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THE DEVOTIONAL AND OCCULT WORKS  
OF SUHRAWARDĪ THE ILLUMINATIONIST

It was not uncommon for Islamic metaphysicians to attribute the motions of the celestial bodies and spheres to angels. It was rather less common for them to actually pray to those angels. And one would scarcely expect such prayers to be copied in madrasas and then be recopied for the personal use of Islamic rulers. Yet such is the case with the curious magical prayers of al-Suhrawardī.

The mystical philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) was known as Shaykh al-Ishrāq, “Master of Illumination,” or al-Maqtūl, “the one who was killed,” to distinguish him from his contemporary Shihāb al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī, the Sufi leader in Baghdad known for his Sufi handbook ‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif and the founder of the Suhrawardiya order. The two are often confused by bibliographers, scribes, and people who really ought to have known better, such as Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the author of the most widely used commentary on our Suhrawardī’s famous Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq, “The Philosophy of Illumination”.\(^1\) Given that the two authors were writing on similar topics at about the same time, it is not surprising that their works are also sometimes confused, especially shorter and less known works. In the case of our Suhrawardī, there is the further factor that he led a wandering life, was executed for his views, and had no appointed disciple to organize his literary remains.

The Biographical and Manuscript Evidence

Our best bibliographical source on Suhrawardī’s writings is Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrzūrī, writing about a century after his death. Shahrazūrī wrote a biographical dictionary of earlier philosophers, known either as Ta‘rīkh al-Ḥukamā’,\(^2\)

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\(^1\) The present article is partly extracted from an unpublished study of the manuscript and historical evidence for the works and lives of al-Suhrawardī and the earlier members of the Illuminationist school.

“History of the Sages,” or more properly Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ, “The Delight of Spirits”.

This work contains a long biography of Suhrawardī, by far our best source on his life, within which is a bibliography of some fifty works supposedly by Suhrawardī. Shahrazūrī himself does not seem to have had access to an authoritative list of Suhrawardī’s works, for he says at the end of the list, “These are all of his works that have reached me or whose names I have heard. There may be other things that have not reached me.”

Elsewhere, in the introduction to his commentary on Suhrawardī’s Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq, he mentions that he learned of Suhrawardī during his scholarly wanderings and that the learned were anxious to acquire copies of his poetry and wise sayings and to learn his philosophical methods. To the extent that this is not to be read as formulaic, it indicates that Suhrawardī’s works were known mainly by repute in the second half of the thirteenth century or that, at any rate, they were not available systematically. The manuscript evidence bears this out. There are few surviving manuscripts from before the last third of the thirteenth century when the Jewish philosopher Ibn Kammūna seems to have popularized al-Suhrawardī. With the exception of a collection of mystical and philosophical texts containing ten Persian works of Suhrawardī that was completed in 1261, the earliest surviving attempt at a comprehensive collection of his works is a manuscript copied in the early 1330s in Baghdad.

About half the titles in Shahrazūrī’s list can be identified with surviving works. A few more items are attributed to Suhrawardī in various manuscripts with varying degrees of plausibility, though almost any of these could be works from Shahrazūrī’s list under other (or no) titles. Some are probably or certainly misattributions, in many cases being works that possibly or certainly belong to

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5 Y. Tzvi Langermann (Ibn Kammūna at Aleppo // Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 3/17/1 (2007). P. 1–19) surveys the scanty evidence of influence of al-Suhrawardī’s writings before the second half of the thirteenth century and speculates that Ibn Kammūna found his writings in Aleppo while he was working there as an ophthalmologist and brought them back to Baghdad.

6 This is Ragip Paşa 1480, discussed in detail below. The earliest Suhrawardī manuscript I know is Vatican arab. 873, a copy of al-Lamḥāt dated 588/1192, about the time of Suhrawardī’s death. This is one of the works that ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī mentions seeing and being disappointed by. He also mentions that Suhrawardī put occult letters between the sections of his books. See: Langermann. Ibn Kammūna. P. 4–6.
‘Umar al-Suhrawardi in Baghdad. Shahrazuri’s list contains a number of titles that seem to refer to devotional or occult works:\footnote{The numbering of titles comes from certain Istanbul manuscripts, but the numbers are probably not part of Shahrazuri’s original text.}:

17. \textit{al-Raqīm al-Qudsī}, “the sacred Inscription.”

34. \textit{al-Tashbihat wa-Da‘awāt al-Kawākil}, “praises and invitations of the planets.”

Several manuscripts list this as two distinct items.

35. \textit{Ad‘iya Mutafarriqa}, “various invocations.”

37. \textit{al-Da‘wa al-Shamsīya}, “the solar invocation.”

38. \textit{al-Wāridāt al-Ilāhīya}, “the divine litanies.”

