



# **The Occult Sciences in Pre-modern Islamic Culture**

**December 5-6, 2013**

**Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB)**

**and**

**Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES) /**

**American University of Beirut**

**Conference venue:**

**American University of Beirut, College Hall, Auditorium B1**

## I. Synopsis

In any culture, the location of the so-called “occult” sciences in an area between natural sciences and metaphysics is one that can enrich modern scholarship in regards to notions of science and knowledge. Specifically, if we investigate those “occult” sciences in pre-modern cultures and their conceptualization in classification of sciences, different understandings of science can be critically examined.

In pre-modern Islamic culture, a number of these “occult” sciences that deal with non-observable realities and are marked by ritual references were acknowledged part of the canon of knowledge and practiced also by natural scientists. The “occult” sciences, *al-‘ulūm al-khāfiyya*, include sciences such as *‘ilm al-firāsa* (physiognomy), *qiyāfa* (tracking), *‘iyāfa* (myomancy), *kīmīyā’* (alchemy), *‘ilm aḥkām al-nujūm* (astrology), *ruqya*, *ta’wīdh* (spells and incantations), *ta’bīr al-ru’yā* (oneiromancy), and various forms of *siḥr* (magic).

To investigate these and similar sciences and to place them in the context of the other sciences in Islam, and of Islamic culture in general, this conference presents contributions that can be placed under two main topics: The first will examine particular “occult” sciences and their context within the body of the sciences. The second explores how the relationship between the natural and the supernatural was perceived in Islamic culture and how the “occult” in these sciences was defined.

## II. Program

### Thursday, 5th December 2013

09:00-09:30 Coffee

09:30-10:00 Welcome addresses: AUB, OIB, CAMES

10:00-11:30

Panel 1 – Chair: Nader El-Bizri (AUB)

**Muhammad Ali Khalidi** (York University, Toronto) and **Tarif Khalidi** (AUB)

*Is Firāsa a science? Reflections on the Firāsa of Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī*

**Antonella Ghersetti** (Ca' Foscari University, Venice)

*A science for kings and masters: firāsa at the crossroad between natural sciences and power relationships*

11:30-11:45 Coffee break

11:45-13:15

Panel 2 – Chair: Stefan Leder (OIB)

**Nader El-Bizri** (American University of Beirut)

*The occult in numbers: The arithmology of the Brethren of Purity*

**Matthew Melvin-Koushki** (Princeton University)

*Letter magic and sacral kingship in early modern Iran and India*

13:15-14:40 Lunch

14:30-16:00

Panel 3 – Chair: Eva Orthmann (Bonn University)

**Isabel Toral-Niehoff** (Aga Khan University, London)

*Doing Egyptian in medieval Arabic culture: The long-desired fulfilled knowledge of occult alphabets by Pseudo-Ibn Wahshiyya*

**Emma Gannagé** (Georgetown University)

*The khawāss in alchemy and in pharmacology: failure of reason or triumph of magic?*

16:00-16:15 Coffee break

16:15-17:45

Panel 4 – Chair: Tarif Khalidi (AUB)

**Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad** (American University in Cairo)

*The occult technology of Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Būnī (d. 622/1225?): An inquiry into the art and science of talismans in the Corpus Bunianum*

**Christopher Braun** (The Warburg Institute, London)

*“Advance seven steps forward with your torch and your incense” – The role of magic in Arabic treasure-hunter manuals*

## Friday, 6th December 2013

09:30-10:00 *Coffee*

10:00-11:30 **Panel 5 – Chair: Stefan Leder (OIB)**

**George Saliba** (Columbia University, New York)

*Which 'Alī was Haly? Astrological prognostications from comets*

**Kristine Chalyan-Daffner** (Heidelberg University)

*Predictions of natural disasters in astro-meteorological handbooks*

11:30-11:45 *Coffee break*

11:45-13:15 **Panel 6 – Chair: Nader El-Bizri (AUB)**

**Eva Orthmann** (Bonn University)

*Astral magic and divine names: the kitāb al-Jawāhir al-khams of Muḥammad Ghauth Gwāliyārī*

**Dahlia Gubara** (Orient-Institut Beirut, Columbia University)

*Formations of orthodoxy and the everyday life of the occult in the eighteenth century*

