Treasures of Knowledge

An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)

VOLUME I: ESSAYS

Edited by

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CONTENTS

VOLUME I: ESSAYS

PREFACE BY THE EDITORS XI

Overview and Significance of the Palace Library Inventory

1. Gülru Necipoğlu, The Spatial Organization of Knowledge in the Ottoman Palace Library: An Encyclopedic Collection and Its Inventory 1

2. Cemal Kafadar, Between Amasya and Istanbul: Bayezid II, His Librarian, and the Textual Turn of the Late Fifteenth Century 79

3. Cornell H. Fleischer, Learning and Sovereignty in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries 155

The Palace Library as a Collection and the Book Arts

4. Zeynep Atbaş, Artistic Aspects of Sultan Bayezid II's Book Treasury Collection: Extant Volumes Preserved at the Topkapı Palace Museum Library 161

5. Zeren Tanindi, Arts of the Book: The Illustrated and Illuminated Manuscripts Listed in 'Atufi's Inventory 213

6. Judith Pfeiffer, "The Ottoman Muse Fluttered, but Poorly Winged": Müeyyedzade, Bayezid II, and the Early Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Literary Canon 241

Book Titles and Their Disciplines in the Palace Library Inventory

7. Mohsen Goudarzi, Books on Exegesis (*tafsīr*) and Qur'anic Readings (*qirā'āt*): Inspiration, Intellect, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Post-Classical Islam 267

8. Recep Gürkan Göktaş, On the Hadith Collection of Bayezid II's Palace Library 309

9. Guy Burak, The Section on Prayers, Invocations, Unique Qualities of the Qur'an, and Magic Squares in the Palace Library Inventory 341

10. Abdurrahman Atçil, The *kalām* (Rational Theology) Section in the Palace Library Inventory 367

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11. Himmet Taşkömür, Books on Islamic Jurisprudence, Schools of Law, and Biographies of Imams from the Hanafi School 389

12. Mürteza Bedir, Books on Islamic Legal Theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) 423

13. Cemal Kafadar and Ahmet Karamustafa, Books on Sufism, Lives of Saints, Ethics, and Sermons 439

14. Hüseyin Yilmaz, Books on Ethics and Politics: The Art of Governing the Self and Others at the Ottoman Court 509

15. Nükhet Varlik, Books on Medicine: Medical Knowledge at Work. 527

16. Aleksandar Shopov, "Books on Agriculture (*al-filāḥa*) Pertaining to Medical Science" and Ottoman Agricultural Science and Practice around 1500 557

17. Cornell H. Fleischer and Kaya Şahin, On the Works of a Historical Nature in the Bayezid II Library Inventory 569

18. Pinar Emiralioğlu, Books on the Wonders of Creation and Geography in ʿAtufi's Inventory 597

19. Tahera Qutbuddin, Books on Arabic Philology and Literature: A Teaching Collection Focused on Religious Learning and the State Chancery 607

20. Sooyong Kim, An Ottoman Order of Persian Verse. 635

21. Christopher Markiewicz, Books on the Secretarial Arts and Literary Prose 657

22. Ferenc Csirkés, Turkish/Turkic Books of Poetry, Turkish and Persian Lexicography: The Politics of Language under Bayezid II 673

23. Noah Gardiner, Books on Occult Sciences 735

24. A. Tunç Şen and Cornell H. Fleischer, Books on Astrology, Astronomical Tables, and Almanacs in the Library Inventory of Bayezid II. 767

25. Jamil Ragep, Sally Ragep, Sajjad Nikfahm-Khubravan, Fateme Savadi, and Hasan Umut (McGill Team), Astronomical and Other Mathematical Sciences 823

26. Elaheh Kheirandish, Books on Mathematical and Mixed-Mathematical Sciences: Arithmetic, Geometry, Optics, and Mechanics 857

27. Khaled El-Rouayheb, Books on Logic (*manṭiq*) and Dialectics (*jadal*) 891

28. Dimitri Gutas, Philosophical Manuscripts: Two Alternative Philosophies 907

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APPENDICES

Appendix I-III: Some Identified Manuscripts Stamped with Bayezid II's Seal

APPENDIX I:
Zeynep Atbaş, Preliminary List of Manuscripts Stamped with Bayezid II's Seal in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library 937