39. \textit{Takhayyurāt al-Kawākil wa-Tasbīḥātuhā}, “auguries and praises of the planets.”

41. \textit{Kutub fī ‘l-Sīmiyā’ tunsab ilayhi}, “books on white magic attributed to him.”\footnote{\textit{Sīmiyā} has various senses, but it is distinguished from \textit{sīhr}, sorcery, which is certainly condemned by Islamic law. Ibn Khaldun (al-Muqaddima, Ed. De Slane. Vol. 3. P. 137–38; trans. Franz Rosenthal. P. 171) remarks that the term originally applied to the whole science of talismans but that in his day the Sufis used it to refer specifically to letter magic; cf.: MacDonald D.B. and T. Fahd. \textit{Sīmiyā} // Encyclopaedia of Islam. 2nd ed.}

43. \textit{Tashbihat al-‘Uqūl wa-l-Nufūs wa-l-‘Anāṣir}, “praises of the intellects, souls, and elements.” One manuscript of Shahrazuri identifies this as two items.

And indeed among the manuscripts we find a few curious works that seem to correspond to these titles. Only a few pages have been published. Because it is not usually possible to be sure exactly which of Shahrazuri’s titles belong to the works that we find in manuscript, I have lumped them in my bibliographical study into two categories: \textit{Ad‘iya Mutafarriqa}, “miscellaneous prayers,” and \textit{Wāridāt Ilāhīya}, “divine litanies.” In addition, one set of prayers does seem to match a specific title: \textit{Tashbihat al-‘Uqūl wa-l-Nufūs wa-l-‘Anāṣir}, “praises of the intellects, souls, and elements.” Complicating the matter are a number of catalogue entries for manuscripts that I have not been able to examine. Usually these do not provide enough information to identify the text. There is also something called, with variations, \textit{al-Awrād al-Suhrawardiya}, which are litanies either by or attributed to ‘Umar al-Suhrawardi and which themselves have commentaries. It is thus likely that of the score or so of manuscripts that I know of purporting to contain prayers by Suhrawardi, some will turn out to be misidentified. It is also virtually certain that other copies or other such texts exist in inadequately catalogued \textit{majmū‘as}.

However, lest the best be the enemy of the good, I will proceed here on the basis of a small group of Istanbul manuscripts that I have seen. As we will find, such works are compatible with Suhrawardi’s philosophical and religious views.
Suhrawardī’s Occult Prayers

Let us first consider an example chosen because it is short, the *Da’wat al-Ṭibā’ al-Tāmm,* “Invocation of the Perfect Nature.” I quote the prayer in full:

أبيها النّفيس، الّذي أتى الوَلّد الرّوحانيّ الأب، أنتِ النّفيس، الرّوحانيّ القدّيس والملك الرّئيسي السّيّد أيّھا ﷲ إلى المبتھل شخصي بتدبير ﷲ بإذن المتمثّل
— آلھة إله فضل عزّ
— تكميل في
أسألك. أعلاھامن درجات الكمال في  الواقف أسناھا اللّھوتيّة أنوارمن  اللابس نقصي
لي في أحسن  تجلّيتما  ألاّ وھبك ھذا الفيض الجسيم وق العظيم وھذا الشّ  منحك بالذي
الأسرار بنور بإفاضته الآلھةوتوسّطت لي عند اٍله المظاھر وأريتني نور وجھك الباھر
.تمّ . عليك ومكانته لديك بحقّه الأستارعن قلبي ظلمات  ورفعت

O thou chief master and holy king, precious spiritual being, thou art the spiritual father and mystic son entrusted by the leave of God with the care of my person, he who prays devoutly to God—Great is the bounty of the God of gods!—for the rectification of my deficiencies. Thou art clothed in the most splendid of the divine lights and standest in the loftiest degree of perfection. I beseech thee by that One who granted thee this mighty longing and bestowed upon thee this corporeal emanation to reveal thyself to me in the best of manifestations, to show me the brilliant light of thy face, and to mediate for me before the God of gods by the emanation of the light of mysteries, to lift from my heart the shadows of the veils by the right that He hath upon thee and His station before thee.

If this prayer is to be successful in summoning the visible presence of one’s perfect nature, some preparation is required:

وإذا أردت يظھر عليك فاجتنب أكل الحيوان وجرّد عن العلائق و ألزم الصّلوة والصّوم فإذا
.نيغطھّر لباسك وھو الموفّق و الو

If you wish him to appear before you, shun the meat of animals, cast off attachments, devote yourself to ṣalāt, and purify your clothes. It is He who gives success and aid.

