Commanding Demons and Jinn: The Sorcerer in Early Islamic Thought

Travis Zadeh

Magic and the Marvelous

The popular Persian television serial *Imām ʿAlī*, a production of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Channel, directed by Dāvūd Mīrbāqirī, premiered in 1997 with the story of the Companion Jundab b. Kaʿb al-Azdī confronting the drunkard al-Walīd b. ʿUqba, governor of Kūfa under the caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (r. 23–35/644–56). The first episode of the series opens with the trickery of a Jewish magician (*sāḥir*), known in the early Arabic historiographical sources as Buṭrūnī or Bustānī. The ghoulish buffoon entertains al-Walīd in the congregational mosque of Kūfa, by transforming his pliant and addled slave into a dog and back again, all with the toothy grin of a hennaed madman. This witchcraft is captured through the magic of trick cinematography. The sorcerer is poised to decapitate his captive and magically bring him back to life, when Jundab, played by ʿInāyat Allāh Shafīʿī, rushes forward and puts an end to the grisly scene. The righteous Jundab scolds al-Walīd and the audience gathered around for promoting magic, claiming that sorcery is an illicit activity forbidden by Islamic religious law. Jundab then turns his fury to the crazed magician, rebuking him as an infidel.

A lively debate ensues as the magician contends that the marvels of the prophets Moses and Jesus were themselves magic. Fervently rejecting this, Jundab argues that the prophets produced divine miracles from God. The ghastly sorcerer, played by Murtaḍā Ḍarrābī, retorts that knowledge of magic is knowledge of the unseen (*ghayb*); whoever possesses this knowledge commands the secrets of creation (*asrār-i khilqat*) and can in turn perform miracles (*muʿjiza*). Furthermore, the magician contends that the possession of such power serves as a basis for denying the existence of God. Infuriated, Jundab demands to know whether it is the magician or God who truly has the power to kill a man and bring him back to life. When the sorcerer cackles that he indeed wields such power, Jundab unsheathes his sword and swiftly decapitates his adversary. Standing over the severed head, Jundab taunts the dead magician to bring himself back to life.

This graphic opening scene, which ultimately leads the pious Jundab to seek protection from Imām ʿAlī as he is pursued by the debauched governor, follows the general outline of the original Arabic source material on the anecdote.[1] To be sure, much of the dialogue represents a significant expansion of the early account, specifically the debate between Jundab and the magician. In this vein, the theological tension concerning the secrets of creation and the category of the *muʿjiza* as an evidentiary basis for prophethood are rather

1 See Ṭabarī (310/923), *Tārīkh*, 1:2845–56; Madelung *The Succession to Muhammad*, 109.

anachronistic for the period. Here the distinction between miracle and magic is quite sharp, as it overlooks the pronounced current within Islamic intellectual history that blends the two together, particularly in the absorption of Neoplatonic thought.

Yet, the cinematographic representation nicely captures the early characterization of magic as an illicit activity poised as the antithesis of true religion, generally practiced by religious outsiders. The figure of the Jewish magician at the Kufan assembly echoes the famed account of Labīd b. al-Aʿṣam, a Jewish magician who is said to have cast a spell on the Prophet Muḥammad.[2] The ancient Arabian *kāhin*, or soothsayer, also plays a similar role as a religious outsider in the progression of Islamic soteriology.[3] In the spheres of jurisprudence, *siḥr* (magic or enchantment) is generally associated with illicit beliefs and practices based on infidelity and polytheism. However, while magic and the occult have often been set in opposition to true religion, there are notable examples where such demarcations break down. The charisma of religious authorities often intersects directly with thaumaturgy and the power to work wonders. Within the development of Islamic theology and law, the sphere of the occult gains most legitimacy in the prophetic precedence of Solomon through his knowledge of the unseen and his occult command of jinn and demons. From ascetics and mystics to philosophers and theologians, a range of authorities have engaged with various occult practices.

In the broad array of Professor Wheeler Thackston's academic writing, one may find a particular penchant for the strange and uncanny. This is often expressed in the marvels and monsters inhabiting diverse literary fields that are united in a larger aesthetic logic of bewilderment, spanning saintly miracles and paranormal curiosities. Beyond the tales themselves, Thackston's prodigious productivity itself has felt like a marvel that in turn lends even greater awe to the wondrous landscapes of his translations.

An anecdote here will suffice. In the classroom, Thackston would often have his students choose a text to translate from their own work as a final project. At the end of one spring, I submitted the introduction to the Persian encyclopedia and cosmography, the *ʿAjāʾibnāma* (*Book of Marvels*), which Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad al-Ṭūsī dedicated to the last Saljuq ruler of Persia, Tughril (III) b. Arslān (d. 590/1194). I had come across this collection in the course of my research on marvel writing, which generally took me to the east side of the sixth-floor of Widener library in the Arabic and Persian holdings. With characteristic attention to detail, Thackston offered various improvements and suggestions, but with no comment as to the text itself. Some time later he mentioned in passing that he had been preparing an English translation of the Ottoman adaption of Ṭūsī's wonder book, which he had by way of a Turkish manuscript. When I originally submitted my end-of-term translation, I had no idea that Thackston was interested in Ṭūsī's collection, let alone that he had been working on its translation. When I asked why he did not wish to translate the original Persian, he simply replied that he found the Ottoman prose to be more engaging. No doubt similar motivations have guided his numerous translations, lexicons, and grammars in multiple languages.

2 See Ibn Hishām (d. ca. 218/833), *Sīra*, 2:157; Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:175–78.

3 See Fahd, *La divination*, 91–98.

The broad range of materials, along with his characteristic understatement contributes to what I would call the "Wheeler Thackston legend" that measures in awe his countless publications across sundry fields. Such astonishment has been dutifully cultivated by his students through their own marvelous tales of his astonishing feats. To be sure, Thackston's thaumaturgy is quite distinct from the marvels of the magicians and saints who populate his scholarship. Today there appears to be something patently unreal about the miracle working and magical acts of our source material, a tension that undoubtedly contributes to the very pleasure of entertaining the strange and uncanny in various historical configurations.

Of the many stories of bewilderment to be found in Thackston's chrestomathy of Persian prose is his eleventh selection, from biography of Sufis, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* (*The Memorial of Saints*) by the great Persian mystic Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. ca. 617/1220). The chapter culminates in the gruesome dismemberment of Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), who was executed as a heretic in Baghdad. 'Aṭṭār opens his account with a description of Ḥallāj as a wonder-worker producing strange and miraculous feats. 'Aṭṭār's memorialization also distances Ḥallāj from the charges of sorcery and deceit that have long surrounded him. I remember reading that Ḥallāj laughed while he forgave his executioners as they dismembered him before the jostling crowd and I was particularly struck by the climactic cry "I am the Real" echoing out from his ashes and the Tigris river itself. 'Aṭṭār concludes that no one from the people of the path (*ahl-i ṭarīqat*) have obtained such *futūḥ*, which has the double meaning here of both victory and revelation. 'Aṭṭār's account forms part of a concerted effort to recuperate Ḥallāj within the pantheon of early Sufi mystics. The later sanctification transforms Ḥallāj's magic into saintly miracle, combating an early identification of Ḥallāj with both occult knowledge and trivial swindling.

Yet, the line between miracle and magic is easily blurred. One testament to this is the historical association between the religious elite and the occult arts, particularly in the fields of divination, apotropaic medicine, and exorcism. As with any historical process subject to continual reformulation, the definition of licit and illicit forms of knowledge and practice is anything but static. It is in this light that we find early religious scholars engaging in the formalized study, cultivation, and practice of the occult. The art of casting out demons and jinn, for instance, is strongly associated with the learned *'ulamā'*. Exorcism, however, is merely one end on the spectrum of commanding the spirits of the unseen. There is an impressive corpus of literature documenting how to control the stars or subjugate demons and jinn for a variety of ends, from the meritorious and salubrious to the mischievous and nefarious.

Similarly, the literary record is replete with anecdotes featuring a host of figures, from petty charlatans to respected religious authorities who engaged in occult practices. A noteworthy example from Thackston's work is the short biography of the learned Ḥanafī scholar of Central Asia Abū Ya'qūb al-Sakkākī (d. 626/1229) that features in the world history of the Timurid man of letters Ghiyāth al-Dīn Khwāndamīr (d. 942/1535), the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (*Companion of Histories*). Khwāndamīr opens his account referencing Sakkākī's famous study, the *Miftāḥ al-'ulūm* (*The Key to the Sciences*), which offers a systematization of morphology, syntax, and literary rhetoric. Here Sakkākī is greatly indebted to the linguistic study, the *Nihāyat al-ījāz* (*The Utmost Brevity*), by the famed Ash'arī theologian, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). Sakkākī also shares with Rāzī a strong association with magic. After mentioning the *Miftāḥ*, Khwāndamīr then describes Sakkākī as a master of

wondrous sciences and marvelous arts, including the subjugation of jinn (*taskhīr-i jinn*), spells, invocations to planets and talismans, white and dark magic, and the properties of earthly and heavenly bodies.

Khwāndamīr continues with an account of how Sakkākī came into the service of the Mongol emperor Chagatai Khan (r. 1227–42) through his use of occult powers. One day while Sakkākī was accompanying Chagatai Khan, the emperor saw a flock of cranes flying through the air. As the emperor turned for his bow and arrow, Sakkākī asked which of the cranes the emperor wanted to strike. Chagatai then pointed and said, "The first, the last and one of those in the middle." So Sakkākī drew a circle on the ground and recited a spell (*afsūnī khwānd*). He then merely pointed his finger and instantly the three cranes in question fell to the earth.[4] While his powers over the unseen drew Sakkākī into the emperor's circle, they were also ultimately the cause of his demise. The memory of Sakkākī as a sorcerer or enchanter, even if only in the literary imagination, offers an important example of how the religious elite could engage with occult learning. The image of the sorcerer commanding the forces of the unseen appears in diverse genres of early Arabic and Persian letters, spanning theology, natural science, belles lettres, and beyond.

The Trickster and the Saint

The status of sorcery and sorcerers features notably in the theological and philosophical debates over the ontological reality of magic. The early Mu'tazilī rejection of magic as anything other than mere trickery represents one pole within the religious responses to the occult. A telling example of the Mu'tazilī position is found in the comments by the chief Ḥanafī jurist of Baghdad, Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981), in his legal exegesis, the *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (*Juridical Rulings of the Qur'ān*), during a discussion of magic. Jaṣṣāṣ follows the Mu'tazilī rejection of the existence of magic, as he ridicules enchanters or exorcists (*mu'azzimīn*), who pretend to have power over jinn through incantations and who claim the ability to summon the jinn through charms (*ruqā*) by invoking the names of God.

