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Ottoman Eschatological Esotericism: Introducing Jafr in Ps. Ibn al-ʿArabī's *The Tree of Nuʿmān* (*al-Shajarah al-nuʿmāniyyah*)*

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Abstract

This article addresses a desideratum in Islamic intellectual history concerning apocalyptic eschatology. I propose to focus on the Islamic revelatory genre *par excellence* known as *jafr* which as a textual tradition comprises the fusion of eschatology and esotericism. As a case study, I have chosen to examine an Ottoman apocalypse known as *The Tree of Nuʿmān Concerning the Ottoman Empire* (*al-Shajara al-nuʿmāniyya fi al-dawla al-ʿuthmāniyya*). This complex revelatory text was composed at some point in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century and was pseudepigraphically attributed to Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), the "Great Doctor" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) of Sufism. Importantly, *The Tree of Nuʿmān* shows us that eschatological predictions were central to bolstering Ottoman imperial claims to universal sovereignty, this being an historical phenomenon that permeated Islamic dynasties following the collapse of the central Abbasid Caliphate in 1258. More specifically, end-of-times tractates like *The Tree of Nuʿmān* highlight the reliance of revelatory propaganda on the esoteric sciences of lettrism (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) and astrology (*ʿilm al-falak*). With these two esoteric pillars, I argue that Pseudo-Ibn al-ʿArabī secured the validity and appeal of his pseudepigraphic apocalypse. A further important contribution of this essay is a new, critical definition of *jafr* that expands on previous scholarly attempts at understanding this immanently Islamic eschatological genre.

Keywords: Eschatology; lettrism; astrology; Ottoman Empire; Sufism; Ibn al-ʿArabī; pseudepigraphy

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> One lunatic tossed a stone into a well; forty scholars could not get it back out.
> — Turkish saying[1]

"With its predictions, this curious and spurious work places the Ottomans in the eschatological tradition of Islam, more particularly that of *jafr*."[2] Here Denis Gril introduces what remains to date the only academic analysis of any length of the *The Tree of Nuʿmān Concerning the Ottoman Empire* (*Shajarah al-nuʿmāniyyah fī al-dawlah al-ʿuthmāniyyah*).[3] This "curious and spurious" and even "enigmatic" text is a self-identified mystical revelation (*ruʾyā*, *kashf*) originally composed at some point during the late tenth AH/late sixteenth century CE by an anonymous—probably Egyptian—author claiming to be the (in)famous Ṣūfī master Ibn al-ʿArabī (d.637/1240). No holograph copy exists, however, from the sixteenth century. Many supposed copies of *The Tree of Nuʿmān* (hereafter *ToN*) cited in catalogues are, in fact, only commentaries, a key insight that points to the lasting popularity and appeal of *ToN* among scholarly communities across the Ottoman Empire down the centuries. I have identified, however, four copies as true exemplars of this esoteric eschatological apocalypse: Princeton University Garrett Collection Ms. Yah. 4497 (fols. 19a–49a), Süleymaniye Ktp. Ms. Beyazıd 4609 (entire manuscript), İstanbul Üniversitesi Ktp. Ms A. 4484 (fols. 1a-49a), and Beyazıt Yazmsa Eserler Ktp. Ms. Veliyüddin Ms. 2292/2 (fols. 40a–65a).[4] For the purpose of this

1. Tur.: *Bir deli kuyuya taş atmış, kırk akıllı onu çıkaramamış*.

2. Gril, "Enigma," 51.

3. Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Shajarah al-nuʿmāniyyah*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi (hereafter: SK) Ms Beyazıt 4609. Hereafter, all citations from Ms Beyazıt 4609 will be indicated as *ToN* followed by the folio page. Ahmet Zildzic's unpublished Ph.D. claims to present a chapter-length analysis on *ToN*. Zildzic's primary text is not, however, the prophecy but rather one of the commentaries. There are other serious historiographical issues that disqualify Zildzic's treatment as a critical contribution. See Ahmed Zildzic, "Friend and Foe," 83–118.

4. Additional copies are possibly extant in Egypt's Dār al-Kutub. Egyptian authorities at Dār al-Kutub have prevented me from examining these texts. Fleischer claims to have found "ten copies of [*al-Shajarah al-nuʿmāniyyah*]." Nowhere does he indicate the codicological information, but he explicitly relies on Gril's article"; in email correspondence, Fleischer has suggested that he was referring to copies of the commentaries, and not the primary apocalypse itself. See Fleischer, "Haydar-i Remmal," 295, fn. 20. The same information is referenced in Fleischer, "Shadows," 57, fn. 21. Gril, for his part, relies singularly on Princeton University's Garrett

essay, the primary copy used and referred to is Süleymaniye Ktp. Ms. Beyazıd 4609. This manuscript is a nineteenth-century imperial copy sponsored by Bezmiʿālem Sultan, the mother of Sultan ʿAbdülmecīd (r. 1255–1277 AH/1839–1861 CE). Ms. Beyazıd 4609 has been chosen for three reasons. First, its text does not differ substantially from Ms. Yah. 4497, Ms. A. 4884 and Ms. Veliyüddin Ms. 2292. Second, it possesses an incipit that provides a precise dating of composition. And third, it was clearly composed for the Sublime Porte and with the intent of reviving Ottoman eschatological propaganda among the highest echelons of imperial power. Ms. Beyazıd 4609 is, in short, a reliable and good copy for purposes of this present introductory article on Ottoman eschatological esotericism.

Importantly, *ToN* is a *jafr*ist-esoteric prophecy of "salvific knowledge [reserved] for a select elite of initiated disciples."[5] This is true insofar as *ToN*'s cryptic prophecies can only be fully interpreted by those skilled in occult sciences like lettrism (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*)—the Islamic equivalent to Kabbalistic gematria—and astrology (*ʿilm al-falak*).[6] But *ToN* is also an esoteric text with a communal, that is to say public, orientation. As argued in the second section of this essay, esoteric texts in the Ottoman period did circulate and appeal to wider audiences. The plenary import of these puzzling auguries does not prohibit apprehension of this revelation's general message *per se*: the End of the World is at hand and the Ottomans are its gatekeepers. We should be wary of limiting the history of Islamic esotericism to a constricting notion of hidden societies and hidden modes of knowledge.

Collection Ms Yah. 4497 (fols. 19a-49b) as his primary copy; Ms Yah 4535 only contains commentaries by Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Ḥabīb al-Ṣafadī, and Ps.-Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī. See Gril, "Enigma," 52, fn. 3. For the catalogue information, see Mach, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts*, 442–43 (nos. 5131, 5133). The additional manuscripts Gril cites are reproductions of codicological lists given in the catalogues of Brockelmann, Osman Yahya, and one manuscript — based on second-hand information — supposedly extant in the private collection of one Pére Paul Sbath, there labeled as "SBath [*sic*] private library Ms 663." See Gril, 72–74.

5. Hanegraaff, "Esotericism," 337, second column. I rely on Hanegraaff's typological definition of esotericism over and against the historical definition, the latter of which verges into the study of specific currents of esotericism in Western culture as it arose in the nineteenth century. See Hanegraaff, 337, first column.

6. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 77–79.

With that said, the pseudonymous author (hereafter: Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī) is uniquely concerned with proving two things. First, Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī contends that with the close of the first Muslim millennium (1000 AH/1592 CE), the final "hour" (*al-sāʿah*) of creation was about to chime.[7] Second, and consequently, he identifies the Ottomans as the exclusive gatekeepers of the cosmic *eschaton*. Islam's final and supreme sovereigns are neither descendants of Muḥammad nor are they even Arabs, but Turks, a quandary that had to be solved. As proof of their election despite their genealogical shortcomings, Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī points to a conspicuous conjunction (*qirān*) of the planets Saturn and Mars (*kaywān* and *al-marīkẖ*). This alignment was a most auspicious augury, visible proof of their investiture as *the* millennial Muslim monarchs. The writing was, so to say, not on the walls but in the skies.

Building on Gril's introductory discussion of *ToN*, this essay proposes to introduce the eschatological esoteric genre of *jafr* and its application in the apocalypse of Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī. First, given the dearth of any up-to-date discussion of *jafr* in academic literature, I will outline the origins and define what *jafr* is. Here one will observe that, in contrast to the previous cursory definitions of D. B. MacDonald, Toufic Fahd, and Armand Abel, the Islamic eschatological genre *par excellence* was not an exclusively Shīʿī Islamic intellectual tradition. Equally important, Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī's use of *jafr* rests on lettrism and astrology as occult tools for predicting the course of cosmic events; *jafr* is not a subgenre of lettrism, however. Such a contention amounts to a confused phylogeny and inverted order of epistemological importance. Lettrism here is that occult-mathematical corpus of equating the letters of the Arabic alphabet (e.g. *bā-kāf-ẓā* → 2 + 20 + 900 = 922 AH/1516 CE) with transcendental-symbolic meaning, the calculation and decipherment of which in *ToN* points to the truth of the Otto-

7. For references to the impending eschaton of Muḥammad's revelation in terms of "the Hour", see Qurʾān (hereafter: Q) 6:31, 40; 7:187; 12:107; 15:85; 16:77; 18:21, 36; 19:75; 20:15; 21:49; 22:1, 7, 55; 25:11; 30:12, 14; 30:14, 55; 31:34; 33:63; 34:3; 40:46, 59; 41:47, 50; 42:17–18; 43:66, 85; 45:32; 47:18; 54:1; 54:46; 79:42. Arguably, Muḥammad's mission was to proclaim the imminent End of Time.

mans' claims to supernatural election. Second, I contextualize *ToN* by looking at its pseudepigraphic authorship. Here, one will observe how Ṣūfī esoteric practices—especially Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings of "secrets" (*asrār*)—and eschatological speculation helped generate a unique, esoteric revelation. Third, I discuss the possible Egyptian-Coptic tradition that may help explain the shift of apocalyptic focus to Egypt away from the traditional Islamic End-Times battlegrounds like Jerusalem, Damascus, and Constantinople.

An additional question I propose to interrogate by examining the above is: what were the intellectual and cultural conditions that facilitated—or even called for—the composition of such a perplexing text? That is to say, what need was there for an apocalyptic work of pro-Ottoman propaganda when the Ottomans had already conquered Constantinople, toppled the Byzantine Empire, and defeated the Burjī Mamluk Dynasty (r. 792–923/1390–1517), the latter conquest resulting in the inclusion under the Ottoman aegis of such major capitals as Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, Mecca, and Medina? A superficial answer would point to the encroaching millennium; this is not sufficient, however. Rather, a better response lies with the general trend in the Eastern Mediterranean of weaponising certain occult sciences in the imperial race to claim the crown of millennial cosmocracy.[8] What is supreme Islamic sovereignty without an esoteric apocalypse with lettrist and astrological content to back it up?

8. Saif et al., "Introduction." See also Fleischer, "A Mediterranean Apocalypse"; Artun, "Hearts of Gold"; Şen, "Astrology." For the Persianate and Mogul world, the sentiment also applies. See Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 47, 53, 108, 112, 127, 132, 148–49, 189–90. Moin prefers the locution "sacred kingship" or "millennial sovereign" over cosmocratic imperialism. The meaning is the same, however. For an interesting identification of the biblical Daniel being a model for occult-based monarchy, see also Moin, 200. This article does not allow for a longer discussion of this Danielic tradition in the Ottoman Empire, but it bears remarking that the Ottomans as well were interested in this biblical figure. The textual tradition in question is known under the title *Mülheme-yi Dānyāl*. For example, see SK Ms Ayasofya 3367; Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi (hereafter: TKSM) Ms H.491, fols. 1b–35b; Harvard University – Houghton Collection (hereafter: HHough) Ms Turk 13, fols. 1a–35b (incomplete, missing initial pages). I thank Maryam Patton for sharing with me the final text.