APPENDIX II:
Zeren Tanindi, Preliminary List of Manuscripts Stamped with Bayezid II's Seal and Transferred from the Topkapı Palace Inner Treasury to Other Library Collections 983

APPENDIX III WITH PLATES FROM MANUSCRIPTS AT THE TOPKAPI PALACE MUSEUM LIBRARY:
Gülru Necipoğlu, Some Books Bearing the Seal of Bayezid II and/or Dedications to Him: A Comparison of Titles Inscribed by His Librarian and Corresponding Entries in the Library Inventory . . . 1011

Appendix IV-V: English Translations of the Librarian 'Atufi's Ottoman Turkish and Arabic Prefaces to the Palace Library Inventory

APPENDIX IV:
Gülru Necipoğlu, Translation of 'Atufi's Ottoman Turkish Preface to the Palace Library Inventory 1077

APPENDIX V:
Mohsen Goudarzi, Translation of 'Atufi's Arabic Preface to the Palace Library Inventory 1079

VOLUME II: TRANSLITERATION AND FACSIMILE "REGISTER OF BOOKS" (*KITĀB AL-KUTUB*), MS TÖRÖK F. 59

Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára Keleti Gyűjtemény
(Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

Principles Observed in Transliterating MS Török F. 59. 1

Transliterated Text of MS Török F. 59, prepared by Himmet Taşkömür and Hesna Ergun Taşkömür. . . 5

Facsimile of MS Török F. 59 243

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CORNELL H. FLEISCHER

LEARNING AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

ʿAtufi's inventory allows us to address important questions pertaining to Ottoman notions of time, history, writing, and reading. A point of singular value in the inventory is its temporality, situated almost precisely at the midpoint between the physical assertion of Empire with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and the appearance of a cultural, historiographical, linguistic, and legal canon, the efflorescence of which took its form from the middle of the sixteenth century. ʿAtufi gives us a snapshot, *in medias res*, of a project under construction and in process: the creation of a universalist imperial identity and culture genealogically identified with the House of Osman and historiographically associated with the notion of a "classical age" achieved under Süleyman the Lawgiver (r. 1520–66) at the hands of the likes of Taşköprizade (d. 1561), Celalzade Mustafa (d. 1567), ʿAşık Çelebi (d. 1572), and Mustafa ʿĀli (d. 1600).

There are several corollaries to this proposition that deserve some emphasis, obvious though they might seem. The first is that the library is a construction, a product of conscious collection, selection, use, and deployment, as many contributions to this volume demonstrate, and not merely an inheritance at once random and a product of "tradition." A second is that the library cannot be assumed to be directed, teleologically, to an endpoint in the late sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth century. Whatever developed into a distinctively "Ottoman" culture in the later sixteenth century was not merely an organic phenomenon implicit in the library of 1502–3; it was equally a construction shaped by the massive perturbations of the reign of Selim I (r. 1512–20), the struggles of his successor to secure dynastic legitimacy and supremacy over opponents internal as well as external, and the establishment of a human apparatus that could seem, at least, to control vast territories formerly ruled by the suddenly vanished states of the Timurids, Mamluks, and Turkman Akkoyunlus. Third, and finally, we should not assume that the Anatolian-Rumelian-Eastern Mediterranean world of the fifteenth century was, *in nucleo*, roughly comparable to that of the sixteenth century post-1520 or, more properly, post-1550. Beginnings do not necessarily imply natural endings. This is why I prefer, in reference to the full-blown "Ottoman" order of the "classical age," to term the era of the inventory "Ottomanizing," in the sense that it represents an intermediate phase in the construction of a new formulation of dynastic legitimacy and its lineage, a new language (Ottoman Turkish), and a new genealogy of knowledge particular to the Ottoman lands and their dynastic inheritance.[1] But the project that seems to have ended in this fashion had its origins in a very different world, to which I would like to draw attention, underlining the differences between the very fluid world of the fifteenth century and the apparently more structured and stable one of the sixteenth.