13:15-14:30 *Lunch*

14:30-15:15 **Panel 7 – Chair: Tarif Khalidi (AUB)**

**Liana Saif** (The British Museum, London)

*Causality in Islamic occult thought and its reception in early modern Europe*

15:15-16:00 Concluding remarks

### III. Abstracts and Bios of Participants

**Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad** (American University in Cairo)

***The occult technology of Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Būnī (d. 622/1225?): An inquiry into the art and science of talismans in the Corpus Bunianum***

Since the pioneering studies of Cornell Fleischer the importance of what we may call the occult dimension in Islamicate civilization has received much deserved attention by a small group of scholars, namely Kathryn Babayan, I. Evrim Binbaş, and Matthew S. Melvin-Koushki. All of these studies have examined figures and events that bear an intimate connection with the occult *ouvre* of Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Būnī particularly the text known as the *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa laṭā’if al-‘awārif*. The importance of occult knowledge especially as the basis for the occult technology involved in the construction of talismans, talismanic shirts, and other processes of a telestic nature was not only seen as pivotal for prognostication and prophecy but also for the preservation and propagation of political power. This was a truism not only for the so-called “gunpowder empires” of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals but also for earlier Islamicate dynasties, such as the Mamluks. Interestingly, it seems that al-Būnī himself was associated with the Ayyubid Prince who would become al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb b. Kāmil Muḥammad (rg. 637-647). We propose to examine this talismanic technology as preserved in selected MSS of what Jan Just Witkam has aptly termed the ‘Corpus Bunianum.’ As alluded to above, I first studied these manuscripts in a paper presented at the Eighth Islamic Manuscripts Conference at Queens’ College, Cambridge University on July 11, 2013<sup>11</sup> much of dealt with what I have termed the “three recensions hypothesis.” The latter refers to what I established was a completely mistaken notion that there were three recensions of al-Būnī’s *Shams al-ma‘ārif wa laṭā’if al-‘awārif*, namely a *kubrā*, *wuṣṭā*, and *ṣuḡhrā*, and that in fact there was only a long version and a short version of this work. I further established that a third treatise, often mistaken for being the shortest version of *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, was in fact a distinct work known as *Latā’if al-ishārāt*. My conference paper was almost entirely devoted to the MSS themselves and barely touched on matters of the actual substantive content of the *Shams al-ma‘ārif*, namely the occult technology of talismans and the Divine Names. Aspects of the latter were further explored in a lecture presented at the Warburg Institute on May1, 2013 entitled “Magic and the Occult in Islam: Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al- Būnī and the *Shams al-ma‘ārif*.” Much work remains to be done on al-Būnī and the present paper continues to elaborate on the themes of the previous two in investigating the relationship between the theory and praxis of occult theurgy. Given the importance of the occult sciences for Muslim dynastic rulers, a study of these materials promises to shed light on this still relatively obscure dimension of Islamicate civilization.

**Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad** is Assistant Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the American University in Cairo. He received his Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from Princeton University. His most recent research is on the occult theurgical writings of Aḥmad al-Būnī as well as Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of which he has just completed a new critical edition to be published by OIB.

**Nader El-Bizri** (American University of Beirut)

***The occult in numbers: The arithmology of the Brethren of Purity***

The learned and anonymous adepts of the tenth-century (fourth-century of the Hijra) Iraqi fraternity of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā') gave a central structuring role to numbers in the symbolic order of their thinking which rested on a literal and intricate interpretation of the antique microcosm-macrocosm analogy. This penchant in thought was partly inspired by their philosophical adaptations of the teachings of Neo-Pythagorean arithmologists (Nicomachus' in particular) alongside the assimilation of selected leitmotifs from the Neo-Platonist meditations on numbers (especially as set in Plotinus' *Enneads VI.6*). A coherent arithmology emerges from the Brethren's reflections on the arcana of numbers that surpassed the strictly technical aspects of the science of arithmetic (*'ilm al-'adad*) as noted in the first tract of the mathematical division of their proto-encyclopaedic compendium, the *Epistles (Rasā'il)*. The ontological significance of numbers runs across the Brethren's epistolary compendium and connects with remarks that are alchemical in character in the natural sciences division, as well as being entangled with reflections on magic in the fifty-second and last epistle of their opus. The first epistle connects with the last in the compendium, and arithmology reinforces the thematic elements that secure the architectonic unity of the whole text. This presentation focuses on investigating the underpinnings of the Brethren's arithmology whilst situating it in the broader context of the classical occult significance of the onto-theological, mystical, and magical properties of numbers in connection with the being of beings.