According to Jaṣṣāṣ, these acts are performed through various forms of deception; he gives the example of the famed case of the nocturnal apparition that haunted the ruthless Caliph al-Mu'taḍid billāh (r. 279–89/892–902) in the Palace of the Pleiades in Baghdad.[5] During the fall of 284/897, the caliph witnessed on various occasions a figure (*shakhṣ*) appear in the harem, as well as on the roof of the palace. The apparition took on various guises, at times wielding a sword, wearing beards of varying colors, or even dressed in the attire of a Christian monk. The efforts of the palace guards to secure the grounds and apprehend the nocturnal visitor were repeatedly thwarted, as the intruder, remarkably, eluded their grasp, often disappearing into the palace gardens. The story of the apparition spread through the court and beyond. Some thought the caliph had been stricken by a rebellious demon, who was set on tormenting him, while others thought a faithful jinn had alighted upon the palace to haunt Mu'taḍid for all the blood that he had shed.

4 Khwāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 3:80–81; translation, 1:46.

5 On the historical memory of the cruelty of al-Mu'taḍid, see Malti-Douglas, "Texts and Tortures."

Increasingly alarmed, the caliph summoned several enchanters to the palace in the hope that they could communicate with the apparition and ascertain its true nature. Accompanying the enchanter was a group of men and women who appeared to be possessed by jinn (*majānīn*). It was claimed that this enchanter was the most skilled in the craft of summoning jinn and that he had the ability to command them to possess people of sound health. The enchanter then demonstrated this by casting an incantation (*ʿazīma*) on a member of his group, who was at that point of sound mind. The companion immediately fell to the ground in a fit, acting as though a jinn had entered his body. Jaṣṣāṣ relates that the entire performance was a deception achieved through a secret agreement (*muwāṭa'a*) between the two men. Seeing the hoax for what it was, Muʿtaḍid was disgusted by the whole affair. When the enchanters were unable to communicate with the apparition, the caliph paid them each five dirhams and sent them on their way.

The account of the haunted palace was widely known to historians of the period, though the mystery appears only to have been resolved a generation later, during the reign of al-Muqtadir billāh (r. 295–320/908–32).[6] Jaṣṣāṣ recounts that he heard directly from a friend who had been in the service of Muqtadir that the specter that haunted the halls of Muʿtaḍid's palace was actually a light-skinned servant who was carrying on a love affair with a slave girl in the caliph's harem. This servant would don various disguises, often bearing with him a sword as he made his way into the harem. When the other servants searched for the intruder, he would escape into the darkness of the gardens. Removing his disguise, he would unsheathe his sword and join in the search party, pretending to hunt along with the rest for the apparition. The slave girl only revealed the story a generation later, after her lover had been sent off to Ṭarsūs, where he ultimately died. Jaṣṣāṣ concludes that everything that appeared to be a magical enchantment was actually a hidden deception (*ḥīla khafiyya*), which no one, despite the attention of even the caliph, was able to uncover. Beyond Jaṣṣāṣ, who is one of the first to fully demystify the account, the story of the servant's deception circulated in Muʿtazilī circles as a further basis for disproving the reality of magic and incantation.[7]

Jaṣṣāṣ is similarly vituperative toward the controversial mystic, thaumaturge, and itinerant preacher al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), who was later memorialized in hagiographical literature as a Sufi martyr. While Ḥallāj came to be celebrated in Sufi circles, a good deal of the early literature portrays him as a rogue and swindler who claimed to have esoteric knowledge that gave him magical control over the occult world, and with it the power to summon and command the jinn.[8] Criticized by his opponents as a charlatan,

6 Early historians on the matter mention the account, but do not appear to have had full knowledge of the trickery behind the apparition, see Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3:2178–80; *History*, translated by Rosenthal, 65–66, see particularly n346; and Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), *Murūj*, §3319–20; compare this with Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), *Muntaẓam*, 12:372–73. See also Dols, *Majnūn,* 275–79. Both Rosenthal and Dols translate *majnūn*, pl. *majānīn*, as "insane," though clearly the context warrants "possessed by jinn" or "be-jinned," the primary meaning of the word. As for enchanters during the period, see Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990), *Fihrist*, 2:337.

7 See, for instance, Ibn al-Jawzī, who cites Abū Yūsuf al-Qazwīnī (d. 488/1095), a Muʿtazilī theologian, Ḥanafī jurist, and student of the Muʿtazilī judge ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), with the same explanation of the apparition as Jaṣṣāṣ, *Muntaẓam*, 12:373.

8 See Abū al-Ḥusayn Ibn Abī Ṭāhir (d. 313/925) in Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:675. See also the account in

Ḥallāj was accused of fooling his ignorant followers with petty acts of trickery and sleight-of-hand subterfuge. As with the fakery of the enchanters, Jaṣṣāṣ decries the majority of Ḥallāj's actions as tricks (*makhārīq*) enacted through secret collaboration (*muwāṭa'a*) with others who helped him dupe naive initiates.[9]

Ḥallāj is associated with various preternatural acts, such as ascending a rope straight into the air, producing a live lamb from a burning oven, procuring food out of season, flying through the sky, inflating his robes to fill an entire room, and reviving the dead. Several sources relate that Ḥallāj traveled to India, the standard *locus in quo* for the dark arts, in order to obtain knowledge of magic. Debunking Ḥallāj's magical feats became a cause célèbre for Islamic dialectical theology. In contrast to his later memorialization as a Sufi saint, a tone of ridicule inflects much of the early historiographical literature documenting Ḥallāj's execution for heresy. As may be expected, many of those responsible for his trial promoted the image of Ḥallāj as an imposter who dazzled the ignorant masses with petty tricks and grand claims of divinity and prophethood. Ḥallāj was apprehended in Baghdad, charged with deceiving the servants and chamberlains in the service of the caliph al-Muqtadir into believing that he could raise the dead and summon jinn to serve him at will.[10] During this period, the opponents of Ḥallāj attempted to discredit him by various means, both as a dangerous heretic set on overthrowing the state and as a piddling magician. It is the latter category that best describes a pamphlet composed and circulated by the Shīʿī tax collector Abū ʿAlī al-Awārijī (d. 344/955), which aimed to expose the tricks of Ḥallāj and the hidden mechanisms behind them.[11]

In the framework of Muʿtazilī theology, which forms the structural basis for Jaṣṣāṣ's treatment of the topic, magic has no independent reality. The various deceptions ascribed to Ḥallāj are advanced as further evidence of the fraudulent nature of magic. This line of argument is robustly developed by the Muʿtazilī theologian al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) in his theological summa, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl* (*The Complete Compendium on the Topics of Unity and Justice*). As with Jaṣṣāṣ before him, ʿAbd al-Jabbār follows the established Muʿtazilī argument rejecting magic as mere trickery and deceit. He cycles through an array of miracles ascribed to Ḥallāj and exposes the various tricks and secret acts of collaboration used to deceive people, most of which were done with simple sleight of hand. ʿAbd al-Jabbār gives as an example the case of Ḥallāj appearing to produce dirhams out of thin air in the company of the Muʿtazilī leader Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbā'ī (d. ca. 303/915–16). To this, Jubbā'ī inquired why these magical coins bore the dates and the minting marks of caliphs, thus indicating that they were normal tender in

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Ibn Bākuwayh (d. 428/1036), *Bidāya*, 46, §21; cited in Abū Bakr al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), *Tārīkh*, 8:704; for clarification that this pertains specifically to the jinn, see Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 14:322; cf. Massignon, *Passion of al-Hallāj*, 1:293–94, cf. 1:154.

9 Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām*, 1:56.

10 See Ibn Zanjī al-Anbārī (fl. 325/936), *Dhikr*, 3–4; Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), *Tajārib*, 5:43.

11 See Anbārī, *Dhikr*, 4; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 8:713; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 5:44; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 14:337; cited in Massignon, *Passion of al-Hallāj*, 1:447–48, 486–87. Evidently based only on conjecture, Massigion states that Awārijī was a Muʿtazilī. While Mutannabī claims that he followed the doctrines of *taṣawwuf*, he is counted among the adherents of the Shīʿa, see Najāshī (d. 450/1058), *Fihrist*, 430, §1183.

regular circulation and therefore were physical objects implicated in the material world and not created, as it were, out of thin air.[12]

The primary theological concern with the entire field of the occult was the problem of distinguishing genuine prophetic miracles, and thus prophets, from the paranormal acts of magicians. According to ʻAbd al-Jabbār, Ḥallāj gained prominence and power through a series of tricks and acts of deception; furthermore, Ḥallāj ascribed these feats to a divine power he had obtained, alleging that he was himself a deity, or that God had in some way united with him. To this point, ʻAbd al-Jabbār relates how the ignorant among the Sufis who followed Ḥallāj secretly maintained that he was a prophet, or even the Mahdī, the messianic leader said to return at the end of time. Ḥallāj is said to have justified his power to his benighted acolytes in the following terms:

> Whoever purifies his body through obedience and exercises his heart through wholesome action, forbidding himself of all desires and abstaining from pleasures … will continue to rise in degrees of purity until he finally frees himself from human nature. When no share of human nature remains in him, the spirit of God Almighty, which God granted to Jesus, will dwell within him. Then he will be obeyed and whatever he orders will be granted, and his actions become divine.[13]

The basis for the critique leveled at the followers of Ḥallāj is that they were unable to detect the true nature of his deceptions. As ʻAbd al-Jabbār argues, the more the deception is exposed, the less astonishment (*taʻajjub*) one feels, particularly when the actual causes of the tricks are clearly brought to light. He concludes that the miracles (*muʻjizāt*) of prophets, in contrast, have no trick behind them, for they are signs of the divine.[14]

In addition to the rejection of magic, Muʻtazilī theologians generally questioned the miracles ascribed to saints (*karāmāt al-awilyāʼ*),[15] on the grounds that the existence of such paranormal phenomena would make it impossible to distinguish with certainty a prophetic miracle, referred to as a *muʻjiza*, from any marvelous act performed by the pious or the mischievous. The entire theological structure of the debate hinges on the notion that Muḥammad was the seal of the prophets and no one else could claim the power of prophecy after him. In theological terms, miracles came to be defined as occurrences that broke with customary reality (*al-khāriq li-l-ʻāda*) and thereby served as the evidentiary basis for prophethood. As with magic, ʻAbd al-Jabbār reasons that the wonders ascribed to other later pious figures actually have no ontological reality. This position was taken, in large part, to safeguard miracles as the sole domain of the prophets. ʻAbd al-Jabbār further argues that just employing different expressions to differentiate saintly from prophetic miracles

12 ʻAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), *Mughnī*, 15:272. On Jubbāʼī and the so-called dirhams of power (*dirāhim al-qudra*) of Ḥallāj, see Tanūkhī (d. 384/994), *Nishwār*, 1:172, §88. For a similar story, however, concerning the Imāmī jurist and Muʻtazilī theologian Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī (d. 311/924), see Qurṭubī (d. ca. 370/980), *Ṣila*, 93–94, cited in Massignon, *Passion of al-Hallāj*, 156n69. Also see the variant in Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:676.

