dhālika al-kitābu lā rayba fīhi hudan lil-muttaqīn*, Q. 2:1–2). Their lack of semantic determinacy has provoked both classical exegesis and esoteric speculation. They resist grammatical reduction yet persist in signalling ontological depth. While Toshihiko Izutsu does not address these letters directly, his semantic analysis of Qur’ānic vocabulary underlines that Qur’ānic signs often function as symbolic triggers that open onto levels of meaning beyond rational-linguistic explanation.<sup>173</sup> In this light, the *ḥurūf* may be interpreted as liminal signs pointing towards a metaphysical dimension irreducible to literal semantic content. Their placement at the threshold of revelation underscores their apophatic role: they are not content but orientation, not meaning but metaphysical directionality.

In early Islamic mysticism, one of the first systematic attempts at constructing a metaphysics of letters emerges in the thought of Ibn Masarra of al-Andalus (d. 931). Among his fragmentary works, the *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf wa-ḥaqā‘iqihā wa-uṣūlihā* (*The Book on the Properties of Letters, Their True Essences, and Their Roots*) is especially significant for its synthesis of Qur’ānic exegesis with Neoplatonic

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<sup>173</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur’an: Semantics of the Qur’anic Weltanschauung* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2008), esp. ch. “Qur’anic Key-Terms in History.”

emanationism. As Sarah Stroumsa explains, the treatise: “is dedicated to the fourteen *ḥawāṭim*, the mysterious letters that appear at the beginning of twenty-nine Qur’ānic sūras. These letters, says Ibn Masarra, constitute the innermost meaning (*bāṭin*) of revelation.”<sup>174</sup> In this view, the disjointed letters are not ornamental but ontological markers that disclose hidden metaphysical truths. Ibn Masarra develops this idea further by presenting the letters as divine hypostases, “the manifestations of the divine attributes. As they overflow, they create the universe and control its destiny to eternity.”<sup>175</sup> His *Risālat al-i’tibār* (*Epistle of Contemplation*) complements this cosmology by offering a contemplative path to divine knowledge, while *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* provides a symbolic key by “deciphering the ontological significance of the Arabic letters.”<sup>176</sup> Through this dual articulation Ibn Masarra interprets the Qur’ānic *ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa’āt* as *loci* of esoteric meaning embedded within a Neoplatonic cosmology, assigning to them a constitutive role in the structure of emanation. His ontology of language, grounded in Neoplatonic emanation and Qur’ānic symbolism, provides an early articulation of themes later developed in both Sufi and Shi’i lettrist traditions, where letters were treated as possessing ontological significance beyond their semantic or grammatical function.

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, operating within a broader encyclopaedic project of harmonising philosophical, scientific, and religious knowledge, accorded *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* a privileged place among the mathematical and metaphysical sciences. In their epistles, letters are treated as numerical and geometric archetypes, resonating with celestial movements and musical harmonies. In his seminal work *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, S. H. Nasr explains that the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’’s classification of the sciences integrates arithmetic, geometry, and music as pathways to decipher the divine order of the cosmos: “The purpose of the Ikhwān, according to their own definition, seems to be educational in the fullest sense of the word—that is, to bring to fruition and perfection the latent faculties of man so that he may gain salvation and spiritual freedom. Practically every chapter of their long work reminds the reader that in this world he is a prisoner who through knowledge must free himself from his earthly prison. All the sciences they consider—whether astronomy, angelology, or embryology—are discussed, not with the aim of a purely theoretical or intellectual interpretation or for their practical application, but to help untie the

<sup>174</sup> Sarah Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad: On Philosophy and Its History in Islamic Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 51.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

knots in the soul of the reader by making him aware, on the one hand, of the great harmony and beauty of the Universe and, on the other, of the necessity for man to go beyond material existence.”<sup>177</sup> Within this schema, letters and numbers function not only as epistemological tools but as symbolic reflections of metaphysical realities; microcosmic signs of macrocosmic principles. This correlation between letter and cosmos provides a conceptual framework within which talismanic construction could be rendered cosmologically intelligible.

It is with al-Būnī that *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* reaches its most systematic and influential exposition. In the *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, al-Būnī codifies an extensive framework linking letters to the [most beautiful] divine names (*asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā*), planetary configurations, numerical values (*abjad*), and spiritual states. Each letter is a vessel of spiritual power (*quwwa rūḥāniyya*), deployed within talismanic matrices designed to establish consonance between textual form and cosmological order. As J.-C. Coulon has shown, al-Būnī’s *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* presents itself as a *summa* on the letters, beginning with a theoretical exposition on creation, cosmology, and the place of letters within systems of analogy, before proceeding to a description of the letters one by one.<sup>178</sup> Here al-Būnī situates himself in a lineage of masters of *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, citing Sahl al-Tustarī and Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī among the “ancients” and Ibn Masarra and Ibn Barrajān among the “moderns.” The declared aim of the work is not to treat the letters for their own sake, but to approach, through them, the nobility of revelation and the divine subtleties it contains.<sup>179</sup> Yet the very ambiguity of the discourse betrays a double horizon: while framed as Qur’ānic hermeneutics, the science of letters also offers practical applications, cosmogonic analogies, and tables of correspondences integrating astrology, angelology, and cosmology. In the *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, as cited by J.-C. Coulon, al-Būnī remarks that “the science of letters is among the most noble sciences of the mystics.”<sup>180</sup>

Al-Būnī’s talismanic writings articulate a systematic model of symbolic operations grounded in metaphysical and cosmological correspondences. In the *Shams al-ma‘ārif* and *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, he codifies an extensive framework linking planetary elections, Qur’ānic verses, divine names, and numerical matrices within a rule-governed ritual architecture. His diagrams and letter arrays function as carefully ordered inscriptions in which language, number, geometry, and invocation

<sup>177</sup> Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 30.

<sup>178</sup> Coulon, *La magie en terre d’Islam au Moyen Âge*, 222.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

converge, forming composite configurations designed to establish consonance between textual symbol and cosmological order. The operational dimension of the *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* tradition becomes particularly visible in the use of *awfāq*, letter grids, and numerical permutations inscribed onto physical media. As P. Lory explains, these *awfāq* are constructed according to precise numerical and symbolic correspondences, operating as geometrical articulations of the divine names within an attuned ritual framework. Their efficacy is theorised as contingent upon formal congruity and spiritual receptivity, such that talismanic construction appears as a disciplined science whose operative conditions are ethical qualification and calibrated correspondence.<sup>181</sup>

Būnian sources repeatedly locate operative knowledge in the heart: in *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt* the heart (*qalb*) is described as the deposit of the letters’ secrets, and *fahm* (realisation)—a God-given apprehension distinct from *tafsīr* (exoteric interpretation of phenomena or text) and *ra‘y* (interpretation through opinion)—is said to proceed through the heart and to illuminate the soul, culminating in *kashf* (unveiling).<sup>182</sup> In the *Shams al-Ma‘ārif*, this is elaborated as a mystical anatomy of the heart with three chambers (*tajwīfāt*), each with an “eye”: the first chamber’s “Eye of Light” enables *taṣkhīr* (subjugation) and discloses “the secrets of *sensibilia*, the evolution of composites, the verities of letters, their secrets, and the greatness of what God the Exalted has placed in it [pertaining to] the secrets of the names and the verities of His knowledge,”<sup>183</sup> thereby tying efficacy to an inward faculty rather than reducing it to technical procedure.

In the same tradition, the letter–cosmos economy renders mastery of letters a function of emancipation and unveiling: “The letters themselves are the essential principles of the spheres, their rotations, emanations, and the *rūḥāniyyāt*. Thus it is only through mastery of the letters that the operator can attract the powers of the *rūḥāniyyāt* and the higher world,” with *himma* intensified by the soul’s emancipation.<sup>184</sup> L. Saif corroborates this with Būnian folios highlighting *taṣarruf* (divinely authorised directive power), *himma* (concentrated spiritual will), and the web of divine sympathies that link letters, *rūḥāniyyāt*, and creation. In this

<sup>181</sup> Lory, *La science des lettres en Islam*.

<sup>182</sup> Al-Būnī, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt*, 4v; 5v; 10v ff., as cited in Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma‘ārif*,” 338–339.

<sup>183</sup> Pseudo-al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā‘if al-‘awārif*, 14; as cited in Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma‘ārif*,” 339.

<sup>184</sup> Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma‘ārif*,” 343.

light, *Shams al-ma'arif* reads as a technical philosophical theology of mediation: cosmology, ethics, and symbol coalesce in a theurgic ritual whose efficacy turns on the heart's receptivity and authorisation, not on bare manipulation of forms.

The speculative grammar underlying such lettrist operations had already received systematic articulation in the metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī, who elevates *'ilm al-ḥurūf* to the level of cosmological first principles. In the *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, he presents each letter as endowed with spirit, rank, and cosmic correspondence, and understands the divine command (*amr*) as unfolding through their articulations. Here, Ibn 'Arabī elaborates a system in which each letter corresponds to a divine attribute, an element of creation, and a spiritual station. "The meanings carried by letters encompass absolute Existence in its totality: God and the Universe, or more specifically, He who imposes the Law and those upon whom it is imposed (*mukallif-mukallaḥūn*). It is through the letter that both what is Written is drawn out, and the Law is fulfilled."<sup>185</sup> The world itself is read as letters and words comprising the "Great Qur'ān," creation as divine discourse. Talismanic inscription thus is conceptualised as participatory articulation: writing becomes a mode of enacting ontological correspondence within the temporal order, conditioned by ethical alignment. In this horizon, the talisman is not linguistic ornament but a microcosmic enactment of the creative utterance (*kun fa-yakūn*): it aligns symbolic form with divine order while never claiming autonomous efficacy.<sup>186</sup>

Moreover, the moral dimension of this practice is not incidental but foundational. Both the Būnian corpus and Akbarian Sufism condition talismanic efficacy not on mere technique but on spiritual purity and right intention. As N. Gardiner notes in connection with *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, the operator is required to observe fasting (*ṣawm*), maintain ritual purity (*ṭahāra*), and cultivate continuous inner clarity (*ṣafā' al-bāṭin*), so that the talisman functions as a conduit for the powers of the divine names (*asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*) through a purified soul rather than through purely mechanical procedure. These prescriptions encode a doctrine of moral causality that precludes any purely technical manipulation of divine symbols. N. Gardiner further explains that many of al-Būnī's works—beyond *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*—are centrally concerned with embodied spiritual exercises (*riyādāt*) familiar from the classical Sufi tradition (e.g., seclusion (*khalwah*), supererogatory fasting, *dhikr*).

<sup>185</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. II, in collaboration with Cyrille Chodkiewicz and Denis Gril, 108 (comm. by Denis Gril); 150 (text). See also Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 1, ch. 2, 176.

<sup>186</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 1, ch. 2, 176–245.

In *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, these disciplines are directed towards an enhanced capacity to dispose astral-lettristic forces in the material world, particularly through the use of talismans.<sup>187</sup>

This ethical architecture is not confined to a single textual layer but is reaffirmed in the broader Būnian tradition. In a pseudo-Būnian text circulating within this tradition, *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif* (*The Sun of Knowledge and the Subtleties of Gnostic Knowing*), which L. Saif identifies as an early textual stratum underlying the later *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* (*The Great Sun of Knowledge*), the science of letters is explicitly conditioned on spiritual emancipation and purification: “The secrets of the letters and their instrumentalisation depend on the emancipation of the soul from its [physical] attachment, and [it is] the special path on which the gnostics—people of knowledge—march toward the emancipation of the soul from the sensory world and its purification from the lowliness of natural matters. And they are assigned to some of them but not to others; they protect it, conceal it, and express it with symbols. Such extraordinary skills are achieved without difficulty and inconvenience and, most of all, without any kind of tricks. Furthermore, those who hope to achieve such supernatural effects without bothering to purify their souls achieve only *sīmiyā'* and corruption on earth.”<sup>188</sup> In this formulation, lettrist magic is aligned with *taskhīr*—the production of effects such as the subjugation of spirits, while being carefully distinguished from the illusory and mundane practices of *sīmiyā'*. Crucially, its efficacy is presented as dependent not upon technique alone but upon the spiritual state of the operator, including purification, ascetic detachment, and unveiling (*kashf*). Accordingly, the science of letters is framed as an ascetic and epistemic discipline in which symbolic efficacy is inseparable from the practitioner's inner disposition.<sup>189</sup>

The systematic articulation of *'ilm al-ḥurūf* did not end with the medieval period but continued to develop well into the post-classical era. A striking example is provided by the 16th-century polymath Dawūd al-Antākī, whose definition of the discipline, preserved in his *Tadhkirat ulī al-albāb wa-al-jāmi' lil-'ajab al-'ujāb* (*Notebook for the Sound-Minded and the Agglomeration of the Marvel of Marvels*) and cited by J.-C. Coulon, lays out its epistemic architecture with scholastic precision. He writes:

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<sup>187</sup> Gardiner, “Stars and Saints,” 61–62.

<sup>188</sup> Pseudo-al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma'ārif wa-laṭā'if al-'awārif*, 80v-81r ff., as paraphrased in Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma'ārif*,” 337.

<sup>189</sup> Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma'ārif*,” 337.

“The science of letters is—as the shaykh<sup>190</sup> has defined it—the investigation of the properties of letters, whether taken individually or in combination. Its subject is the letters of the alphabet; its matter, magic squares and composite arrangements; its form, their division according to quantity and quality, the formulation of oaths and conjurations, and what results from them. Its agent is the thaumaturge. Its goal is power over the orientation through which the desired effect is produced, whether to bring it about or to prevent it. It pertains to the level of spiritual essences, the spheres, and the stars. It requires medicine in many of its aspects: knowledge of natures, methods, degrees, and mixtures. Due to ignorance, errors frequently occur in this science. He whose mixture is hot, if he uses hot letters, is burned—and vice versa. Among its applications is the knowledge of fumigations, whether vegetal or otherwise, without corrupting the operation by substitution. Medicine has no need of the science of letters, except when writings are involved in mixtures and compounds. The conjurations and the names are like remedies, with the exception of what will be explained in detail, if God—exalted be He!—so wills.”<sup>191</sup>

Al-Antākī’s definition, written centuries after Ibn Masarra and al-Būnī, reveals how far the “science of letters” had extended: from Qur’ānic hermeneutics and Sufi cosmology to a scholasticised discipline with its own ontology (letters, essences, spheres), epistemology (knowledge of properties and correspondences), and even a clear therapeutic framework (*tibb* as ancillary science). This testimony indicates that *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* was conceptualised within learned discourse as a structured discipline intersecting with cosmology, medicine, and theurgy. Its post-classical codification thus demonstrates the longevity and resilience of the talismanic paradigm within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

This historical trajectory has been re-examined in modern scholarship, where increasing attention has been devoted to the philosophical and cosmological dimensions of *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*. Studies by P. Lory, J.-C. Coulon, N. Gardiner, and others analyse the science of letters as an internally structured system of symbolic correspondences linking language, cosmology, and ritual practice. Rather than treating lettrism as a diffuse form of popular magic, these scholars demonstrate the extent to which its practitioners articulated formal procedures, ethical conditions, and

<sup>190</sup> In al-Antākī’s definition of *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, the expression *al-shaykh* designates Aḥmad al-Būnī, who is repeatedly described in later Islamic esoteric literature as al-Shaykh *par excellence*, the pre-eminent authority on the science of letters and talismanic operations.

<sup>191</sup> Coulon, *La magie en terre d’Islam au Moyen Âge*, 266.

metaphysical premises governing symbolic operations. Such analyses clarify that *'ilm al-ḥurūf* operated within coherent intellectual frameworks whose internal logic can be reconstructed without recourse to reductive or romanticising classifications. The historical record and modern scholarship alike demonstrate that talismanic traditions articulated internally coherent systems of symbolic operation embedded within identifiable philosophical and spiritual frameworks.

Across these developments, *'ilm al-ḥurūf* can be understood as a particularly elaborated articulation of symbolic mediation within Islamicate thought. By construing letters as ontologically significant elements within a hierarchically ordered cosmos, letrist traditions formulated a structured account of how language, number, and form mediate between intelligible and sensible domains. In this sense, the science of letters does not merely accompany talismanic practice but supplies one of the conceptual frameworks through which its operations were rendered intelligible.

#### 2.4. Talismanic Practice as Theurgy: Symbol, Power, and Divine Will in Islamic Esoteric Contexts

Building upon the metaphysical architecture established through *'ilm al-ḥurūf*, talismanic practice may be interpreted as a theurgical modality through which symbolic forms are constructed to participate in a hierarchically ordered cosmology. In this conceptual horizon, the talisman functions not merely as a ritual artefact but as a formally structured configuration of letters, names, and correspondences through which symbolic mediation is enacted. Such operations presuppose a cosmology where the world is conceived as a field of intelligible signs (*āyāt*) structured by the divine command (*amr*) and articulated through names, forms, and relations.

The notion of divine speech (*kalām ilāhī*), as articulated in the Qur'ān and elaborated by Ibn 'Arabī, frames creation as a living text rather than inert matter. In the *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, he explains that the first determinations to emerge from the Divine Breath (*nafas al-rahmān*) are the letters, through which knowledge descends and things become individuated. Every existent, he suggests, is composed of the traces of these letters, each bearing a specific divine property and sound. The cosmos thus appears as the unfolding discourse of God—the extended Word (*al-kalima al-mamdūda*)—in which every being is a letter (*ḥarf*) and every form a

configuration of divine articulation (*ṣūrat al-ta' bīr al-ilāhī*).<sup>192</sup> Within this conceptual framework, the talisman may be described as a syntactically structured instantiation of divine speech: the inscription of a Name (*ism*) or formula is understood not as the production of new meaning but as the material reiteration of a primordial utterance in formal configuration. Its efficacy is theorised not in terms of material causality but as semiotic alignment; the positioning of written symbol in analogical relation to the ontological Word from which, according to this metaphysics, it derives. Hence, talismanic action is the ritual formalisation of semiotic alignment in a theocentric cosmology, a symbolic correspondence that mirrors the creative command (*amr takwīnī*) of *kun fa-yakūn* (Be! and it is). The talisman may thus be understood as a symbolic inscription structured in conscious analogy to divine speech, its legitimacy resting on participation rather than autonomous causation.

Within Islamic intellectual history, the closest analogue to theurgical operation is the performative nature of the divine command itself; a *fiat* that constitutes rather than merely describes the world. Talismans, when ritually constructed and ethically animated, become echoes of that performative structure. In Būnian sources, talismanic action is construed as symbolic participation in that performative order through form, correspondence, and election: the talisman's geometry and text—its *hay'a* (formal configuration or figure) and *miqdār* (quantitative measure or proportion)—the calibrated pairing of letters and *asmā'* with celestial actors, and the choice of time constitute the very conditions of effect. L. Saif documents this architecture in the *Shams al-ma'ārif*, where extended tables align Qur'ānic verses, letters, *rūḥāniyyāt* (spiritual forces / spiritualities), planets, and angelic orders, and where lunar-mansion schemes are keyed to letter-energies and ritual aims; these layouts render the talisman an interface between textual symbol and cosmological order rather than a charm of brute causality.<sup>193</sup>

Each element of talismanic structure—material, geometry, astrological timing, and textual content—must align with ontological principles derived from Islamic cosmological science (*'ilm al-hay'a*), metaphysical theology, and, in many traditions, angelological hierarchies. Within the tradition's mathematical-astrological sciences, the *awfāq* are theorised as algorithmic diagrams of celestial harmonics. Their logic draws on Qur'ānic symbolism and Neopythagorean mathematics, internalised through the epistemologies of *falsafa* and Sufi hermeneutics. According to P. Lory,

<sup>192</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 1, ch. 2, 176–245.

<sup>193</sup> Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma'ārif*,” 341–342.

these configurations function as ritual interfaces for invoking divine presence; rather than diagramming causality in a mechanistic sense, they are constructed to establish resonance between cosmological order and symbolic form.<sup>194</sup>

Within Islamicate receptions of Hermetic materials, talismans were conceptualised as receptacles structured to receive celestial influence under specific astrological and ritual conditions. Their efficacy was theorised not as intrinsic power but as derivative participation in planetary mediation. Through astrological timing and ritual action, the object is animated with spiritual efficacy, capable of enacting transformation in the material world.

Būnian theurgy locates efficacy in the qualified agent. Rather than resting on technical minutiae, effect is attributed to *taṣarruf*, divinely authorized operative capacity, tied to graded unveilings in which letters structure the planes of being and cognition. In the *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, creation and invention are mapped onto the *laṭāʾif* (subtle powers) of intellect, spirit, soul, and heart, with the heart (*qalb*) cast as the deposit of letter-secrets and thus the proximate seat of operative knowledge. Within this scheme, talismanic effectiveness is not reducible to technique: it depends on alignment with divine will (*irāda*) and upon the practitioner's state (*ḥāl*). When the heart is ethically and spiritually prepared, the signs disclose their efficacy; when it is sullied, they remain veiled and without effect.<sup>195</sup> The talisman, as a *locus* of *tajallī*, must therefore be clear both in its form and in the one who constructs or employs it: otherwise its signification is occluded and its operation fails.

This emphasis on the heart as the *locus* of efficacy finds its most developed articulation in the Sufī conception of *himma*; the inner dynamism of theurgy. In Ibn ʿArabī's lexicon, *himma* is “the soul's power (*quwwa nafsiyya*) over mind and matter,” and without it “every spiritual endeavour” fails.<sup>196</sup> Building on this, Akbarian sources describe *himma* as the heart's concentrated spiritual force or will, by which *taṣarruf* (effective agency) proceeds, conditioned by *ʿazm* (resolve) and *thabāt* (steadfastness). The talisman is inert without *himma*, just as a symbol is without voice: only when inward state and outward form are aligned does symbolic action participate, derivatively, in the divine command, refining rather than compromising *tawḥīd*.

<sup>194</sup> Lory, *La science des lettres en Islam*.

<sup>195</sup> Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-maʿārif*,” 338.

<sup>196</sup> Dunja Rašić, “Masters of Dark Arts—Ibn ʿArabī's Records on African Sorcery, Qaḍīb al-Bān and the Power Known as *Himma*,” *Religions* 15 (10), 1223 (2024), 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15101223>.

This performative and participatory cosmology finds further theological reinforcement in the Qur'ānic view of the cosmos as a liturgical field: “There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you understand not their praise” (Q. 17:44). Within this cosmological framing, talismanic practice is interpreted as participating in an already ongoing order of praise, aligning symbolic form with a universe understood as theocentric rather than asserting independent agency. Its inscriptions do not command, they supplicate—structurally, ritually, and metaphysically. It is through this alignment that the talisman fulfils its function as a vector of *baraka* (divine blessing).

Modern scholarship has examined Islamic theurgical and talismanic traditions as internally structured systems of symbolic reasoning, governed by analogical correspondences, ritual calibration, and cosmological hierarchy. L. Saif analyses the occult sciences as operating within articulated metaphysical and epistemological frameworks that regulate symbolic efficacy through correspondence and disciplined procedure.<sup>197</sup> N. Gardiner similarly situates medieval talismanic practices within learned milieux characterised by formal rigour, ethical discipline, and theological articulation.<sup>198</sup>

Furthermore, a measure of juristic latitude existed, particularly where Qur'ānic text was involved. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350), in the *Zād al-Ma'ād (Provisions for the Hereafter)*, records reports from the early authorities permitting the use of Qur'ānic verses in healing practices: whether recited as *ruqyah* (healing incantation using Qur'ānic recitation) or written for the sick, and notes that disagreement concerned only their suspension as amulets. He concludes that when such acts are free from prohibited elements and grounded in *tawakkul* (trustful reliance on God), they fall within the scope of licit remembrance rather than forbidden talismanry.<sup>199</sup> The critical distinction lies not in the object itself but in the practitioner's intention, content, and orientation toward divine agency. This juristic nuance indicates that talismanic practices involving Qur'ānic materials were evaluated through distinctions concerning intention, content, and theological orientation rather than through categorical prohibition.

In this esoteric regime of thought, talismanic acts may be understood as formally structured ritual operations that encode cosmological correspondences in material

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<sup>197</sup> Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*.

<sup>198</sup> Gardiner, *Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture*.

<sup>199</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zād al-Ma'ād fī Hady Khayr al-'Ibād*, vol. 4, transl. by Jalāl Abū al-Rub (Madinah Publishers and Distributors, 2020).

form. Their efficacy is conceived as contingent upon the alignment of symbolic configuration with metaphysical order. Rather than functioning as instruments of domination, they are theorised as modes of participatory engagement within a theocentric cosmology. Islamic talismanic theurgy can thus be approached as a semiotic system grounded in Qur'ānic ontology, philosophical cosmology, and Sufi ethics, and articulated through the science of letters. Within this framework, talismanic practice consists in the ritual configuration of divine names in accordance with both cosmological principles and ethical conditions.

The foregoing analyses clarify the intellectual conditions under which talismanic practice was articulated as a disciplined mode of symbolic mediation. Across *kalām*, *falsafa*, letrist theory, and theurgical elaboration, such operations were framed within structured cosmological and theological parameters rather than as assertions of autonomous power. Situated within debates on causality, language, and mediation processes, these practices emerge as part of a coherent conceptual architecture that rendered theurgy intelligible within Islamicate intellectual history as a philosophically articulated theory of symbolic mediation.

### 3. CHARACTERISTICS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL ISLAMIC TALISMANRY IN THE 10TH–13TH CENTURIES

#### From Integration to Systematisation: Transformations of Talismanic Mediation

The preceding chapters established the conceptual conditions under which talismanic mediation became philosophically intelligible within Islamic intellectual traditions. Parts I and II demonstrated how talismanic reasoning was articulated through Qur'ānic semiotics, Neoplatonic metaphysics, *kalām* debates on causality, and philosophical cosmology. This part traces the shift from these earlier integrations to their more deliberate reorganisation and examines how, between the 10th and 13th centuries, these earlier integrations underwent significant transformation and systematisation.

This period represents a reconfiguration of earlier developments. Talismanic discourse becomes more explicitly theorised, more textually codified, and more closely integrated with philosophical anthropology, cosmology, and metaphysical psychology. The transformation thus consists in the consolidation and internal differentiation of symbolic mediation into a more systematically articulated field of inquiry.

By the 10th century, works such as *De radiis* and the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* had already articulated models of analogical causation and cosmological correspondence. Within these frameworks, the talisman functions as a mediating configuration situated between celestial and terrestrial orders. Its intelligibility depends on hierarchical ontology, calibrated correspondence, and disciplined knowledge of cosmological structure. The talisman in this way operates as a formally constructed *locus* in which cosmology, epistemology, and ritual action intersect.

During the medieval period, this mediatory model was increasingly codified as a distinct theurgical discipline. Texts such as *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, systematic discussions of occult properties (*khawāṣṣ*), and elaborations of astral hierarchies demonstrate a move towards technical and conceptual consolidation. The Graeco-Arabic heritage was not merely transmitted but rearticulated within a monotheistic metaphysical horizon. Aristotelian and Neoplatonic causal models were reinterpreted in relation

to divine sovereignty, allowing talismanic mediation to be framed as derivative participation within a hierarchically ordered cosmos.

Recent scholarship has emphasised the internal coherence of these developments. Studies by L. Saif, J.-C. Coulon and N. Gardiner, among others, analyse the occult sciences as structured domains governed by articulated cosmological premises, analogical reasoning, and ethical regulation. In these analyses, talismanic and lettrist materials are treated as components of broader metaphysical and epistemological projects. The texts examined in this part therefore reveal not isolated prescriptions but sustained reflection on mediation, causality, and symbolic form.

A significant transformation during this period concerns the role of the human agent. While earlier models emphasised the construction of material talismans aligned with celestial configurations, later philosophical elaborations increasingly foreground the ontological and psychological qualification of the practitioner. The efficacy of symbolic mediation is relocated from the object alone to the relation between cosmological structure and disciplined subjectivity.

In earlier codificatory works such as *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, talismanic construction is embedded within a comprehensive cosmological schema. The talisman is situated at the intersection of celestial influences, elemental compositions, and human intentionality, functioning as a calibrated configuration within a structured cosmogram. The emphasis lies on articulating the precise conditions under which cosmological correspondences become operative. At this stage of codification, human agency is presupposed as necessary for mediation, though it remains primarily oriented towards the correct construction and timing of material configurations.

In a more explicitly philosophical register, Suhrawardī's Illuminationist philosophy (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*) intensifies this anthropological dimension. Recasting emanation in terms of graded lights, Suhrawardī situates the human being within a hierarchy of luminous intensities. A figure structurally comparable to what later traditions call *al-insān al-kāmil* functions as a mediating *locus* within this hierarchy, capable of reflecting higher intelligences through ontological refinement. Here, mediation is not confined to constructed objects but becomes inseparable from the ontological state of the knower. The body, imagination, and intellect are integrated into a structured account of participation in higher orders of being.

These trajectories converge in later lettrist and Akbarian developments, where mediation is increasingly interiorised. In the works of Ibn 'Arabī and al-Būnī, talismanic logic is transposed into linguistic and anthropological registers. Divine names, letters, and symbolic forms are integrated into accounts of imagination,

spiritual discipline, and ontological correspondence. Material inscription remains important, but it is inseparable from the epistemic and ethical state of the practitioner.

The transformation traced in this part may therefore be characterised as a shift from integration to systematisation, and from object-centred mediation to anthropologically mediated participation. The talisman is no longer approached solely as a constructed instrument of ritual efficacy, but as a structured configuration situated within broader ontological, cosmological, and psychological frameworks.

The chapters that follow examine how key figures of the 10th–13th centuries elaborated these transformations. By analysing their rearticulations of causality, mediation, and symbolic form, this part clarifies how talismanic discourse developed into a more explicit and internally differentiated theory of symbolic mediation grounded in hierarchical ontology and disciplined agency.