**Nader El-Bizri** is an Associate Professor in the Civilization Sequence Program, the Director of the Anis Makdisi Program in Literature, and the Coordinator of the MA in Islamic Studies at the Centre for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies / AUB. Prior to joining the American University of Beirut he was a Principal Lecturer at the University of Lincoln, and he previously taught for twelve years at the University of Cambridge, and lectured at the University of Nottingham, the London Consortium, and Harvard University, in addition to holding senior research affiliations at The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris (CNRS). His areas of research are in Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, Phenomenology, and Architectural Humanities. He has published and lectured widely and internationally.

**Christopher Braun** (The Warburg Institute, London)

***"Advance seven steps forward with your torch and your incense" – The role of magic in Arabic treasure-hunter manuals***

The Arab historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 784/1382) who was born in Tunis and worked later as teacher and Qāḍī in Egypt reports of a widespread belief among his contemporaries. He claims that 'many weak-minded persons in cities hope to discover property under the surface of the earth and to make some profit from it. They believe that all the property of

the nations of the past was stored underground and sealed with magical talismans. These seals, they believe, can be broken only by those who may chance upon the (necessary) knowledge and can offer the proper incense, prayers, and sacrifices to break them.'

Such rumours on treasure protected by magic were quite popular in Medieval Egypt. The inhabitants believed that Egypt's past civilisations and foregone rulers had stored their treasures underground and that they had entrusted them to demonical guardians or had sealed them with magical talismans. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the inhabitants of Cairo in particular were obsessed by the idea of finding hidden riches. Encouraged by occasional discoveries of Pharaonic tombs and actual finds of precious artefacts, many adventurers shouldered their pickaxes and shovels and engaged in real treasure-hunts. In order to unearth the buried hoards, however, these 'lords of the treasures' (*aṣḥāb al-maṭālib*) needed the appropriate incantations, fumigations, and ritual offerings to overcome the malevolent spirits or to break the protective seals.

This 'necessary knowledge' was revealed in a quite peculiar genre in occult literature: Arabic manuals for treasure-hunters. Such manuals existed already in the 4th/10th century. They list locations of buried treasure and disclose the necessary magical formulae, fumigations and sacrificial offerings to defeat the guardians or to break the magical talismans. Fortunately, some manuals survived and are still extant in the form of manuscripts today. In this paper I want to explore the magical dimension of these texts. Why required the search for treasures knowledge in the occult sciences? Where did the idea of protected treasures originate? Can the belief in demonical guardians be traced back to Pharaonic times? To what extent relate these texts to other Arabic grimoires and magical treatises? By relying on Arabic historiographical sources and the extant manuscripts, I shall present a very fascinating genre in Arabic occult literature which remained for many years unnoticed by modern historians.

**Christopher Braun** studied Arabic, French and the History and Culture of the Middle East in Berlin and Paris. After he obtained his master's degree, he held a research scholarship by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation for the Research Library Gotha. In October 2012 he started to write a doctoral thesis at the Warburg Institute in London. His PhD project aims at a thorough analysis and historical contextualisation of Arabic treasure-hunter manuals. These occult texts disclose the locations of hidden treasures and reveal the magical means to raise them.

**Kristine Chalyan-Daffner** (Heidelberg University)

### ***Predictions of natural disasters in astro-meteorological handbooks***

While explaining causes of "natural disasters", pre-modern Arab authors integrated into the narrative of their works different interpretations. This paper explores—as one interpretative model—predictions of natural disasters located in the so-called astro-meteorological *malḥama* handbooks. These texts show decisively that it is in the heavens where natural hazards—triggers of disasters on earth—were made. It examines to what extent the ideas expressed in this kind of literature reflect social needs on the example of Mamlūk Egypt.

Detailing this process, this paper also traces the transmission of the ideas expressed in these texts and reveals the motives behind their composition. The objective is not only to highlight the intricate entanglement of cultural flows and historical agencies that culminated into the production of huge number of *malḥama* manuscripts but to demonstrate their importance for the society and the time. It is thus a process demonstrating both historical intellectual currents and their impact on and place in the world.