The deeper background of the intellectual organization underlying ʿAtufi's inventory, and its substantial difference from the context of the later sixteenth century and beyond, is best observed through a snapshot of the career and oeuvre of ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Bistami (1380–1454). A mystic (Bistami) and lettrist (*ahl al-ḥarf*), Bistami was a key figure in the formulation of Ottoman sovereignty as a gnostic project at the court of Murad II (r. 1421–44, 1446–51), and his innovative "classification of the sciences" in the form of a tree with roots, trunk, and branches was certainly one of the major sources for ʿAtufi's organization of his own material, as demonstrated by positioning, next to one another, of particular sub-

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branches of knowledge (see the essays by Gardiner, Markiewicz, Şahin/Fleischer, and Şen/Fleischer in this volume). Bistami's 400-page classification of the sciences (undertaken in response to a request from Murad II spurred by ill-intentioned questioning of Bistami's scholarly and spiritual rectitude), which places the science of letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) at both root and pinnacle of all forms of learning, served as an organizational foundation for the massive royal library as catalogued in 1502–3, a library that itself contained an array of Bistami's works, including autograph copies and volumes sealed or signed as belonging to Sultan Bayezid II.

An Antiochene scholar raised and educated in Mamluk Syria and Egypt, and a witness to Timur's catastrophic sack of Aleppo in 1400, Bistami spent most of his career as an author and teacher largely in the "Ottomanizing" territories of Rumelia and Anatolia over a period that saw the dismemberment of the first Ottoman attempt at empire in 1402; a hotly contested restoration of territorial integrity between 1413 and 1421; and expansion under Murad II, whose son, Mehmed, would conquer Constantinople in 1453 and so fully assert the universal imperial stature of the Ottoman house. Bistami spent roughly the last three decades of his life in Bursa, the intellectual and spiritual capital of the Ottoman principality.

Bistami began his "Roman" career by explicating those portions of the Bunian corpus (see the essays by Burak, Gardiner in this volume) dealing with branches of the science of letters and divine names, and teaching his rapidly expanding corpus on much of the vast body of sciences, occult and otherwise, that came into his purview. He was a member of the neo-Brethren of Purity of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, who revived, claimed, and adapted the Pythagorean Hermeticism of their tenth-century Basran eponyms, together with, in Bistami's case at least, much of their Greek terminology. These elite intellectuals, who inhabited a central Islamic world increasingly defined as such by Timurid cultural and political prestige, were supremely self-confident and shared a millennialist project to effect social and spiritual renovation by joining their own command of the sciences and gnostic cosmology to a political (read dynastic) cause they identified as messianic.[2] The transformation of the Ottoman Murad II from regional march lord to universal emperor of Islam and representative of the millennial dynasty, made visible in Bistami's literary traces and enduring scholarly prestige well into the sixteenth century, represents the single, long-lived success of the Brethren project. The longevity and vitality of Bistami's influence in the formation of dynastic ideology is most strikingly apparent in the sixteenth century when his apocalyptic compendium, *Miftāḥ al-jifr al-jāmiʿ* (Key to the Comprehensive Prognosticon), constituted the Urtext from which the image of Sultan Süleyman as messianic conqueror, Last World Emperor, Renewer of Religion, and *axis mundi* was hewn.[3]

In this context I must dwell briefly on the political dimension of Bistami and his Brethren's project to create a millennial society on the basis of a marriage between the new sciences (which aimed to mobilize ancient wisdom in new, historically conditioned contexts) cultivated by the scholarly generation of the Brethren, and new rulers and lineages identified and guided by the scholars. One (but only one) significant part of the answer to the question of why the Ottoman branch of the project should have survived while others (Timurids, Mamluks, Turkmans) did not, lies in the unique novelty of the Ottoman location in the West and in the mystique that Rum enjoyed, in old Muslim lands, as the location in which a new and thus "pure" Islam was being erected, free from the pollution of historical accretion. A second factor, presented schematically in the form of a tree depicting the organic relationship of the sciences to one another, is the centrality of sovereignty as a revealed category to Bistami's preoccupations as a scholar who was both insistent on the approach of a final, apocalyptic resolution of history, and keenly aware of the significance in this context of Mongol and Timurid destruction. Knowledge of politics or rule, *siyasa*, is one of the four branches of Metaphysics, be it royal or prophetic (and the scholars are the inheritors of the prophets), general, domestic, or personal. The tree is reproduced in the manuscripts of both Bistami's *Fawāʾih al-miskiyya fī al-fawātiḥ al-makkiya* (Scents of Ambergris on the Meccan Revelations) and *Naẓm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk* (The Ordering of Paths for the Accompaniment of Kings), as well as in a unique autobiographical work, *Durrat tāj al-rasāʾil* (Pearl in the Crown