### 3.1. Al-Qurṭubī's *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* and the Ontology of Astral Talismanry

#### 3.1.1. Celestial Order and Human Perfection in al-Qurṭubī's Talismanic Theory

As demonstrated in Part II, the Islamic conceptualisation of talismanry emerges at the intersection of *ilm*, *sihr*, and *falsafa*; epistemic fields never strictly demarcated in Islamic thought. Maslama al-Qurṭubī's (c. 906–964) *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (*The Goal of the Sage*), later Latinised as *Picatrix*, exemplifies this synthesis: the talisman is theorised as an instrument of celestial causality situated within a cosmological and philosophical framework. Al-Qurṭubī himself remarks on the construction of the Arabic word *ṭilasm* (*ṭlsm*), observing that when read in reverse it corresponds to *musallaṭ* (*msslṭ*), meaning “that to which power over another has been given.”<sup>200</sup> Such power is attained by embedding “celestial secrets” within a material object—that is, essentially by possessing sufficient astrological knowledge and the ability to channel the forces of the planets and stars into that object.<sup>201</sup> This observation underscores how the concept of the talisman was linguistically framed as an instrument of authority and influence, aligning closely with its theorised function of harnessing astral forces through learned practice.

<sup>200</sup> Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, I.2., 7; cf. Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 23, ch. 352, 391.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–13.

The treatise stands in continuity with late antique talismanic traditions in which consecrated images (*telesmata*) served as vehicles for cosmic influence. In the Islamic context, these practices are grounded in Aristotelian cosmology and a Neoplatonic framework of emanation and cosmic sympathy. *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* integrates inherited theurgical logic into a philosophically articulated account of causality, providing a bridge between Hellenistic theurgy and the epistemology of Islamic talismanry. Its topic is magic, “a divine power advanced by causes, the latter being explicitly knowable.”<sup>202</sup> The celestial bodies mediate between divine causes and things sublunar, including human affairs. Through the construction of talismans, celestial powers are directed towards terrestrial effects.<sup>203</sup> Grounded in natural philosophy, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* embodies what L. Saif describes as an epistemological stance in which magic consists in understanding causal relations (physical, astral, and pneumatic) and employing them to direct desired effects; within this framework, knowledge of the terrestrial and celestial realms is achieved through observation, reasoning, and the deduction of causes, ultimately oriented towards a deeper understanding of the First Cause.<sup>204</sup>

Of particular significance for the subsequent intellectual history of talismanry is the fact that the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* was translated into Latin during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the title *Picatrix*. Within this Latin context, the talisman was referred to simply as an *imago*, an image, and its study framed as the *scientia imaginum*, or “science of images.”<sup>205</sup> This discipline developed as a recognised field across the three dominant languages of scholarship: Greek, Arabic, and Latin. Its translation into *Picatrix* thus enabled sustained cross-cultural engagement on the metaphysical role and efficacy of images, establishing a shared intellectual vocabulary that shaped both Islamic and European discourses on talismanry.

Ch. Burnett observes that al-Qurṭubī distinctly categorises magic into three parts: *nīranjāt* (ritual acts performed through incantation), *ṭilasmāt* (talismanic magic), and *al-kīmiyā* (body-on-body transformation). He explains that *nīranj* is the Arabic

<sup>202</sup> Anderson, “The Science of Talismans Today,” 3.

<sup>203</sup> Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma‘ārif*,” 299–300.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>205</sup> Charles Burnett, “Talismans: Magic as Science? Necromancy among the Seven Liberal Arts,” In *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages (Study 1)* (Variorum, 1996); Nicolas Weill-Parot, “Causalité astrale et ‘science des images’ au Moyen Âge: Éléments de réflexion,” *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences* 52 (2) (1999), 207–240, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rhs.1999.1351>; Nicolas Weill-Parot, *Les “images astrologiques” au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance: Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XIIe-XVe siècle)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002).

transcription of the Middle Persian word “*nerank*” used for an incantation or ritual formula; *ṭilasm* (talisman) clearly derives from the word *telesma*, which literally means “completion” or “performance (of the ritual)”; alchemy, according to one theory, originates from the Egyptian word *kēme*, meaning the black soil of the fertile Nile delta. “But it is not on ethnic lines that the author of the *Ghāya* differentiates between the three divisions. Rather, he uses the categories of spirit (Ar., *rūḥ*) and body (Ar., *jasad*): *nīranjāt* involve the operation of spirit on spirit, talismans, of spirit on body, and alchemy, of body on body.”<sup>206</sup> However, in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, only two types of magic are described: *nīranjāt* and talismanic magic, while alchemy is discussed in al-Qurṭubī’s earlier work the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* (*The Rank of the Wise*). Ch. Burnett further emphasises that in both *nīranjāt* and *ṭilasmāt*, efficacy arises not from symbolic resemblance alone but through a ritual mechanism that “activates” the object by drawing planetary spirit into it at the astrologically precise moment. In this sense, the talisman functions as a ritually activated instrument, rendered efficacious by the convergence of material form, celestial timing, and operator intent. Ch. Burnett traces the ontological logic of such operations back to the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Hermetica*, where *nīranjāt* are described as compound ritual actions: carefully measured ingredients (animal, mineral, and vegetal) are combined and activated through recitation and combustion. The object becomes effective not by its form alone, but by the release of subtle spiritual vapours (*arwāḥ rūḥāniyya*) that interact with astral forces. In this sense, a *nīranj*<sup>207</sup> is both a material object and a

<sup>206</sup> Burnett, “The Three Divisions of Arabic Magic,” 43.

<sup>207</sup> As Ch. Burnett explains: “The *nīranj* is the operation of mixing and burning a carefully chosen and precisely measured range of ingredients. It is both a ritual action (‘*aml*’) and the result of the action: something digestible as a food or a drink. It is listed beside another action—‘*ilāj*: ‘curing (with medicines)’, and another result of an action: ‘poisons’ (*sumūm*)’. The primacy of ‘action’ (making the food or drink) resulted in the word usually being replaced in Arabic by *ṣan’a* (‘the making’) and *khalt* (‘the mixing’), and by the corresponding verbs describing the process: *ṣana’a*, *khalaṭa* and *ikhṭalaṭa*. Action is reflected in the usual Latin word for *nīranj*: *opus* or *confectio*. These replace a transliteration of the Arabic word or a specific term in Latin. The ingredients are all natural things, whether animal, vegetable or mineral, each with their own powers. Thus, a Latin addition to one text comments: ‘*Tanta enim est physica virtus in eis*’ (‘For such is the natural power in these <confections>’). Thus, too, Avicenna in his *Division of the Intellectual Sciences* describes the *nīranj* as ‘mixing the powers which are found in the substances of the earthly world in order that from these a power may be produced from which a strange action emanates’ (in distinction to talismans which combine heavenly powers with those of terrestrial bodies). Great care has to be devoted to the ingredients of the mixture, in terms both of their nature and their quantity.” Burnett, “Arabic Practical Magic”; see also Charles Burnett, “*Nīranj*: A Category of

performative ritual; its function hinges on correct planetary timing and the operator's epistemic and ritual preparation.<sup>208</sup>

While alchemy is reserved for discussion in the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm*, the focus in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* on ritual and talismanic magic reflects al-Qurṭubī's broader theoretical commitment to an Aristotelian cosmology, wherein the operations of magic are undergirded by the interaction and transformation of the four elemental substances. Within this framework, the four elements, fire, water, air, and earth, constitute the material cosmos. Further pairs of opposing qualities (heat and cold, moisture and dryness) determine that these elements interact in various combinations according to Empedoclean notions of Love (attraction) and Strife (repulsion). The *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* thus presents a universe composed of concentric spheres made of a subtle ethereal substance. The material world, located at the centre of the cosmos, is stable, but its structure is continuously changing. The four elements naturally arrange themselves according to their density: the heavy elements (water and earth) descend towards the centre, while the lighter ones (fire and air) rise towards the heavens. The cosmological structure is articulated through the relation between *al-markaz* (centre) and *al-muḥīt* (circumference), such that "all the lines extending from it to the circumference are equal" (*kull al-khuṭūṭ al-khārija minhā ilā al-muḥīt mutasāwiya*). This geometrical formulation is immediately linked to the action of planetary rays upon 'ālam *al-markaz* (the world of the centre), thereby situating the celestial sphere (*al-falak*) in contrast to 'ālam *al-kawn wa-al-fasād* (the world of generation and corruption).<sup>209</sup> When the practitioner is described as rising beyond the sphere of the four elements, he leaves the microcosmic world and enters the macrocosmic order.

The first planetary sphere, the Moon's sphere, serves as a gateway leading from the sublunary world (the world of matter and corruption) to the supralunary world (the world of spirit and the source of generation). Beyond this point, the cosmos is no longer composed of elementary matter: the planets are formed from a non-elemental, incorruptible celestial substance, which radiates force downwards. Above the Moon, the planets are arranged as follows: Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and finally, Saturn. Beyond the planetary spheres is the eighth sphere, the Zodiac, through

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Magic (Almost) Forgotten in the Latin West," in *Natura, scienze e società medievali. Studi in onore di Agostino Paravicini Bagliani*, ed. by Claudio Leonardi and Francesco Santi (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008), 37–66.

<sup>208</sup> Burnett, "Arabic Practical Magic."

<sup>209</sup> Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, I.3., 11–12.

which the planets seem to make all their wanderings. Beyond this eighth sphere lies the ninth, *Primum Mobile*, or the veil covering the Empyrean—the uppermost heaven, the abode of God, which causes the daily rotation of the celestial sphere and acts as a veil (*hijāb*) concealing the divine from direct perception. The divine is described as not contained within these cosmological spheres but as transcending them ontologically as their first principle and source of causation. This cosmological model, drawing on Greek, Indian, Mesopotamian, and related astral traditions as identified by modern scholarship, provides the structural horizon within which the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* articulates its theory of magical causation.<sup>210</sup>

It is within this ordered cosmological framework, stretching from the corruptible sublunary sphere to the *Primum Mobile*, that the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* situates the possibility of magical action, proposing that only one who comprehends and harmonises with this celestial hierarchy can ascend towards true wisdom and mediate the occult forces emanating from the heavens. The treatise therefore raises the question of what qualifies a person as wise and capable of mediating astral forces. According to Hermes Trismegistus, science and philosophy share one common element—perfect nature (*aṭ-ṭabī‘a at-tamma*).<sup>211</sup> The Hermetic concept of perfect nature is developed throughout the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and is explained as a state of ontological perfection that the magician achieves by aligning himself with the planets governing his birth and strictly adhering to ritual principles, so that an intermediary spirit or guardian angel eventually forms. Before undertaking any ritual, the sage-practitioner must be adept at understanding the complex interrelationships that exist among various elements of the chain of being. With sufficient knowledge, the mage perceives hidden or occult correspondences (also known as “sympathies,” *tashābuh / munāsabāt*) between plants, animals, and minerals of the lower world and the spiritual forces of celestial bodies in the higher realm. In the terminology of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, *tashābuh* refers to analogical resemblances by which the properties of earthly things reflect celestial realities, while *munāsabāt* denotes the harmonious proportions and relational ties that bind the lower and higher realms. These are not arbitrary associations but ontological linkages inscribed in the very order of creation, such that each form in nature is seen as a reflection of a higher archetype. Recognising these correspondences, the practitioner can gather all necessary sympathetic materials and use them to invoke astral spirits related to

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<sup>210</sup> Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*, 38.

<sup>211</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, English transl., Introduction, 8–9.

the nature of his goal; through sympathetic resonance between the collected items and the corresponding celestial bodies, the sage is described as capable of directing their influence. The efficacy of the talisman is thus presented as dependent upon the conjunction of disciplined intention, ritual precision, and cosmological knowledge. In al-Qurṭubī's intellectual model, the talisman is conceptualised as a configuration in which intention, material composition, and celestial order converge. Al-Qurṭubī asserts that the sage's body is a magical vessel, receiving and synthesising various spiritual powers and physical materials. The text emphasises the necessity of unwavering conviction and disciplined preparation. Astral intelligences are described as accessible only to the practitioner who fulfils the requisite epistemic and ritual conditions.

In the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, al-Qurṭubī presents a cosmological framework in which all things are understood in terms of causal relations (*asbāb*) and correspondences (*munāsabāt*) linking the terrestrial realm with the celestial domain of the stars and spiritual entities / spirits (*al-arwāḥ*). Within this framework, the efficacy of operative practices depends on the ability to discern and combine these correspondences, such that the powers become present and the spiritual agents respond.<sup>212</sup> Such conviction is presented as a condition for access to astral intelligences and as integral to the operative logic of talismanic mediation. In this formulation, talismans are conceptualised as *loci* where spiritual intent, material composition, and celestial order converge.

Al-Qurṭubī presents talismans as composite objects made to receive and transmit celestial influences. By virtue of their constituent materials, talismans draw down *spiritus* from the upper world through a cascade of rays, in line with al-Kindī's theory. Their efficacy depends on the alignment of matter, time, and ritual action: "The talisman is built out of appropriate substances and at appropriate times, and it is consecrated with the appropriate ritual actions. Then, it is strengthened by the appropriate suffumigations and sacrifices that will attract the spirits to the image."<sup>213</sup> This framework is situated in the treatise's broader claim that things in the lesser (sublunary) world reflect those in the greater (celestial) world, and it aligns with the Neoplatonic model of procession and emanation adopted in the work's cosmology and hierarchies.<sup>214</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, I.1–3, 3–13; III.1–2, 149–160.

<sup>213</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, English transl., Introduction, 15.

<sup>214</sup> Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, I.1–3, 3–13; III.1–2, 149–160; IV.1, 286–295.

For al-Qurṭubī, the talisman functions as a mediating object capable of receiving and transmitting astral influences into the sublunary realm. Its efficacy depends on the practitioner’s knowledge of celestial harmonics and philosophical cosmology. According to al-Qurṭubī’s reasoning, the successful talisman-maker (or talisman-maker of “self”) must first possess true wisdom, acquired through mastery of the natural and celestial sciences, ethical refinement, and unwavering faith. The talisman, then, is not merely an instrument of power, but a manifestation of philosophical knowledge. It reveals cosmic order through precise forms and inscriptions. For example, a talisman for repelling mice is to be inscribed on a copper plate during the first face of Leo, at a favourable rising of the sign.<sup>215</sup> Such procedures might appear mundane, yet they are underpinned by theoretical foundations: the practitioner acts as a learned mediator aligning terrestrial substances with celestial powers.

In this way, al-Qurṭubī bridges cosmology and anthropology: the talisman reflects not only the structure of the cosmos but also the figure of the perfected sage whose intellectual and ethical refinement enables participation in cosmological order. The talisman is no longer simply an image (*ṣūra*), but a metaphysical schema articulating the transmission of divine order through the disciplined sage. This structuring of mediation ultimately remains subordinated to divine causality, preserving the cosmological hierarchy within which talismanic action is situated.

### 3.1.2. *Bāṭin*, *khawāṣṣ*, and the Symbolic Use of Nature

Building on the cosmological foundations discussed in section 3.1.1, the talisman in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* operates through celestial causality and through the activation of hidden correspondences within nature, what Islamic philosophers termed *khawāṣṣ al-ashyāʾ*, the “occult properties of things.” This doctrine holds that natural entities—plants, minerals, animals—possess inherent symbolic forces that can be awakened and directed through ritual inscription, astrological alignment, and the practitioner’s intention.

In this model, *bāṭin* is not confined to scriptural exegesis but extends to nature itself. Every created thing presents an outer aspect (*zāhir*) and an inner, efficacious property (*bāṭin*): a hidden quality (*khāṣṣiyya*) deposited in its substance that is not grasped by the senses but is apprehended by reason and wisdom (*ʿaql; ḥikma*) and acts according to the celestial order (*qānūn al-samāʾ*). On this basis, the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* frames natural philosophy as the key to reading the world’s signs: sublunary

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., II.9, 104.

particulars mirror the higher forms, and efficacies arise when materials and timings accord with that order. This is the conceptual ground on which the treatise later develops its operative arts. The emphasis here is ontological: nature itself is layered with inner properties that participate in the macrocosm–microcosm relation.<sup>216</sup>

The notion of *khawāṣṣ* goes back to Hellenistic doctrines of sympathy (*sympathēia*) and antipathy (*antipatheia*), where each part of the cosmos is bound by invisible affinities. This conceptual heritage found explicit articulation in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, where, as L. Saif shows, al-Qurṭubī describes every entity as inherently astral, their occult properties (*khawāṣṣ*) determined by celestial forms. These properties, he explains, may act either naturally or through talismanic mediation: “*Ḥawāṣṣ* can do wondrous things on their own, such as the ruby’s action as a repellent of plagues and others. And this can be done by a talisman [...] through that which is deposited [in it as a result] of celestial proportions.”<sup>217</sup> In Qur’ānic cosmology, such ideas were refracted into the conviction that each created thing is an *āya*, a sign of divine wisdom. The material world is presented as a symbolic field ordered by astral and divine correspondences that require interpretation and activation. Al-Qurṭubī’s talismanic system is therefore deeply semiotic: the cosmos is treated as a system of signs in which metals, herbs, and stones function as carriers of layered correspondences. The talisman, as a physical artefact, is a syntactic construction: its parts operate symbolically in a manner structurally analogous to the epistemology of *ilm al-ḥurūf*.

In the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, detailed practical instructions, lists of herbs, stones, and their astrological properties reflect this logic. For instance, certain stones are linked to specific planets and thus carry their *ḥukm* (ruling power); others are only efficacious when engraved under precise lunar phases. These associations are not arbitrary, but are grounded in a comprehensive metaphysical worldview: “Whoever engraves this figure of the Sun upon a stone of hematite when the Sun is in the first face of Leo, its bearer will be freed from the recurring epileptic attacks.”<sup>218</sup> Such natural objects are presented as bearers of celestial influence, but only when awakened through ritual knowledge. This logic is articulated within a monotheistic cosmology in which all created forms are understood as deriving from a unified divine source, and talismanic operations are framed as alignment with that cosmological order.

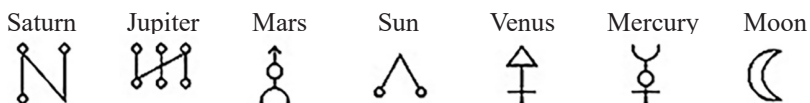
<sup>216</sup> Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, I, 3–51; III.1, 149–156.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., II.5, 85; as cited in Saif, “From *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* to *Šams al-ma’ārif*,” 300.

<sup>218</sup> Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, II.10, 113.

The practitioner's role is not to dominate nature, but to engage it through ritually structured mediation. This idea recurs throughout the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, especially in its emphasis on ritual purity, prayer, and ascetic discipline. The talisman-maker must prepare himself physically, mentally, and spiritually before even touching the materials he works with. Thus, nature is presented as an active participant in cosmological mediation, whose *bāṭin* dimension becomes accessible through disciplined preparation.

The symbolic use of nature also operates visually and geometrically. In the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (III.1), each of the seven planets is associated with a specific *shakl* (figure), transmitted within earlier astral and Hermetic traditions. The Arabic text does not present these as standardised sigils, but describes them in relation to inherited sources such as the *Lapidary of Mercurius*, the *Book of Apollonius*, and the *Book of Spirits and Images*. The figures are embedded within a broader discussion of planetary correspondences, materials, and operative conditions, indicating that their function is inseparable from cosmological context.<sup>219</sup> The text enumerates the seven planetary figures in hierarchical order: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon; each associated with specific materials, invocations, and operative conditions.<sup>220</sup>



Rather than isolated magical emblems, these planetary forms are integrated into a systematic theory of astral mediation. They are linked to planetary temperament, elemental disposition, and appropriate materials, functioning as graphic condensations of celestial relations within the treatise's hierarchical cosmology. Like the letters and substances they accompany, these forms participate in a symbolic logic embedded in a monotheistic cosmological framework. Within this vision, the *bāṭin* and *khawāṣṣ* dimensions of al-Qurṭubī's talismanic theory give shape to a symbolic ontology in which nature is understood as organised through hidden correspondences, and the talisman-maker is required to decipher and engage these structures through disciplined ritual and intellectual preparation.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., II.10, 106–124; III.1–3, 149–169.

<sup>220</sup> Illustration from *Picatrix*, English transl., 104. The schematic figures reproduced here follow the English edition for clarity and consistency of presentation. For the Arabic images, text and descriptions of the planetary figures see Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, II.10, 107; III.1, 149–156.

### 3.1.3. Alchemy and Ritual Action in Talismanic Construction

The final dimension of al-Qurṭubī's talismanic system lies in the domain of ritual performance and material transformation. If talismanic causality is rooted in astral philosophy and its medium encoded in symbolic nature, then its realisation demands a precise ritual grammar: a regulated engagement with material substances under defined cosmological conditions. In the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, this logic is articulated through an elaborate programme of sacrifice, purification, invocation, and material preparation—each act presented as a condition for operative efficacy.

*Al-kīmiyā*<sup>221</sup> appears in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* not as a separate science but as structurally analogous to talismanic transformation. Both rely on the principle that matter is subject to transformation under celestial influence. Transformation of compounded substances is described as occurring in accordance with astral and elemental dispositions. The operative practitioner, the *ḥakīm*, is depicted as acting in accordance with these dispositions, directing substances through knowledge of their forms and conditions. Al-Qurṭubī emphasises that ritual practice divorced from knowledge is ineffective and improperly ordered. He stresses that talismanic operations require the practitioner to be spiritually prepared and intellectually equipped: no one benefits from these sciences whose soul is impure or whose intention is insincere. In the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, effective operations presuppose ritual purity (*ṭahāra*), sincere intention (*niyya ṣādiqa*), and knowledge of the natures and conditions (*ṭabā'ī*; *shurūf*) of the spirits, for only then do they respond to the practitioner. The descent of spiritual forces, he argues, responds only to those who understand their natures and proper conditions. Ritual action is therefore embedded within an epistemic and ethical discipline: efficacy is contingent upon conformity to cosmological order and regulated intention.

Typical talismanic operations described in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* include the careful selection of appropriate materials (such as sulfur, hematite, or bronze), the engraving of figures and letters often associated with *ilm al-ḥurūf*, the recitation of planetary invocations, the offering of sacrificial elements (such as doves, cocks, or incense), and the precise orientation of the body and instruments according to celestial positions. One detailed instruction, for example, prescribes how to contact

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<sup>221</sup> Here, “alchemy” is not meant in the strict sense of *al-kīmiyā* as an independent science, which al-Qurṭubī treats separately in the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm*, but in a broader philosophical sense. For the distinction between *al-kīmiyā* and astral magic as two complementary but distinct disciplines in al-Qurṭubī's corpus, see Godefroid de Callatay, Sébastien Moureau, “Towards the Critical Edition of the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm*: A Few Preliminary Observations,” *Arabica* 62 (2015), 385–394.

the spirit of the Moon when she is in Aries: “If you wish to draw down the power of the Moon (*quwwat al-qamar*) when she is in Aries at the time of her rising on a full night, then adorn yourself and go to a green place with vegetation, on the bank of a river or flowing water (*mā’ jār*). Take with you a cock with a split crest, and slaughter it with a bone, and let no iron touch it. Then turn toward the Moon and place before you two censers of iron. [...] Stand between the two censers, raise your gaze toward the Moon, and say: ‘O Moon, the luminous one (*al-munūr*), [...] I come to you in submission and desire, regarding such-and-such a matter [...].’”<sup>222</sup>

Such procedures are framed within the text as structured operations governed by planetary timing, material selection, and verbal formula. As H. Corbin argues in his studies of Islamic philosophical and mystical traditions, action is not conceived merely as mechanical causality but as a form of symbolic and imaginal mediation, where thought and will become incarnate in images and operative in being.<sup>223</sup> In this light, talismanic practice belongs to the realm of the *mundus imaginalis*: “an intermediate universe ‘where the spiritual takes body and the body becomes spiritual,’ a world consisting of real matter and real extension, though by comparison to sensible, corruptible matter these are subtle and immaterial.”<sup>224</sup> The structure of the rite reflects the broader cosmological premise articulated throughout the treatise: efficacy arises when material configuration, temporal alignment, and intention coincide within a hierarchically ordered cosmos.

The alchemical analogy clarifies this operative logic. Like the Philosopher’s Stone, the talisman transmutes not just material, but the soul of its maker. The burning of substances corresponds to the purification of the lower self (*nafs*), while the engraving of signs parallels the inscribing of divine names upon the heart. In this sense, ritual action is initiation, a threshold to wisdom. It may best be described as a semiotic praxis: a disciplined operation in which outer forms disclose inner truth. The talisman becomes a coagulated prayer, a crystallised moment of alignment between *qudra* (divine power), *niyya*, and *ṭabī’a* (nature).

Yet this symbolic operation does not take place in abstraction. Its forms are inseparable from their material vehicles, which themselves carry cosmological significance. As al-Qurṭubī describes, metals and herbs are not passive substrates but living participants, chosen for their astrological resonance and elemental disposition.

<sup>222</sup> Pseudo-Majrīṭī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, IV.2, 296.

<sup>223</sup> Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī*, transl. by Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 179.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

In the terminology of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, each planet is linked to a particular *ma'din* (metal or mineral) and *nabāt* (plant), whose properties reflect its celestial nature and serve as conduits of astral power. Thus, for example, Venus works are undertaken in copper and timed to her figure and hour, while Saturn's are undertaken in lead with rites suitable to his temperament. In general, when a *ṭilasm* is fashioned according to these correspondences (*munāsabāt*)—with the appropriate matter, configuration, and *waqt*—it produces its intended effect, by God's permission.<sup>225</sup> These associations are expressions of an Islamic cosmology in which the material and the spiritual are bound in symbolic equivalence. Ethical constraints function as internal safeguards within this system: improper procedure results in failure because cosmological conditions have not been met. The *ḥakīm* (sage) does not seek power, but harmony; he does not impose, but listens.

Thus, talismanic construction operates as a form of spiritual alchemy, wherein ritual action effects not only the alignment of terrestrial matter with celestial influence but also the transmutation of the practitioner himself. As in alchemical praxis, precision, ethical disposition, and cosmological knowledge are requisite; the talisman is a material configuration in which astral causality becomes operative. Al-Qurṭubī thus reconceptualises magic as a theurgical act: an epistemic and ontological labour through which the sage participates in the divine order.

### 3.2. Suhrawardī's Illuminationism and the Theurgical Transformation of the Philosopher into a Talisman

#### 3.2.1. Illumination and Hierarchy: The Onto-Cosmology of Suhrawardī

The philosophy of Suhrawardī (*Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī*, 1154–1191), also known as “Illuminationism” (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*), “divine wisdom” (*ḥikmat al-ilāhiya*), or “eastern wisdom” (*ḥikmat al-mashriqiyya*), represents not simply a reinterpretation of the legacy of previous traditions but a systematic re-grounding of metaphysics in a graded ontology of light. This tradition draws upon Platonic and Neoplatonic structures of emanation, integrates elements of Iranian angelology and appropriates Sufi epistemology without collapsing into either *kalām* or *falsafa*.

Modern scholarship has largely approached Suhrawardī through his ontology of light, interpreting Illuminationism as a metaphysical system structured by

<sup>225</sup> Pseudo-Majrīfī [Maslama ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī], *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, III.1–2, 149–160.

the graded diffusion of luminosity from the Light of Lights through successive ontological levels.<sup>226</sup> Platonic forms are reinterpreted as self-subsistent lights (*anwār qāhira / mujarrada*), identified with angelic realities (*malā'ika*), mediating between the Light of Lights (*Nūr al-Anwār*) and the sublunary domain.

Suhrawardī's project has often been described, in H. Corbin's influential formulation, as a form of "Persian Platonism." The label is heuristic rather than ethnic: it designates Suhrawardī's attempt to integrate Platonic noetics, Iranian angelology, and Islamic esoteric epistemology into a unified luminous ontology. In developing this ontology, Suhrawardī constructs a philosophical genealogy linking figures such as Hermes, Zoroaster, and Plato as transmitters of a transhistorical sapiential lineage. This genealogy functions less as a historical claim than as a legitimating architecture for *ḥikma dhawqīyya* (wisdom attained through direct illumination), situating Illuminationist philosophy within a constructed history of wisdom.

Suhrawardī continues the emanationist models of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā: emanation begins from the First Cause, initiating the First Intellect, and proceeds through a hierarchy of intellects to the sublunary world. In Suhrawardī's philosophy, the structural hierarchy is retained, yet its ontological grammar is transformed. Being is no longer primarily analysed in terms of essence and existence, but in terms of degrees of luminosity and obscurity: "A thing either is light and luminosity in its own reality or is not light and luminosity in its own reality. The meanings of 'light' and 'luminosity' are the same here, for I do not use these in a metaphorical way, as when 'light' is used to mean that which is evident to the mind, though even such usages do at the last derive from this light. Light is divided into light that is a state of something else (the accidental light) and light that is not a state of something else (the incorporeal or pure light). That which is not light in its own reality is divided into that which is independent of a *locus* (the dusky substance) and that which is a state of something else (the dark state). The barrier is the body and may be described as a substance that can be pointed to. Some barriers are seen to be dark when light ceases to shine on them. Darkness is simply an expression for the lack of

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<sup>226</sup> See, among others, Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy Theology and Cosmology* (London–New York: Routledge, 2013); Louis Massignon's studies on Islamic mysticism; H. Corbin, especially *En Islam iranien* and *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, transl. by Nancy Pearson (New Lebanon: Omega Publications, 1994)); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1997); W. Chittick's works on Islamic metaphysics; M. Aminrazavi's studies on Suhrawardī and Illuminationist philosophy.

light, nothing more; and it is not one of the privatives conditioned upon possibility” (HI. II, 1.109).<sup>227</sup> This privative account of darkness prevents the luminous ontology from collapsing into ontological dualism and maintains hierarchical asymmetry between manifestation and obscuration.