The ṭibā’ tāmm, according to Mu’īn’s *Farhang-i Fārsī,* is “a luminous essence associated with each human being created before his birth that accompanies him from the day of his birth and is responsible for protecting him, and when the day of his death arrives, this luminous twin attaches to him.” In Suhrawardī’s system this would be an immaterial light, which is to say a mind

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9 Ragip Paşa 1480, f. 314a17–22. Other extant manuscripts are Ankara, Milli 4558/8, f. 88a; Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Ahmet III 3217, f. 212a; and Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Ahmet III 3232, ff. 73a–b.

and thus a living being. He mentions this being in his *Mashāriʿ* in connection with Hermes Trismegistus:

“...When you hear Empedocles, Aghathadaeom, and others referring to the masters of species, you must understand what they mean and not imagine that they are saying that the master of the species is a body or corporeal or that it has a head and two feet. Thus you find Hermes saying, “A spiritual essence cast knowledge into me, so I said to it, ‘Who are you?’ It replied, ‘I am your perfect nature.’” Do not claim that it is like us.”

Here the *ṭibāʿ tāmma* is clearly the Platonic Form or archetype of the human species. As for Suhrawardī’s prayer, the vocabulary is that of the “science of lights” of his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*: “God of gods” (for *nūr al-anwār*), emanation, divine lights, degrees of perfection, and so on. Second, this prayer is part of a magical operation, expressed in terms that are partly religious and partly philosophical.

Let us now look more systematically at these texts and the manuscript evidence for them.

**The Manuscript Evidence 1:**

Ragip Paşa 1480

The closest thing we have to a comprehensive edition of Suhrawardī’s works in an early manuscript is Ragip Paşa 1480, copied in a professorial scrawl by one Badr al-Nasawī in 731–35/1330–34 in the Niẓāmīya and Mustanṣarīya madrasas in Baghdad. This manuscript contains eighteen works of Suhrawardī, including all the major philosophical works, a number of minor Arabic works, two of the Persian allegories, and some of the prayers. Its importance was recognized early, for it was copied in 865/1461 for the palace library of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II; the latter manuscript is now Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Ahmet III 3217. It contains the following four short devotional or occult works:

3. ff. 182a–b: *al-Taqdīsāt*, “the Sanctifications”

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4. f. 182b: *Min da‘wātihi ayḍan*, “another of his invocations”
14. ff. 313b–314a: *Min Wāridātihi*, “one of his litanies”
15. ff. 314a: *Da‘wat al-Ṭibā’ al-Tāmm*

The last we have already seen, but I will consider the others in turn.

_Al-Taqdīsāt_，“the Sanctifications,” corresponding to Ahmet III 3217/4, ff. 174b–175a. An invocation or sanctification (*taqdīs*) in succession of seventeen levels of divine intellects and holy souls, beginning with Bahman, the first intellect, and descending through the ten spheres, the intellects responsible for the material forms, and the souls of the prophets and saints. This could be Shahrzadī’s _Tasbīḥāt al-‘Uqūl wa'l-Nufūs wa'l-‘Anāsir_. The content of the work is Illuminationist, both in its terminology and in its invocation of Platonic Forms under the Illuminationist title _arbāb al-ṭilamsāt_, and is startlingly pagan in its prayers to the celestial bodies. It is not magical, however, in that the content simply praises the angelic intellects rather than summoning their presence or requesting some boon.

The Santification of the Bahman Light, the first intellect. I sanctify the servant of God, the mightiest veil of God, the greatest light of God, the highest creation of God, the first archetype, the nearest holy one, king of the angels, chief of the privy companions, sheriff of the Kingdom in the presence of God, Bahman Light...

The seventh intellect. I sanctify for the glorification of God the overflowing light, strong, splendid, beautiful, comely, possessor of love and affection, perfect in passion, eternal, shining and bright, the Lord of Venus, which is his shadow. I sanctify the ascendant servant of God, Venus, glorious, bright, shining, splendid, she who possesses sweetness, grace, purity, munificence, love, a fair visage, she who is melodious, musical, and joyful. I praise his shining person and his noble soul. I sanctify his lofty, holy, and generous station.12

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Min da’awātihi ayḍan, “another of his invocations,” corresponding to Ahmet III 3217/5, ff. 175b–76a. This is a more conventional prayer of half a dozen lines praising God and asking for detachment from the world. The language is generally philosophical and Illuminationist with some faux-Syriac words (“al-raghabūt”) but without specific Islamic references.

My God and the God of all existents. O necessary existent, dispenser of grace, maker of spirits, and creator of forms. From Thee is the realm of terror and to Thee the realm of desire. Purify us from corporeal connections, and deliver us from the impediments of darkness. Purify us from all matter that we might behold Thy lights... Glorified is He in whose hand is the Kingdom of all things, and to Him shall ye return.\(^\text{13}\)

Min wāridātihi, “one of his litanies,” corresponding to Ahmet III 3217/9, ff. 211a–212b, is a similar prayer to God, written in strongly Illuminationist language.