In this light, *ToN* emerges as a primary case study for the central importance of lettrism and astrological conjunctions (*qirān*), both of which serve as the primary pillars of the eschatological-prophetic genre of *jafr*. Specifically, lettrism functions as the toolbox by which Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī both uncovers and obfuscates God's teleological plan for Creation; after all, lettrism is the tradition of interpreting the Arabic alphabet as the building-blocks of universal creation.[9] An imperial apocalypse without it would be seriously lacking. Astrology generally understood (i.e. *ʿilm al-falak*) aids in demonstrating that the conjunction of Saturn and Mars every 960 solar (990 lunar) years both signals the end of cosmic creation and proves that the Ottomans were God's chosen millennial—and by extension universally ordained—dynasty above all other Islamic caliphs and sultans.[10] *In nuce*, this is the best description of what Ottoman eschatological esotericism was.

I. *Jafr* as an Esoteric Genre: Origins and Definitions

Where does *jafr* come from and how should we define it? The answer to both questions is not straightforward. I herewith introduce a totally new definition for *jafr* that over the course of this section will be historically outlined and discussed: *Jafr* is a non-confessional, Islamic (i.e. neither exclusively Shīʿī nor Sunnī), and esoteric genre composed in a revelatory mode—usually phrased in terms of *kashf* or *ruʾyā*—that is primarily concerned with the "Final Hour" (*al-sāʿah*). As an esoteric genre, its otherwise inscrutable and preternatural content (*ghayb*) is generally presented in terms of gematria codes and symbols (*rumūz*) and therefore necessitates the inclusion of occult methodology, in particular lettrism, to divine its enigmatic content. Lastly, *jafr* overlaps with "dynastic destinies" literature (*hidthān al-duwal*, *malāḥim*) insofar as it conceives salvation history as a teleological progression of Muslim dynasties towards an ideal end (*eschaton*).

9. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 80.

10. This particular dynastic reading of planetary alignment in the history of Islamic science can be traced back to the work of al-Kindī (d. 259/873) and Abū Maʿshar al-Balkhī (d. 272/886).

Traditionally, the emergence of *jafr* has been attributed to several prominent names in the early history of Islam all of which suggest a sectarian (read: Shīʿī) origin and exclusivity. The genesis story of *jafr* follows several possible trajectories. First, the fourth Caliph ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalib (d. 40/661) either composed or dictated a work which subsequently acquired the convenient title *The Book of ʿAlī* (*Kitāb ʿAlī*) or the *Big Book of Jafr* (*Kitāb al-jafr al-kabīr*).[11] Second, the *Codex of Fāṭimah* (*Muṣḥaf Fāṭimah*) is also identified as a potential urtext for the appearance of the post-prophetic eschatological genre of *jafr* on the historical stage.[12] Third, a work titled the *Book of Jafr* (*Kitāb al-jafr*) is attributed to ʿAlī's great-great-grandson and the sixth ʿAlid Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765).[13] There is no evidence of conflicting claims for supremacy or historical primacy. That is to say, the later historical sources that cite these early progenitors of *jafr* do not seek to assert one text as the first or the only true beginning of *jafr*. As with most legends, the creation narrative here is fuzzy.

In the *Book of ʿAlī*, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet reveals information concerning the role his progeny has to play in the final phase of cosmic history.[14] ʿAlid historiography would very much like this to be so. In the second oracular codex attributed to the prophet's daughter and ʿAlī's consort, one finds the titular Fāṭimah receiving revelations via the angel Gabriel pertaining to the fate of ʿAlī and Fāṭimah's offspring (*wa-yukhbiruhā bi-mā yakūnu baʿduhā fī dhurriyyatihā*), with the caveat that ʿAlī served as her scribe.[15] *Jafr* in this light emerges as the brainchild of that inimitable Islamic cohort known elliptically as "the Family" (lit. "People of the House," *ahl al-bayt*), the prophet's closest living relatives. In a community that still valued agnate relations, the appeal of such a

11. Fahd, *Divination*, 221 ff.

12. Atalan, "Şiî Kaynaklarda," 107–9.

13. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 550.

14. National Library of Israel (hereafter: NLI) Ms Yah. Ar. 125, fol. 1b. For additional citations of ʿAlī as the first author of an urtext of *jafr*, see Fahd, "Djafr."

15. Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, I: 291. See also Ignaz Goldziher, "Literaturgeschichte der Śiʿâ," 491, fn. 2.

legendary work can only be described correctly as numinous. In the final work attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, one may observe a kind of proof-text for the notion of the inherited ʿAlid charismatic afflatus (*karāmah*), especially that of revelatory insight (*kashf*), which was designated (*naṣṣ*) by the prophet himself at Ghadīr Khumm.[16] This point is reflected in a passage in the *Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imāms* (*al-Irshād fī maʿrifat al-ḥujaj wa-l-ʿibād*) by the Twelver-Shīʿī theologian al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), wherein he records that Jaʿfar said:

> Our knowledge (*ʿilmunā*) is timeless (*ghābir*) and celestially inscribed (*mazbūr*); it is engraved upon hearts and pierced into ears. We have in our possession the red *jafr*, the white *jafr*, the *Codex of Fāṭimah* and *Comprehensive Prognosticon* (*al-Jāmiʿah*) in which all that Mankind needs is contained.[17]

Attributing the final iteration of the text to Jaʿfar also imbues it with a simultaneously wide and yet esoteric (*bāṭinī*) appeal. Jaʿfar was not only a well-received theologian (*mutakallim*), jurist (*faqīh*), and transmitter of prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) among both Sunnī and proto-Shīʿī scholars, but he also came to be seen as the "master" of Shīʿī esotericism, especially of the divinatory kind as observed

16. Toufic Fahd cites a copy of *Kitāb al-jafr al-ṣaghīr al-mansūb li-Sayyidina ʿAlī* (*Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi* Mss Ahmet III; Revan 1764) and a copy of *Kitāb shaqq al-jayb fīmā yataʿalliqu bi-asrār al-ghayb* (Millet Kütüphanesi Ms Ali Emiri Ef. 2795) in which the chain of the genetic transferal of prognosticatory powers is explicitly given as proof of *jafr* as an inherited imāmī capacity from ʿAlī through Jaʿfar and ultimately terminating with the and imām Muḥammad al-Mahdī: ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib → al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī → Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn → Muḥammad al-Bāḳir → Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiḳ → Mūsā al-Ḳāẓim → al-Muttaḳī → Muḥammad al-Taḳī → Ḥasan al-ʿAlaʿī → Muḥammad al-Mahdī. See Fahd, *Divination*, 222, fn. 2. I have not been able to independently confirm these passages, but the same introduction is given in NLI Ms Yah. Ar. 125, fol. 3a. One should also note that in Fahd's texts, this vatic gift is understood as an ʿAlid-imāmī reboot of a primordial text composed by Adam (*Kitāb Ādam*). Thus, a parallel between Muḥammad's prophecy as a final update of an ancient revelation stretching back to Adam is achieved. For the Adam → Muḥammad → ʿAlī lineage of vatic charisma conveyed symbolically as light (*nūr*), see Schaeder, "Islamische Lehre," 214 ff. The Adamic narrative is not, however, always indicated in the introductory genealogies of later *jafr*ist texts, e.g. NLI Ms Yah. Ar. 125, Bibliothèque nationale du France (hereafter: BnF) Ms Ar. 2669, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (hereafter: SB) Ms Wetzstein II 1212. For the concept of *naṣṣ*, see al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād*, 393–95.

17. al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 186.

in the above texts concerning the fate of "the Family" *nonpareil*.[18] In fact, as Jan Just Witkam has noted, the practice of attributing magic (*siḥr*), predictions (e.g. hemerology, *ikhtiyārāt*), and occult sciences (*ʿilm al-ghayb*, *al-ʿulūm al-khafiyyah*) to Jaʿfar is a widespread phenomenon in the Arabic and Persian worlds.[19]

It would therefore seem that *jafr* originated within the prophet's household and continued as an elite and inherited capacity of revelatory insight that was transmitted down the lineage of the Imāms to Jaʿfar. Consequently, one finds modern scholars claiming *jafr* as an intrinsically confessional Shīʿī genre. For example, D. B. MacDonald remarks that the first book of *jafr* came to be ascribed to ʿAlī due to the "very early" development of the uniquely Shīʿī belief that the Imāms possessed "a body of religious and political esoteric knowledge covering all things to the end of the world."[20] Toufic Fahd defined *jafr* simply as the "Shīʿī science *par excellence*."[21] Armand Abel for his part further specified *jafr* as, above all, a propagandistic genre of the Ismāʿīlī-Shīʿī dynasty of the Fāṭimids (r. 297–567/909–1171) who were known for their "esoteric" (*bāṭini*) techniques of interpretation.[22] One must approach this matter more carefully.

Firstly, there is an archival question to answer: does any material evidence exist of these books? Reading various catalogues combined with work in the archival libraries in the Middle East (Egypt, Israel, Turkey), across Europe (Russia, Italy, Germany, France, UK), and the USA (Harvard's Widener Library, Princeton's Firestone Library) reveals a complete absence of any copy made of the *Book of ʿAlī*, *Codex Fāṭimah*, or *Book of Jafr*. Lack of paper trail does not, of course, necessarily mean that a text or group of texts did or does not still exist. Fragments in later texts could help reconstruct a *stemma codicum* of a hypothetical urtext or *codex optimus*.[23] But the textual

18. Hodgson, "Early Shi'a," 9; Fahd, *Divination*, 222.
19. Witkam, "Treatise on Hemerology," 102.
20. MacDonald, "Djafr."
21. Fahd, *Divination*, 221, for entire entry 221–24.
22. Abel, "Le Khalife, présence sacrée," 37–38.
23. New Philology would eschew the classical obsession with archetypes. See Lundhaug and Lied, "Snapshots," 3–6. Contrast this with the traditional position in Maas, *Textual Criticism*, 19.

silence is conspicuous. Even Ibn Khaldūn makes note that, "no copy of the [*Book of Jafr*] has reached us, nor is its source known."[24] Thus, one may conclude provisorily along with Sean Anthony that, "[n]one of these books is genuinely extant, and it is exceedingly difficult, if not outright impossible, to prove they ever were."[25]

A lack of such evidence should not be surprising. The practice of locating ancient origins and attributing a wholly imagined authorship of prominent persons to later textual innovations is not new in the history of ideas. Creating textual authenticity and authority is an historical phenomenon well attested in classical Rome and Greece,[26] as much as it is in Judaism and Christianity.[27] Islam is not alien to the game either.[28] The attribution to ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, and Jaʿfar is equal to projecting a later textual genre into the earliest installments of Islamic history and, thereby, of all relevant history. Likewise, this trifecta of holy persons (ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Jaʿfar) is comparable in popular religious weight with identifying Paul of Tarsus as the author of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians (to name a couple) or John Zebedee as the composer of the Fourth Gospel. Maximum ancient authority and sacred appeal was the goal. One ought to revise therefore Ignaz Goldziher's pejorative evaluation that, "the inclination for composing apocryphal and apocalyptic texts" was a practice "more pronounced among the heretic [Muslim] sects."[29] Scribes, regardless of sectarian affiliation, were commonly

24. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, I:551, 555.