All beings proceed from the Light of Lights (*Nūr al-Anwār*). The First Intellect is the Nearest Light (*Nūr al-Aqrab*), and bodies function as *barāzikh* (sg. *barzakh*)—isthmic realities that are neither pure light nor pure privation. Sublunary existence is defined not by spatial distance but by ontological opacity and susceptibility to change. In this luminous hierarchy, the human being occupies a distinctive position, as the only earthly entity capable of establishing a connection with the higher lights through the disciplined reconfiguration of the body, conceived as a *ḥaykal* (temple) or *ṣṭīyya* (fortress): that is, as an isthmic (*barzakhī*) mediator between luminous and opaque domains.<sup>228</sup>

It is important to stress that in the *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, Suhrawardī does not lexically designate the human body as a *ṭilasm*. The mediational analogy advanced here is structural rather than terminological. The anthropological configuration he describes, where embodiment becomes the site of luminous reception and obstruction, renders the human being structurally analogous to a talismanic form: a configuration mediating between supernal lights and the sublunary order. “A sound mind will judge that the wisdom of the world of light and the subtle order and astonishing correspondences occurring therein are greater than that of the world of darkness, which is but a shadow of the world of light. That there are dominating lights, that the Creator of all is a light, that the archetypes are among the dominating lights—the pure souls have often beheld this to be so when they have detached themselves from their bodily temples” (HI. II, 2.165).<sup>229</sup> At this point, Suhrawardī lists previous sages: Hermes Trismegistus, Agathodaemon, Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato. He then explains: “whoever is unconvinced by the proof—let him engage in mystical disciplines and service to those visionaries, that perchance he will, as one dazzled by the thunderbolt, see the light blazing in the Kingdom of Power and will witness the heavenly essences and lights that Hermes and Plato beheld. He will see the spiritual luminaries, the wellsprings of kingly splendor and wisdom that Zoroaster told of,

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<sup>227</sup> Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 77.

<sup>228</sup> Faris Hajamaideen, “*‘Ilm* and the Human Body: Al-Suhrawardī’s Concept of the Illuminated Temple,” in Samer Akkach, ed., *Science, Religion and Art in Islam* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2018), 125–138.

<sup>229</sup> Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 107.

and that which the good and blessed king Kay-Khusraw unexpectedly beheld in a flash” (HI. II, 2.166).<sup>230</sup>

Thus, ascent to the Supreme Light depends upon disciplined intellect and contemplative practice, through which the body becomes an intermediary luminous configuration. According to J. Walbridge, such a perception of the human body may have been inspired in Suhrawardī by the 11th-century widespread works on alchemy and talisman-making (“the biographers are clear that Suhrawardī was skilled in magic and alchemy”), which heavily relied on the ideas of Hermes Trismegistus, who had a significant influence on Suhrawardī.<sup>231</sup> M. Aminrazavi similarly emphasises that the School of Illumination represents a synthesis of rational philosophy and mystical insight, employing symbolic and allegorical language to articulate metaphysical realities not exhausted by discursive demonstration.<sup>232</sup> These contextual resonances, however, do not entail terminological equivalence: in the *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, mediation is articulated through luminous ontology rather than through the operative vocabulary of talismanic construction.

When elaborating the relationship between the human body and light, Suhrawardī employs architectural metaphors of *ḥaykal* and *ṣīṣiyya*. This framework is grounded in the gradation of light and articulates the body as a structured *locus* of enclosure and disclosure in the luminous hierarchy. Historian Faris Hayamaideen, focusing on Suhrawardī’s two principal works, the *Hayākil al-nūr* (*Temples of Light*) and the *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, examines the significance of these architectural terms. He argues that the architecture of the human body plays a decisive role in the transformation from opacity to luminosity, that is, from enclosure within darkness to participation in light. In this process, body and soul function as a unified configuration, in which structural form and spatial delimitation operate as conditions for the reception of light, allowing illumination to render the body progressively transparent rather than materially negating it.<sup>233</sup> The metaphor of the temple designates the body as a *locus* of presence (*maḥall al-ḥudūr*); the metaphor of the fortress marks its defensive and limiting dimension. Together they describe embodiment as both condition and constraint of illumination.

In Suhrawardī’s system, the body is not merely physical but a *locus* of metaphysical significance. Humanity is conceived as a reflective microcosm, mirroring the

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>231</sup> John Walbridge, “The Devotional and Occult Works of Suhrawardī the Illuminationist,” *Ishraq* 2 (2011), 93.

<sup>232</sup> Aminrazavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*.

<sup>233</sup> Hajamaideen, “*Ilm* and the Human Body: Al-Suhrawardī’s Concept of the Illuminated Temple.”

order of the macrocosm and thereby capable of participating in divine illumination. This microcosmic relation signifies structural correspondence between cosmic degrees of light and psychic faculties rather than symbolic resemblance alone. Thus, in Suhrawardī's light-based ontology, the human being occupies an isthmic (*barzakhī*) position: embedded in the material world yet oriented towards the supernal lights. Through the metaphors of temple and fortress, the body is not merely passive matter but a structured vessel capable of receiving and reflecting illumination. As *barzakh*, it is neither pure light nor pure darkness, but a site of potential mediation. When disciplined perception renders the body transparent to illumination, the human configuration functions as a mediating form. It is at this structural level, rather than at the level of explicit terminology, that the figure of the Human Talisman (*al-ṭilasm al-basharī*) becomes philosophically intelligible within Suhrawardī's luminous anthropology. Mediation is thus relocated from constructed correspondences to anthropological configuration: the human being, as *barzakh*, becomes the privileged site at which illumination is either obstructed or rendered manifest.

### 3.2.2. The Concept of the Human Talisman

Suhrawardī underscores the human capacity to act as a bridge between the material and divine worlds, akin to a talisman channelling spiritual forces. Everything in existence partakes of light, differing only by degrees of perfection and deficiency (HI. II, 1.174). Among all elemental things, the human soul and spirit most fully correspond to light, being luminous in every respect (HI. II, 4.218–219). Because of this, the soul has the potential to ascend beyond the material world, rising with its body to the heavens (HI. II, 5.273), and at death to emerge into the world of light, attaching itself to the dominating lights and ultimately the Light of Lights (HI. II, 5.259; 274).<sup>234</sup> This vision resonates with the later doctrine of the Perfect Human. Suhrawardī describes the rational soul as the managing light and commander of humanity, a luminous essence linked to the archangelic sphere. Through its purification, this soul becomes the axis between the realms of light and the world of matter, participating in the divine order that unites heaven and earth (HI. II, 2.165–166). In his mystical passages, Suhrawardī even suggests that without the presence of the perfected friends of God, “the heavens would have been cast down as a curse upon earth convulsed” (HI. II, 5.263–265).<sup>235</sup> This notion

<sup>234</sup> Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 112–113; 135–136; 160; 155; 160–161.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 107–108; 156–157.

corresponds to the talismanic idea of a focal point that aligns and harmonises the celestial and terrestrial realms.

At the cosmological level, Suhrawardī himself deploys a terminology closely aligned with talismanic discourse. In the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, he explains that: “By the interaction of the rays with the aspects of independence, dominance, and love, and the extraordinary correspondences between the perfect, intense rays and the others, the dominating lights (*al-anwār al-qāhira*) bring into being the celestial archetypes of species (*arbāb al-aṣnām al-naw’iyya al-falakiyya*) and the talismans (*talāsim*) of the simples (*al-basā’it*), and the elemental compounds (*al-murakkabāt al-’unṣuriyya*), and all that is beneath the sphere of the stars” (HI. II, 2.152).<sup>236</sup> J. Walbridge and H. Ziai clarify in their note that the “celestial archetypes” are literally the “masters of species idols,” i.e., incorporeal lights that are “the Platonic Forms of the various earthly species. It is synonymous with ‘lords of talismans,’ ‘talismans’ being the earthly instances of the Platonic Forms: individual men or horses. Talismans and idols both are material representations of immaterial spiritual realities.”<sup>237</sup>

The notion of the “human talisman” becomes philosophically intelligible within Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist system. Just as talismans in his cosmology are earthly realisations of higher archetypes, the perfected human becomes the embodied *locus* of divine light: a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, and a hierophany in which the metaphysical order is made manifest. The expression *al-ṭilasm al-basharī* (human talisman) appears in devotional materials attributed to Suhrawardī and analysed by J. Walbridge, notably in the text known as *Al-Raqīm al-muqaddas*, preserved in early Istanbul manuscripts (e.g., Ayasofya 2144/1), where the address “O thou human talisman” (*ayyuhā al-ṭilasm al-basharī*) is explicitly attested. While J. Walbridge carefully notes the complexities of attribution and the circulation of Illuminationist devotional texts alongside the philosophical corpus, the vocabulary and metaphysical structure of these materials closely align with the luminous ontology of the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. For this reason, “human talisman” is adopted here not as an unquestioned authorial coinage, but as a heuristic expression naming an anthropological motif sustained by Suhrawardī’s metaphysics and articulated explicitly in the texts transmitted within the Illuminationist milieu.<sup>238</sup>

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 182, n. 10.

<sup>238</sup> The phrase *al-ṭilasm al-basharī* treats the human being as a microcosmic talisman, that is, a living composite sign mediating higher lights and forms within the sublunar realm. J. Walbridge has drawn attention to devotional materials transmitted within the Illuminationist milieu: most

Suhrawardī's account of illumination allows the human soul to be interpreted, in heuristic terms, as assuming a talismanic function, emphasising being free from bodily chains: "The mightiest state is the state of death, by which the managing light sheds the darkneses. If it has no remnant of attachment to the body, it will emerge into the world of light and be attached to the dominating lights. There will it behold all the veils of light as though transparent in relation to the glory of the eternal, the all-encompassing Light: the Light of Lights. It will become, as it were, placed within the all-encompassing Light. This is a station mighty indeed! Plato spoke from his own experience of this station, as did Hermes and the great sages" (HI. II, 5.274). In this state, the purified soul "resembles the dominating lights, and is holy by the holiness of God" (HI. II, 5.243). The more it is abstracted from the darkneses, "the greater will be its passion and love for the dominating light, and the greater will be its independence and its nearness to the Light of Lights," until it becomes sanctified by that very radiance (HI. II, 5.237–238).<sup>239</sup>

Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* situates the human being within a metaphysics of light, where the body and soul are not inert substances but luminous realities. As H. Corbin explains, this Illuminationist ontology became foundational for later Iranian Sufi teachings on the subtle organs (*laṭā'if*), through which the seeker advances inwards step by step, forming what H. Corbin calls the "physiology of the man of light".<sup>240</sup> a mystical anthropology in which the body itself is transfigured

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notably *Al-Raqīm al-muqaddas*, in which the address "O thou human talisman" (*ayyuhā al-ṭilasm al-basharī*) occurs. He further notes that texts such as the *Da'wat al-Ṭibā' al-Tāmm* and the *Taqdīsāt* employ the characteristic vocabulary of the science of lights (emanation, divine luminosities, degrees of perfection) in a manner closely aligned with the metaphysical structure of *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. In light of this manuscript attestation and its clear conceptual resonance with Suhrawardī's luminous ontology, the expression "human talisman" is adopted here as a heuristic designation. The intention is not to assert with certainty that the phrase belongs to Suhrawardī's philosophical autograph, but to identify an anthropological motif fully sustained by his metaphysics and explicitly articulated within the Illuminationist devotional transmission. See Walbridge, "The Devotional and Occult Works of Suhrawardī the Illuminationist," 80–97.

<sup>239</sup> Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 160–161; 148; 145–146.

<sup>240</sup> H. Corbin develops the concept of the "physiology of the man of light" as a mystical anthropology rooted in Suhrawardī's Illuminationist ontology and later expanded in Iranian Sufism. By "physiology" H. Corbin means the doctrine of the *laṭā'if* (subtle organs), whose progressive unveiling constitutes the ontogenesis of the *jism al-qiyāma* (resurrection body). This process is mapped both onto Qur'ānic hermeneutics, where the seven esoteric meanings (*bawāṭin*) of revelation correspond to seven inner organs, and onto prophetic typology, since each *laṭīfa* is associated with one of the great prophets. In this way, the spiritual exegesis of scripture coincides with the inner exodus of the seeker's own being, "making his way step by step inward toward the pole,

into a vessel of illumination. The Divine Light dispels the darkness of the human fortress, but this requires an active pursuit of knowledge of God. Otherwise, the radiance of the light is obstructed and imprisoned within the fortress—the human body. The “Illuminated Ones,” or Gnostics, through humility and effort, experience the essence of God, rising above other beings of the material world and becoming a temple, *haykal*, a conduit and intermediary of divine light. When the greatest Gnostic transformation occurs, and the Sufi “dissolves” into God, he is described as a talisman (*tilasm*) or an idol (*ṣanam*). Once the ‘*ārif* (gnostic) transforms into a talismanic state, the Light, having descended according to the hierarchical principle, can once again ascend to its origins, and the person becomes a microcosmic mirror and a “theurgy of incorporeal light.”<sup>241</sup> While such later developments extend beyond Suhrawardī’s own formulations, they underscore the centrality of luminous anthropology within Illuminationism, as Suhrawardī articulates the concept of humans as vessels of divine energy, similar to how talismans embody cosmic correspondences: his science of lights discloses the relations between the celestial and the terrestrial, and within this harmony the human being becomes the *locus* of divine manifestation.

A later metaphysical articulation of a structurally comparable anthropological role appears in the doctrine of *al-insān al-kāmil* developed within the Akbarian tradition. As Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, cited by Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī and preserved in W. Chittick’s account, explains: “The true Perfect Man is the isthmus between Necessity and possibility and the mirror which unites the attributes of Eternality with those of temporal events... He is the intermediary between God and creation. Through him and from his level of existence the effusion of God and the succor which is the cause of the subsistence of ‘other than God’ reach the world, all of it, both its celestial and terrestrial parts. If it were not for the fact that he acts as the isthmus unopposed to either of the two sides, nothing in the world could be the receptacle for the unique divine succor, because of the lack of correspondence and relationship. The succour would not reach the world and the world would cease to exist. The Perfect Man is the pillar of the heavens and the earth. Because of this mystery, when he leaves the center of the earth, which is... the station of Allāh’s vicegerency, ...the order of the earth and the Heavens will be destroyed and they will be changed into other

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the place of his origin.” H. Corbin situates this doctrine within the larger framework of Islamic esotericism, where symbolic cosmology and mystical physiology converge to present the human as a microcosm of divine light. See: Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*.

<sup>241</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi Maqtul,” in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. 1, edited by Mian Mohammad Sharif (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), 372–398.

than themselves.”<sup>242</sup> In this perspective, the human being assumes an ontological mediating role rather than a merely symbolic one: the perfected human functions as an axis sustaining the cosmos, a living isthmus where divine and created realms meet. The body thus becomes a hierophanic *locus*, a luminous vessel reflecting both the divine attributes and the order of creation. Although historically distinct from Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist system, this formulation clarifies the type of mediating anthropological function that his luminous ontology already renders intelligible.

The structural possibility of such anthropological mediation in Suhrawardī’s system becomes clearer when his cosmology of imaginal forms is examined. Suhrawardī’s Illuminationism radicalises this view by situating it within his Hierarchy of Lights. The highest states of ascent belong to the intelligible World of Lights and are accessible only to the fully realised sage. Those who achieve only partial wisdom may merge with celestial bodies or dwell in the imaginal paradise, but only the Perfect Man embodies the total effusion of divine light. W. Chittick encapsulates this point by describing the Perfect Man as the human self at its final stage of realisation, one that has actualised all latent possibilities and become a mirror reflecting the Divine Reality.<sup>243</sup> Emphasising the intermediate status between heavenly (divine) and earthly (human), Suhrawardī states: “Those who have attained an intermediate bliss and the ascetics whose worship is pure may escape to the world of suspended images (*‘alam al-muthul al-mu‘allaqa*), whose *locus* is some one of the celestial barriers (*barzakh*). There they can and do bring images into being. They can call forth such tastes, forms, pleasant sounds, and the like as they desire. These forms are more perfect than those that we have; for the *loci* in which these of ours are made evident and their bearers are deficient, while those of the former are perfect. There they may abide forever; for their connection with the barriers and the darknesses is unending, and there is no corruption among the celestial barriers” (HI. II, 5.244).<sup>244</sup>

Among the elect is Suhrawardī himself, who asserts that: “I myself have had trustworthy experiences indicating that there are four worlds: the worlds of the dominating lights, of the managing lights, of the barriers, and of the dark and illumined suspended images” (*wa-li fī nafsī tajārib ṣaḥīḥa tadullu ‘alā anna al-‘awālim arba‘a: anwār qāhira, wa-anwār mudabbira, wa-barzakhīyān, wa-ṣuwar*

<sup>242</sup> William Chittick, “The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jāmī,” *Studia Islamica* 49 (1979), 153–154.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–157.

<sup>244</sup> Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 148–149.

*mu‘allaqa zulmāniyya wa-mustanīra*) (HI. II, 5.247).<sup>245</sup> This exalted testimony underscores the transformative capacity of the perfected sage, who ascends through the luminous hierarchy to witness realities inaccessible to ordinary souls. Yet Suhrawardī undoubtedly contrasts this with the fate of those who remain bound to corporeal desires and neglect the cultivation of spirit and intellect, stating that the hedonists of the material world, who have cultivated neither spirit nor intellect, fall into the world of images (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), filled with pains and vile forms, as though it were the hell of religion. When they escape from the fortresses<sup>246</sup> of the *barzakh*, they have the shadows of suspended forms according to their moral qualities (HI. II, 5.245–247).<sup>247</sup>

This Suhrawardīan realm of wonders is constructed by reconfiguring the Aristotelian principles of logic and the constraints of natural philosophy, aiming to explain not only the states of the soul after death but also non-standard experiences, such as “true dreams” and “magical powers.” As the subject moves away from the centre of the sensory continuum segment and approaches the boundary region, qualitative changes occur: material bodies transform into imaginal ones; time alters and no longer confines itself to the dimensions of linear space, and space becomes boundless.

In his early works, Suhrawardī, drawing on the philosophers of Antiquity, especially Plato, articulates a tripartite division of existence later designated as *‘ālam al-jabarūt*, *‘ālam al-malakūt*, and *‘ālam al-mulk*, corresponding respectively to the intelligible, psychic, and corporeal domains. These Arabic designations, whose literal meanings evoke tyranny, sovereignty, and dominion, function in Illuminationist usage as technical cosmological terms rather than as direct lexical equivalents. Later, as Suhrawardī developed his epistemological innovations, this hierarchy expands into a fourfold structure: the intelligible world, the psychic world, the corporeal world, and the imaginal realm (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), which mediates between the material domain and the supernal Lights and possesses its own

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>246</sup> Suhrawardī frequently employs architectural metaphors to describe the embodied condition of the soul. The body may be portrayed as a fortress or as a *ḥaykal* (a structured bodily frame or temple-like *locus*) within which the soul temporarily resides and through which it operates in the sensible world. In Illuminationist cosmology, the term *barzakh* designates an intermediate ontological barrier or isthmus between levels of reality; although corporeality may function as such a barrier, the concept itself is broader and should not be reduced simply to a metaphor for the body.

<sup>247</sup> Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 149–150.

ontological integrity. Consequently, Suhrawardī was the first to grant the imaginal world its own ontological level: “The brethren of incorporeality have a special station in which they are able to bring into existence self-subsisting forms (*muthul qā'imah*) in whatever form they desire. This is called ‘the station of *Be'* (*maqām kun*). Whoever sees that station knows with certainty the existence of another world beyond that of the barriers (*al-barāzikh*). In it are self-subsistent images (*al-muthul al-mu'allaqa*) and the managing angels (*al-malā'ika al-mudabbira*), taking for themselves talismans (*ṭalāsim*) and self-subsisting forms (*muthul qā'imah*) by which they speak and are evident” (HI, II, 5.259).<sup>248</sup> This passage clarifies why Suhrawardī’s imaginal world cannot be reduced to psychological fancy: the forms it hosts are self-subsisting (*ṣuwar qā'imah bi-nufūsihā*) and responsive, mediating between angelic governance and human vision. The mention of angels who “take talismans for themselves” suggests that talismanic structures are not confined to material practice but are rooted in the ontological architecture of the imaginal realm. In this light, the human being as *al-ṭilasm al-basharī* emerges as a parallel hierophany: just as the imaginal world embodies theophanic forms, the illuminated human may be read as functionally analogous to a living talisman through which divine light is instantiated in the material plane. In Suhrawardī’s philosophy, *'ālam al-mithāl* becomes a mystical sphere of images, a distinct domain interposed between the corporeal and incorporeal realms, a symbolic world of visions, dreams, and imaginal forms, existing through the medium of light. This world, with its distinct topography, cities, and beings, is also known as the world of suspended or hanging images (*'ālam al-muthul al-mu'allaqa, ṣuwar mu'allaqa*), whose forms appear through the imagination. Suhrawardī explains that the forms which appear in mirrors or in imagination are not impressed in a substrate but are suspended realities without place. They may have locations in which they appear, such as a mirror or the faculty of imagination, yet they do not in fact subsist there; these *loci* merely serve as sites of manifestation for the suspended forms (HI, I, 3.103–104).<sup>249</sup> The relationship of the suspended image to its place of manifestation, the object (such as a mirror, a metal sheet, calm water, or the imagination), is independent insofar as the place makes the image visible, but the image does not lose its inherent existence as such.

In the *Hikmat al-ishraq*, Suhrawardī not only contemplates the imaginal world, wherein suspended forms and images are perceived by the soul’s imaginative power,

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 71–73.

but also specifies particular toponyms, assigning them to the Eighth Kingdom. Here stands a multitude of cities, including the emerald *Jabalqa* and *Jabarsa*, seen by the Prophet Muhammad during the Night Journey (*Mi'raj*), which, according to Suhrawardī, are accessible only to the most spiritually enlightened: “All of these are illuminations upon the managing light reflected upon the temple and the spirit of the soul. These are the goals of the intermediate. These lights may bear them up, allowing them to walk on water and air. They may ascend to the heavens with their bodies and associate with one of the celestial masters. These are determinations of the eighth clime, in which are *Jābulq*, *Jābars* and wondrous *Hūrqaalyā*” (HI. II, 5.273).<sup>250</sup> This passage underscores that *Jābulqā*, *Jābarsā*, and *Hūrqaalyā* are not symbolic fictions but *loci* within the ontological geography of the imaginal realm (*‘ālam al-mithāl*); “a spiritual topography of a domain that can only be seen by those who have turned away from the *sensus communis* and rely on spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*).”<sup>251</sup> Within this geography, the human being as *al-ṭilasm al-basharī* participates in theophanic light, not merely contemplating divine realities but embodying them in imaginal ascent. These cities therefore serve as talismanic thresholds: they spatialise the encounter with transcendent lights, transforming metaphysical doctrine into lived visionary experience.

Suhrawardī’s eschatological vision, while drawing on Avicennan imaginal theory, radically extends its implications: *‘ālam al-mithāl* is not merely a posthumous domain for imperfect souls but an active ontological stratum mediating between intellect and sense. Through Zoroastrian angelology, Platonic metaphysics, and Sufī ascent, the sage accesses this realm in life, not as metaphor but as ontological participation. Here, the perfected soul becomes a *locus* of illumination, prefiguring its eschatological role and anticipating the full talismanic transformation that Suhrawardī articulates.

The conceptualisation of the human talisman emerges as the ontological apex of Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist metaphysics, wherein the human being functions not merely as a rational soul bound to the material body, but as an intermediary *locus* in which celestial light, imaginal form, and corporeal embodiment converge. The hierarchical diffusion of light from the *Nūr al-Anwār* through successive hypostases reaches its point of maximum opacity in the sublunary world, yet retains the potential for re-ascent through the transformative agency of the perfected soul.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>251</sup> Aminrazavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*, 88.

It is in this context that the figure of *al-insān al-kāmil* designates the human as a microcosmic synthesis of the cosmic hierarchy, capable of reflecting and mediating higher luminous realities within the temporal order. This talismanic function is not metaphorical in a reductive sense, but ontological: it names the structural capacity of the human configuration to serve as a *barzakh* between the supernal and the terrestrial. The imaginal realm (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) serves as the substrate that mediates between the corporeal and intelligible realms, enabling the self-instantiation of suspended forms (*ṣuwar mu‘allaqa*) apprehensible to the visionary intellect. The human talisman thus does not simply represent the cosmos; it enacts its luminous structure. It is both temple and mirror, vessel and conduit, whose metaphysical architecture renders the unseen manifest and whose perfected state reconfigures human embodiment as a hierophanic articulation within the graded ontology of light. In Suhrawardī’s schema, to become a talisman is to transcend mere instrumentality and enter into active participation in the hierarchical diffusion of illumination.

### 3.3. Al-Būnī’s Lettrist Cosmology: The Talisman as Operative Mediation

#### 3.3.1. The Science of Letters (*‘Ilm al-Ḥurūf*) as Metaphysical Code

Among the most intricate and conceptually radical developments of the talismanic tradition in the Islamic esoteric sciences are those associated with the name of al-Būnī (*Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Būnī*, d. ca. 1225 or 1233). Foremost among the texts attributed to him are *Shams al-ma‘ārif* (*The Sun of Knowledge*) and *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt* (*The Subtleties of the Allusions Regarding the Superior Letters*), which together articulate the cosmological and operative foundations of his lettrist system. Within this broader manuscript tradition, texts circulating under titles such as the *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā‘if al-‘awārif* (*The Sun of Knowledge and the Subtleties of Gnostic Knowing*) and the later compilation known as the *Shams al-ma‘ārif al-kubrā* (*The Great Sun of Knowledge*) became among the most widely copied, disseminated, and debated bodies of writing within the Islamic occult sciences.

As briefly discussed in the introduction, the question of the text’s authorship and redaction is complex. As L. Saif has shown, the pseudo-Būnian work *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa-laṭā‘if al-‘awārif* contains clear anachronisms and passages that appear to have been interpolated by later students, while also reproducing material verbatim from authentic works such as al-Būnī’s *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt*. N. Gardiner and

J.-C. Coulon likewise emphasise that the textual corpus attributed to al-Būnī—often referred to in scholarship as the *corpus Būnianum*<sup>252</sup>—is composite and layered, reflecting successive processes of compilation, transmission, and adaptation.<sup>253</sup> From this perspective, the *Shams* tradition is not a unitary authorial product but a dynamic manuscript tradition that accumulated authority precisely through its widespread copying, popular circulation, and incorporation of earlier esoteric materials.<sup>254</sup> Individual manuscripts should therefore be understood as witnesses to this evolving textual tradition rather than as fixed authorial versions.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the authenticity debate is not of central concern. What matters is that in the various recensions and manuscript traditions through which it circulated, *Shams al-ma'ārif* became the most recognisable and influential work of Islamic occultism, shaping both elite and popular conceptions of talismanry, even as *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* preserved the cosmological and diagrammatic architecture upon which that talismanic system depends. However, as J.-C. Coulon points out, it should be reiterated that in his authentic works, al-Būnī himself does not employ terms such as *ḥilasm*, *nushra*, *tamīma*, *ḥirz*, *ḥijāb*, and the like.<sup>255</sup> Instead, his focus lies on the esoteric properties (*khawāṣṣ*) of the letters and their inscription into specific materials, inks, and geometrical forms.<sup>256</sup> While these procedures can

<sup>252</sup> The term *corpus Būnianum* was introduced by Jan Just Witkam to designate the large and heterogeneous body of texts attributed to al-Būnī and transmitted through complex manuscript traditions; see Jan Just Witkam, “Gazing at the Sun. Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and His Work,” in Jan P. Hogendijk and Arnoud Vrolijk, eds., *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture: In Honour of Remke Kruk* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 183–199.

<sup>253</sup> For detailed analyses of the manuscript tradition and the composite nature of the Būnian corpus, see Gardiner, “Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production, Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Aḥmad al-Būnī”; Gardiner, *Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture*; and Coulon, *La magie islamique et le corpus būnianum au Moyen Âge*.

<sup>254</sup> Saif, “From *Ġāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma'ārif*,” 337.

<sup>255</sup> J.-C. Coulon further elaborates that originally, in early Islamic sources, the term *ḥilasm* referred to talismans, understood as those associated with Greek authorities and protective monumental constructions, but in later usage, such as in the *Shams al-ma'ārif*, it came to denote written talismans more generally. *Nushra* and *tamīma* are terms frequently used for pre-Islamic amulets and, subsequently, for protective objects. *Hirz* designates a protective charm or written amulet carried for safeguarding. *Ḥijāb* appears in al-Būnī’s authentic works in a Sufi sense (as a veil to be lifted); by contrast, the same term is used in later *Shams al-ma'ārif al-kubrā* as a synonym for a protective talisman. Some later talismans called *ḥijāb* refer to al-Būnī, although his authentic works do not use the word in this meaning. See Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Būnianum,” 236, n. 19–21.

<sup>256</sup> Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Būnianum,” 236–238. See also Saif, “From *Ġāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma'ārif*,” 337–338.

clearly be read as talismanic, their framing is cosmological and Sufi rather than explicitly “magical.” This terminological reserve partly explains why al-Būnī was remembered both as a Sufi master and, in later receptions, as a theurgist.

It is precisely within this conceptual horizon that the philosophical dimensions of the talisman are most fully elaborated, especially through the systematic articulation of *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*. The science of letters functions in the Būnian treatises as a metaphysical code: a symbolic framework through which letters, numbers, and divine names embody the structural principles of creation, mediating between cosmology, theology, and ritual practice. This marks a distinctive rearticulation within the talismanic tradition. Here, the talisman is not primarily a material object governed by astral correspondences, as in al-Qurṭubī, nor as a mirror of ontological luminosity, as in Suhrawardī. Rather, it is reframed as a lettrist theurgical construct grounded in divine speech, a linguistic–ritual configuration in which letters, divine names, and *awfāq* (letter–number grids) mediate between cosmology and practice, with *kalām ilāhī* functioning as a cosmological principle, without reducing the analysis to a single philosophical genealogy. Through this synthesis, the Būnian tradition repositioned talismanry at the intersection of Sufi metaphysics and practical occultism, establishing an enduring model that shaped the subsequent history of Islamic esoteric sciences, especially in the domains of lettrism and talismanic theory.<sup>257</sup>

Al-Būnī situates *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* at the very epistemological root of creation, insisting that letters are not merely symbolic stand-ins but principles treated as ontologically foundational. Creation is presented as a divine speech-act (*kalām ilāhī*), evoked through the Qur’ānic formula *kun fa-yakūn* (Be! and it is), and al-Būnī builds his lettrist cosmology on that basis: the letters of divine speech (*ḥurūf al-kalām al-ilāhī*) are active across the cosmic planes and within the human microcosm alike (*al-‘aql*, *al-rūḥ*, *al-naḥs*, *al-jasad*<sup>258</sup>). A cosmograph bearing the inscription “the world as disposed by the letters” (*‘ālam al-taṣrīf bi-l-ḥurūf*) in the centre, presented in the *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* (fol. 13b), depicts thirteen concentric rings: the outermost is the Throne (*al-‘arsh*), identified with the Intellect (*al-‘aql*) and the *Primum Mobile* (the outermost celestial sphere, *al-falak al-muḥīṭ*), then the Footstool (*al-kursī*), identified with the World Soul (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya*) and the firmament of fixed stars, followed by the seven planetary spheres (*al-aflāk*: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon), and finally the four sublunary elements (*al-‘anāṣir*: fire, air, water, earth),

<sup>257</sup> Gardiner, “The Occultist Encyclopedism of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī.”