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Fig. 1. TKSK A. 1597, 56b–57a, al-Bistami, *Naẓm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk*, autograph, stamped twice (beginning and end) with the seal of Bayezid II.

of Tractates, Nuruosmaniye Library 3905). Knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of sovereignty is almost invariably marked in red ink. Its significance, in Bistami's world of the early fifteenth century, is hard to miss and yet more difficult to ignore.[4]

It is noteworthy that Bistami's inclusion of Politics as a branch of Metaphysics—as well as his use of Greek terminology for the Propaedeutic arts—represents, without reference or citation, a direct appropriation of the scheme of the original Brethren, which is also to say that the Brethren of his own time, rather than their predecessors, were the Sunni Muslim objects of Bistami's address. His task, in substantial measure, was to establish pre-Islamic Hermeticism as having a rightful and licit place in the genealogy of knowledge appropriate to the Sunni (in his own case, proudly Hanafi) Muslim context of his own age. For Bistami, the root and pinnacle of knowledge was Lettrism, or the Science of Letters and Names, the *ʿilm al-ḥurūf wa al-asmāʾ*, which was parallel and equal in revelatory power to Sufism while differing in method. Even in his own time, the universality and "orthodoxy" of his project were not everywhere understood, despite the coda to his Tree of Sciences, citing Plato to the effect that there is no form of knowledge so bad that ignoring it is not worse than knowing it. He penned for Murad II or another "high personage" his summa, *Scents of Ambergris on the Meccan Revelations* (with clear reference to the *Meccan Revelations* of Ibn

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al-ʿArabi) in 1440–41, itself a massive classification of sciences with Lettrism at its core. This was a response to the implicit accusations of those "who would impugn the repute of one who came to Rum as a visitor" (TSMK, Hazine 274, 13a). His spirited display of the breadth of his learning and right to be placed among the "Men of Learning of the Time" concludes with a heresiography that reviles—twice—Fazlullah of Astarabad (d. 1394) as one who has perverted Lettrism, just as there are would-be Sufis who use a reputation for spiritual accomplishment for their own carnal purposes but whose existence does not therefore discredit the truth of the particular Way.[5] This convergence, four years before the celebrated Edirne incident that resulted in the immolation by fire of the Hurufi propagandist who had so intrigued Prince Mehmed, shows, if nothing else, that dynastic interest in Lettrism was not, as generally presented, an aberrant, one-off incident. Bistami's problem—apparently solved by his writing for the dynast and son whom he served for more than a decade—was to make clear the distinction between true and false Lettrism.

The manuscript evidence from Bistami's own lifetime in Bursa sheds light on the relationship and evolution of Bistami's intellectual and political activities. Successive iterations of his work most directly concerned with history, time, chronography, and sovereignty—*The Ordering of Paths for the Accompaniment of Kings*—not only trace the history of the Islamic community in terms of dynastic succession, notable natural events, the ebb and flow of warfare with Christian powers, the Mongol and Timurid disasters of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the births and deaths of major scholars, mystics, and philosophers as well as kings; they also contain the first internally "Ottoman" references to early Ottoman conquests as significant moments in world history, history itself being considered as significant a form of revelation as scripture. This project would seem to be intimately related to the genesis of the other earliest Ottoman sources we possess: the "almanacs" (*taqwīm*) that emerge from 1420 onwards, which contain chronologies in reverse—usually from Creation to the present—that tie proximate dynastic history and the present day to a larger cosmic course.[6] It is in these ephemeral productions that we can trace, in the use of titulature, the elevation of Murad II (and his lineage) from the status of regional chieftain to world-conquering eschatological ruler able to challenge the claims to such status of his Timurid rival Shahrukh. Bistami's notions of time, history, and scholarship were highly influential during his lifetime and beyond. They helped Ottoman literati reimagine their place, and the place of the Ottoman enterprise, within prophetic, dynastic, and, indeed, cosmic history.