25. Anthony, "Legend," 6.

26. Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.E. was already aware of the phenomenon of forgeries, and by extension of a form of authorial truth. Notably, he doubted the Homeric authorship of *Epigoni* and *Cypria*. See Herodotus, *Loeb Classical Library — Herodotus*, vol. I, 2.117 (p. 409); vol. II, 4.32 (p. 231). The volume *Fakes and Forgeries of Classical Literature* (ed. Javier Martínez) is especially broad and informative.

27. For example, of the twenty-seven writings that make up the New Testament, as few as ten and as many as thirteen are forgeries. For more on the topic, see Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, *passim*. Cf. Brakke, "Early Christian Lies," 378–90.

28. The number of studies dedicated to pseudepigrapha in Islamic studies is, however, comparatively meager. The following is a 'comprehensive' list of such work: Reynolds, "Scriptural Falsification"; Pregill, "Isra'illiyat"; Tottoli, "Muslim Eschatological Literature."

29. Goldziher, "Literaturgeschichte der Śîʿâ," 490. Goldziher makes this remark both in reference to

inclined to attribute ancient origins and popular authorship for a single book or textual corpus so that their work may achieve a more august status and commanding reception among their contemporary readers.[30]

Second, and consequently, one must ask the question why members of the *ahl al-bayt*, who are otherwise popularly conceived as belonging to the Shīʿī confessional tradition, were identified as the original sources for *jafr*. The answer depends on the analytical perspective of the scholar. If one accepts a rough understanding of the relationship between Sunnīs and Shīʿīs as a story of perpetual antagonism and animus, then the identification of ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, and Jaʿfar emerge as Shīʿī patrons in possession of supernatural powers. But such strict divisions are not historical fact. At best, one can trace the deterioration of relations on a political, theological, and cultural level to the classical Ottoman period. The uprisings of messianic-mystical Shīʿī Turkmen brethren known as the Kızılbaş (lit. "Redheads," so named for their crimson-colored headgear) in the early tenth/sixteenth century in eastern Anatolia, the ascent of the Safavid Empire (906–1134/1501–1722) combined with their claims to superior charismatic power and imposition of Shīʿī Islam, and the Ottoman imperial policies of Selīm I (r. 918–926/1512–1520) are generally cited as the causes for a more fundamental splitting of ways.[31] Nevertheless, prior to this point one is hard pressed to find clear dividing lines. One is reminded of Cemal Kafadar's poignant remark that prior to the sixteenth-century, Muslim communities in the

jafr and the "destinies" (*malāḥim*) literature. Goldziher, 491. It is certainly interesting that Goldziher notes the propensity of apocalyptic authors to write pseudonymously, as is the case for *ToN*.

30. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 111. Laura Nasrallah describes this ancient practice as emerging out of an "idea of continuous tradition and enigmatic supplement of the author. . . ." Nasrallah, "Out of Love," 75. Nasrallah's thesis also complicates the notion of writing with the intention of deceiving.

31. For the importance of the Kızılbaş uprisings specifically, and the rise of the Shīʿī-Safavid generally, in forming "legalistic Sunnism" as part of Ottoman doctrine, see Dressler, "Inventing Orthodoxy." For a general history of early Ottoman-Safavid power relations, see Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, *Les Ottomans*. A very enlightening discussion of the historiographical discourse among Ottoman historians around the question of "Sunnitization," see Terzioğlu, "Ottoman Sunnitization," especially 303–5.

frontier (i.e. the Balkans and Anatolia) were not a part of any set orthodoxy but rather existed in "metadoxy."[32] Extrapolating on this point, for the preceding centuries as well one can also argue for a fluid, 'metadoxical' sense of confessional division, a religious sense of self that was aware of difference but not dogmatically antagonistic in a systematic fashion.

From a theological perspective, it becomes clear that the *ahl al-bayt* were chosen for their broad Islamic appeal, charismatic authority, and proximity to the prophet. Sunnī scholars leading up to the sixteenth century had little reason to temper their admiration for the prophet's household. ʿAlī was, after all, not only the prophet's cousin and son-in-law, but the undisputed fourth and "rightly-guided" caliph. Fāṭimah, the prophet's daughter and ʿAlī's wife, was one of the most revered female figures in the sacred history of early Islam. And, as stated before, Jaʿfar was far from a polemical figure for Muslim theologians. In addition to his reliable status as a transmitter of prophetic traditions, he was also widely accepted as an authority in the Ashʿarī school of theology (*kalām*), the leading theological school in Sunnī circles since the fifth/eleventh century.[33] Along with the Mātūrīdī-Ḥanafī theological tradition, Ashʿarīsm and its favorable attitude toward Jaʿfar thus secured the Sixth Imām a comfortable position in the dominant religious trend in predominantly Sunnī environments prior to the sack of Baghdad in 656/1258 and, more specifically, in both Mamluk and Ottoman lands in the post-classical period.[34] Claims that the attributed authorship of the legendary beginnings of *jafr* is indicative of the essentially Shīʿī nature of the genre is simply not acceptable.

Specifically, if such a narrative was plausible, how could it be so that starting in the seventh/thirteenth century and leading up to the eleventh/sixteenth century *jafr* appears in the hands of Sunnī Ṣūfīs like Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 637/1240) and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 858/1454) and, later, squarely Sunnī occult practitioners like

32. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 26. Cf. Terzioğlu, "Ottoman Sunnitization," 308.
33. Makdisi, "Ash'arī I," 37–38.
34. Berger, "Interpretations of Ashʿarism and Māturīdism."

Sultan Süleymān's court geomancer (*rammāl*) Ḥaydar (d. unknown)?[35] A quick flick of Ockham's Razor cuts back the weeds of confusion. Simply put, it is true that the legendary origins of the genre belong to ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, and/or Jaʿfar. Yet, contrary to the assertions of later Western academics with a predilection for sectarian categories, *jafr* did not remain a medium of prophecy belonging *only* to the Imāms.

Early proof of this non-confessional origins story may be identified in the once presumed lost *Epistle* (*Risālah*) of Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Kindī (d. ca. 260/873), tutor to the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim's (r. 833–842) son Aḥmad. Al-Kindī was a specialist in sundry Greek sciences and posthumously knighted as the "philosopher of the Arabs" (*faylasūf al-ʿarab*).[36] Such intellectual accolades signal the beginning of how occult sciences became incorporated into the esoteric-eschatological genre of *jafr*. In his *Epistle*, al-Kindī makes no appeal to genealogy as his fatidic calling card. Rather he relies solely on the two pillars of Islamic apocalyptic prophecy: astrology and the science of letters (ʿilm al-ḥurūf), especially as derived from the "broken letters" (*ḥurūf muqaṭṭaʿah*) of the Qurʾān. The planets and the Arabic alphabet are the signs one can 'read' in order to predict the course of history and, importantly, identify the "calamities" (*fitan*) that are inseparable from eschatological discourse in Islam.[37] Similarly, we find al-Kindī's student Abū Maʿshar al-Balkhī (d. 272/886, known in the European tradition as Albumasar) also composing a *Book of Religions and Dynasties* (*Kitāb al-milal wa-l-duwal*, a.k.a. the *Book of Conjunctions*, *Kitāb al-qirānat*), which is an astrological-based book of prophecies.[38] This evidence suggests that there was significant overlap between the various revelatory and prognosticatory sciences in early Islam.

35. Fleischer, "Haydar-i Remmal," 295–96; Fleischer, "A Mediterranean Apocalypse," 69–72.

36. Otto Loth, "Al-Kindi als Astrolog," 273–79. *De Radiis*, another work of al-Kindī's on magic and the occult, exists only in Latin. See d'Alverny and Hudry, "al-Kindi: *De Radiis*," 139–267.

37. Loth, "Al-Kindi Als Astrolog," 277. In fact, the language here is evocative of what one would term in English as an Armageddon scenario.

38. The line between *jafr* and astrology is difficult to delineate at this early stage. See Saif, *Arabic Influences*, 11–12.

Further evidence is identified in the complex network of texts known variably as *The Orderly Pearl Concerning the Secret of the Most Divine Name* (*al-Durr al-munaẓẓam fī sirr al-ism al-aʿẓam*, a.k.a. *Kitāb al-jafr*) by the seldom cited Sunnī scholar Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn Ṭalḥah (d. 652/1254).[39] This text seems to be the first comprehensive attestation of the vatic genre and it does not evince any sectarian tone. That is to say, Ibn Ṭalḥah identifies ʿAlī outright in the *proemium* as having appeared to an anonymous friend in a vision. Rather than receiving a copy of the legendary *Book of Jafr* composed by the first Imām, ʿAlī instead reveals a celestial tablet (*lawḥ*) upon which salvation history is encrypted in a diagram (*dā'irah*) and sacred names are conveyed in lettrist code, hence the title *The Orderly Pearl Concerning the Secret of the Most Divine Name*.[40] One can confidently conclude that the tablet in question pertains to the very same celestial tablet mentioned in the Qurʾān and with which Muḥammad's revelation is equated. A kind of parallel process of renewed or updated prophecy—albeit of a different and subordinate type than that of Muḥammad's—is observed. No specifically Shīʿī vocabulary or theological assertions are observed at all. In broad strokes, this is an Islamic visionary account written by a Sunnī simultaneously drawing on Qurʾānic symbolism (i.e. the tablet, *lawḥ*) as well as appealing to the numinous authority of the prophetic Family (*ahl al-bayt*). Taken together, sectarian lines of division are totally indiscernible. Based on this information, Bakri Aladdin concludes that, "It is necessary to note that the [*Orderly Pearl*] is a work of *jafr*, derived through divination based on the numerical value of letters and the divine

39. SK Mss Laleli 1532, Hafid Ef. 204; NLI Ms Yah. Ar. 482; BnF Mss Arab 2663, 2664, 2665, 2666, 2667, 2668, 2669, 4606; SB Ms Wetzstein II 1212. Regarding NLI Ms Yah. Ar. 482, see Wust, *Catalogue NLI*, I:750. The texts in question here are variously titled as either *The Comprehensive Prognosticon* (*Kitāb al-jafr al-jāmiʿ*) or *al-Durr al-munaẓẓam fī sirr al-ism al-aʿẓam*. Note: BnF Ms 2665 is wrongly identified as the *Key to the Comprehensive Prognosticon* (*Kitāb miftāḥ al-jafr al-jamiʿ*) of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī. This is quickly ascertained as wrong on fol. 1b where Ibn Ṭalḥah is explicitly identified as the author and the same introductory text is given as in the other copies of the *Orderly Pearl*.

40. See also Aladdin, "Zā'irğa," 169–70.

names."[41] More precisely, it is not just that the *Orderly Pearl* is an example of *jafr*, it is the first such version that demonstrates at length the importance of ʿAlī as a key source and intermediary for apocalyptic visions and, in particular, regarding the destiny of Islamic dynasties. Among its many proclamations the following reflects the point: "And the Holy Name equals 693 and that is the year when a king will fall and the dynasties will vanish. . . ."[42] But Aladdin does not impose any cultic classification on the text based on this information because the facts do not lead to such a taxonomic conclusion. We are thus on the right path for resurrecting *jafr* as a non-confessional revelatory genre.