<sup>258</sup> Intellect, spirit, soul, and body.

with the manifest order explicitly disposed by letters.<sup>259</sup> Doctrinally, the letters are characterised as “signs of signs” (*a ‘lām al-a ‘lām*) and “secrets of judgements” (*asrār al-aḥkām*), linking them to *‘ilm aḥkām al-nujūm* (the science of the judgments of the stars / astrology) while extending their scope: through letters the Greatest Name (*al-ism al-a ‘zam*) is known; through letters the speech of the people of paradise is made intelligible; and through letters the divine speech is heard by unveiling in the presence of the highest spirit of holiness (*yusma ‘ bi-l-kashf fī ḥaḍrat rūḥ al-quḍus*). For this reason, adepts are said to conceal these arcana from those who stray (*ahl al-ḍalālāt*), lest they come upon them and—by means of them—expose what God keeps sacred.<sup>260</sup>

Building on this cosmographic premise, the *Shams al-ma‘ārif* tradition systematises letter-cosmology in a more explicitly operative key. Within the Būnian corpus, correspondences between cosmological levels and specific letters are articulated with considerable precision, and the *Shams* materials consolidate this logic into a transmissible schema. As J.-C. Coulon observes, al-Būnī presents the letters as the foundations of creation and the supports of an entire cosmology: a system in which their hidden forces are simultaneously metaphysical and practical.<sup>261</sup> The table “Correspondence between letters and cosmological levels according to *The Sun of Knowledge and the Secrets of Gnosis*,” by V. Porter, L. Saif, and E. Savage-Smith, collates a representative mapping and makes clear that the hierarchy (throne, footstool, planetary spheres, sublunary elements) is read through the alphabetic code:<sup>262</sup>

TABLE 21.1 Correspondence between letters and cosmological levels according to *The Sun of Knowledge and the Secrets of Gnosis*.

Level	Letter
Throne	ا a
Chair	ب b
Saturn	ج j
Jupiter	د d
Mars	ه h
Sun	و o
Venus	ز z
Mercury	ح ḥ
Moon	ط ṭ

<sup>259</sup> Al-Būnī, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt*, f. 13b, as cited in Gardiner, “Stars and Saints,” 51.

<sup>260</sup> Al-Būnī, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt*, f. 17b, as cited in Gardiner, “Stars and Saints,” 52.

<sup>261</sup> Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Bunianum,” 236–238.

<sup>262</sup> Porter, Saif and Savage-Smith, “Medieval Islamic Amulets, Talismans, and Magic,” 530.

Within this framework, Būnian material treats letters as operative units whose analogical properties ground talismanic procedure: tables of correspondences, permutation series of the divine names, and *awfāq* translate the philosophical claim (letters as ontologically prior principles) into working technique. This is not ornament but a practical grammar: squares function as seals that encode and condense a letter’s or number’s esoteric meaning and properties, thereby rendering them operative while also veiling them from the uninitiated,<sup>263</sup> while the lettrist framework grounds efficacy in the dynamics of divine speech rather than in purely external causal mechanisms. L. Saif complements this perspective by stressing that in the Būnian corpus the letters are envisaged as “non-sensory divine principles,”<sup>264</sup> whose mastery grants access to hidden causalities and to divine action through *kashf* and disciplined ritual practice.

In this light, each of the twenty-eight Arabic letters (together with the three extended forms)<sup>265</sup> is not simply a grapheme but an operative entity, endowed with cosmological, spiritual, and numerical dimensions. Significantly, N. Gardiner notes that in al-Būnī’s esotericist astrology the letters are presented as forty-eight, not twenty-eight: seven *nūrāniyya* (luciform), twelve *rūhāniyya* (spiritual), and twenty-nine *jismāniyya* (corporeal), a structuring that signals astrological correlations and introduces an esotericist reconfiguration of astrology, in which the apparent powers of the planets are understood as the continuous action of the divine names.<sup>266</sup> Each letter may be associated with an *abjad* value, a planetary or stellar correspondence, an angelic counterpart (*khādim*),<sup>267</sup> and an intrinsic *ḥaqīqa* (essential truth), locating

<sup>263</sup> Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Bunianum,” 243.

<sup>264</sup> Saif, “From *Gāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma’ārif*,” 335.

<sup>265</sup> In al-Būnī’s *Shams al-ma’ārif*, when he and later lettrist authors speak of the “28 letters and the 3 extended ones,” they are generally understood to refer to the 28 canonical Arabic letters of the *abjad* system, together with additional forms that may be treated as distinct esoteric operators in certain contexts. These “extended” letters are often identified as including:

- *alif maqṣūra* (ﺀ)—a variant of *yā’* written without dots, sometimes treated as symbolically distinct in esoteric contexts;
- *hamza* (ء)—although orthographically dependent, it may be considered an independent operator because of its unique phonetic and conceptual status as the glottal onset;
- *tā’ marbūṭa* (ة)—usually a feminine marker, but in esoteric numerology it may be treated as a separate letter, linked to receptive, generative forces (sometimes called “the hidden *tā’*”).

<sup>266</sup> Gardiner, “Stars and Saints,” 52–54.

<sup>267</sup> In al-Būnī’s framework, letters are associated with *rūhāniyyāt* (spiritual forces / spiritualities), sometimes personified as *khuddām* (servitors, sg. *khādim*), that mediate between the act of invocation and its effect. While not always systematised as a fixed one-to-one correspondence

it within the broader metaphysical architecture; for example, *alif* is often envisaged at the apex of the cosmic order. These assignments are presented in Būnian correspondence tables and then operationalised through *awfāq* and permutation series of the divine names; efficacy is tied to composition (*tarkīb*) and elected times (*awqāt*), not to isolated characters. The *khādim / rūḥāniyyā* serves as the mediating intelligence between invocation and effect, situating letter-work within an angelological, rather than purely mechanistic, framework.

From a theoretical standpoint, N. Gardiner suggests that al-Būnī conceives the Arabic letter not as a mere mark but as a cosmological constituent operative across distinct planes of being, through which divine speech assumes formal and material articulation.<sup>268</sup> He proposes: “One way to understand the roles of the letters in al-Būnī’s four-plane model of the cosmos<sup>269</sup> is that they exist as the constituent parts of divine thought in the intellect, of divine speech / breath in the world of the spirit, of image / form in the universal soul, and of matter in the manifest world [...].”<sup>270</sup> The potency of letters is not exhausted in isolation; efficacy emerges in carefully constructed combinations, frequently encoded in *ism al-a‘zam* and *asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā* sequences, talismanic figures, and permutation-based formulae. These compound structures are often linked with the *ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa‘āt*, Qur’ānic code formulas (e.g., 786 for *bismillāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*), or the geometric arrangements of ciphers and *awfāq* (letter–number grids).

P. Lory’s discussion of the Jābirian doctrine of *‘ilm al-mīzān* (science of balance) clarifies that balance was conceived not as metaphor but as a precise theory of proportional constitution, extending even to a *mīzān al-ḥurūf* (balance of letters) founded on the principle that the name contains the secret of the structure of what it designates.<sup>271</sup> Read against this broader science of proportion, Būnian lettrism

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for each letter, these entities are understood to “serve” the operator when the letters are properly invoked or inscribed.

<sup>268</sup> Gardiner, “Diagrams and Visionary Experience in al-Būnī’s (d. 622 / 1225) *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt*,” 30–33.

<sup>269</sup> N. Gardiner’s expression “four-plane model” refers to a cosmological articulation reconstructed from al-Būnī’s diagrams and discussions, comprising the world of the Intellect (*‘ālam al-‘aql*), the world of Spirit (*‘ālam al-rūḥ*), the plane of the World Soul (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya*), and the sublunary world of elemental composition (*‘ālam al-tarkīb*), where the four elements combine into generated beings (*al-akwān*).

<sup>270</sup> Gardiner, “Diagrams and Visionary Experience in al-Būnī’s (d. 622 / 1225) *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt*,” 33.

<sup>271</sup> Pierre Lory, “Kimiā,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. XVII, fasc. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 209–212.

may be seen as operating within an analogous logic, where letters function as *loci* of intrinsic forces whose combinations obey determinate laws of equilibrium. For al-Būnī, each letter carries a spiritual and luminous potency (*rūḥ* and *nūr*), and their combinations follow a proportional logic analogous to that structuring the wider cosmological order, including the elemental balance of hot, cold, moist, and dry in the natural world.<sup>272</sup> Each word is thus charged with the properties of its constituent letters, whose measured mixture produces its full meaning and operative power. Balance, then, is both linguistic and cosmological: the visible form (*ẓāhir*) of letters carries hidden significations (*bāṭin*), and the talisman becomes the crystallisation of these equilibria, a *locus* where divine speech, cosmology, and spiritual discipline converge.

This metaphysics of balance is also ethical. In the Būnian framework, *mīzān* governs not only elemental or phonetic proportion but also the operator's spiritual state (*ḥāl*): the harmony sought among letters, spirits, and elements must be mirrored in the moral and spiritual equilibrium of the adept. This ethic is institutionalised as a discipline of transmission and authorisation, so that efficacy is tied to a qualified agent whose authority is established—textually and spiritually—to synthesise lettrist materials.<sup>273</sup> Handling the letters is therefore a matter of authorisation and attunement rather than mechanical manipulation: only a purified soul can maintain proportion between divine form and human act. Misuse signifies not merely moral failure but metaphysical imbalance, disrupting the very *mīzān* that guarantees cosmic order. In this sense, al-Būnī's science of letters fuses epistemology, cosmology, and virtue ethics: to know the letters is to be proportioned to them. On this basis, *'ilm al-ḥurūf* demands not only technical competence but inward conformity with divine will (*irāda*), ascetic discipline (*riyāḍa*), and unveiling (*kashf*)—conditions that ground, rather than embellish, operative work.

The practical applications of *'ilm al-ḥurūf* manifest in ritualised operations that integrate inscription, diagrammatic configuration, and recitation under specified conditions. Rather than isolated techniques, Būnian practice is structured around the coordinated use of written letter-forms and numerical arrangements (especially *awfāq*), often paired with calibrated vocal repetition (*dhikr*) and, in some cases, temporally elected performance (*awqāt*). In this sense, applied lettrism functions as

<sup>272</sup> On the classification of letters into elemental qualities and their integration into cosmological correspondences in the *Shams al-ma'ārif*, see Pierre Lory, “La magie des lettres dans le *Shams al-ma'ārif* d'al-Būnī,” *Bulletin d'études orientales* 39–40 (1987–1988), 101–103.

<sup>273</sup> Gardiner, “The Occultist Encyclopedism of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī,” 4.

a rule-governed mode of operative mediation, in which the written configuration is intelligible only within the ritual and ethical regimen that frames its use.

Such ritual techniques exemplify how letter operations function not merely as symbolic gestures but as precise theurgical acts, mediating between the human practitioner and the cosmic order through sound, form, and ritually specified timing. In the Būnian corpus, this operative dimension is expressed within complex tabular configurations, where letter values are inserted numerically into grids to form visual condensations of cosmic forces. *Wafq* (pl. *awfāq*) configurations are not primarily illustrative but operate as diagrammatic supports for ritual procedure, articulating letter-number relations in a form designed for use. As N. Gardiner shows, these configurations belong to a broader “esotericist astrology,” in which mathematical harmonies and astral correspondences are embedded within Sufi cosmology, allowing the practitioner to channel divine realities through ritual form.<sup>274</sup>

Al-Būnī’s philosophy of letters reconfigures the talisman as a crystallisation of divine speech within material form. In this framework, the cosmos itself is intelligible as articulated through the letters of the divine command, and talismanic construction becomes a disciplined participation in that articulation. The efficacy of the talisman does not derive from autonomous material forces but from the structured deployment of letters, numbers, and divine names within a hierarchy grounded in *kalām ilāhī* (divine speech) and sustained through cosmological correspondences. Script, sound, number, and geometrical arrangement thus function not as symbolic embellishments but as operative configurations through which metaphysical principles are rendered effective.

The talisman, in al-Būnī’s system, is therefore neither a mere image nor a mechanically activated device. It is a theurgical construct whose validity depends on proportional composition (*tarkīb*), elected times (*awqāt*), angelological mediation (*khādīm, rūhāniyya*), and the ethical equilibrium (*mīzān*) of the practitioner. In this sense, talismanic practice is inseparable from Sufi discipline: language becomes an instrument of ontological mediation only when aligned with divine will, ascetic refinement, and unveiling.

Through this lettrist metaphysics, the Būnian corpus relocates talismanry within a theology of divine speech: the written configuration becomes a *locus* where cosmology, ritual technique, and spiritual transformation converge. The talisman does not compete with natural causality; it operates within a hierarchical order in which

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<sup>274</sup> Gardiner, “Stars and Saints,” 39–65.

material form, astral influence, and divine articulation are integrated. What emerges is not a rupture with earlier astral or ontological models, but their reconfiguration within a linguistic–theurgical paradigm that would shape the subsequent history of Islamic esoteric sciences.

### 3.3.2. Numerology, Divine Names, and the Conditions of Efficacy

The efficacy of the talisman in the Būnian corpus, and especially the *Shams al-ma‘ārif* and *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt* tradition, cannot be understood independently of the numerical structure inherent in the Arabic script and the divine names themselves. Drawing upon the *‘ilm al-a‘dād* (science of numbers), the practitioner aligns each letter with a specific numerical value based on the *abjad* system, whereby *alif* = 1, *bā* = 2, *jīm* = 3, and so forth. Yet in this tradition, this is not simply a matter of arithmetical calculation; it is an act of uncovering the structural numerical pattern of created order, as each number corresponds to hidden metaphysical realities and functions as an index for operative deployment (counts, squares, and timed compositions).

For example, the Name *al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful), which totals 289 by *abjad* when the definite article *al-* is included, is not just a devotional designation of God: it becomes an operative numerical configuration through which the corresponding attribute is directed towards a specific effect. Būnian method treats the numerical value not as ornament but as a governing parameter within elected times and ritual conditions. The divine names (*asmā‘ Allāh al-ḥusnā*) are handled as carriers of *sirr* (secret) and *quwwa* (operative power) whose effects depend on the correct number (*‘adad*), proper timing (*waqt*), and the practitioner’s inner purity (*ṣafā‘ al-bāṭin*), while their composition is effected through *dhikr* and specific *awfāq* configurations. A representative Būnian talismanic prescription instructs the practitioner to “write the shape of *dāl* thirty-five times” on white silk when the “Moon is in Cancer” and “aligned [favourably] with Jupiter,” to set it in a signet-ring, and to wear it “in ritual purity, fasting, and continuous internal quietude,” while also “multiplying” (performing *dhikr* of) the Name *al-Dā‘im* (The Eternal)—an exemplar that makes explicit how number, election, purity, *dhikr*, and form are integrated in a single operative grammar.<sup>275</sup>

The invocatory use of divine names, especially through *dhikr* or numerically calibrated writing in magic squares, is presented by al-Būni as a method of metaphysical harmonisation, by which the adept realigns the soul with the divine

<sup>275</sup> Al-Būnī, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fi al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt*, f. 76a.

order. Each Name is treated as an active *locus* of divine self-disclosure (*tajallī*),<sup>276</sup> through which specific attributes are rendered operative within the created order. In operative prescriptions, Names may be selected in relation to the desired aim: for example, healing (*al-Shāfi*, “the Healer”), protection (*al-Hafīz*, “the Preserver” or “Guardian”), provision (*al-Razzāq*, “the Provider”), or justice (*al-‘Adl*, “the Just”). The Būnian tradition consistently presents each Name as bearing intrinsic potency, while insisting that its effective application depends on the prescribed measure and conditions outlined above.

Thus emerges the operative logic of *awfāq*: numerical matrices and letter-grids that function as seals condensing *abjad* values, planetary associations, and name attributes into structured configurations intended for ritual deployment. These are not merely mathematical squares but calibrated instruments of inscription, designed to encode correspondences whose effects depend on prescribed inscription, recitation, timing, and spiritual mediation by a *rūḥāniyyāt* (spiritualities) or *khādim* (servitor spirit).

One of the most widely attested forms in Islamic esoteric numerology is the 3×3 magic square, in which each row, column, and diagonal sums to 15. Although this configuration is not explicitly authored by al-Būnī, it appears frequently in later magical and talismanic manuals that build upon the frameworks established in his *Shams al-ma‘ārif*. The value of the square, its timing, the writing material, and even the direction faced during inscription are all critical variables. Thus, the talisman becomes a composite ritual, wherein number, language, and intention intersect. For this reason, Būnian materials repeatedly emphasise the operator’s inner state (*ḥāl*) and alignment with the divine will. Without spiritual purity and ethical integrity, the talisman lacks operative efficacy. Accordingly, ritual is presented less as an “activation” of an object than as the ordered enactment of the conditions under which an effect (*ta‘thīr*) may occur.

At the level of practice, one can analytically distinguish between contemplative uses of diagrams and explicitly operative procedures of *taṣrīf* (the directed operation or deployment of effects). N. Gardiner has shown that certain diagrammatic materials in al-Būnī’s *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt* are oriented towards disciplined contemplation and

<sup>276</sup> *Tajallī* (lit. “manifestation,” “disclosure”) in this context denotes the operative manifestation of divine names in created reality. The term is widely employed in Sufi metaphysics (especially in Akbarian vocabulary); in the Būnian corpus, it may be understood in a more operative register, insofar as the Name’s manifestation is conditioned by repetition, timing, and purification rather than described solely in ontological terms.

visionary experience;<sup>277</sup> by contrast, operative sections of the Būnian corpus theorise *taṣrīf al-asmāʾ* (the directed operation of effects through the divine names) as enacted practice, in which the practitioner writes the Name’s square at an auspicious time, engages the associated *rūḥāniyya*, and recites the prescribed number to obtain the intended effect.

The *hurūfī* matrix thus becomes a spiritual filter: the adept who has undergone inner transformation is thereby able to translate divine names into operative force. In this light, the talisman is a mirror of the practitioner’s soul: numerically exact yet ethically contingent. Accordingly, the talisman is not complete at the level of inscription. It is fulfilled only when the numerical essence of the Names is enacted through disciplined recitation coordinated with regulated breaths (*anfās*),<sup>278</sup> harmonised with the divine command (*al-amr*).

### 3.3.3. The Ritual Logic of Operative Mediation

The operative dimension of al-Būnī’s lettrism unfolds through a carefully regulated ritual economy in which cosmological principles are translated into concrete procedures. In the Būnian corpus, the talisman does not appear as an autonomous artefact endowed with intrinsic power but as the outcome of a structured process that integrates timing (*waqt*), inscription, recitation (*dhikr*), material preparation, and ethical discipline. These elements do not function independently but operate as coordinated conditions through which the latent efficacy of letters and divine names may become manifest. Talismanic efficacy (*taʾthīr*) is therefore consistently presented as contingent upon the practitioner’s adherence to this ordered sequence of actions, through which symbolic configuration is brought into alignment with the cosmological order.

The first principle governing the procedure is temporal alignment (*waqt*). In the Būnian tradition, operations involving letters and divine names are not

<sup>277</sup> See Gardiner, “Diagrams and Visionary Experience in al-Būnī’s (d. 622/1225) *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt fī al-hurūf al-ʿulwiyyāt*.”

<sup>278</sup> *Anfās* (sg. *nafas*, “breath”) in Sufi contexts can refer to the regulated breaths accompanying disciplined recitation (*dhikr*). In some ritual settings, the number of invocations may be coordinated with controlled breathing, such that repetition-count (*ʿadad*) and breath-count function together as measures of interior discipline. While the concept of *nafas al-Raḥmān* (Breath of the All-Merciful) is central in Ibn ʿArabī’s cosmology, the usage here is practical rather than cosmogenic: here, *anfās* denotes calibrated recitative breaths as part of operative preparation and ethical attunement, not a metaphysical doctrine of creation through divine breath.

performed arbitrarily but are coordinated with specific moments within the cosmic order, most commonly defined through planetary hours. As the early works of the *Corpus Būnianum* indicate, the preparation of written devices—whether letter-configurations, invocations, or numerical arrangements—must take place at the moment judged astrologically appropriate for the intended effect. In this framework, time functions as an operative condition of efficacy rather than a neutral backdrop: the act of inscription must coincide with the astral configuration deemed suitable for the operation.<sup>279</sup>

The second condition is ritual purity (*tahāra*), both physical and spiritual. Talismans, inscriptions, and numerical figures such as magic squares (*awfāq*) are produced in accordance with auspicious celestial moments (*awqāt*), often determined through planetary hours,<sup>280</sup> while the act of inscription itself is preceded by ritual purification (*tahāra*) and ablution (*wuḍūʿ*) accompanied by Qurʾānic recitation. These prescriptions situate the manipulation of letters, numbers, and names within a broader ascetic and devotional regimen, in which the written device functions not as an autonomous instrument but as the material *locus* through which cosmological correspondences are activated. The efficacy of such operations is therefore presented as contingent upon both the proper alignment of celestial circumstances and the ethical disposition of the practitioner, whose spiritual preparation conditions the successful deployment of the science of letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*).<sup>281</sup>

Once ritual preparation has been completed and the appropriate moment determined, the operation proceeds through the material inscription of letters. A point emphasised in the scholarship and discussed in detail by J.-C. Coulon is that the occult properties of the letters (*khawāṣṣ*) are activated through carefully prescribed procedures of writing, in which a letter or numerical configuration is inscribed on a specific material support, such as parchment or paper, sometimes using a designated ink or liquid medium and performed under defined ritual conditions intended to produce a particular effect (*taʿthīr*). In this context, al-Būnī also develops the idea that each letter possesses a characteristic form (*shakl*, pl. *ashkāl*) that synthesises its esoteric properties and symbolic significance. These *ashkāl* are most commonly expressed through diagrammatic configurations, particularly magic squares and

<sup>279</sup> Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Bunianum,” 236–245.

<sup>280</sup> Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* (MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2637) (compared to MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2658), ff. 14a–15a; as cited in Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Bunianum,” 241–242.

<sup>281</sup> Pseudo-al-Būnī, *Shams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*, ff. 80v–81r.

circular figures, which constitute the principal diagrammatic structures through which the letters' occult properties are operationalised.<sup>282</sup>

The act of writing is itself sacralised. In Būnian practice, the act of inscription is closely linked with vocal invocation (*dhikr*), so that the graphic formation of letters and the recitation of divine names form a single ritual operation. The letter is therefore not treated merely as a graphic sign but as a vehicle through which the divine names are ritually articulated, echoing the Qur'ānic image of creation through divine breath (*nafakhtu fīhi min rūhī*, Q. 15:29). Though some later manuscript traditions attribute specific chants, like *Yā Hayy*, *Yā Qayyūm* (O Ever-Living, O Self-Subsisting) repeated 313 times while tracing a magic square and facing the Qibla, these exact prescriptions are not found in the standard print edition of the *Shams al-ma'ārif*. Such examples therefore illustrate practices transmitted in the wider Būnian manuscript tradition rather than prescriptions that can be securely attributed to al-Būnī himself. Still, the broader tradition underscores that material letter-writing, numerical precision, *dhikr*, and orientation converge into a theurgical act rooted in Sufī interiority and linguistic efficacy. As M. Chodkiewicz underlines, the efficacy of the divine names depends on the spiritual steadiness (*istiqāma*) of the invoker; in this perspective, letters function more as mirrors of divine realities than as engines of causality.<sup>283</sup>

Beyond the material and ritual dimensions of inscription, Būnian operations also presuppose interaction with a hierarchy of spiritual intermediaries, including angels (*malā'ika*), spiritual forces (*rūhāniyyāt*), and jinn, who are understood in the textual tradition as cosmological intelligences associated with particular letters, names, or celestial configurations. In the Būnian treatises, these are invited through formulae of praise, humility, and alignment with cosmic harmony, and their participation is framed as part of the hierarchical structure of the cosmos. Failure to observe proper *adab* (ritual etiquette) may nullify the operation or expose the practitioner to harmful influences. In this way, the practitioner does not rely on magical compulsion but on being ethically and cosmologically tuned; only those aligned with divine rectitude will be responded to by these intermediaries.

The final stage consists in the sealing of the talisman (*khatm al-ṭilasm*), typically marked by the addition of sigillary marks, permutations of divine names—whether

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<sup>282</sup> Coulon, “Amulets and Talismans in the Earliest Works of the Corpus Bunianum,” 238. See also Coulon, *La magie en terre d'Islam au Moyen Âge*.

<sup>283</sup> Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints*.

a simple name (*ism mufrad*, i.e., a single divine name) or a composite formula (*ism murakkab*, a compound arrangement of multiple names)—and sometimes Qur’ānic verses (e.g., *Āyat al-Kursī*, Q. 2:255). More than a merely technical conclusion, this act functions as the symbolic closure of the talismanic configuration. By inscribing divine names and scriptural language at the culmination of the procedure, the operation situates the diagrammatic structure within the metaphysical order articulated by the science of letters. At the same time, the rite presupposes the practitioner’s prior purification and spiritual preparation, through which the operator becomes the living mediator of the configuration’s efficacy. In this sense, the sealing does not simply complete a material object but marks the moment at which the written device and the disciplined subject converge within the network of correspondences linking letters, names, and cosmic forces.

Throughout the *Shams al-ma’ārif* tradition, lettrist efficacy is presented as conditional upon the practitioner’s spiritual qualification, so that the talisman does not produce effects autonomously but operates within a pre-given divine order. Writing and inscription are treated as secondary instruments: the operation proceeds only when performed by a practitioner whose soul has been purified and disengaged from purely sensory attachments.<sup>284</sup> In this register, the talisman is less a craft of the body than an operation of a rightly disposed spirit, whose efficacy depends on the practitioner’s inner disposition and spiritual preparation; technique without that alignment remains inert.

In this perspective, the talisman assumes a theurgical character: a ritual event, an epistemic moment, and a material site of mediation. It condenses the practitioner’s cosmological, linguistic, and ethical discipline into a single structured configuration. Talismanic practice therefore does not seek to compel hidden forces, but to align inscription, recitation, and timing with the ordered correspondences of creation. The talisman functions as a point at which the latent efficacy of letters and divine names becomes materially articulated. In this sense, it is less an isolated artefact than a provisional configuration through which the operative grammar of the Būnian cosmos is momentarily enacted. Accordingly, the talisman is best understood not as an object that “contains” power but as a provisional site of mediation in which a disciplined subject, a scripted configuration, and a cosmological order are momentarily made commensurate.

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<sup>284</sup> Pseudo-al-Būnī, *Shams al-ma’ārif wa-laṭā’if al-’awārif*, ff. 80v-81r.

### 3.4. Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the Interiorisation of Talismanic Mediation

#### 3.4.1. The Letter as Ontological Symbol

Situated within Qur’ānic conceptions of divine speech, Sufi hermeneutics, and earlier discourses on *‘ilm al-ḥurūf*, the Andalusian mystic Ibn ‘Arabī (*Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī*, 1165–1240), in his renowned doctrine of the oneness of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*),<sup>285</sup> develops an ontology of symbolic articulation in which letters function as *loci* of intelligibility within divine self-disclosure. Ibn ‘Arabī does not present a program of talismanic construction; instead, he reconfigures the underlying problem-field of mediation within a hermeneutics of form, imagination, and unveiling, such that the talisman may be described as a symbolic configuration capable of both disclosing and veiling divine reality. The talisman thus appears not as an external causal artefact but as a figure of mediation whose significance lies in the interpretative conditions through which form becomes either veil (*hijāb*) or disclosure (*tajallī*).

This hermeneutic reconfiguration of mediation is grounded in Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical understanding of creation as *tajallī* (divine self-disclosure). In his own terminology, the coming-to-be of the cosmos is therefore more accurately described through *tajallī* than through the generalised philosophical model of “emanation.” As W. Chittick observes: “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s frequent use of the word *creation* puts him in the mainstream of Islamic thought. What differentiates him from earlier figures is the manner in which he elucidates the meaning of the term. Thus, for example, he maintains that to say that God ‘creates’ the universe—that is, gives existence to it—is to say that God discloses Himself in the forms that are called ‘creatures.’ The term self-disclosure (*tajallī*)—often translated as ‘theophany’—plays such a central role in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings that, before he was known as the great spokesman for *waḥdat al-wujūd*, he had been called one of the Companions of Self-Disclosure (*aṣḥāb al-tajallī*).”<sup>286</sup>

In the metaphysical universe of Ibn ‘Arabī, the Arabic letter (*ḥarf*) is not a linguistic unit but a metaphysical sign: a symbolic articulation through which

<sup>285</sup> The expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* was not employed by Ibn ‘Arabī himself, but appears first in the writings of later critics, notably Ibn Taymiyya, who used it polemically to characterise his doctrine. See Abul Ela Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din Ibnul-‘Arabī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 1–10; 54–65; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 79–80.

<sup>286</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 52.

divine meaning becomes intelligible in created form. This treatment of letters does not imply a continuity of letter-based operations with al-Būnī; rather, it shares a common background in the Qur’ānic idea of divine speech (*kalām ilāhī*) and the creative command *kun fa-yakūn*, while situating the meaning of letters within an ontological and hermeneutic horizon, articulated through the concept of the *nafas al-Rahmān* (Breath of the All-Merciful). In *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Ibn ‘Arabī develops a Qur’ānic metaphysical narrative in which the letter *nūn*<sup>287</sup> and the Pen (*al-qalam*) appear as primordial elements of divine inscription: the Pen writes upon the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) the order of creation.<sup>288</sup> Through this imagery the cosmos itself is interpreted as a divinely inscribed text, whose letters signify archetypal modalities through which being becomes intelligible. Letters thus function not as operative instruments but as symbolic forms through which the intelligibility of creation is disclosed.