13 ʻAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, 15:270; a similar charge is leveled in Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:675; cf. ʻAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, 230.

14 ʻAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, 15:278.

15 Ibid., 15:226–30, 241–43; see also Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), *Kashshāf*, 6:235 on Q. 72:26–27, cited in Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2:337.

(i.e., *karāmāt* vs. *mu'jizāt*) does not add any substance to the marvels attributed to the pious. Nor can it be merely a matter of degree, as he reasons that raising an animal versus a human from the dead are both paranormal phenomenon, and thus could be equally presented as the basis for prophethood.[16]

As Jaṣṣāṣ argued earlier, the miracles of prophets differ from the various illusions associated with magic by virtue of their ontological reality. The tricks and illusions of magicians, by contrast, are produced through various forms of cunning and stagecraft, designed to make things that have no reality appear to be real.[17] A theme in the criticism of Ḥallāj was his claim to a special spiritual status based on the marvels that he worked. The status of magic, with the corollary problems of who is performing it and what power is claimed by it, defines the treatment of Ḥallāj's thaumaturgy and shaped its reception between the poles of saintly miracle and petty trickery.

Many Shī'ī theologians of the period also expressed a disdain for Ḥallāj.[18] Similarly, one can trace in certain strains of Imāmī theology, inflected as it is by Mu'tazilī thought, a rejection of magic as anything other than trickery.[19] This thread within Shī'ī theology appears to have been quite early, for according to the theologian Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–36), the Imāmī theologian Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795–96) argued that magic is merely deceit (*khadī'a*) and tricks (*makhārīq*), and that unlike a prophet, a magician is not able to turn a man into an ass or a staff into a snake, for it is not possible that signs of prophecy appear to someone other than a prophet.[20] Ash'arī sets this in marked contrast to the traditionists (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) and the people (*ahl*) of the Sunna, who uphold the view that magic does indeed exist in the world and that magicians are themselves infidels.[21] In the framework of Ash'arī theology the existence of magic is advanced as an orthodox creedal position.[22] This acceptance of magic in turn forms part of the embrace by Ash'arī and Māturīdī epistemology of a broader spectrum of paranormal phenomena, a spectrum that includes saintly miracles, and with them the continuing power of prophetic experience beyond the age of prophecy.[23]

Responding in large measure to Mu'tazilī critiques, the Ash'arī theologian Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) argued that magic and saintly miracles have ontological realities,

16 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, 15:241–42.

17 Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām*, 1:60.

18 On the reaction to Ḥallāj and his followers by Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī and Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991), see Ṭūsī (d. 460/1066–67), *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 301–3, §§376–77. Likewise, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1032) is credited with a refutation of the followers of Ḥallāj, see Najāshī, *Fihrist*, 383, §1067; see also Massignon, *Passion of al-Hallāj*, 2:16–18, 3:236.

19 See, for instance, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), *Rasā'il*, 2:272; also Ṭūsī, *Tibyān*, 1:374; however, while Ṭūsī prefers the position that magic has no reality other than trickery and deception, he acknowledges traditions which support its existence, Ṭūsī, *Mabsūṭ*, 7:260.

20 Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 63.

21 Ibid., 296.

22 See Ash'arī, *Ibāna*, 55, §62.

23 For the Ash'arī position on *karāmāt al-awliyā'*, see Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015), *Mujarrad*, 176–77, and more broadly 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 193–210. However, compare with Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 438–39. For a Māturīdī perspective, see Nasafī (d. 508/1114), *Tabṣīra*, 1:536–38. See also Wensinck, *Muslim Creed*, 193, 224–26.

which are in and of themselves distinct from the miracles worked by prophets.[24] As for magic, Bāqillānī considers two types.[25] The first consists of artificial deceptions enacted through the use of illusion (*takhyīl*) and resemblance (*tamthīl*), which largely parallels the Mu'tazilī treatment of the topic. This form of magic is nothing more than making one thing appear to be another through hidden trickery; Bāqillānī groups the various deceptions ascribed to Ḥallāj into this first category.[26] The second kind of magic, according to Bāqillānī, is referenced in the Qur'ān and in the *ḥadīth*. He cites as a proof text a passage from the Qur'ān (2:102), which describes how demons taught humankind magic and that which was revealed to the angels Hārūt and Mārūt in Babel. Bāqillānī contends that it is impossible to deny the existence of magic because its reality is supported directly in the Qur'ān.[27] This fits into his larger argument that, in terms of reality, the customary itself varies with respect to time, place, and context; likewise the various ruptures with normal phenomena differ, and thus it cannot be the case that every occurrence which breaks with the customary reflects a prophetic miracle.[28]

Early Sorcerers

A particularly useful source for documenting the study and practice of the occult during this period is the *Fihrist* (The Catalogue), a bio-bibliographical encyclopedia by Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990), a bookseller from Baghdad and an Imāmī Shī'ī adherent who had, earlier in his life, studied with Ismā'īlī theologians.[29] Ibn al-Nadīm concludes his work with an entire chapter on alchemy, which he identifies as a branch of philosophy (Book X). This chapter offers a testimony to the profound role of Hermetica in the development of Arabic occult writings, which built upon Greek, Syriac, and Middle Persian Hermetic sources. Ibn al-Nadīm identifies Hermes as an ancient Babylonian who traveled to Egypt and erected the great pyramids, the inscriptions on which were long associated with occult knowledge.[30] According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Hermes produced books not only on alchemy, but also on astrology (*nujūm*), spells (*nīranjāt*), and spiritual beings (*rūḥāniyyāt*).[31] Material attributed to Hermes can be found in the early development of Arabic occult literature and is cited directly, for instance, in the Andalusian spell book the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (The Goal of the Sage) and *al-Sirr al-maktūm* (*The Occult Secret*), a study of astrological and talismanic arts widely ascribed to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.[32]

24 On *karāmāt*, see Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 47–49, §55–56.
25 Ibid., 77, §90.
26 Ibid., 74, 76, §§87, 89.
27 Ibid., 78–80, §§91–92.
28 Ibid., 52–53, §§61–62.
29 See Stewart, "Ibn al-Nadīm's Ismā'īlī Contacts," 39–40.
30 See, for instance, Ps-Majrīṭī, *Ghāya*, 309–10. See also Ruska, *Tabula,* 60–68; Fodor, "Arabic Legends of the Pyramids," 336–38; Van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes*, 125–30.
31 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:445.
32 See, for instance, Ps-Majrīṭī, *Ghāya*, 61, 113, 122, 187, 190, 193, 194, 221, 222, 225, 227, 271, 309–10; Rāzī cites *al-Makhzūn fī asrār al-nīranjāt* ascribed to Hermes, *al-Sirr*, 6, see also ibid., 88, 94, 122, 158. On the *Sirr al-maktūm* and its ascription to Rāzī see Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenshaften*, 388–90.

In Ibn al-Nadīm's presentation, one of the most influential figures of this Hermetic tradition of alchemical and occult sciences is the famed polymath Jābir b. Ḥayyān (d. ca. 200/815?), whose biography and writings are shrouded in mystery and legend. The exact nature and size of the corpus ascribed to Jābir, known in the Latin west as Geber, remain largely unsettled.[33] Much of the material associated with Jābir in the alchemical and natural sciences reflects the absorption and reinscription of learning from classical antiquity into Arabic letters.

An important testament to this process of transmission is the *Sirr al-khalīqa* (*The Secret of Creation*), also known as the *Kitāb al-ʿIlal* (*The Book of Causes*) ascribed to Bālīnas, that is, Apollonius of Tyana. This work, which had a direct influence on the Jābirian corpus of alchemical arts, was apparently composed during the reign of the caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 198–218/813–33).[34] According to the introduction, Apollonius, who identifies himself as a sage (*ḥakīm*) and a master of talismans and marvels (*ṣāḥib al-ṭillasmāt wa al-ʿajāʾib*), discovered a hidden emerald tablet (*al-lawḥ al-zumurrud*) that had been engraved by Hermes, which explained the secrets of nature and the universe.[35] The account of the emerald tablet, or the *tabula smaragdina* as it is known in Latin, appears again in the *Sirr al-asrār* (*The Greatest Secret*), a *speculum principis* containing occult knowledge ascribed to Aristotle and widely disseminated in Latin as the *Secretum secretorum*.[36] The *Sirr al-khalīqa* details a vision of the physical world and the cosmos that finds direct parallels with the Syriac *Kṯāḇā d-simāṯā* (*The Book of Treasures*) by Job of Edessa (d. 220/835), reflecting the broader circulation of material that connected Greek, Syriac, and Arabic scientific discourse. According to the catalogue of writings cited by Ibn al-Nadīm, Jābir wrote extensively on the work of Apollonius, referred to here by his title, the "master of talismans."[37] In the written corpus associated with Jābir, the Hermetic tradition in general, and pseudo-Apollonius in particular, play a key role in the study of the hidden interconnections binding the cosmos together.[38] In terms of esotericism, the *Sirr al-khalīqa* of Apollonius is known to have circulated in Ismāʿīlī circles at an early period.[39] As to the interconnection between esotericism and occult sciences, it is also of note that Ibn al-Nadīm identifies several early alchemists as Sufis. This is true of Jābir, as well as the famous mystic Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861) and the occultist Ibn Waḥshiyya (fl. 312/925).[40]

Earlier in the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm treats the field of judicial astrology in a chapter on the natural sciences, which includes philosophy, mathematics, and medicine, and other

33 See Plessner, "Ǧābir ibn Ḥayyān"; Haq, *Names*, 3–32.

34 On the connections between Jābir and Apollonius, see Kraus, *Jābir*, 270–303.

35 Ps-Apollonius, *Sirr al-khalīqa*, 2, 5–7, cf. 523–24. Cited in Ruska, *Tabula*, 112–13; Plessner, "Neue Materialien," 99–100. The Hermetic tablet of Apollonius appears in Jābir, *Kitāb Usṭuqus al-uss*, 90 Arabic text. See also Kraus, *Jābir*, 280, 302–3.