**Kristine Chalyan-Daffner** was born in Yerevan, Armenia, where she did her university degree at Yerevan State Institute of Foreign Languages. Later, she studied Islamic Sciences, English Philology and Public Law in Kiel and Heidelberg, Germany. After doing her Master's Degree at Heidelberg University, she received scholarship of German Research Foundation at Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies of Heidelberg University. There she worked as a PhD member of Junior Research Group "Cultures of Disaster". Within the framework of this project, she researched in Saint Petersburg, Cairo, Paris and London and has recently defended her doctoral thesis titled '*Natural Disasters' in Mamluk Egypt (1250-1517): Perceptions, Interpretations and Human Responses*'. Her professional interests go beyond the academic sphere. Since 2010 she has been publicly appointed and legally recognized translator and interpreter of the Russian and Armenian language in Baden-Württemberg, Germany.

**Emma Gannagé** (Georgetown University)

***The khawāss in alchemy and in pharmacology: failure of reason or triumph of magic?***

The notion of specific property (*khāṣṣiyya*) falls within the framework of the natural faculties or powers of natural substances and drugs. According to Galen each particular substance has natural powers (*dunameis*) through which it exercises an action on the body. Such an action depends on the object on which it is applied and hence varies according to the nature of that object. In his *Kāmil al-ṣinā'a al-ṭibbiyya*, 'Alī b. al-'Abbās al-Mājūsī (10<sup>th</sup> c.) enumerates three kinds of powers characterizing simple drugs and all derived from the primary qualities. A fourth kind of faculties was considered as not derived from the elementary qualities and none of these qualities could account for it. This was the specific property or *khāṣṣiyya* that was only known through experience and could not be deduced through reasoning and demonstration. Hence, resorting to the notion of specific property in order to describe the action of a drug reflects a failure of the rational explanation.

During the Arabic Middle Ages a huge literature on the *khawāṣṣ* has flourished. It has been confined by the contemporary scholarship, often wrongly, to the occult sciences. If there is undeniably a Greco-Roman tradition of the *phusikai dunamis* (natural powers) related to magic, that had a strong influence on the Islamic as well as Latin medieval thought, it is also undeniable that medicine made a great usage of this notion, particularly in the field of pharmacotherapy, without however falling in the register of miraculous or magical recipes. This talk is thus devoted to an analysis of the notion of specific property and its reintegration



in a rational and causal framework in the field of medicine as well as alchemy, with a special focus on the 13<sup>th</sup> c. physician, Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Isrā'īlī.

**Emma Gannagé** is Associate Professor in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University. She holds a PhD (1998) in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy from the University of Paris I – Sorbonne. She is also the editor of the *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* (<http://www.bo.usj.edu.lb/files/melanges.htm>). Her research interests focus mainly on the transmission and reception of Greek philosophy into Arabic; Arabic and Islamic philosophy; Arabic Medicine and its relationship to Philosophy; Arabic Manuscripts. Her publications include several articles and a monograph on *Alexander of Aphrodisias, On Coming-to-be and Passing-Away 2.2-5*, Duckworth, London 2005 as well as other edited books that include *The Greek Strand in Medieval Islamic Political Philosophy*, with P. Crone, D. Gutas, M. Aouad and P. Schuttrumpf, *MUSJ* 57, 2004. Her most recent is a monograph-long article on al-Kindī's *On First Philosophy* for the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook on Islamic Philosophy*.

**Antonella Ghersetti** (Ca' Foscari University, Venice)

***A science for kings and masters: firāsa at the crossroad between natural sciences and power relationships***

*Firāsa* was often perceived as a useful tool to manage social life and to select the most fit persons with whom to live: the courtiers and the queens for kings, the slaves for kings and masters, the wives and concubines for wealthy men. The uncomfortable lack of confidence that sovereigns and well-off men had to feel when confronted to the problem of choosing trustful members of their social circles is evident in many cases. A clue is the anecdote that opens the ps-Polemon *firāsat al-nisā'* where divination (*firāsa*) is used as a key to the right choice of women. The possibility of using *firāsa*, which is based on visible and tangible signs, is presented as a factor that reassures powerful men and helps in preventing the bad choices. We will take into consideration some treatises where physiognomy is presented as a tool to choose courtiers, to buy slaves and/or concubines, to select the right wife; in all these the shared trait is the asymmetrical relation of power.