The next famous *jafr*ist textual tradition is that by the Ottoman court Ṣūfī-cum-occult practitioner ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 858/1454), whose oeuvre includes the *Sun of the Horizons Concerning Lettrism and Magic Squares* (*Shams al-āfāq fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-awfāq*), *The Perfumed Scents on Ibn al-ʿArabī's Meccan Revelations* (*al-Fawāʾiḥ al-miskiyyah fi-l-fawātiḥ al-makkiyyah*), and the *Key to the Comprehensive Prognosticon* (*Kitāb miftāḥ al-jafr al-jāmiʿ*).[43] This latter text is an expansion on Ibn Ṭalḥah's *Orderly Pearl* and, like its forerunner, portends the destiny of dynasties through *jafr*—as the title suggests—albeit with a more robust and innovative take on lettrism and symbols (*rumūz*).

Finally, Ibn Khaldūn's analysis makes no mention of *jafr* as a down-and-out Shīʿī science. The authors Ibn Khaldūn mentions are from various backgrounds. For example, Hārūn b. Saʿd al-ʿIjlī is identified as the "head" (*raʾs*) of Fiver-Shīʿī Zaydīs whereas Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī is mentioned to have been the astrologer (*munajjim*) to the Abbasid-Sunnī Caliphs Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 169–193/786–809)

41. Aladdin, "Zāʾirğa," 170.

42. BnF Ms 2669, fol. 8a.

43. Coulon, "Building Al-Būnī's Legend," *passim*; SK Ms Köprülü 926. One should note that the catalogue record, attribution, and titles of the texts variably identified as *Key to the Comprehensive Prognosticon* and attributed to either Ibn Ṭalḥah or al-Bisṭāmī are confusing and, perhaps, overwhelmingly wrong. That is, Ibn Ṭalḥah is arguably the author and later title pages which identify authorship mistakenly attribute the texts to the more famous al-Bisṭāmī. See the note in Wust, *Catalogue NLI*, I:751. I am currently working on an evaluation of this corpus.

and al-Mamʾūn (r. 197–218/813–833).[44] If one interprets Ibn Khaldūn's discussion of the dynastic destinies genre (*malāḥim*, *ḥidthān al-duwal*) as a tangential or even sub-class of *jafr*, then one can also add to this list of diverse characters a Western (*bi-l-maghrib*) Muslim scholar of revelatory predictions by the name of Ibn Mirānah and another Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī who is identified as the composer of the *Apocalyptic Battles according to Ibn al-ʿArabī* (*malḥamat Ibn al-ʿArabī*).[45] In this light, the Shīʿī claim that *jafr* singularly originated within, and is uniquely privy to, the Imāms was certainly an attempt at delineating an esoteric genre. Shīʿī apologists or propagandists sought to define *jafr* as an ineluctably ʿAlid understanding of cosmic and "salvific knowledge" that rests in the "elite" descendants of the *ahl al-bayt*, aside from whom only the Shīʿī clerics as "initiated disciples" could access and explain.[46] Certainly, *jafr* is esoteric by this definition, but it is not sectarian. As discussed above, the salvific knowledge with which *jafr* is ineluctably intertwined had another elite class of initiated disciples. Ṣūfīs like Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Bisṭāmī, and several Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabīs—whom we might define as mystically aspiring authors—as well as occult scholars like Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī, Ibn Ṭalḥah, and Ḥaydar-i Remmāl all dabbled in the revelatory genre of *jafr* and similar corpora (i.e. dynastic destinies literature) without any awareness of crossing denominational borders. Try as one might, Shīʿī claims of ownership over this revelatory practice of apprehending the "Unseen" (*ghayb*) through visions (*kashf*, *ruʾya*) of God's grand plan of ultimate cosmic termination was, to the contrary, shared far and wide.

Having now provided a general history of the origins and broadly Islamic nature of this apocalyptic-eschatological genre, one may now assay a definition. Much has been made of terms like eschatological, salvific, revelatory, visionary, esoteric, and occasionally occult. One would be mistaken to construe these terms as being used here synonymously or as descriptors *sans* analytical backing. Rather, each term constitutes the polyphonic nature of a pre-modern Islamic

44. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, I:550, 555.

45. Ibn Khaldūn, I:556, 558.

46. Hanegraaff, "Esotericism," 337, 2nd column, a.

tradition that has heretofore escaped scholarly classification. Let us now reintroduce the new definition of *jafr* provided at the outset of this section:

Jafr is a non-confessional, Islamic (i.e. neither exclusively Shīʿī nor Sunnī), and esoteric genre composed in a revelatory mode—usually phrased in terms of *kashf* or *ruʾyā*—that is primarily concerned with the "Final Hour" (*al-sāʿah*). As an esoteric genre, its otherwise inscrutable and preternatural content (*ghayb*) is generally presented in terms of gematria codes and symbols (*rumūz*) and therefore necessitates the inclusion of occult methodology, in particular lettrism, to divine its enigmatic content. Lastly, *jafr* overlaps with "dynastic destinies" literature (*hidthān al-duwal*, *malāḥim*) insofar as it conceives salvation history as a teleological progression of Muslim dynasties towards an ideal end (*eschaton*).[47]

One is invited to compare this definition with previous attempts. For example, MacDonald offers the following characterization:

> There developed very early in Shīʿite [*sic*] Islām a belief that the descendants of ʿAlī were in possession of a secret tradition, a body of religious and political esoteric knowledge covering all things to the end of the world.[48]

Toufic Fahd's opening description is thus:

> The particular veneration which, among the Shīʿas [*sic*], the members of the Prophet's family enjoy, is at the base of the belief that the descendants of Fāṭima have inherited certain privileges inherent in Prophethood; prediction of the future and of the destinies of nations and dynasties is one of these privileges. The Shīʿī conception of prophecy, closely connected with that of the ancient gnosis . . . made the prophetic afflatus pass from Adam to Muḥammad and from Muḥammad to the ʿAlids.[49]

The definition proposed in the present article is distinct for two reasons. First, it shakes off the coil of confessional characterizations. Second, it is functionally precise because it identifies in descending order the goal (foreseeing the future in

47. For an early observation of occult sciences in service of deciphering esoteric *ghayb*, see MacDonald, "Al-Ghayb."

48. MacDonald, "Djafr."

49. Fahd, "Djafr." And see also Fahd, *Divination*, 219–24.

relation to the End of Time), medium (esoteric initiation into or supernatural revelation of *ghayb*), and practical application (dynastic history/propaganda). All three of these elements are observed in *jafr*ist literature. The occult sciences used to decipher the actual content of the vatic visions should be understood of a second order and therefore not synonymous with the esoteric nature of *jafr*. To wit, lettrism is a tool used in decoding revelation; the revelation is not a function of lettrism.

In this regard, this new definition parallels nicely with, but is still distinct from, the common definition of eschatological apocalypses accepted in Jewish and Christian studies:

> An apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.[50]

Much like the eschatological visions in *Daniel* and *Revelation* and the extra-canonical apocalypses of *Enoch*, 4 *Ezra*, 2 *Baruch*—to name a few—, *jafr* is also a pseudonymous "scribal phenomenon."[51] What is more, it also shares the characteristic of being esoteric, by which I mean its divinatory and eschatological assertions are fundamentally concerned with *ghayb*, a preternatural body of knowledge that can only be apprehended by the spiritually exalted like Ṣūfīs and initiated adepts like occult scholars of lettrism and astrology.

Of course, dogmatically speaking, *ghayb* is understood as that divinely "Unseen" or "Ineffable" (hence *ghayb*) aspect of wisdom known only unto God. The Qurʾān reminds us that "[God] does not disclose His ineffability (*ghaybihi*) to anyone."[52] But one should distinguish between theoretical principle and historical practice. One may recall that Islam is also (in)famously aniconic, but that did not stop centuries of artists producing marvelous depictions of Muḥammad

50. Collins, "Morphology," 9.

51. Smith, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," 140. For a fundamental work that discusses all these texts, see Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*.

52. Q 72:26.

and his companions. Thus, we can interpret the Qurʾānic description of *ghayb* not as a categorical prohibition but rather as a challenge for a community subject to a historical paradigm of teleological salvation history. The future is paradoxically known only unto God but still apprehensible through periodic tears in the transcendental tapestry. This proposition is observed as a historical reality when one examines the charismatic principle of *karāmah* endowed to the Imāms as well as unto the Ṣūfī "saints" (*awliyāʾ*), such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Bisṭāmī and many, many others.[53] This shared terminology is indicative of parallel tracks within a singular religious system (read: Islam). In tandem, both Shīʿī and Ṣūfī theoreticians articulated a lexicon of breaking a presumed 'natural order.' Thereby, they approximated a method of penetrating supernatural hierarchies of knowledge in a doxological context wherein the door of prophecy was ostensibly sealed shut.[54] The key both parties fashioned to unlock the doors of the inscrutable cosmos (*ghayb*) is necessarily a bicephalic esoteric-occult tool. *Jafr* as a mode of approximating revelation—that peculiar fissure God occasionally opened in the membrane separating the sublunar and celestial spheres—thus emerges as the esoteric paradigm *sui generis*. Conversely put, *jafr* is the mold from which that esoteric-occult key was forged. As such, this tool could be plausibly attributed to the Imāms and was in fact unproblematically employed by the Ṣūfīs. To better understand this aspect of *jafr* as an eschatological-mystical genre, let us now turn to *ToN*, the primary text at the focus of this article, and the historical context that generated its production.

53. The etymology of *karāmah* is not certain, but there is reason to believe that either it is a serendipitous phonological and semantic approximation of the Greek "charisma" (*χάρισμα*) or it is a direct calque that was later construed as the verbal noun of "to be generous" (*karuma*). See Gardet, "Karāma," np. The *locus classicus* for the Shīʿī theology of the exclusive *karāmah* of the Imāms is al-Ḥillī's *Minhāj al-karāmah*, *passim*. For an overview of *karāmah* in Ṣūfī discourse, see Gramlich, *Wunder der Freunde Gottes*, 19–58.

54. Ibn al-ʿArabī notably questioned the boundaries of man's "rational capacity" (*al-quwwah al-ʿaqliyyah*) to apprehend reality at all. Thus, the concept of a natural order is undermined. Similarly, the hierarchy of "truth" (*ḥaqīqah*) is one in which the seemingly "impossible in the sublunar plane" (*al-mustaḥīl fī al-dār al-dunyā*) is (simultaneously?) feasible and "happening" (*wāqiʿ*) in the "realm of truth" (*arḍ al-ḥaqīqah*). See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, vol. II, 100, 273. Needless to say.