36 On the *Sirr al-asrār* and the emerald tablet, see Manzalaoui, "Facts and Problems," 167, 187, 192, 237.

37 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:457.

38 See Plessner, "Ǧābir ibn Ḥayyān"; Haq, *Names*, 3–32.

39 Van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes*, 170–71.

40 See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:450, 459, 339, respectively; see also Abū Bakr ʿAlī al-Khurāsānī, identified both as an alchemist and a Sufi, 463. On Ibn Waḥshiyya's purported Sufi affiliations, see Hämeen- Anttila, *Last Pagans*, 7–8, 194, 249–50. See also Ps-Majrīṭī, *Ghāya*, 381, cited in Massignon, *Passion of al-Hallāj*, 1:198.

ancillary disciplines (Book VII). Hermes features here as well, as do such prominent astrologers as Māshā'allāh (fl. 193/809), Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārazmī (d. ca. 232/847), Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī (d. 272/888), and various members of the Bānū Mūsā family.[41] Collectively these intellectuals represent the cultivation of astrology in the 'Abbāsid court, which actively advanced the translation and dissemination of astrological writings from antiquity, particularly material in Greek, Syriac, and Middle Persian. The promotion of judicial astrology forms part of a broader ideology that aligned the 'Abbāsid elite with pre-Islamic Sāsānian practices and beliefs.[42]

In contrast to both alchemy and astrology, Ibn al-Nadīm locates various practices explicitly associated with magic, not as a branch of scientific learning or philosophy, but rather in a chapter on stories, fables, and entertainment literature (Book VIII). This may well speak to the tradition in both Imāmī and Mu'tazilī thought of dismissing magic as nothing more than deception. The title for the section on magic likewise may suggest as much: "Accounts of enchanters, tricksters, magicians, and masters of spells, deceptions, and talismans."[43] Likewise, one can detect a slightly dismissive tone in the treatment of the topic.[44] The section on magic comes directly after Ibn al-Nadīm's classification of writings on love affairs between jinn and humans, books on the wonders (*'ajā'ib*) of the world, and the famed *Afsān hazār* (*A Thousand Tales*) told by Shahrazād, the Persian prototype for *Alf layla wa layla* (*The Thousand and One Nights*).[45] In the organizational logic of the *Fihrist*, this suggests an associative proximity between the various discursive fields of entertainment and curiosity found in prodigious phenomena and the hidden marvels of the occult.[46] The wondrous and liminal are very much at play in Ibn al-Nadīm's treatment of magical practices and writing. For instance, Ibn al-Nadīm identifies evil occult activities with Egypt, the Babylon of magicians; he attests to the continued presence there of men and women who practice various magical arts using seals (*khawātīm*), incantations (*'azā'im*), spells (*ruqā*), magic circles (*manādil*), leather bags (*jirāb*), and smoke (*dakhn*); this highlights not only the various tools of the trade, but also the mysterious nature of the discipline.[47] As a group, Ibn al-Nadīm describes how enchanters and magicians (*al-mu'azzimīn wa al-saḥara*) claim that demons, jinn, and spirits obey and serve them, performing their commands and prohibitions.

Ibn al-Nadīm famously details a two-tiered classification of magic as consisting of either praiseworthy or condemned methods (*al-ṭarīqa al-maḥmūda* vs. *al-ṭarīqa al-madhmūma*). On the one hand there are enchanters who profess to follow religious laws (*yantaḥilu al-sharā'i'*), in obedience to God; adhering to the obligations of ritual performance, they claim to subjugate demons and jinn through the power of God's divine

41 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:224–26, 233–34, 242–44.

42 Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 34–52, 108–10.

43 "*Akhbār al-mu'azzimīn wa al-musha'bidhīn wa al-saḥara wa aṣḥāb al-nīranjiyyāt wa al-ḥiyal wa al-ṭillasmāt*." Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:333.

44 See Ibn al-Nadīm's ironic treatment of his personal acquaintance Ibn Abī Raṣṣāṣa, head enchanter of his day, ibid., 2:337.

45 Ibid., 2:331–32.

46 For more on the organizational principles governing the *Fihrist*, see Toorawa, "Proximity."

47 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:334, cited in Macdonald, "Siḥr," *EI*[1].

names or through oaths made directly to God. Ibn al-Nadīm contrasts this, on the other hand, with a form of devil worship, where magicians (*saḥara*) enslave demons through prohibited offerings and sinful acts that offend God but please demons, such as abandoning ritual prayer and fasting, illicit blood sacrifice, incestuous relations, and other evil acts (*al-af'āl al-sharriyya*).[48] This presentation makes clear that there is nothing inherently illicit in summoning the power of demons and jinn, rather the methods used to do so are what determine the lawfulness of the act.

Ibn al-Nadīm traces the art of subjugating the jinn back to the prophet Solomon, known in the Qur'ān for his power over demons and jinn (Q 21:81–82; 38:36–38), and to the ancient Persian king Jamshīd. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, the first to practice the lawful method of incantation in Islam was Abū Naṣr Aḥmad b. Hilāl who was served (*makhdūm*) and spoken to by the jinn; he performed marvelous deeds (*af'āl 'ajība*) and wrote several books, including a commentary on what the demons said to Solomon and the oaths that Solomon extracted from them.[49] Ibn al-Nadīm mentions that Abū Naṣr Aḥmad b. Ḥilāl was among the recent scholars to pursue the magical arts. Also featured in this list is Aḥmad b. Ḥilāl's father, Ḥilāl b. Waṣīf, as well as an enchanter known as the son of the Imām, who lived during the reign of Mu'taḍid (r. 279-89/892-902). The latter may well be the same enchanter whom we encountered in the anecdote of the mysterious apparition in al-Mu'taḍid's court. It would appear that all of these figures lived more or less during the same period,[50] although the passage itself is rather elliptic and confused. Furthermore, the name Ibn Ḥilāl was strongly associated with a famous sorcerer who lived during the Umayyad period.

Indeed, Ibn Nadīm's periodization may be a bit off as to the development of the magical arts, as he also lists other figures under the category of those who practices lawful magic. Included here is the famed sorcerer 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥilāl, who lived during the reign of the Umayyad commander of Iraq, Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714). Most of the details surrounding the life of 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥilāl are largely legendary. It is of note, however, that several religious authorities, including the famed *ḥadīth* scholar Ibn Ḥajār al-'Asqalānī (d.852/1149), chastised Ibn al-Nadīm for not having adequately assessed the character and reputation of 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥilāl when including him among the practitioners of licit methods of incantation.[51] This seems a fair assessment considering the long literary tradition of identifying Ibn Ḥilāl who went by the sobriquet "friend of the Devil" (*ṣadīq Iblīs*), as a Faust-like magician who made a pact with the Devil to obtain supernatural powers.[52]

The section on interbreeding in the encyclopedic study of zoology, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* (*Book of Animals*), by the polymath of Basra, Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ (d.

48 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:334–35, 337–338.

49 Ibid., 2:336–37.

50 Bābānī mentions that Abū Naṣr Aḥmad b. Hilāl died around 300/912, an estimate that he presumably derived from Abū Naṣr's placement in the *Fihrist*, Bābānī, *Hadiyyat*, 1:56.

51 'Asqalānī, *Lisān*, 5:32. The same criticism is leveled by Shiblī (d. 769/1367) in his treatise on jinn, *Ākām*, 102.

52 In the field of *belles lettres*, see, for instance, Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān*, 6:170; Ibn al-Marzubān, *Tafḍīl al-kilāb*, 50; Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 1:153; Tha'ālibī, *Thimār*, 73, §95.

255/868–69), refers to Ibn Hilāl as the son-in-law of the Devil, as he married one of the Devil's daughters and fathered a child with her. This comes as part of a larger discussion on the possibility of interbreeding between humans, demons, and jinn, a topic that was a matter of philosophical and theological debate.[53] Jāḥiẓ situates Ibn Hilāl at the head of a list of those who claimed to be able to summon demons and other spiritual beings through incantations. In his treatment of the topic, Jāḥiẓ quotes an example of an incantation used to command the jinn. The recipe counsels that the most important part of the procedure is to make the body a suitable vessel. The supplicant should first perfume himself with frankincense, perform ablution in pure water, keep an eye on the course of Jupiter, restrain from sexual intercourse and rancid fatty meat, travel roughly through deserts and frequent ruins (the preferred haunting grounds for the jinn), until he grows thin and pure. In this state such a person would resemble the jinn and could then cast incantations to summon them. If successful, one would reach a station higher than Ibn Hilāl. Caution, however, is offered here, for if this process is done incorrectly, there is the danger of becoming completely possessed or even dying.[54]

As for Ibn Hilāl, he comes to represent the quintessential sorcerer of the Umayyad period and is associated with several tales, evidently legendary in nature, which appear to have circulated widely as part of a larger body of literature on marvels. These anecdotes usually involve Ibn Hilāl's use of necromancy and his associations with the governor Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, in the city of Wāsiṭ. In one account Ḥajjāj had nearly finished building his palace in Wāsiṭ when he discovered that one of his slave girls had become possessed (*aṣābahā lamamun*). Fearful that his newly built palace was inhabited by jinn (*mukhtaḍar*), Ḥajjāj sent for Ibn Hilāl, who was then in Kūfa. After ordering the entire area to be ritually cleaned, Ibn Hilāl set about burying in the middle of the palace a sealed earthen jar, which could only be removed through his own magical powers. Disturbed by the illicit nature of the procedure and fearful that others would later claim that he had gained his power solely through magic, Ḥajjāj sent Ibn Hilāl with his earthen jar back to Kūfa.[55]

In another anecdote, Ibn Hilāl uses his occult powers to make a slave girl, dearly cherished by Ḥajjāj, disappear from the governor's palace only to reappear in the house of a laborer who had fallen in love with her and had enlisted Ibn Hilāl's aid. This sorcery was repeated for several nights, during which time the laborer had his way with the girl, who in turn grew ever more and more distressed at her predicament. Finally catching on to the ruse, Ḥajjāj apprehended Ibn Hilāl and sentenced him to death. Ibn Hilāl, however, was able to escape the governor's clutches through the use of the famed rope trick: he cast a rope up into the air, ascended it, and disappeared. On another occasion, Ibn Hilāl once again found himself imprisoned by Ḥajjāj. Asking his fellow prisoners if any of them wished to leave with him by boat to Basra, Ibn Hilāl drew an outline of a boat on the

53 Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān*, 1:188–90, cf. 1:309. Bīrūnī rejects as sheer stupidity the claim that Ibn Hilāl fathered a child with a daughter of the Devil, Āthār, 40.