While the prayers of Ragip 1480 are not especially long or magical, they do tend to establish that Suhrawardī wrote such things and give us some grounds for crediting the authenticity of other such works.

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\(^{13}\) Ragip Paşa 1480/4, f. 182b.

\(^{14}\) Ragip Paşa 1480/14, f. 312b23–26, 214a14–15.
These two manuscripts contain a set of occult and magical prayers. Ayaşofya 2144 is an occult majmū’a of nine items, including texts on the magical powers of the Qur’ān, ethics, and spiritual chivalry by al-Tha’ālibī, Ṭughrā’ī, Ibn al-Mu’ayyad al-Nasafi, Ibn Sinā, and others. It was copied in mid-October 652/late October 1254, sixty-three years after Suhrawardī’s death, by one Sulaymān b. Mas’ūd b. al-Ḥasan. It is thus one of the earliest surviving manuscripts of any work of al-Suhrawardī. Ahmet III 3271/4 was copied half a century later in Kashan in 708/1308 at the end of a volume containing three of Suhrawardī’s philosophical works. The scribe remarks that “These noble prayers were copied from a vile (fī ghāyat al-suqm) manuscript. God willing, they have been copied correctly.” Since this latter manuscript is missing both the first and last items found in Ayaşofya 2144, perhaps part of the suqm of its exemplar was that it had lost pages at the beginning and end. At any rate, it was not copied from the Ayaşofya manuscript, which is still clear and in excellent condition. The contents are as follows:

al-Raqīm al-Muqaddas, Ayaşofya 2144/1, ff. 1b5–7a8; missing in Ahmet III 3271. A meditation on the unity of God in which the Sun plays an important role as a symbol of God. The language is unmistakably Illuminationist. There is a reference at Ayaşofya 2144, f. 3b15 to “dhāt al-abrāj hayākil al-nūr,” perhaps an allusion to Suhrawardī’s Hayākil al-Nūr and Risālat al-Abrāj, thus tending to confirm the authenticity of the latter.

Read thine inscription, O thou human talisman, for thine inscription is without doubt in the Preserved Tablet of God. Sanctify God and the great luminary in one of the two horizons. Purify thy mention of God, for minds bear witness to the occasions of such mention. God will pay no heed to the prayer of one who has not turned thither a face sanctified from the world, nor will thy Lord be satisfied with any action or with any act in which another has a portion.
Awrād al-Istibṣār, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 7a9–7b17; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 183b–184b1. A prayer for illumination using the language of Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq and invoking God and the angelic intellects. I translate the beautiful invocation of the Sun and the refrain that is repeated six times.

God hath made the supreme luminary a sovereign instrument and hath cast His light upon him. He hath brought unto him the sovereignty of the corporeal domains18 and made him master of those who are in bodies. By him hath He made clear the proof to all the worlds. He hath made him the means of order, the perfecter of life, the cause of seasons, of night and day. The holy souls seek to converse with him, saying, O thou most luminous person, whose face is ever to his father, beseech the giver of mind and death and life and say:

[Refrain] Exalt the remembrance of light, aid the people of light, and guide the light unto the light.19

Wārid al-Waṣīyya al-Kabīra, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 8a1–10b12; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 184b1–188a8. Suhrawardī invokes his “father,” his celestial archetype (ṣāḥib al-ṭilism), asking to be delivered from darkness into the realm of divine light, and seems to allude to the composition of Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq. The language is unquestionably Illuminationist. The bulk is general spiritual counsel to his followers.

O thou to whom God hath granted possession of some part of the world below, dost thou not know that he who seeks stability in this ephemeral realm is like one who tries to stitch the day to his robe lest it pass away or one who wants to stop the shadow with a peg? Acquire not the ephemeral whose evil end will be inscribed against thee!20

Awrād al-Anwār, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 10b13–13a16; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 188a9–191b6. This prayer begins with a plea for deliverance in a time of trial,

18 Reading ḥaẓā’ir for ḥaḍā’ir.
19 Ayasofya 2144/1, f. 7b7–13.
20 Ayasofya 2144/1, f. 9b10–13, Ahmet III 3271, f. 186b10–13.
then the voice shifts to God proclaiming his own majesty as the source of the light that illumines and vivifies the worlds. The terminology and theological structure are those of *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*. There is an extended passage in praise of Bahman, the first light.