In 1430–31, Bistami completed an initial version, in three chapters, of his *Naẓm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk* (Süleymaniye Library [hereafter SK], Halet Efendi 311), his major meditation on the measurement of time, the course of history, and renewal of religion (*tajdīd*). Copies of the work proliferated after 1453 with a finale clearly linking the conquest of Constantinople to the End of Days and attendant events. Both before (in 1428–29, SK, Ayasofya 3503) and after 1430–31 (in 1431–32, SK, Reisülküttab 721), he composed a projected fifth chapter to the *Naẓm* in the form of a chronology of major events in the life of the Muslim community since its inception: events prophetic and political, successions of dynasties, natural disasters, and deaths of scholars and saints as well as kings and, increasingly, the back-and-forth of conquest and retreat between Muslim and non-Muslim powers, especially but not exclusively in the context of the Crusader wars.

The first of these chronologies ends with a different disastrous watershed, the Mongol destruction of the Abbasid caliphate in 1258. The second carries the chronology down to Bistami's present day in 1431–32, beginning with the Ilkhans (as Muslim sovereigns), including of course Timur's 1400 sack of Aleppo, but also inserting the first internal references we possess, beyond Ahmedi, to Ottoman history and ascent to dynastic status. The year 1299–1300 witnessed not only the Ilkhanid-Mamluk confrontation in Syria but also, according to the autograph, "the conquest of Bilecik by the Ghazi Osman son of Ertugrul, the ancestor of the Ottoman line (Bani ʿUthman). It was one of the fortresses of the land of Rum, conquered by al-Rashid in 190 [AH], then the Rum [Romans/Byzantines] retook it and it remained in their hands until ʿUthman retook it in this year." A marginal notation adds: "In the year 731 Urkhan bin ʿUthman Ghazi conquered Izniq" (SK, Reisülküttab 721, 40a).

We have here, then, in Arabic, the earliest prose and non-epigraphic invocations of ghazi ideology from an

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Ottomanizing source. These are only magnified and amplified in the Timurid-inspired chronographic sources represented by the *taqwīm*s, in the composition of which, in Murad II's reign, Bistami was likely deeply involved in Bursa. Two of these bear his clear imprint in the form of dedicatory rosettes—dated 1439 and 1440 respectively—that are fully Mamluk in form, eschewing the more Seljuk style of titulature common to both earlier and later exemplars and relying on Mamluk forms natural to Bistami, which were utterly alien to "Ottoman" norms.[7] The second of these is extraordinary in two respects. First, it follows Bistami's necrologies closely in detailing the deaths of saints and scholars along with the deaths of sultans. Secondly, after the necrology and in its dedication to the living ruler—in contrast to the carefully calibrated terminology used in the reverse chronology—this *taqwīm* elevates all rulers of the lineage back to Murad I to the status of "khan," i.e., universal ruler. Five years later, yet another almanac of 1446 (Oxford Bodleian Hunt. 16) further claims the status of "Caliph of the Messenger of God among the Muslims" for Murad, along with clear signs of divine mandate that are elaborated in unusual and extravagant titulature ("Succoured by the Support of the Beneficent," and yet more potently *Ṣāḥib-qirān*, "Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction," universal conqueror in the Timurid mold.