2. A Stranger Kind of Sufism: Ibn al-ʿArabī, Eschatological Expectation, and *ToN*

I now propose to demonstrate how Sufism came to produce a new style of *jafr* that was more explicitly linked with the idea of renewal and imperial propaganda. First, this process of developing a mystical articulation of Islam's unique apocalyptic eschatological genre consequently led to the incorporation of the character known as the "renewer of the age" (*mujaddid al-zaman*) and, by extension, the concept of "renovation" (*tajdīd*) into *jafr* itself. The leading figures of this transformation are Aḥmad b. al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bistāmī (d. 858/1454). Though the connection may not be self-evident, the concept of a spiritual and cosmic renewer for the Islamic *ummah* served well for various dynasties' aspirations in the post-classical (i.e. post-1258) context of Islamic imperial history.[55] This point of fact does not, however, dismiss *jafr* from remaining an esoteric genre. It would be myopic to dismiss esoteric practices for not fitting some idealized notion of hidden societies, hidden modes of knowledge, and limited personal applications.[56]

Moreover, such a definition of esotericism for the Islamic context also ignores the historical conditions of sponsorship and/or attempts at circulating the texts themselves. Quite the contrary, esotericism is an epistemological category that rests on certain principles, paradigms, and authorial orientations. The communal orientation of Ṣūfī esoteric texts like al-Bisṭāmī's *Sun of the Horizons*,[57]

55. Erika Glassen, "Krisenbewußtsein," 167–69. This point is made most clearly for the Ottoman context in the introductory pages of Flemming, "Ṣāḥib-Ḳirān," 43–45. Here, one will note the theme of social catastrophes, disease, and unrest combined with the approaching millennium and Ottoman victories. For a trans-Islamic imperial analysis between the Timurds and Mughals in particular, see Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*.

56. Cornell H. Fleischer, "Lawgiver," 159–77; Şen, "Astrology," 168–69. Şen's focus is on the use of occult sciences, especially astrology, for imperial ends. The principle is the same. An esoteric genre like *jafr* which relies on occult methods can and was employed to support the Ottomans' claims to cosmic sovereignty. For a comparative study for the European context, see Westman, "Astronomer's Role," 121–27.

57. Coulon, "Building Al-Būnī's Legend," 4.

Aḥmed Bīcān Yazıcıoğlu's *The Book of the End* (*Kitābü'l-münteha*),[58] Mevlanā ʿĪsā's *Compendium of Secrets* (*Cāmiʿü'l-meknūnāt*),[59] and, of course, Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Tree of Nuʿmān*, to name a few, are all testaments to this functional aspect of esoteric texts in the Ottoman empire.

In fact, Ṣūfīs had begun to repackage eschatological prophecies early on. Its foremost representative was, at least for the Ottomans, the Andalusian Ṣūfī Ibn al-ʿArabī, also known as "the Red Sulphur" (*al-kibrīt al-asfar*), an epithet that betokens his engagement with esoteric *and* occult topics. The mystical stamp imbued the fatidic pronouncements, like those in *ToN*, with greater appeal in an era that was awaiting redemption and, of course, spiritual renewal. As Gerald Elmore observes, "In the hands of the Ṣūfīs, eschatology became a potent device for rationalizing an immediate return to the original source of timeless truth."[60] A further discussion of the link of Sufism and eschatological prophecy will help better contextualize *ToN*.

Ibn al-ʿArabī was born in 560/1165 in Murcia, a city in southern Andalusia under Almohad (524–667/1130–1269) control. A precocious child of profound spirituality, Ibn al-ʿArabī is known to have experienced visions in his youth. Equally important, he took up study with several prominent religious scholars of Andalusia.[61] In particular, Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿUraynī, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Qaysī, and Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAdawī are mentioned in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *The Book of Holiness* (*Kitāb rūḥ al-quds*) by name. Tellingly, Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAdawī, Ahmed Ateş notes, was "skilled at revealing the future."[62] Given this background, it may come as no surprise that Ibn al-ʿArabī in his adulthood would continue to experience numerous visions (*ruʾyā*), revelations (*kashf*), celestial journeys (*safar*), and even theophanies

58. SK Ms Kılıç Ali Paşa 630. See also Grenier, "Yazıcıoğlus," 7–10.

59. Flemming, "Ğāmiʿ ül-meknûnât," 79–92.

60. Elmore, "Millennial' Motif," 412.

61. Addas, *Quest*, 20. Footnote 42 importantly indicates that the portion of text relevant to the childhood vision is missing in the Bulaq edition of 1329 AH, but occurs in a later edition and in a separate text as well.

62. Ateş, "Ibn Al-ʿArabī."

(*tajalliyāt*).[63] St. Teresa de Ávila (d. 1588) and St. John of the Cross (d. 1591) themselves could have only dreamed of such a constant barrage of encounters with the Divine. Essentially, one should define the information Ibn al-ʿArabī receives through his intimate communication with, and travels (*asfār*) in, the celestial sphere as attaining intimate knowledge of *ghayb* discussed in section I.

As Osman Yahya notes, Ibn al-ʿArabī in his magnum opus *The Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*) takes stock of his intellectual interests and divides them into a catalogue of topics spanning six major themes: 1) doctrines (*maʿārif*), 2) spiritual exercises (*muʿāmalāt*), 3) Ṣūfī states (*aḥwāl*), 4) degrees of spiritual perfection (*manāzil*), 5) spiritual union with the Godhead (*munāzalāt*), 6) and (*maqāmāt*), which Yahya translates as "esoteric mansions" (*les demeures ésotériques*).[64] Perhaps an instance of *traduttore*, *traditore*, Yahya's word choice is quite revealing. No doubt influenced by his own deep familiarity with Ibn al-ʿArabī's work, Yahya here points to an aspect of the Great Master's personal interests.

Yahya also makes reference to a work, the *Catalogue* (*Fihris al-muʾallafāt* or *Fihris al-muṣannafāt*), which figures as the second, and logically necessary, source for any historical analysis of Ibn al-ʿArabī's work. Dictated nigh a decade before Ibn al-ʿArabī's death in 638/1240, the *Fihris* is the Ṣūfī master's personal list of authorial works, and therefore a handbook for discerning between canonical and pseudepigraphical works up to the year 627 AH/1230 CE. Here, he provides a tripartite division of his *oeuvre* as follows: 1) prophetic sayings (*ḥadīt*), 2) "ésotérisme" (lit. "secrets", *asrār*), and 3) metaphysics (*ḥaqāʾiq*).[65] At first one may, albeit wrongly, presume that the master Ṣūfī himself truly believed his vast intellectual output could be reduced to three simple categories. The complexity of his *muʾallafāt* does

63. For example, see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrāʾ ilā maḳām al-asrā*, Istanbul, Bayezıt Kütüphanesi Ms Veliyüddin 1628; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-asfār*, Konya Yusuf Ağa Kütüphanesi Ms 4859.

64. Yahya, "Histoire et classification," 108. The translation may be influenced by the concept of "mansions" (*moradas*) in St. Teresa de Ávila's mystical treatise *Castillo interior*, a.k.a. *Las Moradas*, the latter title rendered in French translation as *Le livre des demeures*.

65. Yahya, 107. Ibn al-ʻArabī, *Fihrist*, HHough Ms 225 341v-342r. Yahya also approximates the above translations: *ésotérisme* for *ʻulūm al-asrār,* and *métaphysique* for *ʻulūm al-ḥaqāʿiq*.

not permit such a simple taxonomy. Yet the retrospective and didactic authorial stances Ibn al-ʿArabī takes in the *Catalogue* are two factors that illuminate this tripartite classification and help us discern how, or for what, this prodigious mind wanted to be remembered. Looking back on his own intellectual productivity, we can see Ibn al-ʿArabī sending a certain message about the nature of Sufism. The Islamic mystical tradition is, at its heart, a *mélange* of orthodox Sunnī sciences, such as *ḥadīth*, inscrutable secrets of the celestial sphere, and quintessentially Ṣūfī musings on intellectual-spiritual union with the ultimate Truth, *ḥaqīqah*, who is God. The centrality of secrets (*asrār*) should be read as a taxonomic marker for his profound interest in esoteric sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-gharībah*, *ʿilm al-ghayb*, *sīmyāʾ*).

In addition to simply receiving communications from the realm of *ghayb*, Ibn al-ʿArabī also wrote extensively on lettrism, the occult toolbox used in *ToN* mentioned at the outset of this essay. In *The Meccan Revelations*, he lays out at length what is arguably one of the defining treatises of lettrism in Sufism.[66] He goes so far as to state that it is "a desideratum for the Ṣūfī" (*ḍarūrah li-ṣ-ṣūfī*) who wishes to truly progress in his spiritual life.[67] This discussion is summarized again in volume III of the *Revelations* in the context of the eschatological concept of the mystical "pole" (*quṭb*) and their "symbols" (*rumūz*).[68] What distinguishes Ibn al-ʿArabī's treatise from previous Ṣūfī musings about the supernatural nature of the Arabic alphabet is that the Red Sulphur, much like his Andalusian predecessor Ibn Masarrah (d. 319/931), argues that knowledge and mastery of *ḥurūf* unlocks the building blocks of the universe and, by extension, the course of historical events. Ultimately, the renewer and the pole and the eschatological Hour should be understood as coetaneous phenomena. As Michael Ebstein succinctly puts it, Ibn al-ʿArabī created a Ṣūfī science of letters that penetrates the "cosmogonic-cosmological dimension" of God's creation, an aspect that is

66. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, vol. I, 225–682, esp. 640–46.
67. *ibid*., *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, 30. For the specific sections dealing with lettrology, see *ibid*., 232ff.
68. *Ibid*., *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, vol. III, 201–8.

quite similar to Shīʿī-Ismāʿīlī lettrist theories as well.[69] What connects Andalusian Ṣūfīs with Shīʿī-Ismāʿīlī lettrist cosmogony is essentially a shared reliance on "Neoplatonic schemes."[70] Again we observe how the confessional division of esoteric sciences is difficult to maintain in light of the evidence. Consequently, and again in striking similarity with ʿAlid theology about the exclusive divinatory powers of the imams, Ibn al-ʿArabī divides the vast ocean of Ṣūfī knowledge (*maʿrifah*) into a *bāṭin-ẓāhir* dichotomy: there is general knowledge (*ʿāmmah*) for the masses and there is specialized knowledge (*ḫāṣṣah*) for the few elect. The latter category is especially dear to Ibn al-ʿArabī seeing as "divine esoteric knowledge" (*al-maʿrifah al-ilāhiyyah al-ghaybiyyah*) is synonymous with "prophetic" and "saintly" *gnosis* (*yakhtaṣṣ bihi al-nabī wa-l-walī*).[71] Likewise, as the two evidently go hand in hand, Ibn al-ʿArabī provides a lengthy discussion of astrology, its effects, and its place as a science of the select few, of the pure initiates of a higher state of being, spirituality, and consciousness.[72] One aspect of sublime, saintly consciousness is apprehension of the *eschaton* of universal salvation.

Consequently, it is not surprising that Ibn al-ʿArabī was inclined to prophesize about the Final Hour. One of the most illustrative examples thereof is his *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (*Kitāb ʿanqāʾ mughrib*).[73] The text is, foremost, a response to the End-Times expectations of an Islamic world in a state of (ostensible) decline, or at least a material existence in need of spiritual rebooting. According to a popular prophetic *ḥadīth*, "Verily, God will send to this community at the

69. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 78.

70. Ebstein, 92. I do not, however, agree with Ebstein that Ibn al-ʿArabī's lettrist mysticism is actually derived from Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonist theology. Comparative similarities do not generate clean genealogies of order. A shared Neoplatonic intellectual background among Ṣūfīs (east and west), Jewish mystics, the Sunnī philosophers and the Shīʿī theosophers is well attested. It was in the intellectual drinking water. For example, see Saif, "From *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* to *Shams al-maʿārif*," 312.

71. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt,* vol. I, 140.

72. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ibid*., 52–58.