I have ordained nothing nobler before me than the light Bahman. He was the first that I created. Into his essence I cast the image of my perfection. By him I created the archangels in their order. Since the archangels are every one intellect and light, the rays are reflected in these lofty beings. Thus, the lights are redoubled and by them are ordained the individuals beneath them in their contemplation of the sovereignty of their master.\(^{21}\)

\[^{21}\text{Wārid al-Taqdīs li-Kulli Mawqif [Kabīr}\text{], Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 13a17–16a15; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 191b7–194b10. Formal praise of God that quickly moves into Illuminationist language, including a reference to God as Ahura Mazda (Ūrmazda Adhār Kayhān). After that it continues with praise of the first light Bahman, occasionally using other Persian terminology from *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* such as *kadkhudā*, *isfahbadh*, and *kaywān*. The prayer goes on to praise the angelic minds associated with the fixed stars and the planets.}\]

I sanctify for the glorification of God that awful triumphant light, the possessor of great might and and strong power, of triumphant victory, of penetrating luster, the lord of Mars, whose shadow it is. I sanctify the obedient servant of God, Mars, the virtuous, the courageous, victorious and triumphant, possessor of triumph and pomp, of great fortitude, kindled fire, awe-inspiring luminary, possessor of freedom and might, of power and sovereignty. I praise his luminous person and noble soul.\(^{23}\)

\[^{23}\text{Wārid al-Tidhkār, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 19a2–19b5; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 198a8–198b15. A prayer affirming the sincerity of devotions, invoking various celestial beings as witnesses and support.}\]

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\[^{21}\text{Ayasofya 2144 ff.12b16–13a3, Ahmet III 3271, f. 191a2–7.}\]

\[^{22}\text{Omitted in Ahmet III 3271.}\]

\[^{23}\text{Ayasofya 2144 ff. 14b9–14, Ahmet III 3271, f. 193a3–9.}\]
Wārid Taqdīs al-A’lā li-Kull Yawm, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 19b6–20b12; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 199a1–200b1. A prayer of praise of God in which He is praised as unique and as the supreme lord and creator of all other beings, in the process describing His relationship to the various elements of the cosmological system of Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq.

Wārid Taqdīs al-Shams li-Yawm al-Āḥad or Hūrakhsh-i Kabīr, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 20b13–21b7; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 200b2–201b3. A prayer in honor of the Sun, for Sunday.

Wārid Taqdīs Yawm al-Ithnayn li’l-Qamar, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 21b8–22a4; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 201b4–202a7. A prayer for Monday in honor of the Moon. It invokes various occult properties of the Moon and asks its intercession with God in obtaining enlightenment.

Wārid Taqdīs Yawm al-Thālīthā’ li’l-Mirrīkh, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 22a5–22b4; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 202a8–202b10. A prayer for Tuesday invoking Mars and using language appropriate to Mars’ traditional association with war.


Wārid Taqdīs Yawm al-Khamīs li’l-Mushtarī, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 23a5–23b10; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 203a14–204a7. A prayer for Thursday invoking Jupiter under the name “Hurmus”—that is, Ahura Mazda, for whom Jupiter is named in Pahlavi, not Hermes. The qualities attributed to him relate to wisdom and justice.

Wārid Taqdis Yawm al-Jum’a li’l-Zuhra, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 23b11–24a9; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 204a8–204b8. A prayer for Friday addressed to Venus. Venus is referred to as “Ūzmān,” a name I have not traced. The qualities attributed to her relate to love and femininity.

Wārid Taqdis Yawm al-Sabt li’l-Zuḥal, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 24a10–24b13; Ahmet III 3271/4, ff. 204b9–205a14. A prayer for Saturday invoking Saturn, named in the text “Kayān,” for “Kaywān,” an old Persian name for Saturn. He is invoked in terms of wisdom, dignity, and solitude with reference to cold and dryness being under his rule.

Faṣl on how to speak with the planets, Ayasofya 2144/1, ff. 24b14–26b15; missing in Ahmet III 3271. This chapter is apparently part of the preceding set of awrād and gives instructions on how to speak with the seven planets, respectively Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. It concludes with cabbalistic symbols for each of the seven planets.

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Again, there seems little reason to question the authenticity of these texts. The manuscripts are early and correspond plausibly with titles in Shahrazūrī’s list. The doctrines and style are compatible with those of Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq.

Manuscript Evidence 3: Isolated Items

A significant number of manuscripts contain prayers, bits of verse, and the like attributed to Suhrawardī.

Min kalimāt [sic] al-mawsūma bi’l-Taqdisāt. In Esad Efendi 3688/10, f. 62b, the only manuscript I have seen, this is a single prayer of a few lines. There is a manuscript in Cairo of three folios, followed by commentary by one Muhammad al-Isfarā’īnī, that presumably contains more. At any rate, the text that I have seen is a vaguely Illuminationist prayer similar in style to the ones above. Since it is attributed to “Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawar dī” there is nothing to link it incontestibly to our Suhrawardī. The manuscript actually has texts by both Suhrawardīs, but since it is mixed in with wise sayings attributed to al-Ḥallāj and various ancient philosophers, it is most likely our Suhrawardī.