P. Lory interprets Akbarian *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* not as a form of speculative magic but as a kind of sacred semiotics of creation, in which each letter becomes a revelatory mirror of the divine names: “For Ibn ‘Arabī, God’s act of creation is indistinguishable from his act of speech and these two modes of being are organically interconnected. With a word, God brings into being an indeterminate multitude of creatures and these creatures become ‘words’ in the immense divine discourse that is the universe. This is ontology in its strictest sense since being and the *logos* are one and the same.”<sup>289</sup> Each letter is a theophany—a *tajallī* of one or more of the *asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā* (the most beautiful names of God). Ibn ‘Arabī himself, in the opening chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, connects the divine names with their *loci* of manifestation (*maẓāhir*), describing creation as the mirror in which the Essence beholds Itself:

<sup>287</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī’s attention to the letter *nūn* derives primarily from the Qur’ānic opening of *sūrah al-Qalam* (Q. 68:1): “Nūn. By the Pen and what they inscribe.” Classical Islamic exegesis often interprets this verse as referring to the primordial act of divine inscription. Within Akbarian cosmology the letter *nūn* becomes associated with the receptacle of inscription—sometimes symbolically described as the cosmic ink-well—while the Pen (*al-qalam*) represents the principle that inscribes the divine command upon the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*). Ibn ‘Arabī’s discussion of *nūn* therefore reflects a broader Qur’ānic cosmological symbolism rather than a technical doctrine of letter manipulation.

<sup>288</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 1, ch. 2, 176–245 and vol. 2, ch. 11, 405; Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 2, 33 (comm. by Denis Gril); Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 127–130.

<sup>289</sup> Pierre Lory, “The Symbolism of Letters and Language in the Work of Ibn ‘Arabī,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 23 (1998), <https://ibnarabisociety.org/symbolism-of-letters-and-language-pierre-lory/>.

“When the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*), glorified be He, willed, in respect to His most beautiful Names (*asmā’uhu al-ḥusnā*), which cannot be exhaustively enumerated, to behold their concrete realities (*a’yānahā*), or, if you wish, you may say, to behold His very ‘*ayn* (‘*aynihi*) in a comprehensive being (*kawn jāmi’*) that contains the whole command (*yaḥsuru al-amr kullahu*), so that His secret might be manifested to Him through it, for a thing’s seeing itself by itself (*ru’yat al-shay’ nafsahu bi-nafsihi*) is not like its seeing itself in another thing which serves for it as a mirror (*ka-mir’āt*).”<sup>290</sup> Creation therefore appears as a field of mediated reflection in which divine names become knowable through the forms that disclose them.

Within this symbolic ontology the alphabet functions as an archetypal structure through which multiplicity becomes articulated in the world. Letters do not operate as independent causal forces but as signs through which the Real’s self-disclosure becomes intelligible in differentiated form. This reading resonates with W. Chittick’s emphasis on *tajallī* as the key to Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics, where creation itself is nothing other than the Real’s self-manifestation.<sup>291</sup>

Where al-Būnī foregrounds the operative register of letters, deploying them for concrete effects within a disciplined ritual science, Ibn ‘Arabī recasts letters as *loci* of disclosure to be contemplated and interiorised. Denis Gril emphasises this shift in his introduction to the chapter on the science of letters in the *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*: “So closely connected are Word and manifestation that each word composed of letters, an emanation of the ‘Breath of the All-Merciful,’ is of Qur’ānic origin. The letters thus become the hermeneutic principle not only of the Qur’ān but of all reality, and this central fact probably constitutes the Shaykh al-Akbar’s most specific, and the most profound, contribution to the science of Letters.” In this perspective, the science of letters functions not as a technique of operation but as a symbolic key for interpreting the structure of creation. As D. Gril further observes: “It is clearly not coincidental that the expression uses the language of Letters, since Letters are both a key that opens the heart to penetration by the Book and the wax that keeps sealed beneath it those revelations whose time has not yet come.”<sup>292</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabī develops this symbolic ontology explicitly in the section commonly known as “The Hierarchy of Letters,” where he writes: “Know—may God grant us success—that the letters constitute a community (*umma*) among communities: they are addressed (*mukhāṭabūn*) and morally responsible (*mukallafūn*), and among them

<sup>290</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 48.

<sup>291</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*.

<sup>292</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 2, 146–147, ch. intro. by Denis Gril.

are messengers from among themselves. They possess names in accordance with their very nature, but this is known only to the people of unveiling (*ahl al-kashf*) who follow our path. The world of letters (*‘ālam al-ḥurūf*) is the most eloquent of all worlds in speech and the most concise in expression. They are divided into classes, like the divisions of the world as conventionally recognized (*fī al-‘urf*).<sup>293</sup> Through this imagery the alphabet becomes an ordered community of intelligible forms whose structure reflects the graded articulation of being itself. The *basa’it*—the simple elements of the *ḥurūf al-mu‘jam* (letters of the alphabet)—are presented as primordial elements through which the *marātib* (degrees) map the transition from unmanifest to manifest existence. This epistemic order may be understood as a symbolic mapping of being: through the letters, the cosmos reflects its divine origin.

Thus, for Ibn ‘Arabī, the talismanic figure, composed of letters, becomes a symbolic configuration whose meaning lies in its capacity to reveal or conceal divine disclosure. It functions as a diagram that opens the heart (*fath al-qalb*) and mediates *tajallī*, through which forms may be interpreted as signs pointing toward *al-Ḥaqq*. Letters simultaneously veil and unveil: “Like the Universal Man, the Book faces both toward the manifested, on one side, and the unmanifested, on the other. In the isthmus that separates these two faces of reality, the letters allow for the passage from one to the other, sometimes to wipe away the difference between them and sometimes to create it, but always to help the servant of the one and multiple Reality.”<sup>294</sup> Behind every letter lies a Name, and behind every Name, a Face (*wajh*). In this way the alphabet becomes a symbolic cartography of being through which multiplicity can be interpreted as disclosure of unity.

Consequently, Ibn ‘Arabī relocates the *locus* of talismanic mediation from external artefacts to the interpretative capacity of the heart (*qalb*). The decisive issue is no longer the construction of a symbolic object but the mode in which forms are perceived and interpreted. *‘Ilm al-ḥurūf* therefore becomes a mode of metaphysical hermeneutics through which the cosmos is interpreted as a field of signs already inscribed with divine meaning. In this sense the knower (*‘arif*) appears not as an operator of symbolic devices but as an interpreter of the divine script articulated throughout creation.

<sup>293</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 1, ch. 2, 190.

<sup>294</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 2, 147, ch. intro. by Denis Gril.

### 3.4.2. Creation as Language: Talismans in the Imaginal Realm

In Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical system, the cosmos is not only created through divine speech; it may be understood as structured through the logic of divine discourse. The divine act of saying “Be” (*kun*) is not symbolic—it is ontological causation. All of creation, therefore, proceeds from divine speech (*kalām ilāhī*), structured and articulated through a language whose ultimate referent is God Himself. This implies that talismans, understood analytically as configurations of letters, names, and forms, are not accidental devices but fragments of the world’s metaphysical grammar.

Yet the talisman, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s hermeneutic imagination, finds its proper *locus* not in the purely corporeal realm but in the intermediate world or the world of imagination: “You have already come to know that the Presence of Imagination (*ḥadrat al-khayāl*) is undoubtedly more expansive. You yourself have directly witnessed in your sensory perception (*ḥiss*), and in accordance with what your constitution (*nash’a*) gives you within yourself, that meanings (*ma‘ānī*) and spiritual beings (*rūḥāniyyūn*) appear through imaginalization (*yatakhayyālūn*) and take on visible forms (*yatamaththalūn*) within sensible bodies before your sight (*naẓar*), such that, when an effect occurs in that imagined form (*mutaṣawwar*), the meaning configured within it is itself affected. There is no doubt that you are more entitled (*aḥaqq*) to the Presence of Imagination than meanings and spiritual beings, for within you there is the imaginative faculty (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*), and it is one of the faculties upon which the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*) brought you into existence. Thus you are more entitled than meaning to possess it (*mulk*) and exercise control within it (*taṣarruf*), since meaning is not described as possessing a faculty of imagination (*quwwat khayāl*), nor are the spiritual beings of the Supreme Assembly (*malā’ al-‘alā*) described as having, in their constitution, a faculty of imagination. Yet despite this, they can attain distinct identities (*tamayyuz*) in this imaginal presence through assuming forms (*tamaththul*) and imaginalization (*takhayyul*). Thus you are more worthy than they of imaginalization (*takhayyul*) and assuming forms (*tamaththul*), since this presence is within you as a reality (*ḥadrat ḥaqīqa*). The generality (*al-‘amma*) neither knows this nor enters it except in sleep, when the sensory faculties (*al-quwā al-muḥissa*) return to it. Whereas the spiritual elite (*al-khawāṣṣ*) perceive it in wakefulness (*al-yaqāza*) by virtue of their capacity for realized perception (*quwwat al-taḥaqquq*) within it.”<sup>295</sup> Here, letters, forms, and divine names take visual,

<sup>295</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 21, ch. 311, 455–456.

audible, and affective shape; they can be vehicles of presence and, simultaneously, filters of truth. Created forms appear through imaginal mediation (*khayāl*), for the Real discloses Himself to each being in a mode specific to that being's receptivity. *Al-Ḥaqq* never discloses Himself twice in the same way: "So know that you are imagination (*khayāl*), and that everything you perceive, of which you say, 'this is not I,' is also imagination, and that all existence (*al-wujūd kulluhu*) is imagination within imagination (*khayāl fī khayāl*), and the Real existence (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*) is God alone (*Allāh khāṣṣatan*), in respect to His Essence and His very reality (*min ḥaythu dhātihi wa- 'aynihi*), not in respect to His Names (*asmā' ihi*), for the Names have two referents (*madlūlān*): one referent is the very Named ('*ayn al-musammā*), and the other is that by which each Name is distinguished from another Name. Thus, the Forgiving (*al-Ghafūr*) is distinct from the Manifest (*al-Zāhir*) and the Hidden (*al-Bāṭin*), and the First (*al-Awwal*) is other than the Last (*al-Ākhir*). So know that each Name is identical with every other Name in one respect, and different from it in another respect. Inasmuch as it is identical, it is the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*), and inasmuch as it is other than it, it is the imaginal Real (*al-ḥaqq al-mutakhayyal*)."<sup>296</sup> Creation thus appears as a field of mediated reflection in which divine names become knowable through the forms that both disclose and delimit them. This world is not imaginary, in the sense of delusion, but imaginal; it has its own ontological status, intermediate between spirit and matter. H. Corbin later described this ontological domain as the *mundus imaginalis*, a metaphysical geography where form and meaning converge.<sup>297</sup> Talismans are not operative mechanisms in the technical, magical sense, but symbolic manifestations: they are theophanic appearances, emergent from the intersection of divine will and human receptivity.

As Ibn 'Arabī emphasises, the imaginal realm (*'ālam al-mithāl*) is a primary vehicle of revelation (*waḥy*), dreams (*ru'yā*), visions, and other forms of spiritual imagination. Talismans thus function within this domain not as causal mechanisms but as symbolic configurations: signs through which the human subject encounters symbolic disclosure. Imagination functions as a *barzakh* (isthmus) between intelligible meaning and sensory form. It is in imagination that the divine names take form, and it is through imagination that divine truth is clothed in symbols: "People are asleep, and when they die they awaken. Everything that a human being sees in

<sup>296</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 104.

<sup>297</sup> Henry Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis, ou l'imaginaire et l'imaginal," *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme* 6 (1964), 3–26; Henry Corbin, *L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*.

his worldly life is like a dream of a sleeper; therefore, it is imagination (*khayāl*) and must be interpreted (*lā budda min ta`wīlihi*).”<sup>298</sup>

Accordingly, a talisman only becomes spiritually effective when perceived through interpretative unveiling (*kashf*), not when manipulated through external ritual. Ibn ‘Arabī presents correct interpretation as requiring the distinction between symbol / pointer (*ishāra*) and source / meaning (*ma`nā*), between the image (*ṣūrah*) and the originating reality. In Akbarian terms, treating the image as an autonomous force amounts to treating forms as autonomous realities, whereas passing through the image to the meaning is the work of *tawhīd*: the form is read as a *tajallī* that veils when taken as ultimate and reveals when taken as a sign.

This redefinition inverts earlier talismanic theories: while for al-Būnī (and, in a different register, al-Qurṭubī) the talisman *acts*, for Ibn ‘Arabī the talisman *speaks*. It “says” something to the gnostic who can read its signs. The image is not magical; it is hermeneutic—a veil demanding traversal. In an Akbarian register, the world itself is a veil woven of signs: talismans, symbols, and forms are like pages from the cosmic book of signs, written in the language of imagination. Talismans are part of this Book: signatures of the divine names (*asmā`*) etched into the fabric of *khayāl*. Their deciphering is not an act of magical control, but a movement of the heart towards unveiling.

Finally, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* returns to the same logic at an anthropological apex: Adam may be analytically described as a mediating form in which the divine names are gathered (*majma` al-asmā`*). His *khilāfa* is not juridical but symbolic: he mirrors the Names and thus reflects the Real in multiplicity. In this light, the realised human being may likewise be described as talismanic: not because he controls the Names, but because he reflects them with purity. The talisman, then, is a cipher of that reflection: not a mechanism to compel change, but a mirror that reveals contingency and invites discernment.

### 3.4.3. Obstruction and Transcendence: *Ṭilasm* in Ibn ‘Arabī’s Metaphysics

If the earlier medieval discourse on talismanry often emphasised construction, activation, and manipulation, Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics exposes a deeper concern: the existential limitation imposed by form and the necessity of its traversal. He reads the term *ṭilasm* in relation to the notion of *musallaṭ* (“given ruling authority”), using it to designate not external devices but dominant states that rule perception and impede

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<sup>298</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 159.

unveiling.<sup>299</sup> In *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, he identifies three “talismans” that God sets over human beings: reflection (*fikr*), imagination (*khayāl*), and habit (*‘āda*), each exercising a distinct form of authority over human cognition and action. Reflection governs judgment, for the human being acts only in accordance with what he deems correct; imagination exerts an even greater power, shaping perception and the forms in which things appear; while habit constitutes the most pervasive influence, directing actions automatically without reflection or deliberation. These talismans thus structure experience and veil reality, until they are lifted and transformed along the spiritual path.<sup>300</sup> In this register, *ṭilasm* becomes an internalised metaphysical construct: a structure of attachment, a modality of the self (*nafs*), a barrier to *kashf*. The “real talisman” is not the grid on paper but the habitual pattern that fixes the gaze upon form. To “destroy” the talisman is to enter *fanā*’.

Ibn ‘Arabī ties the remedy to a twofold discipline. First, clinging to one’s “specific face” (*al-wajh al-khāṣṣ*), the distinctive gate through which the Real apportions what truly belongs to a person, so that reception comes only from the door proper to one’s apportioned share. Second, “breaking habitual patterns within habitual patterns” (*kharq al-‘awā’id fī al-‘awā’id*): preserving outward forms and *asbāb* (secondary causes) while refusing inward dependence on them.<sup>301</sup> Practically, this means directing one’s receptivity to what accords with that divinely assigned gate and releasing attachment to secondary causes; it is a de-habitation that safeguards form while releasing inward fixation.

This is the pivotal axis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy: the transcendence of form is not a rejection of form, but a traversal through it. The talisman is not evil, but an ambivalent structure within divine disclosure. It either binds or frees, depending on the seeker’s gaze. If one halts at the form, one is veiled from the Real; if one passes through it to the meaning, one arrives. In this vision, the form or talismanic symbol is itself a *tajallī*: a luminous sign that can either conceal the Divine Essence if taken as ultimate, or serve as a bridge when read as *ishāra* to the Real. Thus, the talisman becomes a site of testing: whether one clings to the veil of form, or pierces through to the unveiling of *tawḥīd*. This dual function also underlies W. Chittick’s interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology: in Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics the world functions like a talismanic sign whose outer multiplicity veils an inner unity; as with the Qur’ān,

<sup>299</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 23, ch. 352, 391; Saif, “From *Ġāyat al-hakīm* to *Šams al-ma‘ārif*,” 328, n. 164.

<sup>300</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 23, ch. 352, 391–399.

<sup>301</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 140–141.

where letters disclose meanings beyond their surface, the gnostic reads creation not for its forms alone, but for the unity revealed through them.<sup>302</sup>

Hence, Ibn ‘Arabī reconfigures the talisman as hermeneutic challenge: not a technical artefact but a symbolic event. Only through *ta’wīl*<sup>303</sup> and *fanā’* can the seeker dissolve the *ṭilasm al-nafs*: the talisman of the self that veils the Real. This dynamic may be illustrated in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*,<sup>304</sup> particularly in the chapter on Yūsuf: the vision of the stars prostrating becomes an encounter with symbolic forms, yet its initial interpretation remains bound to surface appearances; *al-Ḥaqq* lies not in the image but in the inward light (*nūr*) it clothes. In this context, the talisman becomes a metaphysical test—guidance clothed in symbol—requiring the seeker to discern the divine through the veil of form. The esoteric role of the talisman is pedagogical: it conceals so that the gnostic may yearn for unveiling; the gnostic learns not to master symbols, but to see through them.

This perspective also clarifies Ibn ‘Arabī’s divergence from operative logics of talismanry current in medieval discussions. Where those logics aim at manipulating configurations for effects, the Akbarian path directs attention to reading and traversing the ruling states that bind perception. Efficacy tracks *kashf* rather than technique. The cosmos itself may be understood, in this analytical sense, as a vast *ṭilasm*: a world of veils, symbols, and forms, through which the One becomes many, and the many summon the soul back to the One.

Therefore, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s esoteric cosmology, the *ṭilasm* marks both the limit and the possibility of vision: it obstructs by fixing the gaze on form, yet also invites transcendence by gesturing beyond it. To dissolve the talisman is not to destroy the world of forms, but to pass through it: transforming veil into mirror, obstruction into path, and symbol into disclosure.

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<sup>302</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*.

<sup>303</sup> *Ta’wīl* denotes esoteric or interpretative unveiling in Islamic hermeneutics, referring to the process by which the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) of a text or symbol is traced back to its deeper ontological truth (*bāṭin*). In Sufi metaphysics, particularly in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī, *ta’wīl* functions not merely as textual interpretation but as a spiritual-intellectual act through which symbolic forms are interiorly realised and their hidden metaphysical referents disclosed.

<sup>304</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 99–106.

## 4. PHILOSOPHICAL TALISMANRY IN MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

### 4.1. General Features of Philosophical Talismanry in Medieval Islamic Philosophy

Having traced the philosophical reinterpretation of talismanic reasoning across the writings of four major thinkers, it is now possible to undertake a broader examination of the underlying structures of talismanry in medieval Islamic thought. The following chapter therefore adopts a comparative perspective, drawing together the metaphysical, epistemological, and symbolic dimensions of talismanry in order to clarify its general features within the philosophical traditions of the Islamicate world.

#### 4.1.1. Talismanry as Philosophical Mediation

Within the philosophical–mystical traditions examined in this dissertation, medieval Islamic *talismanry* constitutes a deliberate epistemic synthesis of sacred, philosophical, and cosmological orders. It develops as a discipline mediating between speculative and operative knowledge, rational reflection and symbolic articulation, as well as human agency and divine causality within specific metaphysical traditions of medieval Islam, rather than as a uniform feature of Islamicate thought as a whole. In this respect, talismanry occupies a liminal intellectual position: it renders abstract metaphysical hierarchies experimentally intelligible through proportion, inscription, and ritually structured form.

Talismanic practice becomes philosophically intelligible when situated within what Wouter Hanegraaff, in his analysis of Western esotericism, describes as a mode of “analogical thinking” grounded in systems of correspondence taken to reflect real ontological connections.<sup>305</sup> In this epistemic frame, what this dissertation reconstructs as talismanic mediation aligns the practitioner with a cosmos patterned on intelligible archetypes expressed through celestial configurations, the divine names, and sacred geometries. In Islamicate intellectual traditions—spanning *falsafa*, Sufism, and Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophy as articulated by Suhrawardī, alongside

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<sup>305</sup> Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 189–191.

the metaphysical cosmology of Ibn ‘Arabī—such archetypes are understood as articulations of *tawhīd* permeating every ontological register. Here correspondence does not signify loose resemblance but graded modes of participation: lower forms instantiate higher principles without collapsing into them. Talismanic construction therefore presupposes a metaphysics in which causality is hierarchical and transmissive rather than merely mechanical.

Significantly, the talismanic complex under analysis belongs to the horizon of philosophical theurgy grounded in a conception of the cosmos as a semiotic order articulated through intelligible form. The emanationist metaphysics of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, while not elaborating talismanic theory directly, provide the ontological grammar later esoteric systems mobilise: intellect overflows into soul, soul into nature, and nature into articulated form. Within such a cascading order, talismanic practice can be interpreted as a deliberate intensification of causal alignment, concentrating dispersed correspondences into a focal configuration. The world is intelligible because it is proportioned; talismanic form isolates and amplifies those proportions through calculated inscription and ritualised orientation. Its efficacy, in this light, is inseparable from intelligibility. Talismanry becomes an art of attunement: an ethical and symbolic participation in the divine ordering of things.

Islamic talismans are best understood as symbolic condensations of cosmic order, intentionally constructed to reflect and to invoke the layered architecture of reality. Their recourse to letters, planetary intelligences, geometric ratios, and numerical harmonies is metaphysically grounded within a coherent grammar of mediation. Letters operate as ontic indices of divine speech; numbers encode relational intelligibility; geometry stabilises proportion; astral references situate form within temporal rhythms of descent. Together they produce a configuration in which sign and causality intersect. As Antoine Faivre has shown in his typological analysis of Western esotericism, one of its defining characteristics is the role of “mediations” alongside “correspondences”: structured symbolic forms, rites, and imaginative operations that enable the human being to enter into relation with the divine.<sup>306</sup> In Islamic talismanry, such mediations presuppose ontological clarity and moral preparation, so that forms function as signs (*ishārāt*) within a semiotically articulated cosmos. Form here does not symbolise a reality external to it; it participates in that reality by structured resemblance and intentional activation.

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<sup>306</sup> Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10–13.

A distinctive development within certain Islamicate symbolic and metaphysical registers—particularly in Illuminationist, lettrist, and Akbarian traditions—consists in integrating philosophically articulated Qur’ānic conceptions of reality as a field of signs (*āyāt*) with broader Neoplatonic accounts of manifestation. The talisman becomes legible as an *āya*, whose function is interpretative disclosure. Its operation is therefore primarily hermeneutic before it is instrumental: it demands *ta’wīl* (esoteric scriptural exegesis), the unfolding of inner significations, as the condition of its coherence. Whereas certain late antique strands emphasise symbolic efficacy within cosmological causation, these Islamicate articulations embed that efficacy in a revelatory order of signs. The talisman participates in a scripturalised cosmos in which every form is already a sign awaiting decipherment. In H. Corbin’s formulation, the faculty of imagination (*al-khayāl*), understood as “active imagination,” mediates between intelligible and sensible domains; talismanic diagrams and measures enter this imaginal economy as calibrated thresholds. In his exposition of the Jābirian doctrine of *‘ilm al-mīzān* (science of balance), H. Corbin further presents balance and proportion as ontological principles through which invisible relations assume perceptible contour.<sup>307</sup> This logic is not confined to a single doctrinal lineage, but recurs, in different configurations, across the relevant philosophical–mystical traditions examined, each of which construes symbolic form as a site in which intelligible relations become perceptible without ceasing to exceed their sensible carrier. Reading such forms is a spiritual operation, even if accompanied by technical procedures.

Within this expanded frame, philosophical talismanry articulates a theory of mediation in which symbolic form functions as a site of participatory cognition. The talisman neither replaces metaphysical reflection nor reduces it to ritual procedure; rather, it renders metaphysical claims experientially legible. It transforms ontology into configuration. The practitioner’s disposition becomes integral not as moral ornamentation but as a condition of cognitive adequacy: receptivity determines resonance. The talisman is thus simultaneously diagrammatic and anthropological: its intelligibility unfolds through the calibrated relation between form and subject.

Islamic talismanry thereby participates in broader metaphysical projects shared across philosophical and mystical traditions of medieval Islam that construe reality as hierarchically ordered and semiotically articulated. Its rationality operates through

<sup>307</sup> Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, transl. by Philip Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986), esp. ch. 2 “The Science of the Balance and the Correspondences between Worlds in Islamic Gnosis” and ch. 5 “The Imago Templi.”

symbolic coherence, proportional rigour, and disciplined intentionality. From this perspective, it expands philosophical inquiry into domains where intellection assumes graphic, numerical, and liturgical embodiment.

Such symbolic rationality entails a reconfiguration of epistemology that remains inseparable from ethical discipline and anthropological transformation. Knowledge, in this context, is neither purely discursive nor merely empirical; it unfolds through participatory decipherment of structured forms. The talisman becomes an epistemic medium: a constructed field in which cosmological relations are condensed, activated, and rendered cognitively accessible. It encodes metaphysical intelligibility in spatial, numerical, and linguistic registers, enabling the convergence of contemplative insight and operative precision. In this sense, talismanry materialises philosophical logic in operative and symbolic form.

#### 4.1.2. Form as Action: The Logic of Operative Intelligibility

If talismanry operates as a mode of philosophical mediation, the decisive question concerns the status of efficacy within such mediation. How can a constructed form act without being reduced either to mechanical causation or to mere metaphor? The answer developed in the strands of Islamic talismanic discourse examined here presupposes a metaphysics in which form is not inert representation but operative intelligibility. A talisman does not function because it symbolises; it functions because it instantiates a configured relation within a hierarchically structured field of being.

Such a conception of form as ontologically effective finds another analytic parallel in A. Faivre's identification of "correspondences" and "living nature" as constitutive structural traits of esoteric thought. Although A. Faivre's model is historically confined to Western currents, his emphasis on correspondences as meaningful relations linking visible and invisible domains, together with his conception of nature as a hierarchically ordered and internally dynamic totality,<sup>308</sup> clarifies the logic by which symbolic forms are understood not as decorative signs but as embedded articulations of a dynamic and graded cosmos. In this sense, talismanic form operates not as arbitrary convention but as participation in a network of analogical relations conceived as ontologically continuous. The symbol acts because it is structurally inserted into this continuum; its efficacy presupposes a cosmos already articulated through relational intelligibility.

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<sup>308</sup> Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 10–12.

Efficacy, in this framework, is inseparable from proportion. Letters, numbers, geometric figures, and astral references do not decorate an object; they calibrate it. Each element occupies a determinate place within a network of correspondences that is understood as ontologically grounded. The talisman becomes effective insofar as it reproduces, at a concentrated scale, relations already operative within the cosmos. Action is not imposed from outside but emerges from patterned alignment. Symbolic form operates by intensifying intelligible structure. Proportion, then, is not an aesthetic category but a principle of ontological adequation: form acts when it is commensurate with the order it seeks to activate.

The philosophical stakes of this claim become clearer when situated against broader discussions of form and causality in Islamic intellectual history. As Michael-Sebastian Noble has shown in his study of post-Avicennan engagements with occult science, the talisman was theorised not as a suspension of natural order but as a specific configuration of “heavenly active forces” with “elemental passive forces,” a blending (*tamzīj*) grounded in a rigorously articulated psychology and cosmology. M. S. Noble’s analysis demonstrates that such operations were framed within Avicennan faculty psychology and theories of celestial influence, thereby situating occult practice within natural philosophy rather than outside it.<sup>309</sup> What appears as occult intervention is thus conceptualised as the lawful activation of latent correspondences. Proportion here is not aesthetic symmetry but causal precision: a disciplined alignment of celestial and sublunary registers.

W. Chittick’s analysis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology reinforces one especially important version of this point: the cosmos is nothing other than the ongoing “self-disclosure” (*tajallī*) of the Real, in which entities are *loci* of manifestation rather than independent substances.<sup>310</sup> If existence itself is structured disclosure, then proportion is not aesthetic arrangement but the very grammar of manifestation. The talisman’s measured ratios and letter-values do not imitate an external order; they recapitulate the ontological syntax through which divine names articulate the world. Efficacy thus coincides with fidelity to that syntax. W. Chittick’s exposition provides the metaphysical vocabulary; the present analysis extends it by treating talismanic construction as a deliberate intensification of that disclosed syntax. Read in this light, this formulation makes explicit a more general assumption operative across the traditions examined: that form is effective insofar as it participates in a priori intelligible order, not merely representing it from without.

<sup>309</sup> Noble, *Philosophising the Occult*, esp. chs. 4–5.

<sup>310</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 52–54.

Such an account presupposes that meaning itself is causal, not in the sense of efficient causation, but as a mode of formal and ontological articulation through which relations become operative. Accordingly, signs are not merely secondary to things; they function as modes of manifestation. Divine names, numerical ratios, and geometric harmonies function as articulations of being rather than as arbitrary markers. To inscribe is thus to participate in articulation. The talisman renders explicit what is implicitly structured in reality: it condenses relational intelligibility into perceptible configuration. Its action is neither magical manipulation nor passive reflection, but the activation of a relation already latent within the ontological order. Configured form can therefore function as a mediating site in which higher determination becomes operative within the sensible domain.