54 Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān*, 6:199–200. See also van Vloten, "Dämonen," 236. The recipe appears, in part, designed to increase virility, as frankincense was used as an ointment on the penis to cure impotence during intercourse, see Ibn al-Tilmīdh (d. 560/1165), *Aqrābādhīn*, 134, §285.

55 Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 264–65; quoted in Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 5:349–50. Kennedy draws on Yāqūt's account, "How to Found an Islamic City," 54–55.

ground. He entered into it with a group of prisoners and disappeared, leaving the others behind.[56] Putting aside the question of historical authenticity, these anecdotes of incantations and the power attributed to those who could wield them open a window onto actual occult practices. This literary material intersects with a vast body of archeological evidence in Mesopotamia that points to the widespread use of amulets, charms, and magic vessels to ward off demons and evil spirits, from pre-Islamic times and continuing well after the advent of Islam.[57]

For many later authorities, Ibn Hilāl came to represent either the illicit employment of magical forces or the trickery of a charlatan. Needless to say, the use of occult powers and incantations to subjugate spirits also developed into a field of practice strongly associated with the religious elite. Perhaps the clearest manifestation of this lies in the belief in demonic possession and in the various forms of exorcism used to cast out demons and jinn from the bodies of the possessed. In the philosophical traditions of natural science, such states were often naturalized as a form of epilepsy, generally caused by an imbalance of the humors. In religious terms, however, the creedal position on the existence of demons and jinn expressed throughout various theological branches of Islam generally included the belief in demonic possession.[58]

Subjugating Spirits

Beyond sanctioned practices of exorcism, there is substantial evidence that various religious authorities cultivated occult learning to command the spirit world for a host of other purposes. While one could argue that works such as the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and Rāzī's *Sirr al-maktūm* only pertained to a courtly milieu or were not directly related to normative religious practices, there is much to suggest that in diverse historical and geographical contexts the religious elite not only circulated such literature but also used it to harness occult powers. In this regard the example of Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad al-Ṭabasī (d. 482/1089), who lived much of his life in Nishapur, is particularly illustrative. In the *Sirr al-maktūm*, Rāzī cites Ṭabasī as one of many authorities on the occult.[59] According to the early prosopographical literature, as recorded by the likes of ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (d. 529/1134) and ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Samʿānī (d. 562/1166), Ṭabasī, who was known by the honorific title, the "pride of the imams" (*fakhr al-a'imma*), was a trustworthy *ḥadīth* transmitter with a line of transmission (*isnād*) that could be traced back through prominent religious authorities of the region, such as the famed *ḥadīth* scholar al-Ḥākim Abū ʿAbd Allāh (d. 405/1014) and the Qur'ānic exegete Abū al-Qāsim b. Ḥabīb (d. 406/1016). In addition, Ṭabasī was known as a pious ascetic and a Sufi who composed numerous works.

56 Shiblī, quoting the *Kitāb al-ʿAjā'ib* of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Shakkar al-Hawarī (d. 303/915), *Ākām*, 102; ʿAsqalānī, also quoting Hawarī, *Lisān*, 5:31–32. On Hawarī, see Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 23:129, §162; Ḥājjī Khalīfa, *Kashf,* 2:1437.

57 See Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*; Canaan, "Arabic Magic Bowls"; Spoer, "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls"; Stevenson, "Some Specimens"; Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms*, 7–21; Silverman, "Arabic Writing and the Occult"; Porter, "Islamic Seals"; Vesel, "Talismans."

58 See, for instance, Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 346–47; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ*, 19:39–40; Ibn Qayyim, *Ṭibb*, 51–52; Shiblī, *Ākām*, 106–10.

59 Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 390.

He delivered lectures in the Niẓāmiyya madrasa, established by the powerful Seljuk vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) in the city of Nishapur.[60] As such, Ṭabasī has a vita that fits into a normative regional pattern of Shāfiʿī jurists who followed Ashʿarī theology and had pronounced Sufi affiliations. This is evidenced, for instance, in Ṭabasī's pupil, and the primary transmitter of his works, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qāyinī (d. 547/1153), known as the "tanner" (*dabbāgh*). A trained Shāfiʿī jurist and scholar of *ḥadīth*, Qāyinī headed a group of Sufis for forty years in a monastic lodge (*ribāṭ*) outside of Herat.[61]

Yet, of the many works associated with Ṭabasī, the only one that appears to have been disseminated widely in manuscript form is his *al-Shāmil fī al-baḥr al-kāmil* (*The Comprehensive Compendium to the Entire Sea*), a treatise on subjugating demons and jinn through incantations, spells, and talismans, composed while Ṭabasī was living in Nishapur.[62] In addition to his work as a *ḥadīth* transmitter and religious authority, Ṭabasī was well known for his ability to command jinn. The encyclopedist and scholar of natural sciences Zakariyyā' b. Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283) describes Ṭabasī as the author of the *Shāmil*, a large work that details how to make jinn obedient and the specific manners of subjugating (*taskhīr*) them, with descriptions of various incantations (*ʿazā'im*) and the conditions (*sharā'iṭ*) for their use.

Further, according to Qazwīnī it was widely known that the jinn obeyed Ṭabasī. He illustrates this with the following anecdote. One day the famed religious scholar Ghazālī asked Ṭabasī to reveal the jinn to him. Ṭabasī consented and Ghāzālī reported that he saw them as though they were a shadow on the wall. Ghazālī then requested to speak directly to them and to hear their speech; to this Ṭabasī replied, "You are not capable of seeing more of them than this."[63]

According to the introduction of the *Shāmil*, Ṭabasī originally wrote a work on the same subject for an unnamed patron of significant standing. As people liked it so much, Abū al-Barakāt ʿAbd Allāh al-Furāwī (d. 549/1155) requested that Ṭabasī write another book on the topic, this being the *Shāmil,* which he did by drawing upon his notes and recollections.[64] As for Abū al-Barakāt, he was a legal scholar and a member of the prominent Furāwī family, which, like many of the religious elite in the region of eastern Iran and Afghanistan during this period, followed Ashʿarī theology, Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, and professed a Sufi

60 See Fārisī, *Muntakhab*, 61, §119; Samʿānī, *Ansāb*, 8:209. See also Yāqūt, *Buldān*, 4:20; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 18:588, §309. On the intellectual history of the religious elite of Nishapur during this period, see Bulliet, *Patricians*, as well as Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an*, 331–59.

61 See Samʿānī, who gives a list of the works Dabbāgh transmitted from Ṭabasī, *Muntakhab*, 1:551–60, §218; for other transmitters, see also ibid., 3:1144, 1488, 1828–29, 1893. On Dabbāgh, see also Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 7:54–56, §743; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 20:272–73, §171.

62 The complete title as given in the work itself is *al-Shāmil fī al-baḥr al-kāmil fī al-dawr al-ʿāmil fī uṣūl al-taʿzīm wa qawāʿid al-tanjīm* (The comprehensive compendium to the entire sea for the governing element in the foundations of enchantment and the rules for casting spells). On the technical meaning here of *tanjīm*, see below. For the manuscript tradition and a description of the contents, see Ahlwardt, *Verzeichnis*, 5:280–82; Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 386–87. On the composition of the work, see Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fol. 88a.

63 The Arabic gives an impression that Ghazālī himself could not see more, presumably as he was not a master of the art: *anta lā taqdiru tarā minhum akthara min dhālika*. Qazwīnī, *Āthār*, 406–7; cited in Macdonald, *Religious Attitude*, 144–45, and Macdonald, "Siḥr," *EI*[1].

64 Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fol. 1b. See also Ḥājjī Khalīfa, *Kashf*, 2:1024; Ahlwardt, *Verzeichnis*, 5:280.

form of piety.[65] The *Shāmil* thus intersects with a network of scholars who championed themselves as representing a normative form of religious authority.

One of the primary focuses of the work is explaining how to subjugate various spirits, particularly the jinn. According to Ṭabasī, there are two methods of doing this. The first is through illicit and prohibited magic founded on disbelief (*kufr*); the other is completely licit, as it is based on profound piety, probity, purity, and ascetic seclusion, turning from the temptations of creation and devoting oneself toward God.[66] This particular classification not only legitimates the various occult practices detailed in Ṭabasī's book of spells, but it also situates them in a broader setting of mystical devotion and asceticism. In relation to the cult of saints, the miraculous powers ascribed to them, and the vast networks of shrine devotion promoted particularly by Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians of the period, the *Shāmil* offers a testament to the interconnections that tie thaumaturgy and mystical devotion together. On this point, Ṭabasī highlights the belief that masters of this art have attained the rank of saints (*awliyā'*). Several examples are given of those who had reached high stations in the field, including the famed Persian mystic Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) and Abū Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, who, according to Ṭabasī, produced great marvels that ultimately led to his execution.[67] By this period Ḥallāj had entered into the hagiographical literature of Sufis where he was embraced as a martyr. In the list of those who had mastered the art of conjuring spirits, Ṭabasī also includes Ibn Hilāl, who had befriended the Devil and obtained from him the power of incantation. We are told that Ibn Hilāl gained such a mastery over the occult arts that he was able to transport a man from Baghdad to Samarqand and back again in a single night.[68]

The introduction mentions several other authorities, such as Shaykh Ibn al-Faraj al-Anbārī, known as the "chief of all masters" (*ustād al-asātida*) and his student Khalaf b. Yūsuf, both of whom were early practitioners of the art. Ṭabasī also lists his own teachers. These include, most prominently, Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, known as the "great master" (*al-ustād al-akbar*), who is referred to as "my master" throughout the work; 'Abd Allāh al-Ṭabasī, known as the "first master" (*al-ustād al-awwal*), who is also cited several times in the *Shāmil*; as well as contemporaries of Ṭabasī's two teachers, Ibrāhīm the farmer (*fallāḥ*) and Abū Bakr al-Khazarī al-Nīshābūrī.[69] The opening thus grounds the practice of incantation and the magical arts in a chain of authorities that builds upon the transmission of religious learning from teachers to pupils. Likewise, the *ḥadīth* material that appears in the course of the work is also governed by the formal structure of *isnād* transmission, which is passed from one generation to the next and is a prominent feature governing traditional religious authority.[70]