**Antonella Ghersetti** is Associate Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at Università Ca' Foscari, Venice. She holds a PhD in Semitic Studies (Semitic Linguistics) from the University of Florence. Her main fields of research are the Arabic linguistic tradition, pre-modern Arabic literature, Arabic physiognomy. Among her publications there are some articles on physiognomy in the Arab tradition and the edition of the ps-Aristotle *Kitāb al-firāsa* in the translation of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq.

**Dahlia Gubara** (Orient-Institut Beirut, Columbia University)

***Formations of orthodoxy and the everyday life of the occult in the eighteenth century***

Sometime before 1730, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Kashnāwī al-Sudānī al-Mālikī al-Ashʿarī left his native Katsina (in today's Northern Nigeria) to embark on the pilgrimage and fulfill the ethical injunction of seeking knowledge. He sojourned in the Holy Cities and then in Cairo where he taught as a guest of the sheikh of the East African student lodge of al-Azhar, in whose home he died in 1741. Al-Kashnāwī's studies and writings spanned the various classical fields and included a host of esoteric disciplines. One of his works, *al-Durr al-manzūm wa khulāṣat al-sirr al-maktūm fī ʿilm al-ṭalāsīm wa-l-nujūm*, is a comprehensive commentary of three domains of the "secret sciences" (*al-ʿulūm al-sirrīyya*): *siḥr* (magic, encompassing *ʿilm al-nujūm wa ʿl-tanajjum*), *ʿilm al-ṭalāsīm* (talismanology), and *al-nīrandj* (prestidigitation, fakery and the creation of illusions).

This paper is concerned with the formations of orthodoxy and the shifting place of the occult sciences in the Islamic tradition, both as doctrine and lived scholarly practice. Drawing on research conducted in and around the al-Azhar library in 2009, it provides a broad genealogical assessment of the concepts of 'science,' 'religion,' and 'magic,' and highlights that notions of what is 'real' as opposed to 'occult' science are superimposed by the contemporary scholar on what was a much more fluid web of lived scientific practices and beliefs.

**Dahlia Gubara** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Orient-Institut Beirut conducting research on a project entitled "Virtuous Narratives and the Many Lives of Luqmān al-Ḥakīm." She studied Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and History at Columbia University, New York where her dissertation focused on al-Azhar and orders of knowledge in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Her work bridges the fields of Islamic Studies and African and Middle Eastern History and is concerned primarily with the production, transmission and consumption of knowledge in, and about, the 'Islamic discursive tradition.'

**Muhammad Ali Khalidi** (York University, Toronto) / **Tarif Khalidi** (AUB)

***Is Firāsa a science? Reflections on the Firāsa of Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī***

In this paper, we situate Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's work on *firāsa* in the context of his larger worldview, particularly his theological outlook and his epistemological views. Especially important to this outlook were the principles of inferring the invisible from the visible (*al-istidlāl bi-l-shāhid ʿalā al-ghāʿib*) and the concept of comprehensive knowledge (*iḥāṭa*). Thus, Rāzī's *firāsa* appears to exemplify a view of the universe in which things resemble one another or are analogous to one another, and in which everything is ultimately a sign of the creator, in contrast with the disenchanting modern scientific outlook. At the same time, Rāzī emphasizes the alleged causal connection that is central to *firāsa*, between outward facial

features and inward character, which is grounded in the temperament (*mizāji*) or the soul. Moreover, he underlines the similarity of *firāsa* to the science of medicine and challenges critics of *firāsa* to distinguish it from its more respectable sister discipline. This also raises a challenge for his modern interpreters, to say how exactly *firāsa* differs from medicine. We explore a number of possible responses and suggest a composite answer to the challenge to differentiate *firāsa* from medicine.