This redefinition of efficacy has epistemological implications. If action depends on patterned intelligibility, then knowledge cannot be purely discursive. It requires attunement to proportion and receptivity to correspondence, grounded in ethical and spiritual discipline. The practitioner's disposition is not external to the talisman's function; it is structurally integrated into it. Intelligibility and operativity coincide at the point where form and subject enter calibrated resonance. Efficacy is thus relational rather than unilateral. As W. Chittick repeatedly emphasises in his study of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics of imagination, knowledge of the cosmos presupposes knowledge of the knower; objectivity divorced from the subject's ontological refinement is illusory. The imaginal faculty mediates between intelligible and sensible domains, and only through its disciplined activation does symbolic form become transparent to its source.<sup>311</sup> The talisman's effectiveness therefore depends upon what might be termed epistemic consonance: the practitioner must mirror, at the level of intention and perception, the proportional order inscribed in the artefact itself. Without such consonance, the form remains opaque. Comparable, though not identical, demands for such consonance appear across the corpus: as cosmotechnical attunement in astral talismanry, as luminous receptivity in Suhrawardian terms, as disciplined articulation in Būnian lettrism, and as hermeneutic preparedness in Akbarian thought.

From this perspective, talismanry discloses a distinctive account of causation. Causal power is not conceived as the transfer of force between isolated entities but as the unfolding of patterned relations within a graded whole. Symbolic form becomes a site where those relations are rendered legible and operative simultaneously. The

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 332–339.

talisman exemplifies a mode of action in which meaning and effect are inseparable. Form acts because it embodies intelligible order.

A. Faivre's insistence that esoteric thought privileges mediation over mechanism<sup>312</sup> clarifies this structure: the efficacy of a symbol resides in its capacity to function as an intermediary term between ontological strata, not as a lever applied to inert matter. The talisman operates precisely as such a mediating term. Its action is neither mechanical nor voluntaristic but analogical: it unfolds through continuity rather than rupture. Causation here is relational articulation, not external compulsion.

Understood in this way, talismanry in these philosophical–mystical contexts articulates a philosophical claim about the structure of reality itself: that intelligibility is not abstract but performative; that proportion is not merely descriptive but constitutive; and that mediation is not an intermediary compromise but the very mode through which ontological continuity is sustained. The talisman, as constructed mediation, reveals the extent to which symbolic articulation can function as operative ontology.

Such a claim does not collapse philosophy into ritual practice. It instead exposes the insufficiency of any metaphysics that treats form as inert or meaning as epiphenomenal. In the talismanic synthesis, ontology, semiotics, and praxis converge: to know is to participate in articulated order; to inscribe proportion is to intensify it; to align ethically is to render cognition operative. The talisman therefore crystallises, in material and diagrammatic density, a thesis that the broader Islamic philosophical tradition repeatedly affirms in speculative mode: that being itself is relational, hierarchically ordered, and accessible through disciplined participation rather than external domination.

## 4.2. Differences in Philosophical Talismanry in the Context of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn 'Arabī's Philosophical Concepts

### 4.2.1. Philosophical Models of the Talisman

The four traditions examined do not merely present different accounts of the talisman; they articulate discrete philosophical models of mediation. What varies is not the external form of the talisman—image, diagram, inscription—but the ontological

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<sup>312</sup> See Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism, Book I*, I:1 “Methodology,” 12–13, where mediation is identified as intrinsic to esoteric currents and contrasted with reductive rationalist accounts of cognition.

structure that renders such forms effective, the mechanism through which mediation operates, and the epistemic conditions under which efficacy becomes intelligible. Across these systems, the talismanic construct emerges as a form of mediation between intelligible causality and sensible manifestation, yet this mediation is configured in four irreducible ways: as astral-causal alignment, luminous disclosure, onomastic–performative articulation, and theophanic manifestation. These models do not merely differ in content, but define distinct structures of mediation through which the relation between intelligible causality and sensible form becomes operative, thereby constituting formally differentiated configurations of mediation, governed by their own ontological and epistemic constraints.

### ***Mediation as causal alignment (al-Qurṭubī)***

In the astral model, the talisman is defined by its capacity to render matter proportionate to celestial causation. Its function is neither symbolic representation nor autonomous agency, but causal alignment: it establishes a point at which a determinate astral configuration becomes locally effective.

What distinguishes this model is that mediation is external and cosmological in structure. The relation between higher and lower is governed by a hierarchy of causes in which celestial forms determine sublunary processes. The talisman operates by inserting itself into this hierarchy as a configured receiver of influence. Its efficacy depends on commensurability: between image and star, timing and configuration, form and influx. Knowledge, in this context, is fundamentally cosmological and technical: it consists in grasping the structure of causal correspondence and reproducing it materially. The talisman mediates not by signification but by participation in a chain of causes.

### ***Mediation as ontological disclosure (Suhrawardī)***

In the Illuminationist model, mediation is no longer defined by causal transmission but by ontological disclosure grounded in luminosity. The talisman is not an instrument that channels influence but a form that renders visible the gradation of being. Here the structure of mediation is internal to reality itself: all forms are luminous configurations, differing in intensity and proximity to the source. A talismanic figure is therefore intelligible not because it receives an external force, but because it articulates a relation within the hierarchy of luminosity.

What changes decisively is the condition of efficacy. It no longer depends on external alignment but on epistemic transformation: only a subject capable of

illumination (*ishrāq*) perceives the structure that the form expresses. The talisman thus mediates by making ontological difference intelligible, not by producing effects. Knowledge here is illuminative and participatory. The talisman functions as a noetic diagram: it does not act upon the world but reconfigures the knower's access to it.

### ***Mediation as onomastic–performative articulation (al-Būnī)***

In the lettrist-theurgical model, mediation is grounded neither in astral causation nor in luminous ontology, but in the articulation of the divine names through structured symbolic form. The talisman becomes a site of inscription, where letters, numbers, and geometric arrangements encode specific determinations of divine agency. The crucial shift is that mediation is now linguistic–ontological. Letters are not signs that refer; they are indices of creative command. Their arrangement does not represent reality but enacts a specific configuration of it. The talisman operates through the inscription and activation of a Name as form, such that the relation between intelligible and sensible is mediated by the structure of divine speech (*kalām*).

Efficacy, therefore, is neither causal nor merely contemplative. It is performative: it depends on the correct articulation of symbolic elements and their activation through disciplined invocation. The talisman is effective insofar as it concentrates and deploys the semantic density of the Names. The corresponding knowledge is onomastic and combinatory. To know is to understand the relations between letters, numbers, and names, and to arrange them in a way that renders a specific determination operative.

### ***Mediation as theophanic manifestation (Ibn 'Arabī)***

In Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics, mediation is no longer located in a constructed object at all; but this shift represents an interiorisation of talismanic logic rather than its abandonment. It is ontological and all-encompassing: the entire cosmos is the field in which the divine names disclose themselves. Against this horizon, what can be described in talismanic terms is no longer a device but a mode of perception.

A talismanic form is a localised intensification of manifestation: a point at which a particular configuration of names becomes legible. But this legibility depends entirely on the ontological preparedness (*isti 'dād*) of the subject. The decisive factor is not construction but receptivity. Mediation thus shifts from operation to unveiling. Forms do not transmit, align, or encode; they reveal what is already given in the structure of being. The imaginal realm (*ḥaḍrat al-khayāl*) becomes the proper domain of this mediation, where intelligible realities assume perceptible form. Knowledge is

therefore hermeneutic and gnostic. The talisman does not produce access to reality; it presupposes a subject already capable of reading reality as theophany.

These comparative models of talismanic mediation can be schematically summarised as follows:

<b>Model</b>	<b>Structure of Mediation</b>	<b>Mechanism of Efficacy</b>	<b>Epistemic Condition</b>
Astral (al-Qurṭubī)	Cosmological causal alignment	Reception and transmission of celestial influence	Cosmological-technical knowledge
Illuminationist (Suhrawardī)	Ontological disclosure	Luminous manifestation of hierarchy	Illuminative cognition ( <i>ishrāq</i> )
Lettrist (al-Būnī)	Onomastic–performative articulation	Inscription and activation of divine Names	Symbolic–onomastic mastery
Akbarian (Ibn ‘Arabī)	Theophanic manifestation	Hermeneutic unveiling of divine self-disclosure	Gnostic perception ( <i>kashf</i> )

The table makes visible a threefold differentiation internal to talismanic mediation: the *locus* at which mediation is situated (cosmos, luminous forms, language, or being), the mechanism through which it operates (causal alignment, luminous manifestation, performative articulation, or theophanic disclosure), and the epistemic conditions that govern access to it (cosmological-technical knowledge, illumination, symbolic mastery, or gnosis). These dimensions are not externally imposed classifications but arise from within the respective metaphysical frameworks themselves, each of which determines what counts as proportion, efficacy, and intelligibility within its own ontological and epistemic horizon.

The talisman is not a stable object subject to differing interpretations. It is a formal operator of mediation whose ontological status is determined by the metaphysical system in which it is embedded. Across these four models, a general structure becomes visible: the talisman mediates between intelligible and sensible not by a single mechanism, but through distinct configurations of causality, intelligibility, and participation. For this reason, talismanic mediation cannot be reduced to technique, symbolism, or belief. It constitutes a philosophical problem of mediation as such: how form can render higher determination effective in a lower domain, and under what conditions such mediation becomes intelligible.

It is precisely this variability, the fact that mediation can be causal, illuminative, onomastic–articulative, or theophanic, that establishes talismanry as a privileged site

for the philosophical articulation of the relation between ontology, epistemology, and practice in medieval Islamic thought. The divergence among these models does not concern the material fact of inscribed or diagrammatic form, but the metaphysical grammar that renders such form coherent. Each system determines, with philosophical precision, what constitutes proportion (astral alignment, luminous hierarchy, onomastic calculus, existential preparedness), what counts as efficacy (causal influx, illuminative disclosure, semiotic articulation, hermeneutic unveiling), and what kind of knowledge is operative (astronomical-natural, Illuminationist-intuitive, onomastic-symbolic, imaginal-gnostic). Taken together, the comparison yields a differentiated map of philosophical talismanry internal to Islamic intellectual traditions. The talisman is therefore best understood as a formal construct whose ontological status is redefined by the metaphysics within which it is theorised. The consequence for the present argument is decisive: talismanry cannot be treated as a single doctrinal category.

#### 4.2.2. Cosmological Roles and Theurgical Mechanisms

Ontological specification alone does not suffice to explain efficacy. What must now be examined is the structure of causation presupposed by each system and the manner in which determinate form participates in it. The problem is thus structural rather than definitional: what configuration of secondary agency does render talismanic efficacy intelligible, and through what mode does divine action become determinate? The divergence among al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī lies not in procedural detail but in their respective accounts of causality.

In the astral program represented by al-Qurṭubī and *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, talismanic efficacy presupposes a theory of delegated celestial governance. Planetary entities function as determinate intermediaries whose causal operations extend into the sublunary domain under specific temporal and material conditions. The cosmological role of talismanic practice, in this register, is to render sublunary matter proportionate to a particular celestial configuration at the moment of maximal influence. The mechanism is neither arbitrary nor voluntaristic; it depends upon the intelligibility of astral determination. Secondary causes retain operative integrity, though always subordinated to the First. Theurgy here is lawful alignment across a cascade of derivative agencies.

Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist metaphysics modifies this architecture by displacing transmissive causality with ontological precedence of Light. Causation is not conceived as force moving through intermediaries but as gradation in luminosity.

The higher does not act upon the lower as an external mover; it determines the lower through priority of manifestation. Within such a framework, the cosmological role of talismanic configuration is not to capture influx but to render perceptible a determinate degree of luminous order. Theurgical mechanism shifts accordingly: efficacy depends upon consonance between degrees of light rather than the reception of celestial influence. Secondary causes are not governors but *loci* of graded disclosure.

In al-Būnī's lettrist articulation, causation assumes a distinct formal register. Being unfolds through determinate relations among the divine names; articulation itself becomes ontologically generative. The cosmological role of talismanic construction therefore lies in specification (*ta'yīn*): the concentration of a particular nominal determination within perceptible form. The mechanism is semiotic-ontological. Letters and numerical ratios do not channel an external force; they delimit and actualise a relational property already implicit in divine designation. Secondary causes are not celestial agents nor luminous strata but determinate articulations within the semantic economy of the Names. Theurgy becomes calibrated inscription.

In the Akbarian horizon, the structure of causation is reconfigured once more. Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of *tajallī* dissolves any stable distinction between primary and secondary agency. What appears as causal mediation is, at the deepest level, the Real's self-disclosure in determinate *loci*. The cosmological role of talismanic form is therefore not mediatory in the sense of transmitting influence between ontological levels, but manifestive: it designates a determinate *locus* in disclosure. Theurgical efficacy is neither transmissive nor inscriptive but ontological; it consists in the determinate articulation of the very act of manifestation. What appears as secondary causation is not the operation of autonomous intermediaries but differentiation internal to divine self-disclosure.

These positions articulate four distinct logics of secondary causation: delegated astral agency; luminous precedence; nominal specification; and non-dual manifestation. What varies is not the affirmation of divine sovereignty but the manner in which derivative efficacy is construed. In one model, intermediaries transmit determinate influences; in another, they instantiate degrees of luminosity; in a third, they articulate semantic determinations; in a fourth, they are *loci* in which causation and manifestation are indistinguishable.

The philosophical significance of talismanry lies in the way it brings the problem of secondary causation into explicit focus. It obliges each system to clarify how

determinate form may coincide with effect without compromising transcendence. The talisman is not an external addition to these cosmologies but a pressure point that makes their theory of causation explicit. Whether efficacy is understood as proportional alignment, luminous consonance, nominal determination, or manifestation without autonomous secondary agency, talismanic practice renders visible the metaphysical grammar of secondary causation.

The divergence among these accounts is therefore principled, not superficial. Each supplies a coherent explanation of how determinate form may participate in causality. The differences concern the ontological standing of intermediaries, the mode of participation, and the intelligibility of divine action. Talismanry thus functions as a philosophical stress test: it reveals how each thinker construes the relation between the First and its determinate effects.

#### 4.2.3. Spiritual Anthropology and the Human-as-Talisman

The philosophical reconceptualisation of talismanry in medieval Islamic thought cannot be fully understood without addressing its underlying anthropological assumptions. Within the traditions examined, Islamic esotericism posits a cosmology in which the human being is not merely a passive recipient of divine influences but an agentive *locus* in a symbolic cosmos. The practitioner is not an external manipulator of forces, but an integrated participant within that same symbolic order; in the strongest formulations, the human becomes a talisman. The talismanic sciences thus depend on a specific model of the human: one that can mirror, mediate, and manifest divine realities. In this sense, the human subject is not merely the user of talismanic forms but their primary site of realisation. Across the corpus of Islamic esoteric thought, this symbolic anthropology develops in multiple, contrasting modalities: technical-operational, Illuminationist, performative, and ontological. These modalities are not mutually exclusive, but rather exemplify distinct conceptions of the human subject as a site of cosmological resonance and divine disclosure.

In the most operational model, talismanic anthropology requires the practitioner to possess specific ethical and intellectual qualifications to be effective. This model presupposes that the talismanist must embody a state of *ṭahāra*, *niyya*, and scientific competence. In the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, the talisman functions only insofar as the practitioner is in harmony with the celestial and natural orders it engages. This vision is consonant with a late-antique Hermetic ideal in which the sage-magus is both an astronomer and an ascetic: one whose interior disposition reflects the cosmic balance that is to be activated. Such a conception finds Islamic articulation in thinkers who

viewed talismanry as a theurgical practice contingent on the practitioner's disciplined integration into the ontological hierarchy of the cosmos.

The Illuminationist tradition, advanced by Suhrawardī, introduces a fundamentally different mode of anthropological participation. Here, the human being is not merely an ethical actor or cosmological technician, but a *locus* of ontological light. The soul's capacity for talismanic efficacy derives from its metaphysical resonance with the hierarchy of luminous realities (*anwār*), structured around the *Nūr al-Anwār*. In this framework, talismanic action is inseparable from inner illumination: it is not a manipulation of forces but a metaphysical unveiling (*kashf*) precipitated by spiritual transformation. The practitioner becomes a talisman not by action, but by being: by actualising a state of interior luminosity that mirrors the higher divine order. This anthropological model echoes Neoplatonic and Zoroastrian motifs of ascent, but is decisively shaped by Suhrawardī's philosophical psychology, which positions the human soul as the reflective medium of divine light.

A third model emerges in the symbolic-performative anthropology articulated by al-Būnī, whose *Shams al-ma'ārif* constructs the human subject as both a linguistic vessel and a semiotic operator. Al-Būnī recasts agency as linguistic and numerical performance. The operative media are breath (*nafas*), utterance (*lafẓ*), and ratio (letter–number correspondences); the relevant virtues are truthful speech, attentive presence, and perseverance in *dhikr*. The practitioner's body and voice become a scriptive instrument: by calibrated sequences of Names and letters, divine attributes are imprinted into form. The human “works as a talisman” by participating in the creative Word: aligning articulation, measure, and meaning so that the Name's property is inscribed without remainder. Here, success is assessed not only by external signs but by semantic fidelity: whether the enacted form accords with the Name's intrinsic disposition.

Finally, in the Akbarian horizon, agency collapses into theophanic identity. By the doctrine of *al-insān al-kāmil*, the human is the comprehensive mirror of the divine names; the decisive *loci* are *ḥaḍrat al-khayāl* (the presence of imagination, the imaginal realm) and *al-wajh al-khāṣṣ* (specific face), the unique “door” by which the Real apports what is due. The human does not so much use a talisman as becomes a site of *tajallī*: the symbol is read as a sign of being, and “efficacy” tracks preparedness and unveiling rather than procedure. The human is a cosmological totality, capable of reflecting every aspect of the divine through ontological correspondence. Theurgic action is thereby reinterpreted as *ma'rifa*: hermeneutic recognition within the imaginal *barzakh*, where the Real self-discloses.

These four anthropologies do not merely catalogue virtues; they articulate different predicates of agency (qualified interface, luminous receptivity, linguistic performance, theophanic identity), different statuses of symbol (cosmotechanical key, cognitive sign, linguistic body, site of disclosure), and different verifications of success (lawful correspondence and hour; clarity of unveiling; fidelity of articulation; and stability of recognition). Across these configurations, talismanic logic moves from external alignment towards progressive interiorisation: the practitioner becomes intrinsically talismanic, either by symbolic embodiment or by ontological constitution. Yet a common premise persists: no talisman without transformation. Whether by discipline, illumination, articulation, or recognition, the human subject is never an extrinsic manipulator but a co-participant in divine manifestation: an embodied nexus of *āyāt* through whom the latent intelligibility of the cosmos becomes operative.

In this regard, Islamic talismanic anthropology exemplifies a mode of being in which metaphysical knowledge is inseparable from spiritual practice. The talisman is not simply an artefact, but a mirror of the soul; the practitioner is not merely a technician, but a philosopher-mystic whose body and intellect are aligned with the rhythms of the divine order. The anthropological transformation required by talismanic efficacy thus speaks to the larger metaphysical ambition of Islamic esotericism: the re-integration of the self into the cosmos, and of the cosmos into the divine.

#### 4.2.4. Bridging Intellectual, Mystical, and Practical Realms

Taken together, the foregoing analyses show that the philosophical talismanic traditions of medieval Islam examined here do not lend themselves to neat categorisations as either theoretical, mystical, or pragmatic disciplines. Rather, they emerge as integrative systems wherein intellectual rigour, spiritual vision, and operative technique are co-constitutive. The works of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī, though grounded in distinct cosmologies and epistemologies, each articulate a vision of talismany that unites speculative philosophy, metaphysical anthropology, and ritualised praxis. The comparative framework developed in this chapter is therefore not concerned with isolating “schools,” but with reconstructing the structural principles through which these domains are integrated.

From an intellectual standpoint, all four thinkers operate within and against the backdrop of the Graeco-Arabic philosophical canon: particularly Neoplatonism, Aristotelian cosmology, and Hermetic theurgy, though they inflect these frameworks

in divergent ways. Al-Qurṭubī's corpus, as represented in the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, integrates astrological science and Aristotelian causal logic into a coherent theurgical method. His engagement with astral determinism and planetary hierarchies is underwritten by a Neoplatonic metaphysics of emanation, where talismans serve as tools to harness descending celestial influences through the harmonisation of material, temporal, and ritual conditions. This cosmotechnical apparatus exemplifies a high degree of theoretical formalisation and reflects the classical ambition to unify natural philosophy and practical magic.

Suhrawardī, by contrast, reconfigures rather than simply rejects this framework by displacing transmissive causality with a metaphysics of light. In his *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, philosophy becomes a discipline of interior illumination, and talismanic efficacy is predicated upon ontological affinity rather than causal manipulation. Suhrawardī does not reject operative knowledge, but he subordinates it to epistemic purity and imaginal cognition. As J. Walbridge and M. Aminrazavi have argued, Suhrawardī's synthesis of Zoroastrian angelology, Neoplatonic psychology, and Qur'ānic esotericism transforms the philosophical vocation into a mystical ascent, wherein talismans are no longer instruments of intervention but mirrors of divine light.<sup>313</sup> The emphasis thus shifts from operation upon the world to transformation of the subject's mode of access to it.

Al-Būnī rearticulates this problem in a distinct register, grounding efficacy not in natural causality or luminous ontology, but in divine semiotics. In the *Shams al-ma'ārif*, the talisman appears as a performative configuration of divine names, letters, numerals, and ritual timings. His *ilm al-ḥurūf* functions as a form of sacred mathematics,<sup>314</sup> grounding efficacy in the formal commensuration of figures with cosmological archetypes encoded in Arabic script and the revealed Word. The method is neither empiricist nor illuminative in a Suhrawardian sense; it is syntactic and algorithmic. Here, mediation is achieved through articulation: the cosmos is treated as a semantic order, and talismanic practice consists in configuring that order in determinate form.

Ibn 'Arabī's contribution, while less invested in talismanic construction *per se*, radicalises the entire problematic by reconceiving talismanic efficacy as a function of

<sup>313</sup> John Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Aminrazavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*.

<sup>314</sup> By "sacred mathematics" I mean a rule-governed calculus of letters, names, numbers, and proportions whose correctness is measured by conformity to a revealed cosmology rather than to empirical prediction.

ontological disclosure. His doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* (oneness of being) renders all of reality as a field of *tajallī*, wherein symbols, names, and forms are manifestations of *al-Ḥaqq* (The Real). The talisman is no longer an object to be constructed but a structure to be recognised: an unveiling of ontological truth encoded in the divine names. As M. Chodkiewicz and W. Chittick demonstrate, Ibn ‘Arabī integrates theurgy into gnosis: the practitioner no longer acts upon the cosmos but within it, as its conscious articulation. His epistemology integrates mystical intuition (*kashf*), esoteric scriptural exegesis (*ta’wīl*), and metaphysical insight, uniting intellectual, mystical, and spiritual modalities in a singular hermeneutic of divine presence.<sup>315</sup>

What emerges from this comparative reconstruction is not a simple opposition between practice and theory, or between mysticism and rationalism, but a set of structurally distinct yet internally coherent integrations. Each thinker articulates a different configuration of mediation, causation, and subjectivity: al-Qurṭubī foregrounds cosmotechnical alignment within a causal hierarchy; Suhrawardī redefines mediation as ontological disclosure; al-Būnī articulates it as symbolic–linguistic construction; and Ibn ‘Arabī dissolves it into the structure of manifestation itself. The differences are therefore not merely doctrinal, but concern the fundamental conditions under which form becomes effective and intelligible.

Their divergence is best understood not as a fragmentation of the tradition, but as a systematic variation within a shared metaphysical horizon. At a structural level, these models demonstrate that talismanry functions precisely at the intersection of intellectual, mystical, and practical domains. The talisman is the site at which knowledge becomes operative, practice becomes intelligible, and metaphysics becomes embodied.

These differences can be analytically clarified across three interrelated dimensions already established in this chapter: the structure of mediation, the logic of causation, and the form of human participation.

**At the level of mediation**, the talisman ranges from a cosmotechnical configuration aligned with astral causality (al-Qurṭubī), to a luminous form disclosing ontological gradation (Suhrawardī), then to a semiotic construction articulating the divine names (al-Būnī), and finally to a theophanic *locus* of manifestation within an all-encompassing ontology of disclosure (Ibn ‘Arabī). What appears as a single object is thus redefined across distinct metaphysical registers: natural-causal, Illuminationist, linguistic, and ontological.

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<sup>315</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*; Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints*.

*At the level of causation*, these models articulate divergent accounts of how efficacy is possible. It may consist in proportional alignment within a hierarchy of celestial causes, in consonance with degrees of light, in the performative specification of nominal determinations, or in the very structure of manifestation itself, where causation is no longer distinct from divine self-disclosure. The talisman thereby becomes a privileged site for testing how each system construes the relation between divine agency and its determinate effects.

*At the level of anthropology*, these differences culminate in distinct conceptions of the human subject: as a disciplined operator within a cosmological order, as a *locus* of illumination, as a linguisticperformative agent, or as a site of theophany. In each case, efficacy is inseparable from transformation: the practitioner must become proportionate to the order they seek to engage, whether through knowledge, illumination, articulation, or recognition. Taken together, these dimensions show that talismanry is not a fixed practice interpreted in different ways, but a variable structure whose meaning is determined by the metaphysical system in which it is embedded.

In this light, the integrative character of Islamic talismanry is not accidental but structural. It arises from the necessity of coordinating ontology, epistemology, and practice within a single framework of mediation. This is what allows talismanic discourse to function simultaneously as a philosophical, mystical, and operative domain, without collapsing into any one of them.

Taken as a whole, the comparative analysis of medieval Islamic talismanry shows that this material is not a marginal appendage to philosophy, but a rigorous domain in which cosmology, formal causation, hermeneutics, and practices of self-formation converge in determinate ways. What emerges from al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī is not a single doctrine, but a family of related attempts to explain how higher order becomes present in configured form, how meaning acquires operative force, and how human receptivity conditions access to such forms. In this sense, *talismanry* becomes a particularly illuminating case through which the structures of medieval Islamicate metaphysics become more clearly visible: it brings into sharp relief the relations among manifestation, proportion, efficacy, and spiritual qualification that remain less visible in more abstract formulations. The comparative reconstruction developed in this chapter therefore substantiates the central claim of this dissertation: that talismanic discourse constitutes a philosophically rigorous model of mediation through which relations between causality, knowledge, and human transformation are systematically rearticulated within medieval Islamicate thought.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation reconstructs Islamic talismanry (*ilm al-ṭilasmāt*) as a philosophically structured theory of mediation within specific medieval Islamicate philosophical–mystical traditions. Through sustained textual and conceptual analysis, the study demonstrates that talismanic reasoning acquires conceptual coherence when interpreted through a determinate triadic structure: graded ontology, participatory epistemology, and ethical discipline. Within this framework, symbolic forms mediate between intelligible causes and sensible substrates, while operative efficacy is constrained by purification (*ṭahāra*), intention (*niyya*), licit aims, and disciplined praxis.

The study further exemplifies that Islamicate talismanic discourse developed through processes of conceptual rearticulation within Qurʾānic cosmology, philosophical metaphysics, and Sufī anthropology. Hermetic, Neopythagorean, Neoplatonic, and Persian–Zoroastrian motifs were neither simply replicated nor treated as extraneous imports; rather, the analysis shows that they were selectively reinterpreted and integrated within medieval Islamic intellectual contexts so as to render mediation, correspondence, and symbolic efficacy conceptually coherent within Islamic metaphysical discourse. In these contexts, talismanic operation does not presuppose autonomous causal power in objects or procedures, but is understood as derivative efficacy operating within a hierarchically structured cosmos whose causal order ultimately derives from divine agency. Juridical and theological critiques therefore emerge in the sources as historically situated discursive interventions that delineate the conceptual limits within which mediation, causality, and symbolic efficacy could be articulated in relation to *tawḥīd*.

From a methodological perspective, the argument shows that talismanic discourse becomes philosophically intelligible when examined through a layered comparative framework that distinguishes different levels of historical and conceptual articulation. Diachronically, the study traces conceptual configurations of talismanic reasoning within late antique and early Islamicate intellectual contexts. Synchronically, it compares the metaphysical articulations of talismanic mediation in the works of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ʿArabī. Contextually-transculturally, the analysis situates these formulations within the broader intellectual environments in which philosophical, cosmological, and esoteric vocabularies were interpreted and rearticulated within Islamicate thought. *Talismanry* appears not as an isolated technical discipline but as a structured philosophical discourse embedded within the intellectual ecology of medieval Islamicate metaphysics.

Building on this, a further contribution of this research is the clarification of symbolic cognition and the imaginal realm as epistemic modalities operative within Islamic philosophy. By integrating Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics of the Names and *'ālam al-mithāl*, Suhrawardī's ontology of light and presence, and al-Būnī's letrist mathematics, the thesis demonstrates that talismanic practice can be interpreted as a disciplined technology of cognition in which symbolic form mediates intelligible realities. Symbols and diagrams are not figurative covers for independent causalities but the very media through which participatory intellection proceeds. The study therefore establishes that imagination, symbolism, and ritual action operated as philosophically structured modes of cognition within certain Islamicate metaphysical traditions.

The reconstruction of the semiotic structure of talismanic reasoning forms another key dimension of the argument. Terms such as *ṭilasm*, *sīmiyā'*, *nīranjāt*, *khawāṣṣ*, *rūḥāniyyāt*, and *asmā' Allāh* are shown through philological and conceptual analysis not to function as loosely interchangeable labels but as interrelated elements within rule-governed symbolic systems. Numerical proportion, diagrammatic configuration, letter permutations, and ritual timing operate as formal constraints that regulate the intelligibility and efficacy of talismanic operations. These structures are analysed through close textual reading and philological reconstruction, disclosing that talismanic discourse employs a consistent semiotic grammar through which metaphysical relations assume symbolic form. Symbols and diagrams are not merely decorative or mnemonic devices; they function as structured interfaces through which intelligible principles become experientially legible within the sensible domain. The analysis therefore reconstructs talismanry not as an assemblage of isolated practices but as a system governed by identifiable symbolic operators, conceptual constraints, and textual articulations.

Another major finding concerns spiritual anthropology. Across the examined traditions, talismanic reasoning presupposes a particular conception of the human being as a mediating form within the cosmos. The practitioner is never portrayed as an external manipulator of hidden forces. Instead, the human subject emerges in the analysed texts as a participant in symbolic mediation whose efficacy depends on ethical and spiritual formation. Different thinkers articulate this anthropology in distinct ways. In cosmotechnical frameworks, the practitioner must embody ethical discipline and cosmological knowledge. In Illuminationist contexts, the human being becomes a *locus* of luminous receptivity. In letrist systems, the practitioner functions as a linguistic and performative agent through whom divine names assume articulated form. In Akbarian metaphysics, the human being becomes a theophanic

mirror in which divine names disclose their determinations. Across these variations, the analysis identifies a shared philosophical premise: such mediating operations presuppose anthropological transformation. Talismanic efficacy is therefore inseparable from the ethical and spiritual formation of the practitioner.