73. O. Yahya notes that the *Gryphon* especially appealed to Ottoman Damascene scholars. Out of the circa four known commentaries, two exegetes were Turkish jurists living in Damascus in the tenth/sixteenth century. See Yahya, "Histoire et classification," 159–61.

outset of every hundred years one who shall renew its religion (*yujaddid laha dīnahā*)."[74] In the previous century, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the "Proof of Islam" (*ḥujjat al-Islām*), had invoked the concept as part of his theological project of "reviving religious sciences" (*iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*).[75] Ibn al-ʿArabī, however, further developed al-Ghazālī's notion of "renewal" (*tajdīd*) as discussed above. In his own age beset with the problems of collapsing empires at both geographic extremes of the Islamic world—one in Andalusia and the other in Mesopotamia—Ibn al-ʿArabī reconceived it as a more explicitly eschatological term. That is, the continual reification of Islam as a religious system is no longer a process of unforeseeable iterations *ad infinitum*. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is evidently a hierophantic proclamation of limited renewal. The *eschaton* of Islamic revelation—i.e. the Hour, "the appointed time" (*al-ajl al-musammā*), the Day of Judgment, etc.—marks the logical arrival of a final, and supreme, renewer (*mujaddid*).[76] Enter the mystical pole who is a harbinger of the Mahdī, the latter being an ideal End-Times Islamic warrior-king.[77]

74. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abi Dāwūd*, 469, no. 4291.

75. Gianotti, *Unspeakable Doctrine*. Of course, one should also recall the degree to which al-Ghazālī discussed eschatology in his *Book of Death* (*Kitāb al-mawt*). See al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-mawt*. Note that the *Precious Pearl* (*al-Durrah al-fākhirah*), another eschatological treatise, is pseudepigraphically attributed to al-Ghazālī. The text I have referenced, but which does not discuss the apocryphal authorship, is Ps.-al-Ghazālī, *al-Durrah al-fākhirah*. In fact, al-Ghazālī is also listed as one of the (many) pseudepigraphic authors of a text titled *Daqā'iq al-akhbār*, which is another variation for the same text more commonly known in Western scholarship as the *Conditions of Resurrection* (*Aḥwāl al-qiyāmah*). Tottoli, "Muslim Eschatological Literature," 471.

76. For the additional concept of "the appointed time," see Q 2:282.

77. See Cook, *Muslim Apocalyptic*, 226–27, 322. Please note that the Islamic Mahdī is distinct from both the Jewish Messiah and the Christian concept of the apocalyptic Jesus. The latter, with whom the Mahdī is often erroneously conflated, is an "all-conquering sovereign" (Χριστός Παντοκράτωρ, Christ Pantokrator) and, as per the *Revelation of John*, the Judge at the End of Time (19:10–12; 20:11–15). Though the Mahdī is an ideal human Muslim ruler, he is neither a supernatural king nor a heavenly judge. There are greater parallels between the Islamic concept of the Mahdī and the Jewish Messiah-as-*Melekh* (i.e. king). Gershom Scholem delineates the distinction between Jewish and Christian messianic ideas in his "Messianische Ideen," *passim*. Perhaps the key distinction between Jewish and Islamic conceptions of a Messiah as warrior-king-renewer is the social and (material) historical emphasis over the Christian inclination

Conveniently, a final hundred-year cycle in the seventh century AH would align with the advent of a mystical *mujaddid* who also embodied the final "Seal of Saints" (*khatm al-awliyā'*), a mystical locution that intentionally mirrors the traditional identification of Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" (*khātim al-nabiyyīn*).[78] In the *Fabulous Gryphon*, Ibn al-ʿArabī opens up the oracular tractate with a poem titled "The Sealed Vessel" (*al-Wiʿā' al-makhtūm*) in which he relies on a lettrist code—*khā-fā-jīm* (600 + 3 + 80 = 683 AH)—to foretell the advent of the Mahdī in the 683 AH/1284 CE.[79] Thus, the seventh century is conceptualized as an eschatological age of rejuvenation and, conveniently, the eminent doctor of Islamic mysticism is the self-proclaimed herald; the Red Sulphur is the Seal of the Saints. Even though Ibn al-ʿArabī's prophecy did not come to fruition, historical evidence is replete with visions that fail to come true yet remain perennially applicable, relevant, and appealing to later generations. It is, therefore, no wonder that Ibn al-ʿArabī's fatidic pronouncements appealed to later Ottoman proponents of cosmic sovereignty. With this in mind, let us now turn to the *ToN*.

Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī begins *ToN*, in no unclear terms, with a vatic pronouncement concerning future events:

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toward private and spiritual salvation (ibid., 193–94).

78. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futuḥāt,* vol. I, 64, vv. 9–11; Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 128–46; Elmore, "Millennial Motif," 411. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, the third AH/tenth CE century "theosophy," as Bernd Radtke prefers to refer to his Ṣūfī-esque writings, is the intellectual progenitor of the idea of the "Seal." It appears in al-Tirmidhī's *Book of Saintly Conduct* (*Kitāb sīrat al-awliyā'*). See Radtke, *Al-Ḥakim at-Tirmiḏī*; al-Tirmidhī, *Drei Schriften des Theosophen von Tirmiḏ*. The first volume contains the Arabic texts, whereas the second volume contains the German translation and much valuable notation. Importantly, Ibn al-ʿArabī develops the concept well beyond what al-Tirmidhī himself ever had in mind. Radtke and O'Kane, *Sainthood*, 8. For the Qurʾānic origins of the title "Seal of the Prophets" (*khātim al-nabiyyīn*), see Q 33:40. On the history of the locution "Seal of the Prophets/Prophethood" and of the development of the Islamic tradition of Muḥammad as the "Seal," see Stroumsa, "Seal"; Rubin, "Seal of Prophets." The distinction in vocabulary is crucial here. Though one may debate the semantic difference between prophecy and revelation in English, the semantic and theological weight of both terms is of serious weight for Islamic dogma. Muḥammad received both prophecy and revelation; all other recipients of information about the supernatural world could only claim revelation or vision.

79. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 233.

> For we have seen into the future with regards to our own place in time about what shall be and [that which we have seen] comprises all events. We have limited [our epistle] to that which is the most important, such as the rise and fall of dynasties, the advent of wars, apocalyptic calamities (*fitan*), inflation, disease and the like.[80]

Having the effect of immediately captivating the reader/audience, the text departs from the more typical style of the real Ibn al-ʿArabī. Here, we are confronted both with simplicity of language and boldness of topic. One need not move through, say, a cryptic poem that obfuscates in turns the intent of its author as in the *Fabulous Gryphon*. The matter-of-fact opening is somewhat reminiscent of the other, more famous Apocalypse of biblical fame:

> [1]The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, [2]who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. . . . [10] I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet [11]saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." [81]

There is power in brevity. Informing the audience outright about one's hierophantic credentials and exactly what one purports to reveal best ensures that a wider audience is reached. Esoteric eschatology need not always exclude at every line or on every folio. It can be negotiated based on the goals of the composer and the methods he employs. Again, esoteric texts are not just about hidden societies and hidden modes of knowledge, but they also belong to a network of orientations, both public and private, and their principles can vacillate between the extremely inscrutable to the moderately comprehensible depending on the author's motives and goals.

What is particularly relevant to note is that *ToN*'s apocalypse pertains to the fate of nations and the various calamities that may befall dynasties. It is practically impossible to mistake this text as anything other than a political apocalypse; its primary audience should be those with access to the Sublime Porte

80. *ToN,* fols. 2a-b. Ar. — *fa-raʾaynā al-mustaqbal bi-ʿtibār waqtinā al-ladhī naḥnu fihi.*
81. Coogan et al., *Bible*, 2153–52, 1:1–2, 10–11.

for, in what follows, there is much those in power should know. To make this text more explicitly *jafr*-esque, the pseudonymous author also indicates *ab initio* that his text is doubly esoteric. Following the perfunctory praise of the prophet and God, the text lays out clearly what it is all about: "[the epistle, *al-risālah*] is comprised of the events of the age that are the result of the effect of celestial conjunction (*iqtirān*) and the movement of the planets."[82] This is an important detail for God has specified that each nation (*qaṭr*) is linked to a specific planet, the effects of that celestial body determining the course of historical events.[83] Much like Ibn al-ʿArabī who thought himself to be the harbinger of the Mahdī in the seventh century AH, our pseudepigraphic Ibn al-ʿArabī also touches on the advent of the Islamic End-Times super-Muslim. Now, however, his appearance will take place in the eleventh century AH. The reader/audience is herewith ferried across the chiliastic chasm and into the final phase of cosmic history.

More precisely, the "conjunction" of which the author speaks refers to that awesome tenth conjunction (*al-qirān al-ʿāshir*) of the planets Saturn and Jupiter—or more curiously for *ToN,* Saturn and Mars—which was precisely calculated to occur every 960 solar (990 lunar) years,, a century after the Ottomans' momentous conquest of Constantinople in 857/1453.[84] Thus the author, having done his astrological homework, specifically remarks that, "we have seen [the events that will happen in the eleventh century] beginning in the tenth century."[85] This is a

82. *ToN*, fol. 1b. Ar. — *min dhikr ḥawādith al-zamān al-munbaʿithah min taʾthirāt al-iqtirān wa-ḥarakāt al-aflāk.*

83. *ToN*, fol. 2a. Ar. — *qad khaṣṣaṣ subḥānahu kull qaṭr min aqṭār al-mamlakah al-imkāniyyah fi al-dawrah al-adamiyyah bi-ḥawādith yakhtaṣṣ bihā dhālik al-qaṭr min taʾthirāt kawkabihi.*

84. When two of the three (i.e. Saturn and Jupiter or Saturn and Mars) are in conjunction, they are also referred to as the "unlucky planets" (*al-naḥsayn*). Loth, "Al-Kindi Als Astrolog," 265, 271, and in Arabic on 273. Saturn and Jupiter, however, are more often cited in conjunction (*qirān*) as the "two high planets" (*al-ʿuluwiyyān*). I have yet to come across the conjunction of Saturn and Mars as being referred to as such, even though Mars is a "high" planet, too. Further astrological research must be undertaken to better comprehend this innovation on the part of Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī. The corresponding three "low" (*al-safliyyah*) planets are Venus, Mercury, and the Moon (*zuhrah*, *ʿuṭārid*, *al-qamr*, respectively). See Loth, 268, fn. 1.

85. *ToN*, fol. 2b. Ar. — *fa-raʾaynā al-awlā dhikr mā yataʿalliq bi-l-qirān al-ʿāshir li-zuhūr muʿẓam al-ḥawādith fihimā wa naẓarnā ilā ibtidāʾ dhālik fi awwal al-qarn al-ʿāshir.*

logical position to take. After all, the prophet himself had already specified what exactly takes place at the very end of history. There would be nothing particularly unique in recounting common knowledge. Yes, the Mahdī will come. Yes, the Dajjāl, Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj all make an appearance. Yes, Jesus, too, will reappear, the much anticipated *parousia* of the Christians, to battle the false messiah.[86]

Yet, we are still not in the plenary mode of *jafr* prophecy. One is first assured of the mantic mode of "I have seen..." because, as indicated above, Ibn al-ʿArabī was known for receiving revelation and also undertaking spiritual excursions into the world of *ghayb*. Next, the revelation is given the additional credential of being objectively verified by astrological knowledge, albeit with a mystical veil. What remains is introducing lettrism: "When the number of years *bā-kāf-zā* [2 + 20 + 900 = 922/1516] in the prophetic *hijrī* calendar has finished," the author writes, "which is equivalent to *zā-bā-yā* according to *jafr*. . . . [87]

Thus, the reader is confronted in the first two folios with a trinity of qualifications that secure the *jafr*-icity, if one will permit the neologism, of eschatological prophecy. Ṣūfī-*bāṭinī* access to *ghayb* is implicitly secured through affiliation with Ibn al-ʿArabī. Astrological references to the movement and influence of the celestial sphere is another calling card of legitimacy that links the text up with the scientific milieu regnant in Ottoman society and which appealed to the court. As such, the apocalyptic literature produced in the period, "comprehends in its various iterations everything from metaphysics, cosmogony to numerology, astrology and magic."[88] Lettrism is of critical importance for identifying

86. Compare, for example, *ToN* with the non-prophetic Ottoman illustrated handbook for the End-Times called the *Conditions of Resurrection* (*Aḥvāl-i ḳıyāmet*, SK Ms Hafid Efendi 139; SB Ms Or.oct. 1596). This text is just an *enchiridion* of prophetic traditions sprinkled with Qur'ānic citation for good orthodox measure. It should not to be confused with the previously cited genre in Arabic titled commonly *Aḥwāl al-qiyāmah*.