يا إلـٍهِي وإلـٍهِ جميع الموجودات من المعقولات والمحسوسات، يا واـهب النّفوس والقلوب والروح، يا مخترع ماهيّات الأركان والأصول، يا واـهب الوجود وفابض الوجود، يا فاعل القلوب والأرواح ووجاعل الصّور والأشباح، يا منوّر الأنوار ومدبّر كلّ دوّار، أنت الأوّل الذي و اوّل قبلك وأنت الآخر الذي لا آخر بعدك.
O my God and the God of all existents, intelligible and visible! O Giver of souls and intellects, deviser of the quiddities of the elements and principles! O Giver of existence and emanator of grace! O Maker of hearts and spirits, shaper of forms and images! O Enlightener of lights, manager of every orb! Thou art the First before whom there is none, and Thou art the Last, after whom there shall be none!

A number of other manuscripts contain works said by their catalogers to be prayers or other devotional works of Suhrawardi. That is what they may be, or they may be works by ‘Umar Suhrawardi, spurious or pseudonymous works, versions of the “Forty Names,” of which I will say more below, or other things entirely. In one case, what is cataloged as a prayer is actually Suhrawardi’s best known poem written out as prose. In the absence of further information, I list these for whatever they are worth:

Buhar 320/2a, c, in a manuscript of a Zoroastrian commentary on Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq.

Istanbul, Atatürk, Ergin 953/17 (= 224).

Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayi Müzesi, Emanet Hazinesi 1006.

Tehran, Sinā 286/2, ca. 916/1510.

Damascus, Zāhiriya 8734, ff. 44–71.

Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayi Müzesi, Emânet Hazinesi 1006.


Streiche 360, 9, 1.

Vienna 1750, ff. 111b–173a [?], late 10th/17th century or later.

Magic and the Invocation of Celestial Intellects

What then are we to make of these texts, particularly those that invoke the celestial intellects rather than God? There are obvious parallels in the genre known as istiḥḍār or istinzāl, “summoning of spirits,” a branch of siḥr, magic or sorcery, and therefore an art forbidden by Islamic law. Ḥājjī Khalīfa writes,

“The science of bringing down (istinzāl) and conjuring (istiḥḍār) of spirits in the forms of wraiths (qawālib al-ashbāḥ) is one of the branches of the science of magic. If you control jinn or angels so as to attain your desires by their means without making them take bodily form in your presence, it is called the science

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of incantations (*al-*`azā`îm). If the jinn take bodily form in your presence so that you can perceive them, it is called the science of conjuring (*istiḥḍār*), whether or not you attain your desires by means of them. Only the prophets are able to conjure the celestial angels, but there is disagreement as to whether other are able to conjure the earthly angels.”

Such ceremonial invocations of the celestials play a major role in the greatest classic of Islamic magic, pseudo-Majrīṭī’s *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*, the *Picatrix* of the Latins, as well as later magical works, such as the *Shams al-Ma`ārif* attributed to al-Ḥūrānī. And, indeed, the biographers are clear that Suhrawardī was skilled in magic and alchemy, which feature in some of the most entertaining stories about him. On the other hand, the stories told about him are more like the miracles of Sufi saints than the dark deeds of sorcerers motivated by greed and lust for power. In one he smashes a large Badakhshān ruby, obviously the product of alchemy, to show that his poverty was a matter of choice. In another, when a man from whom he has bought a lamb demands more money while pulling on his arm, the arm comes off in a spray of blood and the man runs away in terror, ridding Suhrawardī of an annoyance. In a third story, he entertains his disciples in a jeu d’esprit by summoning up the towers of Damascus above the southern horizon of Aleppo. This is very different from the purposes to which the *Picatrix* puts such invocations, matters to do with inheritance, mixing with kings, love affairs, and the like.

Most of Suhrawardī’s texts relating to the celestial spirits are strictly devotional, addressing praise to them as exalted beings with near access to God. These texts are, to use his term, *taqdīsāt*, sanctifications. What al-Suhrawardī is really interested in is talking to the spirits of the planets, an exercise that makes perfect sense given the structure of his philosophical system, in which mystical apprehension of the celestial lights is a tool for understanding the metaphysical structure of the universe. It is, to be sure, a rather strange thing for a Muslim to be doing, since it borders on polytheism, but Suhrawardī, like the Late Antique pagan Neoplatonists, would surely protest that he was simply giving due reverence to the greatest of God’s servants, doing something little different than the formal greeting given to Muslim saints at their shrines. In fact, he is doing theurgy, something with very deep and continuing roots in the Platonic tradition.

His prayers are very similar to those of Proclus addressed to the celestial bodies.