These and other authorities suggest a set of regional practices and traditions in circulation, both textually and orally, generations earlier. A further indication of the

65 See Sam'ānī, *Muntakhab*, 2:953–4, §517; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 20:227–28, §146. On the Furāwī family see, Bulliet, *Patricians*, 172–74.
66 Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fols, 2a–b.
67 Ibid., fol. 4b.
68 Ibid., fol. 5a.
69 Ibid., fol. 5b.
70 See, for instance, Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fols. 89b–90b.

intergenerational lines binding together this material is Ṭabasī's use of a *ḥadīth* collection on charms and amulets, the *Kitāb al-Ruqā wa al-tamā'im* by Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn Fanjawayh (d. 414/1023), a religious authority who resided in Nishapur.[71] Ṭabasī heard the collection from the muezzin Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ṣandalī (d. 494/1100), a trained Shāfi'ī jurist and ascetic from Nishapur, who transmitted the work directly from Ibn Fanjawayh.[72] The material itself intersects with the cultivation of Qur'ānic theurgy, ubiquitous throughout Islamic history.[73] The major canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections all discuss the legitimacy of Qur'ānic charms, generally under the rubric of medicine (*ṭibb*); this forms part of a larger set of apotropaic and prophylactic uses of the Qur'ān, in both oral and written forms, many of which can be traced to the earliest formation of Islamic ritual devotion. These practices include recited charms as well as written amulets. The consumption of Qur'ānic verses, often referred to as erasure, was also a largely normative means of drawing upon the power of the Qur'ān, as the *ipsissima verba dei*. This takes the form of writing particular verses known for their special properties, usually chosen for their semiotic content, onto a dish or a piece of paper, often using saffron, and then ingesting the verses after they have been dissolved in water. In his treatment of protective amulets (*aḥrāz*) and the directions for Qur'ānic ingestion, referred to here as *nushra* (i.e. a charm or spell), Ṭabasī gives several such recipes that were clearly in circulation across the region.[74]

The *Shāmil* offers instructions for the preparation of various incantations that usually prescribe the combination of written and recited formulae. Such incantations (*'azīma*, pl. *'azā'im*) are spells designed to impose obligation (i.e., from *'azama* to determine or fix) upon spirits, forcing them into submission in order to obtain supernatural powers through their aid.[75] Central to this process is the preparation of charms referred to as *khawātīm* (sg., *khātim*, literally "seal" or "ring").[76] These are written on various mediums, such as paper, parchment, leather hides, or are engraved on tablets, metal disks, or signet rings. Instructions for drawing (*naqsh*) magical symbols and figural forms (*ṣūra*, pl. *ṣuwar*) feature throughout. Also frequently used is the *mandal* (cf. the Sanskrit *maṇḍala*, "circle"), that is, the magic circle, which is drawn when casting various spells.[77] The act of casting spells is often referred to as *tanjīm*;[78] while this suggests connections with astrological determinations or prognostication, also known as *tanjīm*, or with astral forces (i.e., *najm*, pl. *nujūm*, "stars"), the *Shāmil* has no direct link with the formal study of

71 Fārisī, *Muntakhab*, 291–92, §556. See also Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an*, 386.

72 Fārisī, *Muntakhab*, 586, §1037; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 19:157–59, §84.

73 According to Ṭabasī, Ibn Fanjawayh's collection consisted of reports all transmitted by the Companion Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687–8). For a collection of *ḥadīth* on the topic contemporary to Ibn Fanjawayh, see Nīshābūrī, *Mustadrak*, "Kitāb al-Ruqā wa al-tamā'im," 4:573–81; and later on the same topic, see Ibn Balabān (d. 739/1339), *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 13:448–80.

74 See, for instance, Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fols. 89b–90a, 98a–b, 106a. See also Zadeh, "An Ingestible Scripture."

75 On the etymology of *'azīma*, see Ibn al-Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 12:400.

76 See Allan, "Khātam, khātim," *EI*[2]; Porter, "Islamic Seals"; Stevenson, "Some Specimens," 112–14.

77 See Bosworth, *Mediaeval Islamic Underworld*, 2:323. The use of the *mandal* here is quite different from Lane's famous description of casting (*ḍarb*) a *mandal*, which he refers to as "the magic mirror of ink," used for divination, *Account*, 268–75. Cf. Jawbarī, *Mukhtār*, 235.

78 See, for instance, Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fol. 18b.

astrology or with its Hellenistic and Hermetic background, as represented, for instance, by the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* or Rāzī's *al-Sirr al-maktūm*.[79] The spells and charms of the *Shāmil* are usually activated by directly summoning forces from the spirit world, that is, angels, demons, or jinn.

Ṭabasī's treatment of this material builds on the representation of Solomon's ability to control the jinn, a characteristic that features in both the Qur'ān and the exegetical stories of the lives of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*). An array of jinn are summoned and commanded through these spells, such as Faqṭīṭiyūs, the vice-regent of Solomon and Āṣif, who served as Solomon's vizier.[80] Throughout late antiquity, Solomon is identified with esoteric knowledge and the power to subjugate demons through his magical ring, as documented, for instance, in the Greek pseudepigraphical text, the *Testament of Solomon*.[81] This Solomonic background provides the cosmographical fabric for the *Shāmil*, which describes repeated interactions between demons, jinn, and humans, such as Bilqīs, the queen of Sheba and wife of Solomon who was herself the offspring of a jinn and a human.[82] Likewise, the secret formulae used on the famous rings or seals (*khawātīm*) of Solomon to control the jinn feature prominently in the *Shāmil* and serve as one of many prophetic precedents for the use of charms and incantations.[83]

In the course of the work, Ṭabasī raises several legal questions, while professing his adherence to Shāfi'ī juridical praxis. One of these issues is the legal necessity of inscribing or invoking the divine names of God when casting charms. Ṭabasī affirms the dominant position of the followers of Imam al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), namely that all actions must be undertaken by first invoking the name of God. However, he also advances a juridical ruling that allows for directly invoking the names of angels and the rulers of spiritual powers (*asmā' al-malā'ika wa al-mulūk*), as they also possess sacrality.[84]

The spells are generally activated by the invocation of otherworldly powers, holy figures, and sacred objects. In addition to the jinn, this often includes invocations of the divine names, an array of angels, the entire host of Islamic prophets from Adam to Muḥammad, the sacred writings of Abraham, and the psalms of David, as well as the Torah, the Gospels, and the Qur'ān, all of which are imbued with charismatic power. Also featured is a litany of Qur'ānic verses thought to have special properties, such as the Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q. 1), the final verses (*khawātīm*) of Sūrat al-Baqara (Q. 2:285–86), the throne verse (Q. 2:255), and the last two suras of the Qur'ān (Q. 113–14), known as the suras of refuge (*mu'awwadhatān*). Much of this Qur'ānic material can be found in the literature on supererogatory prayers and supplications (*du'ā'*, pl. *ad'iya*), as well as in traditional *ḥadīth* material on the special soteriological attributes (*faḍā'il*) of the Qur'ān.[85]

79 See Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 386.

80 Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fol. 76b.

81 See Torjano, *Solomon, the Esoteric King*.

82 Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fol. 84a; see Ullendorff, "Bilḳīs," *EI*[2].

83 Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fol. 48a. Abraham and his sons Ishmael and Isaac, as well as the Prophet Muḥammad are all said to have learned how to perform charms, fol. 82a.

84 Ibid., fol. 94b–95a.

85 See Afsaruddin, "Excellences"; Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting," 463–66.

What makes the *Shāmil* unique, however, is its sustained emphasis on subjugating jinn and demons and its accompanying demonology, which details the powers and relations binding together the occult forces of the unseen. We read countless charms and incantations that not only fail to mention God, but directly invoke the Devil (i.e., Iblīs) and his armies. A host of appellations are used to call upon the Devil: the patronymics "the father of bitterness" (*murra*) and "the father of the plowman" (*ḥārith*) commonly feature,[86] as does 'Azāzīl, the Devil's angelic name before the fall; likewise, the Devil is referenced throughout the work as the great shaykh, or simply the shaykh and is known to have sired countless progeny.[87] Frequently invoked is 'Ayna, referred to by the title "lady queen" (*al-sayyida al-malika*), the daughter of the Devil. 'Ayna married a jinnī, commonly known to enchanters as Kharṭafūsh, who betrayed, his father, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān, the king of the jinn, who for his part was a faithful ascetic (*zāhid*) and a devotee of the Ka'ba. As the husband of 'Ayna, Kharṭafūsh also controlled armies and joined forces with Iblīs and his daughter, living among them. Ṭabasī notes that only God is capable of vanquishing him.[88]

Also mentioned in this nefarious pantheon is the mighty demon king named Mahākāl al-Hindī.[89] This corresponds to the Sanskrit Mahākāla, meaning "great time," one of the epithets for the god Śiva, the destroyer and giver of life. The famed temple to Mahākāla in the central Indian city of Ujjayn was well known to Arabic and Persian sources. The Ghaznavid historian Abū Sa'īd al-Gardīzī (fl. 440/1049) describes it as possessing a large idol with four arms representing Mahākāl, a demon (*dīv*) who taught mankind incantations (*'azā'im*) and how to perform wonders (*'ajā'ib*); he wears an elephant hide dripping in blood and a crown made of skulls.[90] These associations, which build upon the identification of India with the exotic and the occult, shape Mahākāl's entrance in the *Shāmil* as a demonic force to be summoned.[91] As for the inclusion of such diabolical material, Ṭabasī justifies his treatment of the various methods of invoking demons by arguing that they all have all been tested and great benefits can be obtained from them. Furthermore, Ṭabasī has intended his work to be as comprehensive as possible, as the title *Shāmil* itself suggests, and thus, he reasons that the demonic material treated in the work legitimate site of inquiry, as it forms part of the wider art of summoning occult forces.[92]

Like other books of spells, the incantations prescribed in the collection are used to obtain a variety of ends. Spells to ward off illness, demon possession, the evil eye, and the

86 Also Abū al-Qitra, see Ibn al-Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 5:73; abū al-ḥārith is also the name for a lion.