87. *ToN*, fols. 2b, 3a-b. Ar. — *idhā tamm ʿadad bā-kāf-zā sinīn min tārīkh al-hijriyyah al-nabawiyyah wa-hiya ʿadad zā-bā-yā jafriyyah* . . . .

88. Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 31.

this text as a *jafr*ist revelation.[89] The cryptic symbolism of the Arabic alphabet betokened an esoteric, and therefore true, source of universal knowledge beyond the ken of the average, carbon-based life form. Whoever the author was, he was a keen student of Ibn al-ʿArabī, Sufism, and the occult sciences of his time.

One can now use the above calculation *bā-ḳāf-ẓā* [2 + 20 + 900 = 922/1516] to define the historical period in which this text was composed. That is, suspending one's potential belief in the legitimacy of prophecy, the text is clearly of the kind generally termed *vaticinium ex eventu*, a common mantic mode across religious traditions. Given the author's knowledge of Sultan Selīm I's (r. 918–926/1512–1520) conquest of Damascus in 1516, we can argue for a *terminus post quem*.[90] The author quite clearly knew of the event. Historical fact is, much like the esoteric credentials mentioned above, laid out explicitly for the reader. On folio 3a, the visionary pen writes, "When the days of *qāf jīm* come to an end, the *mīm Salīm* will arise (*qāmat*)." At this and many other junctures throughout the text one finds the lettrist complexity compromised, either due to only a superficial apprehension of the science or simply because Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī wanted to water down the text enough to reach the target, non-specialist audience at the imperial court. Specifically, the *qāf jīm* here, given the previous dating, indubitably refers to the Mamluk Sultan Qānṣūḥ al-Ghūrī al-Jarkasī (r. 907–922/1501–1516), the penultimate leader of the Circassian/Burjī Sultanate in Mamluk Egypt.[91] Selīm I defeated Qānṣūḥ at the battle of Aleppo in 1516, thus paving the way for the final Ottoman expansion into North Africa.

What matters here, however, is that the ominous letter *mīm* is conjoined with the verb *qām* (to arise). Given the eschatological orientation of the text, the author is clearly intimating Mahdī-*esque* attributes to Selīm's conquests. In fact, the

89. Melvin-Koushki, "Astrology," 144.

90. Gril, "Enigma," 52.

91. The scant biographical information on Qānṣūḥ is conflicting. Either he is an arbitrary despot or the pious patron of poetry with Sufi inclinations. Yalçïn, "'Dîvan-ï Qânṣûh Al-Ğûrî,'" 1–43.Though his body was never found, his mausoleum-*cum*-mosque complex in Cairo still remains to this date as one of the architectural landmarks of the City Victorious.

letter *mīm* is of key import, albeit with shifting symbolic reference. The context cited here quite clearly elevates Selīm to status of cosmic authority; it would be too much, however, to suggest that the Ottoman Sultan was the anticipated Mahdī. This point is made all the clearer further down folio 3a:

> We have predicated our prophecy on the advent of the letter *sīn* from the progeny of ʿUthmān, who is descended from Nuʿmān. . . . And his dynasty shall endure until the appearance of the *mīm al-khatm*.[92]

Several remarks should be made here.

First, the *sīn* is, obviously, Selīm. His name has already been written out in full; his lettrist designation here is made explicit via the genealogical tree. Second, Selīm's conquests will push the boundaries of the empire into the Holy Land (i.e. Greater Syria), North Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, the Ottomans under Selīm will take over stewardship not only of Damascus and Jerusalem, both also of Mecca and Medina. The entire sacred topography of Islamic eschatological imagination is herewith subsumed under one Sultan. Conflicting *ḥadīth* regarding where the End of Times will actually occur are no longer problematic. It is all under the authority of God's chosen dynasty, Turks though they may be. Osman's "imperial encampment" (Ot. *ordu*)—to borrow a metonym from Ottoman dynastic vocabulary—essentially covered all the relevant eschatological hotspots, thus rendering the borders of sacred space and cosmic time coterminous with the geo-political outline of the Ottomans' terrestrial campsite. This fact was all the more obvious since the conquest of Constantinople, an event that set up a cosmic domino effect. No other competing empire—Umayyad, Abbasid, Seljuk, Timurid, Mamluk, Safavid, etc.—ever reached such awesome heights. Consequently, our apocalyptic visionary narrates at turns a fitting prophecy in a pseudo-lettrist fashion. These victories pave the way for the "*mīm* the Seal" (*mīm al-khatm*). One should now distinguish between two apocalyptic *mīms*. First, there is the *mīm Salīm*, who emerges later

92. *ToN*, fol. 3a.

in the text as "*mīm* the Herald, the Lieutenant" (*mīm al-ṣadr al-qāʾim maqām*). Second, with "*mīm* the Seal" Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī invokes the classic sense of *khatm*, the Mahdī of End-Times expectation and the counterpart to another Seal: the Prophet Muḥammad. We will return to this point shortly.

Similar to Jewish and Christian salvation history, Islamic anticipation of the much awaited Mahdī coincides with a "renewal of the earth" and a renewal of Abrahamic faith *tout court*.[93] Having already taken Constantinople, a new Catholic Rome (*Rumiyyah al-Kubrā*) fell within the scope of eschatological targets. The *ghāzī* sultanate thus, again, stood ready for a further *jihād* "in the path of God" (*fī sabīli -llāh*). Part of the consummation of this religious war is a key architectural project: "the Temple (*bayt al-maqdis*) will be restored as it was in the time of Solomon son of David."[94] More research needs to be done on the place of Jerusalem in Ibn al-ʿArabī's work and Ottoman apocalyptic culture. For now, it is sufficient to remark that this undertaking was meant to solidify Islam's—and by extension the Ottomans'—position as the one true faith. The Ottoman armies would build as a public service project the New Jerusalem that symbolized in stone their divine election.

Picking back up the discussion of the significance of the letter *mīm*, it is important to note that a further layer of religious meaning is herewith hinted at, albeit one that is somewhat denuded of any deep crypto-symbolism. By mentioning the *mīm al-khatm* the cosmic symmetry of Islamic religious history moves into view. Muḥammad, according to traditional interpretation, was the "Seal of Prophecy." In a verse of cryptic portent, the revelatory voice declares: "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men but he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets (*khātim al-nabiyyīn*) and God knows all." (Q 33:40)

93. Collins, "Morphology," 10.

94. *ToN*, fol. 3b. Ar. — *wa-fatḥ al-Rumiyyah al-Kubrā wa-hadm bayʿatihā wa-l-qiyām bi-ʿarḍ al-jihād fī sabili –llāh wa-ʿimārat bayt al-maqdis ʿalā ḥukm mā kān ʿalayhi fī ʿahd ḥaḍrat sayyidinā Sulaymān b. Dāwūd ʿalayhimā al-salām.*

The Arabian prophet's birth is traditionally dated to the April 20, 571. As is common enough in religious tradition, this date also coincides with a conspicuous event in the heavens. In the same year, a little more than a month after the prophet's birth, the major conjunction (*qirān*) of the planets Saturn and Jupiter was observed. Behold the birth of a new religion (*qirān al-millah*), which Otto Loth perfectly defines as the "conjunction of the Arabian theocracy *par excellence*."[95] Saturn and Jupiter are two "high planets" (*al-ʿulwiyān*) that form part of a planetary trinity—the third planet being Mars, which figures more prominently in *ToN*. The conjunction of these spinning giants has the longest orbital period of revolution, which is sufficiently long for making astro-apocalyptic predictions. This requires some explanation. One can divide the various conjunctions in three types: small, middle, and great. Small conjunctions refer to the incidence of celestial orbit every twenty years that unites the revolving planets at 'minor' stations in the zodiac calendar. These smaller conjunctions generally are considered to influence—or predetermine—minor events relevant to political history, such as the death of a ruler, revolts, and other quotidian crises. Middle conjunctions occur on the order of every 240 solar years. In the astrological tradition, these are commonly referred to as uniting within a "triangle" (*muthallatha*, Loth's *Triplicität*, sic), this *terminus technicus* deriving from the diagrammatic division of the zodiacal calendar into four equilateral triangles.[96]

The greatest conjunction within each of these four triangular subdivisions, Saturn and Jupiter (or Saturn and Mars) realign. The portent of this calendric division (quadratic triangulation) bespeaks a greater political significance, such as wars or dynastic coups. The greatest conjunction of them all, however, is on the order of 960 solar years, which is the sum of 4 x 240, i.e. an entire period of planetary revolution. Important to note is the fact that 960 solar years, i.e. the cosmically significant astrological conjunction, when converted into lunar years equals

95. Loth, "Al-Kindi Als Astrolog," 268.
96. Loth, 268–69.

approximately 990 years. Thus, the conjunction of Saturn and Mars for Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī is in accordance with the Islamic calendar year and critically brings one nigh a round millennium. Remember, the auspicious apocalyptic writing is not on the walls, but rather in the firmament of the night sky. If Islamic salvation history were drawn as a straight line between two points, a kind of salvific symmetry is achieved. Muḥammad is the beginning of God's final revelation and the Ottomans are the antipodal fulfillment of Muḥammad's prophecy. In short, the Ottomans will usher in the eschaton, hence the conjunction is not about the exact calendar year but rather about designating the final age as a broad phase and its guarantors. A chiliastic cycle of apocalyptic proportion is hereby achieved.