Suffice it to say that these assertions of Ottoman superiority and divine right continued to be made in the reigns of the Conqueror and his progeny. The question we are attempting to answer here is: when and where did these begin? The evidence presented above, and the convergence of the chronographic and historiographical activities of Bistami with the appearance of methodologically cognate materials and concerns in the chronological sections as well as texts of the Ottoman almanacs that begin to proliferate in the reign of Murad II, would suggest that the location is Bursa, the period roughly (but still fairly precisely) 1428–39. At this point, still close to the disaster of 1402, two decades from the Interregnum, with Murad II still asserting control over newly unified territories, the primary ideological target and rival for supremacy in an Islamic mode would have been the Timurid Shahrukh. It was his claims to emperorship of Islam, caliphate, and the status of Centennial Renewer to which Murad II's supporters, among them Bistami, would have been reacting. Timur had reminded Ibn ʿUthman, in 1402, of his limited and regional status: Bayezid I's grandson would challenge Timur's son for at least equality of supreme status among Muslims in the apocalyptic/messianic idiom of the Timurid and Mamluk *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* —hence the direct connection between Metaphysics and Politics/Sovereignty.

It is equally noteworthy that by the end of the sixteenth century and beyond—despite Bistami's ongoing prestige evidenced by his inclusion in scholarly biographical dictionaries, multiple copies of his best-known works (*Naẓm*, *Fawāʾih*, and above all *Miftāḥ*), and even translations into Turkish (*Fawāʾih*, *Miftāḥ*)—the learning underlying Bistami's work was no longer largely understood. Even the translator/adapter of the *Miftāḥ*, selected in 1597 for translation and sumptuous illumination, noted that he had been given the commission because of his excellent knowledge of Arabic; even so, he could not be certain of the accuracy of his translations because he did not understand the science underlying the original composition, and therefore had left Arabic expressions of "secrets" he could not comprehend in the original marked in red (TSMK, Bağdat 373). The Ottoman translator of Bistami's *Fawāʾih*, commissioned in the reign of Selim II (r. 1566–74), was either so aware of political sensitivity or so perturbed by the denunciations of Fazlullah because they might actually imply an ongoing "Hurufi" connection for the dynasty that he omitted them entirely from his rendition.[8] Finally, from the late sixteenth century, scribes producing copies of the popular *Fawāʾih* or *Naẓm*, charged with reproducing, among other things, the Tree of Sciences, show themselves to have been largely flummoxed by the inclusion of Politics as a branch of Metaphysics, presumably because the inclusion made no sense to them. The subcategories of *siyasa* (prophetic, royal, general/public, domestic, individual, etc.) fade away, *siyāsa* is not even recognized, sometimes rendered as the more metaphysical-sounding *sāʿa* (The Hour), and sometimes reduced to unrecognizable scrawl. The later unrecognizability of the world of the fifteenth century is writ large, and tellingly so.

NOTES

Author's note: I must express profound gratitude to the friends and colleagues who have played a role in the gestation and pro-

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duction of this essay, which, slight though it is, is meant as an address to the significance of ʿAtufi's inventory as a whole, and so also to the virtue of our collaborative project, now with some of us for nearly a decade. Kaya Şahin and Tunç Şen, as ever in our acquaintance, have been there from beginning to end; their suggestions and editorial skills have been crucial to the production of a finished essay at a time when health-related events made the physical task of editing extremely difficult. Colin Heywood, trusted friend and companion in most that matters over four decades, at a late stage read acutely and commented yet more so, to excellent effect. At the earliest stages of this essay as in later ones, enthusiastic and informed discussion with Nikolay Antov, Abdurrahman Atçıl, Evrim Binbaş, Snjezana Buzov, Ferenc Csirkés, Noah Gardiner, Sooyong Kim, Mayte Green-Mercado, Christopher Markiewicz, Nükhet Varlık, and Hüseyin Yılmaz always kept things moving in the right direction.