87 See Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fols. 72a–b.

88 See, ibid., fols. 26a, 69b.

89 Ibid., fol. 58a.

90 See Gardīzī (fl. 440/1049), *Zayn*, 293; Minorsky, "Gardīzī," 12. This account is ultimately based on the mission sent by Yaḥyā b. Khālid al-Barmakī (d. 190/805) to India, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:429; Maqdisī (fl. 355/966), *Kitāb al-Bad'*, 4:15; Marwazī (fl. 483/1090) refers to Mahākāl as an *'ifrīt*, a type of jinn, *Ṭabā'i'*, §31, cf. 137.

91 Ṭabasī also identifies Iblīs as the lord of the far off western lands (*maghārib*), as well as India, both exotic locations for the cultivation of magic, *Shāmil*, fol. 70b.

92 Ibid., fols. 54b–55a.

machinations of sorcerers are prominent prophylactics. Likewise, love potions and charms to seduce, particularly between those of unequal social status, feature with frequency.

There are also prescriptions to inflict harm and illness on others. One such spell includes the use of the heart of a sheep that has been sacrificed without invoking the name of God, twenty-one unpierced needles, and the drawing of a seal (*naqsh al-khātim*). An incantation is recited over each needle as it is placed onto the seal; then the heart of the sheep is pricked with each needle while reciting the following incantation: "O so-and-so daughter of so-and so (*fulāna bint fulāna*) sicken with all kinds of punishment, headaches, migraines, and fever through the power of this seal." The spell also requires that a piece of clothing be secretly taken from the victim on which the incantation is to be written. After performing this and other procedures the victim will grow ill within two weeks.[93] The *Shāmil* includes an antidote for this incantation to return the victim to health, which may well mitigate the use of magic to harm others. In addition to invoking demons and inflicting pain, the *Shāmil* utilizes an array of ritual impurities such as swine and patently profane locations, such as Zoroastrian fire temples and the cemeteries of Jews and Christians.

The very sacrilegious nature of much of this material helps to animate it with occult power. Admittedly, the juridical and theological probity of many of these practices would be questionable in normative frameworks of Islamic theology and orthopraxy. Invoking the names of demonic forces is certainly at odds with strict monotheism, and the demonology detailed in the work speaks to a profoundly dualistic vision of the cosmos. Yet the fact that this material was produced by and circulated among the religious elite in the region also gives room for pause.

The collection opens up an inner world of domestic religious practices and an ominous social landscape pregnant with the fear of sorcery, evil spirits, and the ability of occult forces to control nature and the course of human life. Direct recourse to God, who is repeatedly described as having power over everything (*ʿalā kulli shayʾin qadīr*), is one means of dominating these hidden forces, but other intercessory powers also prove to be efficacious. In this respect, the sacrality of the Arabic language is particularly noteworthy. The Qurʾān and prophetic prayers are woven throughout the fabric of the collection, just as the creedal position of the uncreatedness of the Qurʾān is affirmed.[94] Yet the *Shāmil* also reveals a secret and entirely unintelligible language, used for incantations in both written and oral forms, which envelops the Arabic litanies and Qurʾānic verses in complete mystery. Ṭabasī also records incantations to be recited in Persian.[95] This coincides with a period of vernacularization, in which Persian began to emerge as a prestigious language of learning and power, even in fields of religious discourse, which were once reserved solely for Arabic.[96] These Persian incantations also highlight the diglossic reality governing the relationship between Persian and Arabic, as they speak to a set of practices and traditions that extended well beyond the codified written systems of formalized religious knowledge. The use of languages other than Arabic for casting charms or making talismans, regardless

93 Ibid., fol. 63a–b. See also Robson, "Magic Cures," 42.
94 Ṭabasī, *Shāmil*, fol. 83b.
95 Ibid., fols. 65a–b, 77a.
96 See Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾan*, 323–26, and *passim*.

of their intelligibility, was itself a topic of juridical debate and was generally frowned upon by strict traditionalists.

As for the lived deployment of this material, many of Ṭabasī's spells call for amulets and charms to be buried in certain locations or to be hung from particular areas of the home. Likewise, the practice of trapping demons and jinn within vessels to be buried is a procedure used in many of the incantations. The application of spices, drugs, and various medicaments also features prominently. The archeological evidence, both in the region during this period, and broadly throughout the diverse landscapes of Islamic religious devotion, point to the widespread use of amulets, charms, magical vessels, and clothing marked with various talismanic and astrological symbols, as well as Qur'ānic verses and supplications. Many of the talismanic practices detailed in the *Shāmil* find parallels today in diverse contexts, attested to in an array of anthropological scholarship on the modern period, as well as by primary sources in Arabic and a host of vernacular dialects. The ubiquity of manuals on talismans, spells, and amulets and their circulation in premodern Islamic manuscript culture further adumbrates the religious networks across which this material traveled and was used.[97]

Magic and the Unintelligible

Throughout his collection Ṭabasī documents numerous incantations that are to be written and recited in an unintelligible language. Cyphers, incomprehensible languages, and unknown scripts are prominent features of Arabic and Persian grimoires, amulets, and talismans. In certain conservative circles, the use of unintelligible languages in particular and non-scriptural material in general received a good deal of opprobrium.[98] There are, however, example of authorities, who either promoted or rationalized the use of such exotic symbols and scripts. Fakhr al-Din Rāzī, for instance, offers a notable explanation of the power that such spells and incantations hold. This forms part of a larger Neoplatonic rationalization of magic. Rāzī notes that books of talismans and incantations (*kutub al-ṭillasmāt wa al-'azā'im*) generally contain formulas (*adhkār*) and charms (*ruqyā*) that are incomprehensible. Just as these expressions are unintelligible, often the script itself is unknown. Acknowledging the efficacy of such talismans and charms, Rāzī reasons that the incomprehensible words and phrases could very well represent the names and attributes of God, as He is the source of all power and force in the world.

Additionally, Rāzī offers a further explanation, arguing that the souls or psyches (*nufūs*) of the majority of creation are only cable of understanding external meanings. Such people are easily distracted by the literal form of incantations; they lack sufficient strength to conceive of divine matters; they are incapable of stripping their psyches from external bodily attributes, and thus they are unable to obtain strength or power through the influence of ordinary words. However, when such people read unintelligible spells, they understand absolutely nothing and they come to fancy that these words are sublime, and through such obscurity they can strip their psyches from the realm of the body (*'ālam al-jism*) and direct

97 For examples of amulets and talismanic seals from the region during this period see Allan, *Nishapur*, 60–61, 68–70.

98 See, for instance, Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, 19:61

their minds toward the realm of sanctity (*ʿālam al-quds*). It is for this reason, Rāzī concludes, that people can obtain strength and power through the influence of incomprehensible expressions.[99]

This particular rationalization fits into Rāzī's broader identification of occult powers as a natural dimension of the cosmological workings of creation. In the course of his theological summa, *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī* (*Sublime Pursuits from the Divine Science*), Rāzī attempts to locate rational structures governing a variety of talismanic and divinatory practices, as demonstrated through empirical experiments (*tajārib*) that verify their efficacy.[100] These include rules for crafting representations and seals to correspond to celestial bodies; soaking talismans and other magical figures in medicaments with special properties; activating written charms and talismans by burning them or by storing them in particular containers, etc., to harmonize with the humors; using smoke and burning medicinal herbs (*ʿaqāqīr*) appropriate to each celestial body; reciting spells (*ruqā*); animal sacrifice and the consecration of animal blood and burnt remains;[101] invoking planetary names at particularly auspicious times; and determining the correspondence between the constellations of the zodiac and the appropriate geographical locations for the enactment of magical procedures (*al-aʿmāl al-siḥriyya*). Rāzī justifies his detailed treatment of the topic with the explanation that those who practice this art (*ṣanāʿa*) should have a full knowledge of how these affairs work, so that the magical procedures enacted will be efficacious and not riddled with errors.[102] Such statements fit into Rāzī's legitimization of the occult as a licit branch of the natural sciences.

The underlying logic buttressing Rāzī's rationalization is the belief in sympathetic and analogous correspondences between the micro- and macrocosms that bind together creation. Rāzī's treatment of magic in the *Maṭālib* features as part of a broader theological exploration into prophecy, largely through the prism of natural philosophy. For Rāzī, magic, along with the miracles of saints and prophets, is woven into a larger fabric of paranormal phenomena occurring naturally in the cosmos. This builds upon the view that both magic and miracle are interconnected with the internal senses of the *nafs*, i.e. the soul or psyche (Greek, *psukhē*), and thus they both fit into a deeper hierarchical system of natural forces and faculties. Central to Rāzī's exposition is the role of the estimative faculty (*al-quwwa al-wahmiyya*, i.e., Latin, *vis aestimativa*), which can be harnessed by the rational soul of the intellect to produce ruptures with customary phenomena.[103]

This configuration rests largely on the psychological system of the imagination developed by the famous Persian polymath Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), known in the Latin West as Avicenna. Throughout his summa, Rāzī engages with Ibn Sīnā, whom he addresses

99 Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ*, 1:161; Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 8:183–84.
100 Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 8:179–85, cf. 187–96.
101 Rāzī is admittedly nonplussed when attempting to find a scientific basis for the animal sacrifice and burnt offerings of past nations: "it is very difficult to understand how such activities could have benefit, save that over time experimentations made enacting them necessary," ibid., 8:184.
102 Ibid., 8:185, cf. 179.
103 See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 8:137, 144; Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ*, 3:225; Rāzī, *Sirr*, 11–2. On the unique role of *wahm* as a psychological faculty of the internal senses, see Wolfson, "The Internal Senses," 86–113; Black, "Estimation (*wahm*) in Avicenna"; Hall, "The *Wahm*."

by the honorific the "master teacher" (*al-shaykh al-ra'īs*). Though he often parts ways with the great master, Rāzī's theories of psychology, cosmography, and prophecy are greatly indebted to Avicennan philosophy and together reflect a broader Islamic reception and reconfiguration of Neoplatonism. For Ibn Sīnā the estimative faculty is the highest of the internal senses of the soul and can be used to influence other bodies without any physical intermediary, solely through its own power, which in its most perfected form is linked to prophecy.[104] Ultimately, the faculties of the intellect form the natural basis for the thaumaturgic capacity of the soul to act directly on other bodies or other souls through a form of paranormal causation.[105] For both Ibn Sīnā and Rāzī, prophetic miracles are the realization of this natural capacity within the form of an individual who, through inherent disposition, has obtained a level of intellectual and spiritual perfection, in both theoretical and practical capacities.[106]

Admittedly, this naturalization of supernatural forces makes it difficult to separate miracle from magic in logical or philosophical terms. From this Rāzī raises a series of doubts concerning the validity of miracles as a rational basis for a demonstrable proof of prophethood. Thus, for instance, Rāzī questions how one can ascertain with utter certainty that God and not demons or jinn were behind the miraculous acts of those who claimed prophecy, or whether a miracle was produced with the aid of pure, obedient spirits and not harmful, corrupt ones.[107] Without directly stating it, Rāzī follows here a line of inquiry developed by the Ash'arī theologian and mystic Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111),[108] who likewise questioned the probative power of miracles, a position that was itself controversial.[109] Both theologians focus instead on the moral and ethical dimensions of the prophetic mission as the basis for confirming the validity of prophecy.[110]

For Rāzī this takes a phenomenological turn. He starts with the a priori premise that the spread of Islam is itself inherently good and beneficial to humankind; this in turn provides sufficient confirmation of the legitimacy of Muḥammad as a divinely guided prophet.[111] In the structure of Rāzī's metaphysics, the categorization of prophetic powers in moral terms, rather than through miraculous phenomenon, in turn strips magic of any inherent evil or demonic quality.[112] This builds directly on Ibn Sīnā's ethical argument that the only difference between magic and miracle in an ontological framework is the natural

104 Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Nafs*, 200–1, §4.4; see also Marmura, "Avicenna's Psychological Proof."