Consequently, Ps. Ibn al-ʿArabī addresses the astrological calendar of millennial events:

> And of the cryptic signs *(rumūz)* of the tree, we have said that when the rule of *qāf al-jīm* concludes, *mīm Salīm* will arise, and we mean exactly that. And of the cryptic signs of the tree, the Land of the Quiver (*al-kanānah*, i.e. Egypt) is of exclusive importance due to its status as the site of the throne of kings and it is more worthy of mention than any other (land). And we composed the epistle about the events that take place there and we have indicated that it will come under the dominion (*fī yad*) of the letter *sīn* and will remain under the dominion of his successor until the Great Conjunction (*qirān kabīr*) occurs at the conclusion of the dynasty, when Mars faces Saturn in the final mansion of the constellation Libra (*ākhir darajah min al-mīẓān*).[97]

To drive the point home, the text ensures the reader/audience that this is a rejuvenating conjunction for the *ummah*. The text continues that the confluence of celestial bodies and cryptic characters—designated here as a *sīn* and there as a *mīm* in a lettrist year *bā-kāf-ẓā*—reestablishes a lasting age of justice (*khurūj ʿadl la*

97. *ToN*, fols. 5b–6a. Ar. — *wa-min rumūz al-shajarah al-takhṣīṣ bi-l-kanānah dūn ghayrihā li-kawnihā maḥall kursī al-mulūk wa-aḥaqq bi-l-dhikr min ghayrihā wa-ʿaqadnā al-risālah ʿalā dhikr ḥawādithihā wa-asharnā ilā dukhūlihā fī yad ḥarf sīn wa-biqā'ihā fī yad ʿaqbihi ilā qirān kabīr yaḥṣul fī ākhir darajah min al-mīẓān*. See also *ToN*, fols. 7a ff. for some greater astrological explanation. Fol. 7a also contains a far more complex list of lettrist codes for characters and events that will appear as part of the penultimate events of human history.

khurūj zawāl).[98] This is salvation history *ipsissima verba*. Lest one also mistake *ToN* as a pedestrian apocalypse for the masses, the author reaffirms its *jafr* credentials in esotericizing terms. In a moment of authorial admonition, Ps-Ibn al-ʿArabī reminds us that the method by which the details of the *eschaton* are derived is, of course, from an esoteric (*bāṭin*) science as derived from the preternatural, oracular value of the Arabic alphabet, the *abjad*.[99]

Now, to return to the idea of cosmic symmetry, it may now become clear that Muḥammad's birth signaled—both in the heavens as down here on earth—the advent of a new religion and, equally telling, the terminal phase of salvation history. Again, the great conjunction of two high planets—in *ToN* Saturn and Mars—is a boon for composing astro-apocalyptic schemes of history. Thus, at the antipodal end of the millennial spectrum, Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī recognizes a conspicuous parallel. Just as the Ottomans were repeating the successes of their "righteous predecessors" in faith (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) through conquest, this too must necessarily bespeak God's ultimate plan. Muḥammad's prophetic counterpart, the other *mīm* of salvation history, is likewise a "seal"; the Mahdī brings salvation through cosmic renewal as much as the Messenger of God, Muḥammad, brought salvation through religious reformation. Revelation and religion are ineluctably intertwined with, and predetermined by, the astrological influence of the planets. All of this is according to God's plan, of course. The Qurʾān reminds us that God, "raised up the heavens and set it in balance."[100] The firmament is akin to a well-calibrated mechanism, the adept student of which being capable of comprehending the ticking of its gears as it pertains to human history.

98. *ToN*, fol. 6a. Gril's interpretation of this line cannot be correct. Nowhere does it say that Egypt with be "freed" from the Ottomans. Gril, "Enigma," 53. Rather it should be properly understood that, naturally, human control over the course of events will *per force* give way to a divine dispensation. The Mahdī, not the Sultan in Constantinople, will take over.

99. *ToN*, fol. 6a. Ar.—*ḥaqqaqnāhā tadqiqān shāfiyān wa-khadhafnā al-juzʾiyyāt li-kuthratihā wa-li-kawnihā takhruj min bāṭin kulliyyātihā bi-ṭarīqah makhṣūṣah fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa-l-aʿdād.*

100. Ar.—*wa-s-samāʾa rafaʿahā wa-waḍaʿa –l-mīzān*. Q 55:7. The Qurʾān repeatedly identifies God as setting the phenomena of the observable sky, both day and night. Thus, the planets are placeholders for some greater reality.

III. Why Egypt? A Provisional Answer

It is important to address the question "why" Egypt? The following is a provisional answer. As Denis Gril notes, the text employs the curious appellation of Egypt as the "Land of the Quiver" (*Miṣr kināna Allāh fī ardihi*), which is evocative of a prophetic saying, albeit one not included in any of the canonical *ḥadīth*.[101] More specifically, nowhere else in the eschatological *ḥadīth* is Egypt mentioned as a critical site of kick-starting the apocalypse.[102] A *ḥadīth* cited by al-Sakhāwī (d. 903/1497) makes reference to an earlier, similar *ḥadīth* in which the "Land of Quiver" locution is cited. Al-Sakhāwī cites Ibn Zūlāq (d. ca. 387/997), one of the first historians of Egypt and author of *In Praise of Egypt* (*Faḍā'il Miṣr*), to explain that the curious term "quiver" only suggests that Egypt is blessed by God, a land of riches and bounty. But Ibn Zūlāq makes no reference to Egypt as the "quiver." The term he uses to refer to Egypt is "treasury" (*al-khazā'in*). Thus, al-Sakhāwī is more or less glossing Ibn Zūlāq's notion of Egypt as a "treasury" to be an approximate parallel for the obscure prophetic appellation of Egypt as the "Land of the Quiver." One should note that no eschatological connotation is observed in either of these texts. Moreover, al-Sakhāwī notes that Kaʿb al-Aḥbar (or Kaʿb al-Ḥibr, lit. Rabbi Kaʿb, d. ca. 32/652), the (in)famous Yemeni Jewish convert to Islam and source of the so-called Isrā'iliyyāt, claimed that Egypt is a land "spared from calamities (*al-fitan*)." Such a statement further disqualifies Egypt from being the site of End-Times tribulations.[103] How, then, does Egypt become the site of an Islamic-Ottoman Armageddon? For now, there are two interpretations one can propose.

The first explanation is limited, yet historical and based on the prominence Egypt is given in the text. Specifically, one is told outright at the beginning of the apocalypse that Selīm I's conquest of Mamluk Syria and Egypt is a key victory that will secure the advent of the seal of history: the Mahdī. One may,

101. Gril, "Enigma," 52–53; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasinah*, 609, no. 1029.

102. The usual culprits are the Holy Land with Jerusalem and Damascus, Byzantium with Constantinople, and much less so Muḥammad's homeland with Mecca and Medina.

103. Ar. — *Miṣr balad muʿāfāh min al-fitan*. Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Maqāṣid*, 609, no. 1029.

therefore, argue that the author sought to curry favor with the new Ottoman overlords, especially if he were an Egyptian local.[104] Describing Selīm's victory as an act of liberation and a key piece in the puzzle of salvation history sounds much more ingratiating than a tractate about the advent of the godless and dictatorial Turk. Moreover, they were not quiet about their claims to universal sovereignty. It would not have been lost on a would-be political ally that buying into the propaganda *du jour* would appeal to the authorities. But this reading is overly deterministic and involves too much divination on the part of the contemporary scholar. One should be wary of playing the game of historical psychologist, especially when one lacks the necessary sources.

What seems far more likely, and needs a great deal more research, is that Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī is drawing on a known, albeit non-Islamic, tradition that positions Egypt, if not as the battlefield of Armageddon, then at least as a site of eschatological prophecy. Coptic scholars should be consulted. David Frankfurter, for example, has produced a remarkable study on the *Apocalypse of Elijah*—originally composed in Greek but extant in Sahidic and Achmimic renditions—which indicates that the early Coptic Christian communities saw their country as a fulcrum in cosmic history.[105] Frankfurter draws on the concept of *Chaosbeschreibung* in particular, a principle of older Egyptian religion incorporated into early Coptic Christianity.[106] This principle was used as a spiritual hermeneutic for interpreting historical events of distress, such as conquest and dynastic collapse.

Likewise, one should also take into account the Nag Hammadi corpus (discovered in 1945).[107] With eschatologically loaded texts like the *Melchizedek Apocalypse*

104. Gril believes the author is more likely to be a Syrian. I argue that the evidence in the text overwhelmingly suggests an Egyptian author. Gril, "Enigma," 68. Otherwise, why would a Syrian dismiss his homeland as a well-established site of the Hour in favor of Egypt, the Mamluk dynasty who were once the Syrians' overlords and an occupying force to boot?

105. Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, 260–90.

106. Frankfurter, 159–240.

107. As Elaine Pagels notes, the Nag Hammadi corpus contains far more texts that are titled "apocalypse" than "gospel" and "apocryphon." This does not, however, mean that they are apocalypses in the eschatological-revelatory sense proposed by Collins et al. Pagels, *Revelations*,

(NHC IX, 1) and Sethian gnostic prophecies abounding, a more robust picture of Egypt as an apocalyptic site of interest emerges.[108] This was a society keenly aware of its importance vis-à-vis God's cosmic plan. Taking these sources into consideration will help us better understand from what *fonds* Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī drew his inspiration. Islamic esoteric eschatology can be syncretic. Arguably, the centrality of the "Land of the Quiver" is a desideratum for further investigation, especially if one seeks to achieve a plenary understanding of the esoteric apocalyptic nature of *ToN*.

IV. Conclusion

Denis Gril observed a decade ago that *ToN* is a pure *jafr* apocalypse. In the foregoing essay, the historical and technical justifications for this claim have been laid out. First, the question of what *jafr* is and where it came from was provided. The confessional, ʿAlid-only concept of the prophetic genre was proven to be wrong. If *jafr* was a an exclusive fatidic charisma (*karāmah*) of the Imāms, how could later Ṣūfī esoteric authors like ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī, Aḥmed Bīcān Yazıcıoğlu, or Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī writing for and working within the very Sunnī world of the Ottoman court and empire lay claim to this prophetic mode? *Jafr* was never just for the ʿAlids alone. Thus, it could be constantly reworked and appropriated.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Ṣūfīs were some of the principal *jafr*ists who employed this genre in their theosophic-supernatural tractates. Most of all, the real Ibn al-ʿArabī incorporated *jafr* into his mystical corpus. This mystical master not only received visions of the celestial sphere, but also he relied on lettrism and chiliastic historical schemes to legitimize his revelatory and eschatological claims. Apprehending *ghayb* is, ultimately, facilitated via a supernatural salmagundi of spiritual election that begets transcendental insight (i.e. revelation), comprehension of heavenly bodies and their auspicious alignments, and the power to decipher the Arabic alphabet which constitutes, one may recall, the building blocks of the cosmos.

180, fn. 6; Collins, "Morphology," 9; Collins, "Genre Apocalypse." Pagels also provides further relevant readings in the footnote cited.

108. Parton, "Melchizedek Apocalypse."

As a Turkish saying has it, "One lunatic tossed a stone into a well; forty scholars could not get it back out" (*Bir deli kuyuya taş atmış, kırk akıllı onu çıkaramamış*). One often feels like one of those scholars when studying the history of eschatological esotericism in the Ottoman Empire. It is a new and growing field that presents many obstacles and certainly poses many quandaries that may never be definitely answered. Nevertheless, one hopes that in light of the above analysis the present reader may comprehend the "how" and "why" an anonymous—presumably Egyptian—scribe appropriated the name of the Ottomans' favored Ṣūfī, the "Red Sulphur" Ibn al-ʿArabī. By doing so, Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī not only stamped his prophecy with legitimacy, but he therefore emboldened the cosmic veracity of his oracular visions. *Jafr*, especially as practiced by the mystics—and their aspiring acolytes, pseudonymous or otherwise—from the seventh/thirteenth century onward increasingly came to be the eschatological esoteric medium *sine qua non* for bolstering cosmic imperial claims in the very Sunnī Ottoman world. In Ps.-Ibn al-ʿArabī, we clearly see the Sublime Porte emerging as a divinely elected office of universal Islamic authority. To wit, Ottoman history was salvation history. The *Tree of Nuʿmān* is one poignant case study thereof.

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