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The Forty Names

There is an exception to the rule that Suhrawardi’s magical texts are not practical, a protean occult text known as *al-Arba‘īn Isman al-Idrīsiya, al-Asmā’ al-Idrīsīya, Sharḥ al-Arba‘īn Isman, Khawāss al-Asmā’ al-Idrīsīya,* and other similar titles. It is variously attributed to our Suhrawardi, ‘Umar, ‘Ali, and Ahmad al-Suhrawardi, and the like, but most commonly and exasperatingly just to “Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardi.” It is not, so far as I know, found in early collections of Suhrawardi’s works, and the Persian commentary that also circulates widely attributes it to ‘Umar al-Suhrawardi in Baghdad. Thus, its attribution to our Suhrawardi is very uncertain, at the least. However, because it is mentioned so often in connection with him, I will briefly discuss it here.

The text is a commentary on a prayer attributed to the Prophet Idris, which is to say Enoch or Hermes, consisting of forty short invocations of various names, starting with *سبحانك لا إله إلا أنت يا ربّ كلّ شيء و وارثه* “Exalted be Thee, there is no God but Thee, the lord and inheritor of all things.” The underlying prayer clearly predates this particular text. Al-Majlisī’s *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Vol. 92. P. 168–69), contains a version taken from a little collection of prayers in the *Muhaj al-Da’awāt* of Ibn Tāwūs (589/1193–664/1266). The latter claims to have found this particular prayer in the *Faḍl al-Du’ā’* of Sa’d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ash’arī al-Qummī (d. ca. 300/912), who in turn says that he found it attributed to al-Ḥasan al-บาṣرī. In its most common form, each of these sentence-long invocations is followed by instructions for using it to gain various ends. The first, for example, if said seventeen times while facing the person of the king, will gain the king’s attention and favor. The text is extremely variable. Copyists clearly felt free to add commentary and instructions and to modify the text in various ways. The elaborations might be as simple as added instructions—in the case of the first invocation, several sources add instructions for using it against an enemy—the addition of more or less elaborate introductions, usually mentioning that it is “transmitted,” *manqūl,* from Suhrawardi, or elaborate commentaries. There are versions with introductions giving seven or eight conditions for the invocations to be effective in their intended use. At least one manuscript discusses the “eight fives,” how the eight groups of five names might be used in similar ways. There are translations into Turkish and Persian. The whole thing is less a text set down by its author than the sort of urban myth that floats around


There is also another text entitled *Maqādima fī Khawāss Manāfi’ Asmā’ Allāh al-Husnā,* found in at least two manuscripts—Adana 140/11, ff. 85a–87a, 1162/1756 and Istanbul, Esad Efendi 3704, ff. 69b–70b—which deals with the powers of the names of God and their numerical values.
The Devotional and Occult Works of Suhrawardī the Illuminationist

the internet—where, not surprisingly, a search for *al-asmā’ al-idrīsīya* turns up nearly four thousand items. In manuscript it is typically found in private collections of popular occult texts.

There is nothing in the text to especially associate it with our Suhrawardī. It is a typical example of *'ilm al-khawāṣṣ*, the science of the occult properties of the names of God, or *ṣīmiyā’,* and the language is totally Islamic. On those grounds, it would seem more natural to associate it with ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī, a more normal Sufi. However, it is interesting that many copyists had no reservations about associating such a text with our Suhrawardī, presumably on the basis of his lingering reputation as a magician. It is also a warning against underestimating the role of the occult in popular Islamic culture. Anyone who works with Islamic manuscripts will know that occult texts show up everywhere: collections of popular occult texts, items included in collections of otherwise perfectly orthodox material, spells in the margins and flyleafs of other books, sometimes with the notation that they are *mujarrab*, shown by experience to be effective, as is the case with a spell against the plague that I found in several Ottoman manuscripts. Clearly, the occult was a continuing interest of Islamic civilization, and the fact that classic occult texts are still being published shows that the interest has not ended.

**Illuminationism and the Ottoman State Ideology**

The presence of these prayers, and more generally the presence of royal copies of almost all the key Illuminationist works, in the Ottoman royal libraries is an indication of the significance of this school for the Ottoman imperial ideology, particularly in the age of Fatih Mehmet. The exact role of this philosophy in the self-image of the Sultans is something for Ottomanists to investigate, but their concern for it is easy to document in the manuscript record and too pervasive to attribute to the chances of library acquisition. It certainly undermines any image of the Ottomans as simple *ghāzīs* committed to the spread of legalistic orthodoxy. It can be documented in manuscript acquisition, commission of independent works, copying, and pedagogical use over at least a four century period running from the time of Mehmet II down to the very close of the age of manuscripts. This is a theme that requires more exposition and investigation than can be included here, so I will confine myself to a few examples.