**Muhammad Ali Khalidi** received his BS in Physics from the American University of Beirut (AUB) and his MA and PhD in Philosophy from Columbia University. He is currently associate professor of Philosophy at York University, and was previously Associate Professor of Philosophy and department chair at AUB. His most recent publication is: *Natural Categories and Human Kinds: Classification in the Natural and Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); he has also translated and edited an anthology of Islamic philosophy, *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Texts* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

**Tarif Khalidi** was born in Jerusalem in 1938. He received degrees from University College, Oxford, and the University of Chicago, before teaching at the American University of Beirut as a professor in the Department of History from 1970 to 1996. In 1985 he accepted a one-year position as senior research associate at St Anthony's College, Oxford, and from 1991 to 1992 was a visiting overseas scholar at St John's College, Cambridge. In 1996, he left Beirut to become the Sir Thomas Adams' Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University, the oldest chair of Arabic in the English-speaking world. He was also Director of the Centre for Middle East and Islamic Studies and a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. After six years, Professor Khalidi returned to the American University of Beirut, taking on the Sheikh Zayed Chair in Islamic and Arabic Studies, the first chair to be filled at the University since the civil war. He has published several books, including *Images of Muhammad* (Random House, 2009), *The Muslim Jesus* (Harvard University Press, 2001), *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), and *Classical Arab Islam* (Darwin Press, 1996). He has also published a recent translation of the *Qur'an* (Penguin, 2008) and edited a collection of essays, *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East* (Syracuse University Press, 1985).

**Matthew Melvin-Koushki** (Princeton University)

### ***Letter magic and sacral kingship in early modern Iran and India***

After long neglect, early modern Islamic cultural and intellectual history is now being rehabilitated as crucial to our understanding of early modern Eurasian history more generally. However, occultist discourses are still considered to be peripheral in current treatments of the period, despite a veritable mountain of evidence to the contrary. I argue that what is needed to properly account for this evidence is a fundamental reperiodization of later Islamic history. Specifically, I posit that the 13th-17th centuries in the Islamic world represent a major world-historical period defined by the emergence of *sanctity*, or *sanctified power*, as a hegemonic concept in Islamic cultures, and as such driving intellectual, social,

religious, political, economic and creative developments that are often associated with the advent of modernity. In this context, occultism is to be retrieved as central to the emergence of early modern empire in that it functioned as a primary vehicle for imperial assertions of this type of power in the early modern Islamic world.

The pivotal 15th century in particular is best defined as the age of *khurūj* in which saints and sultans openly competed for sanctified power. To this end, rulers and princes eagerly patronized occultists as natural allies in this contest, and the latter were generally happy to oblige royal interest by writing manuals on magical techniques of domination. By way of substantiation, I take as a case study a long-ignored manual of astrological letter magic by an otherwise renowned philosophizing Ash'ari thinker of later 15th century Iran, Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (1427-1503), as a representative, unremarkable example of the genre. The example of Davānī and his peers testifies to the intimate connection between occultism and politics in the 15th century Persianate world, on the eve of the emergence of the great early modern Muslim empires.

**Matthew Melvin-Koushki** (Ph.D. Yale) is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Princeton University (NES) and Assistant Professor of History at the University of South Carolina. He specializes in early modern Islamic intellectual, religious and cultural history, with a focus on the theory and practice of the occult sciences in Iran and the Persianate world. Winner of the Middle East Studies Association's Malcolm H. Kerr award, his 2012 dissertation examined the lettrist thought of Ṣā'īn al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī, the foremost occult philosopher of early Timurid Iran.

**Eva Orthmann** (Bonn University)

***Astral magic and divine names: the kitāb al-Jawāhir al-khams of Muḥammad Ghauth Gwāliyārī***

The early Mughal Empire in India was deeply influenced by magical practices and concepts. Such practices figured in the daily court life as well as in festivals and acts of war.

One of the most famous magical texts from that period is the *kitāb al-jawāhir al-khams* by Muḥammad Ghauth Gwāliyārī (d. 1562). Muḥammad Ghauth was a Sufi shaikh of the Shaṭṭārī order and at the same time a close advisor of the second Mughal emperor Humāyūn. His book is often described as an important treatise on astral magic. This is however only half the truth: most of his book is dedicated to invocations of the divine names.

One part of these divine names corresponds to the *asmā' al-ḥusnā*, the 99 beautiful names of God. They are used for all kinds of *dhikr*, some of them rather strange. For magical purposes, however, Muḥammad Ghauth uses the *asmā' al-izām*, the greatest names. These are 39 (or 40) names composed of several nouns and adjectives. The invocation of these greatest names follows strict rules which apply both to the exterior circumstances of prayer as well as to interior conditions, *sharā'īṭ*. Muḥammad Ghawth does never really

explain what is meant with these conditions. They determine however the outcome and effect of the prayers, which serve at controlling spiritual beings, and sometimes provide the praying person with quite sensational powers. In between these effects, we find the subjugation of the planets, an effect usually attained by direct invocations of the stars.