The philological apparatus proved integral to these analytical results. Engagement with Arabic, Greek, and Latin sources, together with triangulation across multiple manuscript traditions, yielded new semantic maps of key lexemes and clarified structural relations between the Arabic *'ilm al-ṭilasmāt* and the Greek *sýmbolon* / *synthēma* tradition. Variation in terminology and paratexts was correlated with shifts in conceptual emphasis, making visible the exact points at which cosmological causality becomes metaphysical participation and at which ritual grammars are subordinated to ethical and theological constraints. This philological precision functions not as an auxiliary supplement but as the methodological foundation through which the conceptual architecture of talismanic reasoning becomes historically demonstrable rather than theoretically presumed.

Within the wider intellectual history of Islamicate thought, the analysis demonstrates that talismanic discourse occupied a distinctive conceptual position at the intersection of cosmology, metaphysics, and symbolic practice. The customary historiographical binaries, such as *'ilm* versus *sihr* or rational philosophy versus religious knowledge, prove insufficient to capture the epistemic configurations operative in the sources examined. Rather than corresponding to sharply separated domains, the materials reveal intellectual environments in which symbolic reasoning, metaphysical speculation, and ethical discipline functioned as mutually conditioning dimensions of philosophical inquiry. By reconstructing the conceptual grammar through which talismanic mediation was theorised, the dissertation clarifies the philosophical conditions that made symbolic and theurgical reasoning intellectually viable within particular strands of medieval Islamicate metaphysics.

The implications of the study are therefore both historical and systematic. Historically, it clarifies the conceptual status of talismany within specific philosophical–mystical traditions of medieval Islamicate thought. Systematically, it articulates a philosophical framework through which symbolic causality, imaginal cognition, and ethical discipline may be analysed as interrelated components of metaphysical reasoning. Rather than redefining talismany as a newly discovered philosophical discipline, the dissertation reconstructs the conceptual conditions under which certain traditions articulated symbolic mediation as a philosophically articulable problem.

The results of the dissertation may be summarised in six principal findings, each corresponding to a distinct dimension of the research problem formulated in the introduction:

**First**, Islamic talismanry (*‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt*) can be reconstructed as a philosophically structured discourse of symbolic mediation, rather than being understood solely as a heterogeneous body of occult practices. Through systematic analysis of primary sources, the study has shown that talismanic reasoning in medieval Islamicate thought operates within a coherent conceptual configuration structured around three interdependent dimensions: a graded ontology of causal participation, a participatory epistemology grounded in symbolic operators, and an ethical discipline governing the licit conditions of efficacy. This triadic architecture constitutes the conceptual framework within which talismanic mediation becomes philosophically intelligible.

**Second**, talismanic discourse functions through a rule-governed semiotic grammar rather than through arbitrary ritual procedures. Across the examined *corpora*, symbolic operators such as letters, numbers, divine names, diagrammatic forms, proportional correspondences, and astral configurations, operate as formal constraints structuring the intelligibility and efficacy of talismanic operations. By reconstructing this grammar through philological and conceptual analysis, the research has established that talismanry constitutes a systematic symbolic technology through which metaphysical relations are encoded, interpreted, and operationalised within a cosmological framework.

**Third**, the study clarifies the theological and philosophical boundary conditions under which talismanic mediation could be articulated within an Islamic monotheistic cosmology. Engaging critically with juridical and theological critiques articulated by figures such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn Khaldūn, the dissertation demonstrates that debates concerning *sihr*, *shirk*, and licit mediation functioned as discursive mechanisms that defined the conceptual limits within which symbolic causality could be articulated in Islamic intellectual contexts. Rather than treating these critiques as definitive doctrinal verdicts, the analysis reconstructs how different intellectual traditions formulated the conditions under which mediated causality could remain compatible with the principle of *tawḥīd*. Within the philosophical and mystical systems examined, talismanic efficacy has therefore been systematically reinterpreted as derivative participation in divine causality rather than as autonomous agency attributed to objects or techniques, thereby clarifying the conceptual strategies through which symbolic mediation was rendered theologically intelligible.

**Fourth**, the comparative analysis of al-Qurṭubī, Suhrawardī, al-Būnī, and Ibn ‘Arabī demonstrates that talismanry does not form a single doctrinal system but rather appears as a conceptual problem field articulated through distinct metaphysical grammars. In al-Qurṭubī, talismanic mediation was grounded in an astral–natural cosmology structured by celestial correspondences. In Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist ontology, mediation was reinterpreted through the metaphysics of light and the soul’s receptivity to higher intelligible realities. In the Būnian corpus, talismanic efficacy was reconfigured through lettrist-numerical operations structured by the science of letters (*ilm al-ḥurūf*). In Ibn ‘Arabī’s Akbarian metaphysics, talismanic logic became fully interiorised within a metaphysical anthropology of divine names and the imaginal realm. Taken together, these systems reveal a differentiated philosophical topology of talismanic mediation rather than a linear doctrinal development.

**Fifth**, talismanic reasoning presupposes a specific philosophical anthropology in which the human being functions as a mediating form within the cosmic hierarchy. Across the traditions examined, efficacy was inseparable from ethical and spiritual transformation. Whether expressed through cosmotechnical knowledge, Illuminationist receptivity, lettrist discipline, or Akbarian theophany, the practitioner was never represented as an external manipulator of hidden forces. Instead, the human subject became a participant in symbolic mediation whose cognitive, ethical, and spiritual formation conditions the possibility of operative knowledge. In this sense, the study foregrounds how certain Sufi metaphysical trajectories articulate the human being as a privileged *locus* of talismanic mediation, culminating conceptually in the figure of the “living talisman.”

**Sixth**, the dissertation has established that the philosophical reconstruction of talismanry requires a methodological framework capable of integrating historical, philological, and philosophical analysis. By combining diachronic reconstruction of late antique intellectual antecedents, synchronic comparison of four major Islamicate thinkers, and contextual-transcultural analysis of conceptual transmission, the study has articulated a methodological model for interpreting talismanic sciences as philosophically structured discourses rather than as marginal or purely sociological phenomena. In this way, the dissertation contributes to the ongoing historiographical reorientation that recognises Islamic esoteric sciences as integral components of medieval Islamicate intellectual history rather than marginal or isolated domains.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that Islamic talismanry, as articulated in the examined *corpora*, can be reconstructed as a philosophically structured discourse of symbolic mediation grounded in graded ontology, participatory epistemology, and

ethical discipline. The dissertation has identified the symbolic operators through which this mediation is articulated, clarified the conceptual constraints that regulate its intelligibility, and mapped the distinct metaphysical grammars through which four major thinkers formulated talismanic reasoning. Taken together, these results show that talismanic discourse functions as a structured mode of mediation through which relations between causality, knowledge, and human transformation are systematically articulated within medieval Islamicate thought. In this respect, the study does not claim to resolve the theological status of talismanry, nor to elevate it to the centre of Islamic intellectual history. Rather, it demonstrates that, within particular philosophical and mystical traditions, talismanic mediation functioned as a coherent mode of metaphysical reflection whose conceptual architecture can be reconstructed through rigorous philosophical analysis.

Finally, the dissertation identifies several avenues for further research that would deepen and extend the analytical framework developed here. Critical editions and stemmatic analyses of key talismanic *corpora*, particularly within the complex manuscript traditions associated with the Būnian corpus, remain an urgent priority. Equally important are focused investigations of regional schools, transmission lineages, and ritual pragmatics across the Maghribī, Persianate, Anatolian, and Indo-Islamic worlds. Systematic mapping of technical vocabularies across Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman sources would further clarify the semantic evolution of talismanic discourse. A complementary research programme concerns the sustained analysis of juridical and theological critiques (*kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*) in dialogue with philosophical and Sufi defences of symbolic mediation, in order to refine the historical boundary conditions of licit theurgy. At the same time, a material-cultural approach, integrating codicology, art history, and the history of science, could correlate textual claims with surviving artefacts, diagrams, and instruments. Beyond these philological and historical tasks, new methodological possibilities also emerge. Quantitative lexicographic analysis could chart the frequency and semantic clustering of talismanic operators across centuries of manuscript production. Digital humanities tools could assist in the classification of diagram typologies, letter-number matrices, and ritual sequences, transforming qualitative insights into interoperable research datasets. Finally, a comprehensive reception-history atlas tracing the transmission of talismanic concepts across Andalusia, the Mashriq, Anatolia, South Asia, and adjacent intellectual environments would allow scholars to visualise the migration and transformation of symbolic operators across languages, institutions, and intellectual traditions.

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## SANTRAUKA

Disertacijoje *From Astral Instrument to Human Talisman: A Philosophical Reconstruction of Sufi Talismanry* (*Nuo astralinio instrumento iki žmogaus-talismano: filosofinė sufijų talismanijos rekonstrukcija*) gilinamasi į mažai tyrinėtą ir iki šiol nepakankamai teoriškai reflektuotą viduramžių islamo mąstymo problemą – konceptualią talismanų mokslo, arba talismanijos (*‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt*), transformaciją ir jos filosofinį statusą X–XIII amžių islamo intelektualinėje tradicijoje. Tyrimo centre – ne pavieniai talismaniniai objektai ar paskiros ritualinės praktikos, o talismanija kaip konceptuali intelektualinė forma, leidžianti apmąstyti simbolinės mediacijos, priešastingumo, pažinimo ir žmogaus veiksmo tarpusavio santykį, bei savitas tarpininkavimo modelis teologiškai ir kosmologiškai struktūruotame pasaulyje. Talismanas traktuojamas ne vien kaip materialus artefaktas ar ritualinis įrankis, bet pirmiausia kaip simbolinės mediacijos principas, kuriuo aiškina- mas inteligibilių priešasčių, juslinių formų ir žmogaus veikimo ryšys pakopinėje kosmoso sandaroje. Taigi talismanija ne redukuojama į sociologinį, folklorinį ar teologinės polemikos objektą, o priešingai – kryptingai rekonstruojama kaip vidinė tam tikrų islamo metafizikos ir mistinės filosofijos kryptčių problematika.

Pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais islamo ezoterizmo ir okultinių mokslų tyrimai įgijo naują institucinį ir metodologinį svorį. Daugelį metų laikyti periferine, nepatogia ar menkai teoriškai artikuliuota sritimi, šiandien jie vis dažniau vertinami kaip neatsiejama islamo intelektualinės istorijos dalis. Klasikinė islamologija, daugiausiai dėmesio skyrusi teisės, teologijos, institucijų ir pagrindinių intelektualinių kryptčių istorijai, juos dažnai laikė tyrimų paraščių objektu arba aptardavo pasitelkdama normatyvinės kritikos, draudimo, nukrypimo ar marginalumo kategorijas. Tačiau šiuolaikiniuose istoriografiniuose darbuose, ypač Charles`o Burnett`o, Lianos Saif, Matthew Melvin-Koushki`io, Noah Gardiner`io ir Jean-Charles`o Coulon`o, islamo okultiniai mokslai traktuojami kaip konceptualiai nuoseklios, terminologiškai artikuliuotos ir kosmologiškai struktūruotos žinojimo sistemos, kurių neįmanoma adekvačiai suprasti, jas vertinant vien išoriškai ar žvelgiant į jas per religinių draudimų prizmę. Disertacijos autorės siūloma savita filosofinė perspektyva skleidžiasi būtent šiame platesniame šiuolaikinių tyrimų lauke, jį praturtindama ir praplėsdama naujomis konceptualiomis išvalgomis. Darbe ne tik aprašoma talismaninių idėjų raida, bet ir rekonstruojama *‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt* kaip vidinė islamo metafizikos mediacijos teorija.

Disertacijoje teigiama, kad talismanijos filosofinis suprantamumas išryškėja tik tada, kai ji nagrinėjama ne kaip magijos sinonimas, o kaip tam tikras simbolinio priežastingumo modelis. Toks modelis leidžia svarstyti, kaip aukštesniosios inteligibilios priežastys tampa juslinio pasaulio tvarkos dalimi, kaip simbolinės formos gali būti veiksmingos ne autonomiškai, o tarpininkaudamos, ir kaip žmogus gali tapti ne išoriniu manipulatoriumi, o mediacijos vieta. Remiantis šia nuostata, darbe išryškinami trys esminiai, tarpusavyje susiję talismanijos aspektai: talismanija apibrėžiama kaip mediacinė forma, kaip episteminis operatorius ir kaip etinė praktika. Talismanas kaip mediacijos forma tarpininkauja tarp ontologinių lygmenų, steigdamas ryšį tarp inteligibilios ir juslinės plotmės. Kaip episteminis operatorius, jis atskleidžia ženklų, vardų, raidžių, skaičių ir diagraminių struktūrų reikšmę dalyvaujajame, o ne vien diskursyviu samprotavimu grindžiamame pažinime. Kaip etinė praktika, jis iškelia apsisvalymo, intencijos, disciplinos ir veikimo leistinumą klausimus, be kurių talismaninis veiksmingumas nagrinėjamuose tekstuose apskritai negali būti suprantamas.

Disertacijos *probleminį branduolį* sudaro šie pagrindiniai klausimai:

- Kaip ir kodėl ankstyvojoje islamo filosofijoje su astraliniu ir gamtiniu priežastingumu siejamas talismanas vėlesnėje mistinėje islamo tradicijoje ima funkcionuoti kaip filosofinės mediacijos forma, jungianti hierarchinės būties ontologiją, dalyvaujamojo pažinimo epistemologiją ir apsisvalymo bei intencijos etiką?

- Kaip ši transformacija leidžia tam tikruose sufijų metafizikos kontekstuose artikuliuoti žmogų kaip talismaninės mediacijos vietą?

Siekiant atsakyti į šiuos klausimus, tiriama ne tik atskirų doktrinų ar tekstų kaita, bet ir gilesnė priežastingumo, pažinimo ir žmogaus veikimo perkonfigūravimo schema islamo misticizme.

Tyrimas atskleidžia, kad talismanas ilgainiui tampa ne tik išorine konfigūracija, kurios veiksmingumas priklauso nuo tikslios dangiškųjų ir žemiškųjų elementų sąrangos, bet ir integraliu simbolinės, metafizinės bei filosofinės antropologinės tvarkos elementu. Disertacijoje nuosekliai rodoma, kaip islamo talismanija formavosi neoplatoninės, hermetinės, zoroastrinės ir koraninės kosmologijos sankirtoje, ir pagrindžiama, kad tai nebuvo vien mechaniskas ankstesnių tradicijų perėmimas: hermetiniai, neopitagoriniai, neoplatoniniai ir persų–zoroastriniai motyvai buvo selektyviai interpretuojami, permąstomi ir integruojami taip, kad simbolinė mediacija, kosminė atitiktis ir dalyvavimas aukštesniajame priežastingume būtų filosofškai suderinami su islamo metafizine ir teologine

struktūra. Tokia tyrėjos nuostata leidžia išvengti dviejų kraštutinumų: redukcinio istoricizmo, laikančio talismaniją vien skolinių ar perdavos rezultatu, ir aistorinio tradicionalizmo, visas formas suvedančio į nekintamą universalios metafizikos branduolį. Disertacijoje talismaninis diskursas rekonstruojamas kaip konceptualios transformacijos rezultatas, kai viduramžių islamo mąstyme skirtingiems intelektualiniams sluoksniams suteikiama nauja savita forma ir funkcija.

Ankstyvuosiuose filosofiniuose tekstuose, ypač Al Kindžio ir iš dalies Al Farabio, tarpininkas apibrėžiamas kaip materialinė konfigūracija, kurios veiksmingumas priklauso nuo tikslaus dangiškųjų poveikių ir sublunarinės materijos dermės. Toks modelis susieja talismaniją su *‘ilm* (žinojimu) ir *falsafa* (filosofija), grįsdamas ją priežastinių atitikmenų teorija ir racionalios konstrukcijos principu. Šiuo periodu talismanas dar yra glaudžiai siejamas su gamtos filosofija, astraline kosmologija ir techniniu veiksmingumo supratimu. Bet ankstyvųjų islamikato mąstytojų teorijose jau ryškėja vėlesnei raidai svarbios prielaidos: simbolinės formos reikšmė, dangiškųjų ir žemiškųjų lygmenų ryšio samprata ir mediacijos, kaip neišvengiamos filosofinės problemos, siejančios priežastingumą ir pažinimą, iškilimas. Būtent todėl Al Kindžio ir Al Farabio svarstymai aptariami ne kaip periferinė įžanga, o kaip konceptualios problemos horizontas, kuriame vėliau išryškėja sudėtingesni metafiziniai modeliai.

Disertacijoje parodoma ir tai, kad talismanijos filosofinio artikuliuojimo legitimumas buvo lydimas juridinės ir teologinės kritikos. Ibn Taimija, Ibn Chaldūnas ir tam tikrais atžvilgiais Al Gazalis talismanines praktikas vertino kaip artimas *shirk* – dieviškosios vienaties principo (*tawhīd*) pažeidimą priskiriant veiksmingumą tarpinėms būtybėms ar formoms. Ši kritika disertacijoje netraktuojama kaip griežtas *‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt* neigimas – veikiau ji analizuojama kaip filosofinis riboženklis, išryškinantis pačią problemos šerdį: kokiomis sąlygomis mediacija apskritai gali būti laikoma teisėta, mąstyta ir suderinama su *tawhīd*? Tokia nuostata leidžia teologinę polemiką permąstyti ne tik kaip draudimines ribas, bet ir kaip konceptualų akstiną, paskatinusį islamo mąstytojus tiksliau artikuliuoti tarpininkavimo, dalyvavimo dieviškajame priežastingume ir simbolinio veiksmingumo logiką.

Ši įtampa disertacijoje nuosekliai aiškinama per *‘ilm* (žinojimo), *sihr* (magijos) ir *falsafa* (filosofijos) santykį. Šios sritys traktuojamos ne kaip griežtai viena nuo kitos atskirtos kategorijos, o kaip istoriškai kintantys epistemologiniai registrai. Talismanija formuojasi jų sankirtoje: joje susipina simbolinis mąstymas, patyriminis pažinimas, kosmologinė konstrukcija, metafizinė intuicija ir ritua-

linė-techninė praktika. Šitaip talismanas atsiskleidžia kaip daugiabriaunis reiškinys – pažinimo instrumentas, teurginis objektas, dvasinis simbolis ir tarpininkavimo sistema. Tokia daugiasluoksnė samprata leidžia atmesti supaprastintas mokslo ir magijos, filosofijos ir religijos, racionalumo ir ezoterizmo opozicijas bei parodo, kad tam tikrose viduramžių islamikato intelektualinėse aplinkose simbolinė mediacija funkcionavo kaip konceptuali schema, jungianti priešastingumą, pažinimą ir etinę transformaciją.

*Tyrimo objektu* laikoma talismano (*ṭilasm*) ir talismanijos mokslo (*‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt*) konceptualioji raida islamo intelektualinėje istorijoje, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant jo transformacijai iš astralinio-gamtinio priešastingumo instrumento į filosofinę ir simbolinę kategoriją viduramžių sufizmo filosofijoje. Talismanas suvokiamas ne kaip statiškas artefaktas, bet kaip dinamiška ontologinė ir epistemologinė forma – mediacijos būdas, per kurį nusakomas ryšys tarp kosmologinės tvarkos, pažinimo ir žmogaus transformacijos. Ši objekto apibrėžtis lemia ir pagrindinį *darbo tikslą* – filosofškai rekonstruoti islamo talismaniją ir kritiškai išanalizuoti jos istorinę raidą, konceptualųjį savitumą bei vidinę transformaciją, talismaną suprantant ne kaip ritualinį objektą, o kaip struktūruotą metafizinės, kosmologinės ir simbolinės mediacijos formą.

Šiam tikslui įgyvendinti disertacijoje keliami keli *pagrindiniai uždaviniai*. Pirmiausia tiriama talismanijos istorinės ir filosofinės prielaidos, atsekant jos formavimąsi hermetinės, neoplatoninės ir zoroastrinės kosmologijos kontekstuose ir nustatant, kaip šios priešislaminės tradicijos buvo perimtos bei permąstytos ankstyvojoje islamo ezoterinėje mintyje. Antra, analizuojama talismano sampratos transformacija – iš astralinio priešastingumo rėmuose veikiančios konfigūracijos į simbolinę ir teurginę mediaciją sufijų metafizikoje. Trečia, išsamiai nagrinėjama talismaninės terminijos struktūra ir semantinis laukas, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant tokioms kategorijoms kaip *ṭilasm* (talismanas), *khawāṣṣ* (okultinės savybės), *nīranjāt* (inkantacinė magija) ir kitoms. Ketvirta, atliekama lyginamoji talismaninio diskurso analizė Al Kurtubio, Suhravardžio, Al Būnio ir Ibn Arabio tekstuose. Penkta, *‘ilm al-ṭilasmāt* raida aiškinama kaip vidinė konceptuali transformacija, kurioje praktinė astralinė technika perauga į filosofškai artikuliuotą simbolinės mediacijos sistemą. Šešta, apibrėžiami pagrindiniai talismaninės mediacijos komponentai – simbolinis priešastingumas, dalyvaujамasis pažinimas bei etinės nuostatos – ir parodoma, kaip jie kinta skirtinguose nagrinėjamuose teoriniuose kontekstuose.

Disertacijoje taikoma tarpdisciplininė *prieiga*, aprėpianti filosofijos istorijos, islamo intelektualinės istorijos, transkultūrinės lyginamosios filosofijos, metafizikos ir ezoterizmo tyrimų sritis. Lyginamoji tekstinė ir kontekstinė analizė leidžia nuosekliai pereiti nuo bendrųjų teorinių klausimų prie konkrečių tekstinių analizių. Šios *metodologijos* branduolį sudaro trinaris analitinis modelis, apimantis ontologinį, epistemologinį ir etinį pjūvius. Ontologinė analizė tiria, kaip simbolinės formos materialiojoje terpėje aktualizuoja aukštesniąsias priežastis; epistemologinė analizė nagrinėja nediskursyvaus pažinimo formas, susijusias su vardais, raidėmis ir skaičiais, suprantamais kaip dalyvaujamojo pažinimo elementai; etinė analizė apibrėžia normatyvines sąlygas – apsivalymą, intenciją ir veiksmų leistinumą, lemiančias talismaninės praktikos veiksmingumą. Šis modelis nuosekliai taikomas tiek analizuojant pirminius tekstus, tiek atliekant jų lyginamąją interpretaciją.

*Metodologinis modelis*, kuriuo naudojamosi tiriant šaltinius, jungia filosofinę, istorinę, hermeneutinę ir filologinę analizę. Pagrindą sudaro darbas su pirminiais tekštais originalo kalbomis – arabų, graikų ir lotynų, leidžiantis tiksliai rekonstruoti talismaninį diskursą formavusius semantinius laukus, simbolines struktūras ir konceptualias transformacijas. Lyginamosios filosofijos tradicija disertacijoje vertinama kritiškai: pripažįstama ankstesniojo komparatyvizmo euristinė vertė, tačiau metodologinis pagrindas grindžiamas šiuolaikine transkultūrine lyginamąja paradigma. Joje lyginimas suprantamas kaip istoriškai sąlygotas ir refleksyvus procesas: analizuojami objektai traktuojami jų pačių konceptualiuosiuose rėmuose, panašumai laikomi interpretaciniais orientyrais, o skirtumai – filosofiskai reikšmingais rodmenimis. Tokiu būdu talismanija nagrinėjama kaip savarankiška filosofinė praktika ir analizuojama per jos santykį su neoplatonizmo ir hermetizmo tradicijomis, formavusiomis islamo metafizinės mediacijos sampratos prielaidas.

Tyrimas plėtojamas trimis analitinėmis kryptimis. Diachroniniu požiūriu nagrinėjama talismano sampratos raida tarpkultūriniame ir tarpcivilizaciniame kontekste. Synchroniniu požiūriu lyginamos pagrindinių islamo intelektualinės tradicijos mąstytojų – Al Kurtubio, Suhravardžio, Al Būnio ir Ibn Arabio – pozicijos, parodant skirtingus talismaninės mediacijos modelius. Kontekstiniu ir transkultūriniu požiūriu talismanija siejama su platesne islamo filosofijos ir ezoterizmo dinamika, o vėlyvosios antikos ir ankstyvojo islamo laikotarpio intelektualinė perdava laikoma reikšminga tiek, kiek padeda išaiškinti talismaninio diskurso formavimąsi viduramžių islamo mąstyme. Tokia metodologinė architektūra leidžia išvengti izoliuojančio partikuliarizmo bei lyginamojo niveliavimo ir suteikia galimybę parodyti, kaip skirtingos tekstinės ir filosofinės tradicijos prisideda prie tiriamo problem-

nio lauko artikuliuojimo.

*Problemos ištirtumo ir darbo mokslinio naujumo* požiūriu disertacija užpildo reikšmingą islamo intelektualinės istorijos tyrimų spragą – nuoseklios filosofinės talismanijos rekonstrukcijos stoka, ypač sufijų metafizikos kontekste. Pastarųjų dviejų dešimtmečių tyrimai parodė talismaninių mokslų konceptualų nuoseklumą ir legitimumą islamo intelektualinėje tradicijoje, tačiau daugiausiai dėmesio buvo skiriama istorinei raidai, tekstinei tradicijai ir kultūriniam kontekstui, o ne sisteminei filosofinei analizei. Šioje disertacijoje *‘ilm al-tilasmāt* rekonstruojama kaip sistemingai struktūruota simbolinės mediacijos teorija ir nagrinėjama ne kaip izoliuota praktika ar ritualas, o kaip konceptualiai nuosekli filosofinė sistema, jungianti ontologiją, epistemologiją ir etinę transformaciją. Pagrindinis darbo naujumas yra sisteminis: parodoma, kad tam tikrose sufijų metafizikos trajektorijose talismaninė logika nuosekliai perkonfigūruojama ir galutinai išplėtojama suformuluojant žmogaus-talismano sampratą.

*Šaltinių korpusą* sudaro šeši klasikiniai tekstai, reprezentuojantys skirtingas konceptualiai išvystytas talismaninės mediacijos formas islamo minties tradicijoje: Al Kurtubio *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (*Išminčiaus tikslas*), Suhravardžio *Hikmat al-ishrāq* (*Nušvitimo filosofija*), Al Būnio *Shams al-ma‘ārif* (*Žinojimo saulė*) bei *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt fī al-ḥurūf al-‘ulwiyyāt* (*Užuominų apie aukštesniąsias raides subtilybės*), Ibn Arabio *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*Išminties įvertys*) bei *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (*Mekos atvertys*). Šie tekstai pasirinkti ne tik dėl jų istorinės reikšmės, bet ir todėl, kad juose artikuliuojami skirtingi sistemiški talismaninės mediacijos modeliai: pradedant astraliniu priežastingumu ir baigiant simboline bei metafizine interiorizacija. Tiriant vadovautasi dviejų kryptų *interpretacine literatūra*. Pirma, remtasi tradicionalistine interpretacija, kurioje talismaninė simbolika aiškinama kaip su dalyvavimu dieviškojoje tikrovėje susijusi ontologinė struktūra, vaizduotės sfera ir simboline kosmologija. Antra, metodologinė pirmenybė aiškiai teikiama šiuolaikinei filologinei ir istoriografinėi tyrimų kryptiai, kurios atstovai, remdamiesi rankraščių tradicijų analize, tekstų kritika ir intelektualinės istorijos rekonstrukcija, talismaniją interpretuoja kaip konceptualiai nuoseklią ir terminologiškai artikuliuotą žinijos sistemą.

*Disertacijos struktūrą* sudaro įvadas, keturios pagrindinės dalys, išvados, literatūros sąrašas ir santrauka. Pirmoje dalyje „The Intellectual Genealogy of Islamic Talismanry“ („Islamo talismanijos intelektualinė genealogija“) rekonstruojama islamo talismanijos intelektualinė genealogija, nagrinėjamos hermetizmo, neopitagorizmo, neoplatonizmo ir zoroastrinės kosmologijos tarpininkavimo sampratos bei jų

konceptualūs atitikmenys. Šia genealogija siekiama parodyti, kokios metafizinės ir kosmologinės prielaidos lėmė talismaninio mąstymo formavimąsi islamo minties tradicijoje. Tam tikslui pirmoje dalyje ne tik išsamiai aptariami kai kurie idėjiniai šaltiniai, bet ir išskiriamos pamatinės sąvokų bei struktūrų konfigūracijos: emanacijos principas, kosminės simpatijos samprata, hierarchinė būties sandara, makrokosmo ir mikrokosmo atitikmenys skirtingose mąstymo tradicijose bei simbolio kaip ontologiškai veiksmingos formos samprata. Hermetinė tradicija svarbi pirmiausia tuo, kad joje formuojasi pasaulio kaip ženklų ir atitikmenų tinklo suvokimas, leidžiantis regimas formas matyti ne vien kaip reprezentacijas, bet ir kaip realius tarpininkus tarp skirtingų būties lygmenų. Neopitagorizmas įveda skaičiaus, proporcijos ir harmonijos kaip ontologiškai reikšmingų struktūrų sampratą, vėliau būtiną talismaninėms kombinacijoms, diagramoms ir raidinėms-matematinėms sąrangoms suprasti. Neoplatonizmas disertacijoje išryškėja kaip viena svarbiausių filosofinių terpių, kurioje simbolinė mediacija pirmą kartą įgauna sistemiskai apmąstytą metafizinį statusą: Plotino, Jamblichio ir Proklo darbuose analizuojamos tokios prielaidos kaip laipsniškas priežastingumas, dalyvavimo ontologija, simbolio ir teurgijos santykis, taip pat svarstoma, kokiais būdais aukštesniosios priežastys tampa veiksmingos žemesniuose tikrovės lygmenyse. Zoroastrinė kosmologija iškelia simbolinės kosmologijos, šviesos, dvasinių tarpininkų ir sakralinės tvarkos motyvus, kurie tam tikrais pavidalais vėliau integruojami į persiškąją islamo ezoterizmo ir ypač į iliuminacinės filosofijos raidą. Taigi pirmoje dalyje parodoma, kad islamo talismanija gimsta ne periferijoje, o gyvybingoje vėlyvosios antikos idėjų sankirtoje, kai iš skirtingų tradicijų perimamos ne pavienės doktrinos, o visų pirma probleminėmis sąsajomis tarpusavyje susiję modeliai, leidžiantys apmąstyti pasaulį kaip hierarchiškai organizuotą, ženklų persmelktą ir simboliškai veiksmingą visumą.