**Acquisition.** The prime example of discerning early Ottoman acquisition of Illuminationist manuscripts is Ragip Paşa 1480, the collected edition of Suhrawardī’s works copied by a scholar in Baghdad in the early 1330s. Although it presently resides in the relatively late Ragip Paşa collection, it clearly was in royal hands earlier since a copy of it was made for the library of Mehmet II. This does not fall into the category of self-evidently valuable plunder like, for exam-
ple, illustrated Timurid manuscripts. Its value is only recognizable to an informed scholar. Another example is Velüüddin 2050, a manuscript of al-Shahrazūrī’s al-Shajara al-Ilāhīya, an independent compendium of Illuminationist philosophy written about ninety years after al-Suhrawardī’s death and one of the most important works of the school. This particular manuscript was copied by a Jewish scribe in Sivas from an autograph in 1288 and is, as far as I can determine now, the most important manuscript of this work. Finally, there is the fact that almost all the early manuscripts of the works of Ibn Kammūna, the Jewish philosopher who evidently played a key role in popularizing the works of al-Suhrawardī in the third quarter of the 7th/13th century, are in Ottoman libraries.

Commissioning. Illuminationist works commissioned by the sultans are rarer but do exist. The prime example is the Hall al-Rumūz of ‘Alī al-Bistāmī, known as Muşannifak, “the little writer,” a prominent scholar associated with the court of Mehmet II. The work is a commentary on a disputed work of al-Suhrawardī, the Risālat al-Abrāj, “Treatise on towers,” also known as al-Kalimāt al-Dhawqīya from its opening words.30 The autograph is, appropriately, in the Fatih Mosque collection, no. 2611. The list of such works will certainly grow as we learn more about Ottoman philosophy.

Copying. Though these occult prayers seem not to have been copied often, various versions of the Forty Names were constantly copied; I know of more than a hundred manuscripts of various versions, and I have no doubt there are many more. The other works of Suhrawardī and his followers—notably including the Jew Ibn Kammūna—were copied down to the very end of the age of manuscripts. Velüüddin 2050, the early manuscript of Shahrazūrī’s Shajara, for example, seems to have been rediscovered in the eighteenth century, for there are at least five copies made between the early eighteen and early nineteenth centuries. I know of Illuminationist manuscripts of both Turkish and Iranian provenance made after World War I.

Pedagogy. For the most part the works of al-Suhrawardī and his early followers were advanced, and occult works were not used as textbooks, but both al-Suhrawardī’s Hikmat al-Ishrāq and particularly his short Hayākil al-Nūr were copied for student use. The latter work appears in many Ottoman textbook compilations.

30 The work is an allegory in Arabic resembling Suhrawardī’s al-Ghurba al-Gharbīya. Its authenticity has been questioned by some modern scholars (see: Pourjavady N. Mas’ala-yi Inšisāb-i Risālat al-Abrāj ba Shaykh-i Ishrāq // idem. Ishrāq wa ‘Irāfān: Maqāla-hā wa Naqd-hā. Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānishgāhī, 1380/2001. P. 95–113). However, the manuscripts seem to consistently attribute it to Suhrawardī, so I see no justification for questioning its authenticity. At any rate, Muşannifak thought it was Suhrawardī’s.
Conclusions and Comments

1) Diversity of manuscripts. One lesson that I have drawn from looking through some four hundred Illuminationist manuscripts is that there are lessons not to be drawn from printed books. People wrote things in flyleafs. I have seen things ranging from a little debate about whether Ibn Kammūna converted to Islam (and thus should receive the normal blessing due a dead author) to the record of a disastrous flood in a forgotten village and the death of half a dozen members of the owner’s family from the plague.

2) Incompleteness of published literature. In the case of Suhrawardī, a little more than half of his surviving work is published, with the gaps including minor works, works like ours that do not fit in somehow, and the logic and physics of two of his four major philosophical works. Of the commentaries and derivative works the situation is far worse. Moreover, popular works that were obviously widely read have not been published, or at any rate exist only in unscholarly and inaccessible popular editions.

3) Patterns of Islamic intellectual life. In the manuscripts texts tend to come in families, so that, for example, particular groups of philosophical texts tend to occur together, thus indicating a perceived intellectual affinity.

4) Importance of popular, occult, and ‘secret’ literature. There is a large body of popular pious and occult literature ranging from the charm against the plague and a little story about a woman who spoke only in quotations from the Qur’an to a large number of magical and astrological literature. We read the classics, but there are many works that premodern Muslim readers obviously knew, read, and copied that we barely know. We certainly do not appreciate the importance of this literature to Muslim readers. We certainly know almost nothing of its importance to al-Suhrawardī.