The lecture will examine the practices described in the *kitāb al-jawāhīr al-khams* and will compare them with magical operations described in other texts. It will ask for possible sources of this very specific use of the divine names and their combination with astral magic, and will finally address the merging of Sufi *dhikr* and magical invocations as perceived in Muḥammad Ghauth's book.

**Eva Orthmann** is Professor of Islamic Studies at Bonn University since 2007. She received her MA in Islamic and Iranian Studies at the University of Tübingen in 1995 and later on continued with her PhD at Halle University in 2000. After being an assistant professor at the Oriental Institute at Zurich University she became a visiting research scholar at the department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Yale University. Her work focuses mainly on the history of astrology in the Islamic world as well as on Indo-Iranian studies.

**Liana Saif** (The British Museum, London)

### ***Causality in Islamic occult thought and its reception in early modern Europe***

This presentation will introduce causality in the early Islamic period and its role in the development of early modern occult thought. This paper argues that in Islamic esoteric epistemology the causal mode was reconciled with the semiological within a philosophical framework based on a Neoplatonized form of Aristotelianism. Natural philosophy viewed nature as a network of signs. Natural philosophers and occultists were able to discover hidden qualities or meanings by establishing analogies between stars, stones, plants and animals. This way of thinking was inherited from antiquity as exemplified by Hellenic astrology and the Neoplatonic view of the stars as signs and sources of spiritual emanations. However, occult philosophy relied not only on a network of resemblance, but also on the etiological investigation of the heavenly bodies as efficient causes of generation and corruption. This latter foundation was developed in influential Arabic treatises on astrology and magic. Special attention will be given to the doctrine of astral causation of the astrologer Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhī (787-886) found in his *Kitāb al-madkhal al-kabīr ilā l-aḥkām al-nujūm*, and its application in the context of magical theory and practice in the works of the philosopher Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (c. 801- 873), 10<sup>th</sup>-century *Kitāb sirr al-asrār* (*Secretum Secretorum*), and the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* – known in the West as the *Picatrix* – by pseudo-Maslama al-Majrīṭī (11<sup>th</sup> century). This syncretism between causality and semiology proved very attractive to the occult thinkers of the Renaissance as it is necessary to the defence of astrology and magic as sciences and legitimate activities. The aforementioned Arabic works were translated and circulated widely in Europe during the Renaissance. The reception of the theories contained therein will be explored in the works of early modern

occult thinkers, namely Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), and John Dee (1526-1608).

**Liana Saif** received her doctorate in Intellectual History from Birkbeck College – University of London. Her research has focused on the intercultural exchange of esoteric ideas between the Islamic World and Europe in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. She is also curator of the Hajj Legacy Project in the British Museum. Her book *Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Thought* will be published in 2014 by Palgrave.

**George Saliba** (Columbia University, New York)

***Which 'Alī was Haly? Astrological prognostications from comets***

The paper will investigate how the famous medieval physician and astrologer, 'Alī b. Riḍwān (998-1067), came to be known in Renaissance and modern times as having written a treatise on prognostication from the comets. Francis Carmody, for example, in his *Arabic Astronomical and Astrological Sciences in Latin Translations*, UC Press, 1956, p. 156, attributes such a treatise to 'Ali b. Ridwan under the title: *Tractatus de cometarum significationibus per xii signa zodiaci*, and bases his claim on a reference to the Renaissance publication of 1563, of M. Frytschius, *Catalogus prodigiorum*, as well as other renaissance writers. Now the popular wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali\\_ibn\\_Ridwan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_ibn_Ridwan)) follows suit and attributes the same treatise to 'Ali b. Ridwan, and of course the encyclopedia is also followed by the more popular Muslim Heritage site: <http://muslimheritage.com/topics/default.cfm?ArticleID=831>, making the same claim.

The paper will contend that 'Alī b. Riḍwān never wrote such a treatise as far as we know, and the 'Alī who did, was 'Alī b. Abī al-Rijāl al-Shaybānī (d. 1037), the author of the comprehensive astrological work, *al-Bārī' fī aḥkām al-nujūm*, and who was chief of the chancellery of correspondence and a tutor to the Tunisian ruler al-Mu'izz Ibn Badis (1008-1062), and for whom the famous Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (999-1063) dedicated his equally famous book *kitāb al-'umda fī al-shi'r*. Ibn Abī al-Rijāl did indeed speak of prognostication from comets, and the paper will determine how his attempt at such prognostications made it to and was the source of the confusion in the Renaissance record.