Antroje dalyje „Conceptualising Islamic Talismanry“ („Islamo talismanijos konceptualizavimas“) susitelkiama ties sisteminiu lygmeniu ir rekonstruojama, kokiomis sąlygomis talismaninė mediacija filosofiskai artikuliuojama islamo minties tradicijoje. Pirmoje dalyje išryškintos talismaninio diskurso prielaidas formavusios intelektinės teorijos leidžia kelti klausimą, kokiomis sąlygomis toks diskursas apskritai galėjo būti mąstytinas islamo metafizikos ir teologijos kontekstuose. Rekonstruojamas konceptualus laukas, kuriame susikerta koraninių ženklų ontologija, *falsafa* (filosofijoje) išplėtotą hierarchinio priežastingumo sampratą, *kalām* (teologijos) ir juridinio diskurso keliami normatyviniai apribojimai bei ezoterinės disciplinos, susijusios su vardais,

raidėmis, skaičiais ir dieviškojo žinojimo slaptumu bei perdavimu. Talismanija šioje dalyje apibrėžiama ne kaip paprasta ritualinė technika ar nuo filosofijos atsijęs okultinis žinojimas, o kaip simbolinis priežastingumas – tokia priežastingumo forma, kurioje juslinė konfigūracija funkcionuoja ne autonomiškai, o kaip struktūriškai organizuotas aukštesniųjų priežasčių veiksmingumo skleidėjas, įgalinantis jų raišką jusliniame lygmenyje. Šiame kontekste išplėtojamas struktūrinis metodologinis trinaris modelis – ontologinis, epistemologinis ir etinis. Ontologiniu požiūriu nagrinėjama, kaip simbolinė forma gali „priimti“ ar aktualizuoti aukštesniųjų priežasčių poveikį, nepažeisdama dieviškosios vienaties (*tawhīd*) principo. Epistemologiniu požiūriu rodoma, kad raidės, dieviškieji vardai, skaičiai, proporcijos ir diagraminės struktūros veikia kaip dalyvaujamojo pažinimo operatoriai, leidžiantys ne tik diskursyviai samprotauti apie tikrovę, bet ir įsitraukti į jos simbolinę sandarą. Etiniu požiūriu aiškinama, kad talismaninis veiksmingumas nagrinėjamuose tekstuose nuosekliai ribojamas intencijos, apsivalymo, dvasinės drausmės ir veikimo teisėtumo sąlygų. Taigi antroje dalyje talismanija išskleidžiama kaip taisyklingai struktūruota mediacijos teorija, kurioje priežastingumas, pažinimas ir žmogaus savistaba yra neatskiriami vienas nuo kito. Šioje dalyje parengiamas konceptualus pagrindas trečiojo disertacijos dalyje išplėtojamoms keturioms atvejų studijoms.

Trečioje dalyje „Characteristics and Transformations of Philosophical Islamic Talismanry in the 10th–13th Centuries“ („Filosofinės islamo talismanijos broožai ir transformacijos X–XIII amžiuose“) pateikiamos keturios išsamios Al Kurtubio, Suhvardžio, Al Būnio ir Ibn Arabio tekstų analizės. Ši dalis yra disertacijos branduolys, nes joje abstrakti ankstesnių skyrių medžiaga pritaikoma konkrečių tekstinių sistemų analizei. Kiekviena iš keturių pasitelktų tradicijų analizuojama ne kaip izoliuota mąstymo sistema, o kaip savita talismaninės mediacijos konfigūracija, kurioje skirtingais būdais perrikiuojami ontologiniai, epistemologiniai ir etiniai dėmenys. Al Kurtubio mąstyme talismanas apibrėžiamas kaip astralinio-gamtinio priežastingumo instrumentas, kurio veiksmingumas priklauso nuo tikslaus dangiškųjų ir materialųjų elementų suderinimo. Tačiau net ir ši viena ankstyviausių nagrinėjamų talismanijos formų neredukuotina į mechaninę astrologinę techniką. Al Kurtubio mąstymo sistemoje svarbios tokios sąvokos kaip *bāṭin* (vidinis lygmuo), *khawāṣṣ* (okultinės savybės) ir simbolinis gamtos dalyvavimas: gamtinės substancijos veikia ne vien dėl materialių savybių, bet ir todėl, kad jose glūdi atitikmenys, leidžiantys jas įrašyti į platesnį kosminės tvarkos tinklą. Talismanas čia – ne atsitiktinė konstrukcija, o integralus

kosminės tvarkos modelis, kuriame žmogaus veiksnumas įgalinamas tik dėl to, kad paiso jau esamos dangiškosios ir žemiškosios dermės. Al Kurtubio atvejo analizė rodo, kad talismaninis veiksmingumas grindžiamas ne savavališka manipuliacija, o teisingai suprantamu atitikmenų ir proporcijų pasauliu.

Suhravardžio iliuminacinėje (*ishrāqī*) mintyje įvyksta esminis poslinkis – talismaninė mediacija iš astralinio-gamtinio registro perkeliama į šviesos ontologijos ir sielos receptyvumo plotmę. Disertacijoje argumentuojama, kad iliuminacinėje filosofijoje svarbiausiu klausimu tampa ne kaip išorinė konfigūracija medijuoja dangiškąjį poveikį, o kaip pats subjektas gali tapti šviesos priėmimo ir sklaidos vieta. Suhravardžio apmąstomoje hierarchiškai organizuotą šviesos gradacijų kosmoso sampratoje tarpininkavimas atsiskleidžia ne kaip išorinis veiksmas, o kaip ontologinis imlumas šviesai. Jo metafizikoje talismanas tampa ne vien materialia forma, bet ir struktūra, kurioje žemesnioji būtis tampa aukštesniosios šviesos laidininke. Būtent Suhravardžio mąstyme atsekama žmogaus-talismano prielaida: žmogus – filosofiskai ir dvasiškai transformuotas subjektas, suvokiamas kaip medijuojanti forma, sąlygojama kosminės hierarchijos, pažinimo ir etinio pasirengimo. Tokioje mąstymo sistemoje talismaninė logika suprantama ne vien kaip techninis konstravimas – ji susiejama su sielos ontologine būkle, jos iliuminacine kokybe ir gebėjimu dalyvauti inteligibiliroje būtyje. Suhravardžio filosofijoje tarpininkavimas pasiekia pereinamąjį lygmenį – talismanas iš išorinio instrumento virsta interiorizuota mediacijos struktūra.

Al Būnio veikaluose ši mediacija įgauna naują, itin formalizuotą pavidalą. Talismaninis veiksmingumas perkonfigūruojamas per *‘ilm al-hurūf* – dieviškųjų vardų, raidžių, skaičių ir skaitinių matricų sistemą. Al Būnio atveju talismaniniame diskurse neatsisakoma astralinio horizonto – jis perrašomas letristine ir teurgine kalba. Raidė tampa ne grafiniu ženklu, o ontologiškai ir kosmologiškai įkrauta struktūra; dieviškasis vardas – ne teologine nuoroda, o veiksmingu simboliniu operatoriumi; skaičius ir matrica – ne pagalbine priemone, o tvarkos kodu, organizuojančiu veiksmingą mediaciją. Disertacijoje nuosekliai pagrindžiamas teiginys, kad Al Būnio sistemoje veiksmingumas priklauso ne nuo pavienio elemento, o nuo taisyklingos elementų kombinacijos: raidžių eiliškumo, skaitinių proporcijų, vardų išdėstymo, tinkamo ritualinio konteksto ir paties veikėjo pasirengimo. Al Būnio tekstų analizė tiksliausiai parodo, kaip talismaninę mediaciją galima formalizuoti neprarandant jos metafizinio tankio: jo mąstymo sistemoje simbolis nėra dekoratyvus, jis – veiksminga forma, nes priklauso ontologiškai struktūruotam pasauliui.

Ibn Arabio metafizikoje talismaninė logika pasiekia aukščiausią transformacijos ir interiorizacijos tašką. Akbariškoje *waḥdat al-wujūd* (būties vienovės) perspektyvoje talismano klausimas sprendžiamas ne per daikto, figūros ar astralinės konfigūracijos analizę, o perkeliamas į dieviškųjų vardu metafiziką, kūrinijos kaip kalbos sampratą ir vaizduotės, arba *‘ālam al-mithāl*, sferą. Ibn Arabio mąstyme visa kūrinija gali būti suprantama kaip simboliškai organizuotas atsivėrimas, kuriame kiekviena forma žymi, slepia ir atveria tam tikrą dieviškosios savisklaidos (*tajallī*) būdą. Tokiame kontekste talismaninė mediacija nebėra pasikira praktika – ji tampa bendresniu ontologiniu principu: pats pasaulis atsiskleidžia kaip ženklų, vardu ir teofaninių formų (*tajalliyāt*) tinklas. Disertacijoje ypač išryškinama, kad šioje sistemoje žmogus, o tiksliau – tobulasis žmogus (*al-insān al-kāmil*) tampa privilegijuota mediacijos vieta. Tai ne metaforinis palyginimas, o sisteminė antropologinė išvada: žmogus yra tas būties lygmuo, kuriame dieviškieji vardai atsispindi sąmoningai, kosminė tvarka tampa refleksivy, o simbolinė mediacija gali būti ne tik naudojama, bet ir įsisąmoninama. Ibn Arabio analizė vainikuoja visą disertacijoje brėžiamą trajektoriją, žyminčią, kaip islamo mistinėje filosofijoje pereinama nuo talismano kaip išoriškai konstruojamo astralinio instrumento prie žmogaus kaip gyvojo talismano sampratos.

Ketvirtoje dalyje „Philosophical Talismanry in Medieval Islamic Thought: A Comparative Perspective“ („Filosofinė talismanija viduramžių islamo mąstyme: lyginamoji perspektyva“) pateikiama sisteminė lyginamoji ankstesnių analizių sintezė, išryškinanti jų bendrus struktūrinius elementus ir skirtumus. Keturiuos atvejų studijos nėra suvedamos į vieną dirbtinai vienalytę sistemą – priešingai, lyginamoji analizė leidžia parodyti, kad islamo talismanija sudaro ne vientisą doktriną, o diferencijuotą filosofinį problemų lauką, turintį aiškų struktūrinį branduolį. Pirma, visi nagrinėti autoriai talismaninę mediaciją sieja su hierarchine kosmoso sandara, kurioje žemesniosios formos gali būti veikiamos aukštesniųjų priešasčių ir tapti jų laidininkėmis. Antra, visuose modeliuose esminį vaidmenį atlieka simboliniai operatoriai – astralinės konfigūracijos, šviesos hierarchijos, raidės, dieviškieji vardai, skaičiai ar imaginalinės formos. Trečia, nė viename iš nagrinėtų atvejų veiksmingumas nelaikomas grynai objektiniu: jis priklauso nuo pažinimo tipo, subjekto pasirengimo ir normatyvinių ribų. Tačiau tiriami autoriai šiuos bendrus elementus artikuliuoja skirtingai: Al Kurtubio sistemoje dominuoja astralinio ir gamtinio priešastingumo modelis; Suhravardžio mąstyme – šviesos ontologija ir sielos receptyvumas; Al Būnio sistemoje – simbolinio kombinavimo ir letristinės teurgijos formalizmas; Ibn Arabio metafiziko-

je – radikali mediacijos interiorizacija ir metafizinis antropologinis šių elementų sureikšminimas. Ketvirta disertacijos dalis parodo, kaip talismanas iš materialios konfigūracijos palaipsniui virsta vis platesniu metafiziniu principu, kol galiausiai tampa žmogaus, kosmoso ir dieviškųjų vardų santykio modeliu. Šioje dalyje įtvirtinama ir pagrindžiama pagrindiniam tikslui pasiekti pasitelkta darbo struktūra – parodoma, kaip ir kodėl islamo talismaniją galima rekonstruoti kaip filosofiskai artikuliuotą mediacijos sistemą, jungiančią simbolinį priežastingumą, dalyvaujimąjį pažinimą ir etinę savitransformaciją.

Al Kurtubio, Suhravardžio, Al Būnio ir Ibn Arabio analizės disertacijoje matytinos ne kaip keturi atsitiktinai gretinami pavyzdžiai – jos sudaro nuoseklią konceptualiosios transformacijos seką. Ši seka rodo, kad talismano samprata viduramžių islamo mąstyme patiria kaitą iš kosmotechninio instrumento tapdama metafizinės antropologijos kategorija. Savo ruožtu talismanijos sampratos kaitos trajektorija leidžia daryti išvadą, kad talismanijos filosofinis statusas atsiskleidžia tik tada, kai ji nagrinėjama ne kaip marginali praktika ar doktrininis neatitikimas, o kaip tam tikras būdas apmąstyti tarpininkavimą tarp dieviškojo, kosminio ir žmogiškojo lygmenų.

Pagrindiniai *tyrimo rezultatai* aptariami disertacijos išvadose.

Pirma, disertacijoje įrodoma, kad islamo talismanija (*'ilm al-ṭilasmāt*) gali būti traktuojama kaip filosofiskai struktūruotas simbolinio tarpininkavimo diskursas, o ne vien kaip nevienalytis okultinių praktikų rinkinys. Sistemiskai analizuojant pirminius šaltinius parodoma, kad talismaninis mąstymas viduramžių islamikato intelektualinėje tradicijoje veikia kaip nuosekli konceptuali struktūra, kurią sudaro trys susiję matmenys: pakopinė priežastinio dalyvavimo ontologija, dalyvaujamoji epistemologija, grindžiama simboliniais operatoriais, ir etinė disciplina, apibrėžianti leistinas veiksmingumo sąlygas. Ši trinarė struktūra sudaro konceptualųjį pagrindą, leidžiantį talismaninį tarpininkavimą suprasti ir aiškinti jį filosofiskai.

Antra, tyrimas parodo, kad talismaninis diskursas funkcionuoja kaip taisyklėmis grindžiama simbolinė struktūra, o ne savavališkos ritualinės procedūros. Visuose nagrinėjamuose darbuose simboliniai operatoriai – raidės, skaičiai, dieviškieji vardai, diagraminės formos, proporcinės atitikties ryšiai ir astralinės konfigūracijos – veikia kaip formaliosios sąlygos, struktūruojančios talismaninių operacijų suprantamumą ir veiksmingumą. Rekonstruojant šią struktūrą filologinės ir konceptualiosios analizės pagrindu, disertacijoje parodoma, kad talismanija funkcionuoja kaip sisteminė simbolinė technologija, kurioje metafiziniai

santykiai yra koduojami, interpretuojami ir įveiksminami kosmologiniame kontekste.

Trečia, tyrimas išaiškina teologines ir filosofines ribines sąlygas, kuriomis talismaninis tarpininkavimas artikuliuojamas islamo monoteistinėje kosmologijoje. Kritiškai nagrinėjant Al Gazalio, Ibn Taimijos ir Ibn Chaldūno teologinę ir juridinę polemiką argumentuojama, kad diskusijos apie *sihr*, *shirk* ir leistiną arba draudžiamą mediaciją veikia kaip diskursiniai mechanizmai, apibrėžiantys konceptualias ribas, tarp kurių galima artikuliuoti simbolinį priežastingumą. Juridinė ir teologinė kritika nelaikomos galutiniu doktrininu sprendimu: priešingai – autorės atlikta analizė rodo, kaip skirtingos intelektualinės tradicijos formavo sąlygas, kuriomis mediacinis priežastingumas suderinamas su *tawhīd* principu. Nagrinėjamos filosofinės ir mistinės sistemos talismaninis veiksmingumas nuosekliai suprantamas kaip dalyvavimas dieviškajame priežastingume, o ne kaip autonomiška objektams ar technikoms priskiriama veikiančioji galia.

Ketvirta, Al Kurtubio, Suhravardžio, Al Būnio ir Ibn Arabio tekstų lyginamoji analizė rodo, kad talismanija nesudaro vieningos doktrininės sistemos, o veikiau iškyla kaip konceptualus problemų laukas, artikuliuojamas skirtingomis metafizinėmis formomis. Al Kurtubio sistemoje talismaninis tarpininkavimas grindžiamas astraline-gamtine kosmologija, organizuojama pagal dangiškųjų atitikčių principą. Suhravardžio iliuminacinėje metafizikoje mediacija perinterpretuojama remiantis šviesos ontologija ir sielos imlumu inteligibilioms būties formoms. Al Būnio darbuose talismaninis veiksmingumas perkonfigūruojamas kaip raidžių ir skaičių operacijos, grindžiamos *‘ilm al-ḥurūf* (raidžių mokslo) sistema. Ibn Arabio metafizikoje talismaninė logika visiškai perkeliama į vidinį lygmenį, t. y. į dieviškųjų vardų metafiziką ir vaizduotės (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) sferą. Taigi talismanija šiuose analizuojamuose tekstuose atsiskleidžia ne kaip vientisa doktrina, o kaip diferencijuotas filosofinis mediacijos modelių laukas, kuriame simbolinis tarpininkavimas įgyja skirtingas ontologines, epistemologines ir etines konfigūracijas.

Penkta, tyrimas nustato, kad talismaninis mąstymas remiasi specifine filosofine antropologija, kurioje žmogus kosminėje hierarchijoje veikia kaip mediacinė forma. Visose nagrinėtose tradicijose veiksmingumas neatsiejamas nuo moralinės ir dvasinės transformacijos. Skirtingose teorinėse artikuliacijose – kosmotechninio žinojimo, iliuminacinio receptyvumo, letristinės disciplinos ar akbariškosios teofanijos – subjektas nėra suvokiamas kaip išorinis paslėptų jėgų manipulatorius. Priešingai, žmogus matomas kaip simbolinio tarpininkavimo

dalyvis, kurio pažintinis, dorovinis ir dvasinis formavimasis sąlygoja veiksmingo pažinimo galimybę. Tyrimas parodo, kad tam tikrose sufijų metafizinėse trajektorijose žmogus laikomas privilegijuota talismaninio tarpininkavimo vieta, ir tai konceptualiai išplėtojama į žmogaus-talismano sampratą.

Šešta, disertacijoje įrodoma, kad talismanijos filosofinei rekonstrukcijai atlikti būtinas istorinę, filologinę ir filosofinę analizę integruojantis metodologinis pagrindas. Derinant diachroninę vėlyvosios antikos intelektualinių prielaidų rekonstrukciją, sinchroninę keturių pagrindinių islamo tradicijos mąstytojų palyginimą ir kontekstinę-transkultūrinę konceptualiosios perdavos analizę šiame tyrime suformuotas metodologinis modelis leidžia interpretuoti talismaninius mokslus kaip filosofškai struktūruotus diskursus, o ne kaip marginalius ar vien sociologiniu požiūriu aiškinamus reiškinius. Šitaip disertacija prisideda prie šiuolaikinio istoriografinio perorientavimo, kuris islamo ezoterinius mokslus pripažįsta kaip integralią viduramžių islamo intelektualinės istorijos dalį.

*Disertacijos rezultatai* leidžia rekonstruoti islamo talismaniją kaip filosofškai struktūruotą simbolinio tarpininkavimo diskursą, grindžiamą pakopine ontologija, dalyvaujamąja epistemologija ir etine disciplina. Darbe identifikuojami simboliniai operatoriai, per kuriuos ši mediacija įgyja apibrėžtą formą, išaiškinamos konceptualiosios sąlygos, reguliuojančios mediacijos inteligibilumą, ir rekonstruojamos skirtingos metafizinės struktūros, kurias pasitelkdami keturi pagrindiniai mistikai-filosofai artikuliuoja talismaninį mąstymą. Iš šių rezultatų plaukia, kad talismaninis diskursas funkcionuoja kaip struktūruotas mediacijos modelis, per kurį viduramžių islamo mąstyme sistemiškai formuojami ryšiai tarp priežastingumo, pažinimo ir vidinės žmogaus transformacijos. Disertacija nesiekia galutinai išspręsti talismanijos teologinio statuso klausimo ar iškelti talismaniją į islamo intelektualinės istorijos centrą. Veikiau ji parodo, kad tam tikrose filosofinėse ir mistinėse tradicijose talismaninis tarpininkavimas veikė kaip nuoseklus metafizinės refleksijos būdas, kurio konceptualiąją architektūrą galima rekonstruoti remiantis griežta filosofine analize.

Galiausiai disertacija nubrėžia ir *tolimesnių tyrimų kryptis*. Ypač svarbūs lieka tiksliniai regioninių mokyklų, žinių perdavos tradicijų ir ritualinės pragmatikos tyrimai Magribo, persų, Anatolijos ir indoislamiškajame pasaulyuose. Arabų, persų ir osmanų šaltinių techninės leksikos sisteminimas galėtų tiksliau atskleisti talismaninio diskurso semantinę raidą. Materialinis-kultūrinis požiūris, jungiantis kodikologiją, meno istoriją ir mokslo istoriją, leistų tekstines rekonstrukcijas

sieti su išlikusiais artefaktais, diagramomis ir instrumentais. Naujos skaitmeninės priemonės atveria galimybę sistemaiškai klasifikuoti diagramų tipologijas, raidžių ir skaičių matricas bei ritualines sekas, paverčiant kokybines išvalgas lyginamaisiais tyrimų duomenų rinkiniais. Ne mažiau svarbi būtų ir išsami receptijos istorijos analizė, atsekanti talismaninių koncepcijų perdavą Andalūzijoje, Mašrike, Anatolijoje, Pietų Azijoje ir gretimose intelektinėse aplinkose. Tokia perspektyva leistų dar aiškiau parodyti, kad talismaninis mąstymas viduramžių islamo pasaulyje nebuvo nei atsitiktinis, nei antraeilis reiškinys, o funkcionavo kaip viena iš konceptualiai savitų formų, kuriomis buvo apmąstomas tarpininkavimo tarp dieviškojo, kosminio ir žmogiškojo lygmenų klausimas.

## PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

### *Academic Articles*

1. “*Ālam al-Mithāl* (vaizdinių, imaginacinių kūnų pasaulis) sufizmo tradicijoje: Suhra- vardžio ir Ibn Arabio filosofinių koncepcijų lyginamoji analizė.” *Sovijus. Tarpdalykiniai kultūros tyrimai* 8 (2), edited by Antanas Andrijauskas (2020), 111–120.
2. “Tarp tarikos ir estetikos: Tyrumo (*ṣafā*) ir Grožio (*ḡamāl*) simboliai sufizme.” In *Es- tetikos ir meno filosofijos tyrinėjimai VIII*, edited by Antanas Andrijauskas. Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2022, 482–498.
3. “*Isivaizduoti* Anapusybe: imaginacinis pasaulis Suhra- vardžio filosofijoje.” *Sovijus. Tarpdalykiniai kultūros tyrimai* 10 (1), edited by Antanas Andrijauskas (2022), 107–117.
4. “The metaphysical Free Will of Sufi: Fate (*qaḍ ā*) and Destiny (*qadar*) in Ibn Arabi.” *Sovijus. Tarpdalykiniai kultūros tyrimai* 10 (2), edited by Salomėja Jastrumskytė (2022), 167–175.
5. “(Ne)suprastasis islamo ezoterizmas: sufizmas ir kitos ezoterinės islamo srovės.” In *Ezoterizmo fenomenas: tarp Rytų ir Vakarų*, edited by Audrius Beinorius. Vilnius: Vil- niaus universiteto leidykla, 2023, 80–99.
6. “Okultiniai mokslai, filosofija, teurgija: talismanijos apraiškos Suhra- vardžio išrakizme.” *Sovijus. Tarpdalykiniai kultūros tyrimai* 11 (1), edited by Antanas Andrijauskas (2023), 73–84.
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8. “On the Perennialist reception of Ancient Egypt in Lithuania.” *Theosophical History Journal* XXI (2026). In press.
9. “Al-Qurṭubī’s *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and the Ontology of Astral Talismanry.” *Sovijus. Tarp- dalykiniai kultūros tyrimai* 13 (2), edited by Antanas Andrijauskas (2025). Forthcoming.
10. “*Fanā’ fi Allāh*: mirtis kaip atgimimas sufijų filosofijoje.” In *Mirtis ir gedulas*, edited by Kristina Mitalaitė. Forthcoming.

### *Academic (International) Conference Presentations*

1. “The Akbarian tradition: The Mystery of Destiny (*sirru l-qadar*) and Free Will (*ikhtiyār*) in Ibn Arabī” (VU, 2022 06 22–23, International Conference “Beyond Free Will: Variety in Understanding of Choice, Luck and Necessity,” Vilnius).
2. “On the Perennialist Reception of Islamic Esotericism in Lithuania” (ESSWE9, 2023 06 26–28, “Western Esotericism and Practice,” Malmö).
3. “Between Reality and Commodification: Sufi Symbolism in New Mass Media” (EASR, 2023 09 04–08, “Religions and Technologies,” Vilnius).
4. “On the Perennialist Reception of Ancient Egypt in Lithuania” (International Theosophical History Conference “The Reception of Egypt and the Ancients in Theosophy and Related Esoteric Currents,” 2023 10 13–14, Alexandria).

5. “The Concept of *as-Salām* (Peace) and Neo-Sufism” (CESNUR conference, 2024 06 12–15, Bordeaux).
6. “Nature and The Perfection of Soul: The Transformations of Islamic Talismanry” (EASR conference, 2024 08 19–23, Gothenburg).
7. “Sacred Knowledge, Qur’anic Truths: Man and Nature in Traditionalist Thought” (International Theosophical History Conference, “Nature, Theosophy and Related Esoteric Currents,” 16–17 November 2024, Ascona).
8. “The Talisman as Rational Mediation: Esotericism, Theurgy, and Sufi Ontology” (ESSWE10 conference “Esotericism and Rationality,” June 26–28, 2025, Vilnius).

### ***Academic (National) Conference Presentations***

1. „*Žmogus ir gamta sufizmo mąstymo tradicijoje*“ (LKTI, 2021 11 05, nuotolinė konferencija „Antropoceno iššūkiai: žmogaus ir gamtos santykių problemos Rytų ir Vakarų mąstytojų akiratyje“).
2. „(Ne)suprastasis islamo ezoterizmas: sufizmas ir kitos ezoterinės islamo srovės“ (VU, 2022 01 15, nacionalinė konferencija „Ezoterizmas: kultūrinės ir civilizacinės jungtys“).
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4. „Sufiškasis *‘alāmu l-mithāl* (imaginalinis pasaulis): nuo Antikos iki islamo aukso amžiaus“ (LKTI, 2022 05 19–20, nacionalinė konferencija „Antikos ir Viduramžių tyrimai 2022“).
5. „Vienas iš grožio vardų: Tyrumo samprata bei simbolika sufijų estetikoje ir meno filosofijoje“ (LKTI, 2022 05 27, nacionalinė konferencija „Estetika, meno filosofija ir kūrybinė veikla socialinių virsmų metu“).
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7. „Islamo talismanijos virsmai Vakarų ezoterinės tradicijos kontekste“ (LKTI, 2024 04 27, nacionalinė konferencija „Rytai-Vakarai: civilizacijų konfliktai ir / ar daugiapolis pasaulis“).
8. „Žmogus-talismanas (*aṭ-ṭillasm al-basharī*) arba teurginis filosofo virsmas viduramžių islame“ (LKTI, 2024 11 09, nacionalinė konferencija „Rytai-Vakarai: kultūrų ir civilizacijų aljansai dabartiniame pasaulyje“).
9. „*Ḥarām* ar *ḥalāl*? Okultinės praktikos, atributai ir ritualai islamo pasaulyje“ (Nacionalinė LRD konferencija „Akademinis nekonfesinis diskursas apie religiją: teorijos, sampratos, praktikos ir politika“, 2024 11 29, Klaipėdos universitetas).
10. „(Ne)racionalios slinkys islamo aukso amžiaus talismanijoje“ (LKTI, 2025 03 22, nacionalinė konferencija „Rytai-Vakarai: iracionalumas ir racionalumas kultūroje, politikoje ir menuose“).
11. „Okultinės praktikos ir jų legitimumas islame: filosofinė perspektyva“ (Nacionalinė Lietuvos filosofų draugijos konferencija, 2025 05 09–10, Klaipėdos universitetas).



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2021–2025—Doctoral studies in Philosophy, Lithuanian Culture Research Institute (LCRI), Vilnius, Lithuania.

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2002—Courses in Greek Language and Culture, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.

### ***Academic Memberships and Activities***

European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE)—Member since 2022; Main Curator of the 6th ENSIE Conference (2025).

European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE)—Member since 2022; Member of the Organising Committee of ESSWE10 (2025).

Lithuanian Esotericism Study Group (LESG)—Founding member.

### ***Academic Appointments and Teaching***

Lecturer, Arabic Culture Forum—courses and public lectures on Islamic religion, culture, and esotericism.

Freelance Lecturer for NGOs—bespoke seminars and training in Islamic studies for civil society and cultural organizations (religion, intellectual currents, mystical and esoteric traditions).

### ***Fields of Interest***

Intercultural connections between the Arab and Western intellectual worlds.

Islamic occult sciences, esotericism, and mystical religious practices.

Islamic intellectual and philosophical currents.

20th-century Traditionalism / Perennialism.

### ***Languages***

Lithuanian—mother tongue.

English, Russian, Greek, Ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic, Turkish, French.

**Ina Kiseliova-El Marassy**

FROM ASTRAL INSTRUMENT TO HUMAN TALISMAN:  
A PHILOSOPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF SUFI TALISMANRY

Doctoral Dissertation  
Humanities, Philosophy (H 001)

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