105 See Hall, "Intellect, Soul and Body," 68–69.

106 Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 8:121–23. See also Abrahamov, "Religion versus Philosophy," 420–24; Marmura, "Avicenna's Psychological Proof"; Griffel, "al-Ǧazālī's Concept of Prophecy," 110–13.

107 Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 8:46, 50.

108 Rāzī was aware of Ghazālī's doubts concerning the probative nature of miracles, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 208, cited in Abrahamov, "Religion versus Philosophy," 416. See also Griffel, "al-Ǧazālī's Concept of Prophecy," 104. As Griffel notes, Rāzī's ideas on the matter evolved, as reflected in the differing attitudes expressed between the earlier *Muḥaṣṣal* and the later *Maṭālib*, ibid., 106.

109 Ibid., 138–44; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 195–99.

110 See Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 290–91; idem, *Iḥyā'*, 1:16, 29, 39.

111 Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 8:122.

112 Ibid., 8:137; Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, 2:424.

disposition of the soul toward either good or evil.[113] As a force in nature, the occult can be used to achieve both beneficial as well as harmful results; thus for Rāzī the study of magic is entirely legitimate, as the question is not the field itself but the ends to which it is used. Rāzī's conclusion differs markedly from that of Ghazālī, who likewise acknowledged the natural existence of occult forces, but strongly condemned the study of magic and its various branches as an entirely illicit activity.[114]

The Spectrum of Religious Authority

The Neoplatonic configuration of magic may well form the background to the dark arts pursued by Sakkākī, who shared much in common with Rāzī and whose name is also associated with a variety of occult writings. Yet, as we have seen with the case of Ṭabasī, even without a psychology of the soul to lend magic a rational basis in the cosmological forces of nature, we find much evidence that the religious elite promoted occult learning and practices in various fashions.

Despite these examples of qualified acceptance, the deviant and subversive side associated with the sphere of the occult remained a continuing force in the fabric of Islamic orthodoxy. The enchanter as swindler forms a significant branch in the genealogy of the occult. This finds early expression, for instance, in the literary underworld of the Bānū Sāsān, a coterie of rogues, beggars, and charlatans, all associated with various forms of trickery and deceit, as depicted prominently in belletristic material from the ʿAbbāsid period onward.[115] Similarly, the peripatetic occultist and courtier ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Jawbarī (fl. 656/1248) from Damascus advances an image of the enchanter as a profligate trickster. Jawbarī dedicates a chapter to the various tricks deployed by enchanters to fleece the gullible in his study of the deceptions commonly used in various trades, *al-Mukhtār fī kashf al-asrār* (*The Selection on Unveiling Secrets*). In his introduction, Jawbarī gives a bibliography of the works he read in the course of his own studies in the occult arts; these include writings by Hermes, Apollonius, Ibn Waḥshiyya, Jābir b. Ḥayyān, ʿAbd Allāh b. Hilāl, as well as *al-Sirr al-maktūm* of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Jawbarī also wrote treatises on astrology and geomancy and had a clear command of the alchemical arts.[116] In the course of his exposé, Jawbarī discloses various means by which swindlers cloak themselves in asceticism and religion, and extends his list from astrologers and alchemists to dervishes and preachers. As for enchanters, Jawbarī describes them as performing amazing deeds and producing strange states of mind in others. They claim to summon jinn through various incantations, often invoking the names of God, with magic circles, seals, jars, smoke, and the hidden use of chemicals, such as ammonium oxide, to give the appearance of commanding spirits.[117]

With Rāzī's Ashʿarī framework magic and saintly miracle form part of a wide spectrum of natural phenomenon accessible through the purification of the rational soul. Ṭabasī, in

113 Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 4:156–57; see Rāzī's commentary, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt*, 2:661.
114 See Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 290–91; Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 1:16, 29, 39.
115 See Bosworth, *Mediaeval Islamic Underworld*, 1:106–18.
116 Jawbarī, *Mukhtār*, 82–83, 173–96.
117 Ibid., 233–50.

contrast, does not seek to rationalize the process of subjecting spirits, other than offering an expansive prophetic and charismatic lineage for sorcery. Ṭabasī's incantations represent one node in a colorful continuum of social and religious practices, which, Jawbarī and others so clearly demonstrate, easily bend to various arts of deception and subterfuge. The thaumaturgy of the mystic and of the sorcerer may at times be one and the same. Yet, in so far as magic is discursively associated with the illicit or profane, much is at stake in keeping the two apart. There is also a good case to be made that the mystic and the sorcerer generally form distinct social and literary types. The fact that magic and miracle in many discursive contexts blend together is precisely what makes separating the two such a theologically weighted matter. Needless to say, these figures and forces that overlap, either in philosophical or social terms, also speak to efforts to legitimate occult learning within the frameworks of religious piety and authority.

The enchanter or sorcerer commanding supernatural powers functions as a discrete, albeit complex, category in both literary and social terms. On the one hand the *mu'azzim* is associated with a defined set of practices and teachings transmitted generationally, which intersect, in certain contexts, with the authority of the religious elite. Yet on the other hand, in terms of social history, sorcerers could occupy a rather liminal space, situated between forms of religious piety and fraud. Inhabiting at times an underworld of tricksters and swindlers, they are often accused of using various ruses to deceive others into believing that they have the power to summon jinn.

In the realm of dialectical theology, the naturalization of magic as part of the interconnected fabric of the cosmos offers a rational basis for occult learning, recuperating magic as a legitimate site of religious inquiry. Yet, in moral terms such a continuum significantly muddies the distinction between religion and magic. One need not be a theologian or philosopher to see this as a rather slippery slope. The history of magic and sorcery within Islam proves to be more complicated than the Jundab of the Persian television serial *Imām 'Alī* would have it; for while some might try to answer this problem of ambiguity with the swift slice of a sword, such a coincidence of opposites rears its head again and again – one might even say magically.

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Contents

Acknowledgments XI
Introduction XIII
Tabula Gratulatoria........ XIX
Bibliography of Wheeler M. Thackston, Jr. XXIII

I. PERSIAN LITERATURE

Maria Subtelny (University of Toronto)
An Old Tale with a New Twist: The Elephant and the Blind Men in Rūmī's *Maṡnavī* and its Precursors........ 1

Matthew C. Smith (Harvard University)
Poetic Geography: Landscape, Nature and Nationalism in the Poetry of *Malik al-Shu'arā* Bahār 23

Franklin Lewis (University of Chicago)
UT PICTURA POESIS: Verbal and Visual Depictions of the Practice of Poetry in the Medieval Period........ 53

Alireza Korangy (University of Virginia)
Khaqani and the Qaside of Shervan and Arran: A Brief Survey and Study........ 71

Michael Hillmann (University of Texas at Austin)
Khâqâni's Twelfth-Century Advice to Twenty-First-Century Iranians 111

Olga Davidson (Boston University)
Why is the Bāysonghori Recension a Recension? 127

II. LINGUISTICS, PHILOLOGY, AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Travis Zadeh (Haverford College)
Commanding Demons and Jinn: The Sorcerer in Early Islamic Thought........ 131

Daniel J. Sheffield (Princeton University)
The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Āẕar Kayvān and His Followers........ 161

Gregory Nagy (Harvard University)
Herodotus and the *Logioi* of the Persians........ 185

Christian Lange (Utrecht University)
A Sufi's Paradise and Hell: 'Azīz-i Nasafī's Epistle on the Otherworld 193

Yaron Klein (Carleton College)
Music, Rapture and Pragmatics: Ghazālī on *samā‘* and *wajd* 215

John Huehnergard (University of Texas at Austin)
The Semitic Background of Arabic *faqīr* ‘poor’ 243

Jo Ann Hackett (University of Texas at Austin)
Ancient Israel’s Music Man 255

William Graham (Harvard University)
The Qur’ān as a Discourse of Signs 263

Richard N. Frye† (Emeritus, Harvard University)
Achaemenid Law, Predecessor of Roman Law? 277

III. MIDDLE EASTERN, CENTRAL ASIAN, AND SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY

Mana Kia (Columbia University)
Adab as Ethics of Literary Form and Social Conduct: Reading the *Gulistān* in Late Mughal India 281

Supriya Gandhi (Haverford College)
Retelling the Rāma Story in Persian Verse: Masīḥ Pānīpatī’s *Maṡnavī-yi Rām va Sītā* 309

David Brophy (University of Sydney)
High Asia and the High Qing: A Selection of Persian Letters from the Beijing Archives 325

IV. HISTORY OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Linda Komaroff (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)
A Turkman Prisoner or a Prisoner of Love? 369

Pedro Moura Carvalho (Asian Art Museum, San Francisco)
Salīm’s Role as Patron of Mughal Painting at Allahabad (1600-1604): Four Newly Identified Miniatures from a Dispersed Copy of the *Mir’āt al-quds*, a Life of Christ, for Emperor Akbar 381

Jonathan Bloom (Boston College)
Nāṣir Khusraw’s Description of Jerusalem 395

Sheila Blair (Boston College)
Art as Text: The Luster Mihrab in the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art 407

Milo Cleveland Beach (Sackler and Freer Gallery of Art)
Muraqqa‘-i Gulshan: The Inscriptions 437

Epilogue: Philology and the Good Life 447