The paper will conclude by presenting a manuscript of late provenance composed by a Jerusalemite by the name of 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Maqdisī al-Ḥanbalī (fl. c. 1070 AH = 1659/1660) in which he does not only speak of the nature of comets but adds to that whatever he could gather of their astrological influence.

**George Saliba** is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Science at the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University since 1979. He received his BSc in mathematics in 1963 and an MA in 1965 from the American University of Beirut. He further earned an MSc degree in Semitic languages and a doctorate in Islamic sciences from the University of California, Berkeley. He received several awards and honors and was also selected as a Distinguished Kluge Chair, at the Library of Congress and as a Distinguished

Carnegie Scholar. Saliba is doing research on the development of scientific ideas from late antiquity till early modern times, with a special focus on the various planetary theories that were developed within the Islamic civilization and the impact of such theories on early European astronomy.

**Isabel Toral-Niehoff** (Aga Khan University, London)

***Doing Egyptian in medieval Arabic culture: The long-desired fulfilled knowledge of occult alphabets by Pseudo-Ibn Wahshiyya***

For obvious reasons, the native Egyptians and the many Arab pilgrims and traders, which travelled throughout Egypt in the pre-Modern period, were much more familiar with the formidable visible material remains of Ancient Egyptian culture than Europeans before Napoleon's (in)famous expedition in the year 1798. The non-ignorable presence of pyramids, temples, caves, marvelous treasures and mysterious hieroglyphs fired the imagination of Arab scholars alike and fostered the creation of all sorts of more or less fanciful interpretations. Therefore, in Medieval Arab culture, Egypt became the epitome of miracles, superstition and *mirabilia* par excellence. Although some preliminary work has been conducted, the major number of Arabic manuscripts regarding *aegyptiaca* remain unpublished and unstudied, so that, lamentably, there is no critical evaluation of the copious material available until now.

One of the questions that was raised by Western scholarship is to what extent the Medieval Arab knowledge about Ancient Egypt was "correct" and as such the result of serious scientific effort unearthing the (Egyptian) Pharaonic past. While several scholars deny any cultural continuity and emphasize that Medieval Arabs merely told fantastic legends, witnessing themselves a complete break in the tradition, others emphasize the important Arabic contribution to Egyptology that, unfortunately, has been neglected until now.

The most famous statement in this context, which found a large echo in the media, is Okasha El-Daly's claim that a few Arab scholars were even able to interpret hieroglyphs correctly some 800 years before Champollion. Eventually, el-Daly converts the alchemist Ibn Wahshiyya (tenth century CE) into a true Arabic hero of decipherment. In my lecture, I will present Ibn Wahshiyya's work on the hieroglyphs in greater detail, further contextualize this work within the framework of Arabic Hermetica, and discuss Okasha's provocative thesis.

The topic of Ibn Wahshiyya's booklet *The long-desired fulfilled knowledge of occult alphabets* is a long list of magical alphabets, their interpretation and their equivalence in Arabic letters. Most of these "alphabets" are just fantastic inventions and look very similar to the "magical letters" we find in other Arabic magical treatises – these pseudo-letters are shaped like Greek or Aramaic letters with small circles at the ends. Only a smaller number of them can be identified in existing alphabets: e.g. the Kufic and Maghreb Arabic script, the Greek, the Syriac, Hebraic and South Arabian alphabet and the Indian ciphers, interpreted as a magical alphabet. However, the most famous passages in this treatise are dealing with hieroglyphics

and with the Ancient Egyptian priesthood, and its customs. These passages shall be focused in detail.

**Isabel Toral-Niehoff** studied History and Arabic Studies in Tübingen (PhD 1997), Habilitation 2008 (FU Berlin). Her main publishing and research fields are: Arabia and the Near East in Late Antiquity; cultural identity; cultural transfer processes; Arabic Occult Sciences; Literature in translation; Al-Andalus. Since 2012 Marie-Curie Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Muslim Cultures at the Aga Khan University in London.