1. One very clear illustration of the cultural intermediacy of the document is found in ʿAtufi's grappling with the issue not only of classifying but also rendering in Arabic script works written in a form of Turkish, of which there are a relatively small number as yet. Indeed, as Ferenc Csirkés very plausibly suggests, it may be the case that the inventory served a secondary function as a means of taking stock of such holdings at a time when interest in Turkish production was on the rise, and a mere two decades before an "Ottoman" form of written Turkish was fully launched as an imperial language of letters, as well as of diplomacy and administration. There was not yet, as of 1502–3, either a standard language or a single system for rendering Turkish in Arabic script, though as Csirkés notes, ʿAtufi was aware of several methods. ʿAtufi's own usage in his Ottoman introduction on principles of classification bears the imprint of his active grappling with the problem of how to render Arabic or Persian vocabulary in a linguistically Turkish context. It was not carelessness or sloppiness that led him to variant usages (for example, sometimes keeping, sometimes omitting a final hamza on *Ihyā*), but rather his cognizance of multiple systems and, importantly, a keen awareness of the underlying morphology and grammar—*vide* his extensive discussion of the use or non-use of the Arabic definite article in the listing of book titles. Particularly striking in this regard are several instances of his giving multiple vocalizations to the same Arabic (or Perso-Arabic) word, indicating that he was aware of the original form: as a Turkish vocabulary item, it had a different vocalic structure (with a second prosthetic vowel added), and that it was to be read as Turkish and so the prosthetic vowel dropped with the addition of Persian izafa (9/11, *ṣifr/ṣıfır*). The linguistic enterprise, like that of collection, was a serious and complex one.
2. See İhsan Fazlıoğlu, "İlk Dönem Osmanlı İlim ve Kültür Hayatında İhvânu's-Safâ ve Abdurrahmân Bistâmî," *Dîvân İlmî Araştırmalar Dergisi* 2 (1996): 229–40; Cornell H. Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries," in *Falnama: The Book of Omens*, ed. Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2009), 231–43; İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "In Defense of Geomancy: Šaraf al-Dīn Yazdī Rebuts Ibn Ḫaldūn's Critique of the Occult Sciences," in *Islamicate Occultism: New Perspectives*, ed. Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Noah Gardiner, special double issue of *Arabica* 64, no. 3-4 (2017): 346–403; Veysel Kaya, "Abdurrahman Bistami'nin Bilimler Tasnifi," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 35 (2016): 187–216; Noah Gardiner, "The Occultist Encyclopedism of ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Bistami," *Mamluk Studies Review* 20 (2017): 3–38.
3. Cornell H. Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleyman," in *Soliman le magnifique et son temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), 159–77.
4. A simple point of comparison that suggests the originality of Bistami's positioning of *siyāsa* (in all its forms) as a branch of Metaphysics is afforded by Nasir al-din Tusi's *Nasirean Ethics*, which of course formed the foundation of the later (and yet more temporally proximate) ethics treatises of Davani (d. 1502) and Kınalızade ʿAli Çelebi (d. 1572). In his Aristotelian (and Avicennan) classification of the branches of philosophy, Tusi places Metaphysics in the speculative sciences, while Politics belongs to the practical ones. Leaving aside the complexities of Tusi's understandings of imamate and how these were adapted in late fifteenth- and late sixteenth-century Sunni contexts, we may usefully note the striking differences in the placement of crucial forms of knowledge between Bistami (and the Fenarian circle to which he was firmly attached) in the early fifteenth century, on the one hand, and both earlier and later schemes (thirteenth century, sixteenth century) on the other.
5. Denis Gril, "Ésotérisme contre hérésie: ʿAbd al-Rahmân al-Bistâmî, un représentant de la science des lettres à Bursa dans la prèmiere moitié du XVe siècle," in *Syncrétismes et hérésies dans L'Orient seljoukide et ottoman* (*XIVe – XVIIIe siècle*), ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Peeters, 2005), 183–98.
6. Ahmet Tunç Şen, "Astrology in the Service of the Empire: Knowledge, Prognostication, and Politics at the Ottoman Court, 1450s–1550s" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2016).
7. The former is Bibliothèque nationale de France, F Sup. Pers. 367; for the latter, see Nihal Atsız, *Osmanlı Tarihine Ait Takvimler* (Istanbul: Küçükaydın Matbaası, 1961).
8. On the Ottoman translation (from a primarily linguistic and bibliographical perspective), see Ömer Yağmur, "Abdurrahman El-Bistami ve XVI. Yüzyılda Yapılmış Bir İlimler Ansiklopedisi Tercümesi: Terceme-i Kitab-ı Fevaihu'l-Miskiyye Fi'l-Fevatihi'l-Mekkiyye," *Turkish Studies* 4, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 247–63. Observations on the significant omissions are